

Psyche and Time

1. The traditional concept

Half a century ago I was studying Protestant theology in Zürich. There was a spirit of optimism. "Aggiornamento" was the motto of the Second Vatican Council, which met in Rome. The liberal theological faculty of Zürich was also venturing out to new horizons. In one of these ventures, they sought contact with depth psychology: Jung's health permitting, theology students of the last classes were allowed to attend the wise old man in Küsnacht. Another attempt to connect to the present was the demythologising approach of the New Testament scholar, Rudolf Bultmann (b. 1884) which he launched on 21 April 1941 with a lecture in Frankfurt.

To show what was at stake, I will explain the basis of the two biblical creation myths. In the older of the two, it is written: "Yahweh fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being" (Gen. 2⁷). This "report" of the creation of Adam was, for Bultmann, just a "myth": an old story which was past belief. Like a farmer, God takes a handful of arable soil (*adamah*) and forms it into *Adam*. To bring the clay figure to life, he breathes his breath into his nose. The image of God in this myth corresponds, in developmental psychology terms, to the level of a modern-day child, whereas in the other, more recent "creation account" (Gen. 1), it is almost that of a youth. God no longer appears there like a farmer with dirty hands, but like a king who commands, and whose command is executed immediately. "God spoke, and it was so." In just six days the world was created. On the seventh, of course, he celebrated the Sabbath.

The world view that these myths are based on is *dualistic*. There are *two* worlds, a here and a hereafter, this world down below and that up above. The flesh is mortal, the soul is immortal. Man belongs to two worlds, the material that is transient, and the spiritual, which lasts forever. Since his creation he has been connected to the other world. In the older myth Yahweh breathed his breath into him (Gen. 2⁷), and in the younger myth God created him "in his own image" (Gen. 1^{26 f.}).

Now extensive comparisons of religious history show that the dualistic world view underpins all ancient cultures, from the Stone Age to the early modern period in Europe. Obrist calls it "archaic-mythic" - archaic because it is ancient (*archaios* means: old), and mythic because the myths therein are of central significance.

This dualistic view of the world fell apart since the Enlightenment in the Western world. Its decay progressed only slowly, but inexorably and irreversibly. This fundamentally transformed our culture and caused the erosion of its cherished religions.

These have reacted differently to the inevitable process. The liberal wing of the Reformed Church is trying to adapt to the modern period, and has started a process of demythologising or sought dialogue with depth psychology. The conservative Catholic Church, however, has defended the traditional faith. The Pope even envisages anti-modernist alliances with religious fundamentalists, including Islamists, and dreams of a jihad of the true believers against the godless relativism of modernity according to 1. Timothy 6¹²: "Fight the good fight of the faith!"

I summarise the old, archaic-mythic notions of psyche and time as follows:

1. In the dualistic world view the soul had a share in two domains: the transitory life here on earth, and the eternal one above. Its true home was in the afterlife.
2. Time in this life was provisional or limited, in the afterlife eternal or infinite.

Today the old pictures of psyche and time are changing: dying and becoming...

2. Die and become!

1. Bultmann's programme of demythologising

For Bultmann, myths were no longer credible; the mythical world view belonged to the past. He insisted that theology must speak of God *non-mythically* and, for example, the biblical creation myths be reformulated so as to be compatible with the theory of evolution and modern cosmology, with Darwin and the Big Bang.

However laudable this attempt was, the conversion failed. Bultmann, however, to his credit, brought the problem so sharply into focus as none had before, and dared to attempt a radical revision of faith.

With Jung, however, he disagreed. In Bultmann's view, the so-called "acts of God" eliminated any depth psychological interpretation of faith. In the cross, for example, depth psychologists see a symbol of wholeness, meditation upon which promotes the process of individuation. But for theologians, however, the cross proclaims a historical act of salvation: the atonement of the Son of God, whose healing power the Church celebrates on Good Friday and realises in the Holy Mass. For Bultmann, the depth psychological interpretation flew in the face of history; it ignored the "acts of God" on which faith is based and made a mockery of the church calendar. As a Christian theologian he could not accept this. His programme therefore remained incomplete; he left the core of the faith, the central act of salvation, untouched. He still felt "a critical loyalty" to this inalienable centre.

And now to Jung: How did Jung try to understand religion, and to live religiously, in a contemporary way?

2. Jung's programme of symbolic interpretation

Just as Bultmann had little interest in Jung, so Jung wanted to know little of Bultmann. Jung distanced himself from the programme of demythologising. He saw it as a frontal assault on the psyche, a soulless destructive act of positivism. He loved myths, and lived with their images which were familiar to him through great dreams since childhood. His motto was: "Don't abolish, but understand anew!" He no longer interpreted myths in archaic-concrete terms, but *symbolically*. They no longer "reported" historical acts of God, but depicted invisible, psychic issues.

Jung hoped to win over theologians with this approach. In this he failed, as he painfully learned again and again until the very end. It was a hopeless task. Theologians cannot move from archaic-mythical collective religion to a contemporary, natural and individual spirituality, because they are bound to the dogma of their church, to the acts of God. Jung himself managed to make the move because he was free to believe, as a scientist, what made sense to him personally. He took a huge step in the hope that the church would follow him. However, he overestimated the ability of a dogmatically immovable collective organisation.

It was not just a fashionable face-lift, but went to the heart of the matter. Bultmann saw clearly that things could not continue as in the past. The man of today cannot believe the old myths in an archaic-concrete way. A radical rethink is needed. If the church will not convert to a fundamentally new understanding of the myths, faith will grow elsewhere and the church will be reduced to a museum.

Like Jung, Analytical Psychology incorporated to some extent a belief in the possibility of a merger with theology. This is an illusion. Theology and depth psychology belong to different ages. The two are not adjacent in space, but sequential in time. Depth psychology is replacing theology.

Jung opened the way. His school has the task to develop and refine it.

One such development was proposed a decade after Jung's death by Willy Obrist.

3. Obrist's mutation of consciousness

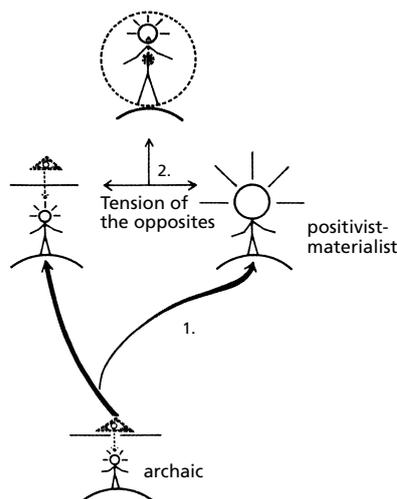
Doctor Willy Obrist (b. 1918) from Lucerne worked from 1970 on the theory of depth psychology, incorporated it into modern knowledge about living organisms, and reflected on the consequences of Jung's discovery for our world view and religion. What was new was that he approached the religious metamorphosis from the perspective of the *evolution of consciousness*. Therefore, the neurologist Gino Gschwend in the "Schweizer Ärztezeitung" (official FMH "Swiss Doctors' Bulletin") 31.10.1990 called him the "Darwin of the evolution of consciousness".

From a young age Obrist sought the basis of the religious crisis of our time. In order to address this problem with the necessary thoroughness, after matriculation he joined the Jesuit Order, which gave him a broad training in intellectual history. After a few years, however, he found the Order too restrictive. He left, turned to medicine, and became a successful angiologist (a specialist in vascular medicine) in private practice. Now the persona took precedence, and his preoccupation with "religion" faded.

In his mid-forties, Obrist encountered depth psychology. During his military service he was told about Jung by an other officer, and so Obrist began to read Jung. Now the big question reappeared, and this time it was unavoidable. Obrist trained at the Jung Institute in Zurich, graduated, and gave up his flourishing practice. He devoted himself - as a private scholar - once again to the question from his youth: "What is the origin of the religious crisis of our age?"

His search for the answer was helped by his participation in the SHG, the **Stiftung für humanwissenschaftliche Grundlagenforschung** (the "Foundation for basic research in the human sciences"). The SHG was a trans-disciplinary research group with a dozen Swiss university lecturers from different subject areas. They were trying to develop a new concept of man. In accordance with the will of its founder, the working group also included depth psychologists. This is how Obrist became involved with the SHG. It was the start of a creative period for him which culminated in the discovery of the *mutation of consciousness*. Obrist outlined the associated cultural change process as follows:

The two steps of mutation



Let's start the bottom of the diagram with the dual world view, the *thesis* in the process of transformation from archaic-mythic to today's contemporary worldview. Religions (centre, left) perpetuate that dual worldview from past ages to the present day.

In modern times beginning Europe, an *antithesis*, the positivist-materialist worldview (centre, right) originated through scientific discoveries. This was the first step to the mutation of consciousness in our age (labelled **1** in the diagram).

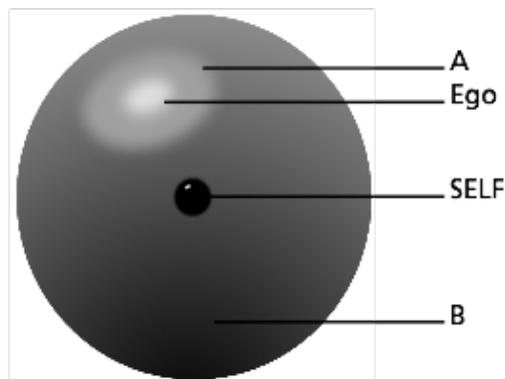
Now there was a painful tension of opposites between belief and knowledge. The protracted struggle was only clearly decided in favour of science after the Second World War. At the same, with increasing education, the positivist world view spread. The emancipated, independent and matured ego was king (centre, right). The hereafter faded, and the churches were increasingly deserted. The secular ego was not directed inward. "Dreams are lies (Träume sind Schäume)", it said. This led to the modern inflation of the ego; ego became superficial and rootless. This in turn resulted in general moral decay and the destruction of the natural environment.

The second step of the mutation of consciousness, *synthesis* (labelled **2** at top centre in the diagram) came with the discovery of the Self by Jung. This discovery is a real lifeline for our time; it opens up a whole new worldview paradigm, and thus a new era. Now man once more has a higher governing body, the Self. However, this is no longer the Almighty enthroned in the Kingdom of Heaven, who hands down everlasting commandments to his servant Moses on Mount Sinai, but a natural, inner guide, the living voice of nature in man (diagram: top).

Jung took the projection of the Self back from the beyond in the unconscious human psyche. Through this process, the supernatural creator was transformed into the natural creative force which drives evolution. This force is still as vital as once - before the mutation of consciousness - was the otherworldly creator God.

Through inner perception - in great dreams, visions, intuitions - the ego has a direct line to the natural creativity of the numinous self.

Jung's model of the psyche, as represented by M.-L. von Franz, will be familiar to you:



The psyche can be compared with a sphere whose surface has a light area (A) which represents consciousness. The ego is the centre of this area (then something is only in conscious awareness when "I" know it). The Self is simultaneously the core of the sphere and its totality (B); its regulatory processes generate dreams.

A direct line connects ego and Self. Neumann described the crucial relationship for religiosity, that between consciousness and the depths of the soul, as the "ego-Self axis". This is the modern equivalent of the archaic-mythic relationship between man and God. Whereas contact with the hereafter was once of vital importance, it is now with the Self. Through this the ego - the young, inexperienced human spirit - linked back to the ancient spirit of nature. Where once the ancients took signs from above seriously, those trained in depth psychology now pay careful attention to the impulses of their unconscious. Without turning inwards, the ego becomes cerebral and lost in fantasy. Maintaining the relationship

with the Self is a contemporary form of religiosity. It enables us to develop our personality by giving us the necessary distance from the outer world. The individuation process gives our lives the depth that religion once gave. It is a contemporary counterpart of the old "path of the soul to God".

With this exposition of the relationship between ego and Self, Jung established *de facto* a new kind of spirituality, even if he did not - probably in view of the many pastors in his family! - explicitly say so. He saw himself not as a religious founder, but as a representative of the science of the psyche.

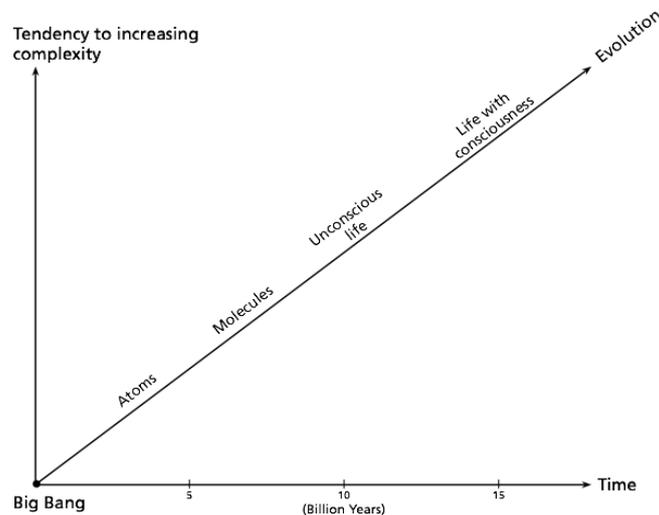
Depth psychology has a different image of the soul than has theology.

This brings us to the title of the third, and final, part: "From soul to psyche."

3. From soul to psyche

We now know that our psyche is not the result of a mythical act of creation just over five thousand years in which an otherworldly being breathed divine breath into a clay figure. No, our psyche was formed over billions of years:

Diagram of overall evolution



The first spatially ordered entities were atoms. Molecules subsequently formed, with more complex spatial arrangements ranging from simple H₂O to huge protein molecules with thousands of atoms. Each new creation was a totality. In the next evolutionary step, giant molecules spontaneously became active, and were capable of cognition and central data processing. It was the first spark of unconscious life. In the course of evolution, these forms became increasingly complex. From the outset, due to predetermined programs, life could respond spontaneously, regulate itself, process information, reproduce, and continue to develop. Life-forms are creative, cognitive systems. This is equally true for bacteria, single-celled and multicellular organisms.

What is new in the cognitive system of *homo sapiens* is the extent and significance of consciousness. This became increasingly important thanks to the invention of language in our cultural development. Thus the psyche developed *two poles*; it became subject to two authorities, the ancient Self and the ego, a *newcomer* which is becoming ever more powerful.

To sum up: our psyche is rooted in biological evolution, and this continues seamlessly in our cultural development.

Jung's discovery of the Self calls for a revision of the materialistic theory of evolution. Jung called the Self the *objective spirit* of nature, and the ego the *subjective spirit of man*. Nature, like psyche, is spiritually endowed. In this case, evolution is not blind chance, but like a forward button. If nature has creative potential at its disposal, then evolution is a giant contest of ideas whose outcome is decided by the clever in their struggle for existence. This concept of evolution is no longer materialistic.

The materialist view can also be disproved mathematically: the development from formless energy to human beings on the basis of chance is not possible in the available time: 14 billion years is not enough. Evolution is only understandable if there is a creative tendency inherent in nature.

With regards to natural and supernatural, the flesh and the spirit: in the dual world view of the ancients, the opposites were separated *ontologically* and were located in this world and the hereafter. According to current knowledge, they are inseparable, like two sides of the same coin. In this unified world view, no matter exists without spirit, nor spirit without matter. The opposites are different *aspects* of the same thing. The spiritual aspect of man is psyche, the material aspect is the central nervous system. There is no psyche without a neural substrate, and no living brain matter without spirit.

A materialistic depth psychology, as exemplified by Freud, cannot do justice to the object of its research, the psyche. The psyche is one of the two sides of the coin; neither of these can be reduced to the other alone. Nor can the meaning of dreams, visions, intuitions, and creative ideas be quantified. Only the material aspect, the "firing" of neurons, can be quantified, but this says nothing about the hidden *meaning* of what is happening. Meaning is the mental or psychological aspect of the event. The two aspects are complementary. Inner experiences such as big dreams or visions are often very impressive. The ancients referred to them as experiences of God. They formed the basis of religion.

Theology and depth psychology plough the same field, but before and after the mutation of consciousness respectively, and so they come into conflict. The fundamental difference between them lies in their interpretation of inner experience. Religion understands inner experience in an archaic-concrete way, while depth psychology, according to current scientific knowledge, considers it symbolically, as an illustration of psychological issues that cannot be directly observed in themselves. While the ancients took inner experiences to be revelations of heaven, depth psychology views them as revelations of one's own psyche. Jung brought the heavens back into the unconscious psyche, the inner heavens. Jung's view is a consequence of the mutation of consciousness, which has produced a fundamentally new approach to religion: individual, natural spirituality.

To summarise my views on psyche and time:

1. The *psyche* is a natural fruit of the tree of evolution. It was created by the further development of the cognitive systems of our phylogenetic ancestors. If we connect our ego to the Self, and care for the ego-Self axis, we try to achieve - in the spirit of Jung - a contemporary spirituality that makes sense.

2. *Time* started with the Big Bang and progresses with evolution. There is only *one* time; the notion of time and eternity is nowadays obsolete.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to a lively discussion.

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Literature:

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