

Precis of James Hillman's "Psychology: Monotheistic or Polytheistic?"

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Book Notes V09BN

3-LETTER CODE: PSY

TOPIC: Archetypal Psychology
SUBJECT: Hillman

SUBSUBJECTS: Monotheism vs. Polytheism, Jung

ORIGINAL LOCATION & FILE NAME (of PDF used for typing): JNG imagination P 8p.PDF
(pp. 5-8)

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Benefits of polytheistic psychology: keeping alive totality of archetypal forms, supporting individual symbol formation
Hillman's preference for polytheistic psychology; sacred differentiation of psychic turmoil

ARTICLE QUOTED FROM:

- James Hillman, "Psychology: Monotheistic or Polytheistic?" in *Spring 1971: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought*; also as Appendix in *The New Polytheism*, David L. Miller (Ed.), 1981

AD HANDWRITING: Typewriter typed, few student edits

COMPLETENESS: Full Paper, precis of part of an article

PUBLISHABILITY: No, already published

DATE ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PAPER: 1982 0417

NOTES:

- **RETYPE D BOOK NOTES presented in class (V09N).**
- This is **1982 04/17b, “Psychology: Monotheistic or Polytheistic?” Book Notes, and the second entry associated with this date. 1982 04/17a = Alchemy; Archetype of Self Class. 1982 04/17c = Imagination is Reality Book Notes. 1982 04/17d = Jung’s Archetype of the Self Paper.**
- This is a precis of a portion of “Psychology: Monotheistic or Polytheistic?,” an article by James Hillman in *Spring 1971: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought*, also found as an Appendix in *The New Polytheism* by David L. Miller (Ed.), pp. 109-142, Dallas: Spring, 1981. The precis consists mostly of statements taken from the article with a few original observations by AD.

PRECIS OF JAMES HILLMAN'S "PSYCHOLOGY: MONOTHEISTIC OR POLYTHEISTIC?"

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Jung: "The anima-animus stage is correlated with polytheism, and the Self with monotheism."

The former is a pre-stage of Self, so is polytheism a pre-stage of monotheism. Consequently the Self is the archetype of utmost value to Jung and for contemporary man. Now this preference for the archetype of the Self strikes at the very roots of the polytheism or the plurality of archetypes that psychology works with. In other words, the exploration of consciousness in terms of the gods will be only preliminary to something more important, the Self. This archetype would be paramount, and the investigation should follow the phenomenology of the conjunction, the mandalas, the quaternity, and the unus mundus. There is a basic conflict in Jungian psychology, what fantasy governs our view of the soul making and individuation, the many or the one. Now there is an unproved notion in comparative religion that monotheism is the pinnacle of the evolutionary development of religion. This hypothesis may be referred to as the "theological temperament". Jung somewhere writes, "the monistic attitude belongs to the introverted mind, and the pluralistic to the extroverted attitude." This is supposedly correlated with polytheism and monotheism, which are supposedly in conflict and constant warfare. Now monotheism is not necessary, except from its own point of view, and the idea that the progressive stages of individuation are leading up to the superiority is questionable. It seems to be an alignment with the Judeo-Christian conception, which favors historical development and hierarchical improvement. There is another thrust in psychology, though, and that tends to the multiple field of circularity. We might refer to the description above as the revisionism which is going on in analytical psychology, which is propounded by Hillman.

Now in his description of the objective psyche, Jung tended towards a multiplicity of partial consciousness, like stars or sparks or luminous fishes' eyes. And psychological polytheism corresponds with this description and provides for its conceptual formulation in terms of classical mythology, so that by providing a god for each context it would find a place for each spark, and is more interested in integrating each fragment according to its own principle, giving each god his due over that portion of consciousness, that symptom or complex which calls for an archetypal background. It would accept the tower of Babel rather than gathering them all into a unity under the auspices of the archetype of Self. This emphasis upon the many-dominance would then favor the differentiation of the anima-animus complex. An interest in a plurality of divine hypotheses and their processes displayed in myth will prove more psychologically useful even if less religious. This interest will more likely produce more insights into the emotions, images and relationships even though less concerned with wholeness. It will reflect more accurately the illusions and the entanglements of the soul.

What in effect Hillman is saying, the more occupied with the anima-animus complex one is, the more one will be preoccupied with the welter of psychological phenomena. In contrast the more I am occupied by the Self, the more will I be concerned with goal-states, peak experiences and universality. The many gods of Mount Olympus must fade away before the single god of Jehovah, even if he has a trinitarian form. For Hillman fragmentation would indicate many possibilities for individuation, and might even be the result of individuation. For if there is only one model of individuation, can there be true individuality? The complexes that will not be integrated force recognition of their autonomous goal and will not serve the

single goal of monotheistic wholeness. This from one point of view might be a psychological improvement, since all of psyche is being reflected. Without a consciously polytheistic psychology, are we not more susceptible to fragmentation? (Vol. 9, part 2, para. 41 and para. 60, CW of Jung)

This theme of monotheism vs polytheism is very complex and requires philosophic understanding. It can be historically viewed as the confrontation between Christianity and paganism.

But a pathological view towards many of the psyche's phenomena is inevitable, if psychology does not keep alive the totality of archetypal forms and the different ways of viewing the soul and life. Should psychology prefer to merge the many ways into a wholeness, determined by monotheism (egotism), will it not be recapitulating its former mistakes, in other words, will it not be dismissing the very reason principles that truly constitute the process of individuation? When our model for individuation is governed by the Protestant monotheistic psychology then every image finds meaning only in those terms, like the pilgrim in his progress towards integration, with the resulting consequence that every psychic event is bound to the Protestant myth. The suppression of the many gods results in the ultimate elimination of all individual fantasy. So we may draw the conclusion that individual symbol formation requires a polytheistic psychology, because the symbols refer to their likenesses in the variety of archetypal forms within which they find their authentication. The danger here which is stressed by Hillman is that Jung's stress upon totality and wholeness could be turned by the influential monotheism of our culture to a new one-sidedness. In other words, is the restoration of the pagan gods as archetypal dominants of the psyche impossible in a monistic psychological world? He would prefer to leave the question of whether the many are each aspects of the one or emanations of the one as a discussion for theology. For him the restoration of the gods reflects both the varied beauty and messy confusion, tragic limitations of the anima-animus. Polytheistic psychology can give sacred differentiation to our psychic turmoil and welcome its outlandish [Note: The typed paper mistakenly says 'outlandist'; original Hillman quote says outlandish.] individuality.

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