

Talking About Psychology
James Hillman

—handout to accompany video clip shown in class

In the video clip, there is a reference to Hillman's book, *Re-Visioning Psychology* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1977)(1975). Hillman tells the reader of *Re-Visioning Psychology*: this book "is about soul-making." The book is an attempt, Hillman says, "at a psychology of soul . . . re-visioning psychology from the point of view of soul." Hillman goes on to observe that "the soul cannot be understood through psychology alone . . ." From Hillman's perspective, "the human adventure is a wandering through the vale of the world for the sake of making soul. Our life is psychological, and the purpose of life is to make psyche of it, to find connections between life and soul." He goes on to say, "[t]he job of psychology is to offer a way and find a place for soul within its own field. For this we need basic psychological ideals." [*Re-Visioning Psychology*, at ix]

Soul: "By *soul*, I mean, first of all, a perspective rather than a substance, a viewpoint toward things rather than a thing itself. This perspective is reflective; it mediates events and makes differences between ourselves and everything that happens." [*Id.* at x]

"In another attempt upon the idea of soul I suggested that the word refers to that unknown component which makes meaning possible, [and] turns events into experiences . . ." [*Id.*]

"By 'soul' I mean the imaginative possibility in our natures, the experiencing through reflective speculation, dream, image, and *fantasy*—that mode which recognizes all realities as primarily symbolic or metaphorical." [*Id.*]

Image and Fantasy: The "primary data of the psyche" is "fantasy images." "Everything we know and feel and every statement we make are all fantasy-based, that is, they derive from psychic images. These are not merely the flotsam of memory, the reproduction of perceptions, rearranged leftovers from the input of our lives." Hillman finds in images "the basic givens of psychic life"; imagines are "self-originating, inventive, spontaneous, complete, and organize in archetypal patterns. Fantasy-images are both the raw materials and finished products of psyche, and they are the privileged mode of access to knowledge of soul. Nothing is more primary. Every notion in our minds, each perception of the world and sensation in ourselves must go through a psychic organization in order to 'happen' at all." Relating this idea of fantasy images as the primary date of the psyche to archetypal psychology, Hillman notes that his "psychology of soul . . . is based in a psychology of image." [*Id.* at xi]

"Man is primarily an imagemaker and our psychic substance consists of images; our being is imaginal being, an existence in imagination. We are indeed such stuff as dreams are made on." [*Id.* at 23]

"Since we can know only fantasy-images directly and immediately, and from these images create our

worlds and call them realities, we live in a world that is neither ‘inner’ nor ‘out.’ . . . [I]mages are in us and we live in the midst of them.” [Id.]

The Debt to C.G. Jung: Hillman makes clear that archetypal psychology owes a “fundamental debt” to Jung and his formulation of the “unconscious levels of the psyche” [Id. at xi]. Jung’s approach to psychology is often referred to as “depth psychology” (in contrast to Freud psychoanalytic approach). Jung and “a long line” of intellectual ancestors suggest that “the dimension of our soul travel is downward.” [Id. at xi]

The Way You Relate to Psychology: “[T]he worth of a psychology for another person lies not in the places where he can identify with it because it satisfies his psychic needs, but where it provokes him to work out his own psychology in response. Freud and Jung are psychological masters, not that we may follow them in becoming Freudian and Jungian, but that we may follow them in becoming psychological. Here psychology is conceived as a necessary activity of the psyche, which constructs vessels and breaks them in order to deepen and intensify experience.” [Id. at xii]

Soul and Psychology (Again): “Where there is a connection to soul, there is psychology” [Id. at xii]. Hillman, in a later passage, notes that “the soul is ceaselessly talking about itself in ever-recurring motifs in ever-new variations . . . [and] in the realm of soul the ego is a paltry thing.” [Id. at xvi]

Relating Psychology to Therapy: “Therapy is a heavy word, bring to mind the suffering of illness and what we go through to cure it.” Therapy takes us “into each individual’s symptomatic peculiarities, the awareness of his or her complexes, and also, right through them. Therapy, or analysis, is not only something that analysts do to patients; it is a process that goes on intermittently in our individual soul-searching, our attempts at understanding our complexities, the critical attacks, prescriptions, and encouragements that we give ourselves. We are all in therapy all the time insofar as we are involved with soul-making. The idea here is that if we are each and every one a psychological patient, we are also each and every one a psychotherapist. Analysis goes on in the soul’s imagination and not only in the clinic.” [Id. at xii]

Understanding Archetypes: Hillman notes that archetypes are notably difficult to explain; they “tend to be metaphors rather than things.” Basically, archetypes are “the *deepest patterns of psychic function*, the roots of the soul governing the perspectives we have of ourselves and the world. They are the axiomatic, self-evident images to which psychic life and our theories about it ever return. They are similar to other axiomatic first principles, the models or paradigms, that we find in other fields. For ‘matter,’ ‘God,’ ‘energy,’ ‘life,’ ‘health,’ ‘society,’ ‘art’ are also fundamental metaphors, archetypes perhaps themselves, which hold whole worlds together and yet can never be pointed to, accounted for, or even adequately circumscribed.” [Id. at xiii].

Hillman goes on to offer this cautionary note: “[O]ne thing is absolutely essential to the notion of archetypes: their emotional possessive effect, their bedazzlement of consciousness so that it becomes blind to its own stance. By setting up a universe which tends to hold everything we do, see, and say

in the sway of its cosmos, an archetype is best comparable with a God.” [*Id.* at xiii].

For an example of an archetype, Hillman comments on the archetype of the hero: “The archetype of the hero . . . appears first in *behavior*, the drive to activity, outward exploration, response to challenge, seizing and grasping and extending. It appears second in the *images* of Hercules, Achilles, Samson (or their cinema counterparts) doing their specific tasks; and third, in a style of *consciousness*, in feelings of independence, strength, and achievement, in ideas of decisive action, coping, planning, virtue, conquest . . . , and in psychopathologies of battle, overpowering masculinity, and single-mindedness.” [*Id.* at xiv]

An important feature of the archetype is its collective aspect. With an archetype, we “collect together disparate personal events and discover a sense and depth in them beyond our individual habits and quirks. [T]he archetypal perspective provides a common connection between what goes on in any individual soul and what goes on in all people in all places in all times. It allows psychological understanding at a collective level. Archetypal, in other words, means fundamentally human.” [*Id.* at xiv]

“Fantasy images that are the stuff and values of soul are structured by archetypes.” [*Id.* at 23]

Pathologizing: “Our internal confusions are a latent richness. They require a differentiated background if they are to be appraised adequately. Often we condemn images and experiences as wrong, weak, sick, or mad simply because we have not discovered their archetypal sense.” [*Id.* at xv]

“The insights of depth psychology derive from souls *in extremis*, the sick, suffering, abnormal, and fantastic conditions of psyche. Our souls in private to ourselves, in close communion with another, and even in public exhibit psychopathologies. Each soul at some time or another demonstrates illusions and depressions, overvalued ideas, manic flights and rages, anxieties, compulsions, and perversions. Perhaps our psychopathology has an intimate connection with our individuality, so that our fear of being what we really are is partly because we fear the psychopathological aspect of individuality. For we are each peculiar; we have symptoms; we fail, and cannot see why we go wrong or even where, despite high hopes and good intentions. We are unable to set matters right, to understand what is taking place or be understood by those who would try. Our minds, feelings, wills, and behaviors deviate from normal ways. Our insights are impotent, or none come at all. Our feelings disappear in apathy; we worry and also don’t care. Destruction seeps out of us autonomously and we cannot redeem the broken trusts, hopes, loves.” [*Id.* at 55]

“In order to approach the psychology of pathology afresh, I am introducing the term *pathologizing* to mean the psyche’s autonomous ability to create illness, morbidity, disorder, abnormality, and suffering in any aspect of its behavior and to experience and imagine life through this deformed and afflicted perspective.” [*Id.* at 57]

“Were we able to discover its psychological necessity, pathologizing would no longer be wrong or right, but merely necessary, involving purposes which we have misperceived and values which must

present themselves necessarily in a distorted form.” [Id.]. Hillman contends that we must “find a place” for pathologizing. [Id.]

“Pathologizing is present not only at moments of special crisis but in the everyday lives of all of us.” [Id. at 70]

“[P]athologizing supplied material out of which we build our regular lives.” Our “styles,” “concerns,” “loves,” all “reflect patterns that have pathologized strands woven all through them.” [Id. at 71]

“We owe our symptoms an immense debt. The soul can exist without its therapists but not without its afflictions. [Id.]

“[S]ymptoms are demonstrations of the psyche, a mode of its being and expression, part of its fantasy and its affliction.” [Id. at 75]

“The psyche uses complaints to speak in a magnified and misshapen language about its depths.” [Id. at 82]

What Is at Stake: “The push of progress has left corpses in its wake.” [Id. at 10]. “What is needed is a revisioning, a fundamental shift of perspective out of that soulless predicament we call modern consciousness.” [Id. at 3]

The Language We Use: We need to recognize “words as independent carriers of soul between people. We need to recall that we do not just make words up or learn them in school, or ever have them fully under control. Words, like angels, are powers which have invisible power over us. They are personal presences which have whole mythologies: genders, genealogies (etymologies concerning origins and creations), histories, and vogues; and their own guarding, blaspheming, creating, and annihilating effects. For words are persons. . . . Without the inherence of soul in words, speech would not move us, words would not provide forms for carrying our lives and giving sense to our deaths.” [Id. at 9]

Personifying: “Personifying is a way of being in the world and *experiencing the world as a psychological field*, where persons are given with events, so that events are experiences that touch us, move us, appeal to us.” [Id. at 13]. “Personifying is . . . a way of knowing, especially knowing what is invisible, hidden in the heart.” [Id. at 15]. “Where imagination reigns, personifying happens.” [Id. at 17]

The Ego: “[T]he ego is not the whole psyche, only one member of a commune.” [Id. at 31]. Ego “represent[s] the literal view: it takes itself and its view for real. Literalism is an ego viewpoint; it means being locked into an ego.” [Id. at 48] What saves us from the ego are the symptoms that “remind us of the autonomy of the complexes; they refuse to submit to the ego’s view of a unified person.” [Id. at 49]

Psychology as a Faith: “Psychological faith begins in the *love of images*, and it flows mainly through the shapes of persons in reveries, fantasies, reflections, and imaginations. Their increasing vivification gives one an increasing conviction of having, and the of being, an interior reality of deep significance transcending one’s personal life.” [*Id.* at 50]