

# **Author's Reply to Sylvester Wojtkowski's polemical review of *Act and Image*.**

**Warren Colman**

First of all, I would like to thank Sylvester Wojtkowski for his detailed review of my book, *Act and Image: The Emergence of Symbolic Imagination*. Thanks too are due to Tom Singer for giving me the opportunity to respond to what Wojtkowski himself refers to as his 'polemical fervour' and 'archetypal animus'.

## **The Cartesian 'Soul'**

I appreciate the time and trouble Sylvester has taken to consider my arguments but it is inevitable, given the difference between his perspective and my own that he has not really grasped the fulcrum of the argument and his review is full of misreadings and misconceptions. The fundamental reason for this, in my view, lies in the challenge I make to the Cartesian perspective that separates mental life from the material world. Wojtkowski's robust defence of 'soul' and 'psyche' remains rooted within a Cartesian world-view and so my attempt to construct a non-Cartesian view of psyche seems anathema to him since, were he to embrace it, it would undermine his own assumptions. Instead,

he takes me to task for not questioning *my* assumptions, upbraiding me for not seeing my own ideas in terms of fantasies and metaphors, apparently without realising that my work is a *critique* of this way of seeing things. That is to say, he remains within a perspective that my argument challenges and then upbraids me for not doing the same. This is a shame since in many respects we are ‘on the same side’ in valuing imagination and the soul as the heart of our human way of being.

To explain this, let me go straight to the heart of the matter – the question of ‘soul’. Wojtkowski frequently bemoans what he takes to be my ignorance of the soul. ‘It is truly depressing’, he writes ‘when Jungians do not at least acknowledge [the soul]’. To understand this, we need to understand what is meant by ‘the soul’ here, something which is not easy to discover as it tends to be taken for granted as a basic tenet of the so-called ‘archetypal school’ of psychology. Wojtkowski makes only a glancing reference to the origin of this ‘soul perspective’ when he attempts to take me to task for questioning Jung’s Cartesian dualistic split between body and mind. He claims that ‘This is a simplification as Jung often thinks in terms of the trinity of mind, soul and body’ (p. 4), presumably referring to Jung’s emphasis on ‘*esse in anima*’ as a ‘third realm’ between body and mind<sup>1</sup>. As I’ve explained elsewhere (Colman 2017a), this was Jung’s ingenious solution to the problem of a split Cartesian world in which the hegemony of scientific materialism threatened the age-old world of the gods,

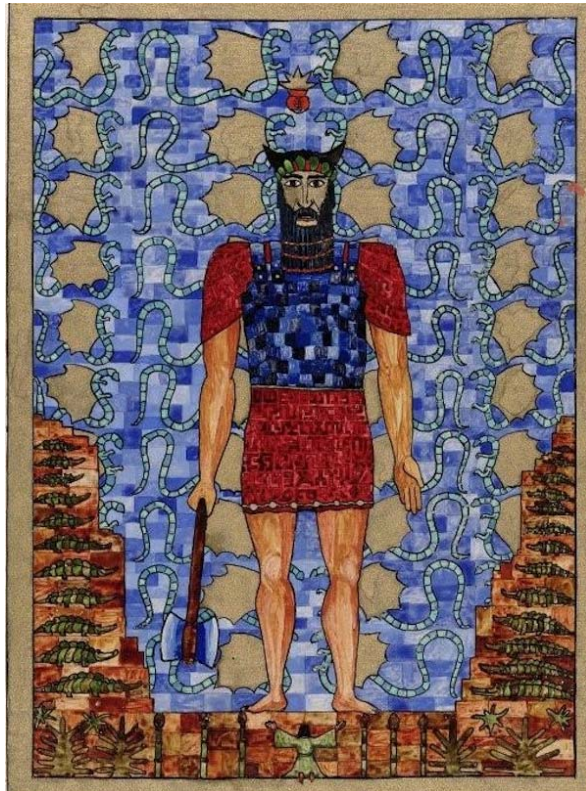
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<sup>1</sup> In her helpful paper on ‘*This Talk of Soul: What Does It Mean?*’ Mary Stamper (1994) shows Hillman’s debt to the work of Evangelos Christou. In similar vein to ‘*esse in anima*’, Christou developed a view of ‘soul’ as an intermediary to the ‘sense perceptions’ of the body and the ‘conceptions’ of the mind, an obviously Cartesian model that takes a particularly narrow view of what is meant by ‘mind’.

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represented in *The Red Book* by Izdubar. Through the establishment of *esse in anima* as an independent third realm (the soul),

Jung was able to use the reality of the psyche as a trump card with which to put not only Izdubar in his pocket but the science and philosophy that threatened to kill him off. Psychological explanations trump philosophical ones by revealing their underlying archetypal origins (Colman 2017a, p. 35).



**Figure 1** *Izdubar in The Red Book*

The trouble with this solution is twofold – firstly, it remains rooted in the Cartesian split since it takes the division between *esse in intellectu* and *esse in re* as given and secondly, it results in a view of the world that necessarily eschews so-called ‘external’ factors such as history, culture, politics and geography as explanatory influences on our individual and collective lives. That is, it rescues

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the soul at the cost of cutting it off from the world. It is this that we see evidenced throughout Wojtkowski's review, repetitively claiming that I should see things as 'fantasies' rather than 'facts'. As I expressed it in 'Soul in the World'

this not only fails to address the complex interrelation between states of mind and the state of the social world but reduces the latter to a kind of ghost-life as if it is merely a screen for psychic projections (*ibid.*, p. 36).

Now this would be all well and good if, as Wojtkowski claims, these supposed interrelations were really (nothing but?) fantasies but my argument is that this way of seeing them is, as Wojtkowski might say, a Cartesian 'fantasy'. If we are able to heal the Cartesian divide there is no *need* to protect the soul in this way. Assuming that in this respect, the 'soul' is equivalent to 'psyche', Wojtkowski fails to see that the psyche is *hidden in plain sight* throughout my book. The aim and purpose is to show how psychic life can emerge out of material conditions *and* that, at least as far as humans are concerned, those material conditions cannot be understood except in and through symbolic imagination, a medium which I show to be psychic and cultural at once, breaking down the divide between an 'internal' psyche and an 'external' (social) world. Unlike Jung to some extent and Hillman to a much greater extent, this does not separate off the soul as a distinct dimension or realm but rather re-ensouls the world and ourselves as creatures within it. So when Wojtkowski paraphrases Jung to say that "It is as if [Colman] did not know or else continually forgot that everything we are conscious of is an image, and that image is psyche" (p. 4) he is missing the point. This is not some dogmatic tenet to be 'known' but a philosophical claim to be argued. I haven't *forgotten* this: I profoundly disagree with it; and in the 40

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pages of the chapter in my book on ‘Expanding the Mind’ I show *why* I disagree with it, laying a foundation for everything that follows. From this I conclude that psyche is never to be found without a material and social world in which it lives and has its being, *our* being, including any perceptions we may have of a non-material or supernatural world. We are in the world just as much as we are in psyche and our psychic life is *dependent* on our being in the (material) world.

So, before I discuss this further, let me underscore the point that my argument against the necessity of positing a ‘third thing’ whether it be the psychoid, the soul or the anima is absolutely fundamental to the rest of the book. It is not a question of ‘fabricating psychology without the soul’ but of showing that the supposed need for the soul as a substantive entity is a function of the Cartesian split that has divided the world into soulless materiality on the one hand and a narrow version of the mind as merely cognitive functions on the other. I think, as ‘Jungians’, we are pretty united in our opposition to this but the difference lies in the way we go about it. Since my argument attempts to be more fundamental than any account which accepts the Cartesian notion that we know nothing but *images* of the world, it behoves my critics to show why this critique is wrong, not to criticise me for not using the very categories whose necessity I’m questioning!

### ***Assumptions, Context and Ground***

Ironically, having either failed or refused to question his Cartesian assumptions, Wojtkowski takes me to task for not questioning *my* assumptions. One aspect of this is what he wittily labels the ‘beforism’ of my search for the

evolutionary and historical origins of the psyche. This is a nice ‘touche!’ to my criticism of ‘behindology’, the idea that the world is to be understood in terms of hidden forces such as archetypes. For archetypal psychology there is indeed neither before nor behind since the psyche is conceived as an entirely autonomous realm with neither context nor ground. Wojtkowski expresses this difference most clearly when he writes that Hillman deems images to be ‘autonomous, immediate, pure psychic, mysterious presences self-originating, self-referential (i.e., without “material” referent) and complete’ (p. 18), contrasting this with my view that images are emergent from interpersonal, affective situations. This is certainly a major difference and is perhaps why it is not enough for Wojtkowski that I acknowledged that my developmental interest in origins was not necessarily shared by others; it would seem that for his Hillmanian perspective, the questions of origins is to be banned altogether or, rather, re-interpreted as a ‘fantasy’. This seems to assume that an argument can be dispatched merely by showing that it proceeds from a particular way of imagining the world, without considering its validity or value in relation to other arguments.

So, for example, Wojtkowski compares anthropological interpretations of cave art to Freud’s interpretation of infantile sexuality on the basis that both are fantasies residing in the minds of their creators. But unless there is assumed to be some reality to which these interpretations refer and against which they are to be judged, how are we to say which is right and which is wrong? If we do not acknowledge the factuality of the world, where are the criteria for evaluating one interpretation rather than another? In this sealed off world of ‘soul fantasies’,

evidence and argument become irrelevant and we are left without any possibility of reaching a better understanding of the world. All we have left are ‘helpful stories’ although I am at a loss to say how Wojtkowski evaluates one story as more or less helpful than another. By contrast, all academic research in both science and humanities proceeds by testing evidence and argument against more or less commonly agreed truth-criteria, albeit these may also change over time. In this way, Freud’s claims have been extensively tested by generations of infant researchers and found to be largely wrong. It’s true that they continue to have value as metaphors as I argued myself in a paper on ‘Theory as Metaphor’ (Colman 2009) but this only goes to show that psychoanalytic theories are more symbolic vehicle than scientific discovery – and that goes for ‘soul’ and ‘the unconscious’ too. This is what *distinguishes* depth psychology from scientific theory; it’s not a recipe for saying, as Wojtkowski seems to do, that science itself is merely a bunch of metaphorical ‘helpful stories’.

Wojtkowski seems to be saying that psychology should *only* be concerned with images and fantasies and should not attempt to say anything about where those images and fantasies come from or how they arise in the mind. Then the psyche is conceived as entirely free-floating in a sea of endless relativism. This makes Wojtkowski’s designation of my approach as ‘post-modern’ sound like a very black pot seeing its reflection in a kettle of entirely different hue.

If what Wojtkowski means by my ‘assumptions’ is that I assume the necessity of establishing a context and ground for psyche then I am pleased to admit to being guilty as charged. As I make abundantly clear throughout the book, for me this context is to be found in the material world by which I mean

that we are embodied agents in the context of an environment (our milieu or *Umwelt*). This has significant implications for clinical work by the way, since it requires the therapist to consider the context of the client's images and fantasies, including a) the context in which those images arise and are disclosed (the therapeutic relationship) and b) the client's personal circumstances and history – what Wojtkowski disparagingly refers to as 'social psychology'. This also applies to the personal associations to dream and fantasy images to which I give priority over any 'archetypal' meaning. Dreams are not, in my view, dreamed by a disembodied imaginary person called 'the soul' but by real embodied persons with real lives and real histories living in a particular social and cultural time and place.<sup>2</sup> I remain unimpressed by the imaginal constructions of those who would interpret images without reference to these quotidian personal and social contexts.

I am likewise guilty as charged in relation to 'beforism', that is the attempt to ground phenomena in their historical origins. This is what ultimately makes me a materialist even though my version of materialism is very far from the crude reductive kind that denies the reality of imagination, psyche and the spiritual world. Here again the question is one of ground. It is true that the 'fantasy' of genesis (i.e. as a way of imagining the world) has its limits. If everything is predicated on something that precedes it, we eventually get back to the origin of the universe in the singularity of the Big Bang. Here, 'beforism' reaches its limit

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<sup>2</sup> It will be apparent from this that I also reject the concept of 'the objective psyche', especially Jung's claim for a 'self-subsistent meaning' (see Colman 2011). To my mind, meaning has to be meaning *for* someone so the idea of objective meaning is a contradiction in terms. In this respect the subjectivity and personalisation of the Hillmanian 'soul' is preferable, although I suppose this too is a metaphorical fantasy.

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insofar as it makes no sense to ask what was ‘before’ the beginning – or so I understand from the mathematicians.



**Figure 2** Conceptual computer artwork representing the origin of the universe.

(Science Photo Library)

But it would be quite wrong to pretend that this is *merely* a fantasy since that would be a travesty of the past 150 years of research in physics and mathematics. Judging by the advances made in both theoretical and experimental physics in the course of my lifetime, I would say that modern cosmology has more than demonstrated its real effectiveness. As Jung might say ‘Reality is what works’. Genesis may indeed be a theory and not a fact as Giegerich claims<sup>3</sup>, but if so it is one that has amply demonstrated its grounding in facticity.

So, if the ground of ‘beforism’ lies in its capacity to demonstrate the actuality of the origins it predicts, where might we look for the ground of

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<sup>3</sup> In one of the quotations heading Wojtkowski’s Review:

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archetypal psychology? Here we find ourselves confronted with a self-generating autonomous psyche that owes its origin and reality to nothing outside itself. This sounds suspiciously like God to me and if we compare it to Berkeley's proof against 'matter', we shall see that archetypal psychology belongs squarely in the Idealist tradition.



**Figure 3** Bishop Berkeley (1685-1753) (Portrait by John Smybert, 1727)

For Berkeley, the reality of the world is not to be found in the heretical and unsubstantiated notion of matter but in the mind: *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived). How then can things exist when there is no mind with which to

perceive them? Berkeley's answer is that they are held in the mind of God. So God becomes the guarantor of the reality of the world, a world that exists within the mind of God. It seems to me that the autonomous psyche functions in the same way in Hillman's psychology: the reality of the world is predicated on the reality of the psyche which is thus taken to be the ultimate reality. As Jung says 'I start with the sovereignty of the psyche' (Jung 1921, para 968). If this is the case, my discussion of Idealism and Materialism turned out to be even more significant than I thought.<sup>4</sup>

Wojtkowski's antipathy to materialism in any shape or form results in (at least) two misconceptions about my approach – the first is the claim that it is reductive and the second is his rejection of the social dimension of psychic life, something he seems to consider a heretical contamination of the purity of psychology and/or the soul.

### ***Is the Argument Reductive?***

One of Wojtkowski's more astonishing claims is that my discussion of symbols as 'tools of revelation' is tantamount to reducing the meaning of cathedrals to the activity of building them. This is followed by the analogy of the 'blue guitar' poem which I found amusingly ironic as it so happens that I really do play blues guitar!

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<sup>4</sup> Wojtkowski considers my discussion of Berkeley to be a simply a 'balance' to the materialist viewpoint. I hope the foregoing paragraph shows that his ideas are still highly relevant to an understanding of where some aspects of Jungian psychology are located philosophically.

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**Figure 4** Warren Colman at the 2016 IAAP Congress in Kyoto – performing ‘Before You Accuse Me’ (yes, really!)

These remarks are puzzling since they take my meaning to be quite the opposite of what I intend. Apparently I am claiming to describe things as they really are when surely the whole point of the argument I build from Searle’s work on constitutive symbols is that reality is constituted by symbolic imagination – it is never simply ‘what things are’. If by the blue guitar we understand ‘symbolic imagination’ or even ‘tools of revelation’ then that’s exactly my point: things as they are are changed [constituted] upon the blue guitar [symbols]. So what is Wojtkowski missing here?

He seems to think that a discussion of how the symbolic realm is ‘built’ reduces its meaning to ‘nothing but’ the building process whereas I would argue that such a discussion can only *enhance* our understanding; it would be absurd to consider that understanding the conditions for meaning could *replace* the meaning. For example, a discussion about the historical conditions in which a

work of art was produced and an understanding of its social, political and historical references (if any) may enhance its meaning, but works of art only survive if and when their meaning transcends their historical conditions. As a case in point, it enhances our understanding Shakespeare's history plays to understand their references to the political situation in Elizabethan England, especially the anxieties about royal succession and the danger of offending a Tudor view of history. But it would be absurd to dismiss *Richard III* on the grounds that it is historically inaccurate.



**Figure 5** *Portrait of Richard III (died 1485), late 16th century (National Portrait Gallery, London)*

**Figure 6** *Anthony Sher as Shakespeare's Richard III (Royal Shakespeare Company, 1984)*

Far from invalidating it, this knowledge helps *liberate* the play from the historical story it supposedly depicts. We can then see the play as a timeless study of power politics, tyranny and corruption – and much else besides. As I always say, following Jung, the meaning of symbolic productions can never be exhausted because symbols are, by definition, multiple and indeterminate.

In this respect, Wojtkowski's approach seems saturated with either/or thinking – *either* the symbol is a socio-material artefact *or* it's an 'subjective fantasy'. But *Richard III* is both – as a piece of literature it exists within a socio-historical context that determined some aspects of its form (the valorisation of the Tudors and the demonization of the Yorkists). But of course that doesn't encompass its meaning, it merely describes the conditions for its emergence. So Wojtkowski is conflating the process with the product – as if I'm somehow invalidating imagination by studying its historical origins and the social conditions that make it possible. That seems to me to be like insisting that the truth or otherwise of *Richard III* should not be questioned as if to do so would invalidate its poetic and symbolic meaning. So it is simply not true that the need for precision in defining psychic matters is an ill-fitting scientific attitude – explaining psychic phenomena in materialistic, behavioural or social terms is bound to reject constructs that can only refer to particular "internal" experiences and be expressed through speech or other expressive forms (that will make them even less precise).' (p. 10).

This view is at odds with the deep engagement with their material practised by artists of all kinds who work long and hard to achieve the necessary precision (including the effect of imprecision<sup>5</sup>) whether it be the exact intonation and rhythm of music, the precise colour for a ceramic glaze<sup>6</sup>, the right words for a line of poetry or the interpretive constructs that do justice to the experiences of our analysands.

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<sup>5</sup> Winnicott is a good example of an analytic writer whose elliptical, ambiguous style was achieved by repeated revision of his draft texts.

<sup>6</sup> As described by Marshall Colman. See <https://marshallcolman.blogspot.co.uk/2018/04/how-much-time-should-you-spend-in-studio.html>

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**Figure 7** “A successful glaze test getting just the right shade of turquoise and just the right surface texture. It’s a line blend of stains and copper oxide. Since you ask, the best one is No. 4.” (Marshall Colman)

Anyone can dream up images but to make meaning from those images requires the active hard work of the symbolic (“transcendent”) function. As my title implies, for me, act and image are deeply intertwined and ultimately inseparable. After the labours of *The Red Book*, from the robust dialogue with his fantasies to the detailed work of transcribing them, I have little doubt that Jung would agree with me here.

### ***The rejection of ‘Sociology and Behaviourism’.***

Wojtkowski seems to have had particular difficulty in getting his head around my inclusion of a social dimension to the psyche. To some extent this

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seems to be due to a refusal to consider any other possibility than a self-generating autonomous and unconditioned psyche as the source of all ideas and images. Given his claim that 'From Jung's perspective, any idea enters social realm from individual psyche', I wonder, how he might explain something like the idea of agriculture that initiated the Neolithic era 10,000 years ago?



**Figure 8** *Gobleki Tepi, an archaeological site in modern Turkey associated with the time and place where agriculture began around 9,000 BCE. Whether the large gatherings of people around this monumental site were cause or effect of the domestication of wild cereals is not clear.*

I suppose he would have to subscribe to the heroic brain-wave idea (fantasy?!) of history whereby socio-historical developments are dreamed up by individual geniuses. Perhaps he would say these ideas come from the soul, that the soul creates history in its own image? This then becomes a Jungian dogma



not subject to any further argument since any alternative viewpoint no matter how well argued or evidenced can be ‘trumped’ by pointing out that it is merely a ‘metaphor’ or a ‘fantasy’.

Views like these would be a serious embarrassment not only in the social sciences but in *any* academic discipline. This matters not a jot to Wojtkowski who seems concerned only with maintaining the purity of his own (or rather Hillman’s) view of psychology against all comers. As he says ‘Colman loses psychological optic (psycho-logy as a logic of the soul ... *that doesn’t need anything from outside psyche*)’ (p. 19 italics added). Of course, I haven’t ‘lost’ this view since I never held it in the first place. Wojtkowski is distressed that Jungians ‘do not read the work of people from different ‘schools’ by which he means that they/I don’t read Hillman or his followers. But given their extremely narrow and dogmatic view of psychology, is it any wonder?<sup>7</sup> Wojtkowski’s complaint about the limitations of my references is also a bit rich given my range of references *outside* Jungian psychology, although it seems that, for Wojtkowski, these are all ‘out of court’, *a priori*. For example, he considers Jung’s severance between psychology and anthropology an advance where I consider it to have contributed to making Jungian psychology an irrelevant backwater ‘on the wrong side of history’ (Colman 2017b). So, although he acknowledges the many cutting edge ideas I draw on in the book (e.g. emergence, extended mind, distributed cognition, phenomenology, material engagement theory, constitutive symbols etc.), he nevertheless maintains the ‘paradoxical’ view that I’m the one taking

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<sup>7</sup> I have actually read *Revisioning Psychology* years ago and tried reading *The Dream and the Underworld* when researching the book. However, it was soon apparent that while Hillman *uses* imagination prolifically, he has little to say *about* imagination and certainly nothing about the *origin* of imagination. Thanks to Wojtkowski, I now understand why.

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psychology back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century! It seems that Wojtkowski and I are a lost cause to each other, fundamentally antithetic to the other's project.

So it is not surprising that he seems to have little knowledge or understanding of the social sciences. When he opines that sociologists don't recognise the unconscious (p. 6), he means a reified Jungian version of 'the unconscious' whereas sociologists are all the time studying the unconscious impact of social forces on individuals – hence the problem of 'false consciousness' in Marxism for example. Similarly, psychoanalytic studies of the social unconscious have been prolific since the 1940s and there is currently a major upsurge of interest in the social world within Jungian psychology itself, including the idea of the cultural complex and the highly successful conferences on Analysis and Activism. Furthermore, when Wojtkowski accuses me of 'behaviourism' he seems to be confusing an outdated form of psychology that deliberately rejected 'the mind' as its locus of study with 'the study of behaviour', something which is common to many disciplines including history, sociology, economics, child psychology and ethology, to mention just a few, all of which include consideration of psychological processes. Ever the Cartesian, he seems to think that images exist in an entirely separate realm from the things people actually do and that my interest in action therefore makes me some kind of psychological apostate.

### ***Hillman's Silo Psychology.***

Here again our views are diametrically opposed. At one point Wojtkowski complains that I 'uncritically accept palaeontologists' and anthropologists' terminology who refer to their speculations and conjectures based on fossils as

hypotheses, rather than fantasies, which is what they are from the psychological point of view' (p. 13). The crucial point here is that I deliberately used the terminology of other disciplines in order to open up Jungian discourse in both directions, thereby facilitating exchange and dialogue. Reformulating hypotheses as fantasies seems only to result in sealing off Jungian discourse from other related disciplines in a self-referential silo, deaf to all other voices to whom it considers itself superior. *Pari passu*, archetypal psychology proposes a model of the psyche in its own image, as if our ways of imagining the world have nothing to do with our actual engagement in it but are self-generating essences cut off from our intentional activity and any process of validation. Thus fantasy holds sway over any attempt to discover factual historical truth. Even Giegerich recognises this problem. In his view, Hillman's work exists in 'a 'bubble of irreality outside time' (Giegerich 1993). In Hillman's psychology 'the immunisation of the imaginal from the historical process has become inherent in its very form'. (Giegerich 2008, p.197.).

This goes well beyond Jung's move of making the psyche the primary datum; it becomes a form of authoritarian dogmatism with an explicit claim for intellectual superiority. As Hillman himself puts it

the psychological perspective is *supreme and prior* because the psyche is prior and must appear within every human undertaking .... psychology *inherently assumes superiority* over other disciplines ... psychology cannot be one department among others, since the psyche is not a separate branch of knowledge. The soul is less an object of knowledge than it is a way of knowing the object, a way of knowing knowledge itself.

(Hillman 1975, pp. 130-131. italics added).

This is a bold claim, to put it mildly. I certainly agree that there are many ways of knowing but here the basis for all ways of knowing ('knowing knowledge') has been equated with one particular way of knowing (psychology) which is then deemed to have special properties that render it not subject to the constraints of any other way of knowing. To achieve this, Hillman has conflated 'the psyche' with 'psychology'. Of course the psyche can't be a branch of knowledge, any more than the universe can be – it's physics that's the branch of knowledge, not the physical world. So Hillman has first equated that which is known (the psyche) with the method by which we know about it (psychology) and, secondly, equated the psyche (that which knows) with epistemology (the study of *how* we know things). This serves to elevate Hillman's psychology above any criticism since all criticism is undercut by the pointing to the image, fantasy and metaphor 'behind' the criticism, a view that requires the archetypal psychology perspective.

The danger of downgrading factual reality in this way was recently pointed out by Nick Baines, the Bishop of Leeds, reacting to a comment by Donald Trump that he would consider the facts and act 'if he agrees with them'. I have interpolated the relevant parallels to Baines' comments:

To disagree with facts is deliberately to choose to ignore reality and that would prioritise ideological prejudice [archetypal psychology] over reality. As Aldous Huxley put it, facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored. Yes, facts have to be interpreted but that's a different question ... There's no alternative but to live in the real world and face the challenges that throws up. Religious faith [a Jungian belief system] that has to be kept in some sealed compartment lest reality intrudes is, in my view, not a faith worth having. If God [the soul] can't cope with the real world as we know it and experience it then what's the point? (Baines 2018).

I suppose this may seem a somewhat extreme conclusion, although I do wonder whether Hillman's brand of psychology may appeal to the 'post-modern' climate of relativism in which truth is more a matter of what one likes than what is actually the case. In any event, I trust that this response will be more than sufficient to make clear that I have not, in fact, arrived at a similar destination to Hillman, as Wotjkowski thinks (p. 21), but an entirely different place.

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