CHAPTER THREE

Archetypes and the collective unconscious

Archetypes described

What is an archetype? On one level the concept is perhaps not too hard to grasp; on another it may be beyond being fully understood. Remember, Jung related the archetypes to the instincts. The instincts, as William James described them, are “the functional correlatives” of physical structure. “With the presence of a certain organ goes, one may say, almost always a native aptitude for its use” (James, 1890, p. 383). In the same vein, Jung referred to instincts as the “pattern of behaviour” in biology (Jung, 1976 [1951], par. 1158). Jung proposed the term “archetype” to delineate what he described as inborn modes of psychic behaviour (ibid.). The instinct is a pattern of physical behaviour and the archetype is a pattern of psychic behaviour. The one is to jump out of the way of a train; the other is to pick up a train of thought. “Just as everybody possesses instincts, so he also possesses a stock of archetypal images” (Jung, 1960 [1919], par. 281). The shelves lined with this stock of images make up the collective unconscious.

Thoughts adhere to these images, so in one sense archetypal images can be thought of as a mechanism for breaking up
experience. They have been designed into our minds through natural selection as a simplifying device, to render the chaotic multiplicity of experience manageable. Whatever we encounter is automatically fitted to an internal image. If no image can be made to apply, the object tends to go unnoticed. Sometimes objects have to be bent to fit an image, and they may consequently end up fitted to the wrong image. In a thicket we start at a sinuous form in the leaves. Where in our mind’s eye lay a snake resides in reality only a curved stick. We are walking at dusk, somewhat ill at ease. We apprehend something in the offing. Our anxiety is heightened. Might there be behind that anxiety a primordial demonic image? We grow closer; the image is gathered into the category embracing animals. A wild beast? Now the shadow is close enough to be made out clearly: a neighbourhood dog. Theseus, in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, makes the point with characteristic Shakespearean compactness: “Or in the night, imagining some fear, / How easy is a bush suppos’d a bear!” (Act V, Scene i). Artists have always relied on the pre-supplied images in the mind to hold artistic representations together and enhance their verisimilitude. Modern artists like Matisse and Picasso pushed the boundaries of the form of objects in order to achieve a psychological effect in the viewer as the viewer’s mind worked unconsciously to fit the created image to the preset one.

The instincts are, in one sense, physical; they go to the very core of the animal organism. They are nature itself. But they also have a psychic aspect to them. Action pursuant to an instinct, at least in the higher animals, implicates the brain or central nervous system. Between a stimulus and the corresponding instinctive reaction, there is an intervening psychic operator. A severed frog’s leg in the school laboratory will “jump” when electrically stimulated, but something in a live frog determines which way to jump, when the shadow of a heron passes over. It goes without saying that humans, however conscious, retain and employ their instinctual apparatus. But in us the instincts often present themselves to consciousness. Take, for example, what we feel when we are hungry. We may not reflect, “I am under orders from the instinct to obtain nourishment”, but we will be motivated to get something to eat. And it becomes a conscious act to acquire and eat food. We have said that behind such needs and feelings are images.
Given this psychic element in the instincts, it would seem logical to see the archetypes as giving form to them, as well as to the collective unconscious. A way of conceiving this is to include the psychic aspect of the instincts as a part of the collective unconscious, conditioned by the archetypes. The instincts might be seen, in other words, as a special case of the collective unconscious. Thus, one has a psychic continuum reaching from the basic instinctual responses to conscious functioning. The instincts plus the broad middle ground between them and consciousness can be characterized as the collective unconscious (Jung, 1960 [1919], par. 281). The archetypes are the structures, or one might say, the properties, of the collective unconscious. As at the instinctual end of the psychic spectrum the archetypes ensure basic behavioural responses, so at the other end they afford the predicate for consciousness.

Such is the psychic setup of all humans, regardless of individual conditioning or experience. We experience consciousness as affording us volition and freedom of thought. Focusing naturally upon these aspects of psychic functioning, we generally fail to take into account the high degree of sameness in our unconscious psychological responses. But there is a sameness. In Jungian terms, it flows from the fact that we are all endowed with the same unconscious archetypal set-up, although we may think of it simply as “human nature”. “From the unconscious there emanate determining influences which, independently of tradition, guarantee in every single individual a similarity and even a sameness of experience, and also of the way it is represented imaginatively” (Jung, 1959 [1954a], par. 118).

**Archetypes as inherited**

The wherewithal for the whole psychic continuum is transmitted through heredity. It is normally accepted without question that the instinctual pattern of the species is passed, along with the bundle of physical attributes, from one generation to the next. At the other end of the spectrum, however—the archetype-driven modes of psychic behaviour—the inheritance factor seems much more problematic. In suggesting the inheritance of archetypes that condition conscious activity one runs the risk of being taken as arguing for the genetic transmission of acquired characteristics. One might
erroneously infer that attributes of consciousness—mental attitudes, say, or learned material—can be passed on hereditarily. The transmission through inheritance of acquired characteristics, whether in terms of physical make-up or intellectual attainment, is a concept known as Lamarckism, and it has long been discredited as a scientific doctrine. Embracing Lamarckism was a charge early laid, incorrectly, at Jung’s door. Indeed, Jung adapted the term “archetype” because his initial term for describing unconscious psychic structures, “primordial images”, had a Lamarckian flavour (Jung, 1960 [1919], par. 270, n. 7 (Eds.)).

At an earlier time Lamarckism exercised a great deal of appeal in intellectual circles. The idea is named for an early nineteenth-century thinker, the Chevalier de Lamarck, who anticipated Darwin in arguing the existence of an evolutionary process in species development (Dawkins, 1986, pp. 288–289). In trying to ascertain how evolution might proceed in the absence of natural selection, which, of course, had not yet been thought of, he espoused a scheme that relied upon the inheritance of acquired characteristics. If one went barefoot, the soles of the feet became thickened, and one’s children were likewise born with tough feet. If the blacksmith’s son had heavy arms and shoulders, that was to be expected, because the blacksmith had passed them on to him. In fact, the blacksmith no doubt had passed on heavy arms and shoulders, but it was not because he had built them up through manual labour and then sent them down the hereditary line. It was because he, himself, had the genes for those features, which may be why he became a blacksmith. That it turns out that acquired features are not passed along genetically should be a comfort to those of us who happen to think that, except for the children themselves, the best things we have acquired in life have come well after we finished having children.

Jung repeatedly emphasized that he was not talking about inherited ideas. Rather, he depicts an inherited psyche that has a certain structure. In as much as nothing about the psyche is material, in the sense of being palpable, its structure, too, must be non-material. To be sure, neural pathways are formed in the brain that have a physical reality. But, assuming science can pin down such physical attributes of the brain, we will not in all likelihood be much closer to linking that physical reality to the living thought or feeling.
Another way to think of the archetypes is as moulds or shapes that make up the collective unconscious. Irrepresentable in themselves, they are immediately fitted out by the conscious mind with related representational material. They present themselves to consciousness, that is, in the form of images or ideas. Although the archetypes themselves are timeless, these images or ideas will naturally be conditioned by the experience of the individual and take on the character of the individual’s particular time and place (Jung, 1967 [1954], par. 476).

I am sensible of a certain uneasiness in characterizing the unconscious as having a structure, or in analogizing the archetypes to “moulds or shapes”. The problem is that of using material terms for an immaterial reality. Another way to state the problem is to point out that we think of structures and moulds and the like as having extension in space. But that which we are trying to understand here seems to be by its nature non-spatial. The brain occupies space, but the things that spring from it—thoughts, emotions, subjective experience—these do not, so far as we can tell, either consist of matter or take up space. We have suggested that we are so constructed mentally as not even to be able to conceptualize except in terms of space. If, therefore, it is a bit fuzzy to speak of clothing or filling an archetype with the material of thought, it is because the very terminology at our disposal is incapable of expressing the thing as it really is. However hard it may be to describe, there is a part of the psyche that has the demonstrable characteristic, in a given situation, of consistently producing more or less the same effects in an individual and of producing likewise similar effects in different individuals. We know the thing is real: what goes on in our minds is real. But unless and until we are able to derive an entirely new conceptual framework, we must accept the necessity of speaking of it by way of analogies. The alternative seems to be to give up any attempt to understand that which lies at the very heart of human experience.

We already have on our screen the objective part of the psyche: that part which is pretty much the same in all of us, and which Jung calls the collective unconscious. There is also a subjective, or personal, part of the psyche. One’s conscious thoughts are, of course, personal and specific to the individual. So also is the personal unconscious, which may be seen as consisting of contents that are
not presently conscious, but are nevertheless a part of the individual’s psychic constitution, things that we know for example, but do not happen to be thinking of at the moment. The personal parts of the psyche, conscious and unconscious, are not inherited, but are accumulated in one’s lifetime. They, in contrast to the collective unconscious, account for our individuality. We will describe the personal unconscious in more detail in the next chapter. In our present attempt to get a handle on the archetypes, we must focus on the collective unconscious: the objective, the universal part of the psyche. Jung sees the archetypes as the dominants of this unconscious part of the psyche, the things that make it identifiable and replicable.

**Archetypes and evolution**

To a certain extent, psychic behaviour derives from the way the exterior world is perceived. The early human, lacking the tools of consciousness with which to fashion an objective view of reality, grasped it, rather, in symbolic terms. The symbols that presented themselves, moreover, as it falls out, lay typically quite far from a realistic rendition of the world (Jung, 1959 [1954a], par. 117). The sun, for example, so it seems from the mythological record, transformed by unconscious ideas projected upon reality, presented itself to the early thinker as a mighty warrior, who, at the end of his journey across the sky, is devoured by a dragon in the sea. Such symbolic imagery, however strange in form, led our forebears to react to the external world in a way that had a selective advantage over the raw application of the instincts. Those whose psyches were so contrived as to generate symbols prompting responses that afforded an evolutionary edge passed that psychic structure, complete with edge, along to their descendants. It did not matter whether the external world were accurately apprehended, it mattered only that it was apprehended in such a way as to produce aresponse to that world superior to the unvarnished, instinctual one.

The development of a symbol-producing unconscious of the sort antecedent to our own obviously afforded a selective advantage. If hominids who acquired the ability to form and project a wide array of images had not found a competitive advantage over
others operating on a more primitive instinctual set, the latter would have been the ones to survive. We, then, clearly would not be here. Neanderthals, say, or some precursor to them might be instead. It is an accepted tenet of evolutionary theory that, when two roughly similar species compete for the same environmental niche, the better adapted will exclude the less well adapted (Dawkins, 1986, p. 239). To use a silly illustration, imagine early hominids whose psychic make-up led them to visualize the world in a way inconsistent with survival. Suppose they saw the sun hero as beckoning them to follow him into the sea, and consequently jumped off cliffs. Such a response might account for why our inherited store of archetypes does not produce the image of a beckoning sun hero at the edge of a cliff.

_The lineage of the concept of archetypes_

Regardless of how they materialized in the psyche in the course of human development, the archetypes, as Jung conceived them, exist outside of the psyche. As we shall see in Chapter Five, Jung envisaged the archetypes as timeless and eternal, threaded into the very warp and woof of the universe. In this sense they resemble Platonic forms. Plato depicted the forms as pre-existent paradigms or models, of which real things are but copies (Jung, 1960 [1919], par. 275). Jung borrowed the idea of the archetype from St Augustine, in whom it stood on a Platonic footing (ibid.). The term “archetype”, itself, appears to have been first used by the first century Greek philosopher, Philo Judaeus (Edinger, 1999, p. 97). The concept of Platonic forms as a non-material reality lost force in the course of the development of Western philosophy. In the seventeenth century, Descartes struck a seemingly ineradicable division between the mental and the material, and from that time forward, owing to Europe’s blossoming scientific spirit, the emphasis in the West has been upon the material. In Kant, the forms lost some of their grandeur, becoming mind-dependent, as categories that condition thought. Kant saw the forms, in other words, not as timeless ideas that exist independently of us, but as a necessary concomitant of the way we develop thought. Even so, he believed that some knowledge is innate, and he held that it lies beyond the power of reason
to demonstrate either that everything came into existence according to mechanistic laws or that there is something that pre-existed such laws. The systems of Spinoza, Leibnitz, Hegel, and Schopenhauer also allowed for something outside and beyond the causal laws that govern the material world. The scientific approach, based on objective observation, was meanwhile having such phenomenal success in explaining the empirical world that any view not amenable to scrutiny under scientific methods came to be disregarded. This state of things accounts in some measure, no doubt, for the obliviousness of the scientific community to Jung’s concept of the archetypes. Nevertheless, Jung’s perspective anticipates a revival of the Platonic way of looking at the world that has been prompted by discoveries in modern physics. The subtle mathematical wonders latent in general relativity and quantum mechanics have given new force to the idea of a timeless realm that somehow stands above the laws of causality. As an example, contemporary British mathematician–physicist Roger Penrose has described the world of pure mathematical Platonic forms as the primary world of existence (Penrose, 1994, p. 417).

**The nature of archetypal images**

No one ever saw an archetype. Archetypes lie behind mental images. They cause images to coalesce, but they are not themselves the images. Again, we have not inherited a set of images, but a predisposition to form certain images. The archetype is not itself a material, or, in one way of thinking, even a psychic, thing; it is rather a latent disposition of the psyche, and perhaps of the world at large. Atoms and molecules act according to the laws of thermodynamics, but they are not themselves the laws of thermodynamics. Those laws can only be observed by their effects, in the behaviour of atoms and molecules or the larger things they make up. It is the same with archetypes. They can be seen, by analogy, as laws of psychic functioning, known only by their effects: by the images produced in our minds and through our reactions to those images.

Going a step further, the archetype cannot even be directly represented by the image. The image is true to the archetype, but it
does not depict the archetype. The archetype of the Great Mother, for example, can be faithfully represented by the image of a spider or by that of a stone, but no one image, even a very complicated image or set of images, can exhaust the reality of the Great Mother Archetype.

We have been speaking rather freely of that which consciousness receives from the archetypes as “images”. Jung said, “I call all conscious contents images, since they are reflections of processes in the brain” (quoted in Van Eenwyk, 1997, p. 68). That establishes the breadth of the notion, but perhaps it would be well to explore the term a bit, so as to be able to flesh it out in the reader’s mind. I propose to consider the image as the backbone of thought, so we might be warranted in reflecting for a moment on the thought process itself. Here “thought” or “thoughts” should be taken broadly to include anything that might occur in conscious experience, but yet not so broadly as to include, as in another context might be justified, certain unconscious processes. Neuroscientists struggle to identify the mechanism whereby one moment’s conscious experience might be linked with that of the next. Logically speaking, each instant should carry its own packet of experience. Even if the firings of neurons across synapses in the brain were of an identical pattern at two successive moments in time, they would not be the same firings. One would have occurred before the other. However, presumably because our conscious experiences of consecutive instants are typically similar and because the succeeding instant is coloured by the memory of the preceding one, we develop a sense of continuity in thought, much as a succession of images on a film blurs together to form a moving picture.

The thoughts that seem to string themselves together through time to form experience are themselves complex. All the data that are recorded in a frame of film—to carry the film analogy forward, each detail of the clothing of the actors or of the furniture of the room—something as rich as this—can be seen as compressed into a single thought, and here we are almost compeliled to say, into a single image. The data of the frame of film can be broken down by focusing on the separate items pictured. But this is not so of the thought. Each of our thoughts is complete in itself. A thought cannot be broken down into separate components because to break out the components of a thought is to have a new thought (James,
1890, Vol. 1, Chapter Six). If, moreover, the thought cannot be reduced, then it must follow that whatever the thought is based on, and I am calling this an image, is likewise indivisible and irreducible.

Now let us remind ourselves that thoughts as we are defining them extend to include all the bodily sensations, intuitions, and feelings of which we become conscious. We are saying that each conscious experience must be taken as an indivisible whole, and each as inseparably linked with an image. If we postulate thought as borne upon archetypal images, then the images we speak of are things no less complex than a whole slice of conscious experience.

We do not, it is true, tend naturally to think about the vast and varied experience known to our consciousness as just a sequence of images. Still, we would be hard pressed to say what else it might be. We formulate our thoughts in words. Yet we can, usually at least, tell that the thought comes first, because we can watch ourselves, so to speak, formulate the word pattern. A common turn of phrase is “to put a thought into words”. We can tell, then, that the verbal expression is formed around the thought. Still, it is less than clear what the thought is formed around. Perhaps we would feel more secure in envisioning an image behind thoughts if we could put aside the idea that the image is perforce a pictorial thing. Let us choose, therefore, to use the term “image” to stand generally for the sort of core impression we have been talking about, and not for now trouble ourselves too much as to whether it is necessarily pictorial or not.

Marcel, in Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, was transported back to his childhood by the taste of a little cake, the famous petite madeleine. In Marcel’s mind, where he became a boy again, there must have been a taste. But it could not have been, as it came back to him (or, as is probable, to Proust) through memory a real, physical taste, an actual stimulation of the palate. It was not, moreover, just a memory of a taste; otherwise it would not have been so charged with meaning or emotion as to have become the core of a seven volume work of art. So one may say it was an image of the taste.

As I have acknowledged, the archetypes that we are asked by Jung’s theory to build into our way of looking at the world are perhaps not altogether congenial to our practical take on how we experience the world. We take ourselves too seriously to be
receptive to the suggestion that our daily lives are borne along upon something as insubstantial and seemingly inconsequential as, for example, the stuff of dreams. In short, the whole idea of our thinking in terms of images that spring from parts of our psyches, of which psychic parts we are by definition unaware, can be a little hard to digest. Let us try, therefore, yet another way of conceptualizing the problem. Let us think of the situation from outside in. Consider how consciousness, when it finally arrived upon the evolutionary scene, might have been expected to have registered signals from the body or from the unconscious. In the absence of conscious intervention, instincts, both in ourselves and in animals we observe, result in action. Let us introduce an observer—the ego—between the instinct and the act. How would this impulse to action appear to the observer, that is, to ego consciousness? Would not one good possibility be that the impulse present itself in terms of an image—something in the nature of the flash of an idea or impression or mental picture, or some mix of the same, of the sort of which we have been speaking?

Accepting this possibility as our best bet, let us see if we are not induced further to accept that the most likely bearer to bring to consciousness the message from the unconscious, whether generated in the senses or elsewhere, would have a pictorial aspect. For one thing, visual impressions carry a lot of information in a concentrated fashion—remember all the detail in the single frame of film in our earlier motion picture analogy. And, perhaps for this reason, they also carry a natural impact far beyond that, for example, of verbal communication. Now, it is true that verbal expression can be seen as generating a similar impact when it is in the form of poetry. But poetic language is pictorial language; that is, poems conjure visual images. We speak in terms of the imagery of poems. What the visual image lacks, comparatively speaking, is the linear focus of verbal thought, with its consequent ability to develop an idea with great precision. It may be, however, that this linear focus is a quality that surfaced later on in the development of our faculties, that it grew hand in hand with an advancing consciousness. The linguistic or verbal element would, in that case, stand in a like relation to the pictorial image—if that is what indeed we should settle upon as the primordial vehicle for archetypal expression—as consciousness stands to the collective unconscious.
Let us take an example of imagery in action. It is from the dream of a former model of mine whom, because I do not now know where she is, I will call by the fictitious name, Kit. Kit is a beautiful woman, born in England and raised in Australia, mother of two young girls. She was an aspiring artist when I knew her, and that is how she came to pose. Married to an American engineer, she was having trouble adjusting, both in her marriage and to the Virginia community where, by reason of her husband’s transfer, she found herself. Kit reported a dream in which she was chased by cowboys and Indians. She hid in a cave in the desert-like setting. The dream shifts, and she approaches a sort of outpost. She realizes that it is a gift shop. In it were Native American women. One holds out a baby to her. The baby has a beautiful jewel around its neck.

How succinctly being chased by cowboys and Indians expresses the sense of alienation a foreigner might feel in America; how graphically hiding in a cave captures the urge to withdraw. Yet the dream offers hope. The women in the shop, though different from the dreamer, react to her with kindness. Not a word is spoken in the dream, but it contains a great deal of information, and it was quite moving to Kit as she came to reflect on it. The dream seems to operate on several levels. The baby and the jewel are symbols familiar to Jungians, implicating the possibility of psychic rebirth. The imagery of dreams, it can be seen, has exceptional power both to communicate and to stir the emotions.

In order to get a better grip on the image, we have been speculating on how the impulse deriving from the senses or the unconscious might have presented itself to consciousness. In citing the image as a likely mechanism, we are not, however, suggesting that images speak only to consciousness. Jung took the view that we are capable of deriving images directly from the substrate of the nervous system; that is, without their being processed by the cerebral cortex (Jung, 1960 [1952], par. 957). It is known that some emotions derive from the limbic system, which is distinct from, and prior on the evolutionary scale to, the cerebral system (Ornstein, 1991, p. 80). It is, or was, something of a revolutionary idea that there are forms of thinking that do not involve conscious processing. It means that we have direct, non-conscious ways of apprehending and responding to the environment in what would appear to be a rational way. The concept of a direct response to the
environment fits in nicely with an evolutionary timetable in which hominids were responding to the environment, presumably through unconscious imagery, long before consciousness was a physical possibility. It is largely in this interval of aeons that Jung conceives there to have occurred in the collective unconscious, through natural selection, the accumulation and recordation of human experience. The image-making faculty would have been built into the organism in the course of its development long before there was a consciousness to apprehend its products. It is improbable that we would evolve a capacity to form images that could only be apprehended by consciousness when consciousness did not exist. The instincts and the extension beyond them, the collective unconscious, must respond to images as well. Of course, we cannot know what really it is that tickles the unconscious. What registers to consciousness as an image might be something else to the unconscious. Even so, it is all of a package. We are talking now about whatever it is that presents itself to consciousness as images. The point is that it must be, and must have been in the preconscious state, operative at the unconscious level.

The idea of the direct reception of images without conscious processing does not pose a contradiction to Jung’s Kantian stance that holds that we cannot know whether we perceive the world as it actually is. Even direct perceptions must nevertheless be considered as affected by the psychic apparatus, whatever it may be, upon which they register. There is no reason to assume that images stemming directly from the nervous system are more literally reflective of outer reality than are those routed through consciousness.

Let us revisit that wily woodland bird, the ruffed grouse. The four-wheel drive vehicle that comes upon the grouse on a back road might not spook it, whereas anything on foot almost surely would. This is because there is no pattern in the grouse’s brain matched by that newcomer to the forest scene, the sport utility vehicle. As it moves towards the grouse, perhaps at some point the vehicle will conform to the pattern of “charging beast” wired into the grouse’s brain. Then the grouse roars off into the brush. Some butterflies feed as caterpillars only on a single species of plant. The butterfly does not flit about like Goldilocks checking every sort of plant until it finds just the right one on which to deposit its eggs. It “knows” right from the beginning the single type of plant on which its future
larvae can feed and grow. There is probably not room within the cranium of the bird or the equivalent space in the butterfly to house the incomprehensibly complex neural apparatus necessary to what we would call consciousness. What I am saying is that the complex patterns that the butterfly is able to recognize in the flower and that the grouse is unable to recognize in the vehicle are the same things that come to us as images.

I am a fly fisherman. I get satisfaction from inducing a trout who is feeding on insects floating on the surface of a stream to mistake a patch of feathers tied to a hook for a bit of food. That’s right, I take pleasure in “outsmarting” a fish. But it is not as easy as you may think. The trout is hovering just beneath the surface of a crystal-clear stream selecting from among bits and pieces of matter floating three or four inches from its nose things that look like the particular insect abundant on the water at the time that is serving as lunch. And a trout can be very discriminating. But what about the leader? The leader is a clear length of filament joining the relatively thick line to the fly. For difficult fish, a very fine tippet to this leader is selected. Most fishermen believe, no doubt, that this is so the trout will not see it. Think of it! The trout is able to reject a tiny fly because it is not precisely the right size or because its wing does not lie just so, but it cannot see a leader? I think the trout sees the leader. But, for the trout, the leader does not count. It is not in the trout’s computer. But the mayfly, *Baetis*, most decidedly is, although presumably not by its technical name. What is in the computer is the pattern of *Baetis*, in all the forms in which generations of trout have encountered it, nymph, dun, and spinner. Replicate the form on which the trout is feeding, and you are on. The leader and, for that matter, the hook are seen by the trout, but as far as the trout is concerned they do not exist. Why then, the fine tippet, which experience shows affords an advantage? Because its greater flexibility allows for a more natural float. Anything coming down the river in an unnatural way is definitely not on for lunch.

We had an old Pointer named Jake, who was apparently eating road-kill up on the highway when he was rolled under the undercarriage of an eighteen-wheeler, miraculously, without being killed. The encounter clearly made a strong impression on Jake, so I thought to take advantage of it. Every Sunday when I took Jake up to get the paper I would stop him short of the road and point to
where the incident had occurred, saying firmly: “Careful, Jake, Truck!” And I could see the response forming behind his earnest yellow eyes. “I don’t know about ‘truck’, but I can tell you one thing: I’m not having any more of that possum.” Perhaps if the truck had taken on the image of “charging large animal” . . .

“Well,” you might say, “the animal might not have had a mental picture or anything like that, it might have just felt a certain way.” Certainly at very primitive levels of biological organization image formation is inconceivable, say in bacteria. There would simply be stimulus and response. But, at the level of consciousness, the sort of feeling just suggested is one of the kinds of manifestations we are describing. It would be, say, an emotion. Although we are usually not aware of them, images in the sense in which we are using the term seem to lie behind the emotions in the same way they lie behind our thoughts. Jung is said to have commented that one of the things he tried to do late in his life was to penetrate to the image lying behind a particular feeling or emotion he was experiencing.

What if the instinct in a certain situation were to be to flee? The emotion, of a piece with the instinct, is fear. Sometimes it is possible to catch the underlying image. We are in a dark place and hear a noise behind us. We may see in our mind’s eye a threatening figure—a figure that somehow gets placed behind us at the site of the noise. We have imagined something, and coupled with the image that has come to us is the onset of the emotion, fear.

What we are now able to recognize through our consciousness as “emotions” were being experienced by our ancestors in the absence of conscious imagery. It is easy to think of examples of reactions that might have occurred before the advent of conscious reflection. Consider a typical reaction to the onset of pain. Initially the reaction may be disproportional to the level of pain actually experienced. On reflection, we may conclude that the exaggerated reaction sprang from the anticipation that the level of pain might increase. But the impulse was immediate and not itself the product of reflection. It was due to an image or feeling about where the pain might go, which, because it was instantaneous, could have had little to do with the initial extent of the pain, and nothing to do with an analysis of its cause and the possibility of its continuing or increasing. Indeed, many people, some sitting in dentists’ chairs, have a strong reaction in anticipation of pain even as their reason tells
them that the pain will surely be much more contained than the
reaction warrants. The feeling, in other words, may be reviewed by
consciousness, but it is not the product of consciousness.

The projection of archetypal images

The archetypes shape all conscious and unconscious functions, but
there are times when an archetype is especially activated or
“constellated”. Jung suggests that “every psychic reaction which is
out of proportion to its precipitating cause should be investigated
as to whether it may be conditioned at the same time by an arche-
type” (Jung, 1964 [1931a], par. 57). Everyone has both witnessed
and experienced over-reactions. The term “over-reaction” itself
suggests that there is something beyond the precipitating cause to
account for the magnitude of the reaction. In such cases the stamp
of the constellated archetype is its numinosity: its ability to fasci-
nate or compel.

Let us hark back for a moment to the illustration of the imag-
ined threatening figure in the dark. A further observation is that the
unconscious image of the lurking figure was “projected” into the
unknown of the darkness. As we know, interior images may be
projected on to the exterior world. When the fact of such a projec-
tion is made conscious, when we realize that the image sprang from
something within us, we see it as again inside our minds. The term
for this is “introjection”. When the image is introjected it tends to
lose its numinous power. If, for example, we stop to consider that
the shadowy figure behind us in the dark exists only in our imagi-
nation, we may calm down.

Today we recognize a psychic disturbance as a part of psychol-
ogy. In a former time it would have registered as a part of the phys-
ical world. “An alluring nixie from the dim bygone,” says Jung, “is
today called an ‘erotic fantasy’” (Jung, 1959 [1954a], par. 54). It was
not so very long ago that a woman found to have such fantasies
could have been condemned as a witch and burned at the stake—
for having literally consortcd with the devil. We look at a tree and
think with confidence that what we visualize has some direct and
fairly accurate reference to the object before us. Accepting that we
can never know the “thing in itself”, we take our perception to be
of the real object, coloured though it may be by the process by which we perceive it. In any event, we normally expect that we are seeing it relatively independently of the contents of our unconscious. The projection of unconscious contents upon the tree has been withdrawn through the mechanism of increased consciousness. Our relative objectivity rests upon our underlying knowledge that the tree consists of wood and leafy vegetation, of which we have some understanding, and that it came about in a certain way and functions according to certain biochemical processes. These notions are largely incompatible with the idea, say, that the tree is inhabited by spirits, or is our ancestor.

The cave person, let us call her Alice, existing in a quasi-conscious state, saw the exterior world in terms, not of objects and events separate from her, but of the unconscious contents that were a part of her ancestral psychic make-up. As her ego was not differentiated so as to become a distinct centre of consciousness, Alice still saw no clear distinction between herself—i.e., the still forming ego—and the exterior world. Thus, she saw things that were going on in her mind as a part of world around her. Of course, she did not know she was visualizing unconscious contents. Projection is the unconscious imposition of an inner image upon an external object or event. An occurrence was not, to the preconscious Alice, the product of a natural cause—she had, no doubt, at best a somewhat confused sense of cause and effect—or a chance event, but an omen, a development infused with archetypal imagery and therefore freighted with meaning. Only gradually did human beings obtain a measure of control over their world by giving things names; that is, by becoming conscious of them as things distinct in their own right. Adam’s naming of the animals in Genesis betokens this sort of differentiation. At this point (of course there was no point, in the sense of a specific point in time, but rather a long progression at different paces in different places and with many a regress) the things of the outside world took on what we may call their literal meaning.

To the primitive mind, activated portions of the unconscious associated with an archetype may show themselves as the hand of a deity, actively producing effects in the natural world. A psychologically more sophisticated person, responding to the activation of the archetype, might be aware at least that an unconscious element
is generating an emotional response to a certain situation. Yet even
the superstitious Alice—let us move her forward in time to the early
stages of civilization—was conscious of the attributes she saw the
Goddess to possess and of what her relation to the Goddess was.
She had a clear idea, that is, of what the Goddess could do to or for
her and of what the Goddess might require by way of invocation or
propitiation. This is, of course, a far cry from a recognition that the
forces that demanded obeisance sprang from her own psyche.
Much, but not everything, remained unconscious.

The more conscious stance allows a more realistic adaptation to
the exterior world. Something is lost, however, in the process of
withdrawing the projections of unconscious contents: most
profoundly, the conviction with which they present themselves, the
conviction, as in our example, that attaches to an encounter with the
Goddess. In appropriate circumstances this conviction can endow
one with supreme confidence, and in any event there is little about
it in the way of doubt. An enlargement of consciousness, on the
other hand, makes psychic energy, or libido, subject to the disposal
of the individual will. Psychic energy is, as it were, released from
the bonds of the projection. The conscious individual can direct and
focus attention, whereas the individual fixated by projection
perceives this power as springing from the object of the projection.
Attention is commanded. The associated psychic energy is therefore
not available to the individual to deploy at will (Harding, 1971,
p. 76). Jung gives a simple example. The term “physical matter”
(from mater) is a lifeless term. It has been stripped of its numinous
connotation of the “Great Mother”, and has thus lost the emotional
energy evoked by the image, say, of “Mother Earth” (Jung, 1976
[1964], par. 584). The person for whom the concept of matter
invokes “Mother Earth”, say a Native American addressing sacred
ground, may not be in full control of the emotion which that
concept imparts. The person, on the other hand, who contemplates
“physical matter” is not caught up with that emotion and may
approach the subject with relative objectivity. The psychic energy
that the first person projects upon “Mother Earth” is not expended
by the second person, who may then otherwise, and, usually more
usefully, gain access to it. But the very ability to dispose of libido
implies the ability to make choices, and with that, of course, comes
doubt. The person who has withdrawn the projection, while at
much greater liberty to do what she wants, enjoys little of the compelling certainty of primitive Alice, who was firmly in projection’s grip.

Suppose I am exceptionally fastidious in manners. The likelihood is that some early developmental pattern or event fixed unconscious contents upon an archetype, the effects of which continue to influence my behaviour. I may, for example, have been led by the archetypal set-up rigorously to repress any disposition of my own towards slackness in manners. At the same time, I will have, in all likelihood, continually observed slackness in the manners of others. Seen from the outside, my own repressed inclinations towards unruliness have been projected on those around me, so as to produce in me a disproportionate reaction to their conduct. I, in time, may come to realize that I am over-reacting, perhaps by observing that conduct that offends me rarely bothers anyone else. If other, perfectly refined people are undisturbed, perhaps my reflexive response is unwarranted. If, now, I tailor my reactions in accordance with this observation, I will have supplanted an unconscious motive with a conscious one, even while remaining unaware of the basis for my reflexive attitude. The projection, in other words, will have been partially withdrawn. I will have gained the power to regulate my own behaviour by containing what I now recognize to be an unjustified sense of outrage or disgust. I may, moreover, find myself less preoccupied with others’ behaviour and have therefore more energy to devote to useful things. If, further, I come to understand the unconscious basis for my initial reaction, I may in time become free altogether of compulsive fastidiousness.

**The language of the unconscious**

We have said that the language of archetypes is symbolic. In as much as the unconscious preceded consciousness, and therefore rational thought, one would not expect the unconscious to speak in the language of reason. The unconscious blithely ignores the strictures of logic, the tool of reason, such as the observance of temporal sequence, strict spatial relationships, and cause and effect. Rather, it employs symbolic representation. In the language of the
unconscious, at least as it communicates itself to consciousness, one thing invokes another through association, analogy, opposition. Dreams and fantasies can be quite contemporary in their material—a soaring bird of yore may be a plane or rocket today—but their mode remains symbolical. One must remember that we are not speaking of a conversation with a friend on the street. On the contrary, the unconscious that Jung postulates is an overwhelming mystery. The deeply archaic, resonant, ambiguous, encompassing language of symbols is suited to the majesty of that mystery.

Here again we observe the connection between poetry and the workings of the unconscious. The magic of poetry lies in its symbolic speech. A good poem delivers its impact with economy; rather than being spelled out, things are suggested. The image reaches beyond the words. “The symbolic process is an experience in images and of images,” says Jung, 1959 [1954a], par. 82). The thrill in penetrating to the meaning of an allusion in a poem must certainly have at its heart more than the gratification of one’s having been clever enough to “get it”. I suspect the feeling has more to do with the fact that, in penetrating to the message of the poem, conscious processes are keying into the natural symbolic paths of the unconscious. A gratifying connection with the unconscious is thus established.

Symbols, Jung observes, are never simple. Signs and allegories are simple, admitting of complete conscious comprehension, but the symbol “always covers a complicated situation which is so far beyond the grasp of language that it cannot be expressed at all in any unambiguous manner” (Jung, 1958 [1954a], par. 385). Both the eye and the sun, for example, stand as symbols of consciousness. They can also serve in the more literal sense as a simile or metaphor for the same thing: as where one might say that sunlight, like consciousness, dispels the darkness. When the meaning is on the deeper, symbolic level, the link with the archetype is more immediate. Remember, though, that the archetype is not, itself, the symbol. When a myth or dream evokes the eye or the sun, the archetype is not the eye or the sun, nor is it consciousness, which is being symbolically suggested. It is rather an unknown third thing, itself inexpressible directly. Thus, the import of the archetype is carried symbolically through the collection of images that form about it.

A myth in which archetypal expression is embedded is so vastly ramified that, as Jung said, books would be required to achieve an
explanation of a single point. “What Perseus is compelled to do with the Gorgon’s head”, for example, “would never occur to anyone who doesn’t know the myth” (Jung, 1959 [1941b], par. 319). And, of course, one could know the myth without being aware of the significance of what Perseus does. Having slain the dragon (the Great Mother or the unconscious) in the person of the Gorgon, Perseus gives the severed head to Athena, the goddess of wisdom, who affixes it to the _aegis_, the celebrated shield given her by Zeus. Thus is the unconscious, when heroically overcome and dismembered, placed in the service of wisdom, or elevated consciousness. It might not, moreover, be inapposite to note that from the blood of the severed head of the Gorgon sprang Pegasus, the winged horse, whom Athena trains and puts at service of the muses, and, therefore, of course, of poets (Bullfinch, 1962, p. 162).

Notwithstanding the complexity with which it typically confronts us, archetypal material can, to an extent, be dealt with in a scientific way. Just as with anything that requires analysis, one breaks the material into its identifiable parts and then compares and classifies them according to their similarities (Jung, 1961 [1913], par. 326). It was just this process that led Freud, Jung, and others to fix upon the correspondence between the material of dreams and fantasies and that of myth. Indeed, studies in mythology and comparative religion proceed in the same way. Obviously, the process is not easy, and the results are not always clear-cut, but neither of these conditions is necessary to a scientific approach. At the same time, when one deals with the archetypes within the context of the experience of the individual, one is confronted with the subjectivity of the individual, a thing from which science has traditionally stood apart. That fundamental reservation of science has been compelled to undergo a reevaluation in view of the fact that quantum physics has found observation of the physical world at its deepest levels to be necessarily conditioned by the subjectivity of the observer, and of the further fact that science must confront the human mind as the last frontier into which it has been unable to make appreciable inroads.

Jung saw the unconscious as primarily compensatory in its functioning. He theorized that it provides a counterweight to the conscious standpoint, constellating images that serve to promote an appropriate balance between the two aspects of the psyche. Jung accordingly took the position, contrary to that of Freud, that there
is no reason to believe that manifestations from the unconscious are designed to mislead. He held, on the contrary, that the depiction brought forward by a dream constitutes a frank representation of the state of affairs as between the conscious and the unconscious parts of the psyche. Of the dream Jung said, “So flowerlike is it in its candour and veracity that it makes us blush for the deceitfulness of our lives” (Jung, 1964 [1934], par. 305).

Jung saw the unconscious, then, as manifesting itself in such a way as suggest the direction that consciousness should take. He saw it as generative, goal-orientated, and directed towards the future. Freud, by contrast, sought to look behind manifestations of the unconscious to find their meaning in some past event. Freud found that, as much of what appears in dreams has been repressed as incompatible with the conscious attitude, dream material is often disguised. What Jung, on the other hand, tended to see in the notorious inscrutability of dreams is the difficulty consciousness has in deciphering symbolic meaning. The resistance of the rational mind to relinquishing its categories in deference to the non-rational parlance of dream symbols is extremely strong. There are, moreover, inherent difficulties in the process. Jung illustrates this point with the example of the opposing aspects of the Great Mother as encountered by the hero. Logic finds it hard to accept that a thing is one thing now and, in the next moment, its opposite. Yet the Great Mother appears alternately as the nurturing source of life and a terrifying demon:

This image, taken as a kind of musical figure, a contrapuntal modulation of feeling, is extremely simple and its meaning is obvious. To the intellect, however, it presents an almost insuperable difficulty, particularly as regards logical exposition. The reason for this lies in the fact that no part of the hero myth is single in meaning, and that, at a pinch, all the figures are interchangeable (Jung, 1956 [1952], par. 611).

**The opposition between the archetypes and the instincts**

The archetypes describe their own courses, often in direct opposition to our conscious volition. But by their numinous character they influence the conscious attitude, presenting now a fascination, now a repulsion. Jung characterized the archetypes and the instincts as
opposites, because the role of the archetypes in directing consciousness is to curb the instincts, channelling the energy that is their natural resource into paths that can be controlled by conscious judgement. This is not to say that the instincts, themselves are not driven by the archetypes. “Archetype” and “instinct” are just words that describe different aspects of a basic thrust in nature. It is not inconsistent to consider that the archetypes both underlie the instincts and direct consciousness so as to regulate them. We cannot prescribe how nature should behave, or choose the routes by which she brings about the development of her creatures. But precisely through this strange opposition she has brought *Homo sapiens* to the state that, for all its precariousness, and for better or for worse, has given him dominion over all of the other creatures of the earth.

Each form of life has a particular pattern of behaviour, which leads us to distinguish it from inert matter and from other life forms. This pattern of behaviour we recognize in more developed creatures as instinct. The instincts could be viewed as the blueprint, or, as Jung puts it, the ground plan, of a species. We have traditionally accepted a division between what in the make-up of the creature is tangible, the cells, say, and what is not, i.e., that which causes the creature to function. But Jung compels us to accept that a transition must logically be made between the two. We observe, he points out, that the bodily organs are in all humans much the same, and that the brain is such an organ. The psyche stems from the brain, and it should follow that the mental processes that the brain generates should be organized in much the same way in all of us (Jung, 1963, p. xix). So beguiled are we by the seeming freedom we have in our own thought-making, however, that we tend, while knowing perfectly well to the contrary, to think that consciousness is entirely independent of the organ that generates it. When one drops this illusion, one may more readily grasp that all human brains will logically generate at least their unconscious emanations in the same fundamental configurations. Consciousness may indeed enjoy a measure of freedom, but the instincts and, as we shall see, the unconscious at its deeper levels are bound to be genetically based—and therefore rooted in the physical, just as are our tangible bodily organs.

Instincts evolve with their respective life forms. But we must conclude that something further happens in the case of humans,
we know that we developed consciousness. We have made the case as best we can that consciousness grew out of and rests upon the collective unconscious. If that is so, then, at least in humans, the collective unconscious must have become broader than what is necessary to drive the instincts. Another way to say this, though it tampers with the traditional terminology, is that in humans there is a particularly elaborated set of instincts that initiate and guide a movement towards consciousness. That same consciousness then stands outside the instincts and serves to regulate them.

Even preconscious or liminally conscious humans managed a much greater diversity in the way they lived than the other higher animals. The making of tools, fire, clothes, baskets, pots, and objects of art seems to have been going on when the light of consciousness was at most but dimly lit. These enhancements of adaptation must have arisen with, and aided in shaping, a collective unconscious that reached well beyond the purely instinctual. Finally, that collective unconscious arrived at the point from which it launched the great expansion of consciousness that is marked by the development and advance of civilization over the last six thousand years.

The human ground plan is so constituted that the natural or instinctual side of every individual actually pushes the individual towards the conscious state. This urge is countered by the strong attraction of the unconscious state, the pull of the oblivion of the purely instinctual response. But the construction of the psychic mechanism is such that the ego resists that return at all costs, because for the ego to succumb is to yield up consciousness, to surrender the priceless evolutionary edge that makes human beings human.

The genetic evolution of the collective unconscious

The deposit of mankind’s whole ancestral experience—rich in emotional imagery—of father, mother, child, husband and wife, of the magic personality, of dangers to body and soul, has exalted this group of archetypes into the supreme regulating principles of religious and even of political life, in unconscious recognition of their tremendous psychic power. [Jung, 1960 [1931a], par. 337]

Jung postulates that the primary regulators of the daily behaviour of both individuals and societies are the archetypes. Our attention
is galvanized, our thoughts organized, our motives prompted by ideas and images that spring from them. But he goes further to say that these ideas and images are the product of humanity’s ancestral experience. How did this experience become encoded in the collective unconscious? For, as long as humans have been able to experience the psyche, the archetypes must have been in place. Indeed, as the drivers of the instincts, they must in some form have been present for at least the greater part of the evolution of the human being as a species.

Jung tended to believe that the archetypes are timeless and immutable. We have had a glimpse of Jung’s essentially Platonic spirit, and we will take up further later on the idea that the archetypes are timeless forms, knit into the very fabric of the universe. At this stage of our inquiries it is not necessary to the argument. Indeed, at this stage there is no point of departure between the idealist (Platonic) and materialist views. Let us say, for argument, that we accept the concept of the archetypes, but are given to a materialist/deterministic view generally. We would hold that life arose through a fortuitous combination of events and that the same is so of consciousness. In arriving at this latter conclusion, we would have had little difficulty in finding that the archetypes, in the form of a disposition to generate certain images in response to external or internal stimuli, found their way into the species by way of Darwinian natural selection. The modern idealist would see it the same way.

When Jung says that the fruit of human experience is accumulated in the collective unconscious, we can visualize that that accumulation took place in the human organism alongside of the development of its physical attributes. Why, asks Jung (1959 [1939], par. 518), should we believe that the structure of the psyche is the only thing in the world that has no history? Even our consciousness, he observes, has a history of thousands of years (ibid.). Instinctual behavioural characteristics—timidity or ferocity, say, or the tendency to form a cocoon on only a particular kind of plant—are the products of DNA, just as are physical structures such as legs, livers, or the pattern of spots on the coat. They evolve with the organism through natural selection. We accept this genetic basis for the instincts. If we take the instincts, further, as being grounded in archetypes, then we might also reasonably postulate a genetic basis
for other parts of the collective psyche—those parts, for example, that dispose us to form the images that register on consciousness. It would follow, in other words, that the collective unconscious, also, is encoded in us through our genes.

The non-genetic evolution of consciousness

Jung made the distinction between consciousness and the collective unconscious on the ground that the former develops individually whereas the latter is inherited (Jung, 1959 [1936/37], par. 90). Obviously, one’s consciousness is specific to one’s self, alone. It was not implicit in Jung’s scheme, therefore, that consciousness should have become, like the collective unconscious, ingrained in the collective psyche. It is tempting to imagine that in the course of the expansion of consciousness the psyche has indelibly recorded earlier conscious experiences and built upon them in arriving at later, higher, levels of consciousness. One must shy away, however, from such a speculation, for it is to say that something personal, i.e., conscious experience, might somehow become imprinted in the genome. First and foremost, to say so is to enter upon the scientifically untenable ground of accepting genetic transmission of individually acquired characteristics. Conscious experience is a thing that one acquires during a lifetime. To propose that it gets incorporated into the DNA is pure Lamarckism. We need not worry about that theoretical trap, however. Other considerations will steer us away. Let us take a few of them in account.

The rapid expansion of consciousness

There are radically different time-scales involved between the evolution of the collective unconscious and the evolution of consciousness. Our bodies are presumably still in the process of evolving, but it is a slow enough process as to be practicably meaningless to us. In consequence, the human being strikes us as being morphologically fixed. The psyche can be looked at in the same way. Given that our physical apparatus and our psychic apparatus evolved jointly and interdependently (Geertz, 1973, pp. 67–68), it follows that the collective unconscious would, along with the physical body...
and brain, have been operationally complete by the time we became recognizable as *Homo sapiens*. In other words, the collective unconscious, like the body, would have developed incrementally over vast spans of time, and it would continue to do so only at a pace so slow as not to be discernible at all in historical time. Yet, in the last the six thousand years, a period beginning with the birth of civilization, psychic advances in *Homo sapiens* have occurred at a rate unparalleled by anything in the course of evolution. The vehicle for this dramatic change has been consciousness. Here, as shall shortly be made clear, I am not speaking of advances in intellect, but in the ability in the collective objectively to apprehend the world. Simply put, in a state of relative consciousness one has a better handle on reality than in a state of relative unconsciousness.

The mark of a society’s level of consciousness is in its culture. For hundreds of thousands of years, human societies lived in a primitive state. They distinguished themselves neither by agricultural nor architectural achievement nor by the development of elevated religious or political institutions. As to all the things we might think of as attributes of an advanced consciousness, the record of primitive cultures is largely blank. Humankind was, as the historian Arnold Toynbee suggests (1946, pp. 48–51), in a prolonged state of repose. About six thousand years ago societies suddenly burst into creative activity. Civilizations first appeared on the face of the earth. Thereafter they surged and relapsed, but after each relapse there was a resurgence, and usually in consequence of a new or altered cultural style. It is our thesis that what drove these changes was the creative force of consciousness. But, if that is the case, this flourish of creative activity has occurred over so short a span of time as not feasibly to have allowed for concomitant changes in the collective unconscious. So rapid a procession of changes could hardly have occurred through the mechanism of genetic natural selection.

It is appropriate to note here that, when I speak of primitive cultures, I would not have the reader envision tribesmen to be found today in remote places. By the theory we are advancing, these latter societies have, by their very existence, demonstrated a potent adaptation to their environments. If we take consciousness to be the adaptive tool *par excellence*, the level of consciousness attained by such peoples cannot be inconsequential, for their
societies emerged as survivors in the competition that must everywhere have raged among cultural styles to secure a niche in the environment. A distinction should be made between these peoples and peoples who existed at the very dawn of consciousness. If the presence of culture, however basic, is to be our guide, we can suppose that incipiently conscious peoples existed among the first humanoid toolmakers, long before humans had acquired their present physical configuration and mental capacity. Culture would have evolved slowly among such peoples. We can deduce that before the advent of agriculture and stock breeding, less than 11,500 years ago (Cauvin, 2000, p. 25), variations among cultures were rather limited. There were only so many cultural patterns available to hunter-gatherers in a given environment. Thus we can opine, on the basis of observable diversity in historical times, that, as peoples experienced the beginnings of consciousness, there occurred an efflorescence of widely varying cultural patterns. Such rapid cultural change could not have had genetics as its base.

The context for consciousness is but little changed

Conscious experience translates, as one of its primary offshoots, into knowledge. Yet if human experience continued to be hard-wired into the psyche beyond the point when modern humans emerged, the additions would not be those reflected in expanded knowledge. The fact is, our experience of external reality has not changed in any fundamental way. That is to say, the needs, the dangers, and the calamities that have been faced by conscious people have been, in the fundamental sense, pretty much constant. There have always been love, lust, privation, war, natural disaster, and just plain luck, good and bad. The faces or frequency of these elementary conditions may have varied from place to place or have been altered by changes in social organization, but at base they remained unchanged in human experience. As to life after, say, the industrial revolution, one may ponder whether the events we encounter, along with the stresses attendant upon them, are different in kind from those confronted by members of archaic societies. Regardless, any difference would be but a small deviation in the long record of human culture. Thus, there do not seem to have been the changes in the external situation of the species requisite to impel
knowledge-based structural changes in the psyche, regardless of the time-scale involved.

*The psychic unity of all humanity*

Finally, we must consider the contradiction between the idea of consciousness-related structural changes in the psyche and the generally accepted anthropological doctrine of the psychic unity of humankind. The latter holds that there are no essential differences in the fundamental nature of the mental processes among humans anywhere in the world (Geertz, 1973, p. 62). There are observable physical differences, and, at least arguably, mental differences, between the various peoples of the earth. These, except for superficial genetic differences, relating to skin colour as an example, one must take as products of adaptive or preferential breeding within groups. There may be in consequence of cultural or environmental differences greater concentrations of, say, tall people or stocky people as between populations, but the possibilities in virtually the whole of the human genome are potentially exploitable within every existing society. The point could hardly be made more resoundingly than by the simple presence in the National Basketball Association of Yao Ming of China, the seven-foot, five-inch standout for the Houston Rockets.

This is to say that the “primitive” tribesman of today operates intellectually in just the same way as everybody else. Yet, if the psyche has changed appreciably in the last six thousand years with the onrush of civilizations, the consequence would be that the fundamental mental make-up of a person today would be different from that of the person who lived at the dawn of civilization. The latter would have a mental apparatus less evolved than that of modern people. The evidence, however, is to the contrary. Aristotle is closer to us in time than to the earliest civilized thinkers. Yet there is no basis upon which to suppose that the human brain of which his was a specimen was more advanced genetically than that of the earliest city dwellers. By the same token, we can suppose that a person of the present era, Einstein, say, might expect to be equipped, genetically, with no more powerful a mental organ than Aristotle’s. None the less, it is fair to say that developing the theory of general relativity was not a possibility for Aristotle. Of course,
Einstein was able to build on knowledge developed by Aristotle and others after him, but, more importantly, there was available to Einstein a way of looking at the world that was simply not available to one of Aristotle’s day. This way of looking at the world is, I posit, the product of advances in consciousness. Moreover, as we shall see, through the instrumentality of culture, it can be retained for succeeding generations.

**Natural selection among cultures**

As we have suggested, there is a way, one that does not involve genetic selection, whereby consciousness might build upon itself, preserving what has gone before while nevertheless creating new forms. That way is culture. Physical evolution, in order to work its marvels, must attend upon the combination of genetic change, natural selection, and vast spans of time. Consciousness, on the other hand, through the medium of culture, allows for experiments to be launched which may lead, within a relatively short time, to a potentially enhanced cultural form. The process of natural selection is at work, but it works, not upon genetic change, but rather upon changes in cultural styles. These styles reflect, largely, conscious applications of unconscious impulses. Styles that afford the group the most successful adaptation to its surroundings are those most likely to be preserved. The “cultural” patterns of apes and monkeys vary hardly at all within their respective species. They are hard-wired into the species as instincts. But the lifestyles of human beings can take on the widest imaginable range of variations. And this is because consciousness has to a large extent freed humans from the rigid forms of the instincts.

What, then, might have been altered in the actual structure of the psyche in the course of the expansion of consciousness marked by the advent and advance of civilizations? The answer would appear to be, little, if anything. It seems that we are pretty well stuck with the proposition that we are not innately smarter than human beings, generally, have been for a very, very long time. Still, we can recognize that real changes have occurred in historical times, if not in how peoples have operated mentally, then in how they have responded psychically to the basic conditions of life. The
response, for example, to the loss of a loved one by an Egyptian of
the Old Kingdom, a Greek of the classical age, or a modern Wes-
terner would no doubt differ. And all would no doubt differ from
that of an archaic tribesman, convinced of the work of evil spirits or
the magic of an enemy. What seems to have changed is the way we
encounter the world psychically, and in this encounter the change
wears the face of culture.

Our evolving psychic responses represent, in Jungian terms, a
progression in our ways of experiencing the archetypes. New
expressions of the archetypes, first registered in individuals, would
have been captured and preserved by a particular cultural cast for so
long as that culture survived, or until it changed in response to new
conditions. New challenges prompt new archetypal expressions,
resulting in new cultural configurations. These are passed on as a
part of the culture from generation to generation for as long as they
remain congenial to the conditions in which the culture finds itself.
Thus, innovations that with increasing efficacy reflect reality are
successively preserved. These innovations are achieved through a
heightened consciousness in the extraordinary individual. And they
are preserved, not through genetic change, but through the mecha-

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isms of culture. Nor are the best of such innovations likely ever to
be lost. Take writing, for instance. It has stayed with us from the
dawn of civilization. It may be, and has been, improved upon, but it
is unlikely, as long as there are humans, that it will ever be lost,
though it could conceivably one day become, owing to the develop-
ment of more effective forms of communication, a dead mechanism.

The images that supported a dawning consciousness, so the
argument goes, were given expression in culture through myth and
ritual. These latter, on their part, served to bolster the purchase on
consciousness they reflected. Religious rites, for example, tend to
enshrine unconscious contents as projected upon the divine figures
they celebrate. But, at the same time, they are consciously per-
formed and consciously preserved, so they afford a conscious orien-
tation to the external world. In the more primitive stages of the
practice of magic and religion, the orientation established would
have been, to be sure, a somewhat unrealistic one. Nevertheless, as
we have earlier observed, it evidently provided a better adaptive
tool than blind instinct. Even as a group engages in what may be
seen as wasteful and bizarre sacrificial rites, say in the effort to
make the Goddess fructify the earth, those rites nevertheless serve to focus the group upon the planting and cultivation necessary to the project. It is easy to imagine the agrarian primitive, without something powerful to concentrate the mind, as lapsing into confused, aimless, or indolent behaviour. Or we might conceive that, in the absence of an entrenched ritual, the husbandman might fail of the wherewithal to keep proper track of time and seasons, and to relate to them their appropriate activities. Yet divinities who beckon in the stages of the moon or the equinoxes of the sun might summon the worker to the necessary tasks.

In similar fashion, initiation rites, almost universally present in culture, serve to reinforce the differentiation of consciousness. Typical of them are rituals through which the youth is “reborn”; the child “dies” and the youth steps forward into the state of manhood and independent self-assertion. For girls, social observances attendant upon menstruation, marriage, and motherhood serve similar ends. Culture both arose with and sustains consciousness. It is the mechanism by which the progress of conscious experience is fixed and preserved. Culture serves in respect of consciousness, in other words, as the analogue to the process by which the unconscious experience of humanity was collected within the human genome as the collective unconscious. The new experience is not recorded and preserved in the DNA, but rather in the collective consciousness of the culture.

Recapitulation from the materialist standpoint

For the propositions put forth in this book to be persuasive to a broad readership, the most central of them must stand the muster of the essentially materialist point of view of our culture. I believe that what we have covered so far does so. The materialist approach to the development of consciousness through the archetypes does encounter, however, one problem. Why, one might ask, would the archetypes be so constituted as to accommodate, indeed activate, consciousness, if they themselves evolved in our species during the period when the species was, in the main, unconscious? What, in the absence of consciousness, would afford a selective advantage to a collective unconscious set up so as to serve the needs of
consciousness? Remember, however, that we are notoriously unable to follow the paths that evolution has taken to arrive at a particular phenotype. Francis Crick, co-discoverer with James Watson of the DNA molecule, has said, wryly, that it is a rule that: “Evolution is cleverer than you are” (Dennett, 1995, p. 74). Consciousness is obviously an excellent adaptive device, and there might easily be explanations of why the collective unconscious evolved in such a way as to support consciousness that in no way suggest that consciousness was in some way the goal all along.

The materialist view, then, would go something like this. It is postulated that all the basic experiences of hominid creatures came, through natural selection, to be embedded in the collective unconscious, in the form of archetypes. This archetypal imprint of the history of the creature led to inner promptings, though not at first experienced consciously, that caused the creature to react in certain situations in certain ways. Archetypes that produced such promptings as favoured survival were preserved in the genetic make-up of the species. Given the long accumulation of archetypes and the marvellous flexibility that consciousness has demonstrated itself to have, when the time came, consciousness simply appropriated from within the archetypal matrix whatever was necessary to its advance.

We have observed that it appears that early humans lived in a state of participation mystique. This state of quasi-consciousness obtains at a time before a clear ego development has transpired. It presupposes the lack of a firm differentiation between the individual and the external world, because there was no clearly emerged ego to which everything else might be related. Early humans projected manifestations from within their own unconsciouses upon their surroundings and accordingly perceived them as being actual parts of those surroundings. Thus, in response to the hunter’s imprecations, the antelope spirit might submit the quarry to the kill. Over long stages, and with many fits and starts, these projections were increasingly withdrawn, and the psychic contents giving them rise became conscious. That is, the world began increasingly to appear to people as we see it today, rather than as a stage on which unconscious fears and desires play themselves out. What had previously been seen as existing outside, in nature, came to be accepted as interior, mental, images. It became, that is to say, the basis for conscious thought.
Seen from the standpoint of religion, which is a good marker of culture, we find that, over the extended period of conscious development, vague uncontrollable demonic forms evolved into specific divinities, whose motives might be grasped by conscious reflection. These personalized divinities in turn developed into personified ideas, and finally into abstract ideas (Jung, 1967 [1929], par. 49). Through this process human beings gained the power to manipulate the material whose origins lie in the archetypes, and we have thereby acquired the wide compass that consciousness at our present state can offer. The same process that prompted cultural advance is identifiable in the psychic maturing of each individual. Some impulse, over and apart from parental and societal nudging, seems to guide the process in the individual. Consider, for example, the psychological changes that inexorably attend upon puberty. “Teenager” implies a lot more than the indicated number of years of age. Jung sees the collective unconscious itself as this motivating force—as spontaneously producing images that lead the way towards psychic differentiation and consciousness. In other words, whatever drives the collective unconscious has led human beings, through the images and ideas that come to them, over the long haul, to increasingly expanded levels of consciousness.

One must take as mustering considerable explanatory power Jung’s suggestion within the context of his thoughtfully worked-out system that spontaneous psychic developments are brought about by autonomous movements of the collective unconscious. The materialist approach to that suggestion would say that natural selection produced, as yet another of its wonders, a collective unconscious uniquely constructed to do just this. Myths and rituals whose function it is to strengthen our hold on an as yet unsteady consciousness are themselves consciously observed, even if it is not consciously known why. They are attributes of culture. The driving force of evolution in humans shifted from the genetic to the cultural. Its focus was redirected from changes in the DNA within the cell to changes in the conscious stance of individuals, echoed in culture. Yet, in its essence, the process is the same. Characteristics promoting survival are preserved, and, within culture as in biology, virtually inconceivable degrees of refinement can be achieved.
Cultural movements

In the individual, dreams and fantasies may point the way for the adjustment of an out-of-balance conscious orientation. Sooner or later a change in the conscious orientation will be brought about or stagnation in the life of the individual, or worse, will result. By the same token, on the societal level, movement in the unconscious prepares the ground for new cultural attitudes. When the general system of adaptation breaks down, unrest ensues. A new attitude towards life is required. The ground for such an attitude has long been being prepared in the unconscious. Prevailing social, political, and religious conditions have required the repression of non-conforming attitudes towards life, and these repressed attitudes, over time, have effected an activation of corresponding contents in the collective unconscious across the society. Certain highly intuitive individuals become aware of the changes going on subliminally and translate them into communicable ideas. Because parallel changes have been going on in the unconsciouses of individuals all around, these ideas are widely received and take currency (Jung, 1960 [1948], par. 594).

Consider the rapid onset of Christianity arising out of the spiritually threadbare world of first century Rome. Moral decay, brought on by the loss of vitality in the images of the Roman gods, produced a malaise that could only be redressed by a new vision. The alignment of the unconscious, in compensation of the unhealthy state of affairs in the realm of the conscious, was ripe for a new expression of the archetypes. At just this point Christianity arose to provide a formulation of archetypal myths more suited to the forthcoming age. The new connection it established with the archetypes accounts for the great vitality with which the Christian rite was so obviously imbued (Jung, 1963, par. 744). In just a few hundred years Christianity took over the whole of the Roman world.

At such times, the tendency towards enantiodromia is to be observed. Enantiodromia, a running contrariwise, is a psychological law given its name by Heraclitus (Jung, 1953 [1917], par. 111). He meant by it that, sooner or later, everything runs into its opposite. The concept bears a close identity to the interplay between the Chinese yin and yang. The alchemists symbolized the tendency of
the archetype to run into its opposite by the many-faceted _uroboros_,
the snake biting its tail, which we have encountered before (Jung,
1960 [1947], par. 416). Contrast the stern authoritarianism reflective
of the mentality of Imperial Rome with the elevation of meekness
as a virtue in the Christian ethic.

Momentous historical events are often seen as the cause for
changes in world view that attend upon them, but to Jung they
were more appropriately seen as occasions in which adjustments in
the collective unconscious make themselves manifest (Jung, 1960
[1948], par. 594). Major shifts in world view followed the two world
wars—attitudes, for instance, in Europe and America about women
and their place in society. Is this the sort of shift that might have
been gestating in the collective unconscious? If so can all the horror,
destruction, and dislocation of those wars be conceived as a means
to such an end? Could, in other words, cataclysms of such scope
and magnitude be reasonably seen as the product of something so
ephemeral as movements in the collective psyche? But, one might
ask, what other than psychological mechanisms produced the
wars? Is not the thirst for power or even an urge for economic
advantage psychological? Seldom are these motivations seen
clearly as such by those who act upon them. Rather, the impulse is
cloaked in an image or ideal that is more acceptable to conscious-
ness—nationalism, for example. And, thus, they remain uncon-
scious and derive their force from unconscious energy. From Jung’s
point of view, the violent psychic forces given vent in the world
wars were indeed released in consequence of broad movements in
the collective unconscious. Taking the long view, moreover, in
respect of the change in attitudes towards women, should that in
fact be a part of what was operating, who can say that the potential
liberation from domination of half the world’s population is not a
worthy predicate for upheavals even so great as these?

The forces behind the wars likewise represented an _enantiodro-
mia_. The extraordinary technological products of European culture
were mobilized to lay waste the lands from which they had sprung.
“Thus the rational attitude of culture necessarily runs into its oppo-
site, namely the irrational devastation of culture” (Jung, 1953 [1917],
par. 111). Jung wrote that sentence in _Two Essays on Analytical
Psychology_ during the First World War. He let it remain in a revision
made in 1925, in as much as “it had been confirmed more than once
in the course of history”. He noted in the next edition, in 1942, that the next confirmation had not been long in coming (ibid., n. 13).

If one reflects that, as posited by Jung, all the forces of the psyche, from instinctual drives to conscious thought, are given their structure or shape by the archetypes, it is easier to comprehend the possibility that great movements in history are influenced by developments in the collective unconscious. It is through the archetypes that religious ideas take their form and derive their strength (Jung, 1960 [1931a], par. 342). The archetypes lie as well beneath the core ideas of philosophy and science, again supplying not only the categories which frame such ideas but also the attraction that draws adherents to them (ibid.). We like to think that we are the masters of our thoughts, but, viewed this way, it is the thought that takes over the thinker and not the other way around (Jung, 1954 [1931], par. 147).

The initial conception of the atom in modern science was as a sort of mini-solar system: a nucleus with electrons revolving around it in various orbits. This image was undone by Niels Bohr, who, in 1913, supplied a quantum picture of the atom (Barrow & Tipler, 1986, p. 304). The image of the stars wheeling around the earth must be a deep-seated one indeed, going back as far as humanity’s fascination with the heavens. It translated readily into the earth-centred conception of the solar system, which could then be neatly reversed by the Copernican understanding, with earth and its sister planets revolving around the sun. The ability of Bohr and those working with him to break away from this ingrained picture was a triumph of consciousness. A major advance in the understanding of objective reality was achieved, by freeing thought from the compulsion of a naïve image. This does not mean, however, that the archetype underlying the image of the planetary model has given way to an intellect that is no longer beholden to unconscious structures. Rather, the incompatibility of the earlier image with scientific observation gave rise to a new image, a more appropriate archetypal reading, this time taking the form of the wave. The Copenhagen interpretation, the description of the quantum world advanced by Bohr and his colleagues was elevated almost to a dogma—a fact that may be taken as a strong indicator of an archetypal grounding. Scientists are not above the archetypes. They can sometimes be their prisoners, trapped like anyone else by
an idea with unconscious roots. But science is also the beneficiary of the archetypes, for it is by the attraction of new images, born of the unconscious, that science makes its advances.

Some specific archetypes

Jung had a rare faculty for symbolic thinking, and this stood greatly in aid of his insights into the unconscious. In addition, of course, he accumulated observations from the psychic workings of a great many patients. Even so, he could find no way to convey in his writings the experience of the archetype: an incapacity he lamented. In an attempt on one occasion at least to suggest the experience, he pointed to the example of three commonly encountered archetypal figures: the Shadow, the Syzygy, or royal pair, and the Self (Jung, 1959 [1951], par. 63). The Shadow is clearly recognizable in myth and literature as the dark adversary, be it Iago, Mephistopheles, or Darth Vader, and the Syzygy is the source behind all divine couples. The Self, finally, underlies the supreme ideas of unity inherent in all religious systems. We have mentioned the Shadow and shall come again to it shortly, and, in the following chapter, on individuation, we will try to impart a greater sense of the central figure of the Self. The romantic pair perhaps needs no further elaboration.

In spite of Jung’s own reticence in trying to pin down particular archetypal figures, I will, in an attempt to bring some specificity into the discussion, talk about some others of them. In doing so, however, we must keep in mind that an archetype cannot be pinned down. A figure that is brought to ground as a metaphor and captured by analysis is no longer the immediate embodiment of the archetype. Such a figure will, in the process, have become entirely conscious, and the vitality that attaches to the archetypal realm of the unconscious will have slipped away. In the place of the archetypal image there will be concepts, by which conscious understanding is achieved. We would be operating, in other words, at a further remove from the feeling-toned core of the archetype.

The Great Mother

The individual’s primary experience of the Great Mother begins before consciousness. There is every reason to believe that the child
is the subject of unconscious experience while yet in the womb. Certainly the infant partakes of unconscious experience in the first year of life. In that first year, the human alone of all the animals lives in a state of total dependence upon the mother. This is the equivalent of intrauterine time, and the child is psychically “in” the mother during it (Neumann, 1994, p. 230). The unconscious psyche is observably active in infants in this dependent state. Typically, not until the third or fourth year—about the time from which our first memories appear—has the ego become sufficiently differentiated that conscious experience on a sophisticated level takes hold. It is not surprising therefore that the image of the mother should be a particularly powerful one in the archetypal world. Indeed, the Great Mother is herself the symbol of that world (Neumann, 1959, pp. 184–185). The Great Mother in her most elemental form is uroboric, containing the opposites, including the masculine (Neumann, 1994, pp. 188–190). She can appear positively as the nurturing, embracing mother, or negatively as the ensnaring or devouring mother. She may appear in myths, dreams, and fantasies as Mother Earth, as the Dragon, or as the interceding Mother of God. Or she can be the earth itself and its fruit, the tree or the grain; or she can be the sea, the vessel of life. In her transformative aspect she can be the moon, the embodiment of the feminine, with its changes and rhythms.

_The Father_

As the Great Mother is the embodiment of the earth and sea and with them all the depths of the unconscious, the Father reflects the sky and the spirit. Thus, it is “our Father who art in Heaven”. The fatherland is not the land itself, but the nation, the cohering principle of the people. The Father image emerges out of the Mother Archetype, and stands in opposition to it, just as in antiquity patriarchal religions succeeded the chthonic cults of the Great Mother. The Father represents the world of moral commandments and prohibitions, as it is the function of the world of the spirit to oppose pure instinctuality.

_The Persona_

The following archetypal figures are hard to discuss without entering the realm of personal psychology, but I shall tread lightly.
Broadly put, the Persona is the image one establishes of oneself. The image, of course, is particular to the individual, but its source is archetypal, for it is necessary that every individual develop a personality that she or he presents to the world. This personality will always diverge from the real individual, because all of us conduct a part of our psychic lives in secret. A person who let her or his psychic impulses show through without in any way monitoring or regulating them would immediately be taken as an idiot or a lunatic, or perhaps a criminal. At the same time, a basic level of consciousness requires that we be aware that we are not the precise person we present to those around us.

As it falls out then, we all carry around in ourselves an image of our self that is the Persona. It is the way we tend to see ourselves, although we are able on reflection to recognize the incongruity between this image and who we actually are. Nevertheless, there is a substantial risk that a person might completely identify herself or himself with the Persona. As it is impossible for one to be just whom she or he wants to be, a reaction in the unconscious in such a case is sure to set in. The consequence will be moods, obsessions, vices, or other behaviour that is inconsistent with the Persona (Jung, 1953 [1928], par. 307).

The Persona as I have described it may strike the reader as a perfectly ordinary thing, familiar to all. Why, then, dress it all up as a Jungian archetype? Consider, though, that I have described the Persona as a potent image that everyone experiences in one way or another. That is, in the main, how I have tried to depict archetypal images generally.

The Shadow

The Persona is what we expose to the light of day; the Shadow hides in the dark. In the Shadow are collected those parts of ourselves that we find repugnant or that are otherwise inconsistent with the Persona. We repress these traits and think we have got rid of them, but in fact we have only pushed them down into the unconscious. The Shadow is typically projected on to another person suitable to the purpose. In our worst enemy we are likely to find the parts of ourselves we most despise. Much socially unsuitable sexuality lurks in the Shadow. The Shadow makes a great subject for literature. Jung
pointed to the relationship between Faust and Mephistopheles in Goethe’s *Faust* as characterizing the relationship with the Shadow (Jung, 1959 [1939], par. 513). Satan in *Paradise Lost* and Iago in *Othello* are also great Shadow figures. We can recognize, therefore, that the Shadow is a figure with a great deal of power. Often, what we push out from the *Persona* are our idiosyncrasies. Yet, in some ways, these more accurately reflect who we are than anything else. Reincorporated into the overt personality, they can be liberating. The Shadow, then, consciously accommodated, can work for us rather than against us.

**The Anima and Animus**

Also related to the *Persona* is the figure described by Jung as the soul-image: the *Anima* in men and the *Animus* in women (Jung, 1971 [1921], par. 808). As the *Persona* is the image by which we relate to the world outside, the *Anima* and the *Animus* relate us to the unconscious within. The soul in a man is personified by a feminine figure; correspondingly, the *Animus* has a masculine character in women. The two figures are counterparts, but they function differently in the two sexes, in as much as the relation to the unconscious differs between the sexes. As with the Shadow, the *Anima* and *Animus* often register through projection, in their case usually upon a member of the opposite sex. The compelling attraction of romantic love is typically the result of such a projection.

**Other archetypal figures**

The Trickster and the Wise Old Man or Woman (the Crone) are other archetypal images commonly appearing in dreams, fantasies, myth, and literature. Jung points out that archetypally-based functional or situational motifs also make regular appearances. Examples are ascent or descent, a crossing, as of a ford or strait, the world of darkness, helpful or dangerous animals, etc. (Jung, 1976 [1951], par. 1158).

In the light of day it might seem improbable that one should actually experience the presence of such figures, but I think we all do. For those not attuned to pronouncements from within, the figures may not be recognized. But to one who recognizes them,
regardless of whether or not their meaning is grasped, their reality is beyond denial. To object to such an image because of its strangeness or because it does not square with one’s view of the world is like objecting to the plausibility of the bodily conformation of the duck-billed platypus. The objection is of no consequence to the platypus. The voucher for the living reality of these archetypal figures, said Jung, lies in the experience of them by multitudes of people.

*The religious impulse: an example of archetypal images in operation*

We have seen how the archetype of the Great Mother asserts the earliest influence upon the psychic development of the child. The Great Mother embraces both sexes. She is the embodiment of the unconscious, in the chaotic world of which there is no differentiation, sexual or otherwise. The build-up of consciousness implies differentiation. The ego must accomplish a series of separations. It must separate itself from the mother, from the environment, from the body, and from the contents of the unconscious (cf. Wilbur, 1977, p. 279, Figure 18). In step with that process, a progression of archetypes comes into focus.

Early on, the Father image splits off from that of the Great Mother. It presents itself as the emblem of authority. The reason for this development, says Jung, “indeed its very possibility”, stems from the fact that “the child possesses an inherited system that anticipates the existence of parents and their influence upon him” (Jung, 1961 [1949], par. 739). Thus, behind the biological father stands the archetype of the Father. As the child grows up, there occurs a struggle between the infantile attitude towards the parents and the perceptions of increasing consciousness. The developing child senses the incompatibility between the archetype-borne image of the parents and the role and station of the parents in the real world. As we elsewhere observed, the hitherto god-like parents develop clay feet.

In the face of this incongruity, the paternal influence of the infantile period is repressed and sinks into the unconscious. But it is not eliminated. “Like everything that has fallen into the unconscious, the infantile situation still sends up dim, premonitory feel-
ings, feelings of being secretly guided by otherworldly influences” (ibid.). With normal development these feelings, as they relate to the father, are deflected towards a divine figure or figures. This transfer is universal, says Jung, and occurs partly spontaneously and partly through education (ibid.).

Because of its unconscious roots, the feeling of a relationship with the divine, i.e., a religious conviction, is to a high degree impervious to the objective analysis or criticism of the conscious mind. Thus, Jung considers us to be inherently religious (ibid.). That which is the province of faith is not provable one way or the other, but what can be observed and demonstrated empirically is the intensity with which metaphysical convictions are advanced and denied. The emotion, in other words, attaching to religious statements is a reliable indicator of their connection with something that lies outside the range of the consciousness of those who make them.

The inner promptings in the individual that derive from the Father Archetype lead naturally towards religious expression in the collective. Thus, in early societies religious rituals sprang up as naturally as grass. Jung speculates that religious rites developed in much the same way as language (Jung, 1958 [1954a], par. 339). They were not made up, they were simply acted out, and long before they became the subject of conscious reflection. People performed them, as is by no means exceptional even today, without knowing why (Jung, 1958 [1954a], par 410; 1959 [1954a], par. 22).

The observance of rituals and the retelling of myths and fairy tales energize the underlying archetypes and cause them to be re-experienced. There occurs in this process simultaneously a conscious apprehension of the thematic matter and an unconscious response to it. In this way a connection between the conscious and the unconscious is established (Jung, 1959 [1951], par. 280). The liturgy of the Catholic Church supplies a case in point. It is built around the archetype of the family, with Christ as the bridegroom, the Church the bride. According to Jung, in the Catholic rite of baptism, the baptismal font is the womb of the church. To fertilize the womb, a candle as a phallic symbol is thrust into it three times. Salt has been added to the water in the font, making it parallel amniotic fluid and seawater. The priest performing the ceremony is the representative of the mana personality or medicine man, which is the Pope (Jung, 1960 [1931a], par. 336). The
symbolism of the ceremony can be very moving, regardless of whether the participant is consciously aware of its specific references.

_A new myth_

The images that emerge from the archetypes give an adequate expression of the state of the unconscious. When they are given conscious consideration and accepted as meaningful, often a connection with the unconscious is made. When, for example, as suggested above, the symbolism in a religious observance is received with conviction, the individual or the group experiences a renewed spiritual vitality. When the core of religious experience dries up, a natural interchange between the conscious and the unconscious is interrupted. The resulting attitude is, as Jung puts it, lacking in conviction:

If, however, certain of these images become antiquated, if, that is to say, they lose all intelligible connection with our contemporary consciousness, then our conscious acts of choice and decision are sundered from their instinctive roots, and a partial disorientation results, because our judgment then lacks any feeling of definiteness and certitude, and there is no emotional driving force behind decision. [Jung, 1954 [1951], par. 251]

The immediate role of consciousness is to temper the instinctual urge. As consciousness is enlarged, it increasingly supplants instinctual and intuitive responses with rules and modes of behaviour built up through thought and practice. In the absence of a strong connection with the unconscious, the tendency is for the conscious ego to set its own will entirely in the place of what is natural and instinctive (Jung, 1956 [1952], par. 673). The result can be an arid rationalism, if not an outright psychological disturbance.

Rationalism dominates our day. Science and reason enjoy the same sway in our time that the church held in the Middle Ages. And, like those of the church, their teachings are deeply believed even when, knowingly or not, they are being disregarded. A churchman may, in his reason, reject essential parts of his church’s metaphysics, and a woman of science may be secretly superstitious,
but each considers himself or herself a faithful adherent of the creed in question. It is not hard to see why we tend to prize reason to the exclusion of all else. Not only does it normally work for us, but it affords a sense of power and control. Man, however, does not live by reason alone. In spite of what we may wish, we are motivated by the unconscious, as well as the conscious, parts of our psyches. The unconscious, as embodied, say, in one's emotionality, will have a powerful effect on one's life, no matter how much its expression may be at war with the objective of rational control. We chafe that the unconscious will not just be clear with us. Rather, it seems to manifest itself indirectly, through feelings, hunches, impulses—inklings the rational mind reflexively mistrusts. In developing linear reasoning to our present high degree, we have suppressed, as incompatible with it, more intuitive ways of confronting the world. We must in the future find our way to where, while holding on to the power of reason, we are comfortable with non-rational processes. If this is to contemplate the combination of incompatibles, perhaps there is a symbolic way to arrive at such an outcome. In just such achievements lies the magic of symbols.

The conscious and the unconscious stand as antithetical aspects of the psyche: reason and will on the one hand, emotionality and instinct on the other. Neither end of the spectrum can be safely neglected. Nor can the two extremes, being opposites, unite of themselves. By definition the conscious cannot be unconscious, and vice versa. The conscious and the unconscious can only come together in a third thing, a thing that derives in part from both, but yet is exclusively neither. This is the symbol. The symbol, to a certain extent, admits of intellectual apprehension, as when we grasp the meaning of a story or image, and so it has a conscious element. At the same time the symbol evokes an emotional response, and so partakes of the unconscious. If a symbol is completely understood, it has lost its charge: it is mere allegory; yet, if it is not understood at some level, its subject remains wholly unconscious. Standing above these extremes, the true symbol has the power to mediate experience that partakes of both realms.

In the hands of the church, Christian symbolism flourished for the better part of two thousand years. But, as the scientific spirit took possession of the soul of the West, that part of the mystery upon which the church insisted as fact was rejected as absurd, and that
which was preserved as mystery failed to strike as deep a chord. We are thus in our society left largely without living symbols to mediate between our conscious and unconscious selves. There is every reason to believe that our age is not unique in this predicament. An uncomfortable rootlessness has characterized other periods of interregnum between times of belief. Our age, however, is unique in one sense. Because our traditional symbols have become so depotentiated, we have been able to see behind the façade of the gods to recognize, hiding there, the elements of our own psychic structure: that is, the archetypes of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1959 [1954a], par. 50). This circumstance suggests that modern discoveries in psychology will necessarily play a role in the way the archetypes bring themselves to bear upon us in the future. Levi-Strauss characterized Freud’s discovery of the Oedipus complex as nothing other than the modern telling of the Oedipus myth (Paz, 1978, p. 61). To some future generation, then, our understanding of psychology may appear as simply the myth that prevailed in our day. The gods are continually evolving. Thus, Jung says:

Every attempt at psychological explanation is, at bottom, the creation of a new myth. We merely translate one symbol into another symbol which is better suited to the existing constellation of our individual fate and that of humanity as a whole. Our science, too, is another of these figurative languages. Thus we simply create a new symbol for that same enigma which confronted all ages before us. [Jung, 1923, p. 314]

Notes

1. Richard Dawkins (1976, Chapter Eleven) comes to this conclusion from a different direction—through his concept of memes: non-gene-based replicators—ideas, tunes, ways of doing things, ways of viewing things—that propagate themselves through the medium of culture.

2. I speak from the standpoint of the patriarchal posture of Western culture. The one-sidedness of the attitudes referred to might be much mitigated if the note of the culture were to be struck from the attitudes and outlooks of women.