

A Little Note On Splitting

In her recent (OTT?) book: *Committed: A Sceptic Makes peace With Marriage*(sic), Elizabeth Gilbert writes quite violently against infatuation as an unhealthy version of the “singular fantasy of human intimacy that one plus one will somehow, someday, equal *one*” Not a new idea and one already most excellently examined in Robert Johnson’s book *We*.

However, Gilbert does remind us that Aristophanes told the story that humans originally had four arms, four legs and two heads. So equipped, they were perfect and perfectly happy in their completeness. In the usual run of things, however, this completeness led to arrogance and the usual sort of punishment. Zeus cut all the two-heads in half, so that the world was peopled with half humans, with only 1 head and four limbs each; who forever had the feeling that they were not quite whole. So that we are all born believing that, if we only search hard enough, we may find our other halves and be complete again. Without completion we are incurably lonely.

Gilberts proposition is that humans try to cure there incompleteness through the behaviours and feelings of (acute) romantic love. Not bad, but not nearly enough. Analytical psychology provides us with almost (but not quite) all the explanations we need for this undoubted sense of incompleteness that most of us have.

First, there is romantic love, that Jungians (more or less) describe as the projection of the anima or animus, the contra-sexual side that we all possess. See also the file on archetypes. The Jungian argument here is that we all need to know, understand and if possible integrate our contra-sexual sides, so that a sort of psychological androgyny can be achieved. More than this, the anima or animus can perform a variety of functions. As the object of sexual desire, as a spiritual guide, as a guide to creativity and so on. Examples often given are Beatrice, a girl glimpsed once only in the street by Dante who became forever enshrined as his muse (a positive anima image) and Iseult, the lifelong love of Tristan, who distracted him from any sort of productive life until his premature death (a negative anima image).

Second, there is the relationship between ego and shadow: the alter-ego that contains everything we regard as evil, do not want to be part of the ego and/or has been forgotten or repressed. Mephistopheles to Faust, Iago to Othello and so on. An archetype that is often the first thing that arises in therapy and, especially at midlife and later, needs to be recognized, understood and –very arguably – integrated with the ego.

Third, there is the ego-self axis (union). Maintenance of this union is said to be essential to mental wellbeing and its recreation is often said to be the most important task of the

second half of life. The ego is often thought to split off from the self in the first half of life when the individual creates an existence in the outer world. The self is regarded as representing psychological wholeness and the ego is merely a (relatively minor) development from this (again, see the archetypes file). There is much argument about whether the self should be regarded as a (or the) god-image and as to whether the god-image exists outside of the human psyche.

So there we have three ways in which analytical psychology has suggested that we are likely to be less than whole and to seek integration with archetypal forces. But there are at least three further points that need to be made.

First, just because we have an urge to integrate the ego with other elements of the psyche, it doesn't follow that this can or should be achieved. Any more than the presence of a sex drive means that mating is compulsory. Clearly, we have a drive towards integration wholeness, which provides some satisfaction when it is obeyed. But that may be all.

Second, and following on from the first, what evidence is there that the psyche should be whole. Entirely or at least largely integrated? Or that the archetype of the self (and of god) should be unitary? 750 million polytheists in India would probably argue for a multitude of components for both the psyche and the god-image. The Greeks had perhaps as many aspects of the gods as do the Hindus, too. A happy, multifarious projection of many of the aspects of the psyche. The drive to integration balanced by its opposite, the drive to division, the two forming an archetypal pairing. And the potential for yet another argument in psychology that it is not possible to resolve.

And, third, there is the whole area of social relatedness that is so ignored by Jungians. Perhaps the need for wholeness is no more than the drive to be a part of a human group (family or tribe with perhaps 50 to 100 members), so deeply as to make ego predominance unnecessary. Jungians are very keen on the idea that all advances stem from the work of individuals, but this often isn't so. Scientific advances are most often created by the shared work and writings of a body of scientists (Darwin's Theory of Evolution is a case in point), in intimate communication with each other over many years. This point is illustrated by the writings and letters of many scientists, from the Botanist John Ray and Gilbert White of Selborne in the 18th century to the complex history of the 'discovery' of the genetic code.

Over 30 years ago Michael Leunig published a cartoon in which humans were shown to have dreamtimes (as bubbles coming from their heads). Beginning, long ago with happily shared bubbles, but ending with each human having their own little bubble, unconnected and lonely to death. If anyone has a copy of this cartoon, perhaps they could share it.

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