

God?

A review of

Beyond Psyche: Symbol and Transcendence in C. G.

Jung

by Mark R. Gundry

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Reviewed by
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☞ Mark R. Gundry's project in *Beyond Psyche: Symbol and Transcendence in C. G. Jung* is clearly outlined in four steps, with a chapter devoted to each. His first step is to show that Jung's critics, as exemplified most particularly by Philip Rieff's (1965) *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, have not succeeded in dismissing Jung's psychology as a "dishonest" substitute for religion. He argues that the critics are guilty of the same weakness of which they accuse Jung, that is, of not being able to articulate their personal relation to the underlying hermeneutics.

☞ Gundry feels this demonstration frees him from taking sides and liberates him to take his second step: a fresh look at the philosophical and historical influences on Jung's early formation of the central principle of his psychology—the "reality of the psyche." In this exploration, Gundry concludes that Jung's theories invariably fail any criterion of scientific validity because they are fundamentally enmeshed and infused with fruitless, subjective, and untestable roots of metaphysical idealism.

☞ Relieved of the burden of the question of theory, Gundry then takes his third step: examining Jung's concept of the "symbolic life" as it is lived on the individual level. In this, Gundry focuses especially on those meditative and contemplative practices emphasized in the praxis of Jungian psychology (e.g., expressing interior images in various art forms, having an active imagination, following synchronistic hints).

☞ Having embraced the truth intention of the symbol-forming experience at the core of lived symbolic life, Gundry then is prepared to take his fourth step and the essential object of his project. This requires arguing that Jung failed to go "far enough" in his characterization of the center of symbolic life (the "still point," as Jung called it). To go further, Gundry asserts, is made possible by recourse to developments in modern psychoanalysis, as exemplified in the work of Winnicott, Bion, Eigen, Grotstein, and Ogden,

among others, where, Gundry proposes, a foundation for the reality of "transcendent presence" is being built.

☰ Gundry concludes that his solution avoids the problem of placing God forever out of reach, trapped in the psyche as "only an image" (p. 112). Instead, he suggests that a "theological horizon" opens up "beyond psyche" and becomes the basis for a "theology of symbolic life that includes transcendent presence not as a peripheral phenomenon, but as integral to the very structure of symbolic function" (p. 130).

☰ While critiquing critics is not typically a strong defense, Gundry's critique of Jung's critics usefully highlights a central reality of all psychoanalytic "systems." At bottom, they become and remain belief systems more or less complete with promulgatory impulses toward institutionalization, cult-like adherence to the master's vision, the inevitable crisis of faith, followed by the irreparable schisms and splits that have so marked the history of religions and the history of psychoanalysis. Periodic bursts of ecumenism and widely hailed rapprochement phenomena notwithstanding, shared belief is the cultural and political reality that dominates the theoretical conversation. There may be no escaping this when "two or more are gathered." Why do we expect something different?

☰ To Gundry's credit, after making the point, he warns against reducing the failures of Jungian theory to a simple product of the sources that influenced Jung. He notes, but does not examine in detail, the idea that Jung may have been trying to "push beyond the limitations of the materialist-idealist debate in which he was caught, but could not find the means to achieve a more adequate grounding" (p. 66). As strange as it may seem, the solution to this issue does not lie in Jung's early formulations (which Gundry unfortunately limits himself to), but to the formulations found in Jung's mature work: *Answer to Job* (1954), *Aion* (1951), *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944), *Alchemical Studies* (1968), and *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (1955). The key here is to see in these volumes that Jung's late work, in particular, exemplifies the spirit of Goethe's science (even if Jung does not explicate it as such) in contradistinction to Newton's science in which much of modern psychology is still imprisoned. An important reading of Goethe's science is provided by Bortoft's (1966) *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's Way Toward a Science of Conscious Participation in Nature*. The title alone will have to suffice as a hint to the readers of Gundry, Jungian psychology, and of the literature of modern psychoanalysis, of the profound relevance of Goethe to this conversation.

☰ Both those familiar and unfamiliar with Jungian praxis of the symbolic life, from active imagination to the transcendent function to the centrality of synchronicity as guide, will profit from Gundry's raising these crucial phenomena to center stage. These aspects, in much of contemporary Jungian discussion, have been eclipsed by the dominant focus on transference and other interpersonal and intersubjective

issues framed by the therapeutic dyad. Still, after giving these factors such precedence, Gundry concludes that the "theological importance" of these symbolic functions has been "neglected" not only by readers of Jung, but by Jung himself.

☞ Neglect? It was startling to me in a book of this nature that the author failed to take note of Jung's most direct comment on the "question of God." In the series *Face to Face* (BBC, 1959), John Freeman asks Jung: "Do you now believe in God?" Jung replies: "Now?" After a long pause, Jung continues: "Difficult to answer. I know. I don't need to believe. I know."

☞ In a recent interview (Lockhart, 2006), I was asked what I thought Jung meant. I pointed out that Jung was using *know* in its gnostic simplicity, meaning "it is in my experience." This does not mean that it is evidence for "something else" (as in the experimental requirement of empiricism's conjecture and refutation). I indicated that the word's etymology gives us the proper shades of meaning: *cunning* (to know how to), *ken* (to be able to name), and *narrate* (to be able to tell). The etymology points to something in one's experience that enables one to do, to name, to tell. So Jung knows God in that sense—that he can do, he can name, he can tell. For him, "belief" pales in comparison to this sense of knowing. And that is why he answered the way he did to Buber (Jung, 1973). Jung's knowing can make absolutely no claim on anyone else. The gnostic position is utterly individual in this sense. And, like the alchemist that animated so much of Jung's life, one seeks confirmation not in the collective by sharing with or forcing on others (as is so typical of belief) but in the ever further reaches of the unfolding experience of the interior. Where experience of "other" is so powerful and numinous, there (in that geography of the psyche) belief simply does not come into it. In many ways it is like a dream. You simply know the dream. Belief begins to operate when one tries to speak of the dream's meaning, or the dream's origin, thinking of the dream as projection or anything "beyond" the dream. But no belief can really touch your gnosis of the dream, your knowing the dream.

☞ In Gundry's chapter titled "Transcendent Presence," he calls on modern psychoanalysts to fill in what he considers Jung's and Jungians' neglect. Although Gundry may find more support in the psychoanalytic literature for the transcendent, it is odd that he does not bring in more of the direct treatment of these religious issues in that literature, such as the work of Meissner or Gargiulo, or Rizzuto, to name just a few of those absent from consideration. Perhaps it is because at bottom in the psychodynamic literature, in spite of the transcendent terminology, psychoanalysis has yet to go beyond what Rizzuto says of her work: "I am not writing about religion but only about object relations" (as cited in Ulanov, 2001, p. 17).

☞ Even more surprising is the absence of deeper treatment of the contributions of Edinger (1984), most particularly of his *Creation of Consciousness: Jung's Myth for Modern Man*,

perhaps the most direct treatment of the role of the transcendent stemming from Jung's work. And how could the Jungian analyst Ulanov's (2001) *Finding Space: Winnicott, God, and Psychic Reality* be considered "neglect by Jungians" of Gundry's central concerns? Listen to what Ulanov said, in her use of Winnicott in the most creative way yet:

When we focus on the transitional space, our questions shift from being about the truth or falsity of God to whether we experience God in a lively way that feels real to us or in a dead way that feels, for all its correct appearance, deadly, that is as something pasted on what we feel forced to adopt lest something worse befall us... . Religion is relocated in this space between subjectivity and objectivity, between our unconscious and consciousness, between faith and fact. (p. 18)

☰ This to me embodies what Jung intended when he said, "I know." And this is, I believe, the simplest answer to Gundry's question. Nonetheless, Gundry is to be commended for his efforts to rescue the spiritual dimension of Jung's work. The problem is not that these issues have met a dead end in Jung's work. Rather, it is that Jungians, by and large, have abandoned the deeper implications of Jung's late work. I trust there is a renaissance brewing, as the new work on Goethe mentioned above as well as new developments in modern physics are brought to bear on Jung's late work as exemplified in such recent efforts as Michael Conforti's (2003) *Field, Form, and Fate: Patterns in Mind, Nature, and Psyche*.

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