

Giegerich's Response to Mogenson's Critique

<http://csf.colorado.EDU/seminars/cgjung/giegerich.oct98/index.htm>

In a personal note Mogenson wondered whether his criticism might just be due to “resistances.” I do not believe so. Given the two presuppositions that he starts out from, it is valid, interesting and weighty. The one presupposition, I would say, has the character of a misunderstanding of my position, the other one is a certain difference in the basic conception of psychology between him and me, a difference of emphasis.

(1) It is a misunderstanding that I conceive of the individual as irrelevant. It goes without saying that the individual is indispensable and that “laying [our] infinitesimal grain in the scales of humanity’s soul” is crucial. Mankind exists in the form of individuals. Without them, there would be no thought, no art, no social life, no dreams. Just as birth and death, eating and sleeping, working and love-making are constants, so the importance of the individual is a constant. I am not pleading for team work, not for a laissez-faire attitude, I am not trying to do away with individual responsibility and thereby endorse “the banality of evil.” My thesis of the obsolescence of the individual is on a different level, which can be seen when in the last passage from my article I add the comment in parentheses, “(even though it [the life of the psyche] lives through us and needs us to give expression to it).” The *parentheses* are to indicate that here, with this comment, I have left the otherwise psychological level of my discourse and shifted to another, the extrapsychological discourse of common sense or everyday consciousness.

Seen from outside, from the perspective of outer reality or common sense, the shaman, the chief, the Pharaoh, the great artist, the alchemist were, of course, individuals. But psychologically, they did their dreaming, thinking, and creating not as singular individuals, but *as* the soul of the tribe, as “the whole,” as “universal.” This alone is what makes a dream a “big” dream, the opus a *magnum opus*, a painting a work of art. The alchemists did not work at *their* self-development, but sought *the* Stone as such, everybody’s Stone, the Stone for mankind, and Jung’s claim that their’s was an unconscious concern for their own Self (only projected outside into matter) is an unforgivable psychologism, and an unfair interpretation of alchemy.

My thesis is that the individual is *logically, psychologically* obsolete. The thesis is not that it is obsolete *as a positive fact*. This difference of the psychological versus the ordinary consciousness sense of “individual” is essential. My whole argument is a psychological one. I am not speaking from the point of view of ordinary reality. This is to say that I attack the *psychological idea* of the individual *as focus and purpose*, not the positive reality called individual. In a way I am trying to return (or advance?) to the truth of alchemy: that what counts is the transformation of the prime matter, not my own; and only to the extent that I dedicate myself to the prime matter’s and not my own individuation or transformation process can I, too, experience *my* “redemption,” where “my” refers to the extrapsychological notion of me as individual human being and not to the psychological notion of the ego-personality.

(2) Now I come to what I consider the different emphases in the set-up of psychology between Mogenson and me. If I get Mogenson right, he basically operates within the subject-object relation. The Real is on one side for him, and the psyche is predominantly the human psyche *responding* to “the traumas of the Real.” The “objective psyche is also manifest in the capacity of the individual to image reality,” he says. This sentence has a chance of being true only if it is meant positivistically and not psychologically, i.e., if “individual” refers to the factual or empirical human being, to people, because an empirical person could be a shaman or true artist, etc. However, the capacity of the individual (in a *psychological* sense) to form fantasies is a manifestation of the subjective psyche. The individual’s response is the equivalent to the work of sprayers who do not want to see the *reality* of an empty grey concrete wall and thus spray their own colorful designs on it. Psychologically speaking, the objective psyche manifests in our

capacity to image reality only on the condition that we do our imaging not as individuals, but as logical “Universal,” mythologically speaking as the soul, the non-ego. This crucial distinction I miss in Mogenson’s text. Of course our young men may continue to dream dreams. But if their dreams are their individual dreams, they have the same status as the dreams and the drug-induced visions of the hippie generation that later turned yuppie. Why today do we have a drug problem as no time before did? Because people want to dream their own dreams, cut off from the soul’s magnum opus. Only if a young man’s dream is not his individual dream, but if he is dreaming the Mercurial dream hidden in today’s prime matter, in what is really going on in our time is it a dream of the objective psyche. Yes, *we* must “struggle to differentiate and redeem” the “dark side of the Self,” we who, externally speaking, exist only as individuals. But psychologically speaking we must not do this *as individuals*, as Mogenson insists, because as individuals in the strict sense we do not even get near the Self. We pass it by.

I am too much of an alchemist to appreciate Mogenson’s quote from Jung, CW 8 §§ 331f., which I find reductive, even nihilistic. Jung starts out from the fictitious abstraction of “the purely physical element” (as if there were such a thing), which through a secondary fantasy activity is allegedly turned into a god. If this were how it is, such a god would not have truth in him and thus not really be a god. He would not be an epiphany, but a subjective projection, a bumper sticker glued onto the Real. Viewed from a mythological or alchemical perspective, the god or the Mercurius does not come from a secondary “autocratic” (!) response to the Real, but is what is contained or imprisoned in the Real itself to begin with. The “autocratic” response to the Real is only anima, only Maya, projection. Likewise, the *effort* to re-ensoul the world with anima mundi is, in my eyes, a typically modern ego effort. If you start out with the idea of the objective psyche, you do not have to work at re-ensouling anything, because the soul is already there to begin with, and it is usually where it is least expected and least wanted. This is why I want to mine the objective phenomena (for example, the phenomena of Globalization, Profit Maximation, etc.) for soul, rather than to “form fantasies” about them. Instead of responding in the sense of a *compensatory* relationship between psyche and the traumas of the Real, I want to listen to what the real process is telling me; I want to be taught by the Real how I have to think, I want to be put into my place, maybe even “baptized” by it. This is how *I* am trying to lay my “infinitesimal grain in the scales of humanity’s soul.”

I find the idea of compensation in this context less than helpful. In our case it would mean: First we develop an economy based on Globalization and Profit Maximation and then, instead of (psychologically) taking the consequences, we want to cover it up with beautiful fantasies. Would this not be cheating? “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” It is the fruits where our truth lies. Yes, let us drink the cup of our own unconscious collective doings to its very dregs. Because in those dregs and nowhere else lies our soul. But by saying this I do not suggest, like the Gnostics, that we should commit any “sins” in order to be able to be redeemed from them. The “sin” (if it is a sin) has already been committed. “To drink the dregs” as used by me is not an appeal to the literal behavior of committing any deeds. It means allowing oneself to be reached by the core of the deeds that have already be done and of what is going on, to both comprehend it and to be comprehended by it.

No doubt, Mogenson is able to back up his view with ideas of Jung’s. But I would want to put the emphasis on another Jung than his, that Jung who, e.g., said about the neurosis that we should try “to experience what it means, what it has to teach, what its purpose is. ... We do not cure it—it cures us” (CW 10 § 361). As all symptoms, Globalization and Profit Maximation are not what *needs* the psyche’s “autocratic response,” they *are* the psyche’s “autocratic response.” It is for us to get their psychological message, to comprehend them and, through our comprehension of them, be transformed by them.

The opposition of “traumas of the Real” and the “autocratic responses to” them seems to create

a split. The psychological comes to be placed on one side only, the side of our imaging and the soul's response to the Real, whereas the Real itself on the other side is construed as totally soulless¹ (which is what is responsible for the desire to re-ensoul the world with anima mundi in the first place; if the Real were not *construed* as devoid of soul and in need of our individual symbolizing, no need to re-ensoul it would be felt). In the case of tornados and earthquakes such a conception of the Real may be acceptable. But in the case of Globalization? The latter is a development within our human economic activities and as such not a "trauma of the Real" in the sense that natural catastrophes are. As man-made, Globalization is in itself a product of the soul's symbolizing activity. It does not need *another* symbolizing. It needs our intellectual and feeling comprehension and that response to it that consists in our allowing it to penetrate and transform us or, as Jung put it, to cure us.

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¹ The prime example of traumatizing events is torture, the infliction of pain that is absolutely devoid of any inherent soul-meaning or spirit. There is not even a "Mercurius" *imprisoned* in it that could possibly be redeemed. The "traumatic" is the one extreme, the opposite extreme would be the "epiphanic," with the alchemical *massa confusa* mid-way between them.