

# Is the Modern Psyche Undergoing a Rite of Passage?

By Richard Tarnas

[A] mood of universal destruction and renewal...has set its mark on our age. This mood makes itself felt everywhere, politically, socially, and philosophically. We are living in what the Greeks called the *kairos*--the right moment--for a "metamorphosis of the gods," of the fundamental principles and symbols. This peculiarity of our time, which is certainly not of our conscious choosing, is the expression of the unconscious human within us who is changing. Coming generations will have to take account of this momentous transformation if humanity is not to destroy itself through the might of its own technology and science....So much is at stake and so much depends on the psychological constitution of the modern human.

C. G. Jung

What are the deep stirrings in the collective psyche of the West? Can we discern any larger patterns in the immensely complex and seemingly chaotic flux and flow of our age?

Influenced by the depth psychology tradition founded a century ago by Freud and Jung, and especially since the 1960s and the radical increase in psychological self-consciousness that era helped mediate, the cultural ethos of recent decades has made us well aware how important is the psychological task of understanding our personal histories. We have sought ever deeper insight into our individual biographies, seeking to recover the often hidden sources of our present condition, to render conscious those unconscious forces and complexes that shape our lives. Many now recognize that same task as critical for our entire civilization.

What individuals and psychologists have long been doing has now become the collective responsibility of our culture: to make the unconscious conscious. And for a civilization, to a crucial extent, *history* is the great unconscious--history not so much as the external chronology of political and military milestones, but as the *interior* history of a civilization: that unfolding drama evidenced in a culture's evolving cosmology, its philosophy and

science, its religious consciousness, its art, its myths. For us to participate fully and creatively in shaping our future, we need to better understand the underlying patterns and influences of our collective past. Only then can we begin to grasp what forces move within us today, and perhaps glimpse what may be emerging on the new millennial horizon.

I focus my discussion here on the West, but not out of any triumphalist presumption that the West is somehow intrinsically superior to other civilizations and thus most worthy of our attention. I do so rather because it is the West that has brought forth the political, technological, intellectual, and spiritual currents that have been most decisive in constellating the contemporary world situation in all its problematic complexity. For better or worse, the character of the West has had a global impact, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Yet I also address the historical evolution of Western consciousness because, for most of us reading these words, this development represents our own tradition, our legacy, our ancestral cultural matrix. Attending carefully and critically to this tradition fulfills a certain responsibility to the past, to our ancestors, just as attempting to understand its deeper implications fulfills a responsibility to the future, to our children.

A paradox confronts every sensitive observer about the West: On the one hand, we cannot fail to recognize a certain dynamism, a brilliant, heroic impulse, even a nobility, at work in Western civilization and in Western thought. We see this in the great achievements of Greek philosophy and art, for example, or in the Sistine Chapel and other Renaissance masterpieces, in the plays of Shakespeare, in the music of Bach or Beethoven. We see it in the brilliance of the Copernican revolution, with the tremendous cosmological and even metaphysical transformation it has wrought in our civilization's world view. We see it in the unprecedented space flights of a generation ago, landing men on the moon, or, more recently, in the spectacular images of the vast cosmos coming from the Hubbell telescope and the new data and new perspectives these images have brought forth. And of course the great democratic revolutions of modernity, and the powerful emancipatory movements of our own era, vividly reflect this extraordinary

dynamism and even nobility of the West.

Yet at the same time we are forced to admit that this very same historical tradition has caused immense suffering and loss, for many other cultures and peoples, for many people within Western culture itself, and for many other forms of life on the planet. Moreover, the West has played the central role in bringing about a subtly growing and seemingly inexorable crisis on our planet, a crisis of multidimensional complexity: ecological, political, social, economic, intellectual, psychological, spiritual. To say our global civilization is becoming dysfunctional scarcely conveys the gravity of the situation. For humankind and the planet, we face the possibility of great catastrophe. For many forms of life on the Earth, that catastrophe has already taken place. How can we make sense of this tremendous paradox in the character and meaning of the West?

If we examine many of the intellectual and cultural debates of our time, particularly near the epicenter of the major paradigm battles today, it is possible to see looming behind them two fundamental interpretations, two archetypal stories or metanarratives, concerning the evolution of human consciousness and the history of the Western mind. In essence these two metanarratives reflect two deep myths in the collective psyche--and let us define myths here not as mere falsehoods, nor as collective fantasies of an arbitrary sort, but rather as profound and enduring patterns of meaning that inform the human psyche and constellate its diverse realities. These two great myths in the collective psyche structure our historical self-understanding in very different ways. One could be called the myth of progress, the other the myth of the fall.

The first, familiar to all of us from our education, describes the evolution of human consciousness, and particularly the history of the Western mind, as an extraordinary progressive development, a long heroic journey from a primitive world of dark ignorance, suffering, and limitation to a brighter modern world of ever increasing knowledge, freedom, and well-being. This great trajectory of progress is seen as having been made possible by the sustained development of human reason, and above all by the emergence of the modern mind. We recognize this view whenever we encounter a book or program

whose title is something like "The Ascent of Man" or "The Discoverers" or "Man's Conquest of Space," and so forth. The direction of history is seen as onward and upward. Humanity is here often personified as "man," and imaged, at least implicitly, as a solar masculine hero of Promethean character: bold, restless, brilliantly innovative, ceaselessly pressing forward with his intelligence and will, breaking out of the structures and limitations of the past, forever seeking greater freedom and new horizons, ascending to ever higher levels of development. The apex of human achievement in this vision begins with the ascendance of modern science and individualistic democracy. The view of history is one of progressive emancipation and empowerment. It is a vision that emerged fully in the course of the European Enlightenment, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though its roots are as old as Western civilization itself. In many respects our modern consciousness is so fully identified with this myth that it has become our common sense, the lineaments of our self-image as modern humans.

The other view, whose presence has become much stronger in our cultural discussion in recent years, though it was always present to one extent or another as a compensatory countercurrent to the progressive view, describes this story in quite opposite terms. In the form this myth has taken in our era, the evolution of human consciousness and the history of the Western mind are seen as a tragic story of humanity's radical fall and separation from an original state of oneness with nature and with being. In its primordial condition, humankind had possessed an instinctive knowledge of the profound sacred unity and interconnectedness of the world; but under the influence of the Western mind, and especially intensifying with the ascendance of the modern mind, the course of history has brought about a deep schism between humankind and nature, and a desacralization of the world. This development has coincided with an increasingly destructive human exploitation of nature, the devastation of traditional indigenous cultures, and an increasingly unhappy state of the human soul, which experiences itself as ever more isolated, shallow, and unfulfilled. In this perspective, both humanity and nature are seen as having suffered grievously under a long domination of thought and society associated with both patriarchy and modernity, with the worst consequences being produced by the

oppressive hegemony of Western industrial societies empowered by modern science and technology. The nadir of this fall is seen as the present time of planetary ecological disaster, moral disorientation, and spiritual emptiness, which is the direct consequence of human hubris as embodied above all in the structure and spirit of the modern Western mind and ego. Here the historical perspective is one which reveals a progressive impoverishment of human life and the human spirit, a fragmentation of original unities, a ruinous destruction of the sacred community of being.

Something like these two interpretations or paradigms of the history of human consciousness, which I have described here in somewhat oversimplified terms for the sake of easy recognition, can be seen to inform many of the more specific issues of our age. One might say that these opposing historical perspectives, with their many variations and compromise formations, constitute the most fundamental argument of our time: Whither humanity? Upward or downward? How are we to view Western civilization, the Western intellectual and spiritual tradition, its canon of great works? How are we to view modern science, the modern era? How are we to view "man"? Is it progress, or is it tragedy? Has the modern Western project brought Enlightenment, or Kali Yuga?

John Stuart Mill, in his splendid essay on Coleridge, once made an observation I have always considered to be shrewd and perceptive, even wise. He pointed out that in intellectual controversies both parties to the debate tend to be correct in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny. Mill's insight into the nature of intellectual discourse shines light on many things: whether it is conservatives debating liberals, parents arguing with their children, or a lovers' quarrel, almost invariably something is being repressed in the service of making one's point. But I believe that this insight applies with particular aptness to the conflict of historical visions I have just described. For I would like to suggest that both parties to this dispute have grasped an essential aspect of the picture, that both mythic visions are in a sense correct, each with compelling arguments within its own frame of reference, but that they are both intensely partial visions, as a result of which they both deeply misread the larger story. And I believe that this larger story is one in which the two opposite interpretations are exactly intertwined to form a complex but

integrated whole.

Indeed I believe the two stories actually constitute each other. They underlie and inform each other, make each other possible. One might compare the way these two historical interpretations coalesce, while appearing to exclude each other, to those gestalt-experiment illustrations that can be perceived in two different, equally cogent ways, such as the precisely ambiguous figure that can be seen either as a white vase or as two black faces in profile. By means of a gestalt switch in perception, the observer can move back and forth between the two images, though the figure itself remains unchanged. Niels Bohr's famous dictum, drawn from his experience in quantum physics, that the opposite of a great truth is another great truth, expresses a similar insight.

What is difficult, of course, is to see both images, both truths, simultaneously. But this may be the task we must engage if we wish to gain a deeper understanding of the evolution of human consciousness and the history of the Western mind: to see that long spiritual and intellectual journey, through stages of increasing differentiation and complexity, as having perfectly ambiguously brought about both a progressive ascent to autonomy, and a tragic fall from unity--and as having perhaps prepared the way for a synthesis on an altogether new level. For I believe that the two historical perspectives which I have described reflect opposite but equally essential aspects of an immense dialectical process, an evolutionary drama that has been unfolding for thousands of years, and that now appears to be reaching a critical moment of transformation.

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We can gain deeper insight into the polarity of these two historical perspectives, as well as their possible synthesis, by examining carefully the underlying structure of the modern Western world view. If we were to isolate the particular characteristic of the modern

world view that distinguishes it from virtually all premodern world views, what we might call primal world views, I believe we would have to say that the fundamental distinction or difference is this: The modern mind experiences the world in such a way as to draw a radical boundary between the human self as subject and the world as object. The subject-object divide, the sense of radical distinction between self and world, which we could call Cartesian for shorthand, is fundamental to the modern mind. The modern mind is constituted upon it. Modern science, from Bacon and Descartes on, is deeply founded on the conviction that if one is to know the world as it is in itself, then one must cleanse one's mind of all human projections, such as meaning and purpose, onto the world.

By contrast, in the primal world view, meaning and purpose are seen as permeating the entire world within which the self is embedded. The primal human walks through a world that is experienced as completely continuous between inner and outer. He or she sees spirits in the forest, perceives meaning in the movement of two eagles across the horizon, recognizes significance in the conjunction of two planets, experiences a world in which the human being is completely embedded in a larger being that is ensouled. The primal world is radically ensouled: it communicates and has purposes; it is pregnant with signs and symbols, implications and intentions. The world is animated by the same psychologically resonant realities that the human being experiences within. The human soul participates in a world soul, or *anima mundi*, and the language that articulates that *anima mundi* in all its flux and diversity is the language of myth, the archetypal language of the human psyche. The many particulars of the empirical world are all intrinsically endowed with an archetypal significance, mythic and numinous, and that significance flows between inner and outer, self and world, without any absolute distinction.

The modern world view considers this a naive epistemological error. If I see spiritual presences out in the world--as if the world is communicating with me in some purposeful way, as if it is laden with meaning-rich symbols--then I am projecting human realities onto the nonhuman world. This is childish and immature, intellectually primitive, delusory, and needs to be outgrown.

In the modern world view, then, the human self is seen as the exclusive repository of conscious intelligence, moral sensibility, and spiritual aspiration in the universe: all meaning in the universe comes from the human subject. Not just modern science but the entire world view of modern humanism is based on this assumption; it underlies, for example, the basic twentieth-century existentialist conviction that essential to the human project, in its unique pathos and courage, is the imperative to bring meaning to a universe that otherwise lacks all meaning.

In retrospect we can see that virtually everything in Western intellectual and spiritual history, from the Hebrew prophets and Greek philosophers on, has in one way or another supported this long, bipolar movement. Two basic developments have happened: On the one hand, the human self has been gradually differentiated out of the larger matrix of being; its autonomy, intellectual and moral, has been forged. It is dynamically self-determining, self-aware, self-revising, self-responsible; it even has an impulse toward self-transcendence. The autonomy of the individual rational mind and will is an extraordinary development, and it is precious to every one of us. We value our individual freedom to be able to stand up to a tradition, to our parents, to the world view we were socialized within, to the conventional society's values. We value being able to question, to go deeper, to go farther than the status quo. We value being able to explore and judge for ourselves whether some other reality is more profound than the one presented to us by the orthodoxy. This is precious to us. We all have an allegiance, often unspoken and unrecognized, to this autonomous self, forged over many centuries of cultural, psychological, and intellectual development.

On the other hand, this autonomy has been purchased at a great price: the disenchantment of the universe. The high cost has been a gradual voiding of all consciousness and intelligence, all soul, all spirit, all meaning, all purpose from the entire world, with all these now relocated more or less exclusively within the human self. This disenchantment has been discerned and lamented almost from the very start of the modern project--"I am terrified by the eternal silence of these infinite spaces," said Pascal as he looked out on the modern universe. The human soul has not felt at home in that universe--the soul can hold

dear its poetry and its music, its moral passion, its private religion and metaphysics, but these find no certain foundation in the empirical cosmos. Our psychological and spiritual predispositions are absurdly at variance with the world revealed by our scientific method. We are, it seems, "by nature" personal, intentional, concerned with value and meaning and purpose, but "nature" itself is understood to be devoid of these qualities. In such a context, all human imagination, religious experience, aesthetic sensibility, moral values and so on must be seen as idiosyncratic human psychological constructs, as courageous projections. It is a profoundly self-contradictory situation to be in.

The modern experience of a radical division between inner and outer--of a subjective, personal, and purposeful consciousness that is paradoxically embedded in and evolved from a world that is intrinsically unconscious, impersonal, and purposeless--is represented historically in our culture in the great division between the Enlightenment and Romanticism. In the world view of the modern West, the Enlightenment essentially rules the outer cosmos and the objective world, while the Romantic aspirations of our art and music, our spiritual yearnings, rule the interior world of the modern soul. In the Romantic tradition--represented, for example, by Goethe and Rousseau, Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Beethoven and Holderlin, Emerson and Whitman all the way up to our post-Sixties counterculture--the modern soul found profound spiritual and psychological expression. The Enlightenment tradition, by contrast, represented by Newton and Locke, Voltaire and Hume--and more recently by thinkers such as Bertrand Russell or Karl Popper, the cosmologists Stephen Hawking and Steven Weinberg, or the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins--has been mainly informed by rational-empirical science. In a sense, the modern soul's allegiance is to Romanticism, while the modern mind's allegiance is to the Enlightenment. There is a kind of schizophrenia within the world view that all of us grew up with in the twentieth century. Our spiritual being, our psychology, is contradicted by our cosmology. Our Romanticism is contradicted by our Enlightenment, our inner by our outer. There is no easy congruence between those two radically different world views; yet, to use Faust's term, they are somehow forced to "cohabit within our breast."

Yet the problem with this condition is not merely internal distress. Since the cosmological context within which all human activity takes place has lost any ground for transcendent values--spiritual, moral, aesthetic--the values of the marketplace and mass media freely colonize the human imagination and drain it of all depth. In the contemporary world, a disenchanted world view essentially empowers the utilitarian mindset to colonize all human subjectivity. The drive for ever greater financial profit, political power, and technological prowess supersedes all other aspirations. The utilitarian impulses of instrumental reason inevitably take over as ends rather than means. In turn, anxiety in the face of a meaningless cosmos and the loss of a coherent world view creates a spiritual hunger, an alienation and disorientation, which leads to an addictive hunger for ever more material goods, a pathological consumerism that cannibalizes the planet in a kind of self-destructive frenzy. Highly pragmatic consequences ensue from the schizoid modern world view.

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So many factors have pushed us in this direction. In many ways, not just the Western path but the entire human project can be seen as impelling the differentiation between self and world, between humanity and nature, between autonomy and participation, between part and whole. As soon as our species first used a tool, we began to move as a subject against an object, a human being vis-à-vis the world. As soon as we used linguistic and religious symbolization, we began to objectify our experience in such a way that the world acts on us and we act on the world. A memorable image at the beginning of the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* captures this larger coherence in the overall vector of the human epic: In a sequence entitled "The Dawn of Man," a protohuman primate has just made the primal discovery of using a tool; he has used a bone as a weapon to succeed in some life and death struggle. And in the ecstasy of that discovery, he hits the bone over and over again on a rock; eventually it shatters and flies up into the air, and in slow

motion metamorphoses into a spaceship in the year 2001. In that one image we see the whole Promethean trajectory, the alpha and the omega of the Promethean quest to liberate the human being from the bonds of nature, to differentiate and emancipate the human being through human intelligence and will, to gain control over the matrix from which it emerged. This quest climaxes in modernity, in modern science, where the whole focus of knowledge is prediction and control over a natural world seen as unconscious, impersonal, and mechanistic, lacking all interiority or subjectivity. Alone, we humans possess interiority--all else is made up of objects "out there."

The modern Western differentiation of the autonomous human self and disenchantment of the empirical cosmos also has significant roots in certain aspects of the religious traditions that have informed the Western spirit, whereby a transcendent divinity is discerned as being radically separate from the mundane created world of mortal finitude and unredeemed nature, while bearing a special relation to the human being and human history. "Man is made in the image of God," whose ontological separation from and superiority to the world He has created is mirrored in the human being's separation and superiority with respect to the rest of nature. The role of Judaism and Christianity in this larger process of differentiation and disenchantment is crucial. But I wish to focus here particularly on secular modernity, which emerged out of the Judaeo-Christian European matrix, and which propelled this process in a dramatic sequence of major paradigm shifts in our intellectual history.

We can trace much of this of course to the Cartesian revolution which separated soul from body, human subject from objective world. But Descartes' philosophy, which basically articulated the emerging awareness of the autonomous modern self, grew out of a prior, even more dramatic and consequential paradigm shift, the Copernican revolution. The Copernican shift of perspective can be seen as a paradigmatic metaphor for the entire modern world view: the massive seeing-through of the naive understanding, the discovery of the superiority of the modern mind to all past understandings, the awakening to the world-creating and world-destroying power of human reason, the radical displacement of the human being from the center of the ancient cosmic womb to a relative and peripheral

position in a vast and impersonal universe, the ensuing mechanization of the world picture. And this shift has been followed by others. Darwin, in essence, introduced a "Copernican" revolution in biology: whereas Copernicus left the Earth as just another insignificant planet, no longer the noble center of the universe, so Darwin left humans as just another ephemeral species among the animals, no longer the divine focus of creation.

Even the postmodern mind finds its roots in Copernicus's paradigmatic act of deconstructive reflexivity, his recognition that the apparent movement of the objective heavens was being unconsciously caused by the movement of the observing subject on the Earth. Here Kant was the crucial, proto-postmodern figure, with his Copernican revolution in philosophy whereby he recognized that the phenomenal order of the world is constituted by the ordering structures of the human mind. This is where the modern begins its shift to the postmodern. For Kant's insight into the human mind's subjective ordering of reality, and thus, finally, the relative and unrooted nature of human knowledge, has been extended and deepened by a host of subsequent developments, from anthropology, linguistics, sociology of knowledge, and quantum physics to cognitive psychology, neurophysiology, semiotics, and philosophy of science; from Marx, Weber, and Wittgenstein to Heisenberg, Kuhn, and Foucault. The consensus is decisive: The world is in some essential sense a construct. Human knowledge is radically interpretive. There are no perspective-independent facts. Every act of perception and cognition is contingent, mediated, situated, contextual, theory-soaked. Meaning is rendered by the mind and cannot be assumed to inhere in the object, in the world beyond the mind, for that world can never be contacted without having already been saturated by the mind's own nature. That world cannot even be justifiably postulated. Radical uncertainty prevails, for in the end what one knows and experiences is to an indeterminate extent a projection.

It was Friedrich Nietzsche who fully captured the pathos of the existential and spiritual crisis that would befall modern humanity in the aftermath of these revolutions that caused the displacement of the human, the disenchantment of the cosmos, the destruction of the metaphysical world, the death of God. Listen to the hyper-Copernican imagery--and that

peculiarly tragic combination of self-determining will and inexorable fate--in this famous passage:

What were we doing when we unchained this Earth from its Sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us?" (Nietzsche [1882] 1974:181)

Here we enter the eye of the needle of the late modern self, of the alienated postmodern self.

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Depth psychology enters into this history in a most interesting and consequential way. On the one hand, in a famous passage at the end of the eighteenth of his Introductory Lectures, Freud pointed out that psychoanalysis represented the third wounding blow to the human being's naive self-love and megalomania, the first being Copernicus's heliocentric theory, the second, Darwin's evolutionary theory. For psychoanalysis revealed that not only is the Earth not the center of the universe, and not only is the human being not the focus of creation, but even the human mind and ego, our most precious sense of being a conscious rational self, is only a recent and precarious development out of the primordial id, and by no means master of its house. With his epochal insight into the unconscious determinants of human experience, Freud stood decisively in the Copernican lineage of modern thought that progressively relativized and peripheralized the status of the human being. And again, like Copernicus and like Kant

but on an altogether new level, Freud brought the fundamental recognition that the apparent reality of the objective world was being unconsciously determined by the condition of the subject.

But Freud's insight was a sword that cut both ways, and in a significant sense Freud represented the crucial turning point in the modern trajectory. For the discovery of the unconscious collapsed the old boundaries of interpretation. As the post-Cartesian empiricists had emphasized, the primary datum in human experience is ultimately human experience itself--not the material world, and not sensory transforms of that world; and with psychoanalysis was begun the systematic exploration of the seat of all human experience and cognition, the human psyche. What Freud, and more deeply Jung, uncovered was that hidden by the radiant light of modern consciousness was the larger mystery of the psyche, the unconscious, informed and impelled by powerful mythic structures.

Here we see the extent to which depth psychology is rooted in and expressive of not only the solar Enlightenment side of the Western legacy but also the lunar Romantic. Both Freud and Jung were as much influenced by Goethe as by Darwin; they were equally committed to the exploration of the interior mystery of human subjectivity as to the lucid rational analysis of the human animal; their researches focused on myth, religion, dreams, and art, but were carried out with the intellectual rigor of the scientific observer. Moreover, as especially Jung understood, depth psychology engaged the challenge recognized by Kant as it attempted to discern the deep structural principles informing the human subject, those enduring patterns and forms which affect and even constellate our reality. Thus was opened up the radical possibility that even the world of modern science, the Enlightenment project, the self-image of modern man, could be revealed as expressive of underlying archetypal forms, mythic patterns. Even the anti-mythological consciousness of the Enlightenment reflects a mythic impulse at work. Disenchantment is itself a kind of enchantment, a form of consciousness reflecting a particular archetypal gestalt.

If we examine the long journey of differentiation of the human self and disenchantment of the cosmos, beginning with the primal anima mundi, we can see that the *participation mystique*--the consciousness of being embedded in an ensouled world, a matrix of living meaning--was gradually transformed into the modern experience of being a separate autonomous conscious self divided from a soulless world, and that this development can also be viewed as a gradual transformation of the anima mundi into the individual unconscious. The anima mundi has thereby been subjectivized, humanized, individualized, secularized, and repressed by the rational ego. Thus do Freud and Jung represent the great pivot, coming at that stage in the Cartesian development when the ego was able to theorize that from which it had emerged and cut itself off, with pathological consequences that they set out to heal. Freud of course continued many of the Enlightenment's limiting assumptions, and it was Jung who more fully recognized the depth and mystery of the unconscious. Moreover, in his final decades, through his later researches into the nature of archetypes, and particularly into the problem of synchronicities, Jung began to break through the Cartesian-Kantian limitations of his earlier understanding and to overcome the barriers between human interiority and external world. This, combined with his deep insights into the transformational teleology of the psyche, collective as well as individual, into the death-rebirth process, and, finally, into the alchemical sacred marriage, began to bring forth a new potential of participatory wholeness in the Western world view.

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Depth psychology has provided countless tools and insights with which we can better comprehend the historical developments this paper has described, from the discovery of the unconscious to the understanding of the psyche's symbolic modes of expression, the multivalent complexity of archetypes, and the dynamics of psychospiritual transformation. And it is with the aid of these tools and insights that we can begin to recognize that the

highly critical situation in which we find ourselves--in our world as well as in our world view--closely resembles a critical phase in an archetypal initiation process of death and rebirth, a process that Jung explored both experientially and theoretically throughout his life, and that was subsequently illuminated by the work of others such as the psychoanalyst and transpersonal psychologist Stanislav Grof and the mythologist Joseph Campbell.

I recall a lecture by Campbell in the late Sixties when he told a story of North American shamanic initiation. Rasmussen, the Danish-Eskimo explorer and ethnologist, in the course of his expeditions through the arctic regions of the North American continent, had conversations with many old shamans. One of them told the story of his own initiation as a young boy. He said that he was taken by an older shaman out on a sled over ice, and placed in a small igloo just big enough for him to sit in. He crouched on a skin, and was left there for thirty days with just a little water and meat brought in occasionally during that period. He said, "I died a number of times during those thirty days, but I learned and found what can be found and learned only in the silence, away from the multitude, in the depths. I heard the voice of nature itself speak to me, and it spoke with the voice of a gentle motherly solicitude and affection. Or it sounded sometimes like children's voices, or sometimes like falling snow, and what it said was, 'Do not be afraid of the universe.'" This discovery, Campbell goes on, became a point of absolute internal security for the initiate, and made possible his return to his community with a wisdom and assurance that was unmatched by everyone there, so that he could help others from that inner place.

This was of course the great death-rebirth initiation that, whether in the form of sacred rites of passage or of ancient mystery rituals, has informed indigenous, traditional, and archaic cultures throughout human history. But our own culture is notable for the utter absence of such an initiatory tradition. The dangerous, bold, risk-taking energies of youth are necessary for an initiatory process to take place, as all primal cultures know. Ours does not. Primal societies use these energies to mediate that great transition of each generation from dependence to independence, from immaturity to maturity, from childhood to adulthood, for the sustaining of the community both materially and

spiritually. This initiation consists of a profound, very frightening encounter with the darkest aspects of existence: with death, with utter aloneness, with suffering, with a crisis of meaning, with a sense of despair, a leaving of the community. In a sense, it is a leaving not only of the safety of the maternal, familial, and community womb but of the entire community of life.

This encounter provides a rite of passage for youths who can thereby discover their deeper purpose, their meaning, because in that great encounter with death and rebirth they are able to engage and experience, directly in their bodies, in their souls, the powerful archetypal forces that permeate life and nature and every human being, and they thereby come into direct knowledge of the great mysteries of death and rebirth. From that place, they can re-engage life with a new knowledge; they can bring back to the community an enriched understanding.

Our culture does not provide such an initiation, a rite of passage for youth. But that is just the beginning of it. If all our youth are uninitiated, then of course all our adults are uninitiated too. When one turns on the television, virtually everything one sees is designed for the adolescent mind, of all ages: *Pow! Zap! Boom!*, explosions, aggression, superficial sex, incessant change, shiny surfaces, ceaseless growth, the new, the fast, the ever youthful, the momentarily exciting. There is no sense of the deeper meanings, the profundity of life, no sense of the fact that decisions about the future need to be made not just from the point of view of what is going to show up on the bottom line of the next quarterly report, but what is going to affect the seventh generation from now. That is an awareness much larger than what is available to someone who has not gone through an initiatory transformation.

The reason our culture does not provide such an initiation, however, may not just be that it has somehow simply forgotten, or foolishly abandoned, its traditional wisdom, and myopically asserted a mechanistic material world with no deeper spiritual purpose or significance. While true as far as it goes, this explanation does not do justice to a possibly deeper process that seems to be unfolding. For the very absence of initiatory rites of

passage in our culture appears to have effectively created a kind of closed container, a psychic pressure cooker, an alchemical vessel that is intensifying the archetypal energies into a collective morphic field of explosive power. Perhaps the fact that our culture does not provide rituals of initiation is not simply a massive cultural error, but rather reflects and even impels the immersion of the entire culture in its own massive collective initiation. Perhaps we, as a civilization and a species, are undergoing a rite of passage of the most epochal and profound kind, acted out on the stage of history with, as it were, the cosmos itself as the tribal matrix of the initiatory drama.

I believe that humankind has entered into the most critical stages of a death-rebirth mystery. In retrospect it seems that the entire path of Western civilization has taken humankind and the planet on a trajectory of initiatory transformation, into a state of spiritual alienation, into an encounter with mortality on a global scale—from world wars and holocausts to the nuclear crisis and now the planetary ecological crisis—an encounter with mortality that is no longer individual and personal but rather transpersonal, collective, planetary; into a state of radical fragmentation, into the "wasteland," into that crisis of existential meaning and purpose that informed so many of the most sensitive individuals of the past century. It is a collective dark night of the soul, a deep separation from the community of being, from the cosmos itself. We are undergoing this rite of passage with virtually no guidance from wise elders because the wise elders are themselves caught up in the same crisis. This initiation is too epochal for such confident guidance, too global, too unprecedented, too all-encompassing; it is larger than all of us. It seems that we are all entering into something new, a new development, a crisis of accelerated maturation, a birth, and we cannot really know where it is headed.

But we can draw on those sources of insight that come from the mystical and shamanic epiphanies and writings of those individuals who have undergone a death-rebirth initiation. We can draw as well from our own psychospiritual journeys, which perhaps permit us to glimpse that extraordinary truth which Goethe understood: "Until you know this deep secret, 'Die and become,' you will be a stranger on this dark Earth."

This is the dark Earth that the modern mind has in some sense constructed for itself. Yet, in another sense, perhaps we find ourselves thrown into this dark estrangement because larger forces are at work, larger than the merely human. That is, the selective interpretation of experience that underlies the modern objectification of reality may itself be a highly developed--if largely unconscious--expression of the evolving mythopoeic imagination, operating within a very specific archetypal gestalt, moving towards some new reconfiguration of the human being in relation to the cosmos--a "metamorphosis of the gods."

What is on the other side of being a stranger on this dark Earth? In a speech at Stanford University in 1994, Vaclav Havel suggested an answer:

Planetary democracy does not yet exist, but our global civilization is already preparing a place for it: It is the very Earth we inhabit, linked with Heaven above us. Only in this setting can the mutuality and the commonality of the human race be newly created, with reverence and gratitude for that which transcends each of us, and all of us together. The authority of a world democratic order simply cannot be built on anything else but the revitalized authority of the universe. (Havel 1994)

And how is "the authority of the universe" rediscovered? How can we participate in a transformative unfolding that would lead toward a more integral world? One factor, I believe, is that we need to radically expand our ways of knowing, our epistemology. We need to move beyond the very narrow empiricism and rationalism that were characteristic of the Enlightenment and still dominate mainstream science today. We need to draw on--to use a single encompassing term--the wider epistemologies of the heart. We need ways of knowing that integrate the imagination, imaginal and archetypal insight, the intuition, the aesthetic sensibility, the revelatory or epiphanic capacity, the capacity for kinesthetic knowing, the capacity for empathic understanding, the capacity to open to the

other, to listen. Indeed, a highly developed sense of empathy is critical if we are to overcome the subject-object barrier. We need to be able to enter into that which we seek to know, and not keep it ultimately distanced as an object. We need, to use biologist Barbara McClintock's phrase, "a feeling for the organism."

Our best philosophy of science has taught us the extent to which our epistemology creates our world. Not only reason and empiricism but hope, faith, and compassion play a major role in constellating reality. And this perhaps is the underlying message of our modern Enlightenment's unexpected darkening of the world: At the heart of cognition is a moral dimension. To assume that purpose, meaning, and conscious intelligence are solely attributes of the human being, and that the great cosmos itself is a soulless void, reflects an invisible act of cosmic hubris on the part of the modern self. In essence, our task may be to move from an I-It relationship with the universe to an I-Thou relationship.

Let us try a thought experiment: Imagine that you are the universe, a deep, beautiful, ensouled universe, and that you are being approached by two different epistemologies, two suitors who seek to know you. Would you open your deepest secrets to the suitor--that is, to the methodology, the epistemology--who would approach you as though you were unconscious, utterly lacking in intelligence or purpose, and inferior in being to him; who related to you as though you were ultimately there for his exploitation, his self-enhancement; and his motivation for knowing you is driven essentially by a desire for prediction and control for his own self-betterment? Or would you open your deepest secrets to that suitor--that epistemology, that methodology--who viewed you as being at least as intelligent and powerful and full of mystery and soul as he is, and who sought to know you by uniting with you to create something new?

The postmodern mind has come to recognize the degree to which our often hidden presuppositions play a crucial role in constellating the reality we seek to know. It is clear to me, if the universe is anything like the mystery I believe it is, that, under duress, it will always render to the mainstream sciences a highly partial and misleading vision of what it is. At the dawn of modern science, Francis Bacon starkly represented what eventually

became the dominant form of epistemology in the West: He said for science to advance we need to wrest the secrets from nature by methods of forceful interrogation comparable to the torture rack; nature must be “put in constraint,” “bound into service,” made a “slave” (Merchant, 1980:168-69). As we well know from contemporary animal experimentation, this is not a mere metaphor (Schopenhauer once said that animals live in a hell in which human beings are the devils). Compare this ruthlessly objectifying strategy with the esoteric, mystical form of engagement with nature, an entering into a participatory understanding of the universe, characterized by aesthetic delight, intellectual ecstasy, imaginative flourishing, empathic unity, a hermeneutics of trust instead of suspicion. Knowledge becomes an act of love.

I believe we have a choice. There are many possible universes, many possible meanings, floating through us. We are not solitary subjects in a meaningless universe upon which we can and must impose our egocentric will. Nor are we just empty vessels, as it were, on automatic, passively playing out the intentions of the world soul, the anima mundi. Rather, we are creative participants, as autonomous yet embedded interpreters, in a co-evolutionary unfolding of reality. It is a complex process where both we and the universe are mutually creators and created. What seems to be unfolding is not only a recovery of the anima mundi but a new relationship to it. Something new is being forged; it is not simply a "regression" to a premodern state. We seem to be moving to a world view that is a dialectical synthesis of world and self, a new vision of the universe reflected in the many scientific and philosophical impulses working today toward a participatory holistic paradigm.

From this point of view, epistemologically, we are not ultimately separated from the world, projecting our structures and meanings onto an otherwise meaningless world. Rather, we are an organ of the universe's self-revelation. The human self has been forged into an autonomous intellectual and moral self, and is now in a position to recognize itself as being a creative intelligent nexus embedded within the larger context of the anima mundi. We are beginning to see that we play a crucial role in the universe's unfolding by our own cognitive processes and choices, tied to our own psychological development.

And thus our own inner work--our moral awareness and responsibility, our confrontation with our shadow, our integration of the masculine and feminine--plays a critical role in the universe that we can create.

Here depth psychology can serve the further development of that moral impulse which has been slowly forged in the Western consciousness by its religious traditions. For as the Mexican poet Octavio Paz put it, "the examination of conscience, and the remorse that accompanies it, which is a legacy of Christianity, has been, and is, the single most powerful remedy against the ills of our civilization" (Paz, 1991). I believe that it will take a fundamental moment of remorse--and we know this is an essential element in the death-rebirth experience--a long moment of remorse, a sustained weeping and grief, a mourning. It will be a grief of the masculine for the feminine; of men for women; of adults for what has happened to children; of the West for what has happened to every other part of the world; of Christians for pagans and indigenous peoples and Jews and Muslims; of whites for people of color; of the wealthy for the poor; of human beings for animals and all other forms of life. It will be a our own grief, for that shadow and that unconsciousness concerning others that afflicts even the best of us, including our revered predecessors and teachers. It will take a fundamental metanoia, a self-overcoming, a radical sacrifice to make this transition. Sometimes when we speak about the emergence of a new paradigm and a new world view, we focus on the intellectual dimensions of this shift; these are indeed crucial. But I do not think we can minimize the central importance of the moral dimension for this great transformation to take place.

Let us return now to the original polarity of the two mythic perspectives of history, of heroic progress and tragic fall, that have constituted our self-understanding. I have suggested that part of our task is to be able to see both of these metanarratives at once, to recognize both as truths, both as partial images of the whole. Yet I also believe that for us today it is not just a matter of intellectual understanding of this coincidence of opposites in our historical evolution. Rather, it is a matter of experiencing, suffering through, the struggle of opposites within our consciousness. We must in a sense undergo a kind of crucifixion, become a vessel through which the consciousness of our era, and of the

future, works out its contradictions, within our minds and spirits, our bodies and souls. As Marie-Louise von Franz once put it, in the spirit of Jung and of Hegel, by suffering to the extreme under the great problem of opposites--by fully accepting the activity of this dialectic within us--we can sometimes become a place in which the divine opposites spontaneously come together. Much of the intensity of our age derives, I believe, from precisely this dialectical activity, this clash of the opposites, pressing relentlessly to bring forth something new.

Are we going to make it? We cannot be completely sure that we will. No authentic initiatory process begins in the certainty of its outcome. It is not at all certain that we will successfully pass through this eye of the needle, this planetary ego death. For the foreseeable future, we seem to be living in an era of high drama. We seem to be engaged now in a kind of race, as H. G. Wells said, between education and catastrophe, but which I would describe as a race between initiation and catastrophe.

Jung once said that "if the encounter with the shadow is the 'apprentice-piece' of psychological development, then that with the anima is the 'masterpiece'" (Jung 1959:61). I believe this is a statement of profound relevance for our moment in history, pointing not only towards the need for remorse and moral regeneration but also towards the hieros gamos, the sacred marriage of masculine and feminine, both of which will require a sacrifice and ego death. What seems to be called for at this threshold in our evolution is a great self-overcoming, a recognition of not only the heroic magnitude but also the hubris of the modern project.

All of this points to a re-reading of our Western narrative of solar heroic progress within a larger context of tragedy and, perhaps, something more--something perhaps Shakespearean in the grandeur of its moral and aesthetic conception. Of course this is itself a mythic perspective. But what I am suggesting is that not only the human psyche but the cosmos itself may be archetypal, mythically informed. And perhaps this is the deepest act of trust that is being asked of us at this moment in history, to open up to the possibility that our universe may possess a moral and aesthetic dimension in its unfolding

being, that it is not only capable of embodying, say, the intelligence of a Newton or an Einstein, as our Enlightenment view of the universe assumes with its quest for a grand unified equation, but that it may also be capable of embodying the intelligence and imagination and heart of, say, a Shakespeare. For I believe our task is to develop a moral and aesthetic imagination deep enough and wide enough to encompass the contradictions of our time and of our history, the tremendous loss and tragedy as well as greatness and nobility, an imagination capable of recognizing that where there is light there is shadow, that out of hubris and fall can come moral regeneration, out of suffering and death, resurrection and rebirth.

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