

# JUNG, SRI AUROBINDO, FROMM AND HILLMAN AND THE INDIVIDUATION PROCESS

Running Head: Jung, Sri Aurobindo, Fromm, Hillman

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### ABSTRACT

I begin by indicating how, over the years, my interest in the nature of the individuation process developed. I then give a brief overview of the principle ideas, along with and the people identified with them, which have influenced me. There is then a short note on the evolution of consciousness. I follow that with a discussion on the psychologies of Fromm, Jung and Hillman and the yoga of Sri Aurobindo, seen from my perspective of interest. Always, I write with reference to Jung and his approach to psychology, which has been particularly personally relevant to me from the outset. I also acknowledge the importance of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and their integral yoga, which, I believe, represents the fulfillment of Jung's path.

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### Introduction

Shortly after having graduated with an M.B.A. as a young man, I became stimulated by the writings of Erich Fromm. I was particularly taken by his idealistic humanism and the possibility of transforming one's conduct and relationship to life according to the laws of reason. A year or so later, while on a diplomatic posting to Switzerland, I came across Jung's autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* which I read with open-eyed wonder. I thought to myself: "This man is so authentic and normal, and yet he speaks of extraordinary inner experiences and the possibility of a profound transformation of personality." At roughly the same time, I was introduced to a book on Sri Aurobindo and his yoga of transformation.

As events transpired, I ended up in India three years later and eventually lived at Sri Aurobindo and his collaborator the Mother's ashram in Pondicherry. As it turned out my next door neighbor was Helga Saefkow-Berger who had been through some Jungian analysis and had studied at the Jung Institute in Zurich. Because of my enthusiasm for Jung she agreed to help me understand my dreams, and we met regularly for two, one-hour sessions a week. Following my experience in India, I spent a year studying at the Jung Institute in Zurich, where I continued therapy with Cornelia Brunner, again on a semi-weekly basis.

While I was in Zurich I met James Hillman for the first time and heard him lecture. I

was taken aback for two reasons, the first being, what seemed to me, his somewhat irreverent attitude towards some of Jung's teachings, especially regarding spiritual transformation and the transformative nature of the Self. The second reason was the high regard in which people held him. Guggenbühl-Craig, for instance, personally told me that he considered Hillman to be Jung's most creative living disciple. All this intrigued me. This was back in 1975, the year of Jung's centenary.

Although my interest in Fromm, Jung, Sri Aurobindo and Hillman may appear to be mainly a personal one, I believe a paper, even if but a cursory conceptual outline for a larger study, delineating and juxtaposing the principal ideas of each of these men could prove of interest to others. For one thing, it would be an example of the influential ideas and forces behind one person's, a North American, individuation process. It would also help discern the value of the thought of each of the above named individuals with regards to understanding and aiding individuation. Indeed, from my observation, there is considerable confusion on the nature and significance of what Jung referred to as the individuation process.

The subjective nature of this inquiry should not detract from its objective value, according to the principles of phenomenology, but should enhance it. The reason for this is that the psyche, the subject of study, is objective and therefore one's personal experience and reflections can parallel those of other people. From the point of view of a phenomenological and heuristic study, according to Moustakias' (1990) understanding, this paper, and even more so the proposed dissertation, involves

principally the last three phases of research, “explication,” “creative synthesis,” and “validation through meaning.” The first four stages, including the “initial engagement,” “immersion,” “incubation” and “illumination,” have, by and large, been fully experienced in the course of my life and self-reflections over the past twenty-six years or so. I write this, however, realizing that in a real sense, from the point of view of this essay and the dissertation themselves, the process repeats itself afresh from the beginning.

### The Evolution of Consciousness

The human psyche has been going through an evolutionary process whereby consciousness has been embodied in qualitatively different ways at different times in history. Following Sri Aurobindo (1971), I perceive this as a spiral-like process and, following Gebser (1985), that there are quantum leaps that have taken place periodically throughout the course of history. According to Gebser there have been five basic stages in the development of consciousness, from the unitary to the magic, to the mythical, to the mental, to a mutation that we are in the midst of today, the integral. Sri Aurobindo (1971) also describes five stages of consciousness that are in some ways similar to those delineated by Gebser, in other ways different. Jung (1959), too, alludes to an evolution of consciousness although he doesn’t develop his thinking on this matter. He emphasizes the present day, the age of the “Holy Spirit,” where he believed the spiritual burden has shifted from Jesus Christ to the individual.

The reason for this overview is to place the individuation process in perspective. There is a profound transformation of consciousness that is taking place today which, in its

psychological dimensions, the writings of Sri Aurobindo and Jung particularly address. Both see what is transpiring today, that is the new leap in consciousness, as a natural process, which can be precipitated by human involvement. In order to do so it is necessary to turn within.

At this point, a brief comment on the development of the Western mind and its peculiarities are in order. This is especially relevant in order to help gain a perspective on my relationship to the thought of Sri Aurobindo and Indian yoga. Jung (1958) is adamant about the fact that Occidentals have a different history than Orientals and must find their own way or risk a repressive imitation. In fact, from my observation, India and the West shadow each other and in many ways they represent mirror opposites, a phenomenon that must be taken into consideration in studying the nature of the psyche and individuation. Although Sri Aurobindo and the Mother speak eloquently to the Western mind, I believe that Jung's caution needs to be heeded.

### The Psychology of Erich Fromm

Fromm (1941, 1947, 1955, 1956) is primarily concerned with humankind's atavistic tendencies to "escape" from a positive sense of psychological freedom. Instead, he encourages people towards a positive sense of freedom and psychological independence by way of what he calls the "productive orientation," which includes active loving, a creative relationship to work and human relationships and the virtues of humanistic reason; everything which in his opinion aids life to unfold.

Not only does Fromm stress the need for “freedom from” repressive longings, but his principal assumptions include the fact that human nature is conditioned by historical and social forces (Fromm, 1941). He also contends that humankind is ultimately motivated by great passions such as love, hate, ambition and the aspiration for truth, and not instincts such as sex or hunger. Contemporary individuals, he contends, are relatively unconscious of these passions and are instead organized by the prevailing social pattern, which is governed by what he refers to as, the “marketing character.” Its dynamics encourage narcissism, a labile ego, and restless exaggerated outer-directedness. To combat these pressures, Fromm (1951) emphasizes insight, one source of which is the unconscious.

From my perspective, the value in Fromm’s work lies particularly in his penetrating analysis of the cultural unconscious and the general nature of the present social conditioning, and what has led up to it. However, his approach to changing present individual and societal conditions, based on humanistic reason is, in my opinion, deficient. His understanding of the nature of the symbol suggests why.

Although Fromm appreciates the fact that the symbol is universal (Fromm, 1951), his definition is limited when compared to Jung. For the latter, what is ultimately important is that the symbol is based on a archetypal reality that transcends both spirit and instincts, even matter, and that the psyche is objective (Jung, 1974). In contrast, Fromm emphasizes the horizontal dimension of being and the fact that the healthy self relates to thoughts, experiences, feelings subjectively as “my thoughts,

experiences, and feelings,” etc. (Fromm, 1955). He, accordingly, undervalues both spiritual and instinctual forces as well as the objective nature of the psyche. Rather than encouraging detachment from an objective realm of thoughts and feelings, even experiences, like Jung and Oriental wisdom does, he emphasizes them.

Fromm (1964) conceives of individuation as consisting of two principle stages, one involving “freedom from” regressive longings, and the other involving “freedom to,” that results from gaining creative independence from human made laws and social conditionings. In other words, he seems to be suggesting that individuation proceeds in a straight line. This view contrasts with that of Jung (1977) who sees individuation as a cyclic or spiral-like process.

The value of studying Fromm and his thought is twofold. First, he has valuable suggestive insights on the nature of social conditioning and on psychologically healthy ways of being. Secondly, one gains psychological discernment by understanding the limitations of his meta-psychology, particularly regarding relationship to the symbol, the value of humanistic reason itself and the process of individuation.

### The Integral Psychology of C. G. Jung

A perusal of Jung’s voluminous writings suggests that his most important discoveries include the collective unconscious, the nature of the archetype and its personifications, especially the central archetype of the Self, and the individuation process. Significantly, Jung, as reported in Adler, (1975) makes a distinction between the individuation



process, which requires conscious involvement and individuation per se which is a natural process of nature. The individuation process has to do with Self-fulfillment, that is, the unfolding of the Self or wholeness over space and time. Jung (as reported in Jacobi & Hull, 1974) also makes a sharp distinction between individuation and individualism, where individualism is related to ego-fulfillment and the development of supposedly unique properties of the ego, while individuation refers to a more complete expression of collective qualities.

Significantly, in addition to referring to the individual psyche, individuation has to do with one's relationship to the community and one's role there. This is ultimately based on the fact that the Self is as much the ego and other Selves as one's Self (Jung, as reported in Jacobi and Hull, 1974). From this perspective, individuation again contrasts with individualism, where there is always an effective separation between the ego with its self-interest and others. Even, so-called enlightened self-interest is based on a hypertrophied ego and its will-to-power. Individualism modified by social interest, the solution of Adler (1976) and others, is also ultimately an isolating psychology, based as it is on the ego and not the all inclusive Self, as described by Jung. It is important to make these distinctions in order to understand the implications of the nature of the transformation of both individual and the community as envisaged by Jung in comparison to others.

Jung's writings are a marvelous testimony to his own individuation process, which manifestly involved a direct engagement with the collective psyche, the psyche of the

Western collective community, if not the world community. (Murray Stein, 1986), for instance, shows how Jung poses a direct challenge to Christianity for the need to undergo a transformative process. Indeed, Jung's writings are full of suggestions that, at a deeper level, individuation by necessity involves some form of encounter with the collective.

Jung (1979) observes that individuation entails alienation from others, as it demands detachment from collective attitudes and opinions. He also makes ample references to the need to develop Eros or relatedness, indicating that there continues to be a relationship to the community, even at a deeper level. Von Franz (1975), who follows Jung closely, argues that, with individuation relationships are progressively organized by the Self and not one's natural family, and come from all walks of society. Jung (as reported in Hannah, 1978) also continuously advised his disciples to follow the way of "the rainmaker," referring to a true story, told to him by Richard Wilhelm, the man who popularized the "I Ching" in the West. It is about an old man who induced precipitation by attaining a state of Tao. The moral of the story is that things happen as they should when, after being first affected by external conditions, one searches inwardly for and obtains inner harmony and relationship with the Self.

Jung [and von Franz] seems to be suggesting that, although analysis primarily concerns the individual, at a deeper level, it involves an intimate relationship with the community. Moreover, by allowing oneself to be directly affected by others, and by re-establishing inner harmony, individuals are not only in deep interconnectedness with

society, they are at the same time participating in some form of mutual process of transformation. It is noteworthy that the Self, not the ego, is both the source and provides the power for change.

All stages of transformation are directly or indirectly the result of a more or less conscious relationship between the Self, including both the Self behind the heart and a nature transcending Self. To put this discussion in perspective, in *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Jung (1970) alludes to the fact that there are essentially three broad phases in the individuation process. The first phase, the *unio mentalis*, involves a broad mental understanding of the nature of the individuation process and its significance along with the values involved in such an understanding. It requires a transformation of the intellect. In the second stage there is a need for the realization of the insights gained to affect one's actual conduct in life. This eventually involves a far-reaching transformation of the vital or life principal, that is, expressions of pleasure and power. This means that there is potentially a transformation of the vital-physical or instinctive psyche, even the physical nature itself. In the third phase, a connection is realized between the individual *atman* (Self) and the universal *atman* (Self). This involves universalization and deepening of meaning beyond the individual. It also includes increasing realization of a unitary world, which includes and transcends both spirit and matter.

#### The Archetypal Psychology of James Hillman

Hillman's archetypal psychology grew out of his encounter with Jung and his approach to psychology. Although there is intrinsic value to many of Hillman's brilliant insights,

my interest in examining his approach to psychology is to better differentiate Jung's contribution. Needless to say, for some people, Hillman's subjective confession that is, his way of experiencing life and understanding psychology is closer to theirs. My own contention, however, is that Hillman's psychology does not conceptually allow for the same kind of depth transformation of the psyche as Jung's does.

In contrast to Jung, who sees the Self as the supreme archetype of integration, a God-image that contains all the opposites, Hillman, (as reported in Miller, 1981, and Samuels, 1985), experiences it as a kind of moralistic superego. For him, it is not the center of personality but an influence to be rejected in as much as, he believes, it represses the free expression of the archetypal instinctual dynamic. Likewise, the central ego, the ethical attitude, the spirit as a transcendent factor and dogmatic religion are all, for Hillman, phenomena that need to be loosened from their repressive hold on the psyche. In his polytheistic psychology, there is no center of personality as such, but a multiplicity of ever-present interacting centers, experienced as archetypal images, which inform personality (Hillman, as reported by Samuels, 1985). In fact, Lambert (as reported in Samuels, 1985) contends that the goal of [Hillman's] archetypal psychology is to abandon the ego altogether. Hillman, (as reported in Miller, 1981) accordingly emphasizes a passionate deepening relationship to the archetypal image "allowing each event, which has a theos, to show its own face" (p. 134).

To continue with my comparison, Jung (1968, p. 204) posits an ego-Self axis where individuation unfolds as "the center shifts from the ego to the Self and, increasingly" the

ego finds itself in the role of the passive observer. ...”because due consideration gives us pause.” In addition, as Jung (1970, p. 304) reports, “there is a metamorphosis of the gods,” that is to say the archetypes, taking place today, “an expression of the unconsciousness man within us who is changing.” In other words, according to Jung, there is a deep transformation of personality that is taking place today at an archetypal level.

In contrast to Jung, Hillman (1983) views the ego, particularly the heroic ego, as repressive and there is no talk of a transformation transpiring at an archetypal level. Indeed, Hillman is not even prepared to assume that there is such a reality as an archetype per se, but prefers to stick with the experiential phenomenon of the archetypal image. Moreover, consistent with his polytheistic stance is his preference for an aesthetic attitude over an ethical one, which he conceives as being prohibitory and repressive. Such a position can be characterized as a kind of American Zen, where the ideal state is conceived as the spontaneous, uninhibited action experienced through the archetypal image in its animal or instinctual form--a “no mindedness.” Here again Hillman’s view contrasts with Jung’s, who puts considerable emphasis on the ethical nature and the need to make ethical decisions based on conflicts of duty.

Consistent with his view of loosening attachment to repressive modes of being, Hillman (as reported in Miller, 1981) argues against any hierarchy of the psyche. Jung, (as reported in Hillman, 1985) in contrast, observes that the psyche is naturally hierarchical and that it can become conscious through different anima figures, from Eve to Helen, to

Mary to Sophia. Although Hillman (1985) may speak of a deepening through esse in anima, or “being in soul,” for Jung, there is, in addition, potentially a spiritually transformative process that ensues.

On the surface, both Jung and Hillman appear to have similar positions regarding the need to accept inferiority or the inferior side of one’s nature. Von Franz (1971) indicates that, for Jung, one gains access to the collective unconscious through the inferior function and that, potentially, the inferior function goes through a transformation process. Likewise, Hillman (1985) envisions pathology as the locus of healing, although without alluding to a transformation of any specific shadow qualities related to anything like an inferior function of consciousness. It seems that the difference between Jung and Hillman in this regard is ultimately based on different assumptions about the nature of evil.

Jung’s inferior function is related to the archetypal shadow and the question of evil. Although he accepts the relativity of good and evil, he also observes that there is an active force or archetype of evil in the world, (Jung, as reported in Burton-Russel, 1984) with which the individual participates through the personal shadow. Hillman (as reported in Samuels, 1985) appears simply to relativize evil, arguing that each archetypal image comes with a light as well as a shadow or dark aspect that is its own pathology, in addition to a built in inhibitory impulse. Individual “shadow” behavior is related to literalization of the image, rather than relating to the image imaginally (Hillman, 1983). Unlike with Jung, there doesn’t seem to be any concern about ego or

shadow complicity with archetypal evil as such. Although Hillman's position has an intellectual logic to it, in my opinion it suffers from a lack of Eros and feeling considerations and direct human experience with evil.

Another area of difference between Jung's view and that of Hillman's is on the nature of the symbol. Jung (1985, p. 247, 248) defines the symbol as the "best possible representation of something that is unknowable," "an unsurpassed container of meaning," and a "means of utilizing the mere instinctual flow of energy for effective work," a source of psychological transformation. Hillman, (as reported in Samuels, 1985) assails symbols, arguing that they have become lifeless, a "stand in for the concept" (p. 119). He instead gravitates to what Jung once wrote, that "image is psyche" (p. 6) and exhorts his reader to "stick to the image" (p. 9) and deepen relationship with it (Hillman, 1983).

One can argue that Hillman wishes to bring life back into depth psychology with his emphasis on the image, as there is a tendency for a too mechanical application of dictionary symbols onto dream interpretation. However, in my opinion, a deeper reason for his insistence on the image and devaluation of the symbol is that it fits his approach to psychology. Jung's definition includes a psycho-spiritual process of transformation, which per se does not seem to interest Hillman. Nor is he much interested in grounding [read use of symbol for effective work] the image, but opening it up, [for instance, to Hellenism and its imaginal tradition] (Hillman, 1975). Jung, in contrast, sees life as being contained in the symbol, which can be accessed through the image. In addition,

he acknowledges the possibility of it being incarnated through the individual over space and time. Whereas Hillman's psychology can be characterized as opening to process, Jung's can be understood as one that potentially allows for the rhythmic embodiment of spiritually transformed archetypal energies over time.

### Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of Transformation

As with Jung's psychology of individuation, Sri Aurobindo's yoga of transformation is based directly on experience and scientific scrutiny. Both accounts are grounded on the reality of the psyche and the evolution of consciousness, in which individuals can participate as co-creators with God or the Self. Jung speaks of individuation as a natural process that can lead to spiritual differentiation when consciously experienced. Sri Aurobindo (1971) writes that "All life is yoga," (p. 4) and that this yoga of nature can be precipitated by the individual's conscious involvement and tapas (concentration of energy-force). Both assert that the work of spiritual transformation or individuation cannot occur divorced from the vicissitudes of life, but must take place "only in the midst of things" (the Mother, 1982). The ultimate significance of these observations is that spiritual transformation for Sri Aurobindo, like for Jung, involves not only a transformation of the individual but a transformation of the individual in relationship to culture and the community.

As Jung's individuation process involves the fulfillment of the [infinite] Self and wholeness over space and time, for Sri Aurobindo's yoga, transformation entails unfolding of the infinite in human life (Sri Aurobindo, 1971). For both, the Self is as



much collective as individual. Moreover, they both situate themselves and their psychology or yoga in the center of a historical and cultural process. As Jung illuminates Western cultural history, especially Christianity and compensatory movements such as alchemy and Gnosticism, where he found his spiritual ancestors, Sri Aurobindo returns to the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita and Tantra for historical amplification on his own experiences and connection to his predecessors.

For Sri Aurobindo, as with Jung, both the male and female principles and energies are accorded full recognition and are held up as both the twin source of life and the goal. In fact, Sri Aurobindo himself claims that he is the *avatar* and embodies the divine masculine principle, known in India as the Ishwara (Sri Aurobindo, 1972); and that his collaborator, the Mother, embodies the divine Shakti (Sri Aurobindo, 1972). In Western language, this would be roughly equivalent to Sri Aurobindo declaring that he is the incarnation of the logos or the word, and that the Mother is the embodiment of Sophia or the mind of God.

Despite the many fundamental similarities between Jung's message and the yoga of Sri Aurobindo, my impression is that the latter's integral yoga can be properly regarded as a fulfillment of Jung's approach to psychology. It is as if Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's yoga is a fuller expression of what Jung points towards. Jung's (1974) process of triple transformation culminates in a spiritual transformation where the individual atman [Self] finds identity with the universal atman [Self]. For Sri Aurobindo and the Mother there is an additional stage, which they call the supramental

transformation or transformation by the truth mind, which has extraordinarily far-reaching effects (Sri Aurobindo, 1971). Yet Jung, I believe, points in the same direction in his understanding of the Self as unus mundus and potential background for the world, which contains in-itself both unity and multiplicity. While Sri Aurobindo and the Mother write eloquently and with unsurpassed knowledge of the Western mind, Jung's writings offer assistance to the Occidental who, all too easily mimics without understanding, a spiritual tradition that has grown out of a foreign soil.

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I have written this paper as a subjective confession defining my own basic position regarding the nature of the individuation process. My point of reference is always Jung because of his particular relevance to me personally. Although I appreciate some of Fromm's insights and even those of Hillman, I include them in this essay as a kind of foil to better understand Jung and his message. I also briefly discuss the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and its similarities to Jung's path, while acknowledging that it can properly be viewed as its fulfillment. Jung's caution about taking up a discipline that has grown out of a foreign tradition, nonetheless, needs to be taken into serious consideration.

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