

The Gods Within

An review of Erich Neumann's "The Origins and History of Consciousness"

How I got to this point and what am I doing here?

- In recent years I've become more and more fascinated with myth, Jungian psychology and their intersection.
- While researching these themes about 18 months ago I came across Jordan Peterson's video on YouTube on Carl Jung and the Lion King. I was really wowed by his analysis of the movie and his ability to tie the themes of the movie to its underlying mythological and psychological themes.
- To give you an idea in looking at the first scene of the movie, a sunrise, he ties the first seconds of the film to the rise of consciousness, connects the Lion's mane to the sun and solar gods/kings, the hero's journey to illuminating higher consciousness, and rebirth.
- I want to be able to understand and explain this symbolism myself and get to the bottom of it if I can. What's at the root of this? Is that question something we can even answer?
- That led me to starting many books by Jung, Marie Louis Von Franz and Erich Neumann, but I have struggled with the themes but the more I dive in; the more rewarding it becomes. I'd like to share what I've learned with you.

Eventually I landed on Neumann - a student and then colleague of Jung. His "The Origins and History of Consciousness" is such a fascinating book on so many levels. Jungian's like Neumann have an understanding of human history and in particular Western history and its influence on the individual that is more comprehensive than anything I have seen. They can cut through thousands of years of history and find the themes that still heavily influence us today. I am also fascinated with Jung's incorporation of myth into his work on the psyche and the collective unconscious. I became even more interested in reading this book when seeing Jung's forward where Jung states "if I were granted a second lease on life I would start to . . . sift out all those 'beginnings without continuation' and knead them into a whole. This difficult and meritorious task the author has performed with outstanding success." It seems even Jung is suggesting this is the book to read. Who am I to differ?

As intriguing as I have found this book it is a difficult read. I am an amateur in the non-pejorative sense of the word - this is a labor of love. Many popular books like the Harry Potter and Game of Thrones series have podcasts where podcasters go through a book chapter by chapter and offer analysis. I haven't found such a resource as of it yet. So the next best thing is to do this myself.

This is an ambitious intellectual task and I hope the process will be enlightening for me and for you.

- Back to Peterson's interpretation of the Lion King. I think he is interpreting the symbolism correctly or at least a correct interpretation.
- The strange thing about symbolism is we understand them at some level but they are very hard to explain verbally rationally. Symbols stir us but they are so hard to put our finger on. Symbols often point to things we have consciously forgotten but are still there at an unconscious level so they affect us, stir us and move us. Jung said a symbol is "something more and other than itself which eludes our present knowledge." He also called it "the best possible formulation of a relatively unknown thing, which for that reason cannot be clearly or characteristically represented."
- Symbols are at the core of Jungian psychology rich with visual information that can be interpreted in many often contradictory ways.
- The etymology of the word symbol is a good example of this.
- Jungian analyst Anthony Stevens in his book *Ariadne's Clue* explains symbolism as follows. It comes from the Greek word *symbolon* coming from *sym* which means together, and *ballein* which means to throw. Throw together. Often an object like a bone would be broken in two with each half being given to members of a secret society. The two pieces could be united to create a match and establish identity. (This is how public key cryptography works at a high level in computing interestingly enough).
- That is a great microcosm of Jung's model of the psyche. The collective unconscious sends messages via symbols to the conscious ego in an effort to compensate for something that is lacking. If the ego can understand and assimilate the message, the individual achieves higher consciousness and growth. Consciousness develops out of the unconscious. Jung called this process individuation. Neumann in this book outlines what he sees as the stages of individuation based on mythological projections from the collective unconscious.

This is a good time to jump into Jung's model of the psyche which is essential for understanding Neumann's work. If you are familiar with Jung and his work this will be old hat for you. These concepts are covered in volumes of books but I will try to give you just enough here to get started.

Jung's model of the Psyche

Recommended reading or listening if you want more depth on Jung and his

model of the psyche.

I am relying heavily on two resources that I can recommend if you want to dive deeper into Jung's model. Instead of just providing definitions of the parts of the psyche in Jung's model I will try to give you an idea of the core concepts and how they relate to one another.

The Jung Podcast and excellent introduction to Jung's model of the psyche by Jon Betts a Canadian Jungian Analyst.

On Jung by Anthony Stevens.

The Onion Analogy

Stevens uses an analogy of an onion with 4 principle layers to describe this model. The outer layer is the ego while the innermost layer is called the Self. In between we have two layers of the unconscious: the personal and the collective unconscious.

The Ego

The ego is what we call I or myself: our conscious existence. It is in charge of stability of personality and identity over time as well as cognition, daily executive function and reality testing.

The Self

The Self is the director of our lives across time. Jung posits that we are born with our potential defined and the Self guides us to the best possible outcome given the environment we physically and psychologically inhabit during our lives. Jon Betts refers to Jungian analyst and author Andrew Samuels:

“An archetypal image of man's fullest potential and the unity of the personality as a whole. The Self as a unifying principle within the human psyche occupies the central position of authority in relation to psychological life and therefore the destiny of the individual. At times Jung speaks of the Self as initiatory of psychic life. At other times he refers to its realization as the goal.”

The Ego Self Axis

We begin life with a body and the Self. All that potential is with us in the beginning as the Self - we are not blank slates according to Jung. We then over the first half of life build up our ego making it more and more powerful to enable us to interact with and effect the world. At midlife just when we are at our most powerful we may find ourselves in a funk or depression - a midlife crisis. In the Jungian model, there is a teleological reason for this. The Self is sending

us messages to have us pay more attention to the inner world, the unconscious, and the riches to be found there. In this way we come back into balance along the Ego Self axis. The depression has a compensatory function.

The Personal Unconscious

The personal unconscious is made of complexes - which can be healthy or unhealthy in the Jungian model. A complex is a cluster of strong feelings around a theme. We all have multiple complexes.

Jon Betts cites the example of a money complex. As children we realize money is powerful as it allows us to either purchase something we desire or prevents us from purchasing it due to lack of money. We might hear our parents argue over money. As we become independent we might run out of money to pay bills as we establish ourselves. Later we might discover the importance in saving money or investing for retirement.

All these experiences and create a money complex. Jung saw complexes as having their own personalities that can overwhelm the ego (thus are unconscious) and can take over for a time when triggered. Jung said "Everyone knows people have complexes. What is more important is complexes have people." Stevens: "the personal unconscious is the product of the interaction between the collective unconscious and the environment in which the individual grows up."

Becoming conscious of complexes and confronting them is the key method to promoting the growth of personality and psychological health. Jung did say that this is a difficult even terrifying process, especially at first.

Jung thought there was a core or nuclear element to a complex. This element is what he called archetypes of the collective unconscious. This nucleus of the complex provides the surface area where a complex and an archetype touch and individual.

The Collective Unconscious

Just as the personal unconscious is composed of complexes the collective unconscious consists of archetypes.

- Archetype on the first page of the introduction Neumann gives us a nice straight forward definition. "They (archetypes) are the pictorial forms of instincts, for the unconscious mind in images which as in dreams and fantasies, initiate the process of conscious reaction and assimilation." Lets repeat this again: "They (archetypes) are the pictorial forms of instincts, for the unconscious mind in images which as in dreams and fantasies, initiate the process of conscious reaction and assimilation."

- Collective unconscious definition: A trans-personal or collective part of the psyche that has grown out of evolutionary experience that speaks to the ego in symbols or archetypes. We aren't blank slates but a "pre-programmed" with archetypal reactions to life situations we encounter, like falling in love, becoming a parent for example. Think of this as the psychological side of human evolution.

Individuation

A process of individual increase in consciousness (perhaps analogous to emotional, spiritual and intellectual maturity) by surfacing complexes and archetypal images, wrestling with their significance, and making them conscious thus promoting individual growth.

Book Introduction

What is Neumann trying to accomplish in this book? We don't have to read far to answer this question. In the first sentence of the introduction he states: "The following attempt outline the archetypal stages of the development of consciousness is based on modern depth psychology. It is an application of the analytical psychology of C.J. Jung ..."

The key word here is stages. His theory outlines what he sees as the stages of the development of consciousness.

Neumann: "It is the task of this book to show that a series of archetypes is a main constituent of mythology, that they (archetypes) stand in stadial succession in an organic relation to one another, and that their stadial succession determines the growth of consciousness. In the course of its ontogenetic (lifetime) development, the individual ego has to pass through the same archetypal stages which determined the evolution of consciousness in the life humanity.

What I think he is saying in this statement is that historically human consciousness went through a series of stages of development. The individual in his lifetime passes through these same stages as the species. These stages are composed of archetypes - pictorial forms of instincts. We see these archetypes in mythology. Think of it this way: from an evolutionary standpoint it took millions of years to make you. The archetypes, the collective unconscious and myth are a storehouse of information that we can tap into or can tap into us. We aren't blank slates in the Jungian world. We can have complexes but complexes can also have us. Another way of saying this is the collective unconscious influences us much more than we are ever aware of. Species level development or the collective unconscious influences us as individuals greatly.

Passing through each stage, the ego transforms its relationship to the archetypes. "The ability to perceive, to understand, and to interpret these images is a

process of succession in time, .. it takes place in stages.” This ability to absorb unconscious contents improves at each stage and leads to individual transformation and improvement. Jung called this telos which means self-realization.

We can get a feel for these stages composed of archetypes by just examining the section titles of the book. We will do a podcast episode about each of these.

A. The Creation Myth I. The Uroborous II. The Great Mother III. The Separation of World Parents: The Principle of Opposites

B. The Hero Myth I. The Birth of the Hero II. The Slaying of the Mother III. The Slaying of the Father

C. The Transformation Myth I. The Captive and the Treasure II. Transformation or Osiris

Human consciousness has absorbed more and more unconscious contents over thousands of years and in this process expands its own frontiers. Neumann suggests that in the West consciousness has achieved continuity where each stage is integrated. According to Neumann modern consciousness sits on this integration.

Now when he says West this includes ancient Babylon and Egypt. I am really excited to get into this aspect of the book because its absolutely fascinating. He ties the myths like those of Marduk (Babylon), Osiris (Egypt), and Christ together as themes that are the basis for development of society and consciousness. This is that ability to look under the current of history and see the themes that still influence us today that make Neumann so compelling and fascinating.

Why is this podcast called The Gods Within? For Neumann that which was projected outward the gods is still with us in our psyches due to the influence of the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is the deeper layer of humanity that each of us is connected to. Consciousness is a late evolutionary product and the collective unconscious came first. Throughout human history and pre-history symbols were projected outward as powerful forces or gods. These same symbols and archetypes determine individual psychic growth as well.

Neumann states “The integration of these collective symbols leads to the further development of the psyche and synthesis of the personality thus it has a therapeutic aim as well. In this process the psyche expands leading to new solutions and new problems which trigger the whole process again. The collective human aspect is rediscovered and begins to come alive, new insights, new possibilities of life add themselves to the narrowly personalistic and rigid personality of the sick-souled modern man.”

Podcast conclusion I am passionate about learning about this fascinating

intersection of myth and psychology and I hope you will join me on this journey. As we progress through the podcast we will use use movies, myths and fairy tales to make these concepts less abstract and more relatable. Subscribe.