

For the Sake of Soul

James Hillman Memorial (2012)
Pacifica Graduate Institute

We are probably all familiar with Jung's famous phrase, "I would rather be whole than good." Well, when I think of Dr. James Hillman, I think, "I would rather be *soul...*"

Like the mercurial trickster who pulls the rug out from underneath us, or who, like Lucy, yanks the football away just as poor Charlie Brown is about to kick it, Hillman's writing often feels confounding, oppositional, infuriating, maddening. We have certainly had some passionate arguments in class over Hillman's ideas!

But like a slap into consciousness, his ideas have helped me to emerge from a sleep of positive thinking, blind striving for goodness, denying and hiding my shadow, overvaluing spirit and rationality, and undervaluing soul, beauty and the divine feminine. With the fluffy, comfortable rug of borrowed ideas pulled out from under me again and again, the solid ground of my own inner knowing slowly rose up to support me. Dr. Hillman taught me, by example, to think for myself.

I remember Dr. Hillman's visit to our first year class. Not yet familiar with his work, I was bold (or ignorant) enough to ask him 'where' he thought the unconscious resided. He looked at me thoughtfully for a moment, then said rather brusquely that we ought to just get rid of that term – that words such as *anima*, *ego*, and *the unconscious* were all just nonsense and got in the way of a person living their life. I just want to notice the beauty of the landscape as I am driving my car, he said, or feel the joy of merely touching the steering wheel. I remember feeling bewildered by his answer - how could he throw away such important ideas? I didn't yet realize the difference between throwing away and letting go - or seeing through.

Of course, that was just the beginning of my bewilderment with James Hillman. I was confronted in many of my basic assumptions. For example, I felt quite certain about the idea of psychological projection, laid out by Anais Nin's famous dictum, "We see the world not as *it* is, but as *we* are." Yet as Hillman points out, this idea forces psychic reality to exist only in subjective, inner space. In this mode, the world becomes "wholly dependent upon the subject [me] to breathe it into life" (1992, p. 120). Psychology's idea of projection, according to Hillman, is profoundly narcissistic! This never occurred to me before, and with this insight, the way opened up to behold a world majestically ensouled – *with or without me* – and my perspective changed radically. I suddenly felt the presence of the *anima mundi* all around me, and I was no longer alone.

When I looked to what archetypal psychology had to say about forgiveness, my dissertation topic of inherent and obvious value, or so it seemed to me, I got another shock. Hillman is quick to point out that the gods rarely forgave, and that forgiving is

often a forgetting of the very symptoms, pathos, and complexes that connect us to soul. According to Hillman, "Forgiveness of the confusions in which I am submerged, the wounds that give me eyes to see with, the errant and renegade in my behavior, blots out the Gods' main route of access" (1975, p. 186).

Indeed, rather than wish away our darkness, our shadow, we must bear it. In fact, Hillman (1991) says, "The cure of the shadow is a problem of love" (p. 242). He asks, "How far can our love extend to the broken and ruined parts of ourselves, the disgusting and perverse? How much charity and compassion have we for our own weakness and sickness?" The ego must learn to give way, to "listen," "serve," and "discover an ability to love even the least of these traits" (p. 242). To me, Hillman is here offering a moving and powerful description of what it means to forgive *oneself*.

Thank you, Dr. Hillman, for teaching me to think for myself, for introducing me to the numinous beauty of a world en-souled, and for showing me what it means to forgive. I am and will forever be grateful.

Jennifer M. Sandoval, 2/18/12

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