

**The Anthropocene
As Imagined Through Jungian Psychology**

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Introduction. This is a paper about the *anthropocene*. The word, and all it symbolizes, reveal a situation self-organized by humans' capacities for impact. That impact has grown to the degree that, *en masse*, we face the entirely plausible possibility of humanity's end. In the term anthropocene, we acknowledge the epoch-making possibilities for good right alongside the breathtakingly horrific realities of human creation. In the anthropocene, we see a terribly accurate representation of the ways we have unconsciously created a reality that is both filled with possibility and is dangerously unsustainable.

Like Jung's work on synchronicity with the physicist Wolfgang Pauli, this topic straddles the border of the psychological and material. Jung's way of seeing the world tended to combine the two, as in his remarks written after World War II: "The gigantic catastrophes that threaten us today are not elemental happenings of a physical or biological order, but *psychic events*" (Jung, 1954, §302 – my emphasis). Psychic phenomena, to Jungians, are commonly seen as dynamic, living organisms that "inhabit the collective psyche" (Edinger, 1999, p. 2). What does it mean for us to be living in the anthropocene, while it lives within us? The anthropocene has imagined itself in us without our knowledge or consent. It is today a material, biological, psychological structure that shapes our individual and collective cognition, our emotional lives and our behaviour, probably more than we realize (Sulis, 1997). Given its complexity, it is questionable the degree to which this reality can be undone with willpower or threat-denying cleverness. And meanwhile, its trajectory is likely to increase, to the extent humanity remains unconscious of it (Bella, 1997).

The "Anthropocene." In 2008, scientists made a proposal to the Geological Society of London to make "*anthropocene*" a formal era in measurements of geological time. The anthropocene represents the first time in the history of this planet that a single species – *anthropos*, human beings – will determine the planet's future. This circumstance – the melding of human impact and planet-wide scale – has never before existed, and may well never again; quite literally, this is the first time in Earth's history that the decisions human make can create continued life, or end it (Zalasciewicz *et al*, 2008). Up to this point, for millennia on this Earth, "evolution has been in nature's hands. Now, suddenly, it is largely in human hands" (Martin, 2007).

The anthropocene can be viewed as a complex array of disastrous situations – as polycrises (Wilson and Buckle Henning, 2015). The population of Earth exceeded 7 billion in 2011 (World Bank, 2016). Fueled by the Industrial Revolution, which powered our ability to feed larger and increasingly urbanized populations, today the Earth's population consumes more than four planets' worth of biosphere resources (Alexander, 2015). And today, reports suggest that 40% of all food produced is thrown away, although millions suffer from hunger (Pogge, 2015). The Industrial Revolution was the impetus for an unprecedented production of wealth – for some of the world's population. The most powerful economic systems in place today have created massive inequalities in wealth distribution on this planet. It is said that they are also integrally connected to the exploitation of women, colonial subjects, descendants of African slaves, and immigrants displaced by globalization (Federici, 2014). Economic wealth-producing activity is highly correlated with the production of greenhouse gases that are creating climate-changing pollution (Kellie-Smith and Cox, 2011). Those emissions and other human-generated factors have led to a planet-wide decrease in biodiversity: nonreversible changes have occurred in where and how many organisms exist on the planet. In 2015, Stanford University scientists reported that, using highly conservative estimates, "there is no longer any doubt: we are entering a mass extinction that threatens humanity's existence" (Jordan, 2015), entering what has been termed "the sixth extinction" – the sixth time the Earth has undergone a period of time when between 70 and 90% of the planet's species go extinct (Kolbert, 2014). Amidst these events in the natural and economic world, expressions of dissatisfaction with

the state of humanity are seen in increasing acts of violent religious extremism (Almond *et al.*, 2003), and non-state actors possessing weaponry from guns, to bombs, to nuclear and biological ways to kill large numbers of people. Expressed in an array of polycrises, the central question of the anthropocene is this: will humans choose for life or choose death? This is the gravest challenge and most precious opportunity that is ours to face.

Jung: Foreshadowing the Anthropocene. “Anthropocene” was not a term in existence during Jung’s lifetime. Yet, writing in the latter half of the twentieth century, Jung observed some of the dynamics that gave rise to the massive impact of humanity on our planet today. By his lifetime, most people, he observed, were “protected from the most pressing necessities, and for that reason we are daily tempted to excel” (Jung, 1966, §428). It is not hard to imagine the confidence humans began to access when survival became unencumbered by necessity, how vast numbers of people in that situation could come to believe that by seizing control over Nature they could do a better job of steering the ship than She:

Man is bound to follow the exploits of his scientific and inventive mind and to admire himself for his splendid achievements. At the same time, he cannot help admitting that his genius shows an uncanny tendency to invent things that become more and more dangerous, because they represent better and better means for wholesale suicide.... In spite of our proud domination of nature we are still her victims as much as ever and have not even learnt to control our own nature, which slowly and inevitably courts disaster. (Jung, 1989a, §597)

The advances that gave rise to the comfortable lives many of us enjoy today, it seems, neither resulted in corresponding advances in the ways we understood ourselves as a species nor the way we make meaning and take action as individuals. “Much as the achievements of science deserve our admiration, the psychic consequences of this greatest of human triumphs are equally terrible,” Jung believed: “unfortunately, there is in this world no good thing that does not have to be paid for by an evil at least equally as great” (Jung, 1989b, §1366).

While the human species was once closely linked to nature through instinct, the advancements that unfettered us from nature have allowed those instincts to atrophy. Billions of humans today live in ways considerably decoupled from nature. (For example, most people in the western world have never participated in what must be done to satisfy hunger: something has to be killed; a plant must be uprooted or an animal butchered.) From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, the turning away from instinctual compulsions enabled us to become conscious and reflective as a species (Jung, 1964 §26). This is good. As Jung noted, freeing ourselves from many of our instinctive concerns has enabled us the psychological energy (in his terms, “libido” [Jung, 1976b]) to invent science, to invent this remarkable world we’ve created, with its inherent tragedies and dangers. By our decoupling from nature we created the anthropocene-sized possibility that we could destroy it. And so, we and nature, together, are in trouble.

The Anthropocene as Symbol. The anthropocene is a centrally important psychic reality for our times. It is more than an occurrence in the external world: it is a symbol. The symbol is a vital concept in Jungian psychology, as a compensatory force to the logic-oriented ways of making sense of the world that are prevalent in our society: “In dealing with our most fundamental problems, rational logic fails to offer us adequate answers to the understanding and living of life” (Whitmont 1969, p. 17). Symbols point to realities occurring in the world of matter beyond those we can understand with rationality alone. Engaging with symbols, we are drawn past our rational capacities: “As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason” (Jung 1964b, p. 4). The place to which we are drawn is the realm of human emotion. Symbols address our emotional lives. Their effect is more than the recognition of something statistically significant; they

strike us as *personally meaningful*, alerting us to the presence of something of value, of importance. Such recognition can only occur through the feeling function (Jung, 1976b), in our emotional selves. Symbols show us “something more than obvious and immediate meaning” (ibid), beckoning us into relationship with a realm of human experience beyond the familiar realities of the obvious and the immediate. They operate on us in evocative ways, drawing us into contact with the realm of the unconscious. The human unconscious is a symbol-producing force. The patterns it generates are potent, autonomous forces that operate beyond logic, in ways that are “larger, more powerful, and all-inclusive” than any force humans can intentionally design (Heyer 1964, cited in Whitmont 1969, p. 19).

The anthropocene well-suits these criteria for symbol:

- It is an idea, a term coined by scientists to describe an empirical phenomenon. It is, nonetheless, a phenomenon of such scope and complexity that it surpasses the capacities of human rationality to fully grasp.
- Its effects stretch beyond the logical; the anthropocene impacts people emotionally, provoking reactions ranging from outrage and terror to grief and despair.
- It is evocative, catalyzing meaning-making efforts in both those who seek to understand it, and those seeking to avoid it.
- And perhaps the most compelling argument for anthropocene as both geological epoch and symbol is its autonomy. It operates in our world with great power. It is, perhaps, the most powerful force operating in our times. Though generated by unwitting human actions, the anthropocene operates in distinctly patterned ways that are entirely more potent than our conscious apparatus.

When we speak of forces operating on our inner and outer realities in autonomous ways, in Jungian terms we are speaking of the realm of unconscious phenomena.

The Anthropocene as a Force Emerging from the Unconscious. Jung argued that the unconscious was more than a personal, human phenomenon. True, he described it as encompassing dimensions of ancestry, nationality, and ethnic-tribal groups. But he conceived it as involving layers of reality deeper than those: “down to the animal layer; and eventually to the vegetable; and finally the inorganic layer at the bottom” (Edinger, 1999, p. 23). The anthropocene is operating at each of these levels, affecting the Earth’s structural geography and the plants and animals on it, and also impacting on a mass scale humans’ capacity to access natural resources necessary to life, thereby straining human communities, kinship ties, and activating fears of survival at the personal level. The anthropocene unites humanity and nature, emerging as it does from unconscious depths that are both human and inhuman. Jung described unconscious forces, when activated, as operating like natural laws. Writing in his time about the mass insanities of war, he could just as readily have been describing the workings of the anthropocene today: he describes there being “no freedom of choice, and so psychic activities run on... like an uncontrolled law of nature. There is thus set going a chain reaction that comes to a stop only in catastrophe” (Jung, 1954, §303). Like any unconscious phenomenon, the anthropocene is operating autonomously, decoupled from the authority of any elected officials. It is among those “spontaneous phenomena which are not subject to our will... they are to be regarded not only as objects but as subjects with laws of their own” (Jung, 1958 §557). It may be the case that “anthropocene” is a term developed by scientists, but it represents an unconscious phenomenon that, true to all genuine symbols “is not a freely chosen, abstract designation... but is the expression of a spontaneous experience which points beyond itself” (Whitmont, 1969, p. 18).

Characteristics of the Anthropocene Symbol. To what meanings does the anthropocene point? We can see that it symbolizes something in the psychology of humanity that is deeply anti-life, a force aligned with “something in us that wants to destroy the best that we are” (D. Ferrell, personal communication March 20, 2016). Science tells us that the anthropocene has emerged as a result of a mass accumulation of unfettered human actions in relationship to the natural environment. It is perhaps then a symbol pointing to the lack of any discriminating principle at work in the human psyche, an inflationary exuberance resulting from historiographical assumptions that advances in technology, science, and society will produce endless progress; from erroneous beliefs that the Earth’s resources are inexhaustible; from Enlightenment ideals that human potential is unlimited. Each of these produced optimism. The grave realities of the anthropocene operate today alongside that optimism. Thus, symbolized in the anthropocene are both forces of great progress and precipitous decline, poignant beauty and great ugliness, tremendous opportunity and the gravest of threat. In some ways it is a pendulum swing, as two different dynamics of a greatly-benefiting human race followed in sequence by greatly-threatened humanity, as enantiodromia (Jung, 1976b). Or we can see it as not a new phenomenon, but rather one that was present, in potentia, from the very first occurrence of the idea of the inevitability of progress created by the taming of nature.

Although representing something very abstract, as symbols do, we can indeed *see* the presence of the anthropocene. Images associated with this symbol are permeating the human psyche. Aerial photos of the “great Pacific garbage patch” show swaths of plastic debris in the ocean; estimates of its size range from 270,000-15,000,000 square miles (Marks, 2008). Displays of oil-slicked sea fowl accompany media coverage of petroleum spills. Pictures of acres of hot parched land are used to illustrate scientific discussions of neutral-sounding “desertification processes” (processes sounding distinctly less neutral when they are defined as those whereby productive, vegetation-supporting land “becomes permanently non-productive, on a human time scale” [NASA 2016]). Psyches of any age or education level can grasp emotionally-powerful imagery of the anthropocene such as these.

So too, academia has developed images to represent the anthropocene. To scientists, it is represented in an iconic collection of 24 graphs first developed by the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme to “generate a better understanding of the structure and functioning of the Earth System as a whole,” and also the impact of human activity on that structure and functioning (Steffen *et al.*, 2015, p. 81). The graphs plot trends in socioeconomic and Earth system behaviour between the years 1750 and 2010. Twelve of them represent major socioeconomic features of contemporary society (including population, Gross Domestic Produce, fertilizer consumption, water use, telecommunications, international tourism, etc.). Twelve represent major features of the Earth’s atmosphere, climate, marine ecosystems and terrestrial biosphere degradation (including presences of carbon dioxide and methane, increasing surface temperature and ocean acidification, increasing percentages of domesticated land and loss of tropical forest, etc.). Every single one of these 24 graphs show a hauntingly consistent “hockey stick” shape, which inspired the term “the great acceleration” to describe the key trajectory of the anthropocene era (See Appendix). Every socioeconomic Earth system metric of the anthropocene shows abrupt transformations in libidinal force, moving in trajectories that cannot be sustained.

What do these images symbolizing anthropocene-sized forces active in our world tell us about the human psyche at this time? Indicating, as they do, the potential for world-ending apocalyptic events in the near future, this is a desperate question that weighs heavily on many people.

What Anthropocene Does to Psyche. These times are remarkable for their unevenness. We have today incredibly uneven distribution of much, from money to population to access to water and food.

We have today incredibly uneven distribution of consciousness as well. Just as Jung's "Answer to Job" highlighted how painful it is for the human ego to open to a transpersonal presence that has good and evil in it (D. Ferrell, personal communication, November 1, 2015), it is painful for the human ego to take in the enormity of the anthropocene and what it represents for us, personally and collectively.

It is well known that anthropos has evolved a sequence of psychobiological fear responses: freeze, flight, fight, fright, and faint (Bracha, 2004; Friedman, 2015). Throughout early human history, such emotions served as effective emotional strategies in a world that in no way guaranteed our species' survival. Today, more common than immediate dangers to our mortality, most humans live with non-specific psychological distress that they perceive with varying degrees of awareness, ranging from mildly uncomfortable anxiety to primal anguish. The psychological experience of danger is a personally-lived experience (Ridner, 2004). Even apart from the anthropocene, the individual human is, in many ways,

small and impotent, [feeling oneself] a tiny, defenseless speck, enveloped and helplessly dependent, a little island floating on the vast expanse of the primal ocean... a feeling necessarily of constant endangerment... One has only to know how great, even today, is Western man's primordial fear of the world despite his relatively highly developed consciousness. (Neumann, 1954, p. 40-41)

Pervasive anxiety is a predictable and appropriate response to such a reality.

So too is selective attention and rerouting of energy. In the face of great anxiety, humans artfully deny the threat, or lose themselves in distracting activities. They act as if they understand what's happening in dispassionate, objective-feeling ways; they intellectualize, avoiding the suffering they would experience if they allowed themselves conscious contact with the source of their suffering. They downplay their sense of smallness, of impotence, instead emphasizing their potency in bombastic ways – from building manmade islands in the middle of the South China Sea (Watkins 2016) to building global nuclear arsenals "beyond meaningful control" (Mecklin 2016) (numbering more than 15,000 weapons worldwide, each with the ability to kill millions of people [International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, 2016]). Defense behaviours are mechanisms that reduce our psychological functioning, in a sense, in order to allow us any functioning at all; we divert our attention from the real threat, but we continue functioning more or less effectively, dulling our awareness of our fear to avoid paralysis. That dulling of awareness, *decathexis* in the psychoanalytic theory of Freud (1990), essentially suggests that we are a species quite devoted to monitoring and titrating the intensity of our fear, and compensating for our fearfulness by directing our energies elsewhere. Decathexis has consequences. When we defend against the anxieties or despairs of life, when we decathect too much energy from ourselves, we risk self-alienation, impoverishing our ability to bring sufficient problem-solving resources to our circumstances (Edinger 1992; Hobson 1955). Our largely unconscious, survival-oriented behaviour becomes a kind of self-sabotage – one we all share. Every human alive reverts to primitive modes of operating when under threat, reverts to the governance of brain functioning that is less informed, less nuanced, with less processing power (Bracha, 2004). It is difficult to imagine how the anthropocene can be addressed with impaired brains.

When we consider the unprecedented, human-created state of the planet on which we now live, the consequences of *decathexis* are magnified writ large. Whale scientist Roger Payne has said: "We have a choice... we can be the greatest villains in history for having sat on our hands and done nothing while the consequences of both our action and our inaction destroyed the natural world" (1991). Psychologically, "doing nothing" is inaccurate: humans engaging in the kinds of inaction he

describes are actually very busy, dedicating considerable psychological resources to remove mental and emotional focus on the object of fear – our possible extinction – in order to diffuse it in less unpleasant directions. Given what we know of the capacity anthropos has to defend itself from the felt experience of threat, it makes sense that the anthropocene could activate every psychological avoidance strategy at our disposal.

However, not all humans alive today are avoiding conscious engagement with the anthropocene and all it means to our future. What does the presence of that force do to the psyches of those individuals?

Consequences of the Anthropocene on the Conscious Human Psyche. Writing about the author of the biblical Book of Revelation, Jung said, “He must have an intensive relationship to God which lays him open to an invasion far transcending anything personal. The really religious person, in whom the capacity for an unusual extension of conscious is inborn, must be prepared for such dangers” (Jung, 1958, §731).

The contrast – between those susceptible to a psychic reality and those well-defended against it – is illustrated in a report of a widely-publicized exchange between a climatologist and a scientist aboard a Swedish icebreaker exploring the Arctic in 2014 (described in Richardson, 2015). During the expedition, the scientist posted cheery updates:

Our first observations of elevated methane levels, about ten times higher than in background seawater, were documented... we discovered over 100 new methane seep sites... The weather Gods are still on our side as we steam through a now ice-free Laptev Sea...

Climatologist Jason Box was following the blog posts. Having studied the Arctic for several years, he recognized that beneath this breezy scientific detachment lay “one of the nightmare long-shot climate scenarios: a feedback loop where warming seas release methane that causes warming that releases more methane that causes more warming and so on.” He responded with a tweet: “If even a small fraction of Arctic sea floor carbon is released to the atmosphere, we’re fucked.” The tweet went viral on the internet, generating headlines “Climatologist says Arctic carbon release could mean ‘we’re fucked,’” “Climate scientist drops the F-bomb after startling arctic discovery,” “Climatologist: methane plumes from the Arctic mean we’re screwed.” For his remarks, Box was summoned before the entire board of directors at the Government of Denmark research institute where he worked. To reveal in blunt, affect-laden language evidence of the anthropocene threatened this scientist’s credibility and career. Worse, his critique of his scientific community’s own psychological defense strategies made him a catalyst for a media frenzy explicitly addressing the combination of science and anxiety. In Dr. Box’s perspective on the anthropocene, “Crawling under a rock isn’t an option. So becoming overcome with PTSD-like symptoms is useless.” This has made him unpopular with many within his community and outside of it. We could liken Jason Box to the writer of Revelation, a person more open than most to invasion by apocalyptic-scale realities that people would prefer not to know.

What are the consequences of the horror of the anthropocene on those who are less defended against it? A study from the University of Bristol suggests that scientists – those trained in objective inquiry and supposedly impervious to emotionality – feel pressured by those who want to deny the effects of the anthropocene. One of those effects is climate change, and there are individuals, organizations, and governments worldwide who argue that climate change is neither a reality nor a credible threat in the future. Multiple lines of scientific evidence contradict that argument. The Bristol study identified numerous incidences of scientists tempering their reports about the climate because of several psychological mechanisms, including “stereotype threat.” (Scientists who study climate

change believe they belong to a group carrying adverse stereotypes [i.e. they are ‘alarmists’], thus they display predictable emotional and behavioural responses resulting in them downplaying the degree of climate threat in the way they release their findings.) The study suggested another psychological mechanism at play, “pluralistic ignorance” (whereby climate scientists, aware of vocal media coverage countering their work, come to believe their own views about the threat of climate change are in the minority, thus inhibiting them from speaking out in public, motivating them to overemphasize their degree of uncertainty and under-communicate their knowledge for fear of censure or ridicule) (Lewandowsky *et al.*, 2015). These findings echo pressures that Jung knew well: “The danger of making oneself ridiculous is too real, not to mention the risk of offending our real God: respectability” (Jung, 1989c, §1539).

It is said that there is no consciousness without suffering (D. Ferrell, personal communication, November 1, 2015). The personal experience of scientists like Jason Box and the collective behaviours of those studied by the University of Bristol indicate that consciousness of the extent to which the anthropocene’s effects pose a genuine threat to humanity is indeed a heavy burden. That burden is perhaps inherent in the commitment to consciousness involved in the choice to become a scientist. Perhaps too it is a result of a susceptibility to experience the psychic reality of the anthropocene – susceptibility which is greater for some than others. It is disturbing that those bearing the most credible information available about the objective characteristics of the anthropocene are those who become scapegoats – not for creating the anthropocene, but rather for making others have to bear the suffering of knowing its presence. Every hockey-stick graph indicates that the anthropocene is a “great transition” (Tellus Institute, 2015); the known causes of that transition are the behaviours of Westerners who create, enjoy, and sustain socio-economic systems of production and consumption that generate most of the pollution that is causing planetary systems to break down. Every scientific study that points to this correlation causes the suffering of the anthropocene to be borne by people whose guilt could otherwise remain unconscious.

Or, scientists could bear their roles as knowledge-keepers in a manner akin to the scapegoat, whose traditional, archetypal role it was to bear the sins of the community (Perera, 1986) so the community could feel freed of them: scientists could bear in secret the knowledge they uncover. This too would have adverse consequences. As Jung described, when a psychic reality breaks into someone’s consciousness, it can “bring about a momentous alteration of his personality since [it] immediately constitutes a painful personal secret which alienates and isolates him from his surroundings.” Such circumstances have an impact that go beyond the personal:

Isolation by a secret results as a rule in an animation of the psychic atmosphere, as a substitute for loss of contact with other people. It causes an activation of the unconscious... Our normal relations to objects in the world at large are maintained by a certain expenditure of energy. If the relation to the object is cut off there is a ‘retention’ of energy.” (Jung, 1953, §57)

If the anthropocene is a force activated by the collective unconscious, keeping scientists silent will neither abate the atmosphere of threat, nor prevent anxiety- and despair-driven behaviours on a collective scale, whether people consciously realize the source of the threat or not.

Anthropocene as Expression of Yahweh and Anthropos in Union. We could imagine the increased intensity of our times – wild fluctuations in weather, elimination of species, increasingly destructive wars – as manifestations of the Yahweh Jung describes in his psychological study of the Book of Job. We might read the anthropocene as “God struggling to integrate His destructiveness” (D. Ferrell, personal communication, March 20, 2016). In the biblical story, the devastations visited on Job came from a source external to him – from Yahweh (albeit with Lucifer’s help). Job and

Yahweh are distinctly separate beings. In Jung's analysis, this is a story of a divine force ultimately seeking union with humanity. Yahweh and anthropos are to become less distinct.

In the anthropocene we have another story of devastation, more collective than Job's personal tragedy. But in this one, victim and perpetrator are no longer distinct. The anthropocene acting upon us was shaped with the involvement of every one of us. Intentional and otherwise, we are at once unwitting and complicit (Sandler and Sandler, 1987). We now face a situation where inner-originating forces and outer-originating forces are not clear-cut. We need a mechanism to see how a force of Yahwistic proportions that we experience as acting on us from the outside can actually originate from within.

Berger's (1990) theory of the social construction of reality can be helpful here. To him, humans' being flows into the world through acts of externalization which become the society in which we live. That society comes to have objective influence over us (i.e. what we created becomes a "thing" in and of itself that feeds back on us) (D. Ferrell, personal communication, January 31, 2016). The anthropocene of today is very much a time of forces exerting influence on human behaviour on a vast scale. The media industry, for example, is a powerful expression of and force for creating desire, encouraging as it does billions of people to over-consume and believe in the inevitability of utopic (or dystopic) futures. Ideologies we create are conveyed by the media which then establishes status quos that act on us, ideologies that become invested in taken-for-grantedness that render them invisibly powerful. Jung well understood that invisible forces are potent especially because of their invisibility. The *participation mystique* that emerges when vast numbers of people operate under the sway of an invisible force is a dynamic from which it is difficult to separate (Edinger, 1999). Psychologically, a discriminating process of consciousness is needed to disrupt this state. And discrimination – *separatio* – is exceedingly difficult when subject and object (Job and Yahweh, we as victims of anthropocene and we as its creators) are not distinct.

The Work Before Us. The story of the anthropocene is a story of imbalance. One-sidedness seems to be the central issue – namely, the one-sided primacy of humans in influencing the intricate workings of Earth's myriad geological, climate, oceanic, etc. systems. It is a story of what happens as a result of prizing one-sidedly self-interested thinking at a collective scale over concerns of self-and-other-in-relationship together. What work is ahead, if we are to alter the current trajectory of the Earth and humankind?

A Return to the Sacred. If we are to survive, the anthropocene must also become the story of something else. From a Jungian mindset, what might that something else be? One candidate might be replacing the one-sidedness of materialist, scientific secularity with religion. In such a scenario, the traditional Christian model would call for repentance, individually and as a species as a whole. Another perspective though would be a call for a "religious attitude" (Jung, 1989d). To Jung, such an attitude involved giving oneself over to contemplate, reflect on, and feel the power of numinous ideas in our inner lives and transpersonal realities in the outer world. No lack of transpersonal wonders exist today, in this world wherein we can see and talk to one another instantly at distances of thousands of miles. One can, in fact, marvel at the lack of religious attitude, at the lack of wonder people have toward the modern world of the internet, the ability to fly into space and dive to the ocean's depths. Anxiety may well be the core of this problem; it is perhaps too much for people to bear, to experience the wondrousness, the numinosity of the world we have shaped as something awesome, something sacred.

The religious attitude that is needed to meet the anthropocene challenge is perhaps less religious in the traditional Christian sense, and more religious in a pagan sense. The heathen perspective would suggest a path through the anthropocene, not of repentance, but of passion and ecstasy – Eros-drenched modes of being that intrinsically call for relatedness of deep intimacy, not of cool detachment. This would be consistent with Jung’s thought that we need to “revivify among intellectuals a feeling for symbol and myth” (Freud and Jung, 1979, p. 294). It would mean a lessened value placed on the “science of objective detachment” from the world we study and act on, and a greater valuing of the “science of intimate involvement” in what we study and relate to. Instead of intellectualized spiritualities of ethereal transcendence, humanity would need to develop a feeling for a spirituality of immanence – intimacy with both the numinous and also with what it means to be deeply human.

A Return to the Personal. Consistent with the idea of returning to the sacred as I’m describing it is a return to the personal. Unknown to many outside of academia (and unrealized by many within it), forms of scientific inquiry exist that are deeply personal, that involve careful and reflective examination of the person of the scientist as integrally part of the phenomenon under study. This kind of science feels deeply personal. Unknown to many educated people, “objectivity” is only one value by which the quality of one’s reasoning and actions can be evaluated; there are ways of being rigorously guided by deeply personal perception – ways of learning to use our own unique perceptual apparatus through cultivating capacities of disciplined subjectivity.¹ This kind of being-in-the-world constellates a humanity that is more than human-centric. My argument here is consistent with “the emphasis through Jung’s work on the primacy of emotional experience” (Bishop, 2014, p. 42) – a primacy on experiencing things deeply at the feeling level.

Among that depth of experience, in this time, would be intense encounters with love and compassion yes, but also of fear and outrage at the injustices by which the anthropocene has been created. It would usher in a time of mourning, personally experienced and collective in scale. It would require us, as individuals and as a species, to acknowledge how we have been undone by anthropocene-generated events that have harmed and overtaken us. It would require us to admit to ourselves that we have been defeated by collective hubris, and that we can no longer compensate for our wounding by denial or other defenses. It would require, therefore, that we bear witness to the suffering we have both experienced and wrought.

It is hard to conceive how such mass-scale grieving could look, though our work as Jungian clinicians can give us clues. A return to deep and deeply-personal feeling would involve the abandonment of faith in overly-ego-driven ways of engaging with the human experience – a sacrifice of our over-exuberant faith in humans’ unlimited resources and resourcefulness. This would be sacrifice akin to the anguished prayer, “Into thy hands I commend my spirit”. It would involve a very personal reckoning with the dark side of human agency. It would involve a very personal reckoning with the limitations of our love, as individuals and as a species. Truly, if the most courageous act in the human repertoire is love, how would we learn to love selves and others who have done damage to what we value (D. Ferrell, personal communication March 20, 2016) – who have damaged possibly beyond repair the planetary life support system on which every one of us relies? This would be painful healing work of an unprecedented degree. The work would be to compensate for no less than the fiction that nothing could undo our existence on the planet – a truly

¹ ‘Disciplined subjectivity’ is a term discussed by Eric Erikson (1994).

delusional *participation mystique* that has generated terribly instrumental relationships among humans and an exploitive relationship to our Earth.

And healing work like this, if entered into in the deeply personal ways I'm seeking to describe, would usher in alarm – iatrogenic crisis. When a body part has lost circulation for a while and has numbed, we have all experienced the pain of un-numbing – pain that is a good sign, a sign of physical resources returning to a part of the system from which they have been blocked. Discomfort would predictably arise if people were to reconnect with aspects of our personal humanity that we have allowed to atrophy. Those aspects allowed us to replace relatedness with comfortably distant abstractions about “others” who we didn't consider particularly relevant to our daily lives. (For example, most people have never grieved the extinction of living species of plant and animal that will never exist again.) A humanity grappling at the personal level with un-numbing such as this would be confronted with uncomfortable questions: What living others that I never really thought about will now matter to me, in deeply personal ways? How do I cope with the realities of others' struggles alongside my own? What made their suffering invisible to me? In what ways do their suffering matter to me now? Fortunately, amidst the shattering discomfort of such confrontation could be an unprecedented individuation opportunity for those who survive it. This suffering could be the most profound gift of the anthropocene – a gift of creative suffering, where Logos and Eros would both be present, where our loves and hates, callous apathies and profound interests could begin integrating. Integration – central to incarnation – could begin. The picture of “a return to the personal” that I'm trying to convey would not be an end in itself, but a portal to evolving a more relational version of anthropos than has existed to this point.

A Return to the (Deep) Interpersonal. The detached science, technology, and politics of today express well our existential fear of connection as a species. Our detached (even fragmented) behaviours, while an understandable way to avoid fear, have lacerated our interconnected world in ways that have profoundly altered the geological structure of this very planet. However, recent studies of social bonding are beginning to emphasize alternatives to the “fight or flight” ways that humans can cope with fear – we can turn toward one another (Heinrichs *et al.*, 2003). While most Jungians emphasize the individualistic pole of individuation, the social function of the Self is markedly under-theorized. von Franz wrote, “Bonds with other people are produced by the Self... deeper, more essential spiritual interest or concern: reciprocal individuation” (1980, p. 177). The advent of the anthropocene is perhaps an urgent call to engage the *interpersonal* project of individuation – *reciprocal* individuation – which tends to be downplayed in Jungian consulting rooms in favour of uncovering and expressing one's separate uniqueness as a signifier of individuation success. The anthropocene perhaps is a signal that an individuation of deep relationality (psychology of deep relationality, and also politics of deep relationality, science of deep relationality, technologies of deep relationality, etc.) become our new measures of human development and health. If the challenges of the anthropocene arose from the aggregate of billions of human behaviours operating in misattunement to one another, deep relationality could be the enantiodromic force now called for.

A Return to Matter. A turn to relationality in response to the anthropocene threat must be more than interpersonal. It must be a turn – a re-turn – to the very physical matter that we are. I suggest that psyche must reconnect with the deep femininity of the *materia* that we express. (The very sight of a periodic table in chemistry classrooms reminds us we humans are the same stuff as all other matter on this planet. We exist as expressions of matter.) I am not alone in this argument. Jung spoke in “Answer to Job” and elsewhere about the dangers that arise when relationship to the feminine/matter is lost. He spoke of it there in spiritually elevated terms – as the loss of

Sophia/Wisdom. But he spoke in other places about the Earth-bound profundity of matter: “Materia... is... a chthonic mother goddess” (Jung, 1976a, p. 495). Mothers evoke many things, among them love. Erich Fromm (1964) and ecologist Edward Wilson (1984) wrote of “biophilia” as a human psychological orientation involving an urge to affiliate with that which is alive and vital. Wilson has argued that technological advances and the amount of time spent inside buildings and cars have caused the biophilic impulse to atrophy in modern humans. With a lack of time spent in nature, disregard for other animals, plants, and wilderness has grown, leading to ecosystem degradation and species loss.

Parting Thoughts. Since I first encountered the term anthropocene in 2014, I have worked on it and it has worked on me – work that intensified and took on new dimensions during a course at the C.G. Jung Institute on Jung’s book “Answer to Job.” Ideas of the utter destruction of a human’s life, world-wide apocalypse, culpability and innocence, and what these suggest about the unfolding psyche in humankind are ideas I find difficult to ignore. “Conclusions” seems an inaccurate word for what I can do at this point in time. At best I can offer here a summary of thoughts that feel necessary to emphasize.

The “Great Transition” as Great Betrayal. The story of Job that Jung paints for us is a story of great betrayal, a story of destruction of apocalyptic proportions. To Jung, it is a story of distinct parties – Job, Yahweh – and a story of how they are moving toward existence that is less distinctly separate, as God seeks to incarnate in man. The anthropocene is likewise a story of great betrayal. One unconscious decision at a time, humanity has betrayed the planet and ourselves, and we face the prospect of potential destruction of apocalyptic proportions. At one level, it too is a story of distinct entities – us, and the Earth (which we have perceived as an entity operating outside of us). At another level, it may be a story whereby that distinctness is blurring: in betraying the planet we have betrayed ourselves in ways unprecedented in human history; in destroying our surroundings we are destroying ourselves. Our reading of Jung this year revealed to me how “something divine and transcendent underwent profound transformation in the face of one human being saying ‘I don’t accept that this you’re doing to me has any purpose but your own sadism.’ This let loose a revolution in consciousness” (D. Ferrell, personal communication, January 31, 2016). What we have done to the Earth, the progress that has undone Earth’s capacities to operate as it has for eons, seems to me sadistic. What kind of repair then, intrapsychically, needs to be done? “Something in our dark side has harmed us.” In Jung’s reading of the archetypal Job story, “Yahweh will make repair by becoming man” (D. Ferrell, personal communication, March 20, 2016). In that story, repair involved Yahweh undergoing a radical process of individuation.

Individuation as Re-Creation. Oftentimes, the call to individuation comes in dramatic ways. In the lives of individuals, this looks like Self, “knocking on your door, [to] demand a radical re-organization of who you think you are in the world. [There needs to be a] re-experienced, recreated, changed view of the ego in the world that is a form of self-betrayal” (D. Ferrell, March 20, 2016). It stands to reason that the imbalance within the collective human psyche that created the anthropocene is demanding a radically re-experienced, recreated, changed view of humankind. And it seems likely this too will feel like a self-betrayal – of the inflated beliefs we have held dear about our place on this planet. Perhaps a different kind of intrapsychic balance could influence how the present geological era unfolds. In the anthropocene, I am saying, if we are to re-create the planet, we must re-create anthropos, from the inside out.

To Jung, this re-creation would need to involve no less than the incarnation of the divine within humanity, resulting in some higher form of human being. This incarnation must occur, Jung says,

because of God's destructiveness, destructiveness resulting from His loss of relationship with the feminine. To Jung, Yahweh's own development must involve His masculine principle reuniting with the feminine (Sophia) – suggesting that a divine-human union likewise needs the Feminine “to take her rightful place in the economy of things, not be depotentiated by the masculine, the patriarchy” (D. Ferrell, personal communication, March 20, 2016). The anthropocene is, from one perspective, a planet resulting from exuberantly one-sided masculine force and thrust, and a lack of corresponding feminine relatedness and receptivity. Whether we meet the ecological crisis through returning to the feminine-as-matter/mother, or to the feminine as lover/partner (i.e. Harvey 1994), maternal reverence or passionate union, a return of some sort seems crucial.

It seems unlikely that incarnation can happen in unaware parties. The most striking feeling I have about the anthropocene is that the burden of consciousness about it (and of engagement with it, and grieving for it) has been left to too few in the collective psyche. In an unpublished letter, Jung wrote in 1926 about the choice to rectify imbalance between the conscious and unconscious, and the inevitability of suffering in human evolution:

There is the secret meaning of the Christian symbolism, a path of blood and suffering – like any other step forward on the road of the evolution of human consciousness. Can man stand a further increase of consciousness?... I don't want to force my views on anybody else. But I confess that I submitted to the divine power of this apparently unsurmountable problem and I consciously and intentionally made my life miserable, because I wanted God to be alive and free from the suffering man has put on him by loving his own reason more than God's secret intentions... I suffered and was miserable, but it seems that life was never wanting and in the blackest night even, and just there, by the grace of God, I could see a Great Light... Try to apply seriously what I have told you not that you might escape suffering – nobody can escape it – but that you may avoid the worst – blind suffering” (Adler 1975, p. 12)

We see here one man's choice – to consciously take on a burden of suffering so that greater transpersonal forces need not bear so much of the strain of man's personalistic egoism. Suffering is imminent if current trajectories of the anthropocene continue. And suffering is imminent if we are to sacrifice our cherished convictions about the potency of human will and the inevitability of endless progress. The question before us is which kind of suffering is wiser to bear.

We as humans are very vulnerable to complex formation, and our anthropocene complex is one making us vulnerable in dangerously unprecedented ways. Jungians recognize that it is hard work to disidentify with a complex not by disavowing it or devaluing it (D. Ferrell, personal communication, January 31, 2016). Disavowal and devaluing strategies are actively at work in climate-change denial. The work ahead with our anthropocene complex most assuredly will not be easy. It is difficult to locate an agency that is not over-identified with either the light or dark side of human potential (Chris Cooper, personal communication, April 17, 2016). Learning to distrust our unfettered agency while intentionally activating our agency in new ways will be intricate work. The way forward is precarious.

No less than our lives as a human community are at stake.

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