

## Giegerich and the Traditions: Notes on Reason, Mythology, Psychology and Religion

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Wolfgang Giegerich's paper "The Ego-Psychological Fallacy," when read against the background of several of his other works, "The End of Meaning," *The Soul's Logical Life*, and his essays in *Dialectics and Analytical Psychology*,<sup>1</sup> raises a series of questions regarding his assumptions, methodology, and conclusions, and his position with respect to the history of psychology as well as the world's great philosophical and religious traditions.

### Infinite (Wrong) Interpretations

Giegerich says that he has no quarrel with the kabbalistic notion of infinite interpretability. But this, I think, is precisely what his thought excludes.

Giegerich allows for two possibilities or stages in man's relationship to his myths and symbols. The first, "in-ness," where the symbol is pregnant with a depth of infinite meaning, but where man, being totally immersed in the mythical and symbolic, has no interest or impetus to interpretation. In the second stage, meaning has been "born" out of the myth, symbol, and image, but this birth serves to transform the symbolic into the logical activity of the soul. Discursive interpretations of myths and symbols do occur at this stage, but such "interpretations or translations . . . have no significance for the maturing and development of human consciousness" (EPF 74). While in *The Soul's Logical Life*, Giegerich claims that by "entering the wild" he is able to provide an "objective" and "true" psychological interpretation of the ancient myth of Actaion, he gives little if any quarter to competing interpretations, such as Moore's, which he faults for taking the Actaion myth literally (SLL 108), for ignoring the "difference between 'medium' and 'message,'" for failing to "realize that the actual nature of the soul's life is 'other than imaginal'" (SLL 111), and for staying "within the confines of ego-psychology, [and] never penetrating to . . . the depth of the soul" (SLL 131). So Giegerich indeed does have a problem with "indefinite or infinite interpretations" of mythic symbols. His *problem* is that such interpretations exist but have no psychological value.

As a point of fact, Giegerich tells us: "If the kabbalists had the theory of the 'infinite interpretability' of the mystic symbols, those symbols must already have been a thing of the past for them, because living symbols need no interpretation: they *are* their meaning." Indeed Giegerich claims that "Whenever the need to explain and interpret is felt, we know that that which is to be interpreted has lost its significance for the soul and has now become prey to the cut-off ego practicing

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its external reflection and theorizing upon it as upon the relics of the particular contents of a bygone form of consciousness" (EPF 74, my italics).

Leaving aside that in "The End of Meaning" Giegerich held that the death of the symbol did not occur until the 19th century (EOM 3, 7, 9), if Giegerich's claims are correct they would effectively invalidate the entire biblical hermeneutical tradition, including much of the rabbinic, Talmudic and kabbalistic traditions within Judaism (as well as the traditions of Christian hermeneutics)—leaving the sacrificial cult of the biblical and early post-biblical era and its derivatives as the only Jewish practice having a significant connection with the "truth" of its time.<sup>2</sup>

I think that we either must hold that the entire interpretive tradition of Judaism is devoid of significance for the soul or conclude that the fact that the kabbalists pursued an "infinite" hermeneutics and were still able to found and sustain a thousand-year mystico-religious tradition poses a significant challenge to Giegerich's thesis that with the "birth of man" and interpretive consciousness, meaning (specifically, religious meaning) has come to a close. The problem with Giegerich's thinking is that he allows for only two stages, two possibilities, in the development of humanity's relation to its symbols: (1) "pregnancy" or "in-ness," in which symbols, pregnant with unarticulated meaning, point to spiritual realities and Gods within (or beneath) which man dwells, and (2) "birth," in which these same symbols come to be sublated and reborn, not as contents of consciousness but as the very *form* of consciousness itself (EPF 76). Ricoeur's thesis that "symbols invite thought" and that their interpretation opens new forms of life, horizons of being and self-knowledge is never even considered.

### Giegerich's Mythology

Giegerich tells us that the age of myth is over (EOM 9, 13). For example, he states, "Because consciousness has been born out of them, myth as such, religion altogether, higher meaning at large now possess only historical significance; they still exist, but . . . (as) *dead* meanings" (EOM 13). Yet Giegerich continues, despite this, to speak the language of mythology. Giegerich says his project is "quiet, sober, and unpretentious," an ordinary and humble project, yet "The End of Meaning and the Birth of Man" could hardly be more mythological and apocalyptic in tone. Giegerich announces himself in the most sweeping and dramatic of terms—the end of meaning, the birth of man, the impossibility of religion. He makes use of various classical mythological figures (Chronos swallowing his children) to express what might otherwise be a historical, or even empirical, thesis about a change in the typical modes of thought amongst the educated classes in western societies. He insists on calling this change a change in "logical form," or a fundamental alteration in the "objective psyche," thereby lending a sense of inexorable logical precision, authority, objectivity, and "positivity" to his account. Yet he clothes what amounts to an almost anti-Jungian, end-of-mythology thesis in Jungian concepts and mythological garb.

We might say that Giegerich's use of mythological and religious language even as he declares the end of myth and the death of God is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the whole Jungian enterprise of using such language without for a moment believing in its referential status. Heretofore (some) Jungians have used mytho-

logical and religious language in a “bracketed” manner to discuss psychological processes. With Giegerich we now have the use of this language as a vehicle for promoting its very opposite: a radical atheistic, a-religious and a-mythological world view.

### “Man and His Symbols”

I think it fair to say that there has been an evolving relationship between humanity and its symbols, with “in-ness” at one extreme and “death” at the other, and various other possibilities in between.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, Giegerich considers the possibility of a renewed “in-ness” characterizing a future age of the “overman,” “a new symbol whose ‘meaning’ has not been born out of it yet for present man’s understanding,” but states that “Nietzsche’s idea of the overman appears to have been a utopia, even a phantom” (EOM 13–14). Regardless of whether he is here correct (there are certainly grounds for holding that humanity is capable of a higher form of consciousness than that which predominates at present), in “The End of Meaning” Giegerich fails to consider attitudes towards myth, symbols, and religion *other* than the one he describes under the rubric of “in-ness.” One such attitude, described by Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) in *After Virtue*,<sup>4</sup> suggests that religious symbols, metaphors, and myths contribute to a tradition within which we can realize human virtues and thereby attain a sense of unity and meaning in our lives. Now Jung *may* have at times yearned for a return to an almost animistic “in-ness” in his consideration of the archetypes of the collective unconscious, but we are entitled to regard the appearance of archetypes in dreams, or our response to them in art, literature, and religion, not as signaling a return to in-ness but rather as serving to reconnect us to images, ideas, narratives, and *traditions* around and within which we can (re)formulate our personal mission and, in Jungian terms, individuate. (In this regard Jung’s encouragement of Neumann and Kirsch to discover the richness of their own Jewish tradition may be more representative than Jung’s off-hand comment about the “daughter of the moon” [EOM 29].) MacIntyre makes cogent arguments to the effect that in spite of our professed post-modernism and relativism, we cannot help but constitute our lives in narrative, mythical forms that only make sense in connection with a value-tradition. Such traditions may be as narrow as the work of a particular hospital or school or as wide as western (or even world) philosophy, and our connection with such traditions through symbolic rites, acts, study, etc., serves an important human function, without lulling us into the unconsciousness of in-ness. I believe that Kabbalah/Hasidism in particular (and Judaism in general) provides such a value tradition, one, by the way, that by virtue of its own destabilizing concepts—infinite interpretability, “breaking of the vessels,” etc.—allows one to participate without having to abandon “consciousness” and an open economy of thought. I believe, for example, that Buddhism (in spite of its claim to aspire to a no-self) provides another such value-tradition, and that the same is true for each of the world’s great religions.

MacIntyre argues that the very notion of an intelligible human action (and hence any notion of human action) is inextricably bound to the notion of a narrative of which that action is a part. One cannot, for example, address the question of “What am I to do?” unless one has first considered “Of what story or stories do

I find myself a part?" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 216). An action described outside the context of a narrative is a senseless behavior ('his right arm went forward' as opposed to 'he saluted the flag'). Narrative is inescapable. According to MacIntyre, "Man is in his actions and practices, as well as his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal" (p. 210). Further, for MacIntyre, "Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of all things." This is a point that is far too complex to develop here but which I raise as a means of expanding the horizon on myth beyond Giegerich's "in-ness" and "logic."

### "Straw Man", "Birth of Man"

Giegerich, citing Nietzsche, tells us that "of course 'God is dead'" and, quoting Jung, "There are no longer any gods whom we could invoke to help us" (EOM 21).<sup>5</sup> Giegerich continues that "the notion of God no longer exists for us," and that we can no longer even speak of God because the "*position* of God has disappeared. God can now, much like Ether or phlogiston, only be a content of historical knowledge" (EOM 25). He further tells us that to "preach religion in all earnest—instead of seeing, appreciating, and studying it historically . . . is like making a present of a primer to a high school student or . . . like squeezing an adult into a crib" (EOM 22).

Elsewhere, Giegerich reproaches Jung for privileging "'subculture'-type movements (like alchemy)—the raw (i.e., rather inferior texts by mediocre authors) over the refined (i.e., products of the greatest minds and artists)" (EOM 44). He concludes that "the idea that the far more beautiful and comprehensive religious formulas, the late result of long cultural development and the product of the thinking of generations, are the true origin (the 'archetypal' in the strictest sense) . . . did not occur to Jung" (EOM 44). Yet Giegerich himself in his critique of God and religion appears to have done virtually the same thing—setting up the religion of "in-ness" as a sort of "straw man" to contrast with the "birth of man" that has transcended the gods and religious consciousness. There is virtually no acknowledgment of the development of western theology over the centuries, let alone of the higher religious formulations of, say, the Vedanta and Buddhism. Nor is there consideration of such 20th century meditations on religious consciousness as those of Buber, Tillich, or even Einstein,<sup>6</sup> and no consideration of the exquisitely dialectical conception of *Ein-sof* in the later Kabbalah. There is no consideration given to the transpersonal psychology of Wilbur, who in the 1980s was writing on themes similar to Giegerich's in "The End of Meaning" but who has always allowed for many more gradations in the development of "truth" and "consciousness."<sup>7</sup> Finally, there is no thought given to Jewish theologians such as Steinsaltz and Birnbaum, who, prior to Giegerich, had written eloquently about how the very idea of an absolute God requires that "God" as he was understood in past generations must be in eclipse, in order that humanity mature, assume responsibility, and (to use a phrase Jung once used in connection with Jewish mysticism) become a "partner with God in the completion of creation."<sup>8</sup>

Giegerich's position seems to be convincing because in the way he sets up his argument he effectively forces the reader to choose between primitive "in-ness" and modern atheistic consciousness. It seems to me that the other possibilities are simply left out of the picture.

I am further troubled by Giegerich's failure to acknowledge the possibility that religion itself can and must be transformed in the modern era. My own view is that religion must today re-define itself in terms of what many would regard as *its very antithesis*: the open-minded, anti-dogmatic, unknowing stance of critical thinking. Only a thoroughgoing "unknowing," "infinite interpretability" stance on the part of humanity can do justice to the incomprehensibility and infinity of what is of necessity before us when we contemplate the cosmos or consciousness as a whole. This "unknowing," "infinite" yet inquiring stance was, I believe, what the kabbalists were reaching for with their notion of *Ein-sof*. In *The Soul's Logical Life* Giegerich argues for just an "unknowing" negativity to be spoken in connection with each of our positive psychological propositions. "The End of Meaning," however, has discarded "unknowing" in favor of "all-knowing" propositions regarding the end of myth, meaning, God, and religion.

### Meaning, Truth, and Soul

Giegerich tells us that "meaning" (as in the "meaning of life") "is simply no topic anymore. As a topic or notion it is dead and gone. We cannot even speak of its loss, because then we would secretly resurrect and hold on to it is a logical *category* that merely today happens to be empirically empty" (EOM 26). By way of contrast, Giegerich tells us that *truth* is not raised as a topic or category, because it is *against the law*, "against the topmost or central law governing our society, the law 'Thou shalt not raise the question of Truth'" (SLL 275). It is curious that Giegerich regards meaning as extinct but truth as very much alive but outlawed, and "soul," which in many circles is as dead if not even *deader* than God, to be the central notion in psychology.

There is, of course, serious question as to whether Giegerich really *means* it when he says that meaning is no longer a topic. He asks, "Is it really so terrible to live without a higher meaning?" (EOM 27), and responding to his own question says, "After all, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Praxiteles, the Chartres Cathedral, Leonardo da Vinci, Mozart, Plato, Thomas Aquinas, Hegel, etc. etc. remain—incredible, inexhaustible riches. Are they not enough, more than enough?" Giegerich, of course, neglects to consider the likelihood that for many, if not each of these figures, the search for meaning (and virtue) in their lives and world (and for at least for some the search for "higher meaning") was a driving force in their lives and work. Is it fair to say that when we read, view, or listen to their works today their inexhaustible richness derives simply from their "historical interest"? Does their richness not rather derive from the very *meaning* these creative works have bequeathed to us? Giegerich goes on to ask: "What about the smile of the person who passed me this morning on the street; the rays of sunlight falling through the leaves of a forest; the happy events of a true meeting of minds, the friendship of a friend, the love of one's spouse—are they all void, banal, 'all maya compared with that one thing, that your life is meaningful,' as Jung wants us to believe" (EOM 28). It is hard to grasp how for Jung these acts and events could possibly be regarded as banal. In the Jewish mystical tradition, each of these would be regarded as blessings, "sparks" of the divine, the very constituents of *Tikkun ha-Olam* (the restoration and redemption of the world). No doubt that they can just as easily be understood

in secular terms, but even if understood in such terms it can hardly be doubted that they are radically, and perhaps even absolutely, meaningful.<sup>9</sup>

There is a tension in Giegerich between his suggestion that there is no transcendent “meaning to life,” that life is or should be rewarding exactly as it is, and his own efforts to provide a grand scheme that circumscribes the history of human consciousness. It is as if he holds a double standard—for the “subjective psyche” (the meaning of things for everyday men and women) things are perfectly fine in their current state of unsystematic variety, but for the “objective psyche” he demands a “logic” that accounts for the entirety of the soul. One wonders why Giegerich, given his own standards, isn’t satisfied with the anthropological fact that for some people and some sub-cultures, God and meaning are very much alive as they had been in past centuries, for others each of these is irrelevant, and yet for others God and meaning have been understood in new ways that both allow for and goes beyond their seeming irrelevancy, etc.

### Giegerich, Hegel, and Wittgenstein

Although he claims not to be a Hegelian per se (DAP 8), Giegerich makes constant reference to Hegel and Hegelian ideas. While he humbly states, “I do not even claim to understand Hegel properly,” he imperiously asserts that Hegel’s is “the most advanced, comprehensive, and differentiated thinking and supersedes everything that came afterwards (including deconstructive thinking . . .)” (DAP 9). Regardless of the merits of this claim I don’t believe that Giegerich has adequately grasped or worked through the implications of post-Hegelian thought,<sup>10</sup> in particular that of the later Wittgenstein, and (in spite of his criticisms of Derrida) post-modernism. In particular, he shows virtually no awareness or concern that there might be alternative “presuppositions of interpretation” and uses/definitions of “psychology,” “soul,” “truth,” “religion,” and “God” than the ones he offers, or that his presuppositions and definitions must be established prior to their leading us to an “absolute truth.” In “The End of Meaning” and *The Soul’s Logical Life*, Giegerich continually makes sweeping assertions about his terms’ supposed referents without considering the multiple meanings, purposes, and contexts within which these terms are used.

Giegerich faults me for having “no explanation to offer for why and how the death of symbols is possible” (EPF 71). His challenge suggests that there *ought to be an* explanation, when I would think that this is a historical question, requiring detailed research into the individual cases. Wittgenstein warns us against the tendency to insist that everything must be covered by a generalization or law. His philosophical approach was to point out subtle but important differences in what previous philosophers had subsumed under a general case. This tendency to over-generalize was one of Hegel’s excesses, and I believe that Giegerich falls into the same error. When Giegerich says “‘rational, discursive interpretations’ are ego-stuff and have no significance for the maturing or development of human consciousness” (EPF 74), or “Whenever the need to explain or interpret is felt, we know that that which is to be interpreted has lost its significance for the soul” he overgeneralizes and, in my view, fails to adequately comprehend the full texture of man’s relationship to his symbols.

## Symbols “Reborn”

Giegerich writes that I confuse his notion of the “birth of the meaning out of the symbol” with the (very different) idea of a symbol’s rational explanation and interpretation (EPF 71). What exactly does it mean to say that meaning is born out of the symbol? Giegerich suggests that symbols and myths, which were contents of consciousness, are in effect “reborn” as a radical alteration in the logical status of consciousness itself. Giegerich tells us that the logic of consciousness that is “born” out of myths and symbols was somehow nascent (pregnant) in the symbols to begin with. Shorn of its metaphorical dressing, (and in spite of his extensive discussion of the issue in *The Soul’s Logical Life*) Giegerich’s theory may amount to nothing more than the claim that myths and symbols reflect human psychology and when people stop taking an interest in their symbols, what remains is their psychology and the interest that they now take directly in their own minds. Giegerich’s attempt to establish his “birth” theory as distinct from these more mundane theses rests on his suggestion that *meaning* is itself a living organism subject to death, birth, and vital transformation. He tells us that there is a “natural, spontaneous, self-movement of the meaning,” (EPF 72) that the “birth of meaning” “is the previously born meaning’s own doing”, and that “‘Meaning’ . . . is a *reality* in its own right” These are curious phrases given Giegerich’s declaration of “the end of meaning,” and his railing against “positivizing” psychology in *The Soul’s Logical Life*. He seems unsure if he wants to rest with the idea that the “pregnancy-birth opposition is a metaphor” or would rather hypostasize “meaning” as an ontological entity that evolves independently of the human subject, his “sentences” and “ideas” (EPF 72). This hypostatization-reification (along with a second distinction between the contents and syntax of consciousness, which I will consider momentarily) is necessary to maintain Giegerich’s “birth” thesis as anything more than a poetic way of speaking. Without these moves, he is simply repeating the observations made by others that with time humanity comes to recognize that its myths embody general, even universal, psychological truths (Freud, Jung, Hillman), or that they help cultures overcome oppositions and contradictions in human thought, feeling, and behavior (Levi-Strauss).

Giegerich makes much out of a purported distinction between the contents and the syntax (or logic) of consciousness, and faults me for conflating the two. I fail to see the impermeability and value of this distinction. If the negativity, syntax, or logic of the soul is such that it cannot and does not become an *object* of consciousness, then it should remain, as Wittgenstein suggested, “passed over in silence,”<sup>11</sup> and neither I nor Giegerich have any business speaking about it. If, on the other hand, the soul’s “negativity” can be spoken about, as Giegerich claims to do in the course of 270 pages in *The Soul’s Logical Life*, then obviously it has been made a content of reflective consciousness, of “ideas and sentences” (EPF 72). This is true regardless of whether, as Giegerich claims, one’s speaking about the soul must be inspired by, contain, and disclose its own impossibility, silence, “emptiness,” and “stillness” (SLL 37). Whether the Gods *become* abstract ideas, or the stories about them *become* (or reflect) the dynamics (dialectical or otherwise) of the human psyche, it is the job of psychology (while respecting the mystery of consciousness) to make it an *object* of rational observation and inquiry. Any other approach is not psychology, but participatory mysticism<sup>12</sup> or gnosticism.<sup>13</sup>

## Linear vs. Bilinear Thinking

With all of Giegerich's talk about the "negation of the negation" and "dialectics," his thinking in "The End of Meaning" is remarkably linear. The linearity of his thought is apparent in his apodictic assertions about the "death of God," the "loss of myth," "the end of meaning," the "impossibility of religion," etc. As I have tried to show in my discussions of such kabbalistic symbols as *Tzimtzum* and *Tikkun*, truly dialectical thinking is bilinear, insofar as it involves *simultaneously thinking a thought and its opposite*.<sup>14</sup> Thus the kabbalistic symbol *Tzimtzum* (the concealment unity that brings about creation, finitude, and difference) invites us to think the thoughts that creation is both concealment and revelation, that concealment is revelation and revelation concealment, that the concealment of unity is the revelation of difference, the concealment of difference, the revelation of unity, etc. A truly dialectical vision of the universe would endeavor to follow the logic of the *Zohar* in its suggestion that "man creates god" just as "God creates man." While "linear assertions" are appropriate under certain circumstances, they must, on my view, always be made with the understanding that their opposites are coiled up within them as their own foundation and precondition. While in *The Soul's Logical Life* Giegerich endorses a very similar model<sup>15</sup> (SLL 189, 190, 235), his absolute declarations about God, myth, meaning, truth, soul, and religion show that his own thinking has come to rest in linear, positivistic assertions that actually exclude (rather than sublimate) their opposites.<sup>16</sup>

## The Objective Psyche

Giegerich and I differ both in our interpretation of Hegel and in our fundamental assumptions about "truth." Giegerich argues that Hegel and Jung (in his more insightful moments) have moved beyond a "perspectivist" position and arrived at an understanding of the psyche or soul that is "objective" and "true." Giegerich holds that the "transcendental signified" or "thing in itself" is not in any way an object, idea, or positive content that could be present to consciousness, but is rather the dialectical logic or process that constitutes the dynamic of the soul. The "birth of man" is the result of the symbol being sublated as the soul's logic, and a true and valid psychology, instead of interpreting symbols and other contents, will enter the wild and intuit this "logic of the soul."

I agree that *something like* the Hegelian dialectic—some logical process—characterizes the workings of the psyche from the most abstract perspective. I just don't agree that this logic is coextensive with the psyche or that it can serve as the exclusive basis for *psychology*. I think it is a serious error to remain ensconced in the view that the soul is logical negativity, as if this were a fortress guarding against all positive characterizations of the mind. On my view, a very important understanding of the soul can be gleaned both through a study of its contents and through a consideration of its own theories of self-understanding. The "dialectical soul" is nothing without its positive contents, and in formulating its self-understanding it carries these contents along with it, instead of jettisoning them as "unpsychological," as Giegerich would have it.

A further problem, one that I have already hinted at, is that Giegerich's position on the "objective psyche," however interesting, is itself *expressed in language*,

and is thus subject not only to misunderstandings but also to multiple legitimate interpretations. As we have seen, Giegerich himself says the he does not “claim to understand Hegel properly” (DAP 8), and in this light it is worth questioning *why* he finds it so “shocking” (PPF 3) that he has been misunderstood himself. I think the answer to this lies in the fact that his insistence that he has encountered “truth” (and that such an encounter has nothing to do with “interpretations and translations”) entails that his own language be univocal and somehow exempt from the possibility of multiple legitimate interpretations. If, on the other hand, Giegerich were to allow the possibility of multiple legitimate interpretations of theory that he has foreclosed with regard to the symbol, he would effectively lose his handle on “absolute truth” as his readers could each have a unique, and legitimate, interpretation of what he, Giegerich, meant. He would then only have succeeded in displacing the perspectivism he had eschewed in connection with our understanding of the soul to our understanding of *his understanding* of the soul! Giegerich would then be pressed into saying that amongst all interpretations there is only one unique interpretation of his interpretation, etc., that is valid and true. For a variety of reasons (some of which I have already shared) I find Giegerich’s claim to have univocally expressed the truth of psychology totally implausible, and I would like to offer the bare outlines of an *alternative dialectical point of view*.

I believe there is a way of welcoming the inevitability of “multiple interpretations” as well as the positive contents and theories of the psyche that does not mire us in subjectivism and utter relativism, and indeed Hegel amongst others (e.g., Socrates, Wittgenstein, and Derrida) has pointed us in its direction; and that is to realize that each of the perspectives we have on the world, as valuable as their proponents may think they are, are hopelessly incomplete, and indeed have their opposites—or what they originally thought to exclude—coiled up within them as part of their very meaning. Once this is recognized, one comes to the *rational conclusion* that the truth that can be expressed in thoughts and words can never be the property of a single thinker or idea, but is rather the entire dialectically unfolding evolution of the history of ideas—not just Hegel and Jung (but not Kant and Derrida), but Hegel, Freud, Jung, Kant, Wittgenstein, Derrida, etc. Each theorist, I believe, must be humbled by the Socratic (and I believe Hegelian) view that each knows only one portion of the absolute truth and must engage in dialog (*dialectic*) with each of the others in order to correct their one-sidedness,<sup>17</sup> and approach the absolute truth as far as it can be known<sup>18</sup> at any point in the history of ideas. I think that in psychology we are like “2-D people” who can only think in two dimensions, and who, without the benefit of a globe, must map a three-dimensional world onto a two-dimensional (flat) plane. No 2-D map can perfectly accomplish this task (each will inevitably create some form of distortion), but a combination of many imperfect maps, each correcting for the defects of one or several of the others, can give the 2-D people an idea of what a three-dimensional world must be like. Something similar, I think is the case with respect to our theories of psychology. They do not, and cannot, grasp onto the psyche itself, but rather, as a series of mutually-correcting representations, they enable us to approximate and even *ascend* towards its structure. The “new man” who arises out of this way of thinking is not one who believes that from the vantage point of the “daimon” or “Self” he has a direct vision of the soul, but is rather one who rec-

ognizes the power of multiplicity and dialog, who has respect for the perspectives, ideas, interpretations, cultures, and religions of others, who celebrates the open economy of thought, anticipates the possibility of something *totally new*, and who is vigilantly *non-dogmatic*. A problem arises when any single thinker believes that he has latched onto the “globe itself” and can either reduce all other perspectives to his own point of view, or dismisses them as irrelevant to the truth. Giegerich’s ideas about the “objective psyche” and his dismissal of the hermeneutic tradition run perilously close to such a dogmatic position.

There is, however, a sense in which Giegerich has indeed “entered the wild” and perhaps brought us to an encounter with “truth.” By speaking outside the *ruling discourse* of psychology in general (and Jungian psychology in particular) Giegerich makes a cut in the systematic ways in which we as psychologists hold off and contain what has been termed the “Other” (Levinas), the “real” (Lacan), the “monstrous” (Derrida) or the “wild.” This “cut” has the potential to “shatter our vessels” and theories, and, ultimately, bring us to a new way of seeing ourselves and our world. This is why, I think, much of what Giegerich says, especially in *The Soul’s Logical Life*, is not immediately digestible and comprehensible. Like a trauma or a horrifying dream, what Giegerich tells us is not readily assimilable to our comfortable intellectual and personal structures. It is this, I think, and not an uncovering of the “logic of the soul” that is the real value of Giegerich’s work. His writing has the potential to bring us to a place in psychology that we simply cannot anticipate. And *this* may indeed be a hint of the soul’s “logic”, i.e., that the psychical cannot be anticipated, contained, and completely rationalized, and that it has the potential to break asunder and *creatively* reinvent itself as something altogether new.

### Giegerich’s Gnosticism

Nevertheless, Giegerich’s position is not without its serious dangers. Giegerich is concerned about the intellectual state of Jungian psychology, its failure to “attract and inspire great minds, thinkers, writers, artists,” and its status as an academic “nonentity” (EOM 42). He suggests that Jung’s favoring the raw productions of the imagination over higher cultural forms is one reason for this state of affairs (EOM 44), and he proposes to advance an intellectually sound and rigorous psychology. However, Giegerich’s own position perpetuates and deepens the very anti-intellectual and anti-academic posture of the Jungian tradition he speaks of. When he asks the question “who in me is allowed to do psychology” and responds that the “answer is obvious. The person who does psychology must be the new or other personality. The daimon, the Self, the soul: they are the ones who alone can produce a psychology that deserves the name” (SLL 17), he sets the table for a *gnostic elite*. Apart from the fact that Giegerich hypostasizes the self, the daimon, and the soul, he here suggests that it is not what a psychologist says that is worthwhile or valid, but rather what gnostic standing he has for saying it. With his further suggestions that other Jungian thinkers, Hillman, Moore, etc., are mere observers who pretend to encounter the soul but who remain on the safe side of the ego, and that by way of contrast, *he alone* has subverted the contemporary law against raising the question of truth and has “followed Actaion into the wild”

(SLL 275), we have the beginnings of a psychology cult with Giegerich as its (perhaps) “fated” (SLL 213) leader.<sup>19,20</sup> Finally, with his attacks on “rational-discursive” interpretations, his cavalier dismissal of God and religion, his disqualification of the hermeneutic tradition,<sup>21</sup> and his disdain for virtually the entire history of psychology, we have an anti-rationalism (masquerading as intellectualism) that runs the risk of isolating Jungians not only from needed and potentially exciting dialog with other schools of contemporary psychological theory and practice, but also from the world’s religious, mystical, and hermeneutic traditions, which, in the past, have proved to be such fertile partners with which to nourish and develop the Jungian project.

## Notes

- 1) In discussing and citing these works I will abbreviate them as follows: (a) “The Ego-Psychological Fallacy: A Note on ‘the birth of meaning out of a symbol’” (this volume), “EPF” (b) “The End of Meaning and the Birth of Man: An Essay about the State Reached in the History of Consciousness and an Analysis of C. G. Jung’s Psychology Project” (*JJTP*, 6, 1, 2004, pp. 1–65), “EOM” (c) *The Soul’s Logical Life* (3rd Revised Edition, Peter Lang, 2002), “SLL,” and (d) W. Giegerich, D. L. Miller, and G. Mogenson, *Dialectics & Analytical Psychology: The El Capitan Canyon Seminar* (New Orleans: Spring Journal Books, 2004), “DAP.”
- 2) Giegerich’s claims might similarly invalidate his own project, insofar as he rests his own understanding of psychology’s “truth” on a massive hermeneutical effort focused upon the myth of Artemis and Actaion.
- 3) Amongst these possibilities is that a tradition’s symbols remain unchanged but that a people’s or culture’s relationship to them is transformed, as when the rabbinic tradition “textualized” the relationship of the Jewish people to the sacrificial cult symbols of the Torah, or when, in the 18th century, the Hasidim psychologized the symbols of the Lurianic Kabbalah, in each case producing enduring and vital religious traditions. Scholem (in a mood similar to Giegerich’s) has said that it is highly doubtful whether we can live the symbols of the Kabbalah in the way that they were lived by the kabbalists themselves (G. Scholem, *On The Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, New York: Schocken, 1968, p. 117). It doesn’t follow that these symbols can no longer be lived at all and it remains to be seen (i.e., it is an open question) whether they can again be transformed in such a manner that we can live these (and other) symbols in the 21st century.
- 4) Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd edition, University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.
- 5) In another context, in SLL, Giegerich praises Jung for “knowing” that God exists, suggesting that in this moment and phrase Jung comes closest to “truth”—albeit an antiquated truth.
- 6) Einstein on religion: “A person who is religiously enlightened appears to me to be one who has, to the best of his ability, liberated himself from the fetters of selfish desires and is preoccupied with thoughts, feelings, and aspirations to which he clings because of their superpersonal value...In this sense religion is the age-old endeavor of mankind to become clearly and completely conscious of those values and goals and constantly to strengthen and extend their effort.” For Einstein the religious person has a conviction regarding the “overpowering meaningfulness” of these values “regardless of whether any attempt is made to unite this content with a divine being” (*Ideas and Opinions*, Random House, 1988, p. 45).
- 7) Ken Wilbur, *A Sociable God*, Rev. ed., Shambhala, 2005.
- 8) Carl Gustav Jung, *Letters*, Vol. II, p. 157.
- 9) Interestingly, Giegerich fails to include in his casual list of worthwhile human activities anything that might be termed religious or spiritual; for example, experiencing awe at the existence or workings of the universe, the deep satisfaction of being committed to a cause

beyond oneself, the soaring feeling of becoming fully engaged in communal prayer, the peace and joy of meditation—or have these also come to an end with the “birth of man”?

10) I have no quarrel with Hegelian, dialectical thought. In fact, my own philosophical project has been to show that because language bifurcates a single reality into polar oppositions, especially between words and things, mind and matter, subjective and objective, that particular philosophical positions (e.g., materialism, idealism, theism, atheism, essentialism, nominalism, etc.) seize hold of only one pole of these oppositions and are thus invariably incomplete without the pole that they argue against and attempt to exclude. By demonstrating the reciprocity between presumably exclusive or contrary theories and rationally intuiting their interdependence, we come closer to grasping the primal pre-linguistic unity than through any single philosophical point of view. Although I regard this procedure metaphorically as a form of “rational mysticism,” an intellectual ascent to the absolute, it is one that intellectually and rationally engages the history of ideas and is open to *normal* reflection and reason. See, for example, my “Fragmentation in Psychology: A Dialectical Solution,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 43(4), 2003, pp. 102–123.

11) Giegerich himself quotes Wittgenstein’s famous closing proposition of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960; original German Edition, 1921, p. 151).

12) Giegerich refuses to take a “mystical” approach to the unspeakable, at one point arguing “that there is so much meditation today that does not seem to lead to an encounter with Absolute Truth,” explaining that “meditation is ‘structurally’ (logically) deficient because it practices unambiguously *positive* receptiveness” (SLL 240). This is certainly not a place to begin a discussion of the implications of Giegerich’s thought for Buddhist and other forms of eastern spirituality, thought, and meditation, but if this brief passage in SLL is indicative, he appears to be rather summarily dismissive of these *vast* traditions.

13) Throughout I use the term “gnosticism” in the general sense of a form of knowledge that is only available to a special group, or to those individuals who have reached a level of consciousness that is not available to ordinary, rational thought.

14) See S. Drob, “The Doctrine of Coincidentia Oppositorum in Jewish Mysticism” and “The Coincidence of Opposites in Kabbalistic and Hasidic Thought” ([www.newkabbalah.com](http://www.newkabbalah.com)).

15) Giegerich writes: “Thought does not come up with a third possibility, nor does it settle in an alleged ‘gap’ ‘in between,’ and yet it is something radically new. Instead of escaping into the gap or to a Third in between the two alternatives, thought merely *thinks* them, the two opposites: as *their* dialectic, *their* movement, as the self-contradictory logical life imaginatively called soul” (SLL 190). Elsewhere he speaks of thinking of two opposites as identical (SLL 235).

16) Giegerich, of course, argues that his own understanding of the logic of the soul adequately sublates (negates, transforms, preserves) God, myth, and meaning. I believe that the test of a truly adequate sublation in Hegel’s sense would be a new conception which fulfills the significance and purpose of the one it sublates rather than simply moves onto something new and transcendent. Indeed, one would think that a dialectically evolving new concept should fulfill the meaning of the old concept better than the old concept fulfills itself! (This, I believe, was Hegel’s claim regarding his own philosophical/dialectical sublation of the Christian myth of the Trinity; though Hegel, of course, retained the Christian myth as a significant level of or perspective upon absolute truth.) I will leave it to the reader to determine whether Giegerich’s conception of the birth of man adequately sublates myth, God, and meaning, in this *or any other adequate* sense.

17) Jung, in his more sober moments, held a similar perspectivist outlook, e.g.: “The fundamental mistake regarding the nature of the unconscious is probably this: it is commonly supposed that its contents have only one meaning” (CW 16, p. 330); “Only a combination of points of view—which has not yet been achieved...can give us a more complete con-

ception of the nature of dreams" (CW 8, p. 473); "the purpose of research is not to imagine that one possesses the theory which alone is right, but, doubting all theories, to approach gradually nearer the truth" (CW 8, p. 569).

18) Giegerich himself acknowledges that there is always an unknown remainder left over after language does its work.

19) Giegerich is clear that he, perhaps alone amongst his Jungian contemporaries, has entered the wild and engaged with "truth." It is unclear, however, whether this was an act of will or fate. Giegerich writes: "No ego decision is able to get me into the wild. It is a logical act that we are talking about, and the question to what degree I have a choice in the matter and am responsible for venturing into the wild or desisting from doing so, and to what degree it is something like fate, I am not able to answer" (SLL 216, n. 212). The personal pronoun is here used impersonally; however, it becomes clear at the close of SLL that Giegerich believes he has "followed Actaion into the wild" and that he might as well have been speaking personally about himself. Of course, on his theory, it is not "he" as Wolfgang Giegerich, an ego that has entered upon the "truth," but only he as one who has in some sense "died to himself" and become his "other."

20) Indeed Giegerich's triumphant conclusion in *The Soul's Logical Life*, his writing in "The End of Meaning" as if he were the "spokesperson for the world-soul," and his rather transparent efforts to engage Hillman (and Moore) in a struggle not only for the heart of the Jungian community but for the soul of man, all point to his sense of himself as a gnostic leader.

21) Giegerich claims to be a champion of abstract thought and the intellect, but this is limited to "thinking and intellect" as he defines them. Rationality as it is commonly understood is disdained, as when he says, "For me, the 'rational, discursive interpretations' are ego-stuff and have no significance for the maturing or development of human consciousness" (EPF 74).

