

Whitmont Identifies the Next Evolutionary Step for Western Culture

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In his learned and deeply creative book *The Alchemy of Healing: Psyche and Soma* (1993), Edward C. Whitmont, M.D. (1912-1998), a Jungian psychotherapist and homeopathic physician, endorses the five types of healers that Paracelsus describes as *naturales*, *specifics*, *spirituales*, *characterales*, and *fideles* (pages 166-167). According to Whitmont, the “healing process may take place in any of Paracelsus’ five basic ways [of healing]” (page 214). Whitmont briefly describes each of these five approaches to healing.

(1) “The *naturales* treat by applying supportive, balancing or compensating peripheral modalities in an attempt to oppose morbidic states: cold is treated with heat, cramps with relaxants, fullness[es?] by evacuation, deficiencies by supplementation. This is the approach of the dominant school of medical allopathy” (page 166).

(2) “The *specifics* heal through the ‘*forma specifica*’ and the ‘*ens specificum*.’ They address ‘specific’ invisible dynamics by shaking up and reconnecting with their archetypal entelechy the fixed states behind and underlying the symptomatic and organic expressions of illness. Here belong homeopathy, acupuncture, osteopathy and chiropractic, to name a few from our own time” (page 167).

Digression: In the well-informed book *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (2014), Austen Ivereigh, Ph.D. from Oxford University in religion and politics in Argentina, reports that then-Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio received acupuncture and massage treatment from a Taoist monk-doctor, a Chinese immigrant, in Argentina from 2004 onward for three years twice a week and thereafter once a month (pages 273-274). Disclosure: I myself have undergone the form of body massage therapy known as Rolwing.

(3) “The *spirituales* command the spirits of plants and animals, according to Paracelsus, and ‘force them to let go of the sick person.’ This is the shamanic or overtly magical approach, directed at relieving the pressure and obsessive power of the invading fields and thereby creating a ‘breathing space’ for the sake of a better integrative possibility eventually” (page 167).

Whitmont points out that to a varying extent in the *spirituales* approach and in the *characterales* approach, and to some extent in all the other approaches, “the healer’s offering of his or her own energies for the sake of ‘building the bridge’ plays a major part” (page 167). Elsewhere, Whitmont uses the term “*Pontifex*” to refer to the healer who builds such a bridge (pages 165, 183, 214).

(4) “The *characterales* are effective by means of the ‘power of the word’ and the force of the healer’s personality. This approach would correspond to modern psychotherapeutic approaches” (page 167). Apart from the context of psychotherapy, the *characterales* approach to healing can also occur in I-Thou communication in other contexts in life.

Digression: Also see Pedro Lain Entralgo’s book *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity*, edited and translated by L. J. Rather and John M. Sharp, with a foreword by Walter J. Ong (1970; orig. Spanish ed., 1958).

(5) “[T]he *fideles* heal through the effect of faith – the surrender to transpersonal power that the healer may inspire and/or the ill person may revere. Ideally, inspired by insight and faith (*pistis*, *fides*, trust), an integrative opening of resistant structuring – psychological and/or biological [and/or cultural?] – to the influx of new structuring would be achieved through a surrender-transformation, which could lead to a change of personality and ‘rebirth’ on the spiritual or psychological level. However, the possibility of such an ideal form of healing is limited by various degrees of psychic and ego-based inertia and psychological immaturity, as well as by maladaptive trends becoming so deeply ingrained that they are fixed in the biological functioning and psychological structuring [of the persons]. Consequently, yielding a part or the whole of what one has come to regard as one’s identity for the sake of change is experienced as a threat to one’s identity, and to psychic as well as biologic equilibrium” (page 167). Clearly Whitmont is not a starry-eyed optimist about the prospect of deep psycho-spiritual transformation for most people in Western culture today in the short-term.

Digression: Concerning the *fideles* approaching to healing, also see Robert E. Cushman’s book *Therapeia: Plato’s Conception of Philosophy* (1958).

By mentioning “Alchemy” in the title of his book, Whitmont pays homage to Jung’s interest in and publications about alchemy. Reading Richard Wilhelm’s German translation of the ancient Chinese alchemical text known as *The Secret of The Gold Flower* played a significant role in Jung’s life.

Whatever else may be said about the medieval European alchemical texts that Jung studied so carefully, medieval alchemy cannot be accurately described as straightforward. On the contrary, it appears to be anything but straightforward. Granted, the aim and goal of transformation and transmutation into gold, “not to be confused with the ordinary gold, the *aurum vulgi*” (page 49), may at first blush sound straightforward enough. But make no mistake about it, the psycho-spiritual transformation and transmutation of the embodied living person into the extraordinary gold symbolized in medieval alchemical texts is itself an extraordinary process.

Concerning the human body, see Michael Murphy’s 800-page book *The Future of the Body: Explorations into the Further Evolution of Human Nature* (1992). He was the co-founder of the Esalen institute in California.

Now, in their 500-page textbook *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision* (2014), Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi do not happen to explicitly mention Whitmont's book. Conversely, Whitmont does not happen to use the systems terminology that they use. But he does explicitly mention (page 29) Capra's book *The Turning Point* (1983). Moreover, Whitmont's book is compatible with the overall systems view of life that they advance in their book.

Most importantly, Whitmont explicitly identifies the next evolutionary step in contemporary Western culture.

According to him, "the next evolutionary step [will involve a critical mass of persons in Western culture moving] toward a more field and transcendental Self-oriented consciousness" (page 131). He capitalizes the term "Self" to indicate that he is referring to Jung's idea of the Self, which is not the same as ego-consciousness.

The next evolutionary step for Western culture that Whitmont identifies is consistent with the American cultural historian and theorist Walter J. Ong's description and characterization of the present situation of contemporary Western culture in his book *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (1971, pages 10-11).

In his book *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (1977), Ong uses systems terminology in the culminating chapter, "Voice and the Opening of Closed Systems" (pages 305-341). In effect, what Whitmont refers to as "the next evolutionary step toward a more field and transcendental Self-oriented consciousness" represents what Ong refers to as the opening of closed systems. For individual human persons (i.e., for ego-consciousness), Ong recommends what he styles as open closure. What he styles as the position of open closure is compatible with what Whitmont refers to as "a more field and transcendental Self-orientation consciousness," provided that the closure of ego-consciousness is open to receiving inputs from the Self – including responsible discernment of spirits about inputs from the Self. This means that ego-consciousness must cultivate awareness and attentiveness, as Whitmont repeatedly indicates.

Whitmont repeatedly emphasizes that we should avoid simply acting out inputs that we receive from the Self indiscriminately but should strive instead to enact inputs we receive from the Self in responsible ways.

Ah, but what about those closed systems of thinking that are in need of opening up (i.e., the closed systems thinking of actual human persons, perhaps at times including certain systems theorists)?

Whitmont says that prior to our being able to take the next evolutionary step in Western culture, our present cultural developmental phase encourages and requires of us "[f]ixation, resistance to

change, urge for permanence, repression, denial, defensive resistance, and the capacity to experience and to resist pain” (page 131).

He identifies these attributes that I am here aligning with closed systems thinking as resulting from cultural conditioning in the particular form of individuality and consciousness that our present cultural developmental phase encourages and requires of us, which we must work through and overcome prior to the next evolutionary step in Western cultural history.

As the title of his book indicates, Whitmont thinks that we in Western culture will need to experience healing of these attributes of closed systems thinking before the next evolutionary step of a more field and transcendental Self-oriented consciousness can emerge in Western culture.

In my estimate, these attributes are still common in the United States today, and elsewhere in Western culture today, and are stronger than they were in 1993 when Whitmont’s book was originally published. If I am correct about this, this does not necessarily mean that Whitmont’s forecast of the next evolutionary step may be wrong. However, we in Western culture today may not see the next evolutionary step that he has identified emerge as a broad cultural pattern in the near future. But it could emerge in the long-run, provided enough individual human persons in Western culture learn how to overcome closed-systems thinking and learn how to engage instead in what Ong styles open closure.

Actually, what Whitmont has identified as the next evolutionary step in Western culture is the logical evolutionary step for people who have integrated the archetypal feminine in their psyches. The basic thrust of Whitman’s book *Return of the Goddess* (1982) was to call on people in Western culture to integrate the archetypal feminine in their psyches.

Briefly, as we work toward integrating the archetypal feminine in our psyches, we activate our potentiality for psycho-spiritual rebirth.

For a Freudian view of how St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Jesuit religious order in the Roman Catholic Church, in effect worked toward integrating the archetypal feminine in his psyche, see W. W. Meissner’s book *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint* (1992). Meissner is himself a Jesuit and a medical doctor whose field is psychiatry.

For those people who have successfully integrated the archetypal feminine in their psyches and experienced psycho-spiritual rebirth, the next logical step in their personal evolution is to move toward and cultivate a more field and transcendental Self-oriented consciousness inasmuch as they can.

To be sure, Whitmont himself personally moved to cultivating a more field and transcendental Self-oriented consciousness – just as Ong did. (By coincidence, both Whitmont and Ong were born in 1912.)

No doubt certain other individual persons have integrated the archetypal feminine in their psyches and have also moved to cultivating a more field and transcendental Self-oriented consciousness.

In the meantime, however, we in the United States have seen a widespread conservative backlash. No doubt many conservative Americans today still want to cling to the particular form of individuality and consciousness that is characterized by the attributes that Whitmont has identified and listed.

Many conservative Americans today are not likely to integrate the archetypal feminine in their psyches and then proceed to the next logical step of cultivating a more field and transcendental Self-oriented consciousness.

Concerning the conservative backlash in the United States over the last half century or so, see Philip Jenkins' book *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of the Eighties America* (2006), Damon Linker's book *The Theocons: Secular American under Siege* (2006), and Peter McDonough's book *The Catholic Labyrinth: Power, Apathy, and a Passion for Reform in the American Church* (2013).

Of course the resistance of the conservative backlash should not deter other Americans who can from integrating the archetypal feminine in the psyches and then proceeding to the next logical step of cultivating a more field and Self-oriented consciousness inasmuch as they can.

In addition to those Americans who can integrate the archetypal feminine and those conservative Americans who want to cling to the particular form of individuality and consciousness that Whitmont characterizes with so many attributes, there are many other conventional Americans who are not likely to integrate the archetypal feminine in their psyches in the near future, but they are not necessarily part of the conservative backlash.

In theory, however, I agree with Whitmont that the next evolutionary step for Americans and other people in Western culture today is to cultivate a more field and transcendental Self-oriented consciousness inasmuch as they can.