

On-an-Other View... *again*

By Christopher Green

The concept of “the Other” has been so appealing, alluring, seductive (as if it can only be approached as though it were a mistress) by so many figures that the Kantian mathematical sublime sheds light on why I find it so difficult to even begin processing what “Otherness” is. Furthermore, in today’s globalizing world where signs for global peace (e.g., acceptance, tolerance of all others) are proudly held by college students in anti-war protests, I—a Ohioan—buy food made in Italy for dinner and wear shoes made in China, a simple click virtually and psychologically links me to people around the world, my neighbors are Vietnamese, and (to put the cherry on this multi-flavor sundae) the media and academicians preach for multicultural tolerance, Otherness is either swept under the rug or condemned if others are actually Other. That is, we are no longer allowed to think of others as Other; even the greatest Other, sometimes called God, can now be experienced for a \$500 fee that provides a weekend getaway, a few lectures, and a cozy hotel room (continental breakfast included). Is there any other way to get to an understanding of the Other except through the labyrinthine jargon of Derrida’s reactions to Levinas? Or the consulting room of a Jungian analyst? Or is there even any point to doing so?

Of course, as you’ll guess, I believe there is such a point. To be up front about where I am going, or where this is taking us, it is not so much urgent as it is “about time” that we see Otherness as archetypal. That is to say, as humans, as particular subjects which partake in the object which is called human existence (whatever “human” as an

adjective might infer), we take part in what Kant called *Menschheit in der Person*, the concept of definition of humanity. Or, as Wolfgang Giegerich puts it, “We as individual persons can at best, but inevitably will also have to, *partake* in [life] one way or another.”¹ Perhaps we could also put it this way: as individuals, we must get on with one another in one-way or another. However, as we do so, it might prove beneficial to understand the archetypal presence of that which philosophers have entitled the Other.

I note the nominalizing source of our nominal genus simply to group together those who have been distinguished, dissected, divorced from “we” contemporaries—namely, those who have never used such nominalization with those who do. We will not find any contemporary language that translates the *Torah*, *Rig-Vedas*, *Upanishads*, Homer, the *Christian Bible*, *Qu’ran* or any other extant text that we (perhaps unfortunately, perhaps not) catalogue as “mythologies” with the phrase “the Other.” In order to understand how our current concept of “the Other” can be used as a hermeneutical tool in re-viewing Otherness throughout time—that is, as archetypal—we must first re-view just what (or who?) we are talking about when dealing with the/another Other.

There are (at least) two levels of Otherness that are, I claim, archetypal, and it should not surprise us that the split is one between Freud and Jung. There is the Otherness within, which Giegerich wonderfully explains as such: “...only if I have become conscious of myself as the *irreconcilable opposition of myself and my Other*, and at the same time conscious of the fact that this *opposite other is also myself*, did the union

¹ Wolfgang Giegerich. “Jung’s *Thought of the Self in the Light of Its Underlying Experience*.” *The Neurosis of Psychology: Primary Papers towards a Critical Psychology*. New Orleans: Spring Journal, 2005, p. 187.

of opposites occur...”² Giegerich is referring to Jung’s notion of the Self, that un-symbolizable, un-representable, but only *incarnate-able* archetype wherein the “union of opposites” occurs. Martin Heidegger would call this “man’s foreignness in the world.” And, of course, Freud’s *Das Unbehagen in der Kulture* (“The Uneasiness in Culture”) is another testament to humanity’s inability to be “at home,” that there is an Otherness within our chest by our very *being here*.

Yet, for Freud, there is also the Otherness of “the neighbor,” or as Levinas called it “the stranger.” Freud famously rejected the Judeo-Christian dictum “love your neighbor as yourself” for, for Freud, the neighbor was always already eternally *ungraspable*, *unreachable*, *unknowable*. One only needs to think of the catastrophes of WWI, WWII, the Algiers War, Darfur in the Sudan, the US war in Afghanistan and Iraq (to think only of the last 100 years), and so on to realize that if my neighbor is raping my daughter, castrating my adolescent son, and putting my wife’s mouth around their genitals I might be inclined to give a hearty “Fuck you!” to the spiritual sentiment of loving such an individual. It is precisely because the neighbor contains the unfathomable capacity to be a monstrous Other that such a dictum is required, for if one were to love their neighbor instinctually then such a maxim would not have remained in the Soul of humanity throughout time.

What are we to make of this binary relationship that is held together by the nominalization of “the Other”? To be honest, I do not know, but I do think.

I structured the binary components above intentionally, and it is to the latter that we shall first attend in order to return then to the prior. It is an anthropological a priori

² *Ibid.*, 182-83, italics mine.

that in order for “us” to exist so must “they,” those “other” people. It should be noted that being human does not preclude a qualitative, substantial, and substantiating difference to exist with others. The Greeks would conquer Troy (Homer), the Egyptians would enslave the Hebrews (Exodus, Torah), the Jewish nation would violently take over Palestine (Old Testament), the Persians would rule over the Babylonians, Romans the Greeks and the Jewish nation—and this is all *before* the Common Era and in *only* the Middle East! As James Hillman documents in his *Love of War*, there have been more recorded *wars* in human history than there has been recorded *years* in human history (which is not the same as “History,” as, much to Marx’s disappointment, is now disputed as existing).

And it is such rife prevalence of vehement hatred towards those who are not “us” coupled with insatiable greed that when we listen to media condemning, for instance, Islamic “terrorists” as being “fascistic,” “bigoted,” and “ethnocentric” they are in actually criticizing a human, all-too-human characteristic: we love to hate others. Which is why the ideological notion that “A stranger is simply someone whose story is unheard” gets it all *wrong*: a stranger is the Otherness within the stranger that is always capable of emerging in unthinkable horror. Jung sounds quite juvenile, then, when he says, “If one does not understand a person, one tends to regard him as a fool.” One only needs to think of the example often used by Slavoj Žižek to understand the point at hand. The Israeli Defense Forces often present their soldiers along with the stress, anxiety and tension they endure in maintaining their oppression over the Palestinian people. As one commander put it, “Violence and war is not in our blood.” However, if such a proposition holds tenable—that beneath the militaristic mask exists a human who experiences all the emotional and psychological trauma that other humans experience—then we forego the

obvious question: if you are human, then why are you doing such things?! The reason: because *they are human*; it is our presupposed propositions on what it means to “be human” that renders such violent occupancy as “inhuman.”

Hence, as Freud implored then so we should risk the experiment ourselves now: let us hear “love thy neighbor as thyself” for the first time, to hear it as though we had never heard it before. Does it not run contrary to that archetypal, eternal, all-too-human characteristic of being all too aware that, let alone the others across the seas but, my own family member has the capacity to turn on me and murder me?

Yet, note the dictum Freud critiqued: “love thy neighbor as *thyself*.” It is the latter where Jung becomes not only handy but crucial, for in order for me to accept the abyss between me and an-other (and the Otherness which is the other), I must plunge into the dialectical adventure of loving myself, my-self, the self which is me but which I must love. In fact, such a dictum infers (or so I am making it infer) that Love can only be accomplished, materialized, affectively effective and effectively affective if and when I come to love my-self as, to use a tiresome and convoluted word, ontologically given. In other words, we must reflect the idea of loving an-other (and their Otherness) back onto and into itself.

In order for me to get outside of my-self, I³ must first know or (minimally) be aware of the frames, boundaries, structural contingencies which make up my-self as a self. In other words, I have to stand outside of—which includes an awareness of

³ I do not use “I” lightly here. Nor do I use it as a reference to the ego. Rather, for the sake brevity, I simply use the pronoun which nominates the Soul’s faculty which chooses, whether that choice be ego driven or not.

what/where I'm not in—my-self in order to see, experience, *encounter* that constellation. We should also note here that we are in a geometric and geographic framework, which suggests that being in relation to and with my-self is, fundamentally, a “geo” or earth-ing, grounding experience. Such an experience presupposes that a love affair is at hand, in hand, that our hands must busy themselves with learning not only *to love* ourselves but who/what that self is that we are to love. Furthermore, as in any exercise of interrelationality, we must submit to the fact that not only does “individuation” never fulsomely emerge from any human individual, *neither can I fully love my-self*. This moment of not only standing outside yet with one's-self is nothing other than the archetypal moment—which is to say, eternal, timeless yet time bound, the eruption of the eternal in the temporary—of tugging and pulling, listening and admonishing, consoling and condemning. In other words, of learning how to live. And it is only until this relationship is acknowledged, submitted to, and engaged with that I can then begin to love the Otherness of an-other. The Other, then, *is* both within and without, yet I suggest here we should listen to the perennial dictum rather than today's dictum of tolerance: let us not learn to tolerate, let us learn to *love*.

I have finally come to the point of re-visiting the Other, and it is the wisdom of Jung that seems most pertinent: “We cannot change anything unless we accept it. Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses.” Toleration of the Other, whether it be the Other within or the Otherness in my wife or ethnicity, is today's form of condemnation for its limitation condemns the intimate closeness demanded of love. Toleration demands distancing, but a distancing that remains distant no matter how tolerable the Other is. It is for this reason why we must learn to love, we must learn to not only step out so we can

live in but we must also learn to step in, we must *partake*. If we do not partake, if we do not step into the fluid flux of living interrelated with ourselves and others, then Otherness' repressed existence will continue to haunt us by its unwillingness to subside.

We might die, but Otherness, as an archetypal force, will not. The responsibility, however, of how Otherness invades our presents and presence is left to us. The question now is not whether or not Otherness is archetypal, but how do we live with it? In other words, how do we learn, yet again, to live an-Other way?