Seeking Reason and Rebirth: Jungian archetypes, scientism, and a question about transhumanism

Abstract

Attempts to make Carl Gustav Jung's theory of archetypes scientifically credible tend to invoke biology and evolution theory. These convey faith in the power of science (scientism), taken here as a cultural metanarrative. The essay provides a critical appraisal of both biology-oriented and culture-oriented trends in Jungian studies, and steers the conceptualization of archetypes towards issues of embodied subjectivity and narrativity. Thematic parallels between transhumanism, on the one side, and the rebirth archetype as described by Jung, on the other, serve as a case in point.

Keywords: Archetypes, C. G. Jung, scientism, transhumanism, rebirth, cultural complex

A century ago, Weber (1919/2009) described the 'fate of our times' as 'characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the "disenchantment of the world"' (p.155). Intellectualization denoted the belief that we could rationally learn and master all things should we wish to. A century later, transhumanism epitomizes this belief. Its advocates urge investing in biotechnologies that could enhance human capacities in ways that will be permanently integrated into human bodies—so much so, that convergent technologies 'will allow us to transcend these limitations of our biological bodies and brains. We will gain power over our fates. Our mortality will be in our own hands. We will … live forever' (Kurzweil, 2005, p.23). This invokes rebirth themes such as described by Jung (1950/1959a). Myths and legends typically conjure supernatural events (e.g., falling asleep in a cave and waking up centuries later) or magical agents that confer longevity beyond the natural span. For instance, Khidr, 'having drunk of the Water of Immortality, is now alive, and will live for evermore. He dwells in the Invisible Kingdom' (Blomfield, 1940, p.199). There is a profound difference between the spiritual significance of Khidr in Middle Eastern traditions and the kind of transformation envisaged by transhumanists. Nevertheless, imaginal parallels may raise the question of whether the ambition to live forever is archetypal. Answering this question depends on how archetypes are conceptualised, which is a matter of controversy even among Jungians.

Jungian and transhumanist discourses have no mutual contact, to my knowledge, but both represent consequences of the Age of Reason. Jung studied human irrationality, but viewed his theorising as grounded in reason and therefore as scientific (Jones, 2019). Levin (2021) characterises transhumanists' rational essentialism as 'an avowed Enlightenment legacy' (p.17). Both discourses are premised on the notion of a psychological interior that is neither identical with brain processes

nor a supernatural soul. Jung defended 'a provisional view of the psyche as a relatively closed system' (1928, cited in Jones, 2001, p.241). Transhumanism alludes to the possibility of digitalising human consciousness. The moral claims of humanism resound in Jung's statement, 'We doctors are forced, for the sake of our patients … to tackle the darkest and most desperate problems of the soul' (1946, cited in Jones, 2019, p.291) and in transhumanist Zoltan Istvan's declaration that transhumanism 'seeks to merge human beings with machines in order to overcome the biological limits of man, disease and ultimately death through technology and science' (von Miller, 2020, online).

Faith in the power of science to illuminate and ameliorate the human condition—in a word, scientism—could be viewed as a cultural metanarrative. It legitimises arguments for the credibility of untestable hypotheses such as Jung's theory of archetypes and for futuristic predictions such as made by transhumanists. My theoretical position on archetypes is not neutral (indicated in the following) but this essay's primary focus is on phenomena of scientism in the Jungian discourse. In this context, transhumanism serves as a testbed for some of the conceptual issues.

Naming it 'archetype'

Jung (1919) introduced the term 'archetype' in an English-language lecture in which he distinguished between instincts and 'pre-existent forms of apprehension … viz., the "archetypes" of apperception, which are the prior determining constituents of all experience' (p.19; revised as Jung, 1948/1960a). Stating that he borrowed the term from St Augustine, Jung linked his own idea to a philosophical tradition from Plato through medieval philosophy to Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant.

Kant's view of the mind as a set of functions that are applied to sensory inputs was given a twentieth-century incarnation also in cognitive-psychological models of mental modularity. It culminates in Cosmides and Tooby's (1992) postulation of multiple highly specialised domain-specific computational mechanisms that evolved to solve specific problems of adaptation. The postulation of Darwinian modules specialising in finding food, mating, kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and more has long been staple in evolutionary biology. The 'modularity' implied by Jungian archetypes, however, is unlike the modularity hypothesised by psychologists and biologists. For example, a Darwinian approach can be persuasively applied to mathematical abilities. The evolutionary basis is well-supported with evidence of number perception in nonhuman animals and preverbal human infants, although formal maths teaching accounts for uniquely human skills (Ferrigno, Jara-Ettinger, Piantadosi and Cantlon, 2017). Number symbolism too is uniquely human, but in an entirely different way. The number 3 has had a unique significance. It is the number of wishes in fairytales. It is a lucky number in Japanese tradition. Jung (1948/1969) regarded it as

symbolising wholeness and discussed its religious significance: 'Arrangement in triads is an archetype in the history of religion, which in all probability formed the basis of the Christian Trinity' (§173). The universality of this number's positive associations warrant naming it an archetype, but if archetypes were the product of natural selection, what could possibly be the survival advantage of imagining '3' as lucky? Jung did not make such claims.

The word 'archetype' has a separate history in biology. Since the 1840s it has been closely associated with Owen's description of the vertebrate archetype (basic forms of limbs). Richardson, Minelli and Coates (1999) contended that 'archetypes represent no more than selected clusters of conserved features associated with a particular taxon' and that traditional archetypes such as Owen's have led to simplified representations that exclude cross-species variations; therefore, 'archetypes are not real entities, but idealized constructions based on artificial selections of characters' (p.5). A similar charge could be levelled at Jungian archetypes (Jung did not mention Owen's vertebrate archetype, to my knowledge). His descriptions of specific archetypes are idealised constructions based on the abstraction of a few motifs shared by widely diverse sources—dreams, hallucinations, folklore, myths, alchemy, and more. Moreover, unlike the relation between the forms of limbs and their functions, the same archetypal motif could serve dissimilar functions. As Jung (1954/1959b) himself warned, it would not suffice 'simply to connect a dream about a snake with the mythological occurrence of snakes, for who is to guarantee that the functional meaning of the snake in the dream is the same as in the mythological setting?' (§103).

Towards the end of his life, Jung (1964) commented that his concept was 'often misunderstood as meaning certain definite mythological images or motifs. … The archetype is a tendency to form such representations of a motif' (p.67). The confusion reflects the variety of ways in which he elaborated his theory over several decades (Knox, 2003, Jones, 2003). Consequently, mutually incompatible interpretations can find equal support in Jung's own writings. Defining archetypes as biological entities (Stevens, 1982) is at odds with defining them as emergent image-schemas (Knox, 2003). Both differ from defining archetypes as eternal cosmic principles uniting mind and matter (Santilli, 2015), a view that Jung developed with physicist Pauli. Further to muddle matters, Jung used the term 'archetypes' interchangeably with 'primordial images' and separated the primordial image from concrete images. He specified the conceptual distinction relatively late:

> The archetypal representations (images and ideas) … should not be confused with
> the archetype as such. They are very varied structures which all point back to one
> essentially 'irrepresentable' basic form … characterized by certain formal elements
> and by certain fundamental meanings. (Jung, 1954/1960c, §417)

An epistemological problem inheres in the circularity of hypothesising the existence of a psychological entity whose existence can be demonstrated only by reducing myriad images and ideas to elements that conform to the hypothesised form.

The credibility conundrum

Jung believed that the proof of his theory lay in the recurrence of similar symbolisms in unconnected settings. To assume that the archetype 'is not inherited but comes into being in every child anew would be just as preposterous as the primitive belief that the sun which rises in the morning is a different sun from that which set the evening before' (Jung, 1954/1959b, §152). He reasoned that these forms, 'if they ever "originated" their origin must have coincided at least with the beginning of the species,' and therefore the primordial image must be hereditary, 'already present in the germ-plasm' (§152). Germ-plasm theory, first proposed in the 1880s, is a precursor of the modern understanding of how physical characteristics are inherited. It contradicts Lamarck's theory of acquired characteristics. Yet, Jung's belief of how archetypes came to be in the germ-plasm echoes Lamarck:

> There are as many archetypes as there are typical situations in life. Endless
> repetition has engraved these experiences into our psychic constitution, not in the
> form of images filled with content, but at first only as *forms without content*,
> representing merely the possibility of a certain type of perception and action.
> (Jung, 1936/1959c, §99)

Apart from these and other occasional comments, however, Jung left causal explanations to biologists and devoted his efforts to describing 'the "human quality" of the human being, the specifically human form his activities take' (Jung, 1954/1959b, §152).

A conundrum ensues for those who would pin the credibility of Jung's theory on the natural sciences. Stevens (1982) defined the archetype as 'a "centre" in the central nervous system which actively seeks its own activation in the psyche and in the world' (p.39). More recently, attempts to make archetypes theory credible insist on its compatibility with modern evolutionary theory, neuroscience, cognitive science, and more (Maloney, 2003). Not everyone agrees, and debates persist within the Jungian community (e.g., Hogenson, 2001, 2019, Goodwyn, 2019, Merchant, 2019). Critics too draw upon the sciences, firstly to show that neuroscience and genetics do not support attributing archetypes to hardwired biological entities and secondly to show that conceptualising archetypes as emergent properties of dynamic systems accords with science (e.g., McDowell, 2001). Unrelated to Jungian circles, Becker and Neuberg (2019) proposed to revise Jung's concept in the light of evolutionary, developmental and cognitive psychology:

phylogenetically, 'Archetypes simulate and predict adaptive responses to recurring social problems' (p.61); ontogenetically, 'Archetypes are merely capacities; they depend critically on experience' (p.63); cognitively, 'Archetypal representational systems are dynamic, multimodal, and subsymbolically grounded' (p.66). Their model deserves closer attention than is given here. Yet, it arguably sidesteps the very phenomena (dreams, myths, etc.) that Jung investigated and to which he applied his theory. For instance, Becker and Neuberg give the example of encountering a stranger who is perceived as hostile, averring that the situation usually elicits some reaction although the manifest reactions could vary across cultures. A Jungian inquiry would concern—not the situated reactions—but symbolic representations of experiencing oneself being in such situations.

Circa 2000, several influential Jungians started to explore concepts of emergence. Most elaborately, Knox's (2003) image-schema model describes archetypal imagery as emerging out of early life experiences. Proponents of emergentism tend to regard the assumption of an innate origin as redundant, even damaging: 'we Jungians cannot go on basing our theory of archetypes on scientific assumptions which have been falsified … It is important that we stop arguing that archetypes are transmitted genetically if we want to be taken seriously' (Roesler, 2012, p.234). Jungians' self-positioning does not necessarily redeem Jung outside Jungian circles. In their commentary on Becker and Neuberg (2019), Boyd, Pasca and Conroy-Beam (2019) cited Knox and a few others but took the fact that Jungians themselves problematise the concept of archetypes as evidence that the theory is 'fundamentally broken … outdated and unnecessary' (p.95). I prefer to view Jungians' debates as attesting to the vitality of Jung's legacy. Analytical psychology continues to evolve. The readiness to dismiss innatism among some Jungians attests to its relative triviality. Jung had more crucial things to say about archetypes and more to offer than just archetypes theory. His core concept is arguably individuation (achieving the wholeness of the self by integrating conscious and unconscious elements).

Shifting the problematic to narrativity

The staying power of the controversy about innatism reflects, in part, tensions between expectations about scientific validation and what Jung was doing. Roesler (2012) commented that although Jung positioned himself as a natural scientist, his studies are 'in line with a long tradition of hermeneutics, interpretation and cultural theory' (p.227; see also Smythe and Baydala, 2012). From this standpoint, the construct of archetypes may be evaluated in terms of its utility as an interpretive tool. The conundrum of scientific credibility would be replaced with the question of whether this construct allows us to analyse aspects of human psychological functioning that other constructs don't.

The idea of pre-existing '*forms without content*, representing merely the possibility of a certain type of perception and action' (Jung, 1936/1959c, §99) could be contrasted with Gibson's (1979) concept of affordances. Gibson coined the word 'affordance' to indicate organism-environment invariants; for example, the ground affords walking or standing on to large terrestrial animals like us, but water doesn't. The impossibility of walking on water constrains our navigation of the physical environment (Gibson's point). My point: it fosters certain expectations about our own existence, and these find symbolic representation, e.g., the Gospel story of Jesus walking on water. If archetypes correspond to 'typical situations in life' (Jung, 1936/1959c, §99), the typical situation in the present example could be awareness of the physical limitations of the human body. I could not find legends of walking on water elsewhere, but tales of humanly impossible feats abound in mythologies and incarnate in comic-book stories of superheroes—any of which would have meanings of its own, invoke feelings, and serve social and psychological functions unrelated to physical affordances (e.g., the significance of Jesus walking on water may have for Christians).

Jung (1964) likened the archetypes to 'the impulse of birds to build nests, or ants to form organized colonies' (p.69) but he meant it in a general sense of natural behaviour. He suggested that there is 'another instinct, different from the drive to activity,' which is uniquely human and could 'be called *the reflective instinct*' (Jung, 1937/1960b, §241). The instinctual factor is the spontaneous formation of symbolic representations of subjective states. Reading Jung through the lens of existential phenomenology, Brooke (1991/2009) defined archetypes as 'the sources of the typical actions, reactions, and experiences that characterize the human species' (p. 226). He further stressed that the archetypal is 'neither "in" the body nor "in" the image but in the "between" which both body and image (world) reveal' (p.219). I would similarly underline the archetypal patterning of human experience. A pattern cannot exist separately of the things being arranged one way or another. As I see it, the archetypal patterning does not lie directly in how human bodies are attuned to the world; it lies in how this attunement is communicated to one's consciousness in dreams, feelings, and action tendencies. If visitors to a cathedral such as Notre Dame de Paris experience its cavernous interior as womblike, for instance, the association is visceral, impacting on deep feelings before and apart from any intellectual reflection. The architectural design (form) may be inseparable from its impact on visitors (function): 'Gothic architects and craftsmen … crafted cavernous interiors that aimed to reach the sky, diminishing the human scale and stressing the insignificance of man against God's loftiness' (Ramzy, 2021, p.379-380). Standing inside it, we might feel both diminished and contained, childlike. Whereas the semiotic implications of the (objective) form could be intellectually grasped (e.g., through photos or videos), the actualisation of the interior's (subjective)

function is contingent on one's physical presence inside it. The archetypal patterning of experience applies to embodied subjectivity more directly than to semiotic aspects of cultural products.

Should psychologists analyse myths, fairytales, religious scriptures, and so forth? The answer is negative if psychology is modelled strictly on the natural sciences. It may remain negative when psychology is broadened to qualitative descriptions of human lives—unless researchers can claim some relevance for understanding human lives as lived today. Baydala and Smythe (2012) justified reading Euripides' *The Bacchae* on grounds that ancient literature can yield new understanding of current issues in psychology, identifying their framework as critical presentism. Their epistemology could be contrasted with the uncritical presentism implicit in Hatfield's (2019) exploration of the 'archetypal roots' of Alcoholics Anonymous in *The Bacchae*. She invites us 'to approach this exploration mythopoetically, as one would approach a dream' and to enter with her 'into a Dionysian consciousness—fluid, embodied, right-brain, holistic' (p.54). Scholars of the classics who seek to establish what the tragedy meant in its own time and place might disapprove of both kinds of presentism. My point at this juncture concerns the two ways in which the construct 'archetype' is deployed. Baydala and Smythe (2012), defining archetypal motifs as 'non-conceptual aesthetic expressions' of pervasive aspects of human life and embodiment (p.849), used Jung's theory 'not as a foundation but, rather, as an approach to inquiry' (p.847). In contrast, Hatfield (2019) quotes Jung's statement, 'The archetype—let us never forget this—is a psychic organ present in all of us' (p.54) as a justification for weaving personal experiences, Greek mythology, and *The Bacchae*. Her epistemological stance accords with what Jones (2014) described as hermeneutics of faith and amplification in Jungianism.

As suggested earlier, the problematic of Jung's original theory lies in the circularity of theorising the existence of archetypes-as-such that generate a diversity of images and ideas which in turn are taken as evidence for the theorised entity. Goodwyn (2013), focusing on folklore, myths and legends whilst calling to abandon the idea of archetypes-as-such, has redefined archetypes as 'the collection of psychological constraints and biases, of whatever origin, that work in concert to create one or more resonant attractor states in the narrative field' (p.400). In dynamical systems theory, the term *attractor* denotes a set of properties towards which a system evolves irrespective of the system's initial conditions; an attractor state is a stable state of organisation that enables the system's ongoing functioning. Elaborating the metaphor, Goodwyn invites us to imagine all possible narratives as existing on a field in which:

> Troughs correspond to high likelihood, acting like gravity wells on narratives over
> time. These gravity wells, or attractor points, represent stories that align well with
> the reliably emergent universal patterns in the human mind (whatever they may be,

positions. (Goodwyn, 2013, p.395).

To apply the metaphor for present purposes, the transhumanist narrative could be viewed as gravitating towards 'rebirth' without necessarily sharing common origins with any other 'rebirth' narratives. That is, the trough we imaginatively see does not generate representations of rebirth; rather, it is caused by the large quantity of separate narratives that gravitate towards this theme.

Rebirth and the city

Jung introduced his ideas of the collective unconscious and archetypes before he hit upon the terminology in a 1912 monograph that was substantially revised in 1952. In both versions, a chapter titled 'Symbols of the mother and of rebirth' analyses religious scriptures and mythologies and, inter alia, provides examples that the 'city is a maternal symbol, a woman who harbours the inhabitants in herself like children' (Jung, 1912/1919, p.129 and 1952/1956, §303). The 'early' Jung was trying to align his fledgling idea with Freudian principles and echoed Freud's notion that the incest taboo diverts the flow of desire away from the mother: 'This compulsion can be derived from the need to manifest an amount of libido bound up with the mother, but in such a way that the mother is represented by or concealed in a symbol' (Jung, 1912/1919, p.133). The 'later' Jung dismissed Freud's view of symbols as concealing forbidden sexual desires. The 1952 revision links mother symbolisms to a desire for rebirth or return to childlike sense of security (not incestuous relationship).

After 1912, Jung radically altered the concept of libido. He decoupled it from Freud's notion of sexual desire and instead defined 'psychic energy' as 'the *intensity* of a psychic process, its *psychological value*. This does not imply an assignment of value, whether moral, aesthetic, or intellectual; the psychological value is already implicit in its determining power, which expresses itself in dentine psychic effects' (Jung, 1921/1971, §778; see Jones, 2001, on parallels with Lewin's field theory). The following extract retains Freudian connotations, but the reference to canalization could be understood as referring to why something has intense psychological value for someone:

> The meaning and purpose of this canalization are particularly evident when the city appears in place of the mother: the infantile attachment … is a crippling limitation for the adult, whereas attachment to the city fosters his civic duties and at least enables him to lead a useful existence. In primitives the tribe takes the place of the city. (Jung 1952/1956, §313)

The quoted paragraph continues to suggest that some present situation 'reactivates the ways and habits of childhood, and above all the relation to the mother' (§313). In other words, something in an

adult's present evokes yearnings for the childhood state of being loved, safe, and nurtured, which may be fulfilled by proactive involvement with the community.

In both versions, the paragraph in focus leads to John's vision of the apocalypse, 'where two cities play a great part,' one of which is cursed and the other is blessed (Jung 1912/1919, p.133, and 1952/1956, §313). In 1912, however, Jung focused on the image of a harlot riding a dragon and suggested that she represented Babylon, the biblical city of the damned, and linked it to 'the idea of the "terrible" mother, who seduces all people to whoredom with devilish temptation' (p.134). In 1952, he replaced that description with an interpretation of the dragon's seven heads as representing seven hills and suggested that the image is 'probably a direct allusion to Rome, the city whose temporal power oppressed the world at the time' (Jung, 1952/1956, §314). Replacing the biblical Babylon with historical Rome alludes to the cultural and political setting in which the vision's author lived. Similarly, Jung originally singled out the belief that 'Christians are the children of the City Above, not sons of the earthly city-mother' and—discussing it alongside sea symbolism in an Indian sun myth and more—concluded that 'religious thought is bound up with the compulsion to call the mother no longer the mother, but City, Source, Sea, etc.' (1912/1919, p.133). The 1952 counterpart text decentres from religious thought, features also earthly cities wherein people foster civic duties (as seen), and concludes that the 'symbol-creating process substitutes for the mother the city, the well, the cave, the Church, etc.' (Jung, 1952/1956, §313). Unlike the early list, the revised list alludes to settings of social significance: the well as the hub of village life, the cave as home for its prehistoric dwellers, and the church for the parishioners.

The 1952 chapter overall retains its 1912 precursor's exhaustive account of religious symbolisms, in which context the allusions to people's embedding in sociocultural milieus seem like throwaway remarks. Jung's students, Erich Neumann and Joseph Henderson, brought an interest in the person-culture interface into classical Jungianism. As Neumann (1959) put it, 'The archetypal as such is imageless and nameless, and the form which the formless assumes at any time is, as an image arising in the medium of man, transient. … its representation is transient and must undergo change and transformations' (p.92). Focusing on artistic creativity, he highlighted 'a continuous interchange' between the collective unconscious and 'the cultural canon (which represents the group's collective consciousness of those archetypal values which have become dogma)' whereby 'new constellations of the collective unconscious achieve form and expression' (p.90). Henderson wrote to Jung in 1947, 'I am gathering the fundamental attributes of historical development of Protestantism and trying to put them together with the modern *cultural complex* appearing in our Protestant patients on the psychological plane' (quoted in Singer and Kaplinsky 2010, p.22). In 1962, he articulated a concept

of a *cultural unconscious*: 'an area of historical memory that lies between the collective unconscious and the manifest pattern of the culture' (Henderson, 1990, p.103).

Problems of 'complexing' cultures

A spate of publications deploying the terms 'cultural complexes' and 'cultural unconscious' emerged in the 2000s, spearheaded by Kimbles and Singer in various works (e.g., Singer and Kimbles, 2004). The timing is interesting, given that Henderson articulated those concepts several decades earlier. Kimbles (2014) defines cultural complexes as the 'unconscious dynamics in group life' that underlie 'basic issues of invisibility and namelessness, marginalisation, powerlessness, and rootlessness ... melded with class, racism, gender and ethnicity' (p.4). His definition takes in its sweep a gamut of socio-politically loaded issues that have become topical since the late 20th century. Jungians' interest in these topics, however, was not associated with attention to what non-Jungian scholars say about the same topics. Singer (2013) reflects, 'We wanted to open up our own tradition to speaking out more about collective events … using his earliest theoretical contribution—complex theory—as a tool for reclaiming one way in which we might explore the collective psyche' (p.408). Jung developed his theory of the autonomous complexes in the 1900s, before archetypes theory, although subsequently proposed that complexes have archetypal cores (Jung, 1948/1960d). The current culture-oriented trend invigorates analytical psychology with timely concerns but does not eliminate the problems inherent in Jung's model.

The controversy about the scientific credibility of archetypes drops out of sight in this context not simply because the focus is on complexes but because archetypes theory is taken as requiring no proof beyond Jung's formulation. In a way, scientism becomes its own shadow. In Jung's model of the personality structure, the shadow comprises characteristics that are disowned by the conscious ego and might be projected onto a demonised 'other'. Furthermore, when the conscious attitude is too one-sided, an opposite unconscious attitude (shadow) sooner or later asserts itself somehow. Like one side of a coin, the shadow cannot be removed. The same may extend to one's worldview. If we reason that ghosts don't exist, the shadow of our reasoning is not someone else's belief in ghosts but our own blind faith in the disenchanted world of Western rationalism. The shadow of science is not unscientific belief-systems, but scientism. Scientism's shadow may assert itself in disregard of scholarly criteria for evaluating truth-claims.

The phrase *cultural complex* is not uniquely Jungian. The American Psychological Association defines it as 'a distinctive pattern of activities, beliefs, rites, and traditions associated with one central feature of life in a particular culture' (APA, 2022). The APA definition refers to observable phenomena that different theories may explain in different ways. In contrast, the Jungian

approach starts with a specific theory and its postulation of abstract entities ('complexes') that are believed to produce certain observable patterns. Jung (1948/1960d) described the complexes as components of the personal unconscious and therefore as originating in lived experiences. Since members of a demographic group are likely to experience similar life situations, they may develop similar complexes. Addressing (white) Americans, Jung (1930/1966) remarked, 'Just as the coloured man [*sic*] lives in your cities and even within your houses, so also he lives under your skin, subconsciously. Naturally it works both ways. Just as every Jew has a Christ complex, so every Negro has a white complex and every American a Negro complex' (§963). Taking Jung's comment forward, Brewster (2019), herself an African American Jungian analyst, has formulated a conceptual model for understanding racial prejudice: 'our racial complex hides behind shadow, surrounds it, and in the case of racial prejudice gives it expression' (p.167). Her personal account of growing up as a black child in the South poignantly illustrates how slavery trauma is transmitted through generations and impacts on the development of individuals' personality. The persuasiveness of her theoretical explanation, however, depends on whether we accept the Jungian canon.

Within the Jungian corpus, culture-oriented publications offset Jung's fixation on analysing arcane texts that likely were inaccessible to his patients and unlikely to impact on their lives. For example, while Guo, Shen, Zhang and Wu (2019) identify archetypal elements in a Chinese hero myth, they also describe the myth's ongoing significance in modern China, and their clinical case study demonstrates its emergence in one man's therapy sessions. Whereas Jung excavated Islamic mysticism for archetypal representations of individuation, Adams (2006) describes the Islamic cultural unconscious in dreams of a Muslim man whose arrival in the USA as a legal immigrant from the Middle East coincided with the 9/11 attacks—a coincidence that drives home how geopolitical situations impact on individuals' lives and mental health.

Some writers in the Jungian context apply the concepts of cultural unconscious and cultural complexes to processes at the level of groups or societies. Oksana, Miles, Indhushree, Bujko, and Thomas (2016) aver that while an interest in cultures has gained momentum across the academia, little attention is given to unconscious dynamics that could illuminate marginalisation and oppression in society. Remarking also that Jungians tend to rely on clinical material, they contend that 'greater awareness of processes related to the cultural unconscious and cultural complexes' would be achieved 'through the accounts of researchers who have actively sought to examine these dynamics' (p.661). They demonstrate this potential with personal accounts of their dissertations on African American adolescent males, human trafficking in India, and birth and death rituals in Macedonia. However, their accounts centre on reporting their own feelings, impressions, and dreams about their

research topics—in effect, making themselves the object of study. It is unclear how researchers' feelings could shed light on macro-level dynamics of marginalisation and oppression in society.

Critically appraising the theory of cultural complexes, Lu (2013) notes that Jungians attempting to analyse social phenomena encroach upon disciplines specialising in investigating collectives (sociology, anthropology, and history) but tend to conflate the different levels of analysis. Among other things, 'Singer and Kimbles are engaged in a form of psychohistory that leaves the "history" out' (p.392). Lu's example is a 2006 essay in which Singer linked 'the appearance of a revolutionary flag in America during the mid-1770s with a George Bush speech in 2005, an opera about the race to build the atomic bomb by John Adams, conflict in the Middle East, and Steven Spielberg's film, *Munich*,' on grounds that all these reveal the same archetype, which Singer called 'the archetypal defences of the group spirit' (p.394). The attempt to reduce fundamentally different kinds of events and types of evidence to some common archetypal core 'does an injustice to the historical record and the social, political and economic factors converging to give rise to such conditions' (p.394). A contentious reduction of socio-political movements to archetypes can be found also in two 'troubling' essays Jung (as Brask, 2000, characterised them) in which Jung linked the rise of the Nazis to a Germanic archetype, Wotan.

Singer (2006) arguably engages also in a form of psychology that leaves out the psychological subject, i.e., the individual human being. His phrase, 'archetypal defences of the group spirit,' might sound like a poetic way of saying that people tend to be protective about their in-group, but Singer seems to mean it in some literal sense: 'Once a certain level of emotional intensity is achieved in the psyche of the group, archetypal defences of the group spirit come to the forefront and begin to determine and even dictate how the group will think, feel, react, and behave' (p.8). In contrast, Tajfel's social identity theory (SIT), a classic in social psychology, attributes intergroup conflict to individuals' in-group preference (Islam, 2014). SIT is supported with rigorous experimental evidence of the conditions under which individuals are more likely to identify with their group and to act upon their self-identification. If wished, we may ask whether in-group preference is an innate tendency and, if so, could it be viewed as archetypal; but this line of inquiry cannot be pursued in a sweep of historical events, presidential speeches, operas, movies, etc., such as presented by Singer.

It might be tempting to seek a cultural complex 'behind' transhumanism or to attribute this socio-political movement to a technologized cultural unconscious. In my view, pursuing this line would be misguided for several reasons, including the risk of overlooking conscious motivations such as hi-tech elite's vested interests in biotechnological research and development. Instead, an

archetypal approach to the topic may seek to describe how certain narratives gravitate towards 'rebirth' in ways that reflect their specific cultural context.

What the question about transhumanism may (or may not) elucidate

Jung's (1950/1959a) essay on rebirth originated in two impromptu talks presented at a 1939 conference themed 'the symbolism of rebirth in the religious conception of all times and peoples' (Stein, 2013, p.28). It was the eve of World War Two, and the conference took place against the backdrop of political turmoil. Jung reportedly noted 'a feeling of the Last Judgement in the air' (p.29). A similar feeling is in the air at the time of my writing. Global and local aftermaths of the COVID-19 pandemic are compounded with the Ukraine war, the energy crisis, looming world famine, and more. At times like this, people may seek spiritual rebirth through religion or strong political commitments. Even under conditions of prosperity and safety, awareness of one's mortality might induce symbolic representations of the wish to overcome it.

Jung (1950/1959a) identified five forms of rebirth motifs: (1) metapsychosis (transmigration of souls), (2) reincarnation, (3) resurrection, (4) *renovatio* (renewal within the span of individual life), and (5) witnessing or participating in some rite of transformation. In the spirit of that conference, he illustrated each with examples drawn from religions. Under *renovatio* Jung classed legends of healing or strengthening of the body or mind without a profound change in the person's essential nature. Comparable examples could be found in modern popular culture, e.g., in scenarios of humans digitalising their consciousness and thereby surviving their biological bodies, and in the transhumanist discourse. Reducing transhumanism to the rebirth archetype would be misguided for a variety of reasons, as mentioned, but suffices it here to underline the undeterminable relation of form to function. It is difficult, if not impossible, to infer subjective functions solely by analysing objective forms presented in narratives. The ubiquity of rebirth symbolism does not mean that it has similar significance in all cases or for everyone. As seen, Jung (1952/1956) linked it to Mother symbolisms and infant-caregiver attachment. The rebirth essay (Jung, 1950/1959) analyses a Khidr legend that he interpreted as a complete expression of the individuation process, thus linking rebirth to transformations akin to spiritual self-transcendence. I have suggested fear of mortality. There could be additional states expressed in narratives that gravitate towards rebirth.

Transhumanists' futuristic visions might seem like science-fiction but are not fiction. Their authors do not make aesthetic judgments when composing their texts nor create their themes as allegories for the human condition. The possibility that technological advances could reconfigure human existence cannot be ruled out. We take airplanes for granted, for instance. The 12th century Jewish philosopher Maimonides listed 'an iron ship floating in the air' alongside 'a man whose head

reaches the heaven and whose feet rest on the earth, or an animal with a thousand eyes' as examples of impossible things created by the imagination (translated in Gorfinkle, 1912, p.41). My immediate point is that the same psychological processes may account for sheer fantasy and for imagining things that could become real. The implications differ. Whereas Jungian individuation and religious spiritual goals aspire to a state in which one's ego is transcended or transformed for the better—and sheer fantasies of rebirth symbolise the goal—transhumanists aspire to transcendence of the body that would leave the ego unaltered. Having our mortality in our own hands (to paraphrase Kurzweil, 2005) will not make us more virtuous or enlightened.

Criticising posthumanism, Levin (2021) contends that the stakes 'are immense both because transhumanists urge humanity's own self-transcendence via science and technology and because their arguments state or suggest that bioenhancement may be morally required' (p.1). To me, the transhumanist vision begs the question of who exactly will benefit. If the transhumanist future comes to pass, it is likely to widen the gap between the haves and have-nots, the bio-enhanced and unenhanced. That debate aside, while proponents and critics alike assign moral and intellectual values to the transhumanist agenda, the *psychological value*—the meaning that is already implicit in its determining power (to paraphrase Jung, 1921/1971)—would be expressed in the intensity and direction of affect that transhumanism has for participants in the debate.

Conclusion

This essay has considered, firstly, implications of scientism for the discourse of Jungian archetypes. Efforts to make Jung's theory scientifically credible convey faith in what Lyotard (1984) called pragmatics of scientific knowledge. Since Jungian hypotheses cannot be validated by means of scientific methodologies, their rhetorical strategy evinces pragmatics of narrative knowledge. To paraphrase Bruner (1986), in the domain of narrative we ask that 'upon reflection, the account correspond to some perspective we can imagine or "feel" as right' (p.52). The account that 'feels' as right to some Jungians has the structure of the ordeal adventure genre. It starts with something amiss in Jung's speculations and ends with rescuing the theory after an arduous journey through the sciences. Secondly, the essay considered the post-Jungian trend associated with the theory of cultural complexes, positioned as scientism's shadow (so to speak). The 'case' of transhumanism has served to steer the conceptualisation of archetypes towards issues of narrativity dynamics (awaiting expansion elsewhere), which departs from scientism.

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