

## “The Challenge of Giegerich”

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There’s no doubt, people have trouble with Giegerich. Upon discovering I would be giving a talk about him, an experienced Jungian analyst whom I greatly admire told me, “One of the impacts of reading [Wolfgang] Giegerich is that he makes you feel stupid...no one can think psychologically except for *him*.” Of Giegerich’s works, Ginette Paris states:

[C]ourage and determination are...needed from the reader, to cut through Giegerich’s heavy hegelian language. He seems to intentionally wrap his ideas in layers and layers of impossible language and germanic heavyness to protect them from uninitiated frivolous French amateurs like myself.

Well, this talk is called “Giegerich for Beginners,” *not* “Giegerich for Dummies,” despite the fact that we probably all feel like dummies when reading Giegerich at some point or another. But dummies are not allowed; reading Giegerich demands that we *think*. Not *only* that we *think* however. He also asks for profound humility and a true commitment to soul. Another way to say it is that he asks us to put on our thinking caps, get off our high horse, and roll up our sleeves in service to a relentless devotion to the work of soul.

Giegerich’s “impossible” language includes words like Relentless. Logical. Absolute. Positive. Negative. Uroboric. Interior. Sublate. *Opus Contra Naturam* (or a work against nature). We are probably familiar with most of these words. Ok, maybe with the exception of “sublate” which was borrowed from Hegel and has the three-fold contradictory meaning of raising up (as in raise up your hands), preserving, and cancelling. It’s closest English counterpart is “to kick upstairs” Inwood (1992).

Now sometimes Giegerich will say something a bit tricky, for example, when he describes the phenomenon of true art:

Art comes into being through the relentless interiorization of the positivity of the empirical experience and its 'realistic' content into the negativity of the form of mere fantasy. (2009, p. 365)

For a second I had the thought I might actually try to *explain* the meaning of this sentence to you, but only for a second, because I remembered that I don't really need to. In my experience, every essay of Giegerich's is remarkably complete and fully self-contained. Each has within it all the information you need to understand it – if you actually *finish* it... :) In fact, the essay I just quoted from, in which Giegerich critiques Jung's Red Book, I read long before I had any inkling of Giegerich's Hegelian dialectic approach to the soul and the way he connects it to alchemy. I didn't yet know that to Giegerich, the soul is not located in externals or in the world or the person, but rather in the interiority of the imaginal realm, as “the inner infinite radiance of the concrete phenomenon or situation in its eachness” (2005, p. 14). “The soul” *is* not, it must be *made*, however in such a self-contradictory (dialectical) way that what is only the produced result is nevertheless at once the origin of the whole movement” (2005, p. 10).

This paper has been very difficult to write. In preparation I pored over many of the books and essays Giegerich has written, trying to *get at the heart* of what he is about in the hopes of somehow being able to articulate that for you tonight. After many dead ends, stone walls and frustrated attempts, it dawned on me that I must actually follow the way of Giegerich and *negate* my passionate attempted forward movement by applying it back onto itself. *I must get at the heart of getting at the heart*. Immediately this statement backs me out of my literal quest and into a psychological consciousness. I am now removed from what *I* want, and into the uroboric realm of the soul's inquiry... I am backed into myself, into a deeply subjective place, and I realize that I am not yet able to

get at the heart of Giegerich's work. I am a beginner; I can get only at *my* heart, so I will speak to that, to what moves me about Giegerich's work.

You may remember how Jung described the four stages of therapy. The first is confession, next elucidation, then comes education, and finally transformation. It is in this final stage, that of *transformation*, that Giegerich's notion of psychological consciousness is applicable, and *only in that stage*. So it is really important when we read Giegerich not to get ahead of ourselves, because in the initial stages, patients are often in need of "down-to-earth help, such as real human attention, sympathy, and understanding; an honest face-to-face encounter with another human being; guidance through personal crisis or difficult life situations, or more generally a kind of philosophical practical wisdom" (2012, p. 216) as opposed to rigorous dialectical inquiry, or the relentless absolute-negative interiorization of externals. "Only with Jung's last category [that of transformation] would we reach the precincts of psychology proper." (2012, p. 316). While this rule applies to clinical practice, Geigerich asserts that psychology as a discipline and mode of thought must be held to the highest standard. I agree with him. Psychology itself, insofar as it consists of the ideas and theories that contain *us*, must always strive for the highest stage of *psychological consciousness* and attain to that ideal. Psychology must always be *ahead* of the individual.

Giegerich states that, "The true locus of the soul is not the empirical individual in its positivity. Its true locus is psychology, [and] psychology not as it is abstractly conceived as a science, but as that concrete living thought to which the individual can rise up" (2005, p. 10). Giegerich pulls no punches here; his latest book *What is Soul* begins with the following charge:

Showing a complete lack of psychological conscience, Jungians after Jung (with only James Hillman and a very few others as exceptions) merely acted out Jung's psychology in various ways. Armed with Jung's and, partially, Freud's theoretical ideas as their model, they usually went directly, just like that, to the psychic material to be studied. They interpreted dreams, studied cases, developed theories, applied psychological concepts to ancient myths and works of literature, and applied myths and psychodynamic theories to personal biographies and pathologies. They were given over to the *object* before them, be it in the form of experiencing and observing it or in the form of theorizing about it, without wasting a thought on the *subject*, on what they themselves as observing or theorizing consciousness are doing, and on what justification there is, if any, for such a thing as psychology in the first place. What makes a psychology psychological? How do our individual assumptions and statements in psychology tie in with the whole of psychology as well as with modern reality around us? In what sense can we speak of a soul? Actually, these questions ought to be answered before one goes to work in psychology. Psychology, one of whose jobs it is to make conscious, first of all ought to be conscious of itself. (2012, p. 1)

So already, with the very first paragraph, we as psychologists are strongly challenged by Giegerich to develop our theories with a psychological consciousness.

#### THINK ONE THOUGHT

Ok. So let's put on our thinking caps – what does it mean to *think*? In describing his idea of the soul as thought, Giegerich references Heidegger's idea of what it means to *think one thought*. Giegerich (2008) notes that a person's entire work,

(that may be laid down in many volumes and may even include shifts of position) is the working out and unfolding of this one thought. And this thought is, according to Heidegger, not 'thought up' by the thinker; it comes to him... (p. 43)

Giegerich defines such thinking as not merely “discursive reasoning or the literal employment of the intellect” – rather, thinking would mean three things:

1. having (having experienced, having been reached and claimed by) a thought;
2. absolute obligation to and constraint by this one thought, no freedom, necessity;
3. potential openness to any and all phenomena of life in the light of one's single thought. (1998, p. 44).

In his book *The Soul's Logical Life* Giegerich (1998) claims “Jung is the thinker of the soul” (p. 43). As such, Jung was able to experience life, as Giegerich describes,

through this one thought as his lens, one might say. In everything he experienced, he was able to hold his place in the Notion “soul.” This one thought was *binding* for all his psychological work; he did not allow the inherent pull of phenomena to seduce him into looking at them in the light of perspectives that *they* might suggest... He remained faithful to his one thought, the Notion of soul. (1998, p. 43)

It seems then that to *think one thought* ultimately means to be able to *hold one's place* in an idea, to situate one's life inside of it, such that all experience is given by and contained within the thought. The question then may be, ‘have I been reached and claimed by a thought?’ What might be my thought to think? What is the thought that thinks me? Such a thought is not merely a superfluous thought to hold in our minds, nor would the work it demands be one more thing to accomplish in our lives. Rather, being given by a thought is the unity of expression with being, such that our lives themselves are given by the work. The thinking of this thought becomes the *ground of being* for our lives. Such *thinking about thinking* can result in psychological or soulful life (Miller, p. xx, 2005).

#### GET OFF YOUR HIGH HORSE

*Giegerich, Like Hillman and Jung before him, is concerned to stress a non-egoic hegemony of the psyche.* (Giegerich, Miller, & Mogenson, 2005). “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” (Giegerich et. al, 2005, p. xv).

Giegerich can seem quite critical, especially with respect to the hubris of the ego. He says,

It is a naïve and narcissistic mistake to take oneself so seriously as to confuse oneself with the true subject of the soul's life (what or whom it is about). *We* are no more than the stage or place where *it* happens, but where it happens for its own sake not for ours. The fact that it needs us to acquire a real presence in the world and undergo its process of further-determination must not go to our heads as if we were meant (2012, p. 312).

*Ouch. But yes, that ouch is important, because* “Doing psychology...demands that we have...departed from ourselves as ego-personality” (2012, p. 312). This is because

individuation process must rise from individual persons up to the level of humanity, ie,

the *concept* of man is what has to undergo [individuation]...Practically it means that the psychologist must not allow himself to have a soft spot, a narcissistic tender-mindedness, for his own or our collectively cherished ideals, values, and dogmas (that is, for “the ego”; for “the ego” is nothing else but our most precious ideals, interests, and beliefs). Psychology is not for sissies.... One has to be able to take it, where “it” here refers to the ruthless truths brought about by the objective soul movement or contained in soul phenomena. Ruthless truths as they manifested, for example, in ancient times in cruel rituals like human sacrifices or in more modern times in the fundamental ruptures and losses brought about by scientific and technological progress and the painful collapse of our traditional values and beliefs. ...One has to firmly, unperturbedly hold one's place vis-à-vis the soul's ruthlessness, allowing the painful soul contents to come home to oneself, to cut into one's flesh, and to transform, redefine consciousness. Professionalism: no pity and solidarity with the desperate wish of the ego, identification with the *anima alba*, to retain its subjectivism, its innocence, and its aestheticism. (2012, pp. 311-13)

Giegerich is careful to distinguish this way of being a psychologist from being an actual person in the world. We might liken what he is describing to inhabiting the analytic stance, or to the scholarly attitude of the depth psychological researcher. I personally have difficulty with this kind of “split” in my own life, especially as I become increasingly aware of the extent to which I *fail* to think psychologically and am unable to maintain a psychological consciousness. I watch myself identify fully with instinct or feeling, knowing that I must experience the process I am in and allow it to fully blossom in all its anima innocence and sentimental naïveté. This knowledge is often itself

experienced as a narcissistic cut into one's own flesh and must be borne, as it reveals the ego-centric longing to achieve a perfected ideal. Yet to understand this about myself, to allow it to be as it is, is in itself a step *toward* psychological thinking. With Giegerich, I am challenged in the ways I see that I do not think psychologically.

### LET'S GET TO WORK: SHADOW BEFORE ANIMA

To me, one of the most important aspects of Giegerich's ideas is the way in which he thinks about the shadow. Many of us are familiar with Neumann's famous book *Depth Psychology and the New Ethic* in which he quite scandalously illuminates humanity's "scapegoat" mentality, of which we are in the grip when, rather than admit the presence of our own dark shadow, we project it onto others and call *them* the "enemy." *You've got the problem, not I.* This is also what happens when we look at someone who has committed a wrong and say, "I could *never* do what she did." This scapegoat mentality, Neumann insisted, in which we fail to see the bad parts of ourselves but rather unconsciously project them onto others, is the deadliest peril now confronting humanity, for it prevents us from dealing directly with the negative forces of human nature.

Giegerich reminds us that the radical and revolutionary gift of depth psychology is that it *confronts* modern man

with all those factors that he wanted to close his eyes to. This was true from the very beginning of psychoanalysis with Freud, who brought about the recognition of sexuality within a Victorian world, to Jung's emphasis on the shadow and his attempt to integrate the idea of evil even into the image of God. *The principle of depth psychology is the lifting of the repressions...*" (2005, p. 45)

and our allowing what was repressed and projected back into the fold of ourselves.

Shadow integration is the arrival of the Shadow and our housing him in ourselves as a (certainly unwanted and uncanny) guest. And his coming is the coming into being of a psychological consciousness....the shadow is the stranger whose gift to

us, if we accommodate him, is the transformation of the world from a world of positive fact into anima country. (2008, p. 83)

In his remarkable essay “First Shadow, then Anima” Giegerich (2008) extends an idea of Jung’s suggesting that soul truly emerges only *after* (or upon) the achievement of full integration of the shadow. Giegerich describes shadow integration through five stages, each one following the inexorable advance of the approaching shadow with corresponding advances in consciousness.

In the first stage, the non-ego is unconsciously projected outside and occurs as an enemy. Giegerich uses the historical example of the Crusades because the enemy is on another continent, presenting as “something truly foreign, unknown, and new” (2008, p. 91). Generally speaking, “a new consciousness always approaches us from without, from abroad, as it were. It is truly encountered as the stranger or enemy out there who has never before been *in us*” (2008, p. 91).

In the second stage, the guest is less of a stranger as the projection is drawn closer into the fold. Giegerich calls this the Heretic or Witch-hunt stage, because it seems as if “the real danger lies at home” (2008, p. 93). “The guest is thus given a sort of lodging among us, even if only in the manner of *condemnation*. Fear...was the first mode of response to the shadow. Condemnation is the second; it is a way of both accommodating and resisting him” (2008, p. 93). Instead of projection, we find, on the second level, the defense mechanism of delegation or scapegoating, which “rescues the innocence of consciousness and preserves consciousness as well-meaning. ...It is still ‘them’ (a minority, a subculture, individual heretics) who do evil, whereas I am on the side of the good, of peace, of innocence” (2008, p. 95).

In the third stage, or the “Turncoat or Subversion” stage, “The shadow is not simply with the [enemy] or the [heretic] in other words, still out there. It is everywhere...The shadow has come much closer” (Giegerich, 2008, p. 97). This is the stage of skepticism, cynicism, Freud and Nietzsche, Marx and Voltaire. This stage *identifies* with the shadow. “Ego deserts its previous idealism and joins the former enemy, the non-ego. It [now] *defends* heretics and sides with the lower or immoral” (Giegerich, 2008, p. 98).

The identification with the shadow involves a denial of the *opposition* or *tension* between the ideals and the so-called low instincts. *Be careful here*; the shadow loses its shadow quality on this level. It is now ego-syntonic. Also in this stage it is the structure or system that is blamed. “Consciousness has become conscious of the fact that the shadow is an integral part of society” (Giegerich, 2008, p. 99).

In stage IV, we reach what Giegerich calls the “Mea Culpa” stage. In this stage “the incompatibility of the ego’s own shadow and the ego must now be endured. But the resulting annihilating contradiction must be avoided by some new form of defense. *Guilt feelings* are the fourth mode of receiving the guest and of defending oneself against him” (Giegerich, 2008, p. 100).

The particular defense mechanism here is that of isolation...Guilt feelings are the phenomenon by which this insulation of the opposites from each other takes place...The judge does not yet admit that the criminal he condemns is himself. And the abashed criminal does not yet realize his identity with the judge... With the *mea culpa* attitude, that shadow has fully come home; he is truly in me, in the subject, my very own shadow, as much mine as my ideals... I am identified with the moral values *and* with the shadow at once. And thus I have become a living contradiction, the name of which is “bad conscience,” “guilt feeling.” It is no longer me and them or me and it (the system). Both are one and the same: me. In harboring the guilt feeling, I kill *myself*, and the form of this killing is remorse. (Giegerich, 2008, p. 101)

In the Mea Culpa stage, the shadow is a *personal* failing, so the moral cosmos remains unimpaired – *God is still good (I am bad, it's not archetypal evil, it's my bad)*. In this stage, “the guest has been admitted into one’s home” (Giegerich, 2008, p. 103).

In the fifth stage of “Hospitality or The Accomplished Integration”,

Consciousness...sees through the arrogance and presumption inherent in the stage of the bad conscience. Precisely by so humbly taking all blame upon itself and by devaluating the shadow as merely subjective shortcoming without autonomous reality, the ego inflated itself to become the opposite pole vis-à-vis the principle of goodness. Human subjectivity had in the last analysis become the real antagonist of “God.” Now it can be understood that the integration of the shadow does not mean its literal mine-ness and that the shadow stems solely from my personal subjectivity. The idea of personal interiority is recognized as the last refuge, the last stronghold in the ego’s fight for self-preservation or for the preservation of a harmonious consciousness. The interiorization constituting personalistic psychology is the last defense against psychology. Now we see that the integration of the shadow means that it is allowed into consciousness itself without reserve.

There cannot be two different aspects any more, as in the previous stage, where I was, to be sure, at the same time the judge or representative of the higher values and the guilty convict, with each, however, on a different plane or in a different respect. Now judge and criminal, ideal and faulty reality meet on the same plane and in the same regard, so that both perish from their inner contradiction, each going under in the other, so that something else, a completely new level of consciousness, can emerge instead. When Jung speaks of the “transcendent function” as that process that brings forth a new consciousness out of the self-destruction of the opposites inherent in the old consciousness, he may have something similar in mind. *What emerges here is a truly psychological consciousness.* (Giegerich, 2008, p. 103-4, emphasis added).

...

But the surrender to the insight of the existence of another, objective center does not mean that the acquisition of the previous stage, namely a sense of subjectivity, interiority, and psychology, has to be lost.... Rather, this sense of subjectivity is deepened, deepened to such an extent that it becomes apparent that it is rooted in an entire new *dimension*, the dimension of (subjective) objectivity (or objective subjectivity) - which is of course a contradiction. But to *be* a contradiction is what *constitutes* psychology (as a psychological consciousness or psychological status) and what allows us not only to *have*, or be the place of, an imaginal or symbolic life, as we find it during the ages, but to consciously *exist as* imaginal (or soul) life. (Giegerich, 2008, p. 105)

What Giegerich is saying is that in *being* psychological, one is demonstrating psychology in the highest sense; one's perspective has moved into the new dimension - I *am* the life I *have* - and become psychological.

Congratulations! The last three paragraphs I read verbatim from Giegerich... :)

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