

Jungian Archetypal Creation Symbolism in Wittgenstein's Earlier and Later Philosophies

Richard McDonough

Arium School of Arts and Sciences (Retired)

51 Cuppage Road

#06-23, 229469, Singapore

Email: rmm249@cornell.edu; wittgensteins_poker2007@yahoo.com

Abstract:

Wittgenstein suggests in *Culture and Value* that he puts a certain kind of lock on his works to “keep certain people” out because they will not understand the “spirit” of his work and do not have the “key”. Mainstream philosophers who focus on propositions and arguments tend to regard the imagery and symbolism in philosophical works as tangential to the core philosophical project. In fact, Wittgenstein’s works, both early and late, are filled with much of the same archetypal symbolism emphasized by Carl Jung, symbolism also found in Augustine, who influenced them both. The paper surveys Wittgenstein’s Jungian archetypal symbolism generally but focuses on the ancient archetypal cosmological creation symbolism in *Zettel* (para. 608) which suggests that language and thought might emerge from chaos or even nothingness at the centre. The paper also discusses Wittgenstein’s interpretation of his own “second dream” as involving alchemical, rather than Christian, symbolism because alchemy employs the same ancient cosmological creation symbolism. On this basis, the paper argues that Wittgenstein’s philosophy, on analogy with Jung’s psychology of transformation, is fundamentally a philosophy of *transformation*, of mere matter into language and thought or of a base human life into a “cosmic life.”

Keywords: Wittgenstein, Jung, Augustine, archetypal symbolism, alchemy, transformation

The [importance of myth in our lives] came upon me like a landslide that cannot be stopped.

Jung *ST*, xxiii¹

If you have a room which you do not want certain people to get into, put a lock on it for which they do not have the key.

Wittgenstein 1980, 7²

When Wittgenstein was working on the latter part of the *Philosophical Investigations*, he said to his ... close friend M.

O'C. Drury: ... "I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view." ... [The] remark made Drury wonder whether "there are not dimensions to Wittgenstein's thought that are still being ignored." ... I have the same doubt in regard to myself.

Malcolm 1997, 1

The idea of a Jungian dimension to Wittgenstein has, at first glance, little to recommend it. Wittgenstein is seen as a "linguistic" philosopher (Preston 2006), while Jung was a psychiatrist who stressed that he is an empiricist interested in *mythologies*, not a philosopher (Falzeder 2016, 14). However, Wittgenstein's works are filled with Jungian archetypal and associated "primordial symbols" that provide a key to help unlock Wittgenstein's views.

§ I discuss Jung's archetypal imagery. § II sketches Wittgenstein's archetypal imagery. § III clarifies an important principle in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy (WLP). § IV discusses paragraph 608 of *Zettel*, where Wittgenstein suggests that language and thought might arise from chaos or nothingness. § V argues that the language in Z 608 is the *archetypal cosmological creation imagery* found in Augustine, who influenced *both* Wittgenstein and Jung. § VI discusses Wittgenstein's remark that his "second dream" must be interpreted *alchemically*. § VII explains *why* Wittgenstein employs archetypal symbolism. The significance of the interpretation is summarized in the Concluding Remark.

I. Jung's Notion of Archetypes

There is another class of [mental] contents ... [of a] mythological character which cannot be ascribed to an individual acquisition ... as if they belong [not to individual minds] but to ... *mankind in general*. ... These I call *archetypes*, an expression of St. Augustine's (Jung *AP*, 40-41).

Jung's archetypes are universal images in human culture found in both East and West, and in religion, philosophy, science, literature, and the arts. Jung (*AP* 44-46 & TEAP, Chap. VII; see Fordham 1959, 24-25) thinks of them as universal patterns in the human unconscious.

The most common Jungian archetypes are: the Self, or *center* of the psyche, the *Shadow* (dark opposite of the ego), the Trickster (Devil), the *mandala*, the labyrinth, the crystal, the abyss, darkness, the *Aether* (divine element), circular movement, creation, and growth (Jacobi, 1971). "*Mandala*" is a Sanskrit word that, in Hinduism and Buddhism, connotes *wholeness* (Jung *MS*, 3, 71) but can also represent the *microcosm*, a miniature image of the cosmos (Khanna 1979, 12-22). Jung took both the crystal and the *mandala* as symbols of *the self*.³ For Jung, each of these archetypes and images plays a role in the symbolic representation of *individuation*, the integration of the conscious mind with the unconscious to achieve wholeness (Franz 1968a, 163-164). Jung holds that archetypes are "irrepresentable" but that they are *manifested* in primordial images (Stevens 2003).

Of these archetypes or primordial images, the notions of the self as center of the psyche and the images associated with creation of order from chaos are important for this paper. This image of

the emergence of an ordered cosmos from chaos traces, in the West, to Hesiod (Lamberton 1993, 73). It is present in pre-Socratic philosophy, in Plato and the Western literary and philosophical traditions (Holroyd 1957; McDonough 2004 and 2021). These are appropriate symbols of Jung's process of individuation, the *transformation* of an incomplete person into a whole balanced person.

The alchemists are best known for the attempt to transform lead into gold (Muir 2007, 41-42, 63). But they were also interested in the transformation of a base earthly person into a "cosmic" person (Douglas 1997, 30). Jung's interest in alchemy derives from his interest in *transformation* (*genesis*) of a whole person from the "chaos" and "darkness" of human life.

II. Archetypal Imagery and Associations in Wittgenstein

It is sometimes said that [one's] philosophy is a matter of temperament, ... A preference for certain similes is a matter of temperament and underlies far more disagreements than you might think (Wittgenstein 1980, 20).

In addition to the arguments and theses, many philosophical texts contain compelling imagery. Here is a partial list of the archetypal imagery in Wittgenstein:

1.) Centre: *NB* (150) refers to the self as the center of the world. *PR* (Foreword) refers to "the center or essence" of the world. *PI* (108), refers to ordinary life as "the center point [*Angelpunkt*] of our real need." *RFM* (III. 15) states that the "center of gravity" of a language consists in action. *Z* 608 uses the spiritual image of *motion towards the centre*.

2.) Chaos: *Z* 608 suggests that language and thought may arise out of chaos. *CV* (65) states that philosophers must "descend into primeval chaos and feel at home there."

3.) Abyss (or Nothingness): *OC* (70) states that if one doubts certain fundamental things, one "stand[s] before the abyss [*Nichts*]." *RFM* (II. 78) states: "We went sleep walking on the road between abysses [*Abgründ*]" and asks "Can we be certain there are abysses ... we don't see?" *CV* (53) refers to fear of "an abyss [*Abgründ*] right at my feet." *Z* 608 states that both an organism and language and thought, might "arise out of nothing [*nichts*]."

4.) Darkness: *PI* (Preface) refers to "the poverty and darkness of our time". *PI* (635) states that in remembering it is as if one can "read the darkness."

5.) Shadow: *PI* (339) states: "Thinking is not a process ... which it would be possible to separate from the speaking rather as the Devil took the shadow from Schlemiehl" (See also *PI* 194, 448). Wittgenstein refers to "shadows" elsewhere in his works, e.g., *Z* 233.

6.) Aether: "Though the ether is filled with vibrations, the world is dark." (*PI* 184).

7.) Microcosm: *TLP* (5.6): "I am my world (The Microcosm)." See also *NB* (84)!

8.) Crystal: *PI* (97): "Thought ... must be of the purest crystal."

9.) Labyrinth: "Language is a labyrinth of paths" (*PI* 203).

10.) *Z* (26) refers to the "red thread [*roten Faden*]" Theseus used to escape the ancient Greek labyrinth.

11.) Mandala: Bartley (1973, 32) discusses the *mandala* images present in Wittgenstein's "first" and "second" dreams.

12.) Alchemy: *RFM* (IV. 16) refers to the possibility of mathematical alchemy (See *CV* 48). Wittgenstein said his "second dream" should be interpreted alchemically (Monk 1990, 199-200; Bartley 1973, 39).

Although the main arguments that Jung's notion of certain archetypes sheds light on Wittgenstein's philosophy are presented in later sections, it is useful to make one initial point here. One might claim that Wittgenstein's mention of the shadow in *PI* (339) has nothing to do with Jung's notion of the shadow, i.e., that Wittgenstein is merely using the image of the shadow, borrowed from Chamisso's "The Strange Tale of Peter Schlemihl," to denote the notion of a Fregean sense that accompanies a linguistic sign and gives it meaning (Hallett 1977, 400-401). However, both Jung and Wittgenstein were influenced by German Romanticism, including Chamisso's story of Peter Schlemihl (*CV* 14; Bishop 1999, 18; Hallett, 400-401). Second, Chamisso's story formed part of the inspiration for psychoanalysis in general and Jung's psychoanalysis in particular (Bishop, 18). Third, Wittgenstein commented on Chamisso's story elsewhere and his interest there was *not* in Fregean senses but in it *as part of a religious-moral story* (*CV* 14; Hallett, 400-401). The minimalist interpretation of *PI* (339) as a remark about Fregean senses fails to explain why Wittgenstein chose a religious-moral image to explain his position.

III. Basic Principles of Wittgenstein's "Later Philosophy"

We may not advance any kind of theory. ... We must do away with all explanation and description alone must take its place (Wittgenstein 1958, 109).

The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness (Wittgenstein 1958, 255).

One of WLP's most basic views is that philosophy must not advance theories or explanations (Monk 1990, 304-308). Rather, WLP articulates a *method* for *describing* what is "already in plain view" (*PI* 89, 129, 435). WLP is concerned with linguistic behavior in the shared public world, or "home" (*CV* 65; *PI* 116), of everyday thought and action. This is connected with WLP's view that the philosopher treats a "philosophical disease" on analogy with the way a therapist treats an illness (*PI* 593). A therapist does not cure the disease with theories but with *practical* activity that aims to restore the patient to *health* (wholeness).

IV. The Orthodox Reading of *Zettel* 608

No supposition seems to me more natural than that there is no process in the brain correlated with associating or with thinking; so that it would be impossible to read off thought processes from brain processes. I mean this: if I talk or write, there is, I assume, a system of impulses going out from my brain and correlated with my spoken or written thoughts. But why should the *system* continue further in the

direction of the center. Why should this order not proceed, so to speak, out of chaos? The case would be like the following—certain kinds of plants multiply by seed, so that a seed always produces a plant of the same kind as that from which it was produced—but *nothing* in the seed corresponds to the plant which comes out of it—this can only be done from the *history* of the seed. So, an organism might come into being out of something quite amorphous, as it were, causelessly; and there is no reason why this should not really hold for our thoughts, and hence for our talking and writing (Wittgenstein *Zettel*, 608).

Although WLP is usually seen as primarily negative, i.e., knocking down philosophical houses of cards (McGinn 1984, 1), most commentators see positive theories about the brain in *Z* 608. McGinn thinks *Z* 608 suggests that the brains of normal people may turn out to be in *physical* chaos, Scheer thinks it posits causal indeterminism in the brain, Davies and Mills each think it anticipates recent connectionist theories of neural processing, Hark thinks it argues against Köhler's theory of electric brain fields (McGinn 1984, 12-13, 112-114; Davies 1991, 229-257; Mills 1993; Scheer 1991, 5-23; Hark 1995, 113-138). All hold that the center and chaos in *Z* 608 are the neural center and neural chaos (hereafter "the orthodox interpretation" or TOI). These views, however, contradict WLP's view that philosophy must not advance theories.

IV.1. Search for the Center

The goal is neither height nor depth, but the center.

Jung *AS*, 154⁴

TOI is based on a misreading. *Z* 608, carefully read, implies that the center is *not* in the brain. The two key sentences in *Z* 608, numbered for convenience, are:

- 1.) There is, I assume, a system of impulses going out from my brain and correlated with my spoken or written thoughts.
- 2.) But why should the *system* continue further in the direction of the center?

The first refers to the common view that the brain produces impulses that cause human behavior. Note that the direction of motion here is *from the brain towards the world*. Since the second sentence locates the center further *in that same direction*, the "center" has to be in the public world of human behavior. TOI gets the direction of motion in *Z* 608 *backwards*.

Further, *the image of motion towards the center is an ancient archetypal image*. Aristotle writes: "The natural movement of the earth ... is towards the center of the whole. ... The goal must be the center of the whole" (1941, 297a). In Aristotle's cosmology, carried down through the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and in Western literature, *the center is not the efficient cause of movement, but its goal*. Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress*, which influenced Wittgenstein (*CV* 28-29, 77), describes motion towards a *spiritual center*. Jung applies this archetypal imagery to the "individuation". *Z* 608 applies it to the genesis of language and thought.

IV. 2. The Notions of the Center, Chaos, and Nothingness in *Zettel* 608

For these people the center of gravity of mathematics is found wholly in doing.

Wittgenstein 1967b, III.15

It is enormously difficult to find the path through the center.

Wittgenstein 1967b, V.12

When you are philosophizing you must descend into primeval chaos and feel at home there.

Wittgenstein 1980, 65

TOI assumes that Z 608 is written in the language of cognitive neuroscience. The center is the neural center. Chaos is neural chaos. Nothingness is an empty cranium. In fact, however, WLP belongs to a German “organic” tradition in which “the center” refers, roughly, to a person’s organic or spiritual center, and “chaos” roughly, to the chaos of human behavior in “forms of life” (McDonough 2004, 297-306). Z 608 holds, not that meaning emerges out of chaos at the neural center, but that it emerges out of the chaos of human activities in the “center of gravity” of a language which, for WLP is the real “foundation” of language and thought.

Wittgenstein’s notion of the center traces to *NB* (80), where he refers to the will as the “bearer of ethics” and “the center [*Zentrum*] of the world.” In *Logik, Sprache, and Philosophie* (co-authored with Waismann), he endorses Goethe’s remark that the organs of plants organize “as if around some natural center” (which cannot be a brain) (Monk 1990, 303). In the Foreword to *PR*, Wittgenstein contrasts the “main current of European and American civilization,” which “tries to grasp the world in its periphery” with his book, which tries to grasp it “at its center, in its essence.” Since clarity and perspicuity is the goal in *PI* (122, 133), one infers that WLP’s aim is to understand the “center” (essence) of “the world.”

WLP states this at *PI* (108), but it is lost in Anscombe’s translation. Wittgenstein there contrasts his old WEP view that language had a kind of “formal unity” with his new view,

The preconceived idea of crystalline purity can only be removed by turning our whole examination around. (One might say: the axis of reference of our examination must be rotated, but around the fixed point [*Angelpunkt*] of our real need.) The philosophy of logic speaks about sentences and words in exactly the sense in which we speak of them in ordinary life ...

Whereas Anscombe translates “*Angelpunkt*” as “fixed point,” it is properly translated as “center point.” (Traupman 1991, 17). *PI* (108) identifies the “center” of our “real need,” not as the neural center, but as *ordinary life*!

Wittgenstein’s references to “the center” trace from *NB* (1916) and *PR* (1930) to *PI* (1945), *RFM* (1937-1944) and *Z* (1945-1948). Although Wittgenstein changes his notion of the center over

this period – from the “metaphysical subject” in Wittgenstein’s Early Philosophy (WEP) to the shared public world in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy (WLP) – he *never* understands it as the neural center.

Wittgenstein also invokes the imagery of chaos in other works. In *OC* (613-614), he writes: “[W]hat could make me doubt that this person is N.N., whom I have known for years? Here a doubt would ... drag everything ... into chaos [*Chaos*] ... [and remove] the foundation of all judging.” This refers, not to chaos in the brain, but to the sort of *chaos in life* which undermines “the foundation” of judgment. *CV* (65) refers to the philosopher “descending” into “primeval chaos”. If WLP’s philosopher descends into anything, it is not his/her brain but his/her “chaotic” linguistic activity that is the source of the philosophical problems.

In *Z* 608, Wittgenstein moves from the image of emergence from chaos to emergence from nothing when he writes that a plant might, *sozusagen*, arise out of *nothing* in the seed, and that, by analogy, language and thought might arise out of nothing in the person. The image of emergence from nothing also appears in *RFM* (I. 46): “The new [mathematical] position has as it were come to be out of nothing.” This has nothing to do with emergence from an empty cranium but with the emergence of new mathematical language from nothing in *prior mathematical activity*. *OC* (370) states that if one tries to doubt certain fundamental things, one will “stand before the abyss [*Nichts*].” The “nothing” here is not physical nothingness in the cranium but *the kind of “nothingness” in human life* that an existentialist would understand perfectly (Cf. Friedman 1984).

IV.3. Summary

Now ask yourself, what do you [really] *know* [about what goes
on in the brain]?

Wittgenstein 1958, 158

TOI reads the images of emergence of order from chaos or nothing in *Z* 608 in neuroscientific terms, despite the fact that WLP explicitly opposes such theories (Malcolm 1997; McDonough 1989). In fact, from WEP to WLP, Wittgenstein invokes the images of the center, chaos, nothingness and the abyss that have nothing to do with neuroscience, but, in WEP, pertain to the “metaphysical self,” and in WLP, to the public arena of human life. The *organic* imagery in *Z* 608 suggests the proper way to read *Z* 608. Just as Wittgenstein holds that Christianity does not present a *theory* about what goes on in the soul, but is “a description of something that actually takes place in human life” (*CV* 28), *Z* 608 does not advance *theories* about the brain, but refers to a kind of emergence of order from chaos or nothingness displayed in human life—precisely what one would expect of a philosopher who holds that everything must already be “in plain view” (*PI* 89, 129).

V. Augustinian Archetypal Symbolism in *Zettel* 608

[Wittgenstein] revered St. Augustine. He told me he decided to begin his *Investigations* with a quotation from [Augustine’s] *Confessions* ... because the conception must be important if so great a mind held it (Malcolm 2001, 59).

These collective patterns I have called *archetypes*, using an expression of St. Augustine's. An archetype means a *typos*, a definite grouping of archaic characters containing, in form as well as meaning, *mythological motifs* (Jung, *AP* 41).

Since Wittgenstein revered Augustine's *Confessions*, his applications of Augustine's ideas are discussed here.

V.1. Augustine's Creation Story

Moses' account of the beginning of time was seen as a mirror set up for them by God, in which they saw reflected the creation of their own souls ... that could take place in every believer. The solemn conjuring of order from chaos and flowering of a whole new world in the heart of every Christian ... took place according to exactly the same rhythms as had ... the creation of the world ... (Brown 1999, xxiii).

Although Augustine employs many archetypal images found in Wittgenstein, center, chaos, shadow, abyss, darkness, and crystal, this section focuses on those images shared between Augustine and Z 608: emergence of order from chaos or nothingness at the center.⁵ Since Augustine uses the images of the abyss, sin, and darkness interchangeably with chaos and nothingness (Brunn 1988, 17, 99), these images in WLP are also relevant.

On Augustine's view, human beings can, by a free choice, and with God's grace, raise themselves out of the chaos, nothingness, abyss, or darkness, of worldly-existence. By "nothingness" Augustine does *not* mean simple lack of existence ("It is not the case that there exists an x such that ...") but rather, an ontological/moral category signifying, roughly, the moral "chaos" or evil of the material world (Brunn 1988, 14, 30 n. 57, 99; Brown 1999, xxiii). For Augustine, human beings are suspended between being and nothingness, with the possibility of "falling" towards nothingness or "growing" towards being (Brunn 1988, 49).

Augustine's story of humanity cannot be adequately written in the dispassionate language of science. It is a *drama* of humanity's fall from being towards the nothingness (evil) of the world and possible growth towards God. Since Augustine conceives the human soul as a microcosm, human salvation is modeled on God's creation of the cosmos *ex nihilo*. Just as God created the cosmos from primordial nothingness, so each human being, with God's grace, can create themselves from the primordial moral chaos or nothingness of human existence.

Augustine's picture of human self-creation takes a particular form. Each person must "turn" from the evils of the material world towards God (Brunn 1988, 14, 20, 101). That is, salvation requires *a turn from one center towards another*. Augustine identifies the center of Babylon as the center of the material world (vice) (Augustine *Conf.*, 26; Brunn 1988, 13). Further, God's attributes converge on a "single center (Being)" (Brunn 1988, 106-107; Jaspers 1962, 112, 118). Unfortunately, people tend to be centered in the "nothingness" of the material world (Brunn 1988, 101). Thus, salvation requires that one turn away from the "false" material center and, using the modified language of Z 608, "proceed further in the direction of the [true] center" in God.

V.2. The Augustinian Model of Zettel 608

One must start with error and convert it into truth.

Wittgenstein 1993, 119

The fact that Wittgenstein begins *PI* with a quotation from Augustine's *Confessions* suggests an Augustinian reading of WLP. Wittgenstein's remark at *PI* (Preface) that he wanted to publish his "old thoughts" alongside his "new" ones because he has come to recognize "grave mistakes" in *TLP*, suggests that *PI* is his attempt at a *confession* of the errors of his *TLP* and an attempt to *turn* towards truth. This, coupled with the archetypal religious imagery in *PI* suggests that there may be a significant analogy between Augustine's conception of *religious* conversion and Wittgenstein's "conversion" of *TLP*'s philosophical errors into truth.⁶

First, the same imagery present in Augustine's story of the emergence of man's moral self from the chaos or nothingness of material existence is found, applied to the account of language-production, in Z 608. Whereas Augustine envisaged the emergence of humanity's higher self from the chaos or nothingness of his worldly existence, Z 608 envisages the emergence of language and thought, from the chaos or nothingness of man's worldly activities. The imagery of emergence of order from chaos or nothing in Z 608 is not taken from the physical sciences but from Augustine's creation story applied to man. Augustine's application of the cosmological categories (emergence, chaos, nothingness, the center) from his creation story to human life is licensed because Augustine saw man as a microcosm of the macrocosm (Conger 1922, 33-35; Sherrard 1987, 53).

If the Augustinian model is applied to Z 608, each of the ontological concepts from Augustine's creation story will correlate with their uses in Z 608. Just as TOI takes the center and the chaos in Z 608 as a *material* center and *material* chaos, where the material is *brain* matter, there is also a material center in Augustine's story, but it is material in a *religious*, not a scientific, sense. Augustine's material center is "material" in the sense in which sinful Babylon is material. Similarly, just as Augustine holds that *spiritual* salvation requires proceeding from that material center in Babylon towards the true center (God), so Z 608 (implicitly) distinguishes a "false" center in the brain from the "true" center in the public world of human action and holds that philosophical "salvation" requires turning from the false material center of cognitive neuroscience and towards the true "center of gravity" (*RFM*, III. 15) of language and thought in the public world of human action.

Similarly, on Augustine's creation story applied to humanity, the chaos is not physical chaos, but moral "chaos" in worldly action, where his moral chaos or nothingness prevents a person from turning towards their "true" center in God, but they can, by free choice and the grace of God, emerge from the *moral chaos* in the sinful world and become a Godlike person. An analogous picture of the genesis of language out of the chaos of human actions is found in WLP's view that language arises from human behavior (*PI* 5-7, 206). Z 567 states that "what determines our judgment" (about what something means) is "the background" consisting of "the *ganze Gewimmel* [great swarm] of human actions." WLP expands this at Z 568-569,

Seeing life as a weave, this pattern ... is not always complete and is varied in multiple ways. But ... we, in our conceptual world, keep on seeing the same, recurring with variations. That is how our concepts take it. ... One pattern in this weave is interwoven with many others.

That is, the order (“weave” or “pattern”) of our “conceptual world” emerges out of the chaos of the “great swarm” of human actions because we, in our conceptual world, need to “keep seeing the same.” Wittgenstein makes the analogy between his account of the genesis of language and thought to creation myths explicit when he quotes Goethe’s *Faust*, “*Im Anfang war die Tat*” (“In the beginning was the deed”) (CV 31; Winch, 1981, 175-177), a play on the Biblical sentence, “In the beginning was the Word.” Z 608 does *not* suggest that language and thought may arise out of neural chaos or nothingness. Rather, following Augustine’s creation story, Z 608 suggests that language and thought may, *sozusagen*, arise out of the “chaos” or “nothingness” of human activities. The language in Z 608 is not that of cognitive neuroscience. It is the archetypal ontological-moral-religious imagery found in Augustine’s story of the creation of the human microcosm out of the “chaos” or “darkness” (PI Preface) of human life.

VI. Wittgenstein’s Alchemical Symbolism

We might speak of a kind of alchemy in mathematics

Wittgenstein 1967b, IV. 16⁷

If a man puts his hand to the opus, he repeats, as the alchemists say, God’s work of creation. The struggle with the unformed, with the chaos of Tiamat, is in truth a primordial experience.

Jung AS, 26; see Franz 1968b, 225

Wittgenstein reports two “alchemical” dreams. § 1 discusses Wittgenstein’s “second dream”. § 2 discusses its philosophical significance.

VI.1. Wittgenstein’s “Second Dream”

Wittgenstein was inclined to interpret [his second] dream in alchemical terms. The rod is at once a phallic symbol (his ‘base self’) and a symbol of alchemical transformation (the base metal changing into gold or silver), ... [Since] he could not convince himself that [his own] transformation ... [would happen], he refused to follow [the] call to become a priest. ... He really *was* base metal; he had to remain stuck on earth (Monk 1990, 199-200).

[T]he man of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, blessed with divine creative powers, ... has begun to free himself from the bonds of the tiered Medieval cosmos and thereby moves *towards the center of the cosmos* [italics added] (Roob 1997, 22).

Wittgenstein’s second dream, summarized:

Wittgenstein is a priest. There is an altar in the front of his house and a grand stairway off to the right. At the foot of the altar is an oriental carpet. Certain religious objects, including a rod of precious metal, are on or near the altar. But the rod has been stolen and the police called.

The police ask for a description of the rod but Wittgenstein cannot give it, leading to doubts by the police that it ever existed. Wittgenstein then began to examine the other objects and noticed that one of them was a prayer rug with a beautiful center. In a “curious” way, the rug seemed faded, but still strong and firm.⁸

The dream contains a reference to the *mandala* symbolism emphasized by Jung (Bartley 1973, 32; Jung, 1973).⁹ Note that Wittgenstein’s *mandala* contains a beautiful *center* (Bartley 1973, 37; Cf. Jung *MS*, 12, 23 note 59). The rug-*mandala* symbolizes Wittgenstein’s “goal,” where, unfortunately, “his sexuality undermines his religious calling” (Monk 1990, 200 note *). It is significant that in the dream, as in *Z* 608, the center is something one moves *towards*. Note that the center, in Augustine, Bunyan, Jung, and in many religious and alchemical texts, is a *spiritual goal*, not (as in TOI) a prior material cause of behavior.

When Wittgenstein’s friend, Hänsel, suggested that the dream symbolism is from the Old Testament, Wittgenstein replied that he understands it in alchemical terms (Monk 1990, 199; Bartley 1973, 39). The alchemical symbolism appeals to Wittgenstein because much of his own religious imagery is religious-cosmological and much alchemical imagery is religious-cosmological. Part of the idea of alchemy is that since the human being is a microcosm of the macrocosm, one must, in order to transform the human being into a “Cosmic man,” restore their rightful relation to the cosmos (Eliade 1979, 116-118, 124-5; Franz 1968a, 211). Alchemical images are symbols of *transformation*.¹⁰ Wittgenstein hopes for his own transformation from being “earth-bound” to taking his place in “the heavens” (Monk 1990, 198-199).

VI. 2. The Philosophical Relevance of Wittgenstein’s “Second Dream

What [one] sees in [one’s] dreams is an extension of one’s own world, PERHAPS what [one] wishes (and perhaps not), but not reality (Wittgenstein 1980, 57).

Gradually it became clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir (Nietzsche 1966, para. 6).

The fact that *PI* begins with a quotation from Augustine’s *Confessions* may hint that *PI* is also Wittgenstein’s personal confession. *CV* (68-69) also holds that dreams can reveal a person’s “world”. Thus, Wittgenstein’s view that his “second dream” must be interpreted alchemically demonstrates his preference for certain similes, and, therefore, indicates his philosophical leanings. But what does this show about *his philosophy*?

Paracelsus held that “nature clearly demonstrates that entities are subject to transformation [and] only alchemy, not Medieval Aristotelian science, recognizes this” (Weeks 1997, 156). Referring to the “sparks” referenced by ancient alchemists, Jung (1960, 190) writes: “They were seeds of light

broadcast in the chaos, which Khunrath calls ‘*mundi future seminarium*’ (the seed plot of a world to come). One such spark is the human mind.” Employing the same imagery found in Z 608,¹¹ Jung here points out that the spirit of alchemy is *transformation*, the emergence of light from darkness, order from chaos (Cf. Muir 2007, 163). Wittgenstein chooses alchemical symbolism because, as Jung (*AS*, 297-302) puts it, “alchemical symbolism allow[s] the nature of the archetype to glimmer through.” One need not, therefore, despair that one cannot discover the key to the “lock” Wittgenstein put on his works. Wittgenstein’s preference for cosmological/alchemical symbolism is just such a key.¹² That is, the spirit of WLP is *transformation*—of base metal of human life into a “cosmic life,” or, in Z 608, of the “chaos” of human actions into language and thought.

VII. Zettel 608 as Creation Myth

[We should not] succumb to the illusion that an archetype can be finally explained and [abandoned] ... The most we can do is dream the myth onwards and give it a modern dress” (Jung *JM*, 126).

TOI holds that Z 608 states that language and thought may arise out of chaos. In fact, Z 608 says no such thing. It states that they may “so to speak [*sozusagen*]” arise out of chaos. Similarly, Z 608 does *not* say that “an organism,” and, by analogy, “our talking and writing,” may arise “causelessly.” Z 608 says these may, “*sozusagen*,” arise causelessly. But when McGinn says Z 608 states that there is no reason why normal people may not turn out to have heads filled with sawdust, he is *not* saying there may “*sozusagen*” turn out to be chaos in their heads. He is saying that Z 608 holds that there may be real *physical* chaos in the brain.¹³

The same applies to those who see an anticipation of connectionist theories, quantum indeterminacy, or Köhler’s electric brain fields, etc., in Z 608. If Johann says Klaus is, *sozusagen*, a monster at work, he is not proposing the *theory* that Klaus literally grows fangs in the office. He is making a *comparison* that he finds illuminating. Similarly, when Z 608 suggests that language could, “*sozusagen*,” arise out of chaos, it is *not stating a theory about neural processes*, but rather is making an illuminating *comparison* or *simile* (*PI* 130-131; *CV* 20). Indeterminism, connectionism, sawdust in the head, electric brain fields, etc., are *theories* about the brain, but Z 608 is no more stating a theory about the brain than he is stating a theory about words when he *compares* them to tools (*PI* 23). TOI completely misses the significance of the qualifier “*sozusagen*.” Whereas TOI sees theories about the brain in Z 608, no such theory could be proposed there. But if Z 608 is not stating a theory, what is it doing—and why?

The answer is that Z 608 is *proposing a creation myth about the genesis of language*. But why, in his scientific age, would Wittgenstein want to propound such a myth?

The short answer is that Wittgenstein proposes a myth for the same reasons the ancients did—as expression of wonder at the “miracle” of existence. For, since the rise of modern science, the illusion has grown that everything can be explained. *TLP* (6.371-6.372) states a view that remains with Wittgenstein throughout his life,

The whole modern conception of the world is founded on the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena. [T]he view of the ancients is clearer insofar as they have a clear and acknowledged terminus, while the modern system tries to make it look as if everything is explained.

With the rise of modern science, people have wrongly acquired the idea that one can have a “theory of everything”¹⁴) and lost the sense of wonder at the world that first inspired philosophy (Plato, *Theat.* 155d). Z 608 puts ancient creation *myths* “in modern dress” in an attempt to reawaken the lost sense of wonder at the “miracles” (*CV* 56) of existence. For, “[M]yth saves us from desacralization, [which] eliminates the sacred from the cosmos, and [from] demystification, a denuding of mythology that ... banalizes the cosmos” (Olson, 1992, 164). Wittgenstein, in both WEP and WLP, retains this sense of the sacred wonder of the world.

Concluding Remark

The paper does not presuppose Jungian psychology or special hermeneutical principles of interpretation, etc. One might do an illuminating Jungian analysis of Wittgenstein’s life and views, but this is not what is done here. Nor does the paper argue that Wittgenstein *is* a Jungian. The paper is, rather, a “meta-argument,” from a *neutral* point of view, *that* reading Wittgenstein’s works against the background of Jungian archetypal symbolism may be the “key” to understanding “the spirit” of his works to which he alludes at *CV* 7. The paper argues that Z 608 proposes, not absurd theories about the brain, but, rather, one aspect of a “life-philosophy,” a philosophy of transformation, the view that the existential chaos and nothingness of human life are transformed into the miracle of language and thought. Since that is *analogous* to the alchemical transformation described in Jung’s psychology, Wittgenstein’s works are full of Jungian archetypal (including alchemical cosmological) symbolism.

Endnotes:

1. Jung’s works are abbreviated as follows. *Psychology and Religion* (PR), *Symbols of Transformation* (ST), *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* (SDP), *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (MC), *Analytical Psychology: Its Theory and Practice* (AP), *Alchemical Studies* (AS), “Approaching the Unconscious” (AU), *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (TEAP), *Mandala Symbolism* (MS), *Jung on Mythology* (JM) and *Commentary on Secret of the Golden Flower* (CSG). All references, unless otherwise specified, are to page numbers.
2. By Wittgenstein’s Early Philosophy (WEP) is meant the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (TLP) and *Notebooks, 1914-16* (NB). By Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy (WLP) is meant the *Philosophical Investigations* (PI), *Zettel* (Z), *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (RFM), *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics* (LFM), *On Certainty* (OC) and *Remarks on Frazer’s ‘Golden Bough’* (ROF). The remarks from *Culture and Value* mentioned in the present work are more akin to the later philosophy. References to TLP are by proposition number, to NB, CV, and LFM are by page number, to PI and OC, unless indicated otherwise, by paragraph number, to PR and RFM by section and paragraph number. It is recognized that dividing Wittgenstein’s philosophy neatly into an earlier and later philosophy is oversimplified but it suffices for present purposes.

3. The self, the more holistic entity, is distinguished from the ego (Jung MS, 7, 20, 73; Franz 1968a, 235).
4. The image of motion towards the center is also found in Jung (*CGF*, 26). See also Franz (1992, 276-278). Jung (1973, 42) refers to *Psalm* 12:8 in which the “ungodly” are said to move in a circle *without* moving towards the center (God).
5. *The Shadow*: See Augustine 2009, 31-33, 41, 68, 100, 153 and Augustine 2003, 452, 468, 576, 597, 680, 727, 729, 730; *The Center*: See Augustine 2009, 28, 185; 2003, 345, 526, 530; *Chaos*: See Augustine 2009, xxiv, 231, 274, 303; *The Abyss*: See Augustine 2009, 20, 29, 32, 57, 69, 92, 114, 179, 247, 249, 250, 253, 258-261, 263, 274, 276; *The Labyrinth*: See Augustine 2003, 777; *Darkness*: See Augustine 2009, 10, 20, 24, 42, 49, 50, 68, 75, 90; 2003, 7, 33, 34, 65, 216, 293, 312, 314, 332, 362, 417, 436, 438, 440, 446, 450; *The Crystal*: See Augustine 2003, 927; *Man and the world as nothingness*: See Augustine 2009, 247, 248, 249, 253.
6. Are philosophical errors analogous to sin? Nietzsche influenced Wittgenstein (*CV* 9, 59; Monk 1990, 122), and Nietzsche (1969, Sec. 3) states that, in philosophy, “error is cowardice.”
7. See also Maddy (1986, 279-312); Wittgenstein (*CV* 71).
8. See Monk (1990, 199-200 note *) and Bartley (1973, 31-40).
9. Bartley refers here to Wittgenstein’s “first dream” but the second dream contains the same rug-*mandala*.
10. Eliade (1979, 52) states that this is “magnificently” demonstrated by Jung. The proximate source of Wittgenstein’s interest in alchemical symbolism is probably Goethe (Monk 1990, 306). Jung (1963 xiii, 554) cites Goethe’s *Faust* as the inspiration for his *Mysterium Coniunctionis*.
11. One or more of these organic images (see note 12) is found on almost every page of alchemical texts (Roob 1997, 20, 23, 25, 28, 37, 45, 47, 55-63, 175-188, 429, 534-539, 543, 551, 554, 698, etc.).
12. Despite the fact that Wittgenstein indicates that he places a lock on his works, no commentator, to the knowledge of this author, has seriously inquired into the nature of this lock or how one might open it or suggested that the key to this lock is Wittgenstein’s archetypal imagery.
13. McGinn would even have us believe that Wittgenstein, who says, “What gives the impression that we want to deny anything?” (1958, 305), wants to deny that human beings need a brain to think!
14. Criticizing the idea of a “theory of everything, physicist Stephen Hawking asks, “[But] what breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to be about?” (Artigas 2001, 123).

References:

- Aristotle. “De Caelo.” Trans. J. L. Stocks. *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. Ed. Richard McKeon. New York: Random House, 1941. 395–466.
- Artigas, Mariano. *The Mind of the Universe*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001.
- Augustine. *City of God*. Trans. Henry Bettenson. New York: Penguin Classics, 2003.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Bartley, William, III. *Wittgenstein*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1973.
- Bishop, Paul. Introduction. *Jung in Contexts*. Ed. Paul Bishop. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Brown, Peter. Introduction. *Confessions*. By Augustine. Trans. F. J. Sheed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999.
- Brunn, Emilie Zum. *St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness*. New York: Paragon House, 1988.
- “Center.” *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Web. 25 October 2011.
<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=center+point&searchmode=none>.
- Conger, G. P. *Theories of Macrocosms and Microcosms in the History of Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1922.
- Davies, Martin. “Concepts, Connectionism, and the Language of Thought.” *Philosophy and Connectionist Theory*. Ed. William Ramsey, Stephen Stich, and David E. Rumelhart. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991. 229–257.

- Douglas, Claire. "The Historical Context of Analytical Psychology." *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*. Ed. Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 17–34.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structure of Alchemy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Falzeder, Ernst. "Types of Truth: Jung's Philosophical Roots." *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche* 10, no. 3 (2016): 14–30.
- Fordham, Frieda. *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1959.
- Franz, Marie-Louise von. "The Process of Individuation." *Man and His Symbols*. Ed. Carl G. Jung. New York: Dell, 1968a. 157–254.
- Franz, Marie-Louise von. "Science and the Unconscious." *Man and His Symbols*. Ed. Carl G. Jung. New York: Dell, 1968b. 357–387.
- Franz, Marie-Louise von. *Psyche and Matter*. Boston: Shambhala, 1992.
- Friedman, Maurice. *To Deny Our Nothingness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Hallett, Garth. *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations"*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Hark, Michel ter. "Electric Brainfields and Memory Traces: Wittgenstein and Gestalt Psychology." *Philosophical Investigations* 18, no. 2 (1995): 113–138.
- Havelock, Eric. *Preface to Plato*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1971.
- Holroyd, Stuart. *Emergence from Chaos*. Manchester, NH: Ayer Company, 1957.
- Jacobi, Jolande. *Complex/Archetype/Symbol in the Psychology of C. G. Jung*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971.
- Jaspers, Karl. *Plato and Augustine*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1962.
- Jung, Carl Gustav, and Karl Kerényi. *Essays on a Science of Mythology*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. "Approaching the Unconscious." *Man and His Symbols*. Ed. Carl G. Jung. New York: Dell, 1968c. 1–94.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Alchemical Studies*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. London: Routledge, 1968a.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Analytical Psychology: Its Theory and Practice*. New York: Vintage Books, 1968b.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Commentary on "The Secret of the Golden Flower"*. London: Routledge, 1962.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Jung on Mythology*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Mandala Symbolism*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Psychology and Religion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Symbols of Transformation*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. London: Routledge, 1956.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. London: Routledge, 1960.
- Jung, Carl Gustav. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1969.
- Khanna, Madhu. *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1979.
- Lamberton, Robert. Introduction. *Works and Days and Theogony*. By Hesiod. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993.
- Maddy, Penelope. "Mathematical Alchemy." *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 37, no. 3 (1986): 279–314.
- Malcolm, Norman. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Malcolm, Norman. *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* New York: Routledge, 1997.
- McDonough, Richard. "A Synoptic View of Kant's Emergentism." *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 60 (2011): 245–274.
- McDonough, Richard. "Plato's Organicism." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2010. <https://iep.utm.edu/platoorg>.
- McDonough, Richard. "The Cosmology of Cognitive Science from Hesiod, Socrates, and Plato to Wittgenstein." *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 8, no. 2 (2021): 107–136.

- McDonough, Richard. "Towards a Non-Mechanistic Theory of Meaning." *Mind* 98, no. 389 (1989): 1–21.
- McDonough, Richard. "Wittgenstein, German Organicism, Chaos, and the Center of Life." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42, no. 3 (2004): 297–326.
- McGinn, Colin. *Wittgenstein on Meaning*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1984.
- Mills, Stephen. "Wittgenstein and Connectionism: A Significant Complementarity?" *Philosophy and Cognitive Science*. Ed. Christopher Hookway and Donald M. Peterson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. 137–157.
- Monk, Ray. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Muir, M. M. *The Story of Alchemy and the Beginnings of Chemistry*. Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2007.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1966.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1969.
- Olson, Carl. *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade: A Search for the Centre*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.
- Pauson, Marian L. *Jung the Philosopher*. New York: Peter Lang, 1988.
- Plato. *The Republic of Plato*. Trans. F. M. Cornford. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Plato. *Theaetetus*. Trans. M. J. Levett. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992.
- Preston, P. "Analytic Philosophy." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Web. 26 October 2011.
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/analytic>.
- Roob, Alexander. *Alchemy and Mysticism*. Cologne: Taschen, 1997.
- Scheer, Richard. "Wittgenstein's Indeterminism." *Philosophy* 66, no. 255 (1991): 5–23.
- Sherrard, Philip. *The Rape of Man and Nature: An Enquiry into the Origins and Consequences of Modern Science*. Suffolk: Golgonooza Press, 1987.
- Stevens, Anthony. *Archetype Revisited: An Updated Natural History of the Self*. Toronto: Inner City Books, 2003.
- Traupman, J. *German and English Dictionary*. New York: Bantam Books, 1991.
- Weeks, Andrew. *Paracelsus: Speculative Theories and the Crisis of the Early Reformation*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.
- Winch, Peter. "Im Anfang war die Tat." *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*. Ed. Irving Block. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981. 159–178.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. "Remarks on Frazer's 'Golden Bough.'" *Philosophical Occasions*. Ed. James Klagge. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993. 119–155.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value*. Trans. Peter Winch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Notebooks, 1914–16*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. New York: Harper & Row, 1961.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *On Certainty*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1969.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Remarks*. Trans. Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White. Oxford: Blackwell, 1975.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967b.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. David Pears and B. F. McGuinness. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Zettel*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1967a.