



Picture from the English edition of Jakob Böhme's *XL Questions concerning the Soule* (1647) depicting Father, Holy Ghost, Son, and Earth or Earthly Man.

Psychoid

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The term “psychoid” was first used by Jung in his essay, ‘On the Nature of the Psyche’ (Jung, 1947). Unlike some of Jung’s other better known formulations, such as “archetype” or “collective unconscious”, the notion of the psychoid has not become widely accepted outside the Jungian world. Indeed, even for many Jungians it remains obscure. Not only is it a metaphysical concept, but it is also a difficult one. Evidently, the psychoid archetype cannot be easily recognised in everyday life. This is because it refers to precisely that aspect of the archetype that is defined as unreachable by consciousness and therefore unknowable. However, despite the intrinsic difficulty of the concept (and its problematic philosophical status) the notion of the psychoid is closely aligned to a seminal aspect of Jung’s late psychology and one, moreover, that has a direct and particular bearing on the analytic process as it actually occurs.

The psychoid archetype possesses three different aspects. First, it is inaccessible to consciousness. Second, located in the meeting place between the psychological and the physiological, it combines or transcends both. It can show up therefore in the relationship between a person’s psyche and their body. Its third and most significant aspect refers, in Roderick Main’s words, “to the relationship between a person’s psyche and the physical world beyond that person’s body” (Main, p.26).

It is this third aspect that accounts for the fact that many of Jung’s uses of the term ‘psychoid’ occur in his writings on synchronicity. As Main points out, Jung first developed the notion of the psychoid psyche (alongside various modifications to older concepts such as the archetype and collective unconscious) “largely in order to account for synchronistic phenomena” (ibid. p.25). However, the writings on synchronicity form only part of a broader project in Jung’s later psychology: to explore what he saw as a unitary dimension to all experience. In his alchemical writings, for example, this informs the notion of the *Unus Mundus*. As we will see, it is also what makes the psychoid realm particularly relevant to Jung’s writings on psychotherapy.

Jung borrowed the term “psychoid” from the neo-Vitalist thinker, Hans Driesch (1867-1941). For Driesch, *Das Psychoid* (1903) was an intra-psychic factor located in neither body nor mind but somehow relating to both. Jung’s director at the Burghölzli Clinic, Eugen Bleuler (1857-1939), also utilised the term *Die Psychoide* as a way to discuss the way body, psyche and phylogeny overlapped (1925). Jung is keen to distinguish his use of the word from both these predecessors. For Jung, Driesch is too philosophical and Bleuler too narrowly focused on physical organs. Jung’s use of “psychoid” is designed to draw attention to a wider dimension that somehow bridges both psychic and non-psychic realms. In ‘On the Nature of the Psyche’ Jung amplifies the concept by describing a psychic spectrum at the invisible ultra-violet end of which resides the psychoid archetype-as-such, and at the visible infra-red end we meet the archetypal image.

As various post-Jungian commentators have pointed out, despite Jung’s attempt to sidestep philosophical difficulties by taking a self-styled psychological approach, the formulation of a

blatantly metaphysical notion like the psychoid inevitably got him into some deep philosophical waters. Brooks, for example, points to glaring epistemological problems (Brooks 2011). She suggests that despite his purported Kantianism, his utilisation of Kant's 'negative borderline or boundary concept' in order to authenticate ideas such as the psychoid is in fact illegitimate, and moreover collapses what was for Kant an irreducible gap between the noumenal and phenomenal realms. While much of this criticism is perfectly valid from a philosophical point of view, it can obscure our discernment of Jung's overall goal in his use of notions such as the psychoid. If possible, the creakiness of the philosophy Jung utilises to support his speculations should not be allowed to distract attention from the important intuition that lay behind these texts.

Roger Brooke's phenomenological approach to the issue seems more fruitful (Brooke 2015). He points out that what underpins Jung's introduction of the psychoid archetype is "an attempt to found psychological life within the materiality of the body and the body within the materiality of the world in a way that is not reductionistic but that sees the body's materiality and natural vitality as fundamentally, however rudimentarily, psychological" (p.84). For Brooke the somewhat esoteric para-psychological trappings of much of Jung's writing on the psychoid distract us from the fact that they contain "the deepest implication of Jung's consistent attempt to think of psychological life as an expression of Nature" (p. 85).

Brooke (along with Friedman 1985) also points out that the notion of the psychoid becomes much more meaningful when we look for it in the field of analytic work. The psychoanalytic way of accounting for what happens in therapy is limited by a tendency to see one person as radically separate from another, and this results in difficulties when conceptualising the complexities of transference/countertransference and projective identification. Yet, as Jung points out at length, especially in his *Psychology of the Transference*, it is the field that connects and includes the two participants that is transformative. Described by Samuels as the imaginal field (Samuels 1985), this dimension, and especially the unconscious communications that link both partners, may usefully be described as emerging out of the psychoid realm, because it transcends limited perceptions of analyst and patient possessing separate encapsulated psyches. It is particularly in the heightened tension generated by such a field that synchronistic events tend to occur (Dieckmann 1976). Jungian analyst Giles Clark (1996) has also utilised the psychoid to explicate phenomena such as psychosomatic aspects of pathology, and especially the ways that these aspects inform the countertransference.

Jung's intuition shows up our habitual tendency to see the world in terms of discrete arenas (such as psychic and material or objective and subjective) as merely a secondary, superficial event. As post-Jungian Nathan Field emphasises, the notion of the psychoid enables us to re-vision the primary dimension of psychic life as a fundamentally shared unitary realm (Field 1991).

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