

ARCHETYPES (pronounced "arka-types")

When I first began studying all this stuff, years and years ago - the very word, "archetype," somehow seemed difficult, distant, and daunting... All I had to do was simply look at this word (archetype) -and my mind instantly went blank.

At the time, I'd recently started attending meetings of the local "Carl Jung Society." While at those meetings, folks would casually banter on in conversation regarding "the archetypes" - tossing all sorts of grandiose, intellectual concepts in my direction... in the attempt to "fit in" and not totally "blow my cover" (by revealing my total and complete ignorance on the matter) - I'd smile, nod my head in a properly thoughtful manner, and pretend I understood just what in the heck they were all talking about.

And, the fact is - (if you're a novice to all this) when you've finished this section on the archetypes, you'll probably smile thoughtfully and go on your way... However, my sincere hope is that before leaving, you'll be just a wee bit closer to "getting a grip" on the concept of archetypes...

Since the archetypes already "have a good grip" on you, I think it's only fair that you have an opportunity to get a grip on them.

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

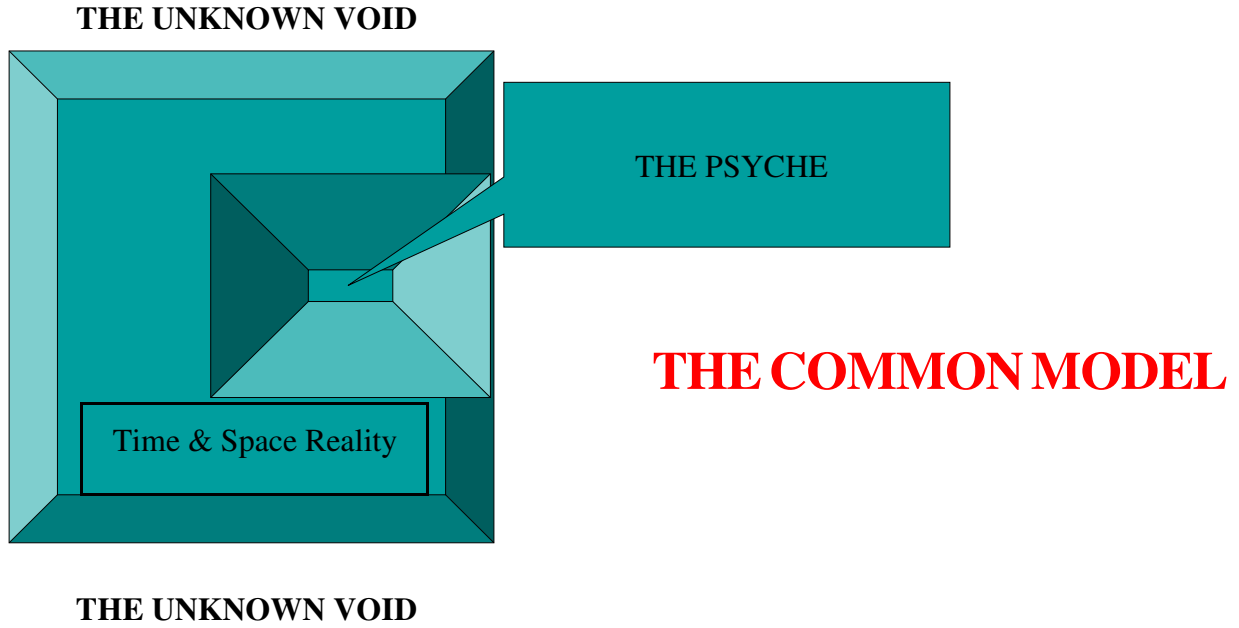
Let's start out by taking a quick look at two pictorial models of time/space reality and the human psyche as viewed through the eyes of the traditional, "orthodox" behaviorist theory of personality.

The first model is a theory that claims we're born into this world as "clean slates." It's a theory which claims all human behaviors are "programmed" into us by our particular environment (or more recently by some cognitive behaviorist "rebels" - some behaviors are thought to be influenced by genetics.)

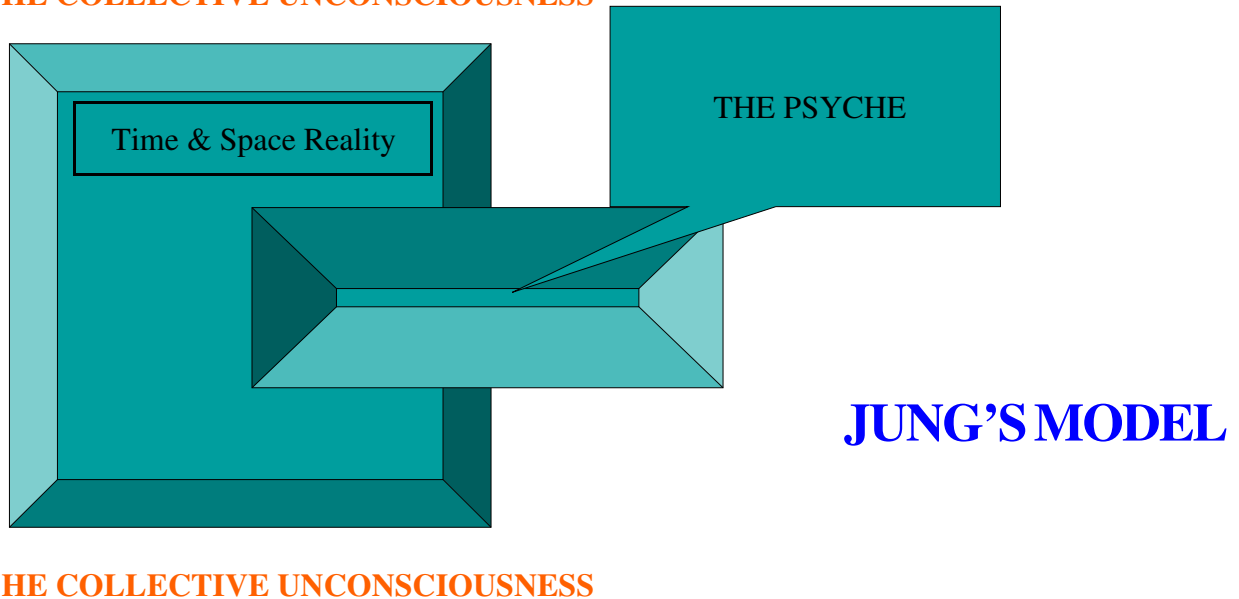
The second model is based on Carl Jung's vision of the human psyche and the "unconscious." Jung hypothesized that our minds at birth contain "inherent predispositions" to perceive in categories. (In other words, we're not born as "clean slates.") Jung called these "inherent predispositions" to perceive in categories: archetypes... "deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity... a kind of readiness to reproduce over and over again the same or similar mythical ideas..."

Common Model:

According to this view, the rectangle is the time/space box we're all (supposedly) locked up tight in. And the square inside this time/space box represents the sum total of the human psyche. Everything outside the box is the "unknown void." The "unknown void" has no direct effect on the human psyche, since the human psyche is conveniently wrapped up quite neatly (and safely) in the box of time/space reality. Accordingly, then regardless of what this "unknown void" might or (might not) contain - it's not considered pertinent to human development or growth.



THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUSNESS



Jung's Model:

On the right side is the box of time/space reality. Everywhere else is the "collective unconscious." The split rectangle in the middle represents the human psyche. Half of the psyche resides in the box of time/space reality - and half the psyche resides in the unconscious. Archetypes generally prefer hanging around outside of the time/space Box, and so they effect us from the vast "unconscious." Using this model of the human psyche, the archetypes (and their influence on the human psyche) are obviously quite profound in human development.

A Practical Example--Magnetic Attraction:

Here's an old and classic example that's often used when describing the archetypes...Think of archetypes as being like magnets with an invisible energy field... Remember back to science class? And a little experiment done with:

a magnet
a thin piece of cardboard paper
and shaved metal filings

First:

You placed the magnet on a table.

Second:

You placed the cardboard over the magnet and then sprinkled the metal filings onto the cardboard.

Third:

You gently shook the cardboard or blew on it lightly...

Outcome:

The metal filings arranged themselves into a coherent pattern (usually a series of swirls) that reflected the magnet's invisible energy field.

Archetypes are like that! The archetype's invisible power (energy field) is revealed by what (or who) gets caught in their energy field -i.e. the archetypal images and behaviors. Strictly speaking no one ever directly sees or experiences the raw form and/or energy of an archetype. Archetypes (inherent predispositions) reside within the deepest, depths of the psyche's unconscious.

What we can, and do see are "archetypal images." These "images" help to explain, or "dress up" the raw energy of an archetype. Then, in turn, we experience these archetypal images as archetypal behaviors. In a nutshell: Archetypes (*stuff we're born with*) are seen as Archetypal Images (*dressing up our stuff*) and experienced as Archetypal Behaviors (*our stuff in daily life*).

Archetypal Behaviors:

Jung used the term "archetypal behaviors" to include all psychological realities that are typical, stereotypical, or universal. Archetypal behaviors are typical, eternally-repeated, behaviors among human beings. But, what is meant by that?

For example, when a newborn baby smiles - its smile is a universal, archetypal behavior. When a newborn baby suckles, frowns, cries - all these instinctive behaviors are archetypal. Another archetypal behavior? Most young animals (including humans) have an inborn urge to relate to some sort of a mother figure. So, simple inborn, primal instincts, such as hunger, reproduction (sex), mother, and anger are all part of the wide range of behaviors that fall within the category of archetypal behaviors. *[Disclaimer: To any of you "By the Book" experts out there... Yes, I'm aware Jung sometimes makes a point of distinguishing instincts from archetypes... but there are plenty of other times that he doesn't.]*

However, it gets much more complicated. Jung also believed that many of our more complex social behaviors and/or "rituals" are also inborn, universal, archetypal behaviors. The intricate mating games and courtship rituals that we humans (as well as other animals) engage in are then also considered to be universal, archetypal behaviors. A good example of this is the proverbial "lover's triangle." Ever taken a good hard look at a "traditional" depiction of the number VI card in a tarot deck's Major Arcana—the tarot card called "the Lover?" It's a picture of a man caught between his desire for two very different types of women. So, a "Lover's Triangle" is an archetypal repeated behavior; a very ancient archetypal pattern of behavior going all the way back to the times of the Caveman and the Cavewoman. It's happened innumerable times in history, and it'll happen to humans again and again and again.

Additionally, it gets even more complex. Going far beyond the basic instincts, and going beyond social, relational "instinctual behavior" (rituals), Jung saw the human desire for spirituality—our need for experiencing "the Eternal"—as being an inborn archetypal behavior.

To paraphrase a short excerpt from *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*: Therefore, when we speak of "god" as an "archetype," we are saying nothing about his/her/its real nature, but are rather letting it be known that "god" already has a place in that part of our psyche which is pre-existent to consciousness and, therefore, "god" cannot be considered merely an invention of consciousness. We neither make "god" more remote nor do we eliminate the concept of "god," but we bring "god" closer to the possibility of being experienced. The psyche of the infant in its preconscious state is anything but *tabula rasa* (blank sheet). It is already preformed in a recognizably individual way, and is moreover equipped with all specifically human instincts, as well as with the *a priori* foundations of the higher functions. And if, by employing the concept of "archetype," we attempt to define a little more closely the point at which the "god" grips us, we have not abolished anything, only approached closer to the source of life.

It is an interesting possibility, then: We are born with the desire to know and experience god.

So, archetypal behaviors are typical, eternally repeated behaviors among human beings. Naturally, different cultures dress them up and put different clothes on them... but the core image and energy is the same. The core image and energy is "typical."

The causes of these archetypal, universal, typical behaviors are to be found, according to Jung, residing in the "unconscious." However, Jung found a couple of primary places where "archetypal images" could be found and then systematically studied.

First Jung found many of the archetypal images "projected" into the symbols of mythology, religion, and alchemy. And in a 1911 letter written to Sigmund Freud, Jung even makes the bold suggestion that astrology seems to be one of the "indispensable" places to go for a proper understanding of mythology. Second Jung found the "archetypal images" residing in our dreams and in our imagination. And, this includes our day dreams (fantasies/imagination) and our night dreams (nightmares).

Unfortunately, I still haven't told you what the core essence of an archetype is because I don't know what the core essence of an archetype is; and, neither does anyone else for that matter. *"There is nothing I am quite sure about. I have no definite convictions—not about anything really. When Lao Tzu says: 'All are clear, I alone am clouded,' he is expressing what I feel in advanced old age"* (Jung - Memories, Dreams, and Reflections, 1965: 358-59).