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Reading Plato through Jung

Why must the Third become the Fourth?

Paul Bishop

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"This is a gem of a book! Once again, Paul Bishop demonstrates why he's a master of insight and a leading light in Jungian scholarship. Bishop guides us expertly through the twists and turns of Jung's interpretation of Plato's cosmology and treats us to a feast of weighty ideas and philosophical traditions along the way. Crafted with Bishop's usual assiduity and delightful style, this book provides much needed clarification of Jung's complex relation to Plato, and Jung's cryptic accounts of the 'third' and the 'fourth'."

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"No serious reader of Jung can avoid encountering and, frankly, being perplexed by Jung's numerous excited references to the third becoming the fourth. What does this idea mean? And why was it so important to Jung? With his characteristic erudition, insight, and open-mindedness, as well as a good deal of sheer sleuthing, Paul Bishop brilliantly explicates Jung's major statements on this theme, especially as they relate to works of Plato, Goethe, and Dorn. What might initially have seemed an esoteric curiosity turns out, after Bishop's masterful analysis, to be a key to understanding the real-world significance and ethical challenge of Jung's entire clinical and cultural thought. This is a stunningly illuminating piece of scholarship."

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"Paul Bishop applies a unique lens to Jung's philosophical framework and evinces fascinating insights into how the influence of Plato resonates through the archetypal underpinnings to analytical psychology. In doing so, the spirit of Plato's enduring presence in the annals of western thought is marvelously illuminated via Bishop's accessible and erudite writing style. This is a book brimming with original ideas and new connections and will be of keen interest to Jungian thinkers and practitioners, as well as to academics and students of philosophy. I highly recommend this to anyone interested in the living legacy of Platonic thought and its influence on depth psychology."

—Phil Goss, Associate Professor, *Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Warwick, UK, and Jungian Analyst*

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Yes, Plato, you are right! All truths are within us: they are US, and when we think we have discovered them, we are merely looking within ourselves and saying YES!
(de Maistre, Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg,
Septième entretien)

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Psychoanalysis and the Problem of the Third and the Fourth

Abstract This introductory chapter examines the notion of the Third and the Fourth in a range of psychoanalytic thinkers as practitioners identified by Ann Belford Ulanov in 2007. Ulanov traced the notion of the Third as a source of healing back to Paul Tillich, who criticized Jung for his "anxiety" about metaphysics. In Jung's defence, Edward F. Edinger highlighted the revelatory function of the symbol in Jung's thought and examined the rôle of the Third in the dialectic of development Jung proposed. While Jung's early work emphasized the Third as the "transcendent function", he increasingly insisted on the importance of the Fourth as something that makes itself known in the human psyche yet lies outside it—the "recalcitrant" Fourth, as he called it, which he related to Plato's *Timaeus* and Goethe's *Faust II*. It is the thinking behind these relations that the present study undertakes to examine in more detail, in order to answer the question: why *must* the Third become the Fourth?

Keywords Jung • Ulanov • Tillich • Edinger • The Third • The Fourth

One of the major tropes of psychoanalytic discourse is the notion that "the Third" is an agent that can in some way or another bring about healing. This notion of "the Third" as a source of healing can be traced back, as the US psychoanalyst Ann Belford Ulanov explored in 2007 in an article in

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The Journal of Analytical Psychology, to the theologian Paul Tillich: and, in fact, various analysts have understood "the Third" in different ways: as "the space in between" (in the case of Winnicott), as located in the mind of the mother or of the analyst (André Green), as speech (Lacan), as intersubjectivity (Thomas Ogden), or as process (Jessica Benjamin) (Ulanov 2007, 585–589). This demonstrates an extremely wide range of how this term is understood; let us consider each one briefly.

In *Playing and Reality* (1971), the English psychoanalyst and object relations theorist Donald Winnicott (1896–1971) argued that play, especially in its use of a transitional object, enables individuals not just to develop in early childhood but to engage with "the abstractions of politics and economics and philosophy and culture seen as the culmination of natural growing processes", thereby opening up a "third area"—the area of "cultural experience which is a derivative of play", that is, play as a third area which "expands into creative living and into the whole cultural life of [humankind]" (Winnicott 2005, 187 and 138). Then again, in his lecture "On thirdness" (1991), the French psychoanalyst André Green (1927–2012) argued that "the real problem with the developmental perspective is not the journey from two to three—from the dyad to the triad—but the transition from the stage of potential thirdness (when the father is only in the mother's mind) to effective thirdness when he is perceived as a distinct object by the child" (Green 2000, 46). Drawing on the work of the American philosopher and semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), Green proposed another view of what he called "the crux of the matter: that one day this paradise has to come to an end, that two in one becomes two who are kept apart, and this is why a third is needed"—namely, that "firstness is being, secondness relating, and thirdness thinking" (ibid., 50 and 63). Thirdness is said to be "the highest capacity of the mind", because "thought is the manipulation of signs" and "this capacity of thought opens the way for an infinite system of interpretation" (ibid., 64 and 66).

Although he was affiliated to the SSP (Société psychanalytique de Paris), in the early 1960s Green began attending the seminar of Jacques Lacan (1901–1981). According to Lacan, the human psyche can be understood in terms of three "orders" or "registers", which he calls the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. On this account, speech itself is a kind of third, represented by the symbolic father who stands between the mother and the infant (or between the analysand and the unconscious) (Evans 1996, 131–132; Ulanov 2007, 587). On 1 November 1974, Lacan

gave an address to the 7th Congress of the École freudienne de Paris in Rome entitled "La Troisième", that is, "The Third", where he declared: "It is not because the unconscious is structured like a language that lalangue does not have to play against its own enjoyment, since it is made out of this very enjoyment. The subject supposed to know, who is the analyst in the transference, is not supposed in error, if he knows what the unconscious consists of, in being a knowledge that is articulated from lalangue, the body that speaks only being knotted to it by the real that it enjoys" (Lacan 2019, 94–95; cf. Lacan 2011). (As it happens, this address opens with an allusion to (or a misquotation from? a playful calque on?) a piece of numerological esotericism by the French Romantic poet Gérard de Nerval (1808–1855), his poem "Artémis" (the sixth in a sequence of eight sonnets published under the title *Les Chimères* [*The Chimeras*] in 1854), which opens, "La Treizième revient … C'est encor la première" [i.e. "The Thirteenth returns … It's still the first"] [Nerval 1966, 702].)[1]

Along with his use of *reverie*, his focus on the use of language in psychoanalysis, and his approach to the relationship between psychoanalysis and literature, Thomas Ogden (b. 1946) introduced into psychoanalysis in 1992 the concept of the *analytic third*. In addition to the analyst and the analysand, he argued, there is a third subject of analysis—the "intersubjective analytic third" or simply the "analytic third", defined as standing "in dialectical tension with the analyst and analysand as separate individuals with their own subjectivities", inasmuch as each participates "in the unconscious intersubjective construction (the analytic third)", albeit asymmetrically (Ogden 1997, 109). On this account, the relationship of the rôles of analyst and analysand "structures the analytic interaction in a way that strongly privileges the exploration of the unconscious internal object world of the analysand", because the analytic relationship itself fundamentally "exists for the purpose of helping the analysand make psychological changes that will enable him to live his life in a more fully human way" (ibid., 109).

In the case of the New York-based psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin (b. 1946), thirdness is bound up with the idea of intersubjectivity (Benjamin 2004). For Benjamin, this idea of passes into psychoanalysis thanks to Lacan, whose view of intersubjectivity "derived from Hegel's theory of recognition and its popularization by the French Hegelian writer Kojève" (ibid., 11; see Lacan 1991; Kojève 1980). Whereas, on her account, Lacan saw the Third as something which "keeps the relationship between two persons from collapsing" in various ways: in the form of merger (oneness),

of the elimination of difference, or of the polarized opposition of the power struggle (ibid., 11–12), Benjamin conceives as thirdness "both as a mental function and as an intersubjective state" (Benjamin 2005, 197). As an intersubjective state, thirdness is "the position that turns the opposition of dichotomies into tensions, spaces, possibilities for creative dissonance and harmony"—hence an image of thirdness "based on a musical metaphor" of "two or more people following a score, not one they have already read but one that reveals itself only as they go along" (ibid., 197).

In their various ways, all these analysts are seen by Ulanov as having endorsed the view of the importance of the Third expressed by the German-US Christian existentialist philosopher and theologian, Paul Tillich (1886–1965).[2] On Tillich's account, there are three fundamental concepts in the Christian tradition: first, *esse qua esse bonum est*, that is, "being as being is good"; second, the universal fall, in the sense of "the transition from this essential goodness into existential estrangement from oneself", is something that happens "in every living being and in every time"; and third, there is the possibility of salvation, in the sense of *salvus* or *salus*, that is, "healing" or "wholeness" (Tillich 1959, 118–119). For Tillich, all "genuine theological thinking" contains these three principles: (1) "essential goodness"; (2) "existential estrangement"; and (3) "the possibility of something, a 'third,' beyond essence and existence, through which the cleavage is overcome and healed" (ibid., 119). (In so arguing, Tillich concluded, our "essential and existential nature" points to our "teleological nature" (in the sense of our *telos*, aim, or that for which and towards which our life drives) [ibid., 119].)

In his contribution to a public memorial meeting held in 1961 in honour of C.G. Jung after his death and sponsored jointly by the New York Association for Analytical Psychology and the Analytical Psychology Club of New York, Paul Tillich paid tribute to the way in which "many of Jung's ideas are of great help to theology and especially to Protestant theology" (see Bertine et al., 28–32). Yet he went on to criticize what he saw as Jung's scepticism about metaphysics, going so far as to speak of "Jung's anxiety about what he calls metaphysics":

> This, it seems to me, does not agree with his actual discoveries, which on many points reach deeply into the dimension of a doctrine of being, that is, an ontology. This fear of metaphysics, which he shares with Freud and other nineteenth-century conquerors of the spirit, is a heritage of this century. […] In taking the biological and, by necessary implication, the physical

> realm into the genesis of archetypes, he has actually reached the ontological dimension "imprinted upon the biological continuum." And this was unavoidable, given the revelatory power he attributes to the symbols in which the archetypes express themselves. For to be revelatory one must express what needs revelation, namely, the mystery of being. (Ibid., 31)

(Some of Jung's current critics in the academy might raise their eyebrows at the suggestion that Jung was not sufficiently metaphysical!) In Jung's defence, the American analyst Edward F. Edinger (1922–1998) later argued that Jung was not so much afraid of metaphysics as of metaphysicians, pointing to the parallel between Tillich's call for symbols that are "revelatory" inasmuch as they "express what needs revelation, namely, the mystery of being", and Jung's statement in *Aion* (1951) about the importance of the shadow, the syzygy, and the self:

> [It] is possible, through them, to relate so-called *metaphysical* concepts, which have lost their root connection with natural experience, to living, universal psychic processes, so that they can recover their true and original meaning. In this way the connection is re-established between the ego and projected contents now formulated as "metaphysical" ideas. Unfortunately, […] the fact that metaphysical ideas exist and are believed in does nothing to prove the actual existence of their content or of the object they refer to, although the coincidence of idea and reality in the form of a special psychic state, a state of grace [*eines status gratiae*], should not be deemed impossible, even if the subject cannot bring it about by an act of will. Once metaphysical ideas have lost their capacity to recall and evoke the original experience they have not only become useless but prove to be actual impediments on the road to wider development. One clings to possessions that have once meant wealth; and the more ineffective, incomprehensible, and lifeless they become the more obstinately people cling to them. (Naturally it is only sterile ideas that they cling to; living ideas have content and riches enough, so there is no need to cling to them.) Thus in the course of time the meaningful turns into the meaningless. This is unfortunately the fate of metaphysical ideas. (Jung 1959, §65)

In fact, Edinger himself drew attention to the fact that one of Jung's "major discoveries" had been "the psychological significance of the number four as it relates to the symbolism of psychic wholeness and the four functions", arguing that the significance of the quaternity is "basic to his whole theory of the psyche, both as regards its structure and its

developmental goal", that is, the individuation process (Edinger 1973, 179). At the same time, however, Edinger conceded that one encounters other numerical motifs in dreams as in myth and folklore, notably the theme of three, but that "because of the predominant value that Jung attached to the quaternity, he tended in most cases to interpret trinitarian images as incomplete or amputated quaternities" (ibid., 179). Such an approach, Edinger noted, could provoke objections, such as the one expressed by Victor White (1902–1960), the English Dominican priest with whom Jung famously conducted a lengthy correspondence about psychology and theology. As White wrote in *Soul and Psyche* (1960):

> […] Are we *always* compelled to ask, when confronted with the number three, "Where is the fourth"? Are we to suppose that always and everywhere the number three us to be understood only a four minus one?—that every triangle is only a failed square? […] Or could it possibly be that ternary symbols are, so to speak, archetypal images in their own right, which present a content distinct from that of the quaternity? (White 1960, 106)

In his chapter in *Ego and Archetype* (1972) entitled "The Trinity Archetype and the Dialectic of Development", Edinger picks up this challenge, proposing that "th[e] ternary symbol is a separate and valid entity in itself" and distinguishing between (a) the quaternity image as expressing "the totality of the psyche in its structural, static or eternal sense"; and (b) the trinity image as expressing "the totality of psychological experience in its dynamic, developmental, temporal aspect" (Edinger 1973, 182). For support for this position, Edinger turns to the English psychoanalyst H.G. Baynes (1882–1943), who wrote in *Mythology of the Soul* (1940) that "the triune archetype symbolizes the dynamic or vital aspect" and that "the number three is specifically associated with the creative process": "Every function of energy in nature has, indeed, the form of a pair of opposites, united by a third factor, their product. Thus the triangle is the symbol of a pair of opposites joined above or below by a third factor" (Baynes 1969, 565 and 405).

And Edinger can point to other threefold developmental models as well. According to William Inge (1860–1954), the mystical process of spiritual development is threefold (purgative, illuminative, and unitive) (Inge 1918, 9–10); the Italian theologian and apocalyptic thinker, Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202), developed a theory of historical time, dividing history into three stages (the Age of the Father, corresponding to the Old

Testament; the Age of the Son, corresponding to the New Testament; and the Age of the Holy Spirit, corresponding to an imminent utopian age and a new dispensation of universal love); the Swiss physician and alchemist known as Paracelsus (c. 1493–1541) combined the mediaeval view of the human being as composed of body, soul, and spirit and the alchemical view of metals as composed of three primary principles of mercury, sulphur, and salt, when he identified mercury as the spirit, sulphur as the soul, and salt as the body (Paracelsus 1967, 125); G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) (or, rather, Hegelians) proposed an understanding of the process of history in terms of three stages of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis[3]; while Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) distinguished three stages in the natural learning process (the stages of romance, precision, and generalization) (Whitehead 1929). Closer to his psychoanalytic home, Edinger could point to Freud's three stages of psychosexual development (oral, anal, and genital)[4]; the distinction made by Gerhard Adler (1904–1988) between feminine and masculine triads (Adler 1961, 26–261); the three stages of psychological development identified by M. Esther Harding (1888–1971) (autos, ego, and Self) (Harding 1963, 22–23); and, indeed, Edinger's own scheme of psychological development, involving (1) the stage of the Self, in which the ego is identified with the Self; (2) the stage of the ego, in which the ego becomes alienated from the Self; and (3) the stage of the ego-Self axis, in which the ego becomes reunited with the Self—three phases of a repetitive cycle which recurs time and again throughout the individual's lifetime (Edinger 1973, 186).

Yet originally, however, Jung had been as keen as any post-Hegelian thinker might have been to think in terms of triads. In his early work, for instance, we find an emphasis on the Third as the so-called transcendent function. In an important essay with this title written in 1916 (in another words, during the time that he was working on the fifth and sixth of his *Black Books*), but not discovered in his files until 1953 and not published until 1957, Jung sought to answer the "universal question", viz.: "How does one come to terms in practice with the unconscious?" (*Wie setzt man sich praktisch mit dem Unbewußten auseinander?*) (Jung 1969b, 67). In this paper Jung distinguished two key stages in the analytic process: after (1) the unconscious content has been "given form" and "the meaning of this formulation is understood", the question arises as to (2) "how the ego will relate to this position" and "how the ego and the unconscious are to come to terms [with each other]" (*damit hebt die Auseinandersetzung zwischen dem Ich und dem Unbewußten an*) (Jung 1969b, §181). This