

SOULISTICS: METAPHOR AS THERAPY OF THE SOUL

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In the imaginary, the world takes on primordial meaning. The imaginary is not presented here in the sense of purely fictional but as a coming to pass, a becoming, a possibility. For something to be possible it must have been imaginable. Colette Gaudin says, "It is within the imaginary element that the dynamics of values must be studied. A value is not something already achieved, it is a becoming, an aspiration."¹ Becoming provides the necessary structure of temporality in our capacity for projection toward a future. It is in this projecting that the power of imagination lives. By attempting to understand the power invested in imagination, we shall come closer to understanding the creative energies and capacities in being human, such as the power of possibilities.

The power of imagery appears to derive from spiritual modes of existence. It is primarily poetic and indicates a vibrating unity in creativity. Gaston Bachelard's research into the ontological aspects of the imagination can be utilized here:

The fundamental word corresponding to imagination is not *image*, but *imaginary*. The value of an image is measured by the extent of its *imaginary* radiance. Thanks to the *imaginary*, the imagination is essentially *open, evasive*. In the human psyche, it is the very experience of *opening* and *newness*. More than any other power, it determines the human psyche.²

This is the frontier of human existence which must be understood to deal creatively with innovative aspects of humankind and shed on the darkness of our common understanding of life. This is where transformation arises. In this resides the ontological implications of the world and the temporal nature of existence. It allows Bachelard to renew warnings against the temptations to study images as things. Images are lived, re-imagined in an act of consciousness which restores at once their timelessness and their newness. The way to study images is to explore their power of trans-subjectivity. Images reverberate in the person's consciousness and uncover possibilities, while communicating.

Trans-subjectivity is a powerful edge to consciousness creative people such as poets (as artists) skate upon. The poet moves in the *Inbetween*³ on the fringes of the pre-reflective, the already known and the mysteriously shared thematic imagery.⁴ Poetry is a zone of language in which originality resides in potential universality. As Bachelard says, "The imagination is thus a psychological world beyond. It becomes a psychic forerunner which

projects its being."⁵ This brings us to the very heart of meaning. It is what gives us a "there is," of which Being itself comes into its own as presence.

Of course Bachelard's thought has followed in its own fore-shadowed footsteps into the meaning of language and even on to poetic expression as an ultimate source of human heartedness and understanding:

To acquire a feeling for the imaginative role of language, we must patiently seek, in every word, the desires for otherness, for double meaning, for metaphor. ...Through imagination, we forsake the ordinary course of things. To perceive and to imagine are as antithetic as presence and absence. To imagine is to absent oneself; it is a leap toward a new life.⁶

In this expression, "leap toward a new life," we clearly see the power of imagination. It is an activation of one's capacity for change, for a new way of living through imagination. The power of imagination is essential to human life it is existential, it is primordial to existence. For Bachelard it is an essential voyage:

The voyage into distant worlds of the imaginary truly *conducts* a dynamic psyche only if it takes the shape of a voyage into the land of the infinite. In the realm of imagination, every immanence takes on a transcendence. The very law of poetic expression is to go beyond thought. Undoubtedly, this transcendence often seems coarse, artificial, broken. At other times it works too quickly, it is illusory, ephemeral, dispersive; for the reflective being, it is a mirage. But this mirage is fascinating.⁷

Metaphor vivifies images that express the soul as they emerge by the extent of its imaginary radiance. This approach brings forth and opens up the possibility for re-centering, a reclamation of coming to oneself. With many clients it seems the self gets so weighted down it doubles in on itself. Through metaphor the counselor helps the client work toward a greater acceptance of self. The counselor helps free the client from demands to change into a different person. Using metaphor the counselor facilitates the client's potential to become more tolerant and understanding of self. For Margaret Chatterjee:

The *possibility* of metaphorical discourse is grounded on the inexhaustible variations of experience, and the unusual figurative expression sets in motion stirrings of accumulated experience with their open-ended possibilities of further development, so that a new insight may ensue.⁸

By freeing for, metaphor allows the possibility for self-transcendence. The counselor helps provide the base for movement and frees energy in the client to move. This activates the imaginary elements of the client as a dynamic being. This approach is an attempt to vivify the soul, through the imaginative possibility in our nature. The client becomes free to imagine possibilities, bringing forth new horizons. A metaphor constitutes a stable world after a number of readjustments. For Bachelard, “The real world is absorbed by the imaginary world.”⁹ The soul governs the perspective we have of ourselves and the world. The soul is fundamental. Bachelard speaks of images of the soul:

It is to prove that reverie gives us the world of a soul, and that a poetic image bears witness to a soul which is discovering its world, the world where it would like to live and where it deserves to live.¹⁰

The soul appears only in relation to something else. It cannot be seen independently. Metaphor vivifies the imaginary for the client to see and feel a different way of moving through the world. With this, one is allowed freedom from restriction and at the same time given an area for concentrated effort to complete the image. This provides something for the client to hang on to and move with.

The client’s experience is seen as growth and becoming. We are as travelers always on the way to, opening up to new horizons. With the use of metaphor, soulistics is therapy of the soul. This brings forth the possibility for reclamation and movement toward one’s center. Soulistics is an applied psychology for spiritual beings. For a spiritual counselor, this would be lining up an aspirant’s natural expression with a self-chosen vocation.

Becoming is seen as a perpetual struggle and discovery, living paradoxes. Metaphor gives expression to the restlessness and puts the person in touch with a way to actualize that potential. In the discussion of “Union of Body and Soul” Thomas Aquinas provides a way to understand how this is possible:

The soul does not move the body by its essence, as the form of the body, but by the motive power, whose act presupposes that the body is already actualized by the soul: so that the soul by its motive power is the part which moves; and the animate body is the part moved.¹¹

As an applied psychology for spiritual beings, soulistics works in this way: The counselor provides supportive guidance and assistance to the person in terms of being able to gain insight into their unique conflicts and aspirations. The approach of the counselor is to provide accurate, precise

information on possibilities being considered and to allow the person to arrive at decisions of their own. The goals and aspirations of the person are brought into full view through this dialogue. In order that appropriate choices can be made in terms of practical possibilities at hand, one must understand the person's world. This approach is a way of understanding the person from an integral view, that one problem experienced is not an isolated event but rather arises from the person's overall life situation. In helping the person to understand and act upon what is discovered through working together, the counselor provides the supportive guidance and assistance required in decisions which are to affect the person's future quality of life. This working relationship comes from the counselor's ability to sense the person's aspirations, strengths and weaknesses and limitations, as well as to be informed on the functional application of choices.

Notes

- 1) Introduction to Gaston Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*, trans., intro. Colette Gaudin (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), p. xxxii. In the introduction to this work the intertwining nature of values and imagination are discussed. Each comes with the other. Values are inherent in one's aspirations.
- 2) *Ibid.*, p. 19. Bachelard's emphasis is upon the way images reveal different ways to live human time and shows the trans-subjective unity which reverberates between meaning and structure in human experience.
- 3) Sunnie D. Kidd, "Music: An Intersubjective *Durée*", *Migrant Echo*, IX, no. 3 (September-December 1980), p. 131. A metaphor to exemplify this: The poet moves *Inbetween* the ocean and the sand on the edge of the world. The poet in each of us seems to draw people to the beach, it brings contemplation.
- 4) The *Inbetween* is the as-yet unknown, a pre-reflective domain often expressed imaginatively by the poet. The unthematic imagery is the zone of origins in meaning. In imagination this ground provides opportunities for discovery of personal possibilities.
- 5) Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
- 6) *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 7) *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 8) Margaret Chatterjee, *The Language of Philosophy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), p. 60.

- 9) Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, trans. Daniel Russell (New York: Orion Press, 1969), p. 13.
- 10) *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 11) *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed., intro. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 309.