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A Terrible Love Of War

by James Hillman

James Hillman was trained as a Jungian psychologist, but in his recent work he eschews all Jungian vocabulary, practicing rather an "analysis" based on the careful weighing of words and their etymologies. He juxtaposes them against their roots, contrasts them to their supposed opposites, to their cultural variants, and culls a new "depth psychology" from this process. There is nothing in this book about the "anima", "animus" the "shadow" and all the other favored Jungian poetry. Instead Hillman goes, quite naturally, to poetry itself. By going deeper into words we find what we are really saying is often quite different than what we think. The external 'verities' of Freud and Jung manifest themselves in as a simpler, more coherent--- internal truth. Like Pascal, Hillman meditates on an opposition, an etymology, or a life story, quite often his own, until he has drawn from each a full cultural resonance, thus letting the process of the divine, which is the ultimately only what is most real, reveal itself.

"As a psychologist I learned long ago that I could not explain my patient's behavior, nor anyone's, including my own..."

This admission of "defeat" is really a victory, for now the scientist can see for the first time what he has been missing: the imagination. "The Gods" manifest themselves today as psychic tension or as behaviors, but they are anything but metaphors, rather they are truth, as we can know it. More truth, in fact, than we can handle.

This book is a meditation in four chapters, entitled: "War Is Normal, War is Inhuman, War is Sublime, and Religion Is War". In the first of these chapters the author disabuses us of the comforting notion that Peace and War are opposites or distinct states, and that love can overcome that hate which leads to War, a traditional assumption of many progressive, high-minded people. War is not an opposite state to "Peace" rather "Peace" is the brief interval before the next War. As the philosopher and student of Martin Buber Emanuel Levinas says "Being reveals itself as War", at least in the West. War is of the earth, is perhaps even driven by those earthy powers, those ancestors whose bodies are the very dust of the earth which absorbs the blood of war. Is this mere metaphor? Think again:

"There have been five-thousand six-hundred years of written history and fourteen-thousand six hundred wars have been recorded."

There have been roughly two and a half wars going on for every year of recorded history. This sentence is surely enough to give the reader of Kant's essay On Perpetual Peace pause. Can it be doubted that not only is war "normal", but that it is a manifestation of a force as powerful to our species as is Eros or Death, and far more permanent than the Peace it outstrips? What, after all, is 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder', but the very presence and preparation for the next war, hovering ominously, even in the moment of "Peace"?

"De Tocqueville describes "a new kind of servitude" where a supreme power covers the surface of society with a network of small, complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and energetic characters cannot penetrate to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered but softened, bent and guided; men are seldom forced to act, but they are constantly *restrained from acting*. Such a power does not destroy; but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrial animals, of which government is the shepherd...The state becomes the sole guarantor of self-preservation...Thus do conditions become right for the Prince, who, as Machiavelli wrote, "Should have no other thought but War..."

Enemies always abound. Pretexts abound. In fact, it is the imagination of the enemy which MAKES (in both senses) that enemy.

Being reveals itself as "War" in the West not because of Homer's glorification of it, but because it is nourished by the extreme monotheism of Christianity, an "Old Testament warrior" God of Jaweh, tacked onto a New Testament without War ("Turn the other cheek, and give your enemy your cloak). War becomes "a self-replicating" pattern of behaviour possessed of a dynamism not unlike that of a living organism." Meanwhile the methods of war evolve. Instead of Dreadnoughts it is now the "cool" presence of the hand behind the computer who causes cities to explode and burn from hundreds of miles away, unseen, and without participation in the ensuing horror. Now war has become "Apollonic" because "It was Apollo who chases, but fails to consummate his relations in closeness." Here Hillman does not hesitate to draw the inevitable conclusions from the fact that Ares always lies down with Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love. From ancient Sumner to present day Iraq the story is the same: the thrill, the glory, and the 'erotics' of war pass every other experience in intensity and delight. The hold of war is as powerful as Eros, indeed, IS Eros: "There is no beauty like it, because its beauty is evil" said one soldier, echoing Baudelaire.

Can anyone be so foolish as to believe that this violence is only incidental, only or purely contextual? The much touted "Sex AND violence" of the so called "conservatives"? Do we think that television generates it?

"The high paid-speechwriters, spin doctors, press conferences gauged to conceal and rebuff in the name of higher principles like "national security", the well-groomed and dispassionate news anchors, the non-committal hypocrisy of "balanced reporting" , the sentimentalities following the accidents, the pharmaceutical ads meant to arouse fear in the name of healing, the Sunday preachers, the titillation of interruptions ("We're out of time I have to cut you off") before any conclusions can be reached, the unrelenting bombardment of the people with the toxins of hypocrisy, TV's own weapon of mass destruction, there is indeed call for sanctions and censorship---not by the government--- but of the government----"

Were we, in America, able to be true warriors, and equal to the mission of the preservation of the civilization with which we have been entrusted--- we might be able to imagine a real enemy, a enemy WORTHY of our opposed strength:

"Imagining the enemy means allowing the other to enter and to occupy whole areas of your soul, to submit to be penetrated, but not possessed. This too is from Aphrodite. She took all lovers to herself, but was herself never taken (Instead) the center of culture in the United States since its colonial days has been faithfully promised to the plain style of Protestant literalism, direct, unambiguous, uncompromising...the American imagination in dance and in music and in writing is receives world wide recognition, but the penetration of this culture to into AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE arrives only in the armoured car of money delivery. The civilizing influence of the aesthetic imagination never makes it to the mall. It is as if the nation were immune to its own culture, protected against it as against something freak, unnatural, a disease of decadence, a corrupting of what Americans REALLY live by and for, forward marching under the flag, against all enemies. Culture, which could possibly "leash" the violence of war with a love of equal strength is so blasted by America's ways of belief, that we can must conclude that religion is war's sinister grandfather..."

But not any religion, but rather, especially, MONOTHEISTIC religion: especially the three: Islam, Judaism and Christianity, who myths, origins and even sacred geography are largely shared or related. Can this be only coincidence? Can anyone point to any wars which have occurred or are likely to occur between POLYTHEISTIC believers? Shintos against Hindus? Taosists against Buddhists? Animists of one sort against animists of another? I don't think

so. James Hillman suggests that we ought to think hard about that is the case. I think he's right.

Thanks for your wisdom, and your book, Mr. Hillman.

Will Morgan

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