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Chapter 9

Personal Myth and Analytical Psychology

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This chapter provides a fresh perspective on a highly significant but neglected area of analytical psychology: Carl Gustav Jung’s conception of the personal myth. In order to accomplish this I first trace the evolution of Jung’s thinking on this subject from his early encounters with Alfred Adler’s ideas on inferiority and guiding fiction through to his much later work on the personal myth discussed in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung, 1961/1995). Building on this, and complementing the related work of Hillman (1994) and Watsky (2002), it is suggested that a more Adlerocentric reading of Jung is required. It is further argued that Jung’s work on personal myth accommodates Adler’s master narrative relating to the inferiority complex and, in so doing, undermines its master status. This aligns the personal myth more clearly with contemporary thinking on the relationship between psychoanalytic studies and narrative (Frosh, 2010, pp. 69–97; Phillips, 2015). The second half of the chapter focuses on delineating the key features of the personal myth. I suggest that it represents Jung’s arrival at an integrative stance in relation to his scientific and more personal works. The personal myth is an evolving lifelong and life-wide project that seeks to find a middle way between the extremes of fatalism and agency. It includes ideational and cultural material and is mythopoetic in conception. It entails coming to
terms with one’s distinctive life pattern and bringing it to its fullest possible expression. Overall, personal myth means to carry life and weave together the golden threads that connect us all.

**Jung’s reception of Adler**

Jung was perhaps first exposed to Adler’s ideas through the meetings of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA), the Jahrbuch, and Adler’s early books. Adler spoke at the IPA on sadism in 1908, and psychic hermaphroditism in 1910. He wrote a paper in the Jahrbuch on the neurotic disposition in 1909 (McGuire, 1974, pp. 563–577). The private catalogue of Jung’s personal library indicates it contained copies of Adler’s *Study of Organ Inferiority* and *The Neurotic Constitution* but not his later works (Bibliothekskommission, 1967). Jung appears to have first read *The Neurotic Constitution* in the summer of 1912 (1913/1961, CW 4, p. 87). Adler was cited regularly throughout the *Collected Works* and particularly in the period 1916–1928 (Forryan & Glover, 1979, CW 20, p. 9).

Jung’s observations on Adler are both appreciative and critical. In 1917, he attempted to explain a typical patient example from both Adlerian and Freudian perspectives, concluding, ‘it is unquestionable that the urge to power plays an extraordinarily important part. It is correct that neurotic symptoms and complexes are also elaborate “arrangements” which inexorably pursue their aims, with incredible obstinacy and cunning. Neurosis is teleologically oriented. In establishing this Adler
has won for himself no small credit’ (Jung, 1917/1926/1943/1966, CW 7, p. 40). In 1921, he praised Adler for introducing the concept of compensation into the psychology of neuroses. He stated that inferiority gives rise to compensation, that is, a guiding fiction to balance the inferiority: ‘The “guiding fiction” is a psychological system that endeavours to turn an inferiority into a superiority’ (Jung, 1921/1971, CW 6, p. 418). He acknowledged this compensating function was, ‘undeniable and empirically demonstrable’ (p. 419) and then outlined his own views on compensation, arguing that it is an inherently self-regulating function of the psyche that seeks to balance the conscious and unconscious attitudes. He added that Adler recognised the anticipatory function of the unconscious (p. 422). In an undated note found in his posthumous papers, Jung praised Adler’s, ‘meticulous elaboration of the psychology and phenomenology of the urge for significance … [he] was the first to illuminate the social context of the problem of neurosis … [italics original] … Adler’s life work constitutes one of the most important keystones for the structure of a future art of psychotherapy’ (Jung cited in Jaffé, 1979, p. 65).

Turning to more critical examples, in a letter to Freud of 1910, Jung criticised Adler for his, ‘total absence of psychology’ (Maguire, 1974, p. 364). Two years later, again in a letter to Freud, he plotted with him to review The Neurotic Constitution in a negative light and claimed, ‘the man really is slightly dotty’ (Maguire, 1974, p. 531). In 1955, in an interview with Michael Schabad, Jung is quoted as saying, ‘Adler had only one idea. It was a good idea, but he did not get beyond schoolmaster psychology’
Perhaps the ambivalent nature of Jung’s reactions is best captured by his argument, made in 1930, that Adler’s individual psychology cannot be considered psychoanalytic and, in the following paragraph, that everyone interested in psychoanalysis should study Adler’s writings (Jung, 1930/1961, CW 4, p. 328).

**Adler as a point of triangulation**

Jung’s reading of Adler appears to have provided him with a key point of triangulation in relation to Freud and played a role in the development of several of his signature concepts. Generally, Jung developed a style of argument, whereby Adler and Freud were compared and contrasted, in order for Jung to establish his own position. This was adopted from 1913 onwards and continued throughout his life. It can be illustrated by three examples.

In 1924, Jung argued that, ‘Freud and Adler can easily be reconciled if only we will take the trouble to regard the psyche not as a rigid and unalterable system, but as a fluid stream of events which change kaleidoscopically under the alternating influence of different instincts. Hence we may have to explain a man on a Freudian basis before his marriage, and on the Adlerian basis afterwards …’ (Jung, 1926/1946/1954, CW 17, p. 82). Here, Jung made the case for a more nuanced understanding of the psyche; and argued that the master narratives of Freud and Adler can be employed more provisionally to interpret particular episodes or periods in a life. This was developed further in 1940, when Jung argued that conscious
megalomania can be compensated by unconscious inferiority just as conscious
inferiority can be compensated by unconscious megalomania (Jung, 1940/1968, CW 9i, p. 180). Here, Jung inverted Adler’s master narrative to suggest an alternative line
of movement from superiority to inferiority.

In 1933, Jung stated that Adler and Freud believed the human psyche is
everywhere the same, and can be explained in the same way, whereas, ‘it was one of
the greatest experiences of my life to discover how enormously different people’s
psyches are’ (Jung, 1933/1934, CW 10, p. 137). Again, Jung contrasted Freud and
Adler, in order to propose a more textured and pluralistic psychology.

In 1934, Jung compared Adler and Freud and argued they both explain
neurosis from an infantile angle and place the therapist in the position of an expert.
They ignore, he suggested, the will to adapt and the potential for growth and creativity
in the neurosis and enable the therapist to hide behind technique (Jung, 1934/1970,
CW 10, pp. 160–161). Here, Jung found both Freud and Adler didactic and proposed a
less technique-driven style. Related to this, in 1935, he suggested that patients may
benefit from reading books by both Freud and Adler and making their own choices
(Jung, 1935/1977, CW 18, p. 128). In 1955, he argued that, ‘psychology has also the
aspect of a pedagogical method in the widest sense of the word … It is an education.
It is something like antique philosophy. And not what we understand by a technique’
(Jung, 1977, p. 255). This hints at a distinctively Jungian pedagogical strategy
whereby grand narratives devolve to key concepts, that is, sit within the method rather than drive it.

So it was that Jung repeatedly framed his argument by contrasting the viewpoints of Freud and Adler (as he saw them) and developing a third position. He emphasized the value of both approaches but consistently refused to hang his developing sense of analytical psychology around either. Jung, it seems to me, argued for a ‘pluralistic’ approach to understanding the almost infinite varieties of psychological phenomena (1930/1961, CW 4, p. 329). He refused to explain them by using any one single theory as this would constitute a form of reductionism; writing, ‘criticism of the psychological assumptions upon which a man’s [sic] theories are based becomes an imperative necessity’ (Jung, 1951/1966, CW 16, p. 114); and, ‘the stubborn application of a particular theory or method must be characterized as basically wrong’ (Jung, 1926/1946/1954, CW 17, p. 113). He consequently refused to use psychotherapeutic techniques based on a single theory as this would approximate to a kind of therapeutic fundamentalism. Jung believed that some individuals may have an Adlerian psychology just as others may have a Freudian, or both, or neither. He also inverted their master narratives; for example, he argued that the inferiority complex may be relevant to some individuals but a form of superiority complex more relevant to others. In short, analytical psychology is analytical, at least in part, because it eschews master narratives. It is a comparative approach to psychology that honours the grand myths of Freud and Adler but refuses reduction to either. Jung, in
my view, is not attempting to replace the Oedipus complex or inferiority complex
with a third grand narrative of psychological theory. One reason for this is his interest
in enantiodromia and the play of opposites. In a limited sense, Adler’s approach is
enantiodromiatic because he saw inferiority turning into its opposite, namely, success.
Jung, however, was more fully committed to this line of thinking and seemed to
believe that all grand narratives eventually succumb to their opposites.

Adler’s theory of fictions

Adler developed an explicit theory of fictions by drawing selectively from Hans
Vaihinger’s *Philosophy of As-If* (Adler, 1912/1921, pp. 15, 18, 38, 81). Whatever its
merits, by 1912, Adler possessed a wide vocabulary of critical terms including:
‘guiding line’ (p. 24), ‘guiding fiction’ (pp. 27, 28), ‘anti-fiction’ (p. 40), and
‘fictitious guiding goal’ (p. 57). At that time, Jung had nothing of similar scope or
depth, and was largely dependent on Adler in beginning to develop his own approach.
It seems to me that Jung took on Adler’s ideas to inform his own thinking. In 1916, he
used the terms ‘lines of psychological development’ (Jung, 1916/1966, CW 7, p. 291)
and ‘life-line’ (p. 293). In 1921, he again used the term ‘life-line’ (Jung, 1921/1971,
CW 6, p. 170). In 1932, he referred to the ‘healing fiction’ (Jung, 1932/1969, CW 11,
p. 331). In 1957, he used the expression ‘fiction of oneself’ to describe the persona
(Jung, 1977, p. 297). The resemblance between these phrases, and Adler’s language
of guiding lines and fictions, is quite marked.
Jung’s adaptation of Adler’s ideas

Jung did not borrow from Adler wholesale, rather, he adapted and modified the latter’s theory of fictions in his own way. In relation to life-lines and guiding fictions, Jung acknowledged Adler’s use of the term ‘guiding fictions’ and sought to distinguish between it and life-lines.

The construction of life-lines reveals to consciousness the ever-changing direction of the currents of libido. These life-lines are not to be confused with the ‘guiding fictions’ discovered by Adler, for the latter are nothing but arbitrary attempts to cut off the persona from the collective psyche and lend it an independent existence. One might say that the guiding fiction is an unsuccessful attempt to construct a life-line. Moreover – and this shows the uselessness of the fiction – such a line as it does produce persists far too long; it has the tenacity of a cramp.

(Jung, 1916/1966, CW 7, p. 294)

Here, Jung explicitly criticized Adler and dismissed the guiding fiction as a failed life-line. The position in analytical psychology is that the life-line constructed by the hermeneutic method enables a synthesis with the collective psyche. It entails the elaboration of analogies and similarities in order to encourage individual and collective lines of development to appear. For Jung, the guiding fiction was too
narrow a concept to accommodate the collective psyche. There is an explicitly
historical dimension to Jung’s critique here that contrasts with Adler’s focus on the
contemporary period (1912/1921, p. 24). The life-line has both synchronic and
diachronic aspects, and it is the latter that provide a counterweight, or point of
comparison, to contemporary events and influences.

Jung also made the criticism that the guiding fiction lasts too long. The role he
envisaged for the life-line is more provisional and dynamic. Here, Jung may have
been concerned that the guiding fiction can solidify into persona identification;
indeed, its grounding in the resolution of a felt inferiority may make this more, rather
than less likely, and therefore difficult to shake off. For Jung, the heroic overcoming
of childhood problems may only be one stage in individuation and itself an obstacle to
further growth. He was also interested in the dynamic nature of libido and the ways in
which it can ebb and flow. For Jung, an individual may pursue several lines of
development at one time, and indeed, over the course of a life. An absorbing plot can
become a tiresome bore.

Adler argued that individuals wear a ‘persona’ or ‘mask’ determined by their
guiding fiction just like classical actors (1912/1921, p. 39). This indicates Adler’s
dramaturgical sensibility and, significantly, predates Jung’s first use of the term
persona (1916/1966, CW 7, p. 281). For Adler, the guiding fiction determines the
persona’s character traits, which then come into conflict with the anti-fiction of
societal influence; whereas, for Jung, the persona is a blend of these two aspects with
the accent on the latter. Adler stated that the guiding fiction is an idol, a deity, a God, holy, and divine (1912/1921, pp. 23, 41, 55). Jung acknowledged this and seems to incorporate it within his description of the persona as a petty-god (1916/1966, CW 7, p. 281).

Adler, influenced by Charcot, argued that the guiding fiction determines all perceptions, ideas, actions, and judgements, including the ideas of science and philosophy (1912/1921, p. 28). In this way, he anticipated Jung’s elaboration of the personal equation (1921/1971, CW 6, p. 9). Adler also argued that the guiding fiction can appear as a second self, an inner voice, or daemon which encourages, punishes, and accuses (1912/1921, p. 47). In 1932, Jung argued that the vocation is the voice of the inner individual and, ‘[a] daemon whispering … of new and wonderful paths’ (1934/1954, CW 17, p. 176). Adler’s signature concept of individual psychology as, ‘the entire psychic life’ (1912/1921, p. vii) bears some similarity with Jung’s evolving sense of individuation and individuality (1916/1966, CW 7, pp. 296–298).

Adler stated that the neurotic is nailed to the cross of his own fiction (1912/1921, p. 33). Jung subsequently argued that it is necessary to carry one’s own cross in order to avoid being nailed to it (1932/1969, CW 11, pp. 340–341; 1977, p. 440; 2009, p. 310). As indicated above, Adler incorporated Vaihinger’s threefold division into fiction, hypothesis, and dogma. Jung seems to have picked up on the idea of living out one’s own hypothesis and argued this is integral to the project of individuation (Jung, 1977, p. 98). Finally, Adler argued that the guiding fiction is an
individual’s answer to the question of life (1912/1921, p. 23); whereas, Jung stated that the personal myth is the answer given to the question that an individual addresses to the world (1961/1995, p. 350).

Conception of the personal myth

The remainder of this chapter focuses in more detail on the personal myth and explicates the key features of it. Jung wrote only very briefly on personal myth, in an explicit way, and this took place in the 1950s when he was already in his mid-seventies. Personal myth is therefore very late work, possibly Jung’s last. It may be one of his most significant contributions but it is not entirely clear what he meant by it. Huskinson (2008, p. 3) is perhaps right to argue that some of the Jungian literature has been more drawn to the analysis of classic myths than myth as personal narrative although there have been some significant contributions on this theme (for example, Bishop, 2014; Giegerich, 2008; MacAdams, 1993; Rowland, 2005; Stevens, 1995).

In a widely quoted passage in Memories, Dreams, Reflections, Jung stated that he was undertaking to tell his ‘personal myth’ (1961/1995, p. 17). Elsewhere in that text, he referred to, ‘an explanatory myth which has slowly taken shape within me in the course of the decades’ (p. 371). In addition, Jung discussed a painting and a related dream set in the city of Liverpool that took place on 2 January 1927, stating that, ‘out of it emerged a first inkling of my personal myth’ (p. 224). Jung also retrospectively alluded to a personal myth (‘my myth’) in the introduction to Symbols
of Transformation (1950/1956, CW 5, p. xxv). According to this account, written
around 1950, the completion of the manuscript of the Psychology of the Unconscious
in 1911 provided the spur to the development of his personal myth. In a letter to J.A.
Gilbert of 1929, he referred to enabling his patients to develop their own mythology
(Jung cited in Shamdasani, 2009, p. 216). These clues indicate that Jung developed a
sense of personal myth over a long period, indeed, that the personal myth could
evolve over a lifetime.

Scope of the personal myth and wider life

The personal myth is seen as profoundly connected with wider life. Jung insisted on
the indivisible connection between his formal writings and his life.

The ‘autobiography’ is my life, viewed in the light of knowledge I have gained from
my scientific endeavours. Both are one … My life has been in a sense the
quintessence of what I have written, not the other way around. The way I am and the
way I write are a unity. All my ideas and all my endeavours are myself. Thus, the
‘autobiography’ is merely the dot on the i.

(Jung, 1961/1995, p. 14)
This appears to be one reason why Jung was reluctant to write an autobiography and tended not to regard *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* as one (1976, p. 550). The personal myth cannot be reduced to a short statement or pat formula. Although there are several points where Jung appears to offer a pithy summary, the personal myth should be seen as encompassing both Jung’s work and wider life (‘all my ideas and all my endeavours are myself’). Linked to this, the personal myth has an explicitly theoretical or ideational content. Jung wrote that making theory should be seen as an integral part of his identity, ‘as vital a function of mine, as eating and drinking’ (1961/1995, p. 359). In his case, the personal myth encompassed a very wide range of fields indeed including psychology, religion, literature, and philosophy. This subverts conventional distinctions between theory and practice, and further suggests that ideas should be seen as key components of narrative. It also indicates that the scope of the personal myth is vast as it potentially integrates all areas of a human being’s experience.

Despite Jung’s statements about telling his myth in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, it would be a misreading to interpret that text as the personal myth. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* is, ‘merely the dot on the i’. It is more of a guidebook to the personal myth and an occasionally unreliable one at that. There is also a sense in which the personal myth is always a work in progress. Shortly before his death, Jung found that he needed to re-visit unresolved childhood experiences and consider their significance (1961/1995, pp. 8–9). The personal myth, then, is never complete.
Its final extent is not known, and in this sense, there must remain a mysterious element to any personal myth.

The personal myth fails to wholly conform to the conventional storyline of a beginning, middle, and end; and nor does it form a purely linear plot. Jung stated, ‘there is no linear evolution; there is only a circumambulation of the self’ (p. 222); and apparently suggested that the frequent repetitions in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* represented his peripatetic or circular modes of thinking (Jung cited in Shamdasani, 1999, p. 39). Jung’s abiding interest in enantiodromia is also relevant, that is, the view that everything turns into its opposite. These clues suggest that there may be more than one way of understanding personal myth. It may be read linearly, episodically, thematically, or cyclically. It seems to me that there is an implicit invitation, on finishing *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, to return to the start, and compare the similarities and differences between the nature visions of the old man and the child (Jung, 1961/1995, pp. 21, 252, 392). Indeed, given that Jung viewed his entire scientific works as autobiographical, one is almost invited, on finishing the last volume of the *Collected Works*, to return to volume one and start again; a somewhat more daunting challenge! In a sense, it is through the concept of the personal myth, that Jung finally integrates his personal and scientific works.

In related vein, in developing a personal myth, Jung appears to have embraced a more thoroughly mythic or mythopoetic epistemological position.
... I have now undertaken, in my eighty-third year, to tell my personal myth. I can only ‘tell stories’. Whether or not the stories are true is not my problem. The only question is whether what I tell is my fable, my truth.

(Jung, 1961/1995, p. 17)

Here, Jung seems to reject objectivist and positivist positions. He did not see his role as proving theories true or false, rather, he argued for the mythic nature of reality. He rejected ‘critical rationalism’, ‘the intellect’, and ‘scientific man’ in favour of the healing power of ‘mythologising’, ‘the emotions’, and ‘mythic man’ (pp. 330–331). This links with earlier statements where he argued that science was a myth (Jung, 1940/1968, CW 9i, pp. 179–180) and a mere ‘corner’ of the world (Jung, 1997, p. 611). Jung implies here that a belief in mythlessness is itself a myth, that is, the myth of scientific materialism. This appears to be what he meant by referring to living ‘without’ a myth (Jung, 1950/1956, CW 5, p. xxv). In a more fundamental sense, it is not possible to live outside myth. There being only two options: to recognize one lives in myth, or to live in myth unconsciously. In this sense, Segal (2011, pp. 75–76) may have overstated his case when he argued that, for Jung, science is not mythic.

Personal myth, life course development, and the carrier of life
Jung famously divided the stages of life into the morning, afternoon, and evening; with a first half of life focused on nature and a second focused on culture (1917/1926/1943/1966, CW 7, pp. 74–74; 1929/1967, CW 13, p. 14; 1930–1931/1969, CW 8). Although this position has some merits, it is somewhat simplistic, and has attracted criticism from later scholars. Fordham (1995) argued that traces of individuation could be detected in the lives of infants. Moraglia (1994) also proposed a less-age-linked view of adult development on the grounds that both young and old people are concerned with wider issues of the human condition as well as earning a living. He aligned Jungian adult development theory more closely to contemporary thinking in life course psychology by reducing emphasis on age-related stages in favour of more fluid understandings of the life course (Mintz, 2015; Zittoun, Valsiner, Vedeler, Salgado, Gonçalves, & Ferring, 2013). In addition, Stein (1983/2014, p. 52) criticised a strictly linear approach, arguing that the unconscious, ‘resists being boxed into fixed temporal contexts and causal sequences’. The imposition of linearity is basically an act of consciousness and it may unwittingly do violence to the flow of life. Jung seemed to be aware of this and acknowledged that there were limitations to any one metaphor (1930–1931/1969, CW 8, p. 397). He argued that individuation was not simply a question of years and could happen at any time, ‘there is the same possibility at any moment of life’ (Jung, 1997, p. 761). This suggests that, whilst stage-based theories of the life course have value, they simply form part of the picture. There is a danger that over-concretised life course schemes lose touch with
the nourishing life of the unconscious. The notion that consciousness can comprehend
life through sequences and structures is, in the end, an act of hubris. There may even
be a form of projection at play, the effect being somehow to hold life at bay or push it
out of the psyche. It is not so much about the ego understanding life, as allowing life
(in the sense of the wider Jungian Self) to create meaning with or from the ego. It is
something more akin to Fordham’s ([1995], pp. 3–78) description of the deintegration
and reintegration process. This focuses on the complementary deintegrating and
reintegrating actions of the Self, that is, the process through which the Self reaches
out and unfolds, followed by taking back in and incorporation. Jung emphasised that
individuation, ‘is both the beginning and the end of life, it is the process of life itself
[emphasis added]’ (1997, p. 758); and, in related vein, Stein ([1983/2014], p. 59)
equated the psyche with this life-force. In analytical psychology, individuation is the
process of life becoming conscious of itself. It reminds me of Dylan Thomas’s line
about, ‘the force that through the green fuse drives the flower’ (1988, p. 13). Jung
([1929/1967], CW 13, p. 52) put it another way when he stated, ‘it is not I who live, it
lives me’. This is not life in any general or generic sense but a specific, unique form
of life, ‘each of us carries his [sic] own life-form within him – an irrational form
which no other can outbid (Jung, [1931/1966], CW 16, p. 41). Within analytical
psychology, the individual is seen as ‘the carrier of life’ (Jung, [1955/1956/1970, CW
14, p. 167). In this sense, individuation and the personal myth mean to carry one’s
unique life and bring it to its fullest possible expression.
Personal myth, authoring, and the golden threads of culture

The idea that myths can be personal is, on the face of it, profoundly problematic. One definition of myth is that it is not individually authored. Myths come to us as the work of many hands. Jung downplayed the sense of personal authoring by emphasizing the roles played by the myth itself and wider culture. It is not so much a question of writing one’s myth; the ‘task of tasks’ is ‘to get to know’ one’s myth and find out how it unconsciously influences one’s life (Jung, 1950/1956, CW 5, p. xxv). It is about becoming acquainted with one’s myth and, perhaps, getting on speaking terms with it. He also counselled against living one’s myth and by this he means, I think, a non-agentic living out of one’s fate through blind unconsciousness. It appears that the personal myth is a sort of middle way through the respective dangers of excessive agency and fatalism. Jung saw the personal myth as the living out of one’s ideas and the testing of one’s hypothesis in the fire of existence. It entailed developing one’s own philosophy of life, an inevitably error-strewn process.

We must make our experiment. We must make mistakes. We must live out our own vision of life. And there will be error. If you avoid error you do not live; in a sense even it may be said that every life is a mistake, for no one has found the truth. (Jung, 1977, p. 98)
On this basis, there can be no prescribed plot or route. Any prefabricated model would be an error, the surest way of avoiding individuation. Individuation is a narrative without a predetermined plot. Or, to put it in unlovely prose, the personal myth is a kind of meta-narratological project.

In similar vein, there is a further significant aspect to discuss related to the cultural and historical nature of the personal myth. Jung suggested, in 1944, that he felt disconnected, and as though he were a ‘historical fragment, an excerpt for which the preceding and succeeding text was missing’ (1961/1995, p. 322). He needed to find out, ‘what historical nexus or my life fitted into … what had been before me, why I had come into being, and where my life was flowing’. In relation to this, he dreamt of a figure framed by a golden chain (p. 322). Towards the end of his life, in an echo of his earlier use of the term ‘life-line’, he referred to seeing, ‘the line which leads through my life into the world, and out of the world again’ (1961/1995, p. 352). He is also reported to have experienced a final dream featuring ‘golden threads’ encircling the world (Franz, 1972/1998, p. 287). This can be linked with Stein’s (2004, p. 221) moving evocation of the connecting ‘threads in a great fabric’; and Giegerich’s (2008, pp. 77–78) discussion of the personal myth as a golden chain connecting individual lives of all ages. This suggests to me that the personal myth, for Jung and potentially for everyone, entails learning about our deep historical connections with others and
the wider world. It is woven from the golden threads that connect, and re-connect, the individual with culture.

Summary

In this chapter, I have explored Jung’s reception of Adler and argued that a more Adlerocentric reading of Jung is required. Adler provided a key point of triangulation for Jung and influenced the development of his signature concepts. This enabled Jung to develop an analytical psychology that is subversive of grand narratives. For example, he argued that the master narratives of Freud and Adler can be employed more provisionally to interpret particular episodes or periods in a life. Jung also inverted Adler’s master narrative to suggest an alternative line of movement from superiority to inferiority. In addition, Jung contrasted Freud and Adler to propose a more textured and pluralistic psychology. He developed a distinctively Jungian pedagogical strategy whereby grand narratives could become contents, that is, topics sitting within the method rather than driving it.

Jung slowly developed a theory of fictions from his encounter with Adler’s system. Adler’s central concepts of guiding lines, guiding fiction, anti-fiction, and fictitious guiding goal influenced the development of key ideas in analytical psychology including lines of development, life-lines, personal myth, persona, and individuation. Jung added a distinctively historical dimension to Adler’s approach and an emphasis on the provisional, dynamic, and pluralistic nature of life-lines. It is in
the personal myth that Jung’s thinking matures. It represents his arrival at a critical, comparative theory of narrative based on a mythopoetic epistemology. The key characteristics of the personal myth are its lifelong and life-wide nature, and inclusion of cultural and ideational elements. It does not conform to a narrowly linear structure nor can it be reduced to a simple formula. It resists the contrasting pulls of extreme agency and fatalism and is, at all times, a work in progress. It entails developing a dialogue with the unconscious and getting to know one’s distinctive life pattern. It is woven from the golden threads of culture and, in turn, forms part of them. The development of a personal myth means to bring one’s life to its fullest possible expression and realisation.

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