

THE SOUL AND DEATH¹

[796] I have often been asked what I believe about death, that un-problematical ending of individual existence. Death is known to us simply as the end. It is the period, often placed before the close of the sentence and followed only by memories or aftereffects in others. For the person concerned, however, the sand has run out of the glass; the rolling stone has come to rest. When death confronts us, life always seems like a downward flow or like a clock that has been wound up and whose eventual “running down” is taken for granted. We are never more convinced of this “running down” than when a human life comes to its end before our eyes, and the question of the meaning and worth of life never becomes more urgent or more agonizing than when we see the final breath leave a body which a moment before was living. How different does the meaning of life seem to us when we see a young person striving for distant goals and shaping the future, and compare this with an incurable invalid, or with an old man who is sinking reluctantly and impotently into the grave! Youth—we should like to think—has purpose, future, meaning, and value, whereas the coming to an end is only a meaningless cessation. If a young man is afraid of the world, of life and the future, then everyone finds it regrettable, senseless, neurotic; he is considered a cowardly shirker. But when an ageing person secretly shudders and is even mortally afraid at the thought that his reasonable expectation of life now amounts to only so and so many years, then we are painfully reminded of certain feelings within our own breast; we look away and turn the conversation to some other topic. The optimism with which

we judge the young man fails us here. Naturally we have a stock of suitable banalities about life which we occasionally hand out to the other fellow, such as “everyone must die sometime,” “you can’t live forever,” etc. But when one is alone and it is night and so dark and still that one hears nothing and sees nothing but the thoughts which add and subtract the years, and the long row of those disagreeable facts which remorselessly indicate how far the hand of the clock has moved forward, and the slow, irresistible approach of the wall of darkness which will eventually engulf everything I love, possess, wish for, hope for, and strive for, then all our profundities about life slink off to some undiscoverable hiding-place, and fear envelops the sleepless one like a smothering blanket.

[797] Many young people have at bottom a panic fear of life (though at the same time they intensely desire it), and an even greater number of the ageing have the same fear of death. Indeed, I have known those people who most feared life when they were young to suffer later just as much from the fear of death. When they are young one says they have infantile resistances against the normal demands of life; one should really say the same thing when they are old, for they are likewise afraid of one of life’s normal demands. We are so convinced that death is simply the end of a process that it does not ordinarily occur to us to conceive of death as a goal and a fulfilment, as we do without hesitation the aims and purposes of youthful life in its ascendance.

[798] Life is an energy-process. Like every energy-process, it is in principle irreversible and is therefore directed towards a goal. That goal is a state of rest. In the long run everything that

happens is, as it were, no more than the initial disturbance of a perpetual state of rest which forever attempts to re-establish itself. Life is teleology *par excellence*; it is the intrinsic striving towards a goal, and the living organism is a system of directed aims which seek to fulfil themselves. The end of every process is its goal. All energy-flow is like a runner who strives with the greatest effort and the utmost expenditure of strength to reach his goal. Youthful longing for the world and for life, for the attainment of high hopes and distant goals, is life's obvious teleological urge which at once changes into fear of life, neurotic resistances, depressions, and phobias if at some point it remains caught in the past, or shrinks from risks without which the unseen goal cannot be attained. With the attainment of maturity and at the zenith of biological existence, life's drive towards a goal in no wise halts. With the same intensity and irresistibility with which it strove upward before middle age, life now descends; for the goal no longer lies on the summit, but in the valley where the ascent began. The curve of life is like the parabola of a projectile which, disturbed from its initial state of rest, rises and then returns to a state of repose.

[799] The psychological curve of life, however, refuses to conform to this law of nature. Sometimes the lack of accord begins early in the ascent. The projectile ascends biologically, but psychologically it lags behind. We straggle behind our years, hugging our childhood as if we could not tear ourselves away. We stop the hands of the clock and imagine that time will stand still. When after some delay we finally reach the summit, there again, psychologically, we settle down to rest, and although we can see ourselves sliding down the other side, we cling, if only with longing backward glances, to the peak once attained. Just as, earlier, fear was a deterrent to life,

so now it stands in the way of death. We may even admit that fear of life held us back on the upward slope, but just because of this delay we claim all the more right to hold fast to the summit we have now reached. Though it may be obvious that in spite of all our resistances (now so deeply regretted) life has reasserted itself, yet we pay no attention and keep on trying to make it stand still. Our psychology then loses its natural basis. Consciousness stays up in the air, while the curve of the parabola sinks downward with ever-increasing speed.

[800] Natural life is the nourishing soil of the soul. Anyone who fails to go along with life remains suspended, stiff and rigid in midair. That is why so many people get wooden in old age; they look back and cling to the past with a secret fear of death in their hearts. They withdraw from the life-process, at least psychologically, and consequently remain fixed like nostalgic pillars of salt, with vivid recollections of youth but no living relation to the present. From the middle of life onward, only he remains vitally alive who is ready to *die with life*. For in the secret hour of life's midday the parabola is reversed, death is born. The second half of life does not signify ascent, unfolding, increase, exuberance, but death, since the end is its goal. The negation of life's fulfilment is synonymous with the refusal to accept its ending. Both mean not wanting to live, and not wanting to live is identical with not wanting to die. Waxing and waning make one curve.

[801] Whenever possible our consciousness refuses to accommodate itself to this undeniable truth. Ordinarily we cling to our past and remain stuck in the illusion of youthfulness. Being old is highly unpopular. Nobody seems to consider that not being able to grow old is just as absurd as

not being able to outgrow child's-size shoes. A still infantile man of thirty is surely to be deplored, but a youthful septuagenarian—isn't that delightful? And yet both are perverse, lacking in style, psychological monstrosities. A young man who does not fight and conquer has missed the best part of his youth, and an old man who does not know how to listen to the secrets of the brooks, as they tumble down from the peaks to the valleys, makes no sense; he is a spiritual mummy who is nothing but a rigid relic of the past. He stands apart from life, mechanically repeating himself to the last triviality.

[802] Our relative longevity, substantiated by present-day statistics, is a product of civilization. It is quite exceptional for primitive people to reach old age. For instance, when I visited the primitive tribes of East Africa, I saw very few men with white hair who might have been over sixty. But they were really old, they seemed to have always been old, so fully had they assimilated their age. They were exactly what they were in every respect. We are forever only more or less than we actually are. It is as if our consciousness had somehow slipped from its natural

foundations and no longer knew how to get along on nature's timing. It seems as though we were suffering from a hybris of consciousness which fools us into believing that one's time of life is a mere illusion which can be altered according to one's desire. (One asks oneself where our consciousness gets its ability to be so contrary to nature and what such arbitrariness might signify.)

[803] Like a projectile flying to its goal, life ends in death. Even its ascent and its zenith are only steps and means to this goal. This paradoxical formula is no more than a logical

deduction from the fact that life strives towards a goal and is determined by an aim. I do not believe that I am guilty here of playing with syllogisms. We grant goal and purpose to the ascent of life, why not to the descent? The birth of a human being is pregnant with meaning, why not death? For twenty years and more the growing man is being prepared for the complete unfolding of his individual nature, why should not the older man prepare himself twenty years and more for his death? Of course, with the zenith one has obviously reached something, one is it and has it. But what is attained with death?

[804] At this point, just when it might be expected, I do not want suddenly to pull a belief out of my pocket and invite my reader to do what nobody can do—that is, believe something. I must confess that I myself could never do it either. Therefore I shall certainly not assert now that one must believe death to be a second birth leading to survival beyond the grave. But I can at least mention that the *consensus gentium* has decided views about death, unmistakably expressed in all the great religions of the world. One might even say that the majority of these religions are complicated systems of preparation for death, so much so that life, in agreement with my paradoxical formula, actually has no significance except as a preparation for the ultimate goal of death. In both the greatest living religions, Christianity and Buddhism, the meaning of existence is consummated in its end.

[805] Since the Age of Enlightenment a point of view has developed concerning the nature of religion which, although it is a typically rationalistic misconception, deserves mention because it is so widely disseminated. According to this view,

all religions are something like philosophical systems, and like them are concocted out of the head. At some time someone is supposed to have invented a God and sundry dogmas and to have led humanity around by the nose with this “wish-fulfilling” fantasy. But this opinion is contradicted by the psychological fact that the head is a particularly inadequate organ when it comes to thinking up religious symbols. They do not come from the head at all, but from some other place, perhaps the heart; certainly from a deep psychic level very little resembling consciousness, which is always only the top layer. That is why religious symbols have a distinctly “revelatory” character; they are usually spontaneous products of unconscious psychic activity. They are anything rather than thought up; on the contrary, in the course of the millennia, they have developed, plant-like, as natural manifestations of the human psyche. Even today we can see in individuals the spontaneous genesis of genuine and valid religious symbols, springing from the unconscious like flowers of a strange species, while consciousness stands aside perplexed, not knowing what to make of such creations. It can be ascertained without too much difficulty that in form and content these individual symbols arise from the same unconscious mind or “spirit” (or whatever it may be called) as the great religions of mankind. At all events experience shows that religions are in no sense conscious constructions, but that they arise from the natural life of the unconscious psyche and somehow give adequate expression to it. This explains their universal distribution and their enormous influence on humanity throughout history, which would be incomprehensible if religious symbols were not at the very least truths of man’s psychological nature.

[806] I know that very many people have difficulties with the word “psychological.” To put these critics at ease, I should like to add that no one knows what “psyche” is, and one knows just as little how far into nature “psyche” extends. A psychological truth is therefore just as good and respectable a thing as a physical truth, which limits itself to matter as the former does to the psyche.

[807] The *consensus gentium* that expresses itself through the religions is, as we saw, in sympathy with my paradoxical formula. Hence it would seem to be more in accord with the collective psyche of humanity to regard death as the fulfilment of life’s meaning and as its goal in the truest sense, instead of a mere meaningless cessation. Anyone who cherishes a rationalistic opinion on this score has isolated himself psychologically and stands opposed to his own basic human nature.

[808] This last sentence contains a fundamental truth about all neuroses, for nervous disorders consist primarily in an alienation from one’s instincts, a splitting off of consciousness from certain basic facts of the psyche. Hence rationalistic opinions come unexpectedly close to neurotic symptoms. Like these, they consist of distorted thinking, which takes the place of psychologically correct thinking. The latter kind of thinking always retains its connection with the heart, with the depths of the psyche, the tap-root. For, enlightenment or no enlightenment, consciousness or no consciousness, nature prepares itself for death. If we could observe and register the thoughts of a young person when he has time and leisure for day-dreaming, we would discover that, aside from a few memory-images, his fantasies are mainly concerned with the future. As a matter of fact, most

fantasies consist of anticipations. They are for the most part preparatory acts, or even psychic exercises for dealing with certain future realities. If we could make the same experiment with an ageing person—without his knowledge, of course—we would naturally find, owing to his tendency to look backwards, a greater number of memory-images than with a younger person, but we would also find a surprisingly large number of anticipations, including those of death. Thoughts of death pile up to an astonishing degree as the years increase. Willynilly, the ageing person prepares himself for death. That is why I think that nature herself is already preparing for the end. Objectively it is a matter of indifference what the individual consciousness may think about it. But subjectively it makes an enormous difference whether consciousness keeps in step with the psyche or whether it clings to opinions of which the heart knows nothing. It is just as neurotic in old age not to focus upon the goal of death as it is in youth to repress fantasies which have to do with the future.

[809] In my rather long psychological experience I have observed a great many people whose unconscious psychic activity I was able to follow into the immediate presence of death. As a rule the approaching end was indicated by those symbols which, in normal life also, proclaim changes of psychological condition—rebirth symbols such as changes of locality, journeys, and the like. I have frequently been able to trace back for over a year, in a dream-series, the indications of approaching death, even in cases where such thoughts were not prompted by the outward situation. Dying, therefore, has its onset long before actual death. Moreover, this often shows itself in peculiar changes of personality which may precede death by quite a long time. On

the whole, I was astonished to see how little ado the unconscious psyche makes of death. It would seem as though death were something relatively unimportant, or perhaps our psyche does not bother about what happens to the individual. But it seems that the unconscious is all the more interested in *how* one dies; that is, whether the attitude of consciousness is adjusted to dying or not. For example, I once had to treat a woman of sixty-two. She was still hearty, and moderately intelligent. It was not for want of brains that she was unable to understand her dreams. It was unfortunately only too clear that she did not *want* to understand them. Her dreams were very plain, but also very disagreeable. She had got it fixed in her head that she was a faultless mother to her children, but the children did not share this view at all, and the dreams too displayed a conviction very much to the contrary. I was obliged to break off the treatment after some weeks of fruitless effort because I had to leave for military service (it was during the war). In the meantime the patient was smitten with an incurable disease, leading after a few months to a moribund condition which might bring about the end at any moment. Most of the time she was in a sort of delirious or somnambulistic state, and in this curious mental condition she spontaneously resumed the analytical work. She spoke of her dreams again and acknowledged to herself everything that she had previously denied to me with the greatest vehemence, and a lot more besides. This self-analytic work continued daily for several hours, for about six weeks. At the end of this period she had calmed herself, just like a patient during normal treatment, and then she died.

[810] From this and numerous other experiences of the kind I must conclude that our psyche is at least not indifferent to the dying of the individual. The urge, so often seen in those

who are dying, to set to rights whatever is still wrong might point in the same direction.

[811] How these experiences are ultimately to be interpreted is a problem that exceeds the competence of an empirical science and goes beyond our intellectual capacities, for in order to reach a final conclusion one must necessarily have had the actual experience of death. This event unfortunately puts the observer in a position that makes it impossible for him to give an objective account of his experiences and of the conclusions resulting therefrom.

[812] Consciousness moves within narrow confines, within the brief span of time between its beginning and its end, and shortened by about a third by periods of sleep. The life of the body lasts somewhat longer; it always begins earlier and, very often, it ceases later than consciousness. Beginning and end are unavoidable aspects of all processes. Yet on closer examination it is extremely difficult to see where one process ends and another begins, since events and processes, beginnings and endings, merge into each other and form, strictly speaking, an indivisible continuum. We divide the processes from one another for the sake of discrimination and understanding, knowing full well that at bottom every division is arbitrary and conventional. This procedure in no way infringes the continuum of the world process, for “beginning” and “end” are primarily necessities of conscious cognition. We may establish with reasonable certainty that an individual consciousness as it relates to ourselves has come to an end. But whether this means that the continuity of the psychic process is also interrupted remains doubtful, since the psyche’s attachment to the brain can be affirmed with far less certitude today than it could fifty years ago. Psychology must

first digest certain parapsychological facts, which it has hardly begun to do as yet.

[813] The unconscious psyche appears to possess qualities which throw a most peculiar light on its relation to space and time. I am thinking of those spatial and temporal telepathic phenomena which, as we know, are much easier to ignore than to explain. In this regard science, with a few praiseworthy exceptions, has so far taken the easier path of ignoring them. I must confess, however, that the so-called telepathic faculties of the psyche have caused me many a headache, for the catchword “telepathy” is very far from explaining anything. The limitation of consciousness in space and time is such an overwhelming reality that every occasion when this fundamental truth is broken through must rank as an event of the highest theoretical significance, for it would prove that the space-time barrier can be annulled. The annulling factor would then be the psyche, since space-time would attach to it at most as a relative and conditioned quality. Under certain conditions it could even break through the barriers of space and time precisely because of a quality essential to it, that is, its relatively trans-spatial and trans-temporal nature. This possible transcendence of space-time, for which it seems to me there is a good deal of evidence, is of such incalculable import that it should spur the spirit of research to the greatest effort. Our present development of consciousness is, however, so backward that in general we still lack the scientific and intellectual equipment for adequately evaluating the facts of telepathy so far as they have bearing on the nature of the psyche. I have referred to this group of phenomena merely in order to point out that the psyche’s attachment to the brain,

i.e., its space-time limitation, is no longer as self-evident and incontrovertible as we have hitherto been led to believe.

[814] Anyone who has the least knowledge of the parapsychological material which already exists and has been thoroughly verified will know that so-called telepathic phenomena are undeniable facts. An objective and critical survey of the available data would establish that perceptions occur as if in part there were no space, in part no time. Naturally, one cannot draw from this the metaphysical conclusion that in the world of things as they are “in themselves” there is neither space nor time, and that the space-time category is therefore a web into which the human mind has woven itself as into a nebulous illusion. Space and time are not only the most immediate certainties for us, they are also obvious empirically, since everything observable happens as though it occurred in space and time. In the face of this overwhelming certainty it is understandable that reason should have the greatest difficulty in granting validity to the peculiar nature of telepathic phenomena. But anyone who does justice to the facts cannot but admit that their apparent space-timelessness is their most essential quality. In the last analysis, our naïve perception and immediate certainty are, strictly speaking, no more than evidence of a psychological *a priori* form of perception

which simply rules out any other form. The fact that we are totally unable to imagine a form of existence without space and time by no means proves that such an existence is in itself impossible. And therefore, just as we cannot draw, from an appearance of space-timelessness, any absolute conclusion about a space-timeless form of existence, so we are not entitled to conclude from the apparent space-time quality of our perception that there is no form of existence *without* space

and time. It is not only permissible to doubt the absolute validity of space-time perception; it is, in view of the available facts, even imperative to do so. The hypothetical possibility that the psyche touches on a form of existence outside space and time presents a scientific question-mark that merits serious consideration for a long time to come. The ideas and doubts of theoretical physicists in our own day should prompt a cautious mood in psychologists too; for, philosophically considered, what do we mean by the “limitedness of space” if not a relativization of the space category? Something similar might easily happen to the category of time (and to that of causality as well).² Doubts about these matters are more warranted today than ever before.

[815] The nature of the psyche reaches into obscurities far beyond the scope of our understanding. It contains as many riddles as the universe with its galactic systems, before whose majestic configurations only a mind lacking in imagination can fail to admit its own insufficiency. This extreme uncertainty of human comprehension makes the intellectualistic hubbub not only ridiculous, but also deplorably dull. If, therefore, from the needs of his own heart, or in accordance with the ancient lessons of human wisdom, or out of respect for the psychological fact that “telepathic” perceptions occur, anyone should draw the conclusion that the psyche, in its deepest reaches, participates in a form of existence beyond space and time, and thus partakes of what is inadequately and symbolically described as “eternity”—then critical reason could counter with no other argument than the “non liquet” of science. Furthermore, he would have the inestimable advantage of conforming to a bias of the human psyche which has existed from time immemorial and is

universal. Anyone who does not draw this conclusion, whether from scepticism or rebellion against tradition, from lack of courage or inadequate psychological experience or thoughtless ignorance, stands very little chance, statistically, of becoming a pioneer of the mind, but has instead the indubitable certainty of coming into conflict with the truths of his blood. Now whether these are in the last resort absolute truths or not we shall never be able to determine. It suffices that they are present in us as a "bias," and we know to our cost what it means to come into unthinking conflict with these truths. It means the same thing as the conscious denial of the instincts—uprootedness, disorientation, meaninglessness, and whatever else these symptoms of inferiority may be called. One of the most fatal of the sociological and psychological errors in which our time is so fruitful is the supposition that something can become entirely different all in a moment; for instance, that man can radically change his nature, or that some formula or truth might be found which would represent an entirely new beginning. Any essential change, or even a slight improvement, has always been a miracle. Deviation from the truths of the blood begets neurotic restlessness, and we have had about enough of that these days. Restlessness begets meaninglessness, and the lack of meaning in life is a soul-sickness whose full extent and full import our age has not as yet begun to comprehend.