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## 4

## The Elements of Psyche

You know well that the gross body is nourished by the four gross elements. Know then that the spiritual body is nourished by its own kind of four subtle elements: wine corresponds to earth; the aroma of wine takes the place of water; songs and musical melodies are air; and light stands for the element fire. Spirit is especially nourished by these four.

—*The Planets*, chapter 24

We have seen how the alchemists tried to transform their consciousness so that the world, formerly appearing as solid stuff accessible to the senses, might be seen as a mixture of body, soul, and spirit. To apprehend the World Soul, "*Anima Mundi*," is in essence to see with a psychological eye. To use James Hillman's phrase, one "sees through" the literal facade of thoughts and actions, conscious of the fantasies embodied in them. It ought to be clear by now, however, that seeing through the otherwise opaque surface of things is not a simple intellectual investigation. Psychological perception is different from sheer mental insight in that imagery and emotion play significant roles. Ambiguity and paradox, multiple meanings and unfinished reflections are proper to this kind of awareness. Psyche is basically quite simple and evident, as obvious as a dream, yet its language is sufficiently different from rational thought that it can be extremely difficult to cross the narrow chasm that separates the psychological from the intellectual.

Ficino clarifies the peculiar nature of psychological reality with an imaginative twist of imagery. He takes the four elements of nature classically identified as earth, air, fire, and water; and he translates these into the world of psyche, substituting for each of the four an element more suited to the subtle nature of psyche. These new elements are themselves images which set a scale for psychological matters, marking out a range for psyche somewhere

between gross material objects and abstract thought. Ficino leads us to imagine an intermediate world which has its own kind of body, but which is clearly more spiritual than the physical realm.

Jungian psychologists are familiar with a psychological interpretation of the natural elements. They customarily transfer the traditional terms to a psychological level. A person's psychological makeup might be mapped according to the elements: one might be dominant, another lacking. Astrologers evaluate personality according to these elements as well, of course, since each sign of the zodiac is imagined to have an elemental character: Aries/fire, Taurus/earth, Gemini/air, Cancer/water, and so on. Psychologically then, an individual might reveal an oversupply of the element air—perhaps someone extremely intellectual, full of ideas, lofty schemes, plans, and wishes without body and substance. Or, quite the opposite, a person may seem extraordinarily earthy—immovable, fixed, conservative, practical, and maybe dense. These elements have no ultimate, metaphysical significance, but as a complex image they serve the imagination in its exploration of psychological patterns. Understanding the imagery of these elements also helps clarify sometimes the underlying imagery in dreams. When water appears in a dream, for example, it might help to see it as one of the basic elements constituting the psychic world of the dreamer.<sup>1</sup>

Ficino's approach is similar in that he uses the idea of applying the four elements to psyche, but he changes the imagery.

| Elements of Nature | Elements of the Soul |         |
|--------------------|----------------------|---------|
| Earth              | Wine                 | Bacchus |
| Water              | Aroma of Wine        |         |
| Air                | Music                | Apollo  |
| Fire               | Light                |         |

Ficino's choice of these new elements of the psyche is consistent with other imagery we have seen him use. Each of these is at once solid and substantial in some way, yet it also emanates an invisible quality. Wine is certainly a substance, but its effect is felt in the soul as well as in the body. The aroma of wine is subtle but unmistakably perceptible. Music pours out of an instrument and light is clearly visible, yet both are intangible. These are metaphors

for the psychological dimension—the world of the psychological is as real and perceptible as the aroma of wine, but it is just as subtle.

Ficino presents his four elements not merely as building blocks of a psychological or spiritual world but also as nutriments for the psyche. Just as we have to take in and digest the physical world in order to survive, these spiritual elements have to become food for the soul in order for it to thrive. Again, this seems to be a fundamental, almost naive notion, yet it is a widespread fact that personal and social values simply overlook these subtle needs. An outstanding example is education: parents are concerned and vocal these days about the training their children are getting in reading, spelling, and arithmetic; and the government is quite concerned about school lunch programs. But what about the psyche of the child? Attention is given to social adjustment, when problems appear, but at this point it seems a futuristic fantasy to imagine an educational system staffed with experts on the processes of the soul and structured to care for the profound psychological needs of children. In this area people we call primitive are far advanced, providing their children with important and efficacious rites of passage. Ficino's language and his whole approach to psychotherapy may appear quaint and irrelevant; but beneath his curious imagery lie important insights that do in fact speak to modern social and personal crises.

### Wine

The word Ficino uses for the process of absorbing spirit from the world around us is *haurire*—"to drink." As we go about our business in the daily routines of life, we might, if properly attuned or "accommodated," drink in some food for the soul. We have seen that one of the best ways of doing this is to surround ourselves with fertile sources of spirit. One of the obstacles standing in the way of spirit, frustrating our "thirst" for spiritual vitality, is the resistance of ego.

In its most fluid and minimal conception, ego is simply the power of agency an individual enjoys. A person has a desire and acts it out. Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy, defined ego as the point of contact between subject and object, a point existing in time only momentarily. But clearly ego is much more than a function. The sense of "I" involves as well an extremely sensitive awareness of individuality. Perhaps the Freudians are correct, who identify the ego as a fantasy projection of the physical body. "I" am

obviously contained within one skin; my body makes me distinct and separate from other "its" and other "I's." The fantasy of ego as we commonly know it seems to be motivated to bolster that sense of uniqueness, if not superiority. What Freud called "narcissism," a tendency to bend attention and energy back upon ego, appears to be such a common cause of distress that one is tempted to label the twentieth-century sense of identity as the narcissistic ego. In love, war, and politics, in the midst of involving international or personal projects, a whisper is almost audible: "How am I doing? Am I accepted?"

The narrow role of ego is further strengthened by personal history. "I" includes all accomplishments and failures of the past. We see in the history of the ego causes of present problems, and we are concerned about the future development of this ego. Indeed, there seems to be something essentially conservative about ego as we know it. It is fairly easy to imagine that habits and manners of an early period remain the same in the ego's old age. In a sense, ego seems to age much faster than the physical body, so that a ten-year-old may sound like an old man. Identifying with personal experience of the past, an individual readily freezes his possibilities, limits his potentiality to what is "tried and true." Rather than multiply the directions for personal biography, frequently ego, narcissistic and defended, maintains a straight and narrow path. It is no wonder that ego and soul seem to be at odds.

Because ego is so often narcissistic and defensive, when phenomena from the outside world or from the larger self make an appearance, ego may experience these as violation and threat. Ego resists movements of the soul. Repression is not motivated simply by moral sensitivity—the ego fears change because change is death to an immobile sense of "I." In relation to ego, change is not really transformation but simply flexibility. If one is moved in soul toward anger, but the ego-pattern does not admit of this emotion, conflict arises, and of course ego can win out, at least temporarily. If one is moved toward grief, but the ego is structured only for strength and a "stiff upper lip," then that spirit is kept from the life of the psyche. Eventually, it seems that these lost spirits make their imprints unconsciously—in disease, compulsions, posture, facial expression, obsessions, and dreams.

This ego we are discussing, all too commonly, is not only narcissistic, it also appears as an avator of the *senex*, a pattern of consciousness we will discuss in the chapter on Saturn. Basically, *senex* is a fantasy of kingship, of senile rule over a warring kingdom. As an attitude of soul, *senex* is cold, distant,

conservative, and rigid. Among scholars, for instance, the *senex* attitude betrays itself in language: they advocate "rigorous scholarship," "rigorous logic," "rigorous self-control," and even "rigorous exercise." Yet, inextricably tied to all this *senex* rigor is "rigor mortis," the hardness of death so characteristic of an ego so influenced.

"Rigor mortis" brings us to the first nutritive element of spirit in Ficino's scheme: wine. It takes little research to gain entry into this image, especially since Ficino himself gives us an important clue for interpreting the elements. He divides them according to two gods he calls brothers: Bacchus and Apollo. The first two elements, of course, are those of Bacchus or the Greek Dionysos, the god of wine, among other things. Dionysos is the dying and rising god, a reflection of the Egyptian Osiris, worshiped as god of the Underworld, the god whose chief characteristic, found in his own myth and in the lives of his followers, is dismemberment.

Dionysos is the god of being-torn-apart; or, put in another way, to be torn apart is to experience the god Dionysos. Dionysos is the grape crushed and fermented to resurrect as wine, and wine is the god taken into the body, affecting the soul. Profound paradox can be found in the nature of most deities, but in Dionysos paradox is of the essence. In Dionysos death and life are practically indistinguishable. To experience the Dionysian affirmation of life, proclaimed and championed by Nietzsche, one has to be torn apart. Touched by a Dionysian spirit, ego feels the stupor of drunkenness and the pain of dismemberment, but these are only phases in the process of the reestablishment of life. The tight hold of ego loosens, with Dionysian wine-spirit—stiff joints are oiled, the brittle paste that holds together the unified personality dissolves, revealing an inner multitude of possibilities along with their very "unrigorous" virtues: ambiguity, paradox, contradiction, amorality, ambivalence, and uncertainty.

Wine, therefore, as an image, is the answer to the hard defensiveness of the narcissistic ego. It parallels the earth element in nature, for in the natural world substance, cohesiveness, and stability form a true foundation. But in the psychic realm, one's base has to be fluid like wine, and it has to support, not stability and security, but multiplicity and movement.

By introducing the element wine under the patronage of Dionysos, Ficino makes it clear that Bacchic insanity and illogic are fundamental to the psyche. But the character of Dionysian consciousness is intricate and vast, requiring volumes of exposition. One can find the modern role of Dionysos elaborated

in numerous outstanding authors: Nietzsche, of course, Norman O. Brown, Carl Kerenyi, Walter Otto, and James Hillman, to name a few.<sup>2</sup> The Dionysian modality described in these authors serves as an antidote to that excessively masculine—particularly Apollonian and Saturnian—attitude that so petrifies ego. To say "yes" to life without avoiding life's death and pain creates a drunken, androgynous, sensual, polymodal response.

The dismemberment motif in Dionysian consciousness demands much more exploration, but let us leave that for other contexts and look more closely at Ficino's image.

Wine, corresponding to the element earth, is the psyche's body and represents things physical and sensual—body experienced psychologically. Both wine and its god have long been associated with sensuality, being close in touch with physical existence. Dionysian physicality, though experienced in soul, is an attribute of the real body, not some visual projection of the body. Isadora Duncan freely admitted the role of the Dionysian in her life, but she felt this God as a continuing threat to her sanity; Dionysos is a stirring of the soul and body, an eruption of life from its vibrant source, a simultaneous brush with the terrors and ecstasies of life and death.

Body is truly a fundamental source for psyche's imagery; it is only our bias for the visual that leads us to expect psychological imagery to appear as pictures. A fully experienced image is a synaesthetic impression, to use a term favored by art educators today. That is to say, an image is a total sensation: seen, heard, felt, smelled, and intuited. The sound of a familiar voice in a strange crowd creates an image of itself. Emotion electrifies the touch of a lover's hand creating an image irreducible to physical factors. Having a late winter cold with all the attendant feelings and remedies and memories creates a complex image in which we participate with body and soul.

If a person wishes to overlook certain psychological factors at work in his life, he may have to become desensitized to his body, for the body is a psychological resonator. Conversely, as one becomes more sensitive to the body, subtle expressions may increase awareness of the soul. The sensory awareness techniques of humanistic psychology, if not confined to the physical realm alone, can serve as exercises for increase psychological perception, but sensory awareness ought to direct us more fully to the image, not to crass sensation. An alert body is not only good for mental activity, it is a body ready for imaging.

Still another characteristic of wine, so simple that it is easily

overlooked, is its capacity to bring pleasure. Pleasure is for Ficino a remarkable and important capacity of the soul, for it leads the soul out of constant activity. Pleasure brings a halt to ego-projects and acts as a bridge between activity and contemplation. Ficino identified these as the three fundamental forms of living: activity, pleasure, and contemplation; and, although the last he considered the highest form of life, pleasure came a close second. The motto of the Florentines at the Academy read: "*Laetus in praesens*"—"Joy in the present." We find this phrase as a salutation in Ficino's correspondence, and it was inscribed on the walls at Careggi. Pleasure, like a glass of wine after hard work, stops the world, preparing an individual to be more receptive to the subtle nuances of his environment, luring him into reverie and reflection.

Bacchic in nature, pleasure intervenes in our plans and efforts. Pleasure is time-out. Pleasure teases us to discover who we are instead of who we are trying to become. *Laetus in Praesens*. Pleasure brings the present to the foreground. As a delay and detour of our past and future ego perspectives and plans, it creates some havoc and minor disturbance—just enough for the opening spirit needs. In pleasure time slows down. Reflections in the pool of the soul come into focus. Pleasure in doing nothing allows for a more receptive posture toward the creativity of the soul.

Taking time out for pleasure differs, naturally, from the egomaniacal pursuit of entertainment. Originally entertainment meant "to keep hold of"—*intertenere*; so we speak of "entertaining" ideas or suggestions. Allied to pleasure, to be entertained is to be held passively in a fantasy—a football game or a light drama, for example. But the vessel of entertainment itself usually discourages the kind of movement vessels can prompt, processes like fermentation and incubation. Pleasure does not strive toward goals and accomplishments, quite the contrary; yet pleasure is an inducement further into some fantasy. Entertainment, on the other hand, in the popular sense at least, is a way of avoiding soul. This is not to say that the many forms of entertainment that play such an influential role in modern life do not in themselves have soul; rather, one's attitude toward entertainment can be soulless. In fact, sentiments surrounding the search for entertainment often seem to express the soul's affection for the body and its potential for unconsciousness. Pleasure lies deeper. It cracks open the soul, while entertainment keeps it soothingly shut.

Wine of the psyche, therefore, offers a pleasurable, sensual, inebriating dismemberment of the materialistic attitude, thus establishing a foundation for psychological participation in life.

All those things and activities which lead us out of literalism, reorient the logical mind, and bring a pause to active projects are made of the atoms of this wine element. At the root of the psychological perspective stands the ancient god of the vine, the deity who simultaneously embraces both life and death.

### The Aroma of Wine

While discussing alchemy and Arnold de Villa Nova's image of "water mixed with water," we alluded to the fact that earth, interpreted as density and literalism, has to be broken up, dissolved in solution, if the fantasies congealed in literal activity are to be released into consciousness. Now Ficino's second element of the psyche parallels water, and it too represents the continuing Dionysian process of dissolution. The aroma of wine, clearly a more subtle image, stands in relation to wine itself as water to earth. Here Dionysian dismemberment through sensuality, pleasure, and drunken madness (the dissolution of reason) appears more complete, and consciousness has been rendered more psychological.

Onians informs us that in classical Rome it was believed that wine was the very sap of life; indeed, in the words of Petronius, "*Vita vinum est*"—Life is wine.<sup>3</sup> Onians also observes that wine was believed to go to the head, literally, where the genius or daimon resides. Therefore, wine was not only the source of physical longevity, it was also the nourishment of the soul. The Romans had a curious custom of smearing wine on the temples,<sup>4</sup> a practice Ficino recommends in *The Planets*. He also advises drinking wine twice a day and taking each day equal portions of wine and light, a mysterious prescription the meaning of which might be apparent when we have considered the Apollonian elements of the soul.

Onians explains the practice of dabbing wine on the temples as a way of getting the wine directly to the head where it is needed, but in view of Ficino's image of the aroma of wine, one might imagine that having wine *on* your head would keep that aroma with you and fully in consciousness. Although wine affects the soul and, as we say, does go to the head, nevertheless it is rather crass. The aroma of wine is more suited to the nature of soul itself—invisible, but perceptible and efficacious.

If the element wine is an image for those things which break up our literal perspectives, then the aroma of wine depicts those more

subtle things which maintain the psychological attitude. The aroma might be those fantasies and memories which surround objects and actions, like a fragrance; keeping them in mind keeps us removed from the literal objects themselves. If we know, for example, that whenever we get a craving for buying things, the fantasy behind that is a search for vitality or a sense of power or novelty and freshness, then we may not have to literalize that wish in the way it is fantasized. It may be possible to stay on the psychological level and respond to the needs of the psyche more directly. These needs are more like fragrances, not as obvious and substantial as literal behavior. A dab of wine keeps the soul in mind.

Aromas and fragrances, as Cirlot reminds us, are both stimulants and symbols for memory, a faculty of the soul we keep running into.<sup>5</sup> Like the fragrance of flowers or of incense, an aroma reminds us of the recent presence of an object. The object is no longer present, but there is a trace left behind. In the human realm a fragrance is like an impression, a thought, or a brief memory. Even more literally, fragrant objects have a relationship with memory. It is well known that odors have an uncanny power to bring up memories of events long forgotten. The smell of a schoolroom can revive images from years past, or the scent of outdoors, of freshly cut grass or hay, or certain flowers, or even machines and gasoline—these aromatic traces bring forth memories of forgotten pleasure or buried traumas. The right combination of food cooking on the stove can speed us back to childhood experiences and feelings for parents, brothers, and sisters.

Opening the chest of personal memories is a mild Dionysian experience that peels off the boundaries of the present, letting in lost ways and hopes of being. Worlds of the past, even though they may be only present fantasies of the past, intrude upon a different present, revealing perhaps the narrowness of our thoughts in the present. Neglected values, unfinished situations, and forgotten ideals return to inebriate the soberness of the present. These stories and images of the past have an aroma, a spirit and tone, which can nourish the soul. They are fragrances of the psyche, a bouquet that comes from aging and slow fermentation. They are related to the cooking and fermenting of alchemical processes.

The soul is nourished by memories because they are the stuff of the psyche. They are events transformed from their literalness into fantasy and feeling. They continue to have the power to move the

soul because, even in concrete events, it is the fantasy in which we participate that is moving to the psyche. Nor is it only the personal memory that gives fantasy to events; it is also the "memory" of the basic pattern behind the action that conditions one's psychological experience. If, in marrying a sweetheart, as they used to say, one is really trying to get hold of the sweetness of one's own heart and soul, then it is *that* fantasy that is so moving and overwhelming. These fantasies flow like currents through imagination and account for the vicissitudes of psychological experience. In other words, it is the fragrance of events that waft their way to the soul, not the concreteness of events. Psychological values imply a certain death to literal experience. As we have noticed, the world of psyche is an underworld to the world of surface meanings.

For the Greeks, psyche exists in the underworld, and in popular imagination the inhabitants of this underworld are ghosts. W. B. Yeats, writing with typical Irish sensitivity to the ghostly realm, connects ghosts with the fragrance of wine, echoing Ficino's image quite directly:

A ghost may come;  
For it is a ghost's right,  
His element is so fine  
Being sharpened by his death,  
To drink from the wine-breath  
While our gross palates drink from the whole wine.<sup>6</sup>

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There is the whole point: the element of psyche is so fine, sharpened by death, enjoying the breath of the wine while we in our unpsychologized bodies, to use an awkward phrase, prefer the whole wine. We prefer, typically, plain experience, or at most matters of cause and effect, while the ghost—psyche—is fed best in images and fantasies. Stretching a point and a pun, one might say that Ficino calls for the revival of a neglected sense, an olfactory awareness used to make "scents" out of this world.

### Music

Dionysos and Apollo are brothers, Ficino says: they both serve the same goal we have been examining from many points of view—the creation of a psychological perspective. But, of course, they accomplish this feat in different ways, Dionysos through direct experience of the physical or fantasy world; Apollo, the Far-Shooter, through a more abstract, distant process.

The third elemental building block of psychological existence in Ficino's paradigm is music. Music has an important place in all of Ficino's writing as it had in his practice. Music is generally recognized as a spiritual phenomenon, though it is quite difficult to say why and how music could be so important for the soul. After surveying the planets in the next section of the book, we will take a close look at music as a factor in the health of the soul, especially as a means of tempering the soul, maintaining its polycentricity; so, for now, we will consider a few of Ficino's more general remarks on the subject.

Since song and music come from the mind's thought, from the impulse of the imagination, and from the passion of the heart, and, together with the broken and shaped air, move the air-like spirit of the listener, the bond of soul and body, music easily moves imagination, affects the heart, and penetrates the innermost sanctuary of the mind.<sup>7</sup>

We saw earlier that in Ficinian psychology spirit is much like air, even an individual's spirit is airlike. Since music is also like air, and is carried on and through the air to the ear of the listener, it is only natural that music should have easy entry to the person's spirit. But more than that, says Ficino, music is also the product of mind, imagination, and feeling, and therefore it readily stimulates these same faculties in the listener. Music is well suited in a number of ways to the soul.

Philosophers, theologians, and music theorists of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance distinguished three kinds of music: *musica mundana*, *musica humana*, and *musica instrumentalis*. The first kind of music they believed to be created by the movements of the universe itself: the steady, slow rhythmic movements of the planets and stars, the coming and going of the seasons, and so on. *Musica humana* they imagined in a similar way, movements of the macrocosm reflected in the human soul. Theologians, especially those influenced by Augustine, identified as music patterns of virtues and other spiritual qualities within the human psyche. Last, and least of all, stood *musica instrumentalis*, what we know today as music, tunes and melodies played on instruments or sung.

The psychological element of music, with which we are concerned here, is clearly an example of *musica humana*, but to understand its meaning it will be necessary to refer to the music of sound. In one case, Ficino was interested in using the sounds of music in order to affect the soul. Music was another art of memory or imagination, a way of getting the soul in touch with various kinds

of spirit. But in another sense music was, for Ficino, a quality of the soul itself, an elemental factor in its constitution, parallel to the air element in nature.

We might begin an examination of this element by inquiring into its specific nature—how does this art differ from others? What are some particular characteristics common to both the sounds of music and the soul?

One of the most striking powers of music is its capacity to produce a *multidimensional image*. Earlier we discussed the synaesthetic nature of some images, how they are constructed out of several sense impressions. The total impression produced by a piece of music has dimensions of space and time qualified by a specific spirit or atmosphere, a highly differentiated sense of movement, and accompanying emotion. It also has, of course, an intricate structure appealing to the intellect. The one thing music itself does not produce is a visual image, a factor which has both advantages and disadvantages.

The multidimensional image produced by music corresponds to the kind of fantasy at work in ordinary human situations. In any setting in which we find ourselves in a day's time, we respond psychologically not merely to a visual impression, but to the total environment as it strikes our imagination. Two people in the same setting can be expected to have different psychological reactions, because even though their physical environments are the same, they are contained within different images. Some settings, of course, make typical impressions on most people: a cathedral and a ball park may be expected to create unique psychological reactions in most people. Sitting in a doctor's office places the soul within a multidimensional image: the quiet, white uniforms, an air of efficiency and professionalism, a mysterious labyrinth of offices and examining rooms, shiny silver instruments associated with pain and opening the body, memories of past visits and problems, a stream of expectations—all of these go together to make the image which impacts upon the soul. Music has the unusual capacity to create such a multidimensional image and therefore differs from purely visual arts like painting and sculpture (allowing for touch in sculpture). Other arts, of course, like drama and dance, also create full images, so we will have to dig further to find the unique character of music.

What is special about music is that it can produce a rich image without visual content, and since visual impressions are closely related to language and can be quite specific, music is of its nature rather ambiguous. It is difficult, if not impossible, and likely

undesirable to produce musically a specific, concrete meaning or referent. Occasionally composers will attempt to stimulate in the listener a visual impression through the use of a title or subtitle or mimicry in sound. Psychologists, too, use music as a means of priming visual impressions in people. But this programmatic and therapeutic use of music is just that: making music useful. This is not the inherent nature of musical expression.

Music leads the listener primarily to the contemplation of the qualities of time, creating at the same time, in the words of Susanne Langer, a secondary illusion of space.<sup>8</sup> Musical terms give us an idea of the qualities of experienced time that music creates and reflects: music has movements, episodes, motifs, counterpoints, scales and modes, melodies, harmonies, fugues, and fantasies. The emotions of its movement depend upon expositions, developments, reprises, tensions, climaxes, and cadences. On the whole, therefore, music abstracts from specific, individual content to portray the dynamic patterns of life and of the soul.

In music we can hear the dynamics of psychological movements and feel the emotions connected with them. Music, then, provides a kind of catharsis, as we discussed before, a way of helping imagination sort out and find order or pattern in experience. The terms used in music could fairly easily be applied to the soul, to the extent that music theory is itself a potential archetypal image-system for the psyche. Like music, life is built up of episodes and motifs, these are based on more universal scales and modes (patterns we will explore in a later chapter), counterpoints and harmonies fill life as do climaxes and cadences, and finally melodies correspond to our unique personal histories—what Jung would call a process of individuation built upon collective materials. It is difficult to say, then, which comes first: music of the soul or music in sound. In the latter we recognize the music of the former, or, in Ficino's own words: "Through the ears the soul perceives certain sweet harmonies and rhythms, and through these images it is exhorted and excited to consider the divine music with a more ardent and intimate sense of mind."<sup>9</sup>

Ficino places music among the Apollonian elements. According to the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, Apollo learned the art from the child Hermes. Therefore, music, even in Apollonian hands, is a kind of hermeneutic, a mode of interpreting life midway between blind experience and distant explanation. But music does abstract from the concrete content, the individual material of the soul, and is for that reason quite properly within the domain of Apollo, the

Far-Shooter. Apollonian consciousness, if not in the classic period at least in modern literature, is high in the sky, removed from the action so as to gain a broad perspective. It differs from the Dionysian in that it keeps a distance from the concrete. But the Apollonian art of music, though interpretive of the dynamic factors of experienced life, is not so abstract as to be noninvolving. Indeed, the image produced by music is remarkable precisely because of its singular capacity to hold the listener's attention within itself. The listener cannot stand back, as from a painting, and analyze. Music professors and students do that as a strategy in pedagogy, but even they, when they truly listen to music, must become absorbed by it. One is *in* the image, not outside of it.<sup>10</sup>

Not all music is Apollo's; indeed, there seems to be an archetypal contest between those who prefer Apollonian music to that of Dionysos or Pan or some other god or goddess. Apollo's music is by nature subtle and spiritual, but it is nevertheless exciting and moving and offers all the psychological advantages we have seen. Bach wrote a cantata on the theme of the contest between Apollo and Pan, showing in text and music the different character of these two, but finally Apollo wins the agon and the judge declares: "Phoebus, your melody was born of grace itself. And he who understands this art, will lose himself in it." Apollo's music interprets for our soul's ear the patterns of life as it moves in time, but it takes us into itself, allowing us to feel not only the various mixtures of tempo and movement, the tension and release, but also the feelings and deeply felt fantasies associated with those movements. Music in sound meets itself in the music of soul.

If the soul is nourished, as in the aroma of wine, with concrete visual fantasies of the patterns underlying surface experience, it is fed at a higher level with the spirit of its own music. To put it more plainly, we gain psychologically when we perceive the various patterns of the soul's life abstracted from content. When we sense fast and slow rhythms, tensions and cadences, and dissonance and consonance, we are nourished psychologically because our consciousness and our participation in these realities of our own inner life are deepened and differentiated. In order to sense this level of life we must get away from content, from specific life problems and even specific recurring themes so that we can appreciate the dynamic of life itself. For this reason the aural metaphor is more appropriate than the visual, and Apollonian abstraction, in the sense described, plays a significant psychological function.

In a letter to Francisco Musano, in 1473, Ficino tried to set his

friend's mind at ease concerning his interest in music and the soul. He wrote:

Do not be astonished, Francisco, if we mix medicine, the lyre, and the study of theology. You should recall, as the philosophers say, that body and spirit in us are joined to the soul. The body is cured with the remedies of medicine. But the spirit, which is airy, the bond of body and soul, tempers and heals the vapor of the blood with airs, odors, music and songs. Finally, the *animus*, as divine, is cared for by the mysteries of divine theology. Though nature is one, it is composed of soul, body, and spirit. The Egyptian priests had one occupation for drugs, faith, and mysteries. . . . *Laetus impraesens*.<sup>11</sup>

Psychotherapy in Ficino's system involves a sharpening of imagination, tuning the instrument of the soul so as to be receptive to the various kinds of spirit available in season. In his chapter of *The Planets* devoted to music, Ficino refers to the musical phenomenon we call "sympathetic vibration." If two strings are tuned to the same pitch and one is plucked, the other will sound as well. So it is, says Ficino, with the soul. When the imagination is tuned to the varieties of spirit, in the presence of that spirit the soul will be set in motion, animated by that particular spirit. A person whose imagination is tuned to pick up on those things especially good for the soul will in fact get them. Without imagination we remain stuck in a drab psychological state, deprived of the variety of spirit soul requires for vitality. In a strange sort of way, we need to be musicians of the soul, with taste and a good ear.

### Light

Ficino was mightily impressed by the sky that arched over his life day and night; he saw everything that happened in relationship to that sky; we might say, in "light" of the sky. For it was the light of the heavens that to his mind accounted for human dignity. Through participation in that light we have knowledge of the things of our world and of ourselves, because light is knowledge. In his essay on light, *De Lumine*, he turns that phrase around and gives us a hint as to the nature of light. The light of reason, he writes, is the reason of light.<sup>12</sup> Light comes first, then our intelligence, because our powers of reasoning are only a participation in a higher intelligence.

If we take the phrase in its usual order, "the light of reason," we

will be bound to end this discourse on the elements of spirit at the dubious pinnacle of human rationality, hardly an adequate conclusion to Dionysian mysteries and Apollonian musical hermeneutics. But this mistake is frequently made, in intellectual circles and among psychotherapists. In the light of reason, many think, we will be saved from our follies. But we ought to know from history, both cultural and personal, that "enlightenment" often paints only a partial picture. Our Western historical era of Enlightenment made, perhaps, some important advances in humanism, but it also gave us an image of man as clockwork, an image that still remains among enlightened technologists. Mystery and depth in human experience are expunged by that light that hangs above us like a glaring lamp used to intimidate criminals and extract confessions, or so the movies say. Enlightened technocrats would doubtless confine Ficino and his like in a special fenced hospital on account of his ravings. We also know the pinched vision of enlightened liberals who claim to know how to raise children rationally, cure neuroses rationally, and dispense with religious traditions rationally. The light of reason shines where it will, but its power seems severely constrained. Apropos here is the famous Sufi story of the man squatting in the circle of light cast by a street lamp looking for a lost key. "Did you lose your key here?" asks a passerby. "No, I lost it over there," the man replies, "but I can see better here by the light." This is the light of reason so many like to use to explore the mysteries of our world.

Ficino is recommending to us, then, not the light of reason but the reason of light, *ratio lucis* in his text. This is the crowning element of psyche and its prime spiritual nourishment. It is not the product of human ratiocination but rather the gift of the God Apollo, the sun God. His benefit to mankind is not simply technical understanding or even philosophical elucidation; on the contrary, the God offers us entry into an image of brilliance, a fantasy of light. Psychologically, in the light we achieve a new quality of understanding, an "in-sight," a view of the "*eidos*" of Plato, a vision of the interior of things. And the vision establishes a relationship between ourselves and our world whereby we perceive our place and sense the connection between human egomentality and far deeper sources of understanding. The quality of this kind of intelligence, far beyond rationality, appears in Ficino's descriptions of the light. The light of the heavens, he says, is an image of all the following: the fruitfulness of life, the perspicacity of our senses, the certitude of our intelligence, and the bountifulness of grace.<sup>13</sup> These are all qualities of intelligence, the

way understanding is experienced. That is the gift and not the simple power of thought. Ficino includes grace, a word not much in vogue these days, but one which conveys our dependence upon the mysterious gifts of life. It implies a spirit of receptivity and humility, even in the face of intellectual accomplishment.

We have seen repeatedly how Ficino sets as an ideal a celestial pattern. In his essay on light he personifies that pattern to some extent. He speaks of *lumen*, this transrational intelligence so difficult to define, as *risus coeli*, the laughter of the sky. He imagines the sun as the eye of the heavens, an eye that conveys true spirit, as does the eye of the lover—an image Ficino uses in his commentary on the *Symposium*—or eyes on a smiling face. Obviously, then, the intelligence he is speaking of is spiritual, a hint intuitively grasped rather than a conclusion planted in a syllogism or a fact inductively discovered.

Consider the difference between a communication received from another person in words and the message conveyed through facial expression or even a twinkle in the eye. This latter is the analogy for the kind of spiritual insight Ficino would have us pick up in the world itself—an awareness of the twinkle in the eye of the cosmos, being clued in on its secrets, its underlying purposes and fantasies.

When Ficino speaks of the “reason of light” he is stating in other terms what we have seen all along: soul is central; even our thinking participates in psyche. Behind our thoughts, or better, permeating our reason itself, are the fantasies of the soul. The rational is contained within the psychological.<sup>14</sup> If the psychological derivation of our thoughts is not appreciated, then we tend to take ideas literally, and spirit becomes as much a quicksand for the soul as materialism. Ficino’s image of light, pervading all levels of knowledge, works against such a literalistic perspective. We can see, in fact, how his imagery develops this with some detail.

In *De Lumine* he suggests several different paradigms showing hierarchies of knowledge, all interconnected. In the fifth chapter he distinguishes light in the following manner:

Light of God—goodness and truth  
 Light of Angels—intelligence  
 Light of the Heavens—the abundance of life  
 Light of fire—the propagation of the powers of the heavens

Here the image of light, taking different forms in the hierarchy, allows us to apply a process James Hillman has called “reversion”

to our thoughts and behavior. By reverting back along this line we can find the deeper psychic containers for our ideas and behavior. The light produced by a simple, earthly fire reflects in a simple way the fire of the stars; our individual ideas and wishes can be traced back to larger movements of the soul, to multiple structures of consciousness and habits of thinking represented by the many planets “burning” in the night sky. Our present wish for a speedy sports car might take its place among other wishes contained in a larger movement toward youthfulness, which itself might be held in a deeper fantasy of freshness and beginnings. Ficino traces this beam of light all the way back to the sun, the sun god, or to the Christian God, where the differentiation of the fantasies ends and one simply encounters psychic life itself.

Another paradigm, in the thirteenth chapter of *De Lumine*, shows this mutual containment more clearly. “The spirit enjoys greatly its own clarity and that of the sun. *Animus* enjoys the clarity of the spirit and mind. But it appears that this light is the mind shining through the body, reflected as in glass, and so made visible.”<sup>15</sup> Here we move from the sun, to the spirit, to the *animus*, to the body. We ought to be able to see the workings of one in another.

Finally, Ficino offers an even more elaborate hierarchy in nine stages, corresponding, he says, to the nine Muses of Apollo:

1. the sun
2. the firmament, bright because of its fineness, hidden to us.
3. the stars (visible)—white
4. the stars—red
5. the stars—mixed
6. simple, uncomposed sublunar things, translucent
7. translucent sublunar things composed of glass or crystal, translucent but holding less light
8. things composed but translucent, like carbuncle, or oily things that hold light
9. colors and colored images, which may in the extreme be white or black, or in the middle, green.

Earlier in this essay on light, Ficino had mentioned that the light of the sun contains all colors. Similarly, all nine of the phases listed contain light, but all in different proportions and in different degrees of perceptibility. Remember always, of course, as Ficino mentions several times in the essay, that light is intelligence, a kind of knowing. Therefore, he is saying that there are many levels of psychological perception, and, according to his theory of the

elements, to perceive these is to nourish the soul. Our understanding of the many personal and cultural events of life may be more or less concrete, so that in one case we may see only as far as the motley colors of individual situations and at other times we may perceive deeper patterns shining through as in crystal.

It is quite clear, then, that in Ficinian psychotherapy the goal is to develop an Apollonian, lucid insight *into* the deep patterns at work in ordinary experience. The soul itself is fed by these deeper "lights," by our perception of soul-values lying deep within, just as the lights of the universe are deep in space. Ficino's image of light sustains his psychology of depth. Toward the end of *De Lumine* he mentions that the Pythagoreans found the vestal fire burning in the center of the world—another fire and another source of light.<sup>16</sup> In this psychology we are concerned not with turning the light of reason on the dark, unknown, and troubling phenomena that seem to invade life fairly regularly, but rather to discover within events and within ourselves the reasons or patterns or seeds, as Ficino sometimes calls them, of that inner light, that internal universe and vestal fire.

The Apollonian movement clearly directs us upward toward spiritual insight and the large patterns of human life—the musical movements of the soul and the light that pervades psychological experience. The Dionysian movement is closer to earth, deeply involved with the experienced world. Both perspectives are useful and significant; it is not enough simply to experience with imagination, nor is it sufficient to leave the experiential level and engage in psychological analysis. Like Apollo and Dionysos, these are brother perspectives. As Ficino says: "I do not know how, having arisen first from Apollo, we fall into Bacchus. Indeed, we go from light to heat, from ambrosia to nectar, from insight into truth to ardent love of truth. Phoebus and Bacchus are indeed brothers—individuals and companions" (*The Planets*, Chap. 24).

If we are to develop an archetypal psychology based on Ficino's view of the soul, we would have to attend to both the experiential and the analytical, understanding the latter as an exploration of images and fantasies at various degrees removed from concrete experience. All too often psychology chooses only one of the brothers, emphasizing either primal screams and hot seats or cool, intellectual analysis. Neither of these, of course, are the categories of Ficinian theory, since in both Dionysian and Apollonian activities psychological reality is the focus of concern. Experience for its own sake—crying, screaming, raging or caressing—and

abstract introspection or theorizing both evade soul. Archetypal psychotherapy is, as its name implies, a caring for the images that permeate human experience. They may be perceived with immediacy or with distance, one in the heat of experience, the other when things have cooled down. Both approaches are useful, both shift our attention from mind and body to the soul.