The background of the cover is an abstract, textured pattern of wavy, layered lines in shades of blue, teal, and purple, creating a sense of depth and movement. The text is overlaid on this background.

Confrontation with the Unconscious

*Jungian Depth Psychology
and Psychedelic Experience*

Scott J. Hill

“A perceptive and creative interface between the thought of Carl Jung and contemporary psychedelic research, now in its rebirth, by a scholar who skillfully articulates a profound comprehension of both realms of knowledge. Those who appreciate analytical psychology and those fascinated by the promise of psychedelic studies will find this synthesis stimulating and enriching.”

William A. Richards, Ph.D., Johns Hopkins School of Medicine,
co-designer and principal monitor for
Johns Hopkins’ study on psilocybin-induced mystical experiences

“The empirical research on psychedelic drugs as adjunctive medical therapies for PTSD, end of life anxiety, substance abuse, and depression—as well as triggers for intense spiritual experiences—has exploded. This book provides a valuable framework for understanding what is happening in the mind during these transformative psychedelic experiences. Dr. Hill renders Jung’s theories in lucid language to provide insights into the nature of psychedelic as well as psychotic experience and their intersection. The Jungian insights Dr. Hill provides here are invaluable for clinicians working with acute psychedelic crises and the integration of difficult psychedelic experiences. They also shed light on the robust archetypal dynamics of all psychological transformation.”

David Lukoff, Ph.D., co-president, Association for
Transpersonal Psychology and co-author of the
DSM-IV category Religious or Spiritual Problem

“This is a landmark study that succeeds in building a bridge, at once robust and elegant, between two fields that have, until now, had little contact with one another. While those who recognize the therapeutic potential of psychedelic experiences are generally favorable to Jung, Jungians have tended to follow Jung himself in being suspicious of psychedelics. Scott Hill respects this suspicion, but goes on to demonstrate that both sides have much to gain, both theoretically and practically, from a sustained dialogue. Practitioners and researchers in Jungian psychology, psychedelic studies and psychotherapy, trauma therapy, and transpersonal studies will all benefit from a close reading of this timely, impeccably researched, and wisely conceived text.”

Sean Kelly, Ph.D., author of *Individuation and the Absolute: Hegel, Jung, and the Path Toward Wholeness* and
Coming Home: The Birth and Transformation of the Planetary Era

“Scott Hill’s brilliant book presents a sophisticated analysis of how psychedelic experiences may be understood from the standpoint of Jung’s archetypal psychology—and how Jungian psychological views could be deepened by more open-minded investigations into the world of psychedelic experiences. Psychedelics can point us, like Jung did in his way, toward consideration of the humans as integrated body-mind-spirit beings, with access to many domains of consciousness (or unconsciousness) not ordinarily encountered.”

Ralph Metzner, Ph.D., author of *The Unfolding Self*
and other books, including *The Psychedelic Experience*
(with Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert)

“Scott Hill has spent a good part of his life trying to understand the paradoxical dichotomy of the LSD experience—from “rapturous psychedelic experience” to “a descent into madness”—with the goal of learning how this drug can be used appropriately for therapeutic benefit and spiritual insight. I find particularly interesting his description of Carl Jung’s interpretation of the unconscious and its relationship to psychedelic experience. Jung’s work resonated with Alcoholics Anonymous founder Bill Wilson, who later explored the spiritual through LSD and contemplated its use as a treatment for alcoholism. Those interested in these complex phenomena will benefit from the insights Scott Hill delivers in this book.”

David Smith, M.D., fellow and past president, American
Society of Addiction Medicine, and founder of the
Haight Ashbury Free Medical Clinic, San Francisco

“Scott Hill writes insightfully about how Jungian psychology can help people understand and heal the adverse effects of difficult and even traumatic experiences that can result from the use of psychedelics. At the same time, he elucidates the therapeutic and transformative potential of these complex substances, thus helping put to rest long-standing prejudices against their responsible use. The wisdom in this book offers hope that we can heal the psychological wounds and political divisions of the past, objectively assess the benefits as well as the risks of psychedelics, and move toward a more informed and mature application of these valuable substances.”

Rick Doblin, Ph.D., executive director, Multidisciplinary
Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS)

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**Jungian Depth Psychology
and Psychedelic Experience**

Scott J. Hill

AEON

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To the late Dr. Ronald Sandison, Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists,
and the late Dr. Margot Cutner, Analyst, British Society of Analytical
Psychology, for their pioneering work with Jungian-oriented LSD psychotherapy
in the early 1950s, and for their papers, which became the recovered treasure
of this investigation.

It is just the most unexpected, the most terrifyingly
chaotic things which reveal a deeper meaning.

C. G. Jung,

The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious

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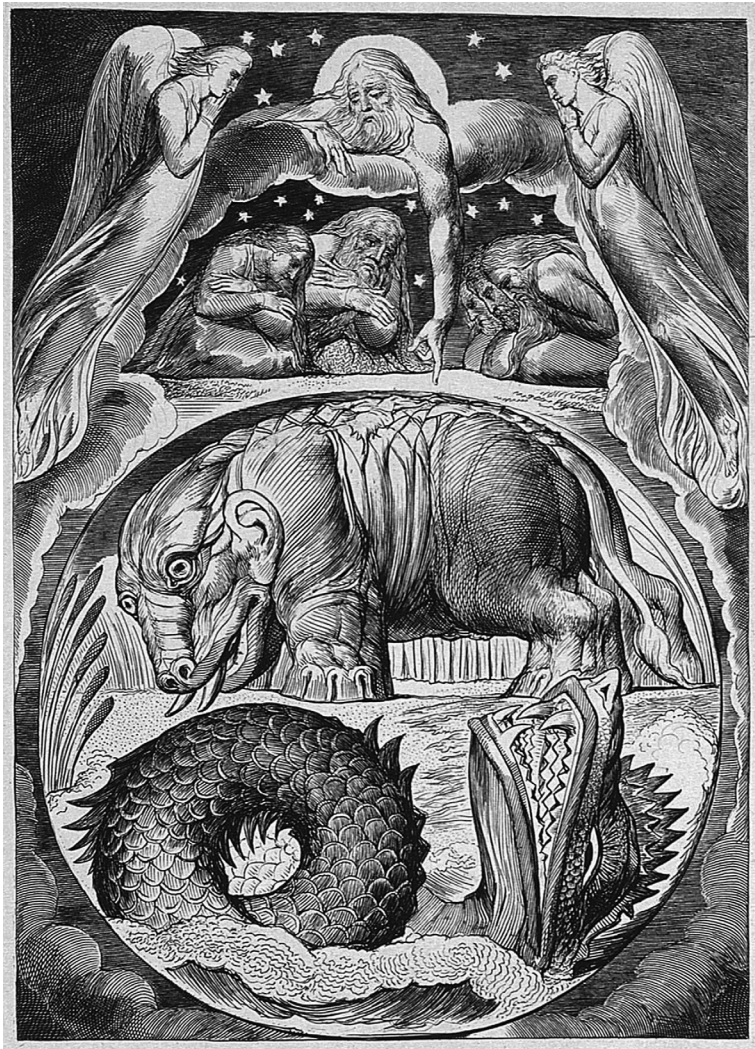
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Yahweh Shows Job the Depths (Behemoth and Leviathan), William Blake

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Preface

Ecstasy! In common parlance, among the many who have not experienced ecstasy, ecstasy is fun, and I am frequently asked why I do not reach for mushrooms every night. But ecstasy is not fun. Your very soul is seized and shaken until it tingles. After all, who will choose to feel undiluted awe, or to float through that door yonder into the Divine Presence? The unknowing . . . abuse the word, and we must recapture its full and terrifying sense.

R. Gordon Wasson

In “The Bridge and the ‘Difficult Passage,’” the historian of religion Mircea Eliade describes a mythological image that portrays a connection between this world and the beyond, a bridge that allows shamans to communicate with the gods again, as all humans did at the dawn of time. The passage over the bridge, suggests Eliade, expresses “the need to transcend opposites, to abolish the polarity typical of the human condition, in order to attain to ultimate reality.”¹ The difficulty of this passage is vividly described in diverse mythological and religious traditions: Arabic texts describe the bridge as “difficult of access;” Arthurian legend describes an underwater bridge that is crossed “with great pain and agony;” and in the Christian tradition, sinners who attempt to cross this bridge are “cast into hell.”²

I once came upon such a bridge. In 1967, at the age of nineteen, I walked over an expansive bridge on the Big Sur coast in California, swallowed a tab of LSD, and climbed into the canyon below. Having had a number of rapturous psychedelic trips earlier that year—experiences that had convinced me LSD was *the* key to a full and happy life—I looked forward to a beautiful day on a secluded beach. Instead, I descended into depths of madness and hell that I could previously never have imagined. This was the beginning of a series of terrifying psychedelic experiences, during which I struggled with the dilemma of whether I had gone insane or had discovered something disturbingly true about the spiritual nature of life. These two possibilities were bewilderingly conflated, and during each

experience I struggled to resolve them in what felt like an eternal hell of confusion.

These experiences were dominated by a clear though unwelcome calling to leave what I took to be an absurd, unreal world by killing myself. This vision unfolded within a pervasive and overpowering sense of another reality, a terrifyingly immense stillness that seemed inexplicably but undeniably sacred. The profound, absolute, and seemingly transcendent nature of this stillness implicitly and mysteriously called my whole life into question, and—despite the lack of any previous religious tendency—ultimately challenged me to redeem myself by sacrificing my life on Earth to reach God in Heaven.

Let me say right off that the research clearly shows that psychedelic substances such as LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, and ayahuasca are surprisingly safe when used carefully; and I will talk about the research and well-established guidelines for safety throughout this book. The trouble was, of course, that I—and who knows how many other uninformed, immature, or foolhardy psychedelic cowboys—didn't do it right. And for some of us the price was steep.

In one way or another, I have worked to come to terms with those difficult experiences since that first day at the bridge over forty-five years ago. At a talk on psychedelics in 2002 by the comparative religion scholar Huston Smith, who had recently written the book *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals*, I realized that serious people were investigating the substances and experiences that had radically changed my life. I was inspired to devote myself to learning all I could about the nature of psychedelic experiences. I decided to return to graduate school and began studying at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, where experts in the fields of psychedelic studies and transpersonal psychology, such as Stanislav Grof and Ralph Metzner, teach. (Like many others, I had turned to the subject of psychology in the early 1970s to gain insight into my psychedelic experiences. But as much as I thrived in the University of Minnesota's psychology department, I learned nothing about such experiences there.)

It was not until I discovered Stanislav Grof's book on LSD psychotherapy that I felt I had found someone who truly understood what I had experienced. Subsequently, while writing on Jung and mythology, I realized that Jung understood, too. Of course, many people know that psychedelic substances can engender terror as well as rapture, psychosis as well as insight; but there was something about Jung's work that captured me. As I read Jung's writings—and as I saw my own psychedelic vision reflected in Jungian descriptions of the death-rebirth archetype in the myths of Gilgamesh, Inanna, Job, and Christ—I became increasingly intrigued by the

possibility that my acid trips had given rise to what Jung calls “experiences of an archetypal nature.”³ I realized that I might better understand my psychedelic experiences, and those of many others, by studying Jung’s psychology. His work, I eventually discovered, is especially suited to elucidating the nature of difficult psychedelic experiences. One purpose of this book is to show why that is true. For now, I will just say that C. G. Jung, like Stanislav Grof, has articulated in an especially thorough way the potentially overwhelming difficulty as well as the transformative potential inherent in deep psychological exploration. I was surprised to learn, however, that despite widespread interest in Jung’s work within the psychedelic community, there exists no introduction to the nature of psychedelic experience in the light of Jung’s psychology. Another purpose of mine is to address this omission, an endeavor that seems especially important at a time when research into the risks and benefits of psychedelic substances is undergoing an impressive resurgence.

Although this isn’t a book about my psychedelic misadventures, it was naturally motivated by my interest to understand them. Through this work, in which scholarship became a personal process of discovery and integration and healing, I have gained both a deep appreciation for my difficult psychedelic experiences and a liberation from the craziness and fear they engendered, which had haunted me most of my life.

In addition to readers interested in the rich relationship between psychedelic research and Jungian psychology, this book should provide valuable insights to people trying to come to terms with their own “bad trips” as well as therapists treating people for an adverse reaction to a psychedelic substance. With this mixed audience in mind, my opening chapter, “Jung’s Confrontation with the Unconscious and Its Relation to Psychedelic Experience,” includes a brief summary of psychedelic research for readers not familiar with the field. My introduction to the practice of psychedelic-enhanced psychotherapy in chapter 2 should also be useful to these readers.⁴ Chapter 3 introduces basic Jungian concepts and principles for readers new to Jung’s psychology. A basic knowledge of both sides of the subject will be helpful when reading subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4 introduces Jung’s explanation of psychedelic experience by introducing a hypothetical principle he called “a lowering of the threshold of consciousness.” Chapter 4 also discusses Jung’s views on integrating unconscious images and emotions released during a psychedelic experience. Chapters 5 through 10 examine especially challenging psychedelic experiences in light of Jung’s approach to trauma, the shadow, psychosis, and transformation. My frequent reference in these chapters to the work of Stanislav Grof, John Nelson, Ann Shulgin, Ronald Sandison, and Margot Cutner, among others, demonstrates the relevance and value of Jung’s

insights to the fields of psychedelic and transpersonal studies. Chapter 10 includes a comparison of Jung's emphasis on integration with Grof's emphasis on abreaction in treating trauma. This leads to chapter 11's focus on Jung's core therapeutic concept, "the transcendent function," which provides a theoretical foundation for integrating unconscious material into consciousness. Chapter 12 outlines Jung's essential psychotherapeutic concepts and principles, including the dialectical relationship between analyst and patient, and the interpretation of dreams and other symbolic products of the unconscious. Chapter 13 relates these therapeutic concepts and principles to psychedelic-enhanced psychotherapy by discussing the most important implications of Jung's psychology for psychedelic-related treatment.

This book will ideally lead to further inquiry into Jungian psychology and psychedelic studies. My focus here is to explain psychedelic experience in the light of Jung's understanding of the psyche's fundamental structure and dynamics. This focus should establish a solid framework for elucidating psychedelic experience in relation to other aspects of Jung's vast body of work.⁵

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Acknowledgments

I could never have imagined that my efforts to understand the effects of my own difficult psychedelic experiences, which I had endured in solitude for years, would bring me into contact with so many goodhearted people. The pleasure of this unexpected good fortune is reflected ironically in a diary entry by J. D. Salinger's character Seymour Glass, who wrote that he was "a kind of paranoiac in reverse" because he suspected people of plotting to make him happy. Even though I can't acknowledge each one of these people individually, I hope that in one way or another I have shown my appreciation to all of them over the years for everything they have given and taught me.

Some, however, have contributed directly to this book's realization. I would like to express my gratitude to my writer brother, Doug Hill, and my dissertation committee members, Sean Kelly, Richard Tarnas, and David Lukoff. Their knowledgeable and thoughtful comments, insights, and suggestions gently but surely pushed the dissertation version of this book to a level I couldn't have reached on my own. That work unfolded in the rare atmosphere of intellectual rigor and imagination I found at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. My work there was supported financially by the generosity of Robert Barnhart, who established the Kranzke Scholarship to advance psychedelic research.

I also want to convey my thanks to Keiron Le Grice for his excellent editorial suggestions, which significantly improved my manuscript, and for having introduced me to Tim Read and Mark Chaloner at Muswell Hill Press in London. I am grateful for their combined vision, sensibility, and expertise.

And, as surely as consciousness is nourished by the depths of the unconscious, I was sustained over many years of work on this project by my poet friend, Richard Speakes, my psychologist friend, Tom Cushing, and my wife, Ragnhild Gatu. The chances are slim that I would have undertaken this work in the first place without their wise and affectionate support.

PART 1

Encountering the Unconscious

Something empirically demonstrable comes to our aid
from the depths of our unconscious nature. It is the
task of the conscious mind to understand these hints. . . .
to understand in time the meaning of the numina that cross our path.

C. G. Jung

*Answer to Job*¹