

Metaphysics of Soul, Universal Spirit, and Consciousness:

Connecting the Embodied Psyche to an Ontology of Consciousness

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Abstract

Jon Mills' and Erik Goodwyn's (2023) work *Archetypal Origins* establishes a foundation for ongoing dialogue about metaphysical origins for Jungian Psychology. This article explores tensions within their work, particularly concerning consciousness, agency, and the ontological status of matter. Examining Goodwyn's cosmopsychism, it problematizes its treatment of matter and suggests an alternative framework. Retaining some of Goodwyn's key themes of holism and formal cause, this variation of ontological idealism gives consciousness more primacy. The proposal suggests Universal Spirit as non-local absolute consciousness and Soul as a localized projection within the appearance of spacetime.

Keywords

soul, spirit, subpersonalities, consciousness, jungian psychology, cosmopsychism, idealism

1 Introduction

The common theme of philosophical idealism is that consciousness or mind constitutes reality to a substantial epistemological or ontological degree. Ontological idealism – which attributes consciousness or mind to fundamental reality beyond personal subjectivity – is one approach to addressing the origins of consciousness. The fact that the very existence of consciousness has not been sufficiently explained by physicalism –the idea that consciousness brutally emerges from matter –, has reinvigorated contemporary discourse with several alternative theoretical positions. Such aims to clarify the origins of consciousness are as pertinent to Jungian Psychology as they are to any other field, as they arguably seek the ground for the existence of psyche itself. That rich ontological space of psyche, consciousness, and origins was explored in the thorough and insightful discourse between philosopher and psychoanalyst John Mills and psychiatrist Erik Goodwyn, published as a series of articles in this journal, as well as a book entitled *Archetypal Origins* (2023). Their dialogue robustly discusses these perennial philosophical issues, as well as Goodwyn’s proposed cosmopsychism, which is a sophisticated exposition on holistic integration, formal cause, and cosmic consciousness – portraying the cosmos as a highly integrated form which shares consciousness with many of its less, although sufficiently, integrated constituents.

In that dialogue, although idealism is mentioned on occasion, Goodwyn and Mills (2023) did not seriously entertain ontological idealism as a viable alternative metaphysics. They instead took matter’s ontological reality as a given premise. Their reasoning absorbs the fact that matter *seems* so phenomenologically and scientifically convincing – although the scientific primacy of matter is up for debate in quantum physics – in terms of inferring its stable ontological status. Ontological idealism was not seriously evaluated due to the structural premises of their respective arguments. Mills’ (2023) gives matter an independence from, “our minds or

subjectivities” (36), which is to say that he holds that matter would exist even if our individual consciousness did not. Whether he believes matter would exist separate from a universal consciousness was not explicitly discussed. Given Mill’s (2021) skepticism towards positing a cosmic consciousness, combined with his self-reported commitment to metaphysical realism (Mills, 2023), it is not unreasonable to conjecture that he would take matter as separate from any form of consciousness. Goodwyn (2023), alternatively, is not as committed to separating the existence of consciousness as such from matter, he simply distinguishes that matter is separate from the smaller forms of consciousness – like humans – within the cosmos. He ultimately proposes consciousness and matter are ontologically co-existent and supported by an integrative metaphysics that transcends and encapsulates their reality. Here I argue otherwise, instead I propose matter as a secondary phenomenon to consciousness, not ontologically real in and of itself, but an appearance within a conscious universe.

The following articulation is an attempt to propose an ontological idealism that might be compatible with Jungian psychology and aspects of Goodwyn’s cosmopsychism. I suggest a model that proffers Universal Spirit and Soul as the ontological base of reality.¹ My proposed flavor of ontological idealism has substantial precursors. There are of course carefully argued ontologies of idealism which constitute epic contributions in the history of philosophy. What I propose here is a blend of different premises; consciousness as Universal Spirit is ontologically primary; forms perceived by consciousness are informational datums of consciousness itself; regularities and changes in the intelligible universe are projections of consciousness with varying degrees of permeability via the agency of multiple consciousnesses – i.e., Souls. Therefore, I

¹ Plotinus (2015), the Roman philosopher who birthed Neo-Platonism, held the soul as having emanated from the one (i.e., the self-causing ontologically simple root of the universe from which all emanates). Plotinus asserted that all souls are ultimately one. Thus, the present essay converges with Neo-Platonic ideation to some degree.

propose a consciousness that is ontologically primary, and that generates a relatively flexible epistemological horizon.

I admit, my spiritual inclinations do find their way into this paper, although I think there is functional philosophical and psychological purpose to terms like Spirit and Soul that get lost when we strip them down into more analytic terminology. If a universal consciousness that spawns multiple consciousnesses does not suggest some form of spirituality, then I do not know what would. Moreover, terms such as Soul and Spirit have a rich cultural, mythopoetic, religious, and psychological history.² While this could be viewed as taking on conceptual baggage, I prefer to see the terms as having traction because they capture something salient and primordial for the human psyche – a premise Jungians may value. Therefore, I place Universal Spirit – a universal consciousness – and Soul – individualized consciousness – as central to the form of ontological idealism I propose.

2 Preparing the Ground for a Potential Ontology of Universal Spirit and Soul

Engaging Mills and Goodwyn, I examine some core questions revolving around the subject of consciousness and its relationship to Jungian Psychology. Those questions are as follows: What is consciousness? What is the metaphysical and ontological ground of consciousness? How does consciousness relate to psyche? Is it identical with psyche or a quartered off space of existence within psyche? By examining traditional Jungian assumptions and potentially broadening the purview of the character of consciousness, I interrogate how the understanding of psychic phenomena might be enriched within that context. For example, there

² Iterations of the Soul recur across ancient cultures as manifestations of the Universal Spirit that take unique forms. Greek culture popularized the anima, or soul, which functions as the animating principle. In ancient Indian culture from which Hinduism grew, thinkers described the soul as the Atman, which is that spark of divinity that connects the individual to the universal consciousness of spirit (i.e., Brahman; Jung, 1969b). And in ancient Egyptian culture the Soul was the life spirit, attached to this earth, and yet dually able to transcend it (Jung, 1969a).

are burgeoning scientific discussions which place consciousness at the heart of nature, giving even single cell organisms the attribution of consciousness. While this view is not contradictory to Goodwyn's cosmopsychism, I explore how idealism is arguably a more robust underlying metaphysics for how consciousness may be present in all life-forms.

3 Interrogating Consciousness for Jungian Thought

While there are many different positions on the origins of consciousness, there are also crucial differences in how theorists define and study consciousness. As illustrated by Bernardo Kastrup (2017), extensive study of consciousness reveals the fact that often scholars are not discussing the same concept and are working within starkly different parameters. Ned Block (1995) made a helpful distinction which breaks the discussion on consciousness into two components; there is "access consciousness" and "phenomenal consciousness." Access consciousness denotes a reportability of one's subjective experiences (Block, 1995) and in my estimation implies metacognitive awareness. Kastrup (2017) distinguishes between metacognitive consciousness and phenomenal consciousness. Metacognition can be characterized as that process whereby a subject is able to monitor their own mental states and actions, direct their behavior and focus within that identified awareness, and have the explicit ability to refer to and understand themselves as an agent. Metacognition can be most simply summarized in the sense that people have of being an explicit "I."³

Phenomenal consciousness on the other hand is purely experiential. Phenomenality is characterized by any qualitative substrate whatsoever. Thomas Nagel (1974) famously described this by arguing that consciousness may be simply understood by inferring that, "*there is*

something that it is like” for a conscious entity to exist. As argued by Bernardo Kastrup, metacognition is not a necessary component of consciousness if one takes consciousness phenomenally. Metacognition is a function of consciousness for organisms with a highly developed neo-cortex. If metacognition is not accepted as identical to consciousness, then it is worth exploring the implications of this for Jungian theory.

3.1 The Unconscious and the Ego-Complex

If the unconscious is taken as a given, as it is in Jungian tradition, how is consciousness characterized in contradistinction? Traditionally, Jung (1971) took the ego-complex to be “a complex of ideas which constitutes the centre of my field of consciousness and appears to possess a high degree of continuity and identity” (425). Consciousness was not seen as identical with psyche, rather it was a field of explicit perceptions relatively confined to the metacognitive function of what he termed ego-complex: the self-monitoring capacity of explicit perception, and the subjective sense of narrative identity (Jung 1975). Therefore, Jung’s definition of consciousness clearly involves reportability and metacognitive abilities. In contrast, he saw unconsciousness as containing more faintly formed agencies – little luminosities (Jung, 1975). However, discussions emerging on universal consciousness present challenges for analytical psychology. Jungian scholars may rightfully ask if the boundaries of consciousness are so drastically expanded – as they are in Goodwyn’s cosmopsychism for example –, what then becomes of the unconscious? What is Jungian psychology without this foundational concept? Before I envision an analytic psychology without “unconsciousness,” it is important to discuss how Mills and Goodwyn still make space for the unconscious in their arguments.

Mill’s (2023) describes his preference to see consciousness as “a set of ordinal phenomenal properties belonging to psyche” (33). He appears to mean that consciousness is a

partitioned off psychic function, not unlike Jung. However, it is not clear to me exactly what Mills takes to be the definitive features of consciousness in this series of articles with Goodwyn. I will try to outline what I understood. He does seem to imply consciousness proper involves *reflexivity* – thereby metacognition – when he discusses rudimentary psychic subjectivities as “*unconscious consciousness*” in contradistinction. He also appears to posit consciousness as emergent from deeper unconscious structures. He attributes to archetypes a sort of proto-intentionality, that is, they are “self-activating” and may eventually culminate in “appearance in consciousness” for human subjects (Mills, 2018, 213). In sum, as far as I can tell Mill’s takes consciousness to be a reflexive point – or process – of psychic identity, which has underlying archetypal structures, and that such structures contribute to appearances – the contents of consciousness. I conclude this view shares similarities with the traditional Jungian view on consciousness, as well as the functions of metacognition described above.

Conversely, Goodwyn (2022) uses consciousness in a way that he describes as interchangeable with mind, experience, and psyche. He appears to claim that phenomenal experience, consciousness, or psyche are terms exploring the same territory and that:

Whatever phenomenal experience is, it has certain characteristics that we must remain cognizant of: that is, this phenomenal experience typically is of coherent and unified phenomena, often accompanied by a concomitant phenomenal impression of ‘separateness’ between the experiencer and that which is experienced (hallucinatory or not). (128)

Here Goodwyn seems to refer to consciousness as any datum of existence which has an experiential unification. It phenomenally exists as a holistic entity that has its own standing in relation to a perceived world. This is how I tend to see consciousness and how I use the term

leading up to my argument in the present reflection. I will elaborate on my own working definition as the argument progresses.

Consciousness, as Goodwyn (2023) identifies, may be taken all the way down to the cellular level, where neurons or cells may have their own psychic being, provided they are sufficiently integrated. Cellular consciousness will be a central topic of discussion later. However, responding to Mills' (2022) commitment to retaining the unconscious, Goodwyn (2023) agrees that the unconscious must be left intact, acknowledging that deeper psychic structures underly awareness. He writes, "unconscious processes are not available to immediate awareness..." (113). Creating an unconscious relative to awareness could work if it were not for the fact that Goodwyn's conception of consciousness has already been diffused among the entirety of psyche and possibly biological life itself to varying degrees. I think the important question here is: processes that are not available to *whose* awareness?

Once it is admitted that even cells might have a certain consciousness, where could "the unconscious" possibly be? Sure, I am not aware of what it is like to be one of my cells – just as there are certain differentiated parts of my psyche that are not explicitly aware of *what it's like to be* other parts of my psyche, but that does not give the term unconscious traction. Terming anything that is not immediate to metacognitive awareness "unconscious," when in fact those deeper psychic and biological layers may themselves be constituted of conscious agencies, is a problematic and inconsistent use of terminology at best. Given Goodwyn's (2023) proposed cosmic consciousness with relative centers and meta-consciousnesses that plausibly subsume smaller wholes of consciousness, the idea of "the unconscious" or "unconscious processes" seems to be a reification. Is this not all relative, thereby making a true unconscious psyche obsolete? Indeed, by Goodwyn's own definition, consciousness and psyche are interchangeable,

so how can he effectively renegotiate an unconscious psyche? It is my view that this cannot be done in a logically persuasive and terminologically careful manner. Yet just because the term “unconscious” may no longer be appropriate in a theory of cosmic consciousness, does not mean the depth and richness of the psyche often connoted by the term is extinct. I think the issue can be addressed by semantic adjustments – i.e., multiple consciousnesses with self-other contact boundaries within cosmic consciousness – and most importantly engaging the topic of agency and agents. Whatever consciousness is, it certainly revolves around an agent that can be said to “have it” or “be it.”

3.2 Macro problems of agency and Psychic Multiplicity

The conversation on agency is directly relevant to discussions on consciousness in general, and its standing in relation to the concept of unconsciousness. As mentioned, the term unconsciousness itself can be seen as relative – unconscious to whom, at what level of agential being, psyche, or world? Certainly, it would be an oxymoron to submit that cosmic consciousness is unconscious. Assessing what consciousness is and ‘who’ has it, is tied into conceptions of agency and agents.

Mills (2018) tackles agency from the very beginning of this series with Goodwyn, understanding that psychic ground is agential ground to some degree. He argues that a nascent archetypal presence within the psyche provides the essential ground for the birth and differentiation of what he terms “unconscious schemata,” which refers to multiples of a “desirous-apperceptive-ideational unit” (211), which is what I will refer to as “subpersonalities,” except that I will argue they are not “unconscious.” Mills (2018) claims that archetypes arise and differentiate themselves through primordial desire as awareness of a lack. Such a lack drives it to know itself by becoming another to itself, thus creating archetypal tensions and bifurcating into

cascading psychic multiplicity (unconscious schemata). Thus, with his onto-phenomenological method, he moves from proto-agential structures to actualized psychic units of agency. Yet, if a problematization of unconsciousness versus consciousness is inserted into Jungian discourse, then such agential multiplicity necessarily takes a primary seat in that discussion.

How agency emerges, what agency is in its relationship to consciousness or psyche, and at what level of the psyche higher forms of agency are supervenient, or transcendent, to lower forms of agency are questions of great importance for psychology. Necessarily, this leads to mereological issues such as how to draw semi-permeable boundaries around certain agentic psychic structures or processes. Exploring such boundaries entertains complex issues, such as: multiple agents in one person, superordinate and subordinate agents, competing or cooperating agents, and finally what skills and abilities agents might have at differing levels of biopsychic complexity – for example, at what level does metacognition become available to a human organism's subagencies?

Addressing the issue of metacognition and 'who' has access, I have argued at length elsewhere that it is dubious whether we should accept the semi-stable identity termed ego-complex as a psychologically valid agentic structure (see Holsapple, 2024). Just briefly, the reasons are as follows: human life and its metacognitive functions are multifarious, the "I" is perhaps better conceived as a verb than a noun, like a revolving door of motivational agencies, more than it is a stable nexus of character in and of itself. Multiple psychic agents seem to access "I" to varying degrees. In some respects, this is nothing new in Jungian psychology. Of course, there are complexes and archetypal configurations that attempt to explain these issues, but I argue these concepts are better understood without erecting an ego-complex to explain metacognitive experiences. To posit the "I" as a self referentially explicit awareness is not the

same thing as positing the “I” by virtue of existing with phenomenal and intentional characteristics. One can be dreaming without explicit metacognitive awareness that they are dreaming (Kastrup, 2017), yet all sorts of intentional and agential activities go on in the dream which posit one or many I’s.

3.3 Subpersonalities

These multiple psychic agents – which themselves do have characteristics worthy of the status of partial identities – can be referred to as self-states (Bromberg, 1996), subpersonalities – the term I prefer – (Rowan, 1990) (Redfearn, 1985) (Strachan, 2011) (Holsapple, 2024), selves (gruber, Fadiman, 2020), subselves (Lester, 2010), I-Positions (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), Personae (Bogart, 1994) etc. They can be grounded as phenomenologically discernable persons (Hillman, 1975), evolved motivational systems (Del Giudice, 2018), genetically idiosyncratic personality predispositions (Strachan, 2011) (Holsapple, 2024), and adaptive coping styles and personality traits which develop through life experience, thus combining nature and nurture (Strachan, 2011) (Holsapple, 2024). Human beings use ‘I’ for a variety of activities and perspectives which belie different agentic subpersonalities. The overlaying argument is that human behavior, self-aware identity, and self-aware perception are not contained by a semi stable ego-complex and are instead a multi-agential coordination of subpersonalities which compete, cooperate, or tolerate each other within the greater meta-agency of the human being.

As an example of this multiple consciousness, take an individual who enjoys life as an athlete, and as a university professor. When they are in the state of athleticism, are they unconscious? Do they not have a sense of subjectivity, or even a meta-cognitive narrative about the game or activity – e.g., “I am sprinting and trying to beat my record,” “we are playing hockey, and we are up two goals with twenty minutes left” –, filtered through the values of that

athletic subpersonality? Conversely, when they show up to teach class – embodying a different underlying set of values, motivational intricacies, and metacognitive narratives – are they somehow more or less conscious or metacognitively involved because they engage in a different perspectival mode of psychic valency – hence a different subpersonality?

Some readers might argue that Jung handles this through his position of the persona – i.e., the outward facing mediator of the individual psyche, designed to adapt to life by assuming culturally acceptable behavior (Jung, 1971) –, but I think the persona is an inadequate concept that tries to cram too much multiplicity into a single space. Hillman (1975) addresses this issue in stating, “we sense these other persons and call them roles . . . but can there be roles without persons to play them?” . 32). In essence, there must be a motivational disposition from some part of the psyche to give worldly interactions their meaning and direction. Calling this the “persona” only obscures resolving the issue of motivational agency. If activities were not salient to some intrinsic aspect of the psyche, they would not be engaged with in the first place – even if the motivating tendency in some cases is a striving for social acceptance or cultural success.

This also introduces the valid question of how humans manage to function at all if they are truly composed of such diversified semi-autonomous agencies with no ego-complex? Functionality – and its absence – as the meta-project of adapting to life circumstances, can be seen as either a negotiation between or dominance of certain subpersonalities, or could be seen as the transcendent whole of the person subsuming its subpersonalities in effective life functioning – but in this case we are not speaking of a small ego subsumed by the larger psyche, but rather the larger psyche as an adaptive system. Finally, functionality could also be seen as a Soul-directed phenomenon, or an activity of individuation, where the subpersonalities subject themselves to a meaningful director within the human subject in relationship to a greater

transpersonal wholeness.⁴ The whole human being, being a wholeness that contains such varied agencies, would be well described as semi-stable in contradistinction to an arbitrarily defined ego-complex that supposedly exists only within a metacognitive psychic framing. The I-function that such a human being has access to is eminently mercurial. I argue that if psychic multiplicity within the wholeness of the human being and corollary metacognitive functions is taken seriously, the ego-complex becomes superfluous and even conceptually obstructive. Jung (1970) himself practically admitted as much in stating:

The ego, ostensibly the thing we know most about, is in fact a highly complex affair full of unfathomable obscurities. Indeed, one could even define it as a relatively constant personification of the unconscious itself, or as the Schopenhauerian mirror in which the unconscious becomes aware of its own face.” *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (107).

Here the ego-complex is essentially characterized as giving psychic activity metacognitive “self-aware” reflection and is not retained as a core identity in and of itself. Such incomprehensibility with the concept ‘ego-complex’ is precisely why I challenge its very existence. Jung understands this and entertains the notion that perhaps the enhanced operations of the ‘I’ are merely a vessel for psychic multiplicity. This passage points to my earlier stated notion that the ‘I’ may be a function that endorses a revolving door of subpersonalities which use such metacognitive talents to fit their agenda.

⁴ Shamdasani (2009) commented in his introduction to *The Red Book*, “whereas [Nietzsche’s] Zarathustra proclaimed the death of God. *Liber Novus* depicts the rebirth of God in the Soul” (p. 20). This turn of phrase suggests the inextricable connection between Jung’s notion of the Self archetype and the soul.

If the ego-complex were to be taken as superfluous (see Holsapple, 2024 for full argument) then this would have collapsed the whole structure of unconscious versus consciousness. There instead would only be relative degrees of metacognitive awareness and narrative identity within a greater embodied phenomenal and agential field of behavioral and perceptual psychic multiplicity, with all their underlying sedimentary structures – which themselves may partake in consciousness –, including genetic, epigenetic, developmental, neurological, and a non-reducible psychic ground in which we find ourselves *thrown*. By collapsing the dichotomy of conscious versus unconscious, and distributing consciousness through the entire psyche, I am inching closer towards idealism. After all, I cannot reasonably attribute consciousness to the entire cosmos if it is not even secured as a pervasive fact of individualized psychic existence. Having extended consciousness among the human psyche, it is worth seeing if this psyche can be extended to the next “experientially near” category, life itself.

3.4 Micro Agency and Psychic Multiplicity

In contrast to machinery, life’s activities are much less deductively bound and display more intrinsic adaptability and complexity (Faggin, 2024). Consciousness has emerged as a viable attribution to cells and provides a framework for their cognitive abilities and intelligent processes. Kramer et al. (2022) suggested “heterogeneity and complexity in signaling networks may have coevolved to enable specific and context-aware cellular decision-making in a multicellular setting” (1). This brings in the concept of phenomenality and agency, as a cell is seen as an agent with perceptual capacities and is driven to decision-making.⁵ While the authors

⁵ Of course, I do not intend to anthropomorphize cellular consciousness, so I point out that a cell’s consciousness would not be like that of experience at the metacognitive capacity of being a human.

do not explicitly use the term consciousness, their phrasing implies intelligent and sentient cellular and intracellular capabilities.

Agency and cognition in life is evident at the cellular level. As biologist Michael Levin (2022) states, “we are all patchworks of overlapping, nested, competing, and cooperating agents that have homeostatic (goal-directed) activity within their self-constructed virtual space at a scale that determines their cognitive sophistication” (30). Thereby with living organisms, perhaps it is “agents all the way down” with varying degrees of cognition which organize into metacognitive capacities at higher levels of personality architecture. Fitting some of Levin’s themes about cellular cognition and enmindedness, František Baluška et al. (2021) have similarly claimed that even single cell organisms are conscious and that, “all cells are self referential ‘knowing’ problem solving entities. As cognitive agents, each cell has its own individualized information field through which it attaches to space-time information” (6). They appear to equate consciousness with life itself. They utilize the term ‘senomics’ to denote the process whereby an entity with a cellular membrane and a multimodal cellular matrix has interoceptive and agential capacities.

Giving cells a distinct agential identity instigates tricky questions about how smaller agents would combine to make larger agents – i.e., the combination problem. Goodwyn handles this psychic nesting by starting with the cosmos and distributing it among progressively smaller organized forms of life and matter. Therefore, it is not a process of combination but only relatively constrained levels of sub-integration within a larger integrated cosmic whole. Cells, often being quite complex and highly integrated, therefore may have the experiential unity Goodwyn (2022) proposes is a necessary feature of phenomenal consciousness. If life having pervasive consciousness is taken as a valid premise, it opens up deeper questions on the origin of

that consciousness, which embraces the question on metaphysical origins. By first extending consciousness into all of the psyche, and then extending consciousness – thereby psyche – into life-forms, the ground for metaphysical questions is finally prepared. I have reduced the problem of agency to the unexplained fact of life itself. How does this consciousness of life and psyche arise?

4 Between Mills and Goodwyn on Origins

As Mills points out in the prolegomenon of *Archetypal Origins* (2023), any discussion that partakes in the problem of origins, whether in physics or metaphysics, is plagued by a certain amount of unprovable supposition. He lucidly problematizes the question of “original points,” asking “how do we finagle our way through reason to a pre-original cause when all we observe and experience are appearances? For example, how do we explain how the universe as a whole got here to begin with, let alone how it was endowed with consciousness?” (xi) Mills goes on to conclude that these questions are probably ultimately unanswerable, given the fact that all we have is our phenomenologically lived-world. Preferring to bracket opaque problems of metaphysics and focusing primarily on a phenomenological analysis gives Mills the distinct advantage of engaging from the starting point of empirical experience. Nevertheless, Mills (2023) accepts matter as ontologically real and accepts its entanglement with psyche under certain conditions – thoughtfully coined “psymatter” (44). Goodwyn (2020) points out this entanglement still needs explanation, and quickly leads to philosophical issues of how consciousness emerges and why some things should be conscious, and others should be devoid of consciousness.

4.1 Abandoning Physicalism and Saving Matter

While Goodwyn and Mills have their differing philosophical approaches, they both agree physicalism is an untenable metaphysics. There are certain distinctions that cast doubt on physicalism's commitment to seeing matter as brutally giving rise to consciousness. Take bioscience, one example of a proximally robust logical extension of the experientially near. It builds a coherent system of observation which allows local regularities to be intelligibly investigated relative to the *behavior* of natural beings and their biomolecular constituencies under certain conditions (Goodwyn, 2022) (Kastrup, 2019). Yet, as Goodwyn (2022) puts it, "since piling on more correlations doesn't get us any closer to that question (*the question of why certain patterns of nature are correlated with qualia*), it seems extremely likely that we are facing a conceptual incoherence problem rather than a lack of data problem" (my parenthesis, 137). In other words, bioscience can hand us a great deal of information about what nature does, but it cannot tell us what nature is nor why it should have any qualitative substrate (Kastrup, 2019).

The conceptual incoherence noted by Goodwyn is related to how the very existence of consciousness has famously become a "hard problem" (Chalmers, 1996). The hard problem asks how can mind stuff emerge out of matter stuff; how can biomolecular complexity give rise to qualia? There is nothing about observable objective properties in and of themselves that would justify the assumption that they give rise to subjective experience. Yet, the "hard problem" only exists if physicalism is assumed at the outset. In idealism, there is no hard problem because consciousness does not emerge out of matter and matter does not "emerge" out of consciousness – matter is an appearance within consciousness (Kastrup, 2019). However, Goodwyn handles these issues differently and retains matter as a basic aspect of reality, which deserves attention.

Mills and Goodwyn's dialogue culminates in a well-argued defense of cosmopsychism from Goodwyn.

5 Goodwyn's Cosmopsychism

Erik Goodwyn (2022) has suggested a cosmopsychism, wherein entities may have varying degrees of consciousness due to their level of integratedness. Integration refers to a complex differentiation of parts within the holistic coherence of an entity or system. As presented by Goodwyn, cosmopsychism is dependent on the suggestion that integratedness is the formal cause of the psyche, formal cause being that Aristotelian category wherein cause is determined by form. In other words, formal cause is about design and the arrangement of properties. For example, if pieces of wood are screwed together in a precise way, a chair is constructed. The formal cause of the chair is therefore the design blueprint of the chair.

In cosmopsychism, however, formal cause is applied in a meta-framework: the formal cause of consciousness is the highly integrated structure of the universe itself. Being the highest *form* of integration, the universe radiates cosmic consciousness – CC – and also becomes the formal cause of individualized spatiotemporal consciousness, because consciousness is taken to have a primordial form. The CC of the universe, containing the maximum form of integration, shares consciousness with its less integrated constituents, which are distinct entities within that universe. Living entities are highly integrated. Such entities modestly reflect the integrated form of the universe as a whole and therefore possess varying degrees of consciousness. A rock, on the other hand, would be considered to have a vanishingly small amount of consciousness – if any – given its lower form of complex integration.

Goodwyn's (2022) position appears to posit the integration of matter as crucial to localized forms of consciousness, yet at the same time he claims neither "matter nor psyche are

seen as prior” (144). Neither matter nor psyche are prior because the holistic integrated form of the universe contains both properties, according to Goodwyn. His argument is that the integration of matter is only relative to the ability for an entity to achieve embodied *localized* consciousness, he does not confine his argument to time and space. Goodwyn (2023) clarifies that the CC from which all consciousness is derived must be *the* maximally integrated form, and that, “such a form is – as it is a form – independent of time and space” (124). This is what allows the position its logical robustness as one can differentiate localized embodied conscious forms from non-localized CC as such. Indeed, Goodwyn’s statement does give maximal integratedness an ontological status that may be prior to any specific spatiotemporal manifestations. Being independent of time and space, the integrated form of the universe does not depend on any concrete organization of matter specifically. In addition, being cosmic, CC is always present irrespective of whether a relatively integrated entity embodies it.

5.1 Identifying the Problem of Local Asymmetry

However, might there be an asymmetry between localized matter and localized psyche in Goodwyn’s model? Matter appears superior in some respects because if a system or subsystem lacks the properties of complex integration of matter, then an entity’s localized psyche is assumed to be diminished to some greater or lesser extent. Goodwyn (2022) suggested that “my own mind is a property that is possessed by the matter of which I am composed in a similar way to that of other minds and bodies” (133). This means that in principle, one can render consciousness obsolete by simply disintegrating a system until one reaches a ‘vanishing point,’ wherein consciousness is spatiotemporally absent for that individualized organization of matter – fair enough, this sounds like a description of biological death.

The problem which appears to me is that if matter and psyche originate equiprimordially, how does matter end up with more leverage over the existence or non-existence of consciousness in a spatiotemporal organism? What causes matter and psyche to be ontologically and universally co-existent, but locally asymmetrical for existent entities? Why should matter possess psyche locally, rather than psyche possessing matter, for example? This asymmetry appears to point to a difficult issue with Goodwyn's proposal, giving matter and psyche equal ontological status from the start leads to problems at the local level of his argument structure, when he grants matter possessive power over psyche. If the maximally integrated form contains the maximal amount of consciousness, and that form is the cosmos itself, who is to say that the integrated bits of holistic forms need to be made of matter, rather than say "information" or projected "consciousness datums." How can we be so sure that matter even exists?

Alternatively, there is no local asymmetry problem in my proposed ontological idealism. Matter is simply posited as a category of appearance that exists within certain manifestations of consciousness. But to see if this is a reasonable premise, it is useful to finally provide a more detailed definition of consciousness. The remainder of this article is dedicated to seeing if seeing consciousness as more primary than matter can still accommodate crucial aspects of Goodwyn's proposal on Cosmopsychism.

6 Working Definitions of Consciousness and its Categorical Manifestations

I offer my own lexicon with some key terms as a reference point for the ensuing analysis. In no way is the validity of these definitions assumed at the outset. However, they provide a clear lens through which I am circumambulating the territory of consciousness. As the argument progresses, the definitions I have created may gain more purchasing power.

I have defined the following terms:

- Soul: Individualized life force, being, essence, consciousness which creates and animates forms in the local realm.⁶
- Universal Spirit: Cosmic Consciousness, universal essence, the deepest and most comprehensive consciousness
- Consciousness: a phenomenal and intentional self-affirming agency which assimilates and accommodates its world in a creative and integrative manner.
 - In the case of Universal Spirit, that world is self-created within the self-projected parameters it manifests for itself.⁷
- Psyforms – directly inspired by Mills’ (2022) *psymatter*, altered to fit my proposed ontological idealism and makes accommodations for partial compatibility with cosmopsychism: An ensouled form – having the right constitution of integratedness to achieve a conscious embodiment in the local realm.
- Psyformation: Psychic information which is organized into intelligible forms in the local realm, which are perceptible to the degree that psyforms have organs of perception attuned to a particular informational form – i.e., the appearance of

⁶ Plato (2002), in his work *Phaedo*, depicted Socrates as giving the soul the following properties: (a) it is the living, vital essence of organisms; (b) it can direct life in meaningful ways, which transcends bodily impulses, and (c) it is immortal and passes through this life and into the next. Therefore, for Socrates, the soul refers to the immortal animating essence of life itself and represents a supraordinate agency in and of itself whereby it can direct meaningful activities in life.

⁷ This could be seen as circular reasoning, but what is more circular than the universe itself? Is the universe not a self-sustaining circle of being?

matter to an organism's perceptual organs, and the very complex organization of those organs and their ability to become psyform consciousness.

7 Local Soul and Non-Local Universal Spirit

Goodwyn's work on holism and formal cause creates an elegant picture of how locally embodied forms achieve varying degrees of consciousness based on the arrangement of their molecular constituents. If I can plausibly replace matter with what I am calling psyforms and psyformation, I will be able to make use of Goodwyn's careful arguments on CC, holism, and formal cause without falling prey to what I referred to as local asymmetry. I tread with care. I think it's best to call everything from here on a provisional argument for ontological idealism.

It is worth investigating how this complex consciousness enabling arrangement of forms occurs in the first place at the local level – what is the former of the complex forms? It could be assumed that the arrangement is merely incidental, and locally embodied consciousness is discovered after natural selection does its work. I argue this falls short because intelligibility is not well explained by a random series of events cultivated into form over a duration. If cosmic consciousness is taken seriously, viewing nature's local intelligibility and progressive complexity as a mere random biproduct of improbable biochemical and molecular interactions risks rendering that consciousness impotent. Moreover, having attributed consciousness to single cells, evolution as a purely passive algorithmic process has already been ruled out. Indeed, a passive conception of natural selection and evolution has failed to account for the total process of evolution (Corning, 2023). Selection processes, adaptation, and mutation are already inherently bound to agency.

The fact that any locally intelligible forms exist at all and can lend themselves to evolutionary processes and thereby increase complexity and intelligibility, is something to be

explained. I argue it eventually culminates in the fact that we do not just need a post facto analysis of “integration” to explain how locally embodied consciousness is achieved, we also need an “integrator” a local agent that can participate in the production, arrangement, and rearrangement of psyformation and the conscious embodiment and evolution of psyforms. To explain the existence and evolution of local psyforms, I think we need a local agent and a non-local agent – more on the non-local agent later. First, I will elaborate on the need for a local agent.

7.1 Unfolding of Complexity in the Biosphere

Drawing on the question of what leads to complex local forms naturally lends itself to an examination of life, which is among the most complex formative processes humans can conceive and study. Life demonstrates extraordinary creativity; it autopoetically creates its own informational receptors and organs of perception and behavior and often even modifies its own parameters on the fly through development, mutation, and evolution. The very origin of life itself could be considered another “hard problem” if physicalism were assumed at the outset, how does life emerge from non-life? On the other hand, an ontological idealism could submit that life does not emerge from non-life and is rather the embodiment of consciousness in a localized projection.

The creative possibilities of life are indefinite. As Kaufmann (2016) points out, as evolution in the biosphere occurs, it creates new actuals, things that actually exist. New actuals create new adjacent possibles, things that could exist. He refers to the evolution of the swim bladder as an example, once the swim bladder evolves it's a new actual that enables possibles, such as a bacteria or worm that could evolve to live in that swim bladder. This cycle of evolution in the biosphere occurs in such an emphatically creative way that it conceals any foreseeably

consistent boundaries around the space of possibilities. New actuals create new adjacent possibles, which give rise to more actuals and more possibles.

7.2 Creativity Necessarily Implies Consciousness – a local integrator

If evolution is creative and not exclusively random mutation condensed into functionality by natural selection, no computational response can be prepared in advance for a possibility that cannot be deduced or modeled. Therefore, creativity represents an appropriate word for nature's ability to transform and become. Whereas Kauffman does not posit a definite creatrix, I argue it is a necessity. Given the premise of cellular consciousness, cascading actuals and possibles becomes tied to agents and their induction of salience and directionality.

Moreover, creative act is an imaginative act, a resourceful act, a sentient and spontaneously generated act that births the emergence of a new order. Not only is creativity via determinism an oxymoron, but accidental creativity also represents a contradiction. Calling the acts of nature creative in the truest sense of the word suggests there must be some core force of conscious being behind them. This claim corresponds with Jung's (1975) position that the psyche "creates its own organ, and maintains and modifies it" (Jung, 1975, 177). This implies psyche possesses the forms it alters over the course of evolution. This evolutionary creativity implies an agent prior to the organization of the psyform itself which eventually becomes the psyform, I will call that agent the Soul.

Notice that I have inverted Goodwyn's local model which suggests matter possesses psyche, I have instead posited that psyche possesses the "apparent" matter – i.e., psyformation – of which it is composed. Once that possession is secured, a psyform exists. I have evaded the asymmetry problem because I have not posited two ontologically equiprimordial entities – i.e.,

consciousness and matter – I have only submitted consciousness, which produces these psyformational projections. This still supports the notion that integration can enable locally embodied consciousness via its psyformational complexity, thus retaining Goodwyn’s holism and aspects of his formal cause. The Soul, as the precursor and eventual embodiment of psyforms, must pre-exist the psyform and yet drive its very possibility of existing as a primordial integrative intelligence. As psyforms increase in their cellular functionality such primordial intelligence gets focused into organizations which allow certain percepts and behaviors to become dispositions and latent factors of organismic salience.⁸ Then the question becomes from whence this posited Soul emerges.

7.3 Universal Spirit and the Non-local Postulate

The position that Universal Spirit is atemporal and non-spatial is arguably compatible with understandings from theoretical physics that base reality is non-local. Hoffman (2019) posits consciousness as fundamental and that space-time is an illusion, arguing that theoretical physics and evolutionary science have shown that time and space are psychic constructs. Such constructs enable organisms to adapt and function in their lived-world. Hoffman et al. (2023), explains the growing consensus in theoretical physics that space-time is not fundamental. Using high forms of mathematics (Hoffman et al, 2023) in conjunction with non locality (Hoffman, 2019), and quantum superposition (Hoffman, 2019) (Hoffman et al, 2023),⁹ there are multiple

⁸ I suggest Soul consciousness works through and builds on what pysformation already exists. If that is the case, the creative force of the Soul works with what it has in terms of embodied complexity and capability. I suggest it works within the enabling constraints of its organism and environment.

⁹ Theoretical physics is a repository for interpretations of quantum mechanics, sometimes quantum superposition is framed by the idea that an observer or a measurement is required for a ‘probability wave’ to collapse into a definite state or a particle. Given the variety of speculative theories, it is natural to wonder whether the most robust interpretations of quantum mechanics involve consciousness, although there are notable lines reasoning which argue in the affirmative. A traditional example is the Von-Nuemann-Wigner interpretation which suggested that consciousness causes the collapse.

converging lines of evidence that challenge the notion of a fundamental space-time. In a similar vein, Lanza et al. (2021) claim that, “neither space nor time actually exist,” (47) and proffered that the appearance of the ‘objective’ universe is simply the “complete spatiotemporal logic of the self” (113). In other words, the appearance of matter is an extension of the matrix of an atemporal and nonspatial cosmic consciousness. If spacetime is not fundamental, and consciousness is fundamental, then I argue psyformation, and embodied psyforms are aspects of the universal consciousness and its encoded monistic reality.^{10 11}

7.4 Soul’s Non-local Origins and its Local Manifestation

Having submitted consciousness as an entity which by extension of its essence integrates, and made Universal Spirit the most comprehensive consciousness, Universal Spirit becomes the greatest integrative being. Universal Spirit is then the non-local agent. Soul exists at the level of local integration as the local-agent. The soul as the local agent is the integrator that creates, evolves, and embodies psyforms within the totalistic Universal Spirit. Thereby such forms, having the right psyformation, embody consciousness, being compatible with Goodwyn's formal cause, albeit in a different manner than he might have intended. If Universal Spirit is beyond time and space, then how does it maintain a coherent substance? As Kastrup (2024, 58:50) explains, “semantic content can exist without extension.” In principle, Universal Spirit as the most comprehensive consciousness can be packed full of all sorts of nuances without spacetime.

¹⁰ These conclusions are quite compatible with Jung’s (1972) view that, “The psyche cannot be localized in space, or that space is relative to the psyche” (531). Therefore, we might attribute to Jung an some idealist inclinations such as the one I have suggested here.

¹¹ Ceylan et al. (2017) add an interesting ideas here, proposing that the “nonphysical’ Soul gains some ‘physical properties’ as it is reduced into cognitions in the brain” (589). This interpretation, although denying the primacy of space-time, shows that the soul may acquire some “weightiness” as it incarnates.

It can be seen as a psychological or a mental existence – just like human dreams appear spatially extended but are in fact not.

Locality, as the projection of the essence of Universal Spirit, infuses the perceived local world with Soul. Soul drives cascading intelligibility. That is, Soul is the creative force that drives the evolutionary process and the becoming of psyforms. Such intelligibility has a few dimensions which are important: organs of perception organize information in intelligible and salient ways, and the lived world as an interrelated holistic system of psyforms creates intelligible structures and processes separate from any “one” consciousness. The existence of nonliving matter would then be the psyformational dreamscape of Universal Spirit. Ectodermic layers of psyformation change depending on the organs of perception apprehending the dream object – e.g., if a bat approaches a large boulder from a distance, it will perceive it through echolocation, whereas I approach the boulder and perceive it through eyesight. Deeper atomic layers of psyformation are the Universe’s own creation and do not alter their innate structures based on such relatively tiny forms of consciousness – e.g., the boulder that the bat and I perceive differently still has an underlying psyformational nature which is not relative to our respective organs of perception.

This aligns with Kastrup’s (2017) notion of the “objective” world beyond perception being something akin to the universe’s mental content. Although Kastrup would likely reject my form of idealism, – even though I argue that its ontological premises are empirically justified accounting for the fact of intelligible structures and agential evolution – he would prefer to see natural processes of mind and its dissociation as developing because anything that can happen will happen in nature, eventually (Kastrup, 2024). I think this just avoids animism and takes a causally naturalistic approach to the question of local forms and their intelligibility, which is no

more convincing than assuming physicalism on that particular point. I take a much more proactive approach to the notion of a conscious universe, giving the soul as a creative integrator a primary role.

I still haven't answered the question as to what drives the soul to be an integrator of psyforms. I will address this syllogistically. The Soul shares an essence with the Universal Spirit, which is naturally the highest form of integration. Because Soul takes its essence as a splinter or as an orb of Universal Spirit, extended into the dreamscape of space-time, this ensures the Soul carries forward the properties of integration. If Soul takes its essence from universalized consciousness which integrates, then integration must be a property and local activity of the Soul. Therefore, the semantics of the Soul in the lived world play themselves out in highly intelligible and integrative ways.¹² This means the forms that gain consciousness in the local world, like organisms or animals, do so because the Soul has created a psyform that approximates the integratedness of the universe to varying degrees, which allows it its consciousness. I argue this leads to appealing parallels between cosmopsychism from Goodwyn and my form of idealism. The main difference is that I have taken matter out of the equation, and I have placed consciousness prior to integration by saying that consciousness is the very essence of what it is to be an integrator or to be integrative.

Finally, the ultimate question I can conceive is what should spur the Universal Spirit to spawn Soul and ensouled psyforms in a space-time projection? If the Universal Spirit is tantamount to the greatest encompassing consciousness, and it is in the nature of consciousness

¹² Based on what has been said so far, it seems the Soul has layers of access and direction within its embodiment, depending on the complexity of an organism. Importantly, I have argued that metacognitive consciousness only represents a small fragment of consciousness as a whole. Therefore, I am not suggesting that the Soul has omniscience when it comes to its own organism, with complete and total self-referential metacognitive understanding and control at every layer of biology.

to integrate, then the universe *extends* its creative urge as psychic multiplicity in order for integration to take place. Homogeny contradicts integration, integration requires differentiation. Differentiation plays itself out in the “local” realm of Soul. Given that Universal Spirit exists prior to space-time appearances, its integrative nature is the unmanifested condition of the necessity of integration via manifestations of the Soul in the local realm. Space-time appearances allow psyforms to individuate their psychic potential as a part-whole of the Universe. The Soul, being the integrator of forms, creates and differentiates psyforms within the holistic totality of Universal Spirit. The only brute fact I have assumed is that consciousness is primary and is by definition an integrative force. Therefore, by its very nature consciousness desires to create.

8 Conclusion

Mills and Goodwyn invited a great opportunity for Jungian tradition to inquire about its ontological home. Their discourse so richly conveyed the relevance of ontological positions which might ground the tradition in ways that allow its nested propositions – up for grabs as some of those propositions may be – to rest on a solid philosophical foundation. I argued there was an asymmetry between mind and matter in Goodwyn’s position on spatiotemporal consciousness – even though they were presented as ontologically equiprimordial –, because consciousness was dependent on the integration of matter in the local realm. Conversely, there is no asymmetry in seeing consciousness as primary because the appearance of intelligible physical systems are merely attributed to the complexification and evolution of psyforms in a conscious universe with multiple consciousnesses.

Consciousness as such, is the ultimate integrative wholeness beyond space and time which I chose to call Universal Spirit. Soul embodied is the spatio-temporal incarnation of

Universal Spirit's consciousness. If the ultimate reality of the universe is non-local and atemporal consciousness, the temporal and local manifestations of psyche and matter are *appearances, regularities, and changing psyforms* encoded within that conscious universe's psyformational matrix. I was able to retain Goodwyn's careful exposition on formal cause for local embodiment while prioritizing the ontological primacy of consciousness. While this line of thinking certainly forces a reconceptualization of certain Jungian structures, such as positing a conscious versus unconscious psyche, the essence of Jung's inquiry remains intact. That the properties of psyche may be universalized, and that they differentiate, create, and individuate at everexpanding levels of holism shows a process which lends itself quite amicably to Jung's own commitments.

Attempts to solve metaphysical issues and origins are always a process and a discussion. There is no "final answer," as that would require the embodiment of a God-like force that encompasses all to even conceive of such a comprehensive understanding.. Therefore, I end simply with the joy of asking questions, framing ideas, and putting forward possibilities which might enrich the process whereby we practice a *depth psychology*.

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Declaration of Interest: I am the Co-Director of Center for Creative Choice, where we use the Self Soul Spirit Model which grows out of a metaphysical understanding of universal consciousness and extends into a sophisticated understanding of embodied complexity.

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