CHAPTER 5

PERSONALITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

It seems that Tarot symbolism speaks to us clearly only when addressed from the perspective of the Jungian archetypes of the collective unconscious or viewed as the existential discovery of being through myths. Noddings (1993a) is adamant that existential questions are the central issues in life and “should form the organizing backbone” (1993a, p. 8) of education counter to the traditional curriculum with its “rigid boundaries between subject matters [that] makes learning fragmentary” (1993a, p. 8). There are many ways to address the existential problems pertaining to the meaning of life and human moral development; in fact Noddings comments on the Neoplatonic “principle of plentitude, espoused by many thinkers” (1993a, p. 9) not unlike the plentitude of experiences awaiting the Fool in his archetypal journey through the symbolism of Tarot pictures and images addressed in the previous chapter.

The universality of Tarot themes reflects the view of humanistic and transpersonal psychology that basic human values are cross-cultural. Cultural relativism surrenders under the fact that Tarot Arcana embody common values grounded in basic, yet universal, human experiences that include “the commonalities of birth, death, physical and emotional needs, and the longing to be cared for. This last – whether it is manifested as a need for love, physical care, respect or mere recognition – is the fundamental starting point for the ethics of care” (Noddings, 1998, p. 188).

In the context of feminist moral philosophy and care theory in education, Noddings pointed to such common global human experiences as birth, marriage, motherhood, death, or separation, even while denying abstract moral universals when they are understood solely as some predestined rules for our actions. As we have seen in chapter 4, universal archetypal experiences are embodied in the imagery of Tarot Major Arcana. Importantly, the abstract universal principles as a theoretical construct acquire embodied reality as concrete, particular, real-life human experiences embedded in our practical lives, thereby transgressing the Cartesian dualism between body and soul.

The more one works with the Tarot the more highlighted become its correlations with many of the views on human nature up to the point of claiming, as Carl Sargent (1988) did, that “the Tarot is almost a ‘super-theory’ of personality. One can hardly find an original insight in personality psychology which is not foretold in the imagery of Tarot” (Sargent, 1988, p. vi). It should be noted however that all theories are only our human artifacts, our constructions in an attempt to explain human behavior. Jung himself was well aware about the danger of our attachment to a particular theory calling the psychological theories “the very devil. It is true that we need certain points of view for their…heuristic value; but they always should be regarded as mere auxiliary concepts” (Jung, CW 17, 7).
The references to a variety of personality theories in the context of Tarot are mainly to illuminate this or that important general aspect of our psychological template. In the context of personality theories, Sargent linked Tarot not only with Freudian and Jungian theories of the unconscious, but also with the key insights derived from the humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow and George Kelly’s theory of constructs.

In humanistic psychology, for example, there is a concept, introduced by Maslow, of the dominating drive in human beings as being an instinct to grow, develop, differentiate, and also to nurture our spiritual feelings.

Growth, development, differentiation, and spiritual aspirations go hand in hand, from one image of the Major Arcana to another as the symbolism of each picture tells us a story just like stories that “Jung and Maslow tell us about just how we can develop as people” (Sargent, 1988, p. 7). For Maslow, there is an endless dynamics to human drives, motivations, and the need to grow. The Fool’s journey through the Major Arcana is a never-ending story, with the personality becoming ever more complex till it reaches the level of the authentic selfhood. It is at this level that Maslow’s inner sense of one’s own worth manifests itself.

Maslow referred to *esteem needs* as a set of our desires for strength, effectiveness, and recognition of ourselves as valued by others; yet not in the sense of attracting attention but as earning respect by virtue of a developed “internal moral agency” (Sargent, 1998, p. 44). Like Jung, Maslow emphasized being true to one’s own nature as the highest level of self-actualization. In terms of Tarot dynamics, addressed in the previous chapter, the Fool achieves his full actualization in the archetype of the Self, symbolized by the Arcanum called The World.

The Fool then is pure potential for future self-actualization; he will go through the multiplicity of Maslow’s peak experiences symbolized by the symbolism and the imagery on the subsequent pictures. The symbolism of The Empress as the Jungian archetype of the Great Mother points, in its positive aspects, to the symbolic representation of attending to what Maslow specified as basic needs. The Empress recognizes a basic human desire to be safe, protected and nurtured. The Empress is also the ultimate symbol for growth: as regards Tarot hermeneutic, her presence in a particular reading can often point to pregnancy and fertility.

The symbolism of Justice points to the inner sense of fairness in making a judgement. The Wheel of Fortune is the image of the very dynamics or developmental *process* pertaining to Jung’s and Maslow’s theories alike. A human figure, which is present in the majority of pictures but is absent in the imagery of the Wheel, indicates “not so much a part of personality, [but] a process governing [human] development” (Sargent, 1998, p. 86) *per se*.

It is commonly assumed that Carl Rodgers’ person-centered psychological theory eliminates much of the unconscious in favor of classical conditions of congruence, positive regard, empathy and trust as applied in counseling situations. Still, Rogers was said to have discovered another characteristic precisely when being closer to his inner intuitive, as yet fully unknown at the conscious level, self. For Rogers, this slightly altered state of consciousness was what produced the healing effect. Working as a counselor, a genuine reader intuitively applies in practice the necessary qualities as articulated by Rogers: congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy.