Instructor’s Manual

for

JAMES HILLMAN ON THE SOULLESS SOCIETY

with

JAMES HILLMAN, PHD AND J. FRASER PIERSON, PHD

Manual by

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Instructor’s Manual for *James Hillman on the Soulless Society*

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Instructor’s Manual for

JAMES HILLMAN ON
THE SOULLESS SOCIETY

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Tips for Making the Best Use of the DVD

1. USE THE TRANSCRIPTS
Make notes in the video Transcript for future reference; the next time you show the video you will have them available. Highlight or notate key moments in the video to better facilitate discussion during and after the video.

2. FACILITATE DISCUSSION
Pause the video at different points to elicit viewers’ observations and reactions to the concepts presented. The Discussion Questions section provides ideas about key points that can stimulate rich discussions and learning.

3. ENCOURAGE SHARING OF OPINIONS
Encourage viewers to voice their opinions; no therapy is perfect! What are viewers’ impressions of what works and does not work? We learn as much from our mistakes as our successes; it is crucial for students and therapists to develop the ability to effectively critique this work as well as their own.

4. SUGGEST READINGS TO ENRICH VIDEO MATERIAL
Assign readings from Related Websites, Videos and Further Reading prior to or after viewing.

5. ASSIGN A REACTION PAPER
See suggestions in the Reaction Paper section.
Hillman’s Contributions to Psychology*

James Hillman, PhD, is an American psychologist and is considered to be the founder of Archetypal Psychology. He is a leading scholar in Jungian and post-Jungian thought, a self-described “renegade psychologist” and is both a social critic and revisionist of depth psychology. He is the author of over twenty books on psychology, philosophy, and spirituality.

Hillman received his PhD from the University of Zurich, as well as his analyst’s diploma from the C.G. Jung Institute and was then appointed as Director of Studies at the Institute, a position he held until 1969. In 1970, Hillman became editor of Spring Publications, a publishing company devoted to advancing Archetypal Psychology as well as publishing books on mythology, philosophy and art. His magnum opus, Re-visioning Psychology, was written in 1975 and nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Hillman then helped co-found the Dallas Institute for Humanities and Culture in 1978.

His 1997 book, The Soul’s Code: In Search of Character and Calling, was on The New York Times Bestseller List that year. His works and ideas about philosophy and psychology have also been popularized by other authors such as Thomas Moore, author of the bestselling book Care of the Soul.

Hillman has been critical of the 20th century’s psychologies (e.g., biological psychology, behaviorism, cognitive psychology) that have adopted a natural scientific philosophy and praxis. His main criticisms include that they are reductive, materialistic, and literal; they are psychologies without psyche, without soul. Accordingly, Hillman’s oeuvre has been an attempt to restore psyche to what he believes to be “its proper place” in psychology. Hillman sees the soul at work in imagination, dreams, fantasy, myth and metaphor. He also sees soul revealed in psychopathology, in the symptoms of psychological disorders. Psyche-pathos-logos is the “speech of the suffering soul” or the soul’s suffering of meaning. A great portion of Hillman’s thought attempts to attend to the speech of the soul as it is revealed via images, fantasies, and dreams.
Hillman does not believe that dreams are simply random residue from waking life (as advanced by physiologists), but neither does he believe that dreams are compensatory for the struggles of waking life, or are invested with “secret” meanings of how one should live, as did Jung. Rather, “dreams tell us where we are, not what to do” (1979). Therefore, Hillman is against the traditional interpretive methods of dream analysis. Hillman’s approach is phenomenological rather than analytical. His famous dictum with regard to dream content and process is “Stick with the image.”

Hillman’s 1997 book, *The Soul’s Code: In Search of Character and Calling*, outlines the “acorn theory” of the soul. This theory states that each individual holds the potential for their unique possibilities inside themselves already, much as an acorn holds the pattern for an oak tree. It describes how a unique, individual energy of the soul is contained within each human being, and is displayed throughout their lifetime, and shown in their calling and life’s work when it is fully blossomed or actualized.

It argues against the “nature and nurture” only explanations of individual growth, suggesting a third kind of energy, the individual soul, is responsible for much of individual character, aspiration, and achievement. It also argues against other environmental and external factors as being the sole determinants of individual growth, including the parental fallacy, dominant in psychoanalysis, whereby our parents are seen as crucial in determining who we are by supplying us with genetic material, conditioning, and behavioral patterns. While acknowledging the importance of external factors in the blossoming of the seed, it argues against attributing all of human individuality, character and achievement to these factors. The book suggests reconnection with the third, superior factor, in discovering our individual nature, and in determining who we are and our life’s calling.

Hillman suggests a reappraisal for each individual of their own childhood and present life to try to find their particular calling, the seed of their own acorn. He has written that he is to help precipitate a re-souling of the world in the space between rationality and
psychology. He complements the notion of growing up with the notion of growing down, or “rooting in the earth” and becoming grounded, in order for the individual to further grow. Hillman also rejects causality as a defining framework and suggests in its place a shifting form of fate whereby events are not inevitable but bound to be expressed in some way, dependent on the character of the soul of the individual.

*Adapted from Wikipedia
Reaction Paper for Classes and Training

Video: *James Hillman on the Soulless Society*

- **Assignment:** Complete this reaction paper and return it by the date noted by the facilitator.
- **Suggestions for Viewers:** Take notes on these questions while viewing the video and complete the reaction paper afterwards. Respond to each question below.
- **Length and Style:** 2-4 pages double-spaced. Be brief and concise. Do NOT provide a full synopsis of the video. This is meant to be a brief reaction paper that you write soon after watching the video—we want your ideas and reactions.

**What to Write:** Respond to the following questions in your reaction paper:

1. **Key points:** What important points did you learn about James Hillman’s views on the soulless society? What stands out to you about how Hillman sees the world?

2. **What I found most helpful:** What was most beneficial to you about the approach presented? What suggestions or perspectives did you find helpful and applicable in your own life? What challenged you to think about something in a new way?

3. **What does not make sense:** What ideas did not make sense to you? Did anything push your buttons or bring about a sense of resistance in you, or just not fit with your own perspective?

4. **What I see differently:** What are some of your views that are different from what Hillman describes in this video? Be specific about what points you disagree with him on.

5. **Other Questions/Reactions:** What questions or reactions did you have as you viewed the video? Other comments, thoughts or feelings?
Related Websites, Videos and Further Reading

WEB RESOURCES
Website for Pacifica Graduate Institute’s James Hillman Collection
www.pacifica.edu/innercontent-m.aspx?id=3502
The International Association for Jungian Studies
www.jungianstudies.org

RELATED VIDEOS AVAILABLE AT
WWW.PSYCHOTHERAPY.NET
James Hillman on Archetypal Psychotherapy

RECOMMENDED READINGS


Discussion Questions

Professors, training directors and facilitators may use some or all of these discussion questions, depending on what aspects of the video are most relevant to the audience.

THE SOUL OF OUR COUNTRY

1. Strength of Soul: Hillman stated that he is worried about the soul of the United States. After watching this interview, what do you think he meant by this? Do you share any of his concerns? If so, which ones? Hillman posed the question, “How do you grow strength of soul?” What comes to mind for you as you ponder that question?

ARE PEOPLE CURIOUS ANYMORE?

2. Curiosity: Hillman questions whether people in the U.S. are curious about each other anymore. He said, “I have the feeling we’ve stopped noticing.” What came up for you as he spoke about this? Do you experience yourself as generally curious about others, or do you agree with Hillman that “there’s kind of a regimen about keeping to yourself”? What do you think the reasons are for why people might not be so curious about their neighbors and fellow citizens?

WAKING UP

3. Re-visioning Breakdowns: What do you think of Hillman’s view that breakdowns or symptoms are the beginning of things waking up? How does this belief fit with your personal experiences of breakdowns or symptoms? How might this belief impact your view of your own troubles?

CONNECTING THROUGH WEAKNESS

4. Vulnerability: Hillman, referencing Carl Jung, said, “We connect through our weakness and not through our strength.” What do you think of this belief? Have you personally found that sharing your vulnerability with others has fostered connection? Can you give any examples of this from your own life?
THE OPPRESSION OF BEING NORMAL

5. Perfection Pressure: Hillman poses the question, “What is America suffering from?” as he reflects on the high number of people who spend thousands of dollars on plastic surgery. What came up for you when he spoke about this? Do you, like Pierson, feel this pressure to be perfect? Do you agree that, as a culture, Americans are “addicted to security”? How does this show up in your life and the choices you make?

ON ELDERS AND OLDSTERS

6. Oldsters: What do you think of the distinction Hillman made between “elders” and “oldsters”? Can you think of anyone, either a public figure or someone in your personal life, whom you believe would fit Hillman’s definition of an elder? Do you agree with Hillman that there is an absence of initiations in American culture?

THE ADDICTION TO INNOCENCE

7. Innocence: What do you think of Hillman’s assertion that an unchangeable piece of the American character is “the addiction to innocence”? How did you feel when he said, “Innocent is the American form of historical repression, and that’s so rooted in us that we will not learn, we cannot learn. That’s our doom.” Does his perspective resonate with your view of the American character? Do you share his sense of doom about the possibility of American culture changing?

8. Social Critic: Hillman makes a series of broad social critiques. On the whole, do you find this sort of criticism and commentary helpful? Even if you don’t agree with him on certain points, do you find this to be a useful role he plays in challenging conventional beliefs and behaviors? What critiques, if any, do you have of his critiques?
QUESTIONS GEARED TOWARDS PSYCHOTHERAPISTS AND COUNSELORS

9. The Role of Psychology: What do you think of Hillman’s notion that psychology can free people by helping them see how they are “strapped in” by conventions, propaganda, advertising, and “even by deliberate government manipulation”? Do you share his view? Why or why not? If so, what do you do with your clients that you believe helps free them in the way Hillman described?

10. Afraid of the Soul: Hillman expressed his belief that psychology is afraid of the soul. Do you agree? Why or why not? Rather than the conventional view of psychology that is about helping people or treating people’s symptoms, Hillman stated that “psychology’s about deepening your own sense of beauty, tragedy, death, importance. Connection.” How does this belief fit with your view of psychology and psychotherapy?

11. Not in the Wound: What did you think of Hillman’s following statement about the therapist who comes into a situation such as the attacks on the World Trade Center: “the therapist can’t actually meet you there because the therapist isn’t there. The therapist is not in the 9/11 wound”? Have you had any experience with crisis counseling of this sort? If so, what challenges have you faced? Do you agree with Hillman that a therapist can’t meet a person “in their wound” unless they are themselves “in the wound”? Why or why not?

12. Leave out hope: What do you think of Hillman’s take on leaving out hope from therapy? Do you agree with him that hope “doesn’t do you any good”? What role does hope play in your work with clients?
Complete Transcript of
James Hillman on the Soulless Society

THE SOUL OF OUR COUNTRY

Pierson: Hello and welcome. I’m Dr. Fraser Pierson, and I’m here with Dr. James Hillman, who is known throughout the world for his work and contributions to archetypal psychology. We’re on the campus of Pacifica Graduate Institute in Carpenteria, California, in Barrett Hall. Dr. Hillman, welcome.

Hillman: Hello.

Pierson: Hello. You know, as I thought about how to introduce you and where to start, I realized that that’s a very challenging task. You have been contributing to archetypal psychology and to psychology for many years now and still are contributing.

Hillman: Too long.

Pierson: Too long.

Hillman: Too long. A lot of years.

Pierson: But not for those of us who eagerly take your ideas in and think about them. But I’m wondering, how should we start our conversation today?

Hillman: Where are we? Where are we? I mean, we should start with what they call the here and now. Where are we now? What’s psychology worth now? Look at the world. Look at the USA. Look at all the people who have taken psychology courses and look at the lack of psychology in our government, in our attitudes. I mean, we haven’t a clue. We go around the world as if there was no such thing as a psyche, no such thing as a soul. I mean, we bomb and exploit and take and kill as if this had no effect in the soul of our own people, let alone other people. If you ask me, as you did when we were talking earlier, what’s on my mind, I’m worried about the soul of our own country from the effects of what we do. That certainly is on my mind.
**Pierson:** And when you talk about the soul of our country and our soul, tell me what you mean by that.

**Hillman:** Well, I think I mean what people say when they say, when they’ve heard soul music or when they have eaten soul food or when they address each other as soul brother, soul sister, or their partner is their soul mate. They know what they’re talking about. The curious thing is when you try to take what they’re talking about, what they sense we’re talking about and translate it into psychology, you lose it. You don’t know what, what it is, because you can’t define it in rational terms—not rational but conceptual terms. You know, making a nice clean idea of it. It’s not a clean idea. It’s experience. It’s something that has to do with the depth of you. It has to do with something that matters. It has to do with something to do with love, with connection. Something to do with risk and death. So those are all involved in that. Also tragedy. You think of soul music, and there’s a deep sense of beauty and tragedy together. That’s all to do with soul.

**Pierson:** So psychology as a discipline seems to miss that.

**Hillman:** I think it’s afraid of it. I think it invents boxes, diagnoses, tests, statistics, graphs, rules, laws, to keep it away. So I’m a little tough on psychology but not on soul. And yet, psychology, the word “psyche,” “soul” is the English word for the Greek word “psyche.” And psychology should mean, “logos,” the study of the psyche, the study of the soul. But I don’t think psychology is the study of the soul as universities present it. Maybe that’s why there’s so much alternative self-help. Maybe that’s why the bookstores are full of self-help books—because they’re trying to talk to the soul without statistics, without numbers, without…. You know, they’re trying to say, “Look, you’re in a mess in your love life.” “Look, your gender is screwed up.” “Look, your relation to your child is….” And these are soul questions. So maybe that’s the reason there’s so much self-help, not that it…. Well, never mind what it does or doesn’t do.

**Pierson:** But it’s an attempt to reach people….

**Hillman:** Yes, it’s a recognition that there is something outside of academic psychology.
Pierson: So you’re talking about a psychology that not only recognizes psyche but celebrates psyche, and offers something to people where they live.

Hillman: People where they’re messed up, and people where they live, and people who long for something more. People who want to know the great stories that keep you going, the fact that we all have heroic things or how to survive a tragedy. How to survive. You know, this is a time where survival is very important.

When you look at Katrina, for example, look at those people. Look what they went through, those days and nights of, of abandonment, desolation, horror, misery, death. I mean, ugly death. Horrible death. And then, out of that, they survived. So much survived. And these are people who knew how to survive, and have had years, generations of being in tragic, terrible situations and survived. They are, in a sense, masters of survival. And what’s come of that? Extraordinary soul. Extraordinary soul music, soul food. That’s where it comes from, in a sense.

So there’s a connection. And they don’t have psychology. Let’s remember that. I mean, it’s ridiculous to think of psychology having any connection and yet, that’s where psychology should have something to say.

Pierson: And you’re saying, too, that out of adversity, out of horrendous circumstances that are very hard to imagine, that there is something that people create, that they draw from.

Hillman: Well, some people are able to do that, and maybe that is something that those of us who didn’t go through Katrina need to look at that and ask, “What is strength of soul?” What is strength of soul? Because maybe hard times are coming: global warming, terrorism, all the things that are now dropped on us to create even more fear. Maybe hard times are coming. How do you grow strength of soul?

Pierson: Well, I think all of us want that. I mean, that’s something I want, in terms of how do I continue to grow strength of soul? And so with horrendous conditions, that’s terribly important, but in everyday life it is, too.
Hillman: Yes. And I think strength of soul is not the same as just coping or dealing with it. “I can deal with it.” Or having what they call in psychology a “strong ego.” A strong ego doesn’t help you on the top of the roof, you know, where the flood water is rising. There’s some kind of depth of soul that we haven’t got, maybe. Or maybe we don’t know about it yet. I think this is what, for me, this is what psychology’s about. Psychology’s about deepening your own sense of beauty, tragedy, death, importance, connection. Never mind the word “relationship.” That’s dead. But connection, being there. You know, working on your relationship, which is one of the big words of psychology, well, how the hell do you work on a relationship? You know, you’re in something and you’re living it. And you try to make, to connect to where the other person is. That’s really what it is. So it seems that unless psychology recognizes that it’s immediate soul brother, soul sister, on the level of soul—soul brother doesn’t work on the relationship. Do you see what I mean? It’s like two other worlds that haven’t anything to do with each other.

ARE PEOPLE CURIOUS ANYMORE?

Pierson: What’s happening for us right now has to do with soul and connection. I feel the searching, of connecting, of reaching out. And how is that for you?

Hillman: Well, I’m struggling with how to think at the same time as we’re talking.

Pierson: Yes.

Hillman: You know, how do I formulate something that makes sense even while we’re working at it at the same time? That’s…. And how do we do it back and forth? Which would be what comes out of us together.

Pierson: Yes. And there is a searching or an opening. I feel the sense of an opening, of a want. Intentionality maybe is a better word.

Hillman: Curiosity was one of your words you used once.

Pierson: Yes. Curiosity.

Hillman: Curiosity. You know, are we really curious about each other?
Are people curious anymore? When I think about what the troubles are that bother me in the States, we’ve dropped some of our curiosity. You know, when people can say, “They were such nice boys. I really liked those boys,” or, “I hardly noticed those boys,” and then they turn out to shoot up the whole high school or something, or they turn out to be serial killers or turn out to be this or that. You know, boys from some town in the Midwest with three names in a nice, quiet suburban area. How come nobody was curious about these… How come nobody noticed them? Or is it polite not to notice who’s who and what’s what?

**Pierson:** Maybe so.

**Hillman:** Is that politically incorrect, to say, “That guy’s a bit odd”? You know, if you walk into a bar, an ordinary person walking into an ordinary bar—at least, it was that way for me in Ireland—you notice everybody at the bar. You notice what’s there. In the old Western movies, the guy who walks in through the doors, he notices what’s in the room. I have the feeling we’ve stopped noticing. So we’re not curious about each other, and we lose our psychological sense that way.

**Pierson:** Say more about that, that psychological sense that we have and may not exercise very much.

**Hillman:** That we may not exercise, yeah. Isn’t it something animal? Don’t animals sort of sniff each other out?

**Pierson:** Yes. Quite literally.

**Hillman:** Quite literally. And don’t they know who you are and what you are by the way you come on? If you have a horse, say, and you want to go ride it, you go out to the stable, that horse reads you as you’re on your way out. And that horse is psychological. The horse is psychological. You’re stupid; you’re just walking out like you did every other morning, but the horse says, “You’re not the same as you were yesterday. You either had a bad dream, or you ate the wrong breakfast, or you haven’t yet been to the toilet. But somehow, you’re not in good shape.” And that horse knows certain things about how you come on, how you walk out, your step, your air, the way you put your hand on its flank, whatever, that reads your specific condition. And I don’t
think we notice people in that way, as we could. You say it’s sort of innate, I think you….

**Pierson:** Yes. Well, it seems, it seems that’s what you’re suggesting, and that we have that capacity.

**Hillman:** I think so. We’re animals, and animals read each other.

**Pierson:** Yes. And also the world.

**Hillman:** And also the world.

**Pierson:** Would you say more about that, as well?

**Hillman:** Yeah, well, the animals read the world. We turn on TV to get what the temperature will be tomorrow, but they read the world. They know what’s…. You know how some animals know when an earthquake’s coming. They say some animals know when a storm is coming. Even your pets hide under the bed about thunderstorms and so. But there’s more to it than that. They read… They couldn’t live and they couldn’t exist if they couldn’t read the plants and the insects and the soil and so forth. And I don’t know how much we do anymore of being curiously involved in what we’re seeing.

I was thinking about how people are interested in each other. In Switzerland where I lived for a long time, I was told through the police, that the police, the law enforcement capture or catch many offenders simply from phone calls from little old women who hang in the windows looking out. And they see what’s going on in the street, and they see when somebody’s parked wrong or somebody’s doing something that they don’t usually do, or somebody’s left a door open across there, they’ve left their door open and they don’t leave their door open. And so it is. Whereas in our world, very often, people are found dead after three weeks in an apartment where lots of other people live. Nobody noticed that that person hadn’t been seen for three weeks, until the smell came into the hall.

**Pierson:** So there’s something about our norms, currently, that shut off that capacity that we have.

**Hillman:** Well, is it…. What is it? It’s being politically correct? Are you not supposed…. See, I stare at people. I mean, I turn my head
and watch them walk by. And it’s rude. There’s a curiosity about that. Children do it.

**Pierson:** Yes, they do.

**Hillman:** But we don’t, we’re not supposed to do it. Now, this is somehow that makes us, I think as a people, less psychological than other people. How about that? Could be.

**Pierson:** Yes, it could be.

**Hillman:** See, that’s what I mean by “psychological.”

**Pierson:** Yes.

**Hillman:** A certain awareness, sensitivity of what’s… of reading the situation, reading people, reading the world.

**Pierson:** So how do we cultivate that within ourselves?

**Hillman:** Being rude. Being curious.

**Pierson:** Asking questions.

**Hillman:** You know, somebody, was it Erving Goffman who wrote—No, Birdwhistell, I think, made a study of how long it was all right to look at another person. And you can only look at another person for a certain few seconds, before it’s a challenge. And especially, a man doesn’t look into a woman’s eyes or…. I don’t remember them all, but there’s a kind of regimen about keeping to yourself.

Now, one of the advantages of city people is that they are forced to notice a lot. On the subway, on the bus. Forced to notice a lot. I don’t think that the automobile has helped us psychologically.

**Pierson:** Keeps us in literal boxes, little boxes.

**Hillman:** It keeps us in literal boxes. We’re looking at the world through the windshield, and we don’t really see in the same way. It’s a different kind of sense of who another person is.

**Pierson:** You know, it strikes me that you’re talking about engagement—engagement with the world, engagement with other animals, engagement with other people.

Hi. Yeah, it is. But it doesn’t even have to be through greetings and
being nice. It’s being interested. And half of…. I’m a psychologist, so what does that mean? It means I’m interested in psyche’s life. I’m interested. And what a person brings into a consulting room is things that are of interest. But it’s also neighbors are interested in each other. Gossip is interested.

People who work … Now there’s studies that say now we’re going to have—what is it?—work at home because with the computer and being wired in, you don’t need to go to an office anymore. You can do your work at home. But it turned out that people didn’t want to do that. They all thought they’d love it. “My god, now I can get up from,” you know, and all the rest. “I’m right at home. I can make my own cup of coffee in the middle of the….” Well, it turned out that people didn’t like it. They really liked to be with other people in an office and to hear the gossip of the day, and to gather at the water cooler or the coffee place. That turned out to be more important than being in command of your time at home. That was surprising.

Pierson: Yes. It’s also, though, in keeping with our animal natures. When I think of… We’re primates.

Hillman: Yes. We’re primates. We’re also dogs who like to run in a pack. Horses do, too. Only hermit crabs don’t like that so much.

Pierson: And even they come out of their shell to go to a larger one.

Hillman: They come out. And they notice what’s going on, too.

WAKING UP

Pierson: You’ve said some very interesting things, I know, in the seminar I just attended and in your reading about how we are in the world and our engagement in the world and soul in the world, the anima mundi, as you call it.

Hillman: Yes.

Pierson: And I’d like you to say more about that, if you will, because I have been so interested in the lifefulness, the vitality in all things. I feel that. I think many people feel that.

Hillman: Yes.

Pierson: But psychology does not often write about that. We hear
about that from other disciplines.

**Hillman:** Well, psychology really stays only within an individual person—in your, so to speak, makeup, and your relationship to something else, other people or whatever. Whereas my psychology or other, or the older psychology was that the whole world is alive and the whole world has things to say. And in some cultures that meant that the world was full of gods, full of soul, full of spirits, full of demons, full of voices, full of sprites if we were in Ireland, and elves, and fairies, and little figures in Swedish woodlands. I mean, the world was alive. This is still the case in many parts of the world. So when you’re in the world, you pay a lot of attention to everything around you.

Now, they say, “Well, that’s all…. That’s how it was. But now what’s out there are just traffic, five lanes of it.” But is that all that’s out there? Isn’t there a sense that everything is partly alive on its own?

Look, for example, your car doesn’t start. Well, first of all, when you get your car, you begin to put little things in it to make it your car. And then you think those things become protectors against an accident. Never mind your insurance policy in the glove compartment; it’s that little thing dangling from the mirror that’s…. And then, the next thing is you begin to notice all kinds of… When things don’t work, let’s say your toaster doesn’t work, you either curse it or you hit it, but you treat it as if it’s a living thing. That is a kind of native, ordinary, what we call superstitious, animism. We believe things are alive at a certain level and respond to us as living…. There’s a certain life in everything. But we only notice it when it breaks down. That’s why breakdown is so important. You only notice your knee if it hurts, if you twist it a little bit. Otherwise, you go through the whole day without ever noticing your knees or your ankles or your toes or your elbows. You don’t notice things until they become, they wake up. They wake up when they’re hurt. So if you think that way, then all these things that are called symptoms are actually the beginning of a wakening up of things you never noticed before. And they’re not necessarily bad things at all.

**Pierson:** Well, that is so fresh. As we talk, I find that a sort of lifting, of, wow. You know, the symptom’s not a bad thing at all. It’s
something really to be treasured in a sense.

**CONNECTING THROUGH WEAKNESS**

**Pierson:** I think you’re saying something very important. It seems to me so many people find it difficult to say that they have something that is hurting in their body or hurting in their heart, their feelings, or in their relationship.

**Hillman:** Oh, yeah.

**Pierson:** And you’re saying there’s opportunity. There’s something, to pay attention. This is a way of waking up, potentially.

**Hillman:** People feel really as if they shouldn’t have these troubles. They shouldn’t have that knee that doesn’t work right, or they shouldn’t hurt in their heart. And yet, first of all, the first thing you notice is you connect through that. What do old people do? They connect through their kidneys. They connect through their this or their that, their troubles. Number one.

Number two, other people tell each other when, as they grow into intimacy—and I don’t mean lovers, I mean just as they grow closer—they tell each other their hurts. So there must be some connection between loving connection or closeness and the need to be vulnerable, or being vulnerable. So we relate, we connect through our weakness, not through our strength. That’s an idea, anyway, that comes out of the psychologist, C.G. Jung. We connect through our weakness and not through our strength. Because when you connect through your strength, you argue. You each try to master the other or control. Connect through your weakness, you’re both helpless. So that’s one thing. So therefore, these symptoms that come along or these breakdowns or weaknesses have a secondary gain in them. They have a value. They make you more vulnerable and therefore more open to connection.

Unfortunately, in a very heroic culture such as we have where you’re supposed to do it on your own and not buckle, the moment of weakness has to be covered over, and so we get more isolated. So psychologically, what’s important is really feeling the places of weakness.
Pierson: And knowing that this is part of what happens for human beings. This is....

Hillman: Just to be human.

Pierson: Yes.

Hillman: Just being around on the planet, you’re going to stub your toe.

Pierson: Yes.

Hillman: And if you didn’t stub your toe, you’re in for a much bigger fall, seems to me. I think the gods take care of the perfect.

Pierson: So in stubbing your toe, there’s an opening.

Hillman: Yeah. There’s an opening. There’s a change. A move. Some change is happening. So this covering up of troubles, pain in the heart, pain in the... Keeps us even more isolated, doesn’t it? I mean, keeps us.... And also, we lose the—I don’t know how to say it, but we lose the chance for finding out much more about who we are.

Pierson: Yes. We’re back to curiosity again, about ourselves and about the other person.

Hillman: Yeah.

Pierson: Today there are many self-help programs and group programs where people who have similar kinds of troubles can meet. How does that play in?

Hillman: Yeah. That’s a really interesting thing in the States now. People used to meet in their ward. You know, in Chicago or Jersey City or Kansas City, there were political wards, and there was a ward boss and the people met in their party, their political party and connected. We don’t have that. That’s weakened tremendously. Instead, people meet through their symptoms. You can read an advertisement in the local paper and it will say, “Tuesday nights are the AA meetings. Wednesday night are the abused, daughters of abused fathers or abusing fathers. Addictive gamblers,” so on and so on and so forth. All kinds of groups who have no affiliation with each other at all—economically, neighborhood, class, work, race, gender. Whatever “race” is—I don’t even know. But if you know what I mean, these
categories. And instead, they meet through their wound. They have a common wound. That says something about one of the doors for loving, because things happen in those groups where there is deep sympathy for one another. Again, through weakness.

**Pierson:** And psyche is present there. That is psyche.

**Hillman:** Psyche is present. The soul is present. People bring their soul into those situations.

**THE OPPRESSION OF BEING NORMAL**

**Pierson:** You mentioned loving, and that’s part of psyche as well.

**Hillman:** Well, the old myths always put love with psyche. Amor and psyche, it was called, and there was a little figure called Amor and a little figure called Psyche, and they had their loving relationship. And it shows up in many pieces of art in the old days, sculpture and so. But it happens in people’s lives because when you’re close to soul or the soul of another person, love is evoked. I don’t know how else to say it. Love is evoked. And when love is evoked, you’re interested in the soul of the other person. So there’s a connection, but it’s not… I’m not saying it very well.

**Pierson:** It might help if I share where I’m going as you say that.

**Hillman:** Yeah.

**Pierson:** I’m thinking of your description of really loving your wonky friend, a friend that you talked about as being wonky. And I thought, “How wonderful,” because this is a friend who you really see and you love, and you love because that person has individuality, is his own person.

**Hillman:** There’s something that the wonky friend does for you that the normal friend doesn’t do, either. Because the wonky friend confirms your own wonkiness and allows it. And that friend is able to walk around and do really strange things or do more drinking than you do or has a physical infirmity, whatever. And that, in some way, is freeing—freeing from the terrible oppression of being normal. Especially in a society that is so afraid of being abnormal or different.

**Pierson:** Yes. Even when we don’t know what that is, but still.
Hillman: Even though we don’t know what that is. So you can’t have enough peculiar friends, and children need to have uncles and aunts, even if they’re not blood uncles and aunts, who are odd. The odd uncle. The peculiar aunt. These are models that stay in your mind all through your life.

Pierson: Yes, and the permission.

Hillman: And, and relieve you from your parents, and the pressures of being straight. Being straight in every sense straight. I don’t mean only gender-straight or sexually straight. I mean straight in the whole American idea.

Pierson: Yes. There’s a feeling that trying to live up to straightness is unreal. It’s not possible. And it also doesn’t allow the person to be who they are.

Hillman: Trying to live up to straightness. Maybe that’s what breakdown is about, that it is the breakdown of straightness. Trying to live up, rather. Not up-straight, but trying to live up to it. The rule. The ruler.

But there’s a lot of anxiety around all that, isn’t there?

Pierson: Yes, there is.

Hillman: Anxiety that I will be perceived as.... And deep. I mean, it has to do with economic anxiety. It has to do with, “Can I keep my job if I really am as I am?” Having to please. You know, the whole hierarchical system of work. Do I have to please the person above me who may be impossible? Or even if it’s a decent person, there’s this need to cover things up all the time.

I’ve often wondered what the model in the mind in America is that dominates the person’s sense of how he should be or she should be. What is the model in the mind, in the psyche, that makes people have so many facelifts and body tucks and all that? What is the model in the mind? We say, “Oh, it comes from advertising.” I don’t think it just comes from—where does advertising come from? What is the model of the mind of being unblemished? Where is this sense of faultlessness?
Pierson: And perfection.

Hillman: Perfection. Of not failing. What are these ideals that are so extremely rigid? I mean, rigid enough to make you go and spend thousands of dollars to change the shape of your eyes or lips. What are these rules? What is America suffering from?

Have you an idea?

Pierson: I wish I had an answer. I wish I had an answer. I certainly see that. And I see the pressure and feel the pressures.

Hillman: Yes. You feel the pressures.

Pierson: Yes. Yes, there is an ideal.

Hillman: And if you think about it, the drug industry, the amount of pharmaceuticals that are dispensed.... For example, Ritalin, that’s just one of them. Over 90 percent of the Ritalin in the world is produced in the United States, and over 90 percent of it is consumed in the United States. So this is one of the drugs that keeps you straight, from being too active or too whatever. And it’s consumed by adults as much as by children. It was originally for children, hyperactive children. What is the pressure that allows us not to be as we are?

Pierson: It seems that there’s an aspect of that, in my way of thinking, that gets back to safety, that somehow there is an ideal that has the illusion of safety and predictability. But it’s the illusion, I believe.

Hillman: The illusion of safety, yeah. And we’re very addicted to that. We’re addicted to security. That’s the big word that’s used now to dominate the populace.

Pierson: Yes, it is.

Hillman: Yeah, we are a seatbelt culture. We’re all strapped in, in that way. So my notion of psychology is that it is a kind of something that can free you by realizing how you are being strapped in—strapped in by conventions, strapped in by propaganda, by advertising, even by deliberate government manipulation.

Pierson: With security alerts and things like that.

Hillman: Security alert. Constantly saying, “We have to get them over
there. Otherwise, they’ll get us over here.” Waiting for them to get us and so on. And “them.” “Them.”

**Pierson:** So it takes us out of, out of connection, not only with the other but with ourselves.

**Hillman:** Yes. But it, the good part about it is that we may begin to notice. Even if it begins as suspicion and paranoid suspicion, at least we’re looking.

**Pierson:** You’re suggesting looking with appreciation.

**Hillman:** Well, that would be the ideal kind of looking, yes. Not looking for an enemy, but looking to see how, to see what each thing is. And then comes the sense of appreciating how great each thing is. See, we tend to look at things in terms of concepts. You look at a bird and call it a bird. Birds do not call each other birds. Each bird is its own bird with its own call and connects to another…. Or tree, or any of these general concepts. So it’s hard for us to just look at what is, as it is, just for itself.

**Pierson:** And yet, I know from reading and hearing you speak that that ability to look at something, someone, another being, just for itself, is so terribly important.

**Hillman:** Yeah. And there’s a lot in between. A lot of cataracts. Because we have concepts immediately in our minds, before. That’s why painters and poets and so, or musicians, teach, can teach us how to look and listen. They hear differently, or they hear more precisely. They hear through the overlays of ideas and concepts that we all have. So that’s why, I think, one learns more from those people than from anybody else. But they have such a lousy, low place in the school system. Not only their work, but they themselves. I mean, those are little electives.

**Pierson:** Or the first job to be eliminated at this point.

**Hillman:** Or the first job to be eliminated. Even in early years, they’re…. Or they’re allowed in the early years, but as you get a little bit more mature, after age 10, that stuff goes away. So what do they give each kid in school? A computer. But the computer doesn’t have that same kind of teaching possible.
Pierson: So how do we make changes in that? Or how does someone listening to us talk today begin to make changes in their own life, to really help themselves to....

Hillman: Play the tape again.

Pierson: Listen for the answers.

Hillman: Yeah, play the tape again and digest some of the ideas of breakdown, the value of breakdown, the importance of looking at another person, the importance of being curious, the value of vulnerability and hurt, the openness that comes to the other person’s hurt because you are vulnerable. The awareness of the terrible rigidities that are put on us. All that we’re saying. So hear it again.

You know, that’s even one of the major rules of psychological learning, is that you don’t hear it the first time. It comes as an echo on your way home. If people go to a therapist or go to a counselor and they have a conversation for 50 minutes or whatever, they don’t get it until they’re in their car and driving home and they suddenly thought, “That’s it!” It works as an echo, as a resonance. The psyche works slowly. If you get it too quickly, you don’t get it. You get it as a bounce off the wall, the next day, in the shower. Something comes back. Regurgitates. The cud is chewed, but you have to chew the cud. That’s important.

Pierson: And this is very different than we’re often taught—to pick up something quickly.

Hillman: Yes.

Pierson: Like fast food for thought, rather than slow.

Hillman: Right. And get the bullet. They’re called bullets. Now, think of that.

Pierson: That’s right.

Hillman: They’re called bullets. I don’t want to learn by bullets.

**ON ELDERS AND OLDSTERS**

Pierson: Dr. Hillman, I’d like to ask you a more personal question. You’re growing older, and I’m wondering....

Hillman: I think I’ve stopped growing older. I think I’ve got there.
Pierson: Have you arrived?

What is, what is this sense of being an elder for you?

Hillman: Well, first of all, let’s not…. before I’m an elder, I’m an older. I’m just simply an accumulation of years, right? And that is a fact, like anybody else who’s growing older knows about it. There’s plenty of things not functioning. And other things are functioning all by themselves marvelously. So somehow, you’re, like, in an office where there are a lot of other people doing things and you’re quite surprised how some don’t show up for work, others are just fine. It’s a remarkable mixture of loose structure. All the parts are doing their own thing. So that’s…. I mean, doing or not doing. But that’s part of it.

Now, the trouble is that what’s expected of old people is that they be elders—superior, wise, calm, patient, gentle and informed, with a touch of irritability but not too much. And that isn’t the case. There’s no reason to think that just because you’ve accumulated a lot of years, you have therefore accumulated or digested a lot of wisdom. That is not right. And in tribal societies that I know about—and I don’t know a lot about them, but anyway, we all talk this way—in tribal societies, it’s not the age. It’s the initiations.

In other words, have you been through it? Have you risked? Have you been cut? Have you gone through the storm? That’s what makes you an elder. And you can be an elder at 25 because you’ve been through the initiations.

Now, in a culture such as ours, where do we get initiated? We don’t. We just grow old. And the initiations, the absence of initiations leaves us, as elders, “oldsters,” not elders. “Oldster” as a parallel word to “youngster.” There were no oldsters long ago. There were youngster, but now we’ve got oldsters. These are not elders. So we don’t have elders. Do we have elders in the Senate? The Senate would be the place to look for them. Do we have elders in the Supreme Court? I don’t know where there are any elders.

Now, another friend of mine says these old people shouldn’t be encouraged to do more for society, because they’ve been so messed up
for so many years, anyway, that they’ll just mess it up further. So keep them off political committees. Keep them off. Don’t bring them back in as wise counselors. They don’t know anything because they haven’t been initiated, even though they’ve lived 60 years or 80 years. That’s one way of looking at it.

**Pierson:** Initiation is an intriguing word because in other cultures, there are formal initiation rites. Everyone knows what they are. And you’re saying in the United States today, we don’t always know what those rites are. Many of us have been initiated, and we’ve been initiated through life experiences.

**Hillman:** Yes. Through risking things in life. Yes.

**Pierson:** Yes. And we may not know it, or we may not claim it.

**Hillman:** And we may have our initiations through the first marriage. We may have initiation through military service. We may have initiation through having been fired from a job. There are many kinds of risks and so on. But initiation isn’t just having gone through a bad experience or having been hurt. There is a teaching with initiation. And if we take our initiations in this country such as the Vietnam War where the whole country went through an initiation—the whole country went through a hurt, not only the veterans—we didn’t get a teaching out of it. There was nobody to tell us what defeat means, what agony means, what a change of consciousness means. And now we had another shot of that with 9/11. No learning. What did we get right away? Revenge. Fear. Insecurity. We didn’t get a message about, “What does it mean when the Towers fall. Why is the attack on the World Trade? What is the meaning for my own personal life of those symbols?” Then it’s not an initiation; it’s simply a repetitive occurrence that will go on and on and on, until there’s teaching that goes with the pain, with the death.

**Pierson:** How would you suggest we do that?

**Hillman:** Who’s going to do it?

**Pierson:** Yes. And who?

**Hillman:** Well, I think that’s one thing artists and psychologists should be able to do. They should be able to think through the
importance in a public life and private life of wounds. Anselm Kiefer somehow has done that for the Germans, for German wounds.

**Pierson:** Could you describe his work a little?

**Hillman:** These vast scenes of desolation that are at the same time exquisite, in which you see ruin and you see beauty, too.

**Pierson:** How do we help our elders do that today?

**Hillman:** You know, you’re asking me very difficult questions. I only think that’s one of my jobs, is to try to make sense of these difficult things.

**Pierson:** Yes. I see that as something you do.

**Hillman:** Yeah. I don’t know how other people can do it. One thing you have to do is be affected by these things yourself, and be enraged and be annoyed and being hurt, and being.... Otherwise it hasn’t hit you. And then, out of that, you may find some modes of realizing, “This has got to be worked.” And it isn’t work the moment you blame it on somebody. You see, the moment we say that those Towers came down because of those crazy, unbelieving terrorist extremists and so on and so forth and we’ve got to go get them, we have stopped working the wound.

**Pierson:** Yeah. We’ve boxed it up in some way.

**Hillman:** And even if they are crazy, extremist, terrorist, destroying people, that isn’t enough. It isn’t to deny who they are, what they are, what you’re supposed to do politically and so on. What matters is, be hurt. And the hurt—we sentimentalize the hurt. Now we’re building a giant thing, some sort of a 9/11 museum. And one of the psychologists involved in this thing says: “The whole nation is suffering from something stress—post-traumatic stress syndrome.” See, she has taken the event, which is un-understandable in its larger sense—we don’t know all of it—and compressed it into a little, tiny psychological cliché. And she’s the consultant to this thing. We don’t learn. We don’t learn unless we really move out of the language.

**Pierson:** And you say “deeply feel,” which....
Hillman: And deeply feel. You see, as long as we’re caught still in revenge or security or not letting this happen again—all those moves. Take it in your own life. You’ve been through some really miserable divorce where your whole life is shattered. It’s not enough to say your husband had the most horrible lawyer and you were in so-and-so and all the reasons, which may have been true, but they don’t lead you to learn a thing.

Pierson: That’s right.

THE ADDICTION TO INNOCENCE

Hillman: Why is it we don’t want to learn? That is the real question. And that question has to do with a piece of American character that is unchangeable: the addiction to innocence.

Pierson: Say more about that, please.

Hillman: Mark Twain in The Innocents Abroad, Henry James, all those innocent, Daisy Miller. The innocence. Innocence. And we love it. We want to stay pristine, untouched, ever-new, forward-looking, bright, unwounded. “The best of America is in front us.” As the country crumbles, they say, “The best of America is in front of us.” We want to stay innocent, because if we once woke up, we’d see murdered bodies from here back to the first colonists. Buffalo, bison, forests, Indians, Negroes. Dead. So we stay innocent. Innocent is the American form of historical repression, and that’s so rooted in us that we will not learn, we cannot learn. That’s our doom.

Pierson: So, Dr. Hillman, does psychotherapy help us in any way? Does it help us to address our innocence? To, in a sense, wake up from our innocence?

Hillman: That’s a kind of leading question for me because when I think about how the moments are possible after a tragedy…. You know, there was a plane that went down in the Atlantic Ocean off Long Island. I forget when that was. And they’ve recaptured the plane and they’ve put it all together in the hangar. Well, right after that plane went down, there were people on the beach, relatives of the people in the plane, and they were in shock and in the midst of a terrible tragedy. The therapists arrived, the ambulance chasers. They
arrived and they were right there as if to help.

Now, the actual help happens when the people connect with each other through their common wound. It’s a very different thing. I’ve seen it on the streets in Dallas where I live, where somebody died. I lived in a mixed neighborhood of African Americans and others and so on, it was a mixed neighborhood. When something happened, the people got together with each other. There was no therapist around. So I’m not sure the therapist helps.

Then I’ve heard that when 9/11 happened, the therapists came from all, like people came with sandwiches and people came offering beds and all that kind of help. There were therapists who rushed down to southern Manhattan to help the people there. And it has since turned out, so I’ve been told, that those who were helped by therapists are in worse shape today than those who were not helped by therapists. Now, if that’s so—anyway, I like to believe that’s so—but if that’s so, it implies that therapy… that the naked, wounded, raw tragedy produces its own connections to others and to the wound and to the mystery of the wound and to the images that the person generates, whereas therapy comes in with its own system, puts it into a… some way or another.

Pierson: And even the way you’re demonstrating it, it’s like an overlay rather than a connection at the deepest levels.

Hillman: Yes, rather than something that comes up out of itself. Quick therapy coming right on the spot doesn’t allow the wound to develop its own inner healing. If you use the parallel with an actual wound, a wound has to heal from its edges and from its center, and it can’t be covered over. It has to heal in its deepest place, and that takes time. In fact, the deepest place may not even show for a long time.

Pierson: So we have to have faith that that is going on underneath what we can see.

Hillman: Yes. And it also connects people. As I said much earlier, people are connected through their vulnerability. People tell their story.

Well. All of this, to go back to your question, “does therapy help break
through the innocence?” It sounds as if therapy becomes a new form of innocence. A new form of covering it up with psychological things, of nice words like “growth” and....

**Pierson:** Healing.

**Hillman:** Healing and.... What are some of the good words?

**Pierson:** Oh, we talk about life’s journey.

**Hillman:** Life’s journey. This is part of your journey. “Hell, this is not part of my journey. This is horrible. My journey may have stopped right here. I may never get over this.” And I think that’s an absolutely genuine feeling.

**Pierson:** And to be met with somebody who knows that, who doesn’t try to cover it up but meets you there is essential.

**Hillman:** Yeah. But remember that the therapist can’t actually meet you there, because the therapist isn’t there. The therapist is not in the 9/11 wound—

**Pierson:** That’s right.

**Hillman:** —in the same way. Whereas the other people are. I mean, that’s a little literal, I know. I’m trying to make... It sounds too literal, but there is something reserved about the therapist position.

**Pierson:** Or one step removed in some way.

**Hillman:** One step removed, and maybe should be. But that doesn’t make the tragedy, fully. The models for these big things really are the Greek tragedies or Shakespeare’s tragedies or the Elizabethan tragedies, where there’s no solution. There’s no therapist. They’re all dead lying on the stage at the end, and everybody is moved. And that’s why those things have lasted so long.

**Pierson:** Yes, and that’s why you connect the artist and the therapist.

**Hillman:** Yes. Exactly. So that maybe the therapy is, if we talk about therapy as a productive, imaginative activity, then that’s maybe what’s art’s all about in its relation to the wounds.

**Pierson:** I’d like to ask one other thing. You leave out hope.

**Hillman:** Yeah, way out. I leave it really out.
**Pierson:** Yes. And why is that?

**Hillman:** Well, hope usually takes you somewhere where you’re not. You know, it’s forward-looking. And why not stay where you are and let the future take care of itself? Let’s see where the future goes. But why hope? The way hope is in our culture, the moment you begin to hope, you’re hoping for something that isn’t. Either not to be in pain, or to see your loved one again, or to repair the damage, or for something that isn’t. So the moment you’re in hope, you’re in irreality. And what is can’t present itself fully. It’s condemned by hoping. It doesn’t do you any good.

Now, if you’re on a life raft with a life vest and the ship just went down and you’re swimming, you’d like to be rescued, and you’re going to look all the way you can to find something. But you’ve got to pay attention to your breathing. You’ve got to pay attention to where you are, or you’re not going to make it. And the hope isn’t necessarily helpful, even then. Your faith can help you, that is, hanging in. But hope tends to move you out.

**Pierson:** What about courage? Because it seems like you’ve been talking so much about an internal courage that someone accesses.

**Hillman:** I don’t think you know anything about courage until it’s asked of you.

**Pierson:** It’s not a concept—it’s what emerges.

**Hillman:** Yeah. There’s a marvelous book by Conrad called Lord Jim, which has to do with the moment of whether he had courage or not, whether he jumped ship. I forget exactly the scene, but it’s really the whole study of that question. You don’t know. And they all say, the men who have been…. You know, I wrote a book about war. And men who have been in battle don’t know how they will react in the moment. You don’t know.

Now, fortitude is a different thing—just withstanding. But courage is a virtue that is called out, that may be there, and it may not be there.

**Pierson:** Dr. Hillman, thank you for a lively conversation and one that touches my soul.
Hillman: Well, thank you. I really appreciate what you had to put up with. Thank you. Thanks a lot.

Pierson: I would be delighted to put up with you, anytime.
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James Hillman, PhD is considered to be the founder of archetypal psychology. He is a psychologist, a leading scholar in Jungian and post-Jungian thought and is recognized as one of the most important radical critics and innovators of psychology. He is the author of over a dozen books, including the best-seller, The Soul’s Code: In Search of Character and Calling and We’ve Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy - And the World’s Getting Worse (with Michael Ventura).

J. Fraser Pierson, PhD is a licensed psychologist and Professor of Psychology at Southern Oregon University where she teaches a variety of undergraduate courses and graduate courses within the Mental Health Counseling program. Her current scholarly interests include psychotherapist preparation and training; women’s self-and-world view transformations associated with participation in adventurous sports; and the personal meanings derived from experiences in the natural world. She co-edited (with Kirk Schneider and James Bugental) The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Leading Edges in Theory, Research, and Practice and recently contributed a chapter to Awakening to Awe.

MANUAL AUTHORS

Ali Miller, MA, MFT, is a psychotherapist in private practice in San Francisco and Berkeley, CA. She works with individuals and couples and facilitates therapy groups for women. You can learn more about her practice at www.AliMillerMFT.com.
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JAMES HILLMAN ON THE SOULLESS SOCIETY

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