

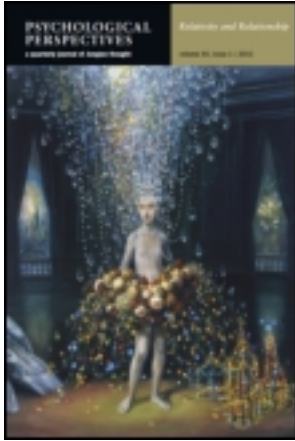
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# Fundamentalism and the Quest for the Grail: The Parzival Myth as a Postmodern Redemption Story

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*Eberhard Riedel*

What is it in the human psyche that lends itself to violent terrorist temptations? My position is that there is a fundamentalist core in all of us and that liberation is a mutual process. This article presents stories and experiences that shine light on this most critical issue of our time: fundamentalist radicalism and violence. One such story is Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* poem that dates to the era of the medieval Crusades. We will feel the difficulties we face when a deeply entrenched paradigm governing how we relate to ourselves and each other requires change. In the deepest sense this is the task we face with regard to the fundamentalist threat in the world today. Fundamentalist terrorism and warfare represent a total failure of the human spirit. Jung (1934) said, "The only chance for redemption is in consciousness." Beyond this, von Eschenbach (1210) knew that liberation is a mutual process and struggle for humanization. Examples are discussed that show how living with the demand of mutuality can be the basis of a most powerful practice of being and problem solving on both the personal and societal levels.

## INTRODUCTION

Darkness lies in the space between the two opposites, fundamentalism and quest for the Grail, which I first noticed through troubling and uncomfortable feelings. Such affective experiences make fundamentalism exist for me. I took note when, about twelve years ago, a number of clients

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This article is based on a paper presented at the conference of the Inter-Regional Society of Jungian Analysts in Virginia Beach, VA, on October 17, 2008.



Tom Chapin, *Sky Burial*, 1997. Marble, 26" x 24" x 12".  
 Photo: Tom Chapin.

appeared in my psychoanalytical practice who all struggled with Christian fundamentalist issues. As I sat with them and felt their pain, I sensed that something deeply troubling was emerging into the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times, which called for careful consideration on both clinical and cultural levels.

A young man said to me, “My body?—my body is a tool, not really a part of me, expendable, it is a booster rocket on my way to heaven.” I felt his burden as he related to his body with anger and contempt. Years later I felt the same chilling contempt for human life, the same literalism of “body as booster rocket to heaven,” when the *New York Times* reported about a Muslim suicide bomber who, before killing himself and three other people, explained to his mother, “Meeting God is better for me than this whole world” (Myre, 2007, p. A14). Then an analysand, also raised by Christian fundamentalist parents, said to me, “Everything that does not agree with this fundamentalism I experience as pathogenic, and all pathogens must be fought.” Tragically, in this belief system life itself is a pathogen that has to be fought. Then the mother of a toddler explained that she needed to follow God’s law and would rather let her sick child die than agree to a blood transfusion for him. This was a most difficult experience for me to stomach, and I literally got sick. A fundamentalist male patient, struggling with guilt about a divorce, reacted to a healing dream or vision with the words, “It came from within me and that invalidates it as a spiritual experience,” and thus he annulled its impact. He, like the others, carried the belief that the “big power” is external and helps only if one abides by its rules—abiding by the rules, of course, is the source of many obsessive–compulsive, perfectionist, controlling, and violent behaviors.

As you read these narratives, imagine how these people might see you, how they view themselves and see the world in which they live. How does the fundamentalist mind perceive, feel, think, and behave? Witnessing and experiencing the pain and suffering of these analysands led me to view fundamentalism as a wound, not just a question. A question can be studied; a wound must be tended. Yet, we need to be careful not to reduce fundamentalism to pathology and pass it on to the mental health professionals. Fundamentalism is part of the human condition.

My earliest personal connection to the fundamentalist wound comes from being born in Germany during World War II; German Nazism was a secular fundamentalist system. I have struggled with the sufferings of the Holocaust throughout my life. The more conscious I became of my early history, the more my sensibilities developed with regard to fundamentalist reverberations in the consulting room and life in general. I learned that “where there are no words the body speaks.” This awareness led me to pay particular attention to psychosomatic symptoms and unmentalized states (cf. McDougall, 1982/1989, 1991; Sidoli, 2000). Though I was but a baby and

toddler during those terror years in Germany, my body and psyche carry memories from early experiences. For example, I remember a dream in which I, the dreamer, saw a baby (also me) sitting comfortably on his mother's lap looking at the world (much like the archetypical Madonna and Child paintings), but below, in front of mother and child and apparently not seen by them, was a line of crouched men and women, who, I felt, were being herded toward the death camps. This is an example of how psyche deals with dissociation—Madonna and Child and fundamentalist terror do not belong in the same frame, yet psyche puts them there. Often intolerable

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When pathways of processing distress at an emotional level are not developed, the person is prone to psychosomatic illness. I learned how listening . . . to the emotions and bodily symptoms opened a door into the inner world of people's fundamentalist dilemmas.

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memories, which are always affect laden, are carried by the body—hence, the term *unmentalized states*. Affect, by way of its physiological component, forms a bridge between psyche and body (Greek, *soma*).

I noticed that my fundamentalist patients all suffered from psychosomatic symptoms or illness. This is a characteristic of dissociation, a term that refers to an unconscious fragmenting of what should be linked in the personality. For example, the intrapsychic dynamics of the man who views his “body as expendable, not part of” himself, seemed to resemble the family environment into which he was born, where parents, hostile to his native Self, forced their rigid fundamentalist code onto him. Now he denied his own Self. When pathways of processing distress at an emotional level are not developed, the person is prone to psychosomatic illness. I learned how listening to the pronouncements of the body—that is, to the emotions and bodily symptoms opened a door into the inner world of people's fundamentalist dilemmas. Following these painful affective and somatic vibrations in the patient *and* myself opened an area of *mutuality*, of commonality in the analytic relationship. Developing trust in such a process is key, because ideology and sectarianism are forces that oppose any meaningful relationship. Such observations also led me to the conclusion that fundamentalism is a state of trauma, and, roughly speaking, trauma equals dissociation.

## THE *PARZIVAL* EPIC

Such fundamentalist dissociation and trauma also occur in the collective, in the culture of a people. It was a dream that moved my thinking in that direction. I dreamt that I needed to involve myself with Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* epic in its original middle-high German. Von Eschenbach finished his *Parzival*, which is an epic poem of almost 25,000 lines with over 200 named characters, between the years 1200 and 1210 C.E. That was in the era of the medieval Crusades, another period of great fundamentalist strife. We know very little about the man Wolfram von Eschenbach. When I think about the question of who he was, what comes to mind most immediately is his *redemptive humaneness* as it emerges from his work. While in later epochs the movements of the Reformation, Enlightenment, and French Revolution established individualism and personal freedom as human rights on the external level, Wolfram's writing comes from a gnostic or hermetic tradition and carries the quest for liberating inner experiences. When Wolfram refers to the Grail, he is not talking about a thing, per se, but the quest for the attainment of a mysterious quality of relating to the inner Self, the human other, the transcendent Other, and the divine "Thou." This is a postmodern, self-reliant attitude.

Fundamentalist dissociation and polarization at the cultural and societal levels are not kids' stuff; they are a question of life or death. Powerful archaic affects are at work—raw, unhumanized affective energies. Mass murder and assassinations are the rule. During the medieval Crusades, there was, on the one hand, the official ideology, which equated the killing of "heathens" with the killing of dumb animals. The church's comptrollers determined the right way of thinking, and thousands and thousands of people died at their hands.

On the other hand, there was the vision of the Grail and the Parzivalian quest for values, such as becoming aware of how injustice is propagated in the world, how we need to overcome our pride and pathological narcissism, how we must awaken to the mysterious power of words (rather than swords) in the service of truly speaking with each other, and how we must listen to the wisdom emerging from the deep Self and let it incarnate in the world. Wolfram's views placed him outside the control of the church—and, therefore, in mortal danger.

Wolfram saw how individuals and communities slid back to relating in primitive and reflexive ways as they became mired in the fundamentalist Christian, Islamic, and other ideologies of the time. He laments that "something of great value has been lost." Indeed, the fundamentalist's attitude is intolerant and kills interiority and soulfulness. We are not surprised to hear that the energies of the Grail myth, which fascinated European people for

a period around the year 1200 C.E., then went “underground” for centuries. These psychic energies reemerged and began to intrigue the Romantics of the 19th century. The romanticist and composer Richard Wagner (1813–1883) chose Wolfram’s *Parzival* and the Grail theme for his last opera *Parsival* (1882). Wagner popularized and Christianized Wolfram’s *story*, reducing the multitude of characters in Wolfram’s text to a mere six (with different spellings). Adolph Hitler identified with Wagner’s *Parsival* as a prophet of redemption, and Wagner’s opera was used by the Hitler regime to instill in Germans something like a German religion during the 1930s. Thus the darkness and moodiness, shadows of Romanticism, came to be lived out with horrible consequences. When I entered elementary school in Germany in 1945, the Second World War had just ended, and anything German that had been subverted by the Hitler regime was banned. I have heard from many insightful Germans that the Nazi years were like a wall of concrete that cut them off from their history. My dream brought me in touch with a cut-off part of that history. This is a case example of how fundamentalist dissociation works at the cultural level.

The picture emerges that the *fundamentalist complex* is a composite of personal, cultural, and archetypal layers. What I call the cultural layer, Jung referred to as collective consciousness. I use the term *fundamentalist complex* to remind myself that it is a multilayered “beast.” Here I explore some of the many feeling-tones associated with this complex and how it affects individuals and societies. Typically the fundamentalist complex wipes out the capacity for imagination and curiosity, and compensatory forces of anger explode internally or externally.

I believe that there is a fundamentalist core in all of us. A telling story is narrated in Book III of Wolfram’s *Parzival*.<sup>1</sup> The young Parzival, not yet knowing his name, grows up in the pastoral setting of the forest of Soltâne, far from the war and bloodshed in which his father died. Parzival knows none of this. The poet characterizes the innocent hero as a child of the spirit: “His body was radiant [and] without fear” (118.11). Then Parzival encounters a group of knights in shining armor and awakens to the heroic journey. His mother Herzeloide (heart full of sorrow) gives him provisions and fool’s clothes and then tells him, just as he is ready to depart, “The proud Lâhelin captured two of your lands and, with his hands, killed one of your vassal princes” (128.4–9). Spontaneously Parzival replies, “This I will avenge, Mother, God willing” (128.11).

When I read this dialogue I sighed and felt that the mother had just transmitted a “virus” to the son, and now the cycle of violence would continue. The poet’s reference to revenge means blood vengeance. He knows that at the time of the story such revenge was viewed as redemptive. The phrase “God willing” indicates that this form of “closure” is seen as



congruent with, and dependent upon, God's order—which makes it practically inaccessible to reflection. Here we feel the difficulties we face when a

deeply entrenched paradigm governing how we relate to each other requires change. We are talking about precisely this with regard to the fundamentalist threat in the world today.

What is it in the human psyche that lends itself to violent terrorist temptation? Andrew Sullivan (2001) raised such a question in his *New York Times* essay just weeks after the 9/11 attacks. Wolfram raised this question 800 years ago. Jung asked similarly about the nature of evil.

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Wolfram's *Parzival* story holds up a mirror to us . . . Parzival will engage in an evil deed because he does not know better—not because he is fundamentally flawed, but because he is blinded by an ideology: "This I will avenge, Mother, God willing."

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We humans have been haunted by our shadow since the beginning of human consciousness. Wolfram's *Parzival* story holds up a mirror to us; it is our myth. Parzival will engage in an evil deed because he does not know better—not because he is fundamentally flawed, but because he is blinded by an ideology: "This I will avenge, Mother, God willing." Are we not like him in so many ways, individually and as a people? In endless repetition our own fundamentalist attitudes stir up in others counterfundamentalist behaviors, and their fundamentalist behaviors bring forth our counterfundamentalist reactions, and on, and on. Like Parzival, we are susceptible to psychic infection. Like Herzeloide, Parzival's mother, we are liable to propagate pathogens and injustice in the world. Redemption from these ills requires consciousness and something more.

Fundamentalism is an emotional wound that needs to be tended to and, if possible, prevented. What attitude of engagement is required of us? Wolfram tells us that Parzival failed to ask the redemptive question during his first encounter with the wounded Grail King Anfortas. What does this message mean to us? What are the archetypal connections between the fundamentalist wound and the Anfortas wound? Fundamentalism is death of the human spirit, of curiosity and imagination. The Grail is an attitude of openness and mutuality in the arduous service of our humanness.

## THE FUNDAMENTALIST WOUND

I sketch a phenomenology of the fundamentalist wound, viewed from the outside and the inside, because we need emotional understanding. Though this is my narrative, readers' reactions to my remarks, especially the ones that sound like absolute statements about fundamentalism, deeply matter. Both are part of the paradox of this topic.

We tend to see fundamentalism as a problem *others* have and rarely reflect on our own literalisms and orthodoxies as fundamentalist. This even applies to how we relate to our psychological theories. Many wars have been fought in psychoanalytic circles in the name of purity or the claim of a superior "foundational principle." Splitting is the name of the game, into an in- and an out-group. In the world at large, people in the service of fundamentalist movements—both secular-political and religious—have imprisoned, tortured, and murdered millions of other human beings, while feeling sanctioned in their behaviors by keeping their movements "pure." The terror and crazy excesses continue. Rendition and secret prisons are condoned even by civilized societies around the world.

It has been said that in the Western world the ideals of the Enlightenment and rationalism have placed the individual at the center of the universe and created a culture, modernity, in which a self-responsible life design is paramount. It has been said that modernity is responsible for the individual's existential loneliness and loss of meaning-giving community. It has been said that the fundamentalisms are shadow sides of modernity (e.g., Künzli, 1989). Does this explain that each one of us, right now, is participating in a religious war at home and overseas? (I address historical and cultural contexts of Islamic fundamentalism later.) But fundamentalism is *not* a recent phenomenon; autocratic theocracies have existed in many places since ancient times. I think that, psychologically speaking, the fundamentalist Crusades and holy wars, secular or religious, are symptoms of collective neuroses and psychoses.

It may be true that a person's move into fundamentalism is a collective defense against survival anxiety or existential angst. I call this phenomenon *fundamentalist regression*. However, this is not how millions of people experience it. They seem to experience belonging to a fundamentalist movement as a promise that they will be delivered or redeemed by some external big power—that is, if they follow the rules of the system.

There are powerful affective forces at work here. Indeed, affect can be employed as an organizing principle. The psyche and the human ego develop in relationship with others. When I work with or think about trauma issues, I distinguish between raw primordial affect and humanized affect, that is, an *archetypal realm* and a *human realm* (cf. Kalsched, 1996). In the

archetypal realm affect is archaic, unregulated, larger than human, one might say, belonging to the “gods.” In trauma states the individual is overwhelmed by storms of raw primordial affect, and the psyche is dissociated. The principal way such raw affective energies get humanized is through relationship—a caring, suffering-together, mediating relationship can constellate the agency of wholeness. I find this a useful paradigm to hold in mind when engaging with issues of fundamentalism.

The fundamentalist belief in the promise for deliverance or the fear of damnation is powered by certain raw, archaic affective energies, as is typical for primordial patterns of behavior. The person is overwhelmed by potent affects that maintain dissociated states of mind. The pair of opposites may be an archaic “longing for paradise” and “threat of apocalypse.” In the fundamentalist’s experience there exist no gray areas and no in-between spaces; rather, the emotional grounding is absolute—either positive or negative.

In the presence of these emotional forces the capacity for reasoning, thinking, and imagining is shut down. Every fundamentalist system claims to have dug down to the roots, to a theoretical beginning, which it then holds to be absolute. The demand for absolutism is interlaced with archaic emotions, such as the promise for salvation or the threat of Armageddon. By this mechanism the foundational principle of the system is effectively shielded against and removed from the realm of critical questioning. Any reasoning is overdetermined by these archaic emotions; hence, normal cognitive reasoning does not exist. Fundamentalist people show little or no capacity for imagination, or, in Winnicott’s sense, there is no transitional space, no room for play.

My hypotheses are less clear when it comes to the psychodynamics of fundamentalist groups and tribalism. Violent fundamentalism always involves a mass ideology. In the face

of fundamentalist regression, amplified by mass hysteria and/or primitive survival paranoia, the whole group falls into being possessed by, and acting out, primordial forces, and the phenomena we are considering are compounded. The contents of the collective shadow are primitive and ruthless. Feeling covered by anonymity or threatened by the group, people commit the cruelest crimes and abuses. The genocide in Rwanda is a relatively recent example of

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tribalism rising up in the face of disorganization, and we are witnessing similar phenomena in other parts of the world. In my view tribalism and fundamentalism are related phenomena.

Fundamentalists, whether individuals or groups, are very touchy and easily offended in their “innocence.” In Jungian terms this propensity to take offense is part of the shadow dynamics. In the name of self-righteous purity the most horrendous acts of terror and mass murder are committed. The narcissistic ego, which feels it has been selected by, and identifies with, the power of a godhead (a primordial, archetypal energy), cuts itself off from humanity. Such states of possession leave little to no room for self-doubt. From this perspective, the “Hitler phenomenon” is one of evil grandiosity and perfection in the name of purity or purification.

Turning inward now, how does the fundamentalist wound feel from the inside? How does the fundamentalist psyche perceive, feel, think, and behave? What are the effects of the *autonomous fundamentalist complex* on a person? I added *autonomous*, because the powerful affects associated with the fundamentalist complex act and determine behaviors independently of ego consciousness. In states of fundamentalist regression—that is, in situations when the complex is active—the person is obsessed with or possessed by these powerful archaic affects with all the psychological consequences. In extreme cases, the person becomes a fanatic.

The following insights, which I gleaned from analysands working to free themselves from fundamentalist imprisonment, may serve as examples.

- *The autonomous fundamentalist complex denies the life force, joie de vivre.* Slightly exhausted by the session, I exclaimed to an analysand, “Until you reach god-like perfection, you refuse to live”—to which he responded, “Yes, I will go to hell if I don’t hold the right beliefs.” It felt to me as if this person were suspended between heaven and hell, and thus unable to live at all. This paralysis frustrates the natural life energy. During a three-day weekend that followed, the analysand dreamt: “I am in a hotel room; I am in a state of fog, sleeping all the time. I watch a friend’s dog. It dawns on me that I haven’t taken the dog out for the last two days. The dog tried everything to keep ‘it’ in, but when I come to realize the situation, he explodes and shit is everywhere.”

Such observations indicate that, when overwhelmed by the autonomous fundamentalist complex that directs and ignores the body, the life force and animal wisdom may react. When such assertive reactions of “gut knowledge” go unheeded, they may turn death-seeking or destructive and manifest (1) by way of emotional and physical symptoms or (2) in unmitigated aggression, hatred, and violence, suitably camouflaged by rigid

religious or political garb. These are two pathways of violence: terror within and terror without. They reflect two types of primitive false-self organization: the life-avoiding organization, such as that of the analysand, and the life-annihilating one, such as that of militant suicide bombers and murderers.

- *The autonomous fundamentalist complex rules by ruthless terror.* I made a mistake in my attunement with an analysand, and she responded by telling me a dream that she remembered just then. In the dream “a big cat suffocated a small cat,” and the dreamer felt powerless to intervene, fearing that the big cat was stronger than she. Then she said, “The big cat is like a tyrannical dictator, afraid of losing power.” Ah, I thought, the big cat represents an aspect of the autonomous fundamentalist complex which maintains the psychic isolation and self-isolation of the fundamentalist person by creating fear.

In this vignette we see how the autonomous fundamentalist complex erodes relationship, for example, by maintaining a closed system into which I, the analyst, have no entry except via conversion. On the flip side there is the analysand’s fear that I might seduce her into yet another fundamentalist system (i.e., analytical psychology). The images of the big cat and tyrannical dictator arose through an experience of misattunement in the analytic relationship. What happened can be interpreted on personal and archetypal levels. On the personal level, this experience disturbed the fundamentalist’s need for *one* absolute thing that is worth giving one’s whole life to—she needs *me* to be perfect. On the archetypal level, these destructive parts of the self (the false-self) keep the fundamentalist complex in power and the analysand in the dark about what maintains the dissociation.

- *The autonomous fundamentalist complex engages in soul murder.* I worked with an analysand on his “strong urge to hurt myself.” In that context the analysand recalled a recurring dream from several years earlier, in which, he says, his hands were literally moving toward his throat to choke himself, and the only way to save himself was to wake up. He also said that he experienced the hands as not belonging to him but being under the power of “a demon that was harassing him.” We understood his rage and murderous fantasies in the context of the “poisonous food” (his words) pushed into him by the fundamentalist missionary zeal of his parents and church people.

Experiences like this one made me wonder how fundamentalist indoctrination affects the brain neurologically. The fundamentalist mind continually defends against a hostile world within and without, and the dreams of patients that deal with aggression and murder give many such examples. I often witness in my work that much as fundamentalist parents were

experienced as hostile and unresponsive to their child's native Self, later in life the autonomous fundamentalist complex blocks an authentic Self from emerging. This, at the deepest level, is the crime of soul murder committed by fundamentalist systems.

- *The autonomous fundamentalist complex is a deep emotional wound.* A day before the first anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, an analysand experiencing many somatic and psychosomatic symptoms said, "It is hard to breathe, there is a big weight here (*pointing to his chest*)." With labored, shallow breathing, he said, "The Taliban are cutting off hands if I appear to be doing something wrong"—and, by way of the transference, added, "the enforcer cannot be argued with." Then an image emerged: "I have to contain myself in a tight box so as not to attract attention." As his analyst, I literally felt the tight box, the coffin, the prison that fundamentalism is.

This vignette is an example of how inner attackers not only interfere with people's thinking but also keep them in a tight box of hypertension and other psychosomatic symptoms or illnesses. Furthermore, the temporal function gets lost and with it the capacity to differentiate between past and future. Jung said, "The self has its roots in the body" (1943/1967, par. 242). But fundamentalists have attachment issues, including to their own body. Hence, when psychosomatic symptoms or fear of physical death pushes the fundamentalist person to pay more attention to his or her body, that is a good thing—potentially it draws energy out of the autonomous fundamentalist complex. Such fear may also stir curiosity. If this is how the objective psyche deals with the fundamentalist wound, then, figuratively speaking, the body may become the place of salvation.

## FUNDAMENTALIST TERRORISM

Not too long ago the United States had a fundamentalist Secretary of the Interior who believed that the end of the world was near and, hence, argued that this justified robbing the earth of its treasures now, since, after all, time was running out. I think it would be a misuse of psychological insight to dwell in clinical explanations; rather the point is to emotionally connect with and sense the breadth and magnitude of the fundamentalist violence occurring in the world.

Long before September 11, 2001, the smell of fundamentalist terrorism was in the air: Recall the murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in 1972; the seizure of the Saudi embassy in Khartoum, Sudan, in 1973; the take-over of the U.S. embassy in Teheran in 1979–1981; the assassination of

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Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981; the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993; the bombing of two U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998; the attack on the Navy vessel *USS Cole* in October 2000. Yet, we, the people in the West, were not quite able to locate the source of the fire that was burning, perhaps partly because we had gotten too entrenched in the Cold War mentality and ideology. But the collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and the burning of the Pentagon gave the signal, and then there was no doubt where the incendiary, evil person dwelt. "Now we knew for certain where all unrighteousness was to be found, whereas we ourselves were securely entrenched in the opposite camp, among respectable people whose moral indignation could be trusted to rise higher and higher." It was C. G. Jung who wrote this last sentence in 1945 after the collapse of German fascism (1945/1970, par. 409). It is not simply that history repeats itself, but that the potential for doing good and evil exists in the human psyche. The catastrophe of 9/11 is also a psychic event.

All psychologically minded people have ideas that bear on this issue of religious fundamentalist radicalism and violence. The young Parzival, as we saw, reacted to his mother's memory of past injustice with the promise, "This I will avenge, God willing" (128.11). Blinded by an ideology, he killed the Red Knight, his relative, mistaking him for Lâhelin. Parzival's mother transmitted the "virus" to him, and he continues the cycle of violence. With regard to such fundamentalist demons, Jung said, "Their association with the ego causes illness and their dissociation from the ego brings recovery" (1948/1969, par. 587). Jung made this statement after German Nazism had been defeated on the battlefield. Wolfram described similar experiences around 1200 C.E., during the time of the medieval Crusades. Not much has changed.

When a fundamentalist virus, secular or religious, infects groups of people, the result is mass hysteria or mass psychosis, with calls for violence and war (as if any of this would alleviate the suffering) and bloodshed, bloodshed, bloodshed. Groups of people, much as individuals, when possessed by a memory of ghosts or demons that wounded them, not only bear that heavy psychological burden but also tend to project split-off demons onto others, while remaining susceptible to further psychic infection. In turn, that susceptibility is all too often misused by political or religious demagogues to

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further their political agenda—to mislead, manipulate, and dominate. There are deep ethical issues here, both political and psychological.

Today many people around the world carry the scars and memories of exposure to past religious or secular fanaticism, colonialism, nationalism, imperialism, fascism, communism, and, now, globalism and new forms of violent religious fundamentalism. Concerning militant Islamist radicalism, there is a straight line from the Wahhabists in the 18th century to the preemptive fundamentalism of today's Saudi establishment; from the Islamic revolution in Iran to Khomeini and the institutionalized revolution of the now ruling Iranian hierarchy; and from the Afghan war against the Soviet Union to Taliban fundamentalism and al-Qaeda (cf. Lewis, 2003, p. 138). Each grew out of its own cultural–historical context that would warrant a detailed “clinical case history” and analysis. A general statement must suffice: “All [three extremist groups] . . . sanctify their action through pious reference to Islamic texts . . . and all three claim to represent a truer, purer, and more authentic Islam than is currently practiced by the vast majority of Muslims” (Lewis, p. 138). Moreover, the leaders of these extremist groups unscrupulously play on the vulnerabilities of the poor and uneducated masses in their regions to stir up and propagate the virus of violent terrorism. But most Muslims are not fundamentalists, and most fundamentalists are not terrorists.

We need to analyze our discomfort and fear and become conscious of the nature of the fundamentalist virus. Psychologically speaking, people attack the targets of their negative projections. People who feel humiliated or disrespected find it difficult to forgive and forget.

Concerning the mechanisms for the transmission of the fundamentalist virus, the *Parzival* myth reveals an important and deep truth: *Memory is a burden because it carries the record of past injustice*. Although memory refuses to accept amnesia and thus is a prerequisite for any meaningful process of healing and redemption, memory does remain vulnerable to closure through simple mechanisms such as revenge. Such premature closures haunt us every day—for example, when we jump to a conclusion, make an assumption, and then act as if we know the truth. Unfortunately, forms of behavior such as revenge do not offer more than the illusion of healing, and, worse, they usually start the next cycle of injustice and possibly bloodshed. These insights are deeply resonant with the passionate efforts of the leaders of the African reconciliation movements to tell the human side of the story of fundamentalist terrorism (e.g., Soyinka, 1999).

The “war against terror” we are fighting is a religious war—that, I think, is the archetypal dimension of this conflict. From *their* perspective we are involved in a crusade against Islam—as bin Laden put it succinctly, “Our religion is under attack. The attackers are Christians and Jews” (cf. Sullivan,



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**Wolfram's *Parzival* epic points to a path of turning to psychic interiority as the place where the capacity for faith begins and the renewal of the religious function and *communitas* takes place.**

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2001). I consciously use this polarizing language so that we feel the “us–them” dichotomy in which we are stuck, as well as the religious dimension of this conflict. From *our* perspective, in what are we engaged? Are we in the United States spearheading a crusade against Islam? Have we been drawn into *their* sectarian violence, and do we believe that a

troop surge will settle it or secure access to cheap oil? Are we using the conflict as a shield behind which a fundamentalist war is fought on our own soil? To paraphrase Sullivan (2001), *is this a war of fundamentalism against faiths of all kinds that are at peace with freedom and modernity?*

The use of religion for extreme repression, and even terror, is not restricted to Islam. Christianity too has a bad record—from the medieval Crusades to the Inquisition and the bloody religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe—and all that, despite the fact that the Gospel's teachings are expressively nonviolent. *What is it in the human psyche that lends itself to this kind of violent terrorist temptation?*

In 1787 the Constitution of the United States, which proclaims the eternal values of freedom of religious expression and separation of church and state, was an achievement of consciousness after centuries of bloody conflict. Do we have the will and strength to live up to our principles? Opposite views of the fundamentalist conflict are expressed by the figure of Parzival, in Wolfram's *Parzival* poem (1210), and in the figure of the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). Wolfram's *Parzival* epic points to a path of turning to psychic interiority as the place where the capacity for faith begins and the renewal of the religious function and *communitas* takes place. Here redemption is understood as liberation from difficulties and limitations in the realm of relating to self, others, and the transcendent numinous—that is, Wolfram speaks about liberation *in* the world and not redemption *from* the world. This perspective closely resonates with the insights and attitudes of analytical psychology and, as well, is a freedom our Constitution seeks to protect. In contrast, Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor states that people cannot use their freedom of choice, declaring:

Man seeks to worship what is established beyond dispute, so that all men would agree at once to worship it. For these pitiful

creatures are concerned not only to find what one or the other can worship, but to find something that all would believe in and worship. . . . This craving for *community* of worship is the chief misery of every man individually and of all humanity from the beginning of time. For the sake of common worship they've slain each other with the sword. They have set up gods and challenged one another, "Put away your gods and come and worship ours, or we will kill you and your gods!" (Dostoyevsky, 1880/1996, p. 263)

The Grand Inquisitor raises some good points: People want to find something that everyone would believe in, and people cannot use their freedom of choice—two seemingly irreconcilable opposites.

These collective dynamics and patterns have biological roots; they are archetypal patterns that emerge from the collective unconscious. Some of these patterns are more easily detected in animal observations. Out of the collective unconscious evolved higher structures, but the old layers are still with us. Consider the following points:

1. The animal behaviorist Sarah Brosnan (2003) developed fascinating evidence to support the evolutionary significance of fair play through her experiments with South American capuchin monkeys. First, she placed two groups of monkeys in separate but adjacent cages, so that each could observe the exchanges between the handler and the animals of the other group. Then she treated the animals in the two groups differently by giving an inferior reward to the animals in one group for identical tasks performed. Unfair? Well, the "underpaid" monkeys certainly thought so and angrily acted out their frustration. It is not difficult to imagine human beings reacting similarly. Such behaviors point to the evolutionary origins of, for example, revolution, trade unions—and even fundamentalist movements.
2. Another archetypal pattern is that of "swarm behavior," wherein groups of creatures behave as a collective unit (e.g., Miller, 2007). An example is the ant highway some of you may have seen extending through your kitchen. Research has shown that this complex behavior comes about by countless interactions between individual ants, each following simple rules when they bump into each other (they communicate by touch and smell), but none individually having the big picture. The creatures stay together, control does not depend on a leader, the individuals are all anonymous and act on local information, and yet the collective "organism of many" exhibits a swarm intelligence that gives the entire group an evolutionary benefit. I would *not* view the question of a survival benefit to fundamentalist groups unreasonable, though it feels ironic to talk about this, given that

fundamentalists of most persuasions are vehemently opposed to Darwin's work. We have already talked about the archetypal forces that keep fundamentalist groups together, for example, survival anxiety and existential angst.

3. The third widespread pattern is the behavior of tarnishing the perceptions and opinions about a people in order to justify exploiting, abusing, or victimizing them. There exist far too many examples, say, from deliberate inventions devised to promote slavery of all kinds to spreading lies in primitive electioneering. I find it mind-boggling how easily and quickly a people's "swarm behavior" can shift directions and how even advanced societies, both in the United States and Islamic countries, intentionally use tarnishing and misinformation to keep people ideologically aligned and enslaved.

Actively knowing about such primitive behavior patterns allows us to say yes or no to them, to say yes or no to propagating a particular virus, or to swimming in a particular kettle of fish. But let us be aware: The protectors of consumerism do not want us to know these things.

## FUNDAMENTALISM AND RECONCILIATION

The fundamentalist wound and fundamentalist terrorism are painful topics to address. Einstein said, "No problem can be solved by the same level of consciousness that created it." This axiom certainly applies to the problem we are facing when a deeply entrenched paradigm of how we relate to each other as people requires change. Somehow, deep down, we know that what is happening in and to the world has something to do with us, both individually and as a people. Let us see how the poet Wolfram von Eschenbach approached an analogous problem.

Wolfram starts from the guiding maxim: "He [she] who does not take the uncomfortable feelings in himself [herself] seriously cannot be redeemed" (113.23–25, my translation). In short, Wolfram says, take your affective life seriously. Doing so develops interiority. But that process requires steadfastness and comes only with the development of a capacity to experience painful feelings. Such capacity develops in relationship with others. Here are a few examples.

Parzival, young, wild, and full of untamed instinctual energy, leaves his mother, kills the Red Knight, and steals what he can from the dead man. Wolfram lets the reader know that Parzival "killed his own flesh and blood" and that when he left his mother, she died from grief. Implied is the message that when Parzival lost the deep, feeling connection with the maternal realm, he lost his orientation and, blinded (by his personal complexes and the

ideology of the times), began to harm himself. Remember, the *Parzival* myth is an archetypal story; it is our myth.

Parzival takes possession of, but cannot reign in, the Red Knight's powerful horse, and it delivers him to the doorsteps of his first male teacher. The latter invites Parzival to dismount, to which the hero replies, "I will not get off this horse, regard-

less of what will happen" (163.23–24). (He sounds just like many stubborn politicians.) However, the teacher feels Parzival's emotional pain; Wolfram develops the interpersonal field between teacher and pupil through moving dialogues. The teacher counsels Parzival: "You must not ask many questions. But get used to thinking about [a] thoughtful answer, one that truly addresses the question of [the person] who wants to get to know you with words [in conversation]" (171.17–21). Here the teacher invites Parzival to imagine himself in the mind of the other, rather than hitting the other over the head, either literally with the sword or figuratively with words.

Using Wolfram's dialogue between the teacher and Parzival as a point of departure, *how might we go about changing the nature of the discourse in our country and with violent Islamic fundamentalism abroad?* Some people, such as the authors of the now forgotten *Iraq Study Group Report* (2006), recommend using the power of words and engaging in conversation with one another; yet, on both sides there are leaders sitting on their "high horses" in fundamentalist prisons and preaching the power of weapons. What kind of language might allow us to humanize this conflict? These are clinical questions as well. Wolfram says, take your uncomfortable feelings seriously and remain steadfast in your efforts. It is a long path from having affect to learning to recognize affect as an internal state, reflecting on one's affect, and, finally, taking action guided by one's affective experiences.

After years of struggle Parzival has a healing vision. At the Grail Castle he comes face to face with the collective wound of the time, the Anfortas wound, and feels the wondrous numinous energy of the Grail. But, unable to reflect on his own condition, he cannot relate to the suffering Anfortas and Grail community and thus remains emotionally imprisoned, lonely, and

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isolated. Some time later Parzival arrives at the court of King Artus and is honorably accepted to the Round Table. The Round Table represents the *conventional order* of the time. For contemporary people the Round Table may be their company's boardroom. However, when Parzival identifies with the conventional order, the Grail messenger, Cundrie, appears and accuses him, "*In your eyes I am monstrous, yet I am not as hideous as you are*" (315.24–25)—hideous because Parzival views things externally. She execrates Parzival, saying, "His [Anfortas's] suffering ought to have awakened your compassion! May your mouth become as empty, I mean of the tongue within it, as your heart is empty of true feelings" (316.3–6). . . . "Your host gave you the gift of the [word] sword . . . when you kept silent you sinned" (316.21–23).

Living in the conventional order of his time, Parzival is not aware of having committed a crime, yet the public accusation of falseness leaves him burning with shame. Now he senses that something is not right with him. The poet exclaims, "*Shame brings honor as reward and is the crown of the soul*" (MP) (319.9–10)—one might say, the "crown of thorns" of the soul. Parzival's burning shame brings up a need for reparative action and begins to function as a fiery furnace of transformation. This is an example of how powerful archaic affects can lead to a healing of the wounds of dissociation and trauma. Old memories with records of past injustice get burned and channels are reopened to the wellspring of life. Parzival's steadfastness in confronting and living out his inner experiences forces him to encounter the dragon, the primordial symbol of destruction and dissolution, and find a new paradigm for relating to self, other, and the divine. Wolfram shows that such a paradigmatic shift cannot happen by the will of one's ego, but must happen out of inner necessity in one's nature (an *enantiodromia*). In the course of things, his or her own striving will compel the hero or heroine to surpass a tradition, the rules of the old order, which he or she had revered.

Taking a different pathway for a moment, during my journeys in Africa, I had the privilege of sitting with a group of Pygmy people in the Ituri rainforest and, at another time, with a group of Bushman people in the Kalahari desert. *Pygmy* and *Bushman* are names that were given to these people by Europeans. The Pygmy are forest people and the Bushman are desert people, both are (or were) hunters and gatherers, and both are among the oldest inhabitants of Africa. They are earth-bound peoples. Being with them struck some deep chords in my psyche. After settling in and overcoming my fears, I felt the gentleness and simple joy with which they interacted and the comfort in which they lived with their natural environment, which, I felt, they honored as their provider, protector, and numinous deity. I also felt their pain in relation to the losses they are increasingly suffering as Western economic

and political pressures impinge ever more deeply on their living space. Perhaps even more painful, I became aware of the racism directed against these two peoples by other Africans. All of these experiences shine some light on my own and, I think, our collective shadow.

I went to Africa to listen. What evolved is an undertaking that I call “Cameras without Borders,” in which I teach photography to children who live in difficult environments (cf. Riedel, 2009). Photography provides

the context within which conversations begin and community builds. Curiosity is infectious. Things start to happen that transcend divisions; doors open, and we all begin to learn from each other. I believe that experiences of shared humanity and curiosity about self and others can act as an immunization against fundamentalism and tribalism.

As I explore the indigenous side in myself, I wonder whether it is a certain environmental kinship and spirituality in these old African peoples that foster the value of mutuality over individualism and restorative values over retribution. It seems to me that the politics of multiculturalism, in which a Western bias pervades all other cultures, is an excuse for exploitation. I believe we need to think about a policy of indigenization that supports the value and sustainability of human well-being in its *many* forms. “By emphasizing the value of nature *only* as it contributes to man’s welfare, the . . . [monotheistic] theologies have tended to create an absolute gulf between man and nature” (Whitmont, 1980/1991, p. 41). This points to the heart of the fundamentalist struggle. As Hillman (1979) said, “Our notion of a tripartite cosmos of *spirit*, *soul*, and *body* devolved into a dualism of spirit (or mind) and body (or matter)” (p. 54). Soul and spirit are opposites. Soul is earth-bound and warm. Spirit is cool, pointed, and likes to soar. *The fundamentalist wound is a wound of the spirit*. Fundamentalist terrorism and warfare represent a total failure of the human spirit. Wounds of the spirit are most often healed by soul or by reconciliation between soul and spirit. Imagination and curiosity are the driving forces.

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This point brings me back to the *Parzival* myth. Wolfram called Parzival a child of the spirit at the time when the hero left the moist realm of the forest of Soltâne, where his mother Herzeloide (heart full of sorrow) had raised him. Later, Parzival reflects and says, “I was begotten by a man who died in a joust because he thought like a knight” (474.27–29). In the healing vision of the Grail Castle, Parzival was unable to relate to the suffering of Anfortas and the Grail community because he did not recognize Anfortas’s wound in himself: the wound of a misbegotten spirit and the dissociation of that spirit-self from soul and body. This, I believe, in its deepest sense, is the nature of the fundamentalist wound: the wound of a misbegotten spirit and dissociation of that spirit-self from body and soul.

Let us take a moment to orient ourselves. In Wolfram’s *Parzival* poem, we have reached the end of the sixth of sixteen books. Parzival’s struggles continue. The next big teaching dialogue takes place between Parzival and a hermit and hierophant by the name of Trevrizent. He introduces Parzival to the deeper mysteries of life. Being in relationship with oneself and others requires subtle self-control; then the essence of the Grail, the voice of the Self, can be experienced as an active life force.

Wolfram has much more to say about the paradox of fundamentalism and reconciliation, the need for a paradigm change governing human relationships, and liberation as a mutual process and struggle for humanization. I will end here with a quote from another German writer and poet who struggled with the problem of irresolvable paradoxes on many fronts. Goethe (1829/1978) wrote: “One says, in the space between two opposites lies the truth. No way! (*Keineswegs!*) The problem lies in between; the invisible, the eternally active life, conceived in a quiet moment” (No. 417, my translation).

## OUTLOOK

Wolfram says that we should take the feelings in ourselves seriously, paying particular attention to the uncomfortable feelings, otherwise we cannot be redeemed. The world is one of “multiple narratives.” Yet we notice very troubling relational aspects, like the attitude that Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor exposes when he says, “Put away your gods [your narrative] and come and worship ours [our narrative], *or* we will kill you and your gods.” This ideology sounds familiar, doesn’t it? Corbett (1996) wrote: “In its traditional sense, redemption implied sin defined as the contravention of a list of authoritative rules” (p. 105). Note how the fundamentalist complex in us tends to turn “narrative” into “authoritative rule”—which you’d better follow or you will be disposed of (like the federal district attorneys who got fired). I think that we’d better pay more attention to this underinvestigated topic: *archetypal patterns of relating*, to self, other, and transcendent Other. In my view,

redemption, reconciliation, as well as becoming aware of shadow projections all belong to the imagery of relating.

We are facing the eruption of powerful affective storms in the world. They are hard for the rational mind to understand—in fact, such storms of primitive emotion obliterate our ability to think. We are witnessing behaviors that do not seem to make any sense.

In Wolfram's *Parzival*, after the encounter with the hierophant Trevrizent, Parzival fights life-and-death battles with his alter ego (*Gawan*), inner demon (*Gramoflanz*), and shadow brother (*Feirefiz*). Clinicians experience how archaic affective storms can overwhelm narcissistic and histrionic patients when they fall into states of borderline functioning and despair. These patients are fighting life-and-death battles internally and externally, including in their attacks on their therapists. It is hard to think in these situations. The destructive emotional storms unleashed in *collective* borderline and psychotic states are no different. The hangmen of the Grand Inquisitors or now the suicide bombers following Sunni or Shiite clerics represent just the tip of the iceberg: They are symptomatic of a collective psychosis and dissociation. Though less visible, the abuses and cruelty committed within cult groups of all kinds need to be mentioned here as well.

Clearly, we are desperately in need of a change in the paradigm governing the patterns of how we relate to each other *and* to the earth. In my reading, Wolfram's conception of the *Anfortas wound* names a deep and multilayered archetype that is related to this question. Tending the wound demands an attitude of openness and mutuality in the service of the arduous process of humaneness.

At last, in Book XVI, Parzival returns to the wounded Anfortas and, in a state of *Einfühlung* (or soulful empathy) and humility,

he asks, "What troubles you, Uncle?" Then he listens. In turn, the myth tells us, Parzival and the world around him are restored to new vitality, and the ongoingness of time is renewed. With poetic genius Wolfram brings

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Wolfram does not offer a new system, religion, or ideology—in fact he detests those. When the reader thinks literally, *oh, now Parzival is getting close to his goal*, the poet tells us, "The Grail was never found," thereby reminding us . . . that the quest is for a soulful *inner* attitude of relating.

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to life, and lets us emotionally participate in, the struggles of his heroes and heroines through which a new sense of being, of humaneness and of *communitas*, incarnates in the world—with grace. Wolfram does not offer a new system, religion, or ideology—in fact he detests those. When the reader thinks literally, *oh, now Parzival is getting close to his goal*, the poet tells us, “The Grail was never found,” thereby reminding us once again that the quest is for a soulful *inner* attitude of relating.

To me, the message of the *Parzival* myth is that a true and compassionate return to the Anfortas wound can effect a deep transformation. Our challenge, then, is this: How do we make meaning of, and begin thinking about, the Anfortas and fundamentalist wound in ourselves, in the American collective psyche, and in the Islamic collective psyche?

I mentioned how the word *fundamentalism* stirs feelings of somatic discomfort in me. Following that path, I began to see how my work on the Parzival myth has returned me to a deep wound in *my* psyche, a wound with personal and collective layers. I told you how a dream had brought me to Wolfram’s *Parzival* poem. I had not read the *Parzival* myth earlier in my life.

As I proceeded in my explorations, I noticed a parallel process. For the people of his time Wolfram’s writing redeemed layers of their culture’s past that had been blocked by Christian and Islamic fundamentalism dominant during the time of the medieval Crusades. Likewise, my eyes had been blinded by the political situation into which I was born. Now, unfortunately, a new layer is forming. My work started during the pre-9/11, 2001 era. I shudder to imagine some generation following ours finding itself in an analogous situation, that is, of having to reconnect with the foundational energies and virtues of an American democratic past. As in the Middle Ages, today’s “Crusaders,” on both sides, believe that they are doing their god’s work in their struggle for redemption. As Paul Ricoeur (1987) observed, there is an overlapping of evil done and evil suffered; he said, “to do evil is always, directly or indirectly, to make someone else suffer” (p. 200). This is a form of mutuality that fuels repetition, leading to cycles of violence and abuse. In contrast, I have tried to point out how, through self-awareness, subtle shifts and healing can occur at the interface of the individual and communal realms—which, in turn, *can* have profound positive impact on the life of a people.

Recently an analysand shared with me a dream that provides a hopeful image of regenerative energies emerging from the collective psyche. He reported:

There is a party in full swing. I recognize people from college. Then I hold in my hands a musical instrument, a horn made of metal, with a mouthpiece and, where the horn widens, there are ripples as on a seashell. I blow a pattern, like I might into

a Tibetan horn. A striking low sound emerges, and all the people assume religious postures, fall into positions of prayer, each according to their individual religion, and they start praying.

In awe of the dream the analysand observed, “The sound of the horn connected the people, drew up something universal, prompting in each a similar response, which was expressed *individually* according to their different beliefs.” In his dream we experience a community of worshipers, connected by the experience of a numinous transcendent sound, but worshiping in individual ways, each person according to his or her own religious tradition, yet all in harmony with each other. This is a profound image of hope—a far cry from the sectarian violence we witness in many parts of the world and the sectarian splitting we find in the West.

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## NOTE

1. The textual source I use for Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* is the edition in two volumes by Deutscher Klassiker Verlag (Wolfram von Eschenbach, trans. 1994). The volumes contain the complete medieval text of the *Parzival* epic poem in middle-high German (following the standard edition of Karl Lachmann from 1833), a verse translation into modern German by Dieter Kühn, and commentaries to the translation by Eberhard Nellmann. The verse numbering follows the Lachmann convention, which divided the text into 16 books, and the poem into 827 blocks of 30 lines each. I follow the Lachmann convention when quoting from, or referring to, the *Parzival* text. For example, the abbreviation (235.20–24) refers to lines 20–24 in block 235 of the poem. The prose translation of Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, into English by H. M. Mustard and C. E. Passage (MP) (Wolfram von Eschenbach, trans. 1961), also follows the Lachmann text and division into 16 books and 827 blocks of text. For example, the text corresponding to verses (235.20–24) will be found in MP, in the second paragraph of block 235, on p. 129. All quotes from Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* in this paper are my translations of the

middle-high German text, except for one instance where I quote from Mustard and Passage, cited as MP.

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