The Economics of Soul:
Work, Money, Failure,
and Creativity

Care of the soul requires ongoing attention to every aspect of life. Essentially it is a cultivation of ordinary things in such a way that soul is nurtured and fostered. Therapy tends to focus on crises or chronic problems. I’ve never heard anyone come to therapy and say they want to discuss gardening or to examine the soul issues in a house that they’re building or to prepare to be a city councilperson. Yet all of these ordinary things have a great deal to do with the condition of the soul. If we do not tend the soul consciously and artfully, then its issues remain largely unconscious, uncultivated, and therefore often problematic.

One of the most unconscious of our daily activities from the perspective of the soul is work and the settings of work—the office, factory, store, studio, or home. I have found in my practice over the years that the conditions of work have at least as much to do with disturbances of soul as marriage and family. Yet it is tempting sim-
ply to make adjustments in response to problems at work without recognizing the deep issues involved. Certainly we allow the workplace to be dominated by function and efficiency, thereby leaving us open to the complaints of neglected soul. We could benefit psychologically from a heightened consciousness about the poetry of work—its style, tools, timing, and environment.

Several years ago I gave a lecture on the medieval idea that the world is a book to be read. Monks used the phrase *liber mundi*, the “book of the world,” to describe a spiritual kind of literacy. Afterward, a woman, a housewife, who had attended telephoned to ask if I would come to her house, to read it in this way. I had never done such a thing, but in therapy I had been reading dreams and paintings for years, so the idea was appealing.

Together we walked through the rooms, observing them closely, and quietly discussed our impressions. This “reading” was not an analysis or an interpretation. It was more “dreaming the house onward,” to paraphrase an expression of Jung’s—“dreaming the dream onward.” My idea was to see the house’s poetry and alphabet, to understand the gestures it was making in its architecture, colors, furnishings, decorations, and the condition it was in at that particular time. The woman was truly devoted to her home and wanted to give housework a place of dignity in her life.

Some of the images that came to us were personal. I heard stories of a former marriage, of children, visitors, and her own childhood. Others had to do with the architecture of the building and with American history, and a few touched on philosophical questions about the very nature of dwelling and shelter.

I remember in particular an immaculate bathroom with smooth tiles and cool colors. The bathroom is a room full of strong imagery and psychological content—bodily waste, cleansing, privacy, cosmetics, clothing, nudity, pipes connected to the underground, and running water. It is a favored setting for many dreams, an indication of its special appeal to the imagination. This bath-
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room seemed to me unusually orderly and clean, and having agreed to an honest reading of the house, we discussed the efforts my hostess put into keeping this room spotless.

In this reading of her house, I wasn't trying to figure this woman out, or look for something wrong, or come up with some new way for her to live her life. We were simply taking a special look at the house in order to glimpse signs of the soul that lies hidden in the everyday and commonplace. At the end of our tour, we both felt unusually connected to the place and to its things. For my part, I was motivated to reflect on my own home and to think more deeply about the poetics of everyday life.

The home is a place of daily work, whether or not one has an "outside" job. If you were to read your own house, at some point you would find yourself standing before the tools of housework: vacuum cleaner, broom, dust mop, soaps, sponges, dishpan, hammer, screwdriver. These things are very simple, and yet they are fundamental to the feeling we have of being at home. Jean Lall, an astrologer and therapist from Baltimore, lectures on the soul of housework. She calls housework "a path of contemplation" and says that if we denigrate the work that is to be done around the house every day, from cooking to doing laundry, we lose our attachment to our immediate world. There is also a close relationship, she says, between daily work around the house and responsibility to our natural environment.

I might put it this way: there are gods of the house, and our daily work is a way of acknowledging these home spirits that are so important in sustaining our lives. To them, a scrub brush is a sacramental object, and when we use this implement with care we are giving something to the soul. In this sense, cleaning the bathroom is a form of therapy because there is a correspondence between the actual room and a certain chamber of the heart. The bathroom that appears in our dreams is both the room in our house and a poetic object that describes a space in the soul.
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I don’t mean to inflate the simple things of life with exaggerated meaning and formality, but we might be reminded of the value to the soul of doing our daily chores attentively and with an eye to detail. We all know that at some level daily work affects character and the overall quality of life, but we usually overlook the way soulfulness can adhere to ordinary housework and the gifts it can bring to the soul. If we let other people do our ordinary work for us, or if we do it ourselves without care, we might be losing something irreplaceable and eventually experience that missing element as a painful sense of loneliness or homelessness.

We can “read” the house of our outside work life in the same way I read that woman’s home: examine its environment, look closely at its tools, consider the way time is spent and note the moods and emotions that typically surround the work itself. How you spend your working hours—what you look at, sit on and work with—makes a difference, not only in terms of efficiency but for its effect on your sense of yourself and the direction your imagination takes. Some businesses cover over their soulless conception of work with a veneer of fake walls, plastic plants, and pseudoart. If that is what we give to the workplace in the name of beauty, then that is the measure of soulfulness we will have at our job. Soul cannot be faked without serious consequences. In his poem “The Garden,” the poet Andrew Marvell refers to “a green thought in a green shade.” Surrounded by plastic ferns, we will be filled with plastic thoughts.

Work as Opus

In many religious traditions, work is not set off from the precincts of the sacred. It is not “pro-fane”—in front of the temple—it is in the temple. In Christian and Zen monasteries, for instance, work is as much a part of the monk’s carefully de-
signed life as are prayer, meditation, and liturgy. I learned this when I was a novice in a religious order. A novice is a fledgling monk, learning the ins and outs of the spiritual life of prayer, meditation, study, and... work. I recall one day in particular, when I was given the job of pruning apple trees. It was a cold day in Wisconsin, and I was out on a limb sawing away at shoots sticking up on limbs all around me like minarets. I took a minute to rest, hoping the limb wouldn't suddenly break, and asked myself, “Why am I doing this? I’m supposed to be learning prayer, meditation, Latin, and Gregorian chant. But here I am, my hands frostbitten, feeling not terribly secure in the top of a tree, my fingers bloody from an erratic saw blade, doing something I know nothing about.” The answer, I already knew, was that work is an important component of the spiritual life. In some monasteries monks file off to work in procession, wearing their long hooded robes and maintaining silence. Monastic writers describe work as a path to holiness.

Formal religion always gives us hints about the depth dimension of anything in daily life, in this case the idea that work is not the secular enterprise the modern world assumes it is. Whether we do it with mindfulness and art, or whether it takes place in unmitigated unconsciousness, work affects the soul profoundly. It is full of imagination and speaks to the soul at many different levels. It may, for example, conjure up certain memories and fantasies that have special significance. These may be connected to family myths, traditions, and ideals. Or work may be a means of sorting out issues that have little to do with the work itself. It may be a response to fate. We may find ourselves doing work that has been in the family for generations or working at a job that appeared after a number of coincidences and chance events. In this sense, all work is a vocation, a calling from a place that is the source of meaning and identity, the roots of which lie beyond human intention and interpretation.

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Etymology, the examination of the deep imagery and myth that reside within ordinary language, also offers some insight into work.

Sometimes we refer to work as an “occupation,” an interesting word that means “to be taken and seized.” In the past this word had strong sexual connotations. We like to think that we have chosen our work, but it could be more accurate to say that our work has found us. Most people can tell fate-filled stories of how they happen to be in their current “occupation.” These stories tell how the work came to occupy them, to take residence. Work is a vocation: we are called to it. But we are also loved by our work. It can excite us, comfort us, and make us feel fulfilled, just as a lover can. Soul and the erotic are always together. If our work doesn’t have an erotic tone to it, then it probably lacks soul as well.

The technical name for the category of rituals that take place in church, such as baptism or the eucharist, is liturgy. It comes from the Greek words laos and ergos, which together can be translated simply as “ordinary person’s work” or “the labor of the laity.” The rituals that take place in church are a kind of work, the soul’s work: something of the soul is being created in the work of ritual. Still, there is no need to separate that work from the work that goes on “in the world.” From a depth point of view, all work is liturgy. Ordinary actions, too, accomplish something for the soul. What takes place in a church or temple is an exemplar for what happens in the world. Church points out the profound, often hidden nature of worldly activity. We could say, then, that all work is sacred, whether you are building a road, cutting a person’s hair, or taking out the garbage.

We can bridge the gap between sacred church and secular world by occasionally ritualizing the everyday things we do. It isn’t necessary to place a cloak of religiosity on everyday work in order to make it sacred; formal ritual is only a way of reminding ourselves of the ritual qualities that are in work anyway. Therefore, like a sacristan who reverences everything he tends, we might want to buy
tools of satisfying quality—well made, pleasing to look at, and fitted to the hand—and cleansers that respect the environment. A special table cloth might help ritualize a dinner, or an office desk of special design or select woods could transform the workplace into an arena that has imaginal depth. Often work spaces are devoid of imagination, so that the workers are left with a purely secularized feeling that doesn’t feed their souls.

Workers assume that their tasks, too, are purely secular and functional, but even such ordinary jobs as carpentry, secretarial services, and gardening relate to the soul as much as to function. In the medieval world, these forms of work each had a patron god—Saturn, Mercury, and Venus, respectively—indicating that in each case matters of profound significance to the soul are encountered in daily work. We could learn from our ancestors that the familiar tasks involved in an ordinary job have a presiding god and constitute a liturgy in relation to that god.

Mythology also offers some suggestions for thinking deeply about work. Daedalus, for instance, was known as the ingenicus maker of dolls and toys, which came to life when a child played with them. Hephaistos, one of the truly great gods, made furniture and jewelry, among other things, for the other gods. Our own children play with toys as if they were alive, keeping the myth alive. It would make great mythological sense for makers of toys to look deeply into their work and see that Daedalus has a hand in it. If they had a deep sense of the truly magical nature of their product, they could take care of the souls of children with sacred imagination. The same principle holds for all professions and for all forms of labor.

When we think of work, we only consider function, and so the soul elements are left to chance. Where there is no artfulness about life, there is a weakening of soul. It seems to me that the problem with modern manufacturing is not a lack of efficiency, it is a loss of soul.
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Not understanding soul, companies look to the work of other cultures and try to mimic their methods. What they don't realize is that method is not the only thing. Another culture may be successful in its manufacturing and business because it is still mindful of the needs of the heart. It may not be enough to copy surface strategies, ignoring the deeper evaluation of feeling and sensibility that gives work grounding in the human heart and not just in the brain.

Another way to enrich the imagination of work is to follow Jung in his work with alchemy. Alchemy was a process in which raw material was placed in a vessel where it was heated, observed closely, heated some more, passed through various operations and observed once again. In the end, the result was an arcane product imagined mysteriously to be gold, the stone of the philosophers, or a potent elixir. In Jung's view, alchemy was a spiritual practice carried out for the benefit of the soul. Its play with chemicals, heat, and distillation was a poetical project in which substances, colors, and other material qualities offered an external imagery for a hidden parallel process of the soul. Just as astrology based its entire symbol system on the bodies of planets, so alchemy found its poetic inspiration in the qualities of chemicals and their interactions.

This process of working the stuff of the soul, objectified in natural materials, the alchemist called the opus, that is, "the work." We could imagine our own everyday work alchemically in the same way. The plain concerns of ordinary work are the raw material, the prima materia, as the alchemist called it, for working out the soul's matter. We work on the stuff of the soul by means of the things of life. This is an ancient idea espoused by Neoplatonists: ordinary life is the means of entry into higher spiritual activity. Or we could say that at the very moment we are hard at work on some worldly endeavor, we are also working on a different plane. Perhaps without knowing it, we are engaged in the labors of the soul.

We might understand the role of everyday work in the soul by
looking more closely at the idea of *opus*. In his book *Psychology and Alchemy*, Jung describes the *opus* as a work of imagination. He is discussing an old alchemical text that tells how to produce the philosophers' stone. The passage says that one should be guided by a true and not a fantastic imagination. Commenting on this idea, Jung says that imagination is “an authentic accomplishment of thought or reflection that does not spin aimless and groundless fantasies into the blue; that is to say, it does not merely play with its object, rather it tries to grasp the inner facts and portray them in images true to their nature. This activity is an *opus*, a work.”

We move closer to the soul's work when we go deeper than intellectual abstractions and imaginary fancies that do not well up from the more profound roots of feeling. The more deeply our work stirs imagination and corresponds to images that lie there at the bedrock of identity and fate, the more it will have soul. Work is an attempt to find an adequate alchemy that both wakens and satisfies the very root of being. Most of us put a great deal of time into work, not only because we have to work so many hours to make a living, but because work is central to the soul's *opus*. We are crafting ourselves—individuating, to use the Jungian term. Work is fundamental to the *opus* because the whole point of life is the fabrication of soul.

To put it more simply, the job and the *opus* are related insofar as work is an extension or reflection of yourself. You conclude a successful business transaction, and you feel good about yourself. You build a cherry dining table or sew a star quilt, then you stand back and contemplate it, feeling a surge of pride. These feelings give a hint that the alchemical *opus* is in play. The trouble is, if what we do or make is not up to our standards and does not reflect attention and care when we stand back to look at it the soul suffers. The whole society suffers a wound to soul if we allow ourselves to do bad work.

When it is not possible to feel good about our work, then soulful
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pride, so necessary for creativity, turns into narcissism. Pride and narcissism are not the same thing; in a sense, they are opposites. Like Narcissus, we need to be objectified in an image, something outside ourselves. The products of our work are like the image in the pond—a means of loving ourselves. But if those products are not lovable, we are forced into a narcissistic place where we lose sight of the work itself and focus on our own personal needs. Love of the world and our place in it, attained largely by our work, turns into solipsistic craving for love.

Work becomes narcissistic when we cannot love ourselves through objects in the world. This is one of the deeper implications of the Narcissus myth: the flowering of life depends upon finding a reflection of oneself in the world, and one's work is an important place for that kind of reflection. In the language of Neoplatonism, Narcissus discovers love when he finds that his nature is completed in that part of his soul that is outside himself, in the soul of the world. Read in this way, the story suggests that we will never achieve the flowering of our own natures until we find that piece of ourselves, that lovable twin, which lives in the world and as the world. Therefore, finding the right work is like discovering your own soul in the world.

In his book Psychology and Religion: West and East, Jung says, following alchemical teaching, “The soul is for the most part outside the body.” What an extraordinary idea! The modern person is taught to believe that the soul—or whatever language is used for soul—is contained in the brain or is equivalent to mind and is purely and humanly subjective. But if we were to think of the soul as being in the world, then maybe our work would be seen as a truly important aspect of our lives, not only for its literal product but also as a way of caring for the soul.

As we saw in our earlier discussion of the myth, narcissism occurs as a symptom in direct reaction to the failure of the Narcissus myth. Our work takes on narcissistic qualities when it does not
serve well as a reflection of self. When that inherent reflection is lost, we become more concerned instead with how our work reflects on our reputations. We seek to repair our painful narcissism in the glow of achievement, and so we become distracted from the soul of the work for its sake. We are tempted to find satisfaction in secondary rewards, such as money, prestige, and the trappings of success.

It’s obvious that climbing the ladder of success can easily lead to a loss of soul. An alternative may be to choose a profession or projects with soul in mind. If a potential employer describes all the benefits of a job, we could ask about the soul values. What is the spirit in this workplace? Will I be treated as a person here? Is there a feeling of community? Do people love their work? Is what we are doing and producing worthy of my commitment and long hours? Are there any moral problems in the job or workplace—making things detrimental to people or to the earth, taking excessive profits or contributing to racial and sexist oppression? It is not possible to care for the soul while violating or disregarding one’s own moral sensibility.

Narcissus and work are further related because the love that goes out into our work comes back as love of self. Signs of this love and therefore of soul are feelings of attraction, desire, curiosity, involvement, passion, and loyalty in relation to our work. I once counseled a man who worked in an automobile factory. He hated his work. On a team that did spray painting, he was the trouble-shooter, clearing up clogged pipes and keeping the chemical mixtures in proper proportion. He was good at what he did, but he experienced his job as an imprisonment. He came to me wondering what had happened in his childhood to make his life so unhappy.

As he talked I noticed that most of his annoyance was focused around his job. So, we discussed his work in detail. Some of his dreams were set on the job site, so we had many occasions to explore the history of his imagination of work, including his child-
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hood fantasies of a life work, his many jobs, his education and training, and his current habits of work. Notice that I was not trying to present him with options or get him to find a better job. I wanted to focus on the place of work in his soul and listen to its complaints about what he was doing. Eventually his reflections on work led him to seek a change. One day he got up enough courage to get a position in sales, which he felt was much better suited to him. Soon many of his “psychological” problems began to disappear. “I love my job,” he told me. “I don’t mind being criticized for a mistake, and I love to come to work. That other job just wasn’t me.” The job of troubleshooting spraying operations might have suited another person, but not this man, who had to suffer awhile in his work until he moved into something soulful for him.

To say that a job isn’t me is to say that the relationship between work and the soul has fallen down, or, to put it in alchemical language, work and opus have no correspondence. When that linkage is present, work is easier and more satisfying because the counterpoint between job and opus is harmonious. When the soul is involved, the work is not carried out by the ego alone; it arises from a deeper place and therefore is not deprived of passion, spontaneity, and grace.

In his Lives of Artists, Vasari tells a story about the Renaissance sculptor and architect Filippo Brunelleschi. Donatello, Filippo, and other artists were hanging out in Florence when Donatello mentioned a beautiful marble sarcophagus he had seen in the town of Cortona, a good distance away. “Filippo conceived a tremendous desire to see the work,” Vasari writes. “So, without changing his shoes or clothes, immediately he headed off for Cortona, examined the sarcophagus, made a sketch of it, and brought it back to Florence before he was missed.” Similar stories are told of Bach walking many miles to hear great music and spending late nights copying the works of composers he admired.

Stories of artists’ intensive pursuit of their vision and craft are a
kind of mythology revealing the archetypal dimensions of soulful work. In our own lives this archetype may appear in a small way, as in a great feeling of satisfaction after spending the morning at the right task. Or it may appear, as it did for the factory worker, in a satisfying career move. One can imagine a radical restructuring of career counseling toward focusing on the soul. Testing would then assess the nature of the opus rather than aptitude, and discussion would touch upon issues much deeper than the surface ego concerns of life.

**Money**

Money and work are, of course, intimately related. By splitting concern for financial profit from the inherent values of work, money can become the focus of a job's narcissism. In other words, pleasure in money can take the place of pleasure in work. Still, we all require money, and money can be an integral part of work without loss of soul. The crucial point is our attitude. In most work there can be a close relationship between caring for the world in which we live (ecology) and caring for the quality of our way of life (economy).

Ecology and economy, both from the Greek oikos, have to do with "house" in the broadest sense. Ecology (logos) concerns our understanding of the earth as our home and our search for appropriate ways to dwell on it. Economy (nomos) is concerned with the ways in which we get along in this world home and with the family of society. Money is simply the coinage of our relationship to the community and environment in which we live. We are paid for our work, and in turn we pay for services and products. We pay our taxes, and the government provides for the basic needs of the community. Nomos in economics means law, but not natural law. It is the recognition that community is necessary and that it requires
rules of participation. Money is central in our attempts to live a communal life.

But a community is not a wholly rational construction. Each community has a complicated personality, with a varied past and mixed values. It has a soul and so it also has shadow. Money is not just a rational medium of exchange, it also carries the soul of communal life. It has all the complications of soul, and, like sex and disease, it is beyond our powers of control. It can fill us with compelling desire, longing, envy, and greed. The lives of some people are shaped by the lure of money, while others sense the temptation and take an ascetic route, in order to avoid being tainted. Either way, money retains its powerful position in the soul.

A neurotic way of dealing with money can reflect and intensify our other problems. For example, we may split money into fantasies of wealth and poverty. If a person’s attitude toward money is essentially a defense against poverty, then this person may never truly experience wealth. The experience of wealth is, after all, a subjective thing. For some, to be wealthy is to have credit cards paid off, for others it requires owning a Rolls Royce or two. Wealth cannot be measured by a bank account because it is primarily what we imagine it to be. Ignorant of the soul and its own brand of wealth, we may become giddy in the pursuit of money because we fear literal poverty around the corner.

Once again we can turn to religion to search out some deeper images of wealth and poverty. In religious orders, monks take a vow of poverty, but if you visit monasteries you might be surprised at how often you find beautifully built and furnished buildings on prime real estate. The monks may live simply but not always austerely, and they never have to worry for food and shelter. Monastic poverty is sometimes defined not as a scarcity of money and property but rather as “common ownership.” The purpose of the vow is to promote community by owning all things in common.
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What if, as a nation, a city, or a neighborhood, to say nothing of the globe, we all took such a vow of poverty? We would not be romanticizing deprivation, we would be striving toward a deep sense of community by feeling ownership of common property. As it is, we divide property literally into public and private. Owners can do anything they want with their private property within the limits of zoning laws, and even these do not always have the welfare of the community in mind. As a public, we may feel no rights or obligations concerning the condition and quality of these buildings and businesses.

If we do not feel any general sense of proprietorship toward the earth, then we can think that it is someone else's responsibility to keep the oceans clean and the air free of poison. The truly wealthy person, however, is the one who "owns" it all—land, air, and sea. At the same time, not splitting wealth and poverty, this wealthy person doesn't own anything. From the perspective of soul, wealth and poverty come together in responsible use and enjoyment of this world, which is only leased to us for the period of our tenure here.

Money is like sex. Some people believe that the more sexual experiences they have, with as many different people as possible, the more fulfilled they will be. But even great quantities of money and sex may not satisfy the craving. The problem lies not in having too much or too little, but in taking money literally, as a fetish rather than as a medium. If wealth is found by rejecting the experience of poverty, then it will never be complete. The soul is nurtured by want as much as by plenty.

When I speak for the soul of poverty, I do not mean one should romanticize poverty as a means of transcending bodily life. Certain forms of spirituality flee the evils of money in favor of transcendence and moral purity. Some people think they should work without receiving any payment. Others like to barter their services, with the intention of avoiding money's shadow. But poverty, like
wealth, can be taken too literally, so that the person escaping money stands lonely outside the community that economics helps to sustain. The desire for wealth, a legitimate element in the soul’s eros, may be lost, along with its joy; or it is repressed and then sneaks back in awkwardness about money or in behind-the-scenes financial wizardry and hoarding. Religions of all denominations demonstrate a remarkable ability, often covert, to raise and invest money. It is not surprising to hear now and then of a highly regarded religious group or leader suddenly exposed for financial scheming, for when the soul of money is denied, it takes on an added measure of shadow.

Like sex, money is so numinous, so filled with fantasy and emotion and resistant to rational guidance, that although it has much to offer, it can easily swamp the soul and carry consciousness off into compulsion and obsession. We have to distinguish between shadow qualities of money that are part of its soulfulness and symptoms of money gone berserk. Greed, avarice, cheating, and embezzlement are signs that the soul of money has been lost. We act out the need for wealth of soul through its fetish, gathering actual sums of money without regard for morality, rather than entering the communal exchange of money.

It is the nature of money to be exchanged. In fact, we sometimes refer to it as “change.” Robert Sardello, who has studied the role of money in the cultural psyche, compares economics to bodily processes. Profit and consumption are like breathing in and out, he says, and money the medium for that vital action in the body of society. When money no longer serves community exchange, it becomes an obstacle to the communal flow. Scheming and greedy manipulation interfere with the natural rhythm of exchange. A group, for instance, announces a fund-raising plan for a public project, and the large cut taken by the organizers is either completely hidden or advertised in extremely small print. Money is no-
toriously drenched in shadow, but when any individual or group takes that shadow to themselves, soul is lost.

Ideally, money corrupts us all not literally, but in the alchemical sense. It darkens innocence and continually initiates us into the gritty realities of financial exchange. It brings us into hand-to-hand combat in the sacred warfare of life. It takes us out of innocent idealism and brings us into the deeper, more soulful places where power, prestige, and self-worth are hammered out through substantial involvement in the making of culture. Therefore, money can give grounding and grit to a soul that otherwise might fade in the soft pastels of innocence.

Dreams of money often hint at its many levels of meaning. Recently I dreamed I was walking down a dark city street in the early hours of the morning. A man approached me and pressed a knife against my back. “Give me your change,” he said. I knew I had two hundred dollars in my right-hand pants pocket and about fifteen in my left. Cleverly I reached into my left pocket and gave him everything that was there. I wondered if he would ask for more, but he took the small sum and ran off. On waking, I recalled the dream and thought: I have a tendency to give myself away. I ruin my plans sometimes, or overlook my own needs in order to accommodate others. Then I feel resentment and anger.

Later that day I had a few minutes to think about the dream further. First impressions about your own dreams are often one-sided and shallow. My first thought represented my usual sense of myself, as giving away too much. So I tried to look at the actual dream. Maybe the ego in the dream was too clever. I deceived and cheated the man who was stealing from me. The dark street, a strong image in the dream, was asking me for change. I had noticed in the dream the careful use of that word change. Was I being asked to change my ways? To engage in the exchange of the city’s darkness? To give something of real value to my own needy shadow side? Is there a
flip side to my tendency to give myself away? Do I also hold back my wealth with a false sense of cleverness, with too much thought? In the dream, without hesitating I found a way to outwit the dark street with my duplicity—my two pockets.

This dream, I think, gave me needed instruction in the economics of the soul. Money is its coinage and may take the form of passion, energy, talent, or commitment. Like many people, I may hoard my talents, my soul money, for fear of the shadowy streets of embodied life. I may divide my resources, hoarding the greater share while at the same time being prepared to lose small quantities. As is often the case, my dream invited me to consider aspects of my character that I’d prefer to keep hidden and unexamined.

With regard to money’s shadow, it’s important to be neither moralistic nor literal. For example, the pleasure of hoarding can be seen as an archetypal quality of money itself, which becomes soul-denying only when it is the only way we deal with money, or when we use it for purely personal reasons. One of the things one does with money is to gather it together and hold it: this is the “breathing in” in Sardello’s image. If shadow is not acknowledged, however, the hoarding may be carried out with feelings of guilt, a sign that we are trying to do two things at once—enjoy money’s hoarding shadow and yet maintain innocence.

A corporation making large profits may feel the weight in its pockets and decide to give some away. It has two choices. Its gift could bring it more deeply into community, where its power and responsibility would be properly placed. Or the company might try to outwit its guilt in some clever scheme in which it seems to give away its profits but actually makes more in tax benefits. In the first case, money quite naturally buys a way into community. In the second case, a corporation or an individual may think they are getting away with something by manipulating communal economics, but
in fact there is a loss of soul and their money becomes a fetish giving rise to pathological symptoms. When a society becomes corrupted by money’s shadow, that society falls apart; whereas a society that owns up to its financial shadow can be nurtured.

In the medieval world, the job of counting money and keeping it secure was understood to be the province of Saturn, god of depression, tightness, anality, and profound vision. Saturn resides in the little act of counting money at the teller’s window or in stashing a wad of cash into a purse or wallet. These gestures, important to the soul, are ways in which money rites are observed in everyday life. The way we fashion cash, checks, and bank accounts also shows the divine spark of Saturn in ordinary monetary transactions. A crisp bill as a birthday gift or the first dollar made by a business framed in glass demonstrate that cash itself is honored and is worthy to be enshrined. Hoarding, too, has its rituals—whether money is stuffed under a mattress or in a Swiss bank account.

The relationship between money and work carries so much fantasy that it is both a burden and an extraordinary opportunity. Many of the problems associated with work center on money. We don’t make enough. We feel we are worth more than we are making. We don’t ask for the amount we deserve. Money is our only concern. Our fathers will be proud of us only when we have made as much as they have or more. We will feel part of adult society only when we have all the hallmarks of wealth and financial security. As a result of such feelings, we respond to money either apotropically—shunning its power—or compulsively. An alternative is to enter into the particular fantasies that money gives us and see what messages they might offer. If we think we need to make a lot of money in order to justify our existence, for example, then maybe there is a truth there. We may need to be more immersed in communal, concrete life in order to feel the soulfulness contained in
that fantasy. The only mistake would be to take that fantasy too literally. We could end up with millions of dollars and still wonder when we are going to grow up.

**Failure in Work**

One perhaps surprising source of potential soul in our work is failure. The dark cloud of failure that shadows our earnest efforts is to some extent an antidote for overly high expectations. Our ambition for success and perfection in work drives us on, while worries about failure keep us tied to the soul in the work. When ideas of perfection dive downward into the lower region of the soul, out of that gesture of incarnation comes human achievement. We may feel crushed by failure, but our lofty aims may need some spoiling if they are to play a creative role in human life. Perfection belongs to an imaginary world. According to traditional teaching, it is the life-embedded soul, not soaring spirit, that defines humanity.

Christianity offers a profound image of this gesture of descent. Artists have painted hundreds of versions of the Annunciation, the moment when the Holy Spirit in the form of a bird in a shower of golden light makes the lowly woman, Mary, pregnant with a divine child. This mystery is remembered every time an idea is brought into life. First we are inspired, and then we search out ways to give body to our inspirations.

Ordinary failures in work are an inevitable part of the descent of the spirit into human limitation. Failure is a mystery, not a problem. Of course this means not that we should try to fail, or take masochistic delight in mistakes, but that we could see the mystery of incarnation at play whenever our work doesn’t measure up to our expectations. If we could understand the feelings of inferiority and humbling occasioned by failure as meaningful in their own
right, then we might incorporate failure into our work so that it
doesn’t literally devastate us.

According to the alchemists, mortificatio, which means “mak-
ing death,” is an important part of the opus. Jung explains that
mortifications in life are necessary before eternal factors can be
manifested. A person is expressing this mystery when he realizes,
“It’s a good thing after all that I didn’t get that job I wanted.” For all
its simplicity, such a statement penetrates beneath human inten-
tion and desire and captures the gist of the mystery of failure. In
moments of mortification, you may discover that human intention
and ambition are not always the best guides in life and work.

If we do not grasp this alchemy of failure, then we stand a good
chance of never succeeding. Comprehending the mystery in failure
and acknowledging its necessity—the way it works alchemically
on the soul—allows us to see through our inabilitys and not overly
identify with them. Being literally undone by failure is akin to the
“negative narcissism” we examined earlier. It’s a negative way of
denying the divine or the mysterious a role in human effort. The
narcissist says, “I’m a failure. I can’t do anything right.” But indul-
gence in failure, wallowing in it rather than letting it affect the
heart, is a subtle defense against the corrosive action that is essen-
tial to it and that fosters soul. By appreciating failure with imagi-
nation, we reconnect it to success. Without the connection, work
falls into grand narcissistic fantasies of success and dismal feelings
of failure. But as a mystery, failure is not mine, it is an element in the
work I am doing.

Creativity with Soul

Creativity, another potential source of soul
in our work lives, is much romanticized. Usually we imagine crea-
tivity from the puer point of view, investing it with idealism and
lofty fantasies of exceptional achievement. In this sense, most work is not creative. It is ordinary, repetitious, and democratic.

But if we were to bring our very idea of creativity down to earth it would not have to be reserved for exceptional individuals or identified with brilliance. In ordinary life creativity means making something for the soul out of every experience. Sometimes we can shape experience into meaningfulness playfully and inventively. At other times, simply holding experience in memory and in reflection allows it to incubate and reveal some of its imagination.

Creativity may assume many different forms. It might at times be saturnine, so that a bout with depression, for example, might be understood as a particularly creative time. Brooding generates its own style of awareness and its own brand of insight, and out of depressive moods important elements of culture and personality can emerge. Jung says that in his long period of falling apart, a “state of disorientation,” as he called it, he conceived (an Annunciation word) some of his fundamental psychological insights. At other times, creativity can be imagined Aphroditically, as arising out of sexual interest and desire. Certainly Marilyn Monroe was creative in her own way.

Creativity finds its soul when it embraces its shadow. The artist’s block, for instance, is a well-known part of the creative process: inspiration stops and the writer is faced with an intractable empty page. Everyone, not only artists, recognizes that evaporation of ideas. A mother may enjoy raising her children for months or years, every day thinking up new ideas for them. Then one day the inspiration leaves and emptiness takes over. If we could see how our blank spots are a part of our creativity, we might not so quickly exclude this aspect of work from our humble lives.

Igor Stravinsky, perhaps the greatest composer of our century, was a hard worker who saw his music less as personal expression and more as an object to be invented and worked. “The workmanship was much better in Bach’s time than it is now,” he once said in
an interview. "One had first to be a craftsman. Now we have only 
talent.' We do not have the absorption in detail, the burying of 
one'self in craftsmanship to be resurrected a great musician." He 
was suspicious of the artist as a pure channel of inspiration. 
"Should the impossible happen," he said in his Harvard University 
lectures, "and my work suddenly be given to me in a perfectly com-
pleted form, I should be embarrassed and flustered by it, as by a 
hoax."

Creative work can be exciting, inspiring, and godlike, but it is 
also quotidian, humdrum, and full of anxieties, frustrations, dead 
ends, mistakes, and failures. It can be carried on by a person who 
has none of the soaring Icarus wishes to abandon the dark shadows 
of the labyrinth in favor of the bright sunshine. It can be free of nar-
cissism and focus on the problems the material world furnishes 
anyone who wants to make something of it. Creativity is, fore-
most, being in the world soulfully, for the only thing we truly make, 
whether in the arts, in culture, or at home, is soul.

Nicholas of Cusa, and Coleridge after him, described human 
creativity as a participation in the act of God creating the cosmos. 
God creates the cosmos, we create the microcosmos, the "human 
world," in Cusa's words. As we do our daily work, make our 
homes and marriages, raise our children, and fabricate a culture, 
we are all being creative. Entering our fate with generous attentiv-
eness and care, we enjoy a soulful kind of creativity that may or 
may not have the brilliance of the work of great artists.

The ultimate work, then, is an engagement with soul, respond-
ing to the demands of fate and tending the details of life as it pre-
sents itself. We may get to a point where our external labors and the 
opus of the soul are one and the same, inseparable. Then the satis-
factions of our work will be deep and long lasting, undone neither 
by failures nor by flashes of success.