

Alliance Roots & Branches: C.G. Jung

Saturday, March 5, 2016

C.G. Jung –

A brief introduction to the historical and cultural context of his life and work

Every individual needs revolution, inner division, overthrow of the existing order, and renewal, but not by forcing them upon his neighbors under the hypocritical cloak of Christian love or the sense of social responsibility or any of the other beautiful euphemisms for unconscious urges to personal power. Individual self-reflection, return of the individual to the ground of human nature, to his own deepest being with its individual and social destiny—here is the beginning of a cure for the blindness which reigns at the present hour.ⁱ

- C.G. Jung, at the close of the First World War, 1918, in his Preface to “On the Psychology of the Unconscious”

Those who have read Henri Ellenberger’s, *Discovery of the Unconscious*, recognize that both Freud and Jung were products of the historical moment in time from which they emerged in the late 19th century, (or the late stages of the middle ages, as Jung joked.) Many people erroneously consider Jung’s work to be a *branch* or spinoff of Freudian Psychology, and think of Jung as an upstart who abandoned his father and went up into cloud cuckoo-land with his esoteric ideas. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jungian Psychology, or what came to be called, Analytical Psychology, is one of the primary *roots* of psychoanalysis. Jung’s own diverse and forward thinking contained early formulations of what we call today, ‘object relations,’ ‘the inter-subjective field,’ ‘deconstruction,’ ‘relational,’ ‘self,’ ‘transpersonal,’ and even ‘eco-psychologies,’--many of

which we will discuss in this brief time we have together. He encouraged those that followed him not to be Jungians, but to follow their own way. They didn't listen too well.

Born in 1875 in rural Switzerland, His most passionate calling after two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century was to speak widely about the severing of the human being from his deepest nature and his heart, and by extension, from what he would call, the 'soul of the earth.' He recognized that the Enlightenment's engine of 'progress' threatened Humanities' very survival by the great over valuation it placed on technological and scientific advances, and its privileging of reason, knowledge, and rationality, each with their own abuses of power. In his words, we, as a species, had lost our 'bush soul.' His message presaged postmodern thinking.

Before meeting in 1907 Freud and Jung were coming from very different places in the newly emerging field of psychiatry. Jung was already famous for his book on schizophrenia, which was called then, "Dementia Praecox," as well as for his 'association experiments' that Freud later used to prove his theory of hysteria. Jung was part of the 'French – English – Swiss – American Alliance,' which viewed *dissociation* very differently from Freud's trauma theory. They were studying somnambulism (sleep walking), psychic phenomena, trance states, and such. From these mediumistic subjects they recognized a form of non-pathological dissociation, alongside that of traumatically induced dissociation, a theory that Freud so brilliantly pioneered. From early on Jung held that a major difference he had with Freud revolved around his belief in the *independence of the unconscious* from that of conscious awareness. Jung contended that Freud viewed the unconscious as deriving from the conscious mind, but Jung would say the

opposite--that consciousness arises from the unconscious, which is prior to it. His theory of the 'complexes' was an early model for internal object relations, but he viewed the ego complex as one of many mostly autonomous selves existing on a horizontal plane in reciprocal relation to one another. That meant that his view of the psyche was *not* a hierarchical one with ego and super-ego reigning supreme, but rather one where consciousness and the unconscious complexes were co-determining, 'ethical factors' in psychic development. He faced his patients, eye to eye, with the idea of diminishing his role of authority as the 'one who knows.'

Jung's mother and her side of the family were 'Spiritualists,' who engaged in séances and folk healing, practices common in rural Switzerland. His mother had bouts of depression necessitating hospitalizations, most likely due to the loss of a son who lived only a few days, just prior to Jung's birth. A sense of instability and distrust pervaded his feelings about his mother, and he lived an isolated and lonely childhood in part because of it. He developed a rich and magical fantasy life, likely as a form of compensation. He had visions and dreams throughout his life that he suffered from, and that changed his life. His father was a country parson who never grappled with the deeper mystical and theological questions that consumed his young son at an early age. He counseled young Carl to simply have blind faith about the things beyond his human reach, but this led to further alienation between father and son.

The student Jung was steeped in Romantic Philosophy, ancient history and culture, classical literature, anthropology, myth, and world religions, along with the natural sciences. His clinical work as a physician was with schizophrenics in hospital. Many of his seminal ideas about the depths of the psyche came as a result of direct observation of psychotic states. He studied

under Janet in France, who is known for the original conception of Jung's *complex theory*. Freud, on the other hand, was a neurologist by training with a classical education, as you'd expect in Vienna; he was a secular Jew. He relied upon Abraham's clinical work with schizophrenics for some of the subject cases that he wrote about, because he hadn't worked with that population himself. (By the way, Abraham worked at the Burgholzli Institute in Zurich, where Jung was director). Jung and Freud were very different men from vastly different origins.

Their famous break in 1913 led to a period of depression, withdrawal from the psychoanalytic community, and what some believe was a psychotic episode. He described it himself as a 'confrontation with the unconscious.' Ellenberger described it as a 'creative illness.' He embraced his 'descent' as an inner, *mythic* process, akin to Virgil's descent to Hell, or to the stories of initiation that indigenous shamans or priests of the ancient mother cults underwent, to 'die and be reborn.' The incursion of powerful contents from visions and dreams were shattering to him at times, decentering his ego's illusions of a unified psyche. Artwork, dream work, journaling, 'active imagination,' and other techniques were developed in order to work through the psychoactive material. Out of the destabilizing of the ego's "monarchy" the raw material for a new psychology was born. *The Red Book* chronicles this process.

As illuminated and brilliant as he was, Jung carried a heavy shadow. His *actions* and the values he espoused were sometimes contradictory. He was accused of anti-Semitic sentiment in his writing at the most dangerous possible time in history for one to be criticizing the differences between the Jews and the Aryan race. After the war, when he met with an eminent rabbi, all he could muster up of an apology was, "I slipped up." He was known to

have a bad temper and was prone to violent outbursts. While his most famous (so-called) infidelity with his former patient--Sabina Spielrein--was most likely *never* sexualized, (despite Cronenberg's unsubstantiated assertion in *A Dangerous Method*), he did cross sexual boundaries with students and former patients, until his ill-fated heart attack in 1944 that changed his life. It led to his paper, "On the Psychology of the Transference" which spoke about the mutual pull and dynamic tension created in the transference/counter-transference relationship, and its importance in the analysis for *symbolic* understanding. This tension was meant to be bore *psychically* between the couple, but *not* meant to be acted out concretely. He dedicated the monograph to his wife.

His theories, while rich and scholarly, tended to become burdened down by ideological attitudes that espoused grand truths and certainty. Some later Jungian writers have tended to romanticize and over-spiritualize the excruciatingly painful process of analysis with words Jung often used himself, that connote happy endings to the work: 'wholeness,' 'rebirth,' 'transformation,' 'completion,' 'oneness,' becoming 'individuated.' Some Jungians have been accused of being too 'lite,' of privileging 'spiritual rebirth' over the raw, destructive, primitive material that deconstructs the narcissistic defenses employed by the ego. This attitude may have been the result of Jung's underlying 'teleological' standpoint that he borrowed from Plato—that is, the idea of a grand design that lies beneath the process, leading to a final end, or a completion in the 'union of opposites.'

This attitude contradicted the more 'phenomenological,' postmodern current in his clinical thinking that relied more on intuition, and his surrender to the images and affects produced by the unconscious. His own psychological journey was fraught with psychological shatterings, mis-steps

and recoveries, each bringing about deeper consciousness. One of his more famous quotes speaks to the courage needed to seek the truth in one's own psyche: "He who takes the safe road is as good as dead." He spoke throughout his life about a basic sense of the unknowable mystery of existence. Each of these examples are evidence of a great inner dichotomy that existed in his life and work, due in part, I believe, to his own early, personal psychology, which I and others have written about in greater depth. (See *Eros and the Shattering Gaze: Transcending Narcissism*, Chapter 4)

There are deep flaws that accompany the most brilliant of all teachers, and Jung is no exception. I consider myself a 'Post-Jungian,' which means that I have differentiated myself enough from Jung and the Jungians, that I *hope* that I am able to critically reflect about Jung's work and ideas. I appreciate the enormous contributions that this pioneering father of psychology has made to our profession, while at the same time, I recognize that he is one of several luminaries that have contributed to this rich and hopefully enduring field of psychoanalysis.

It is my wish that this brief survey of his work, life and times will provide an ample introduction to our upcoming seminar.

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ⁱ CG Jung, “On the Psychology of the Unconscious,” *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966.