

## **According to C.G Jung, the process of individuation is a spiritual journey or pilgrimage. Critically examine this idea.**

### **Introduction**

Jung's concept of individuation belongs to the wider psychological discipline of what might now be termed 'personality development' or 'self-development'. He states, '[the] strongest desire of all mankind is to develop that fullness of life which is called personality.'<sup>1</sup> Individuation was then defined by Jung 'to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'individual' that is, a separate, indivisible unity or 'whole'<sup>2</sup>. Thus, personality development, even at this definition stage, was implicitly for Jung a lifelong journey and it is quickly seen that he also viewed it as requiring spiritual and religious aspects, '...Among my patients every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers.'<sup>3</sup> What was distinctive about the Jungian approach is his development and use of the concept of 'self' as the dynamic of individuation.

### **The Taxonomy of Self**

Jung's "self" initially drew on some of the ideas from Freudian psychoanalysis with its 'first serious consideration of the unconscious'<sup>4</sup> where 'Freud made the simple but penetrating observation ... a dreamer ...will give himself away and reveal the unconscious background of his ailments.'<sup>5</sup> However, Freud viewed the psyche as a closed system limiting viewing the material as objective and understandable by scientific study.

Jung broadly accepted this objectivity on the basis of his own clinical experience<sup>6</sup> with the qualification that although data could be gathered in an empirical context from the clinical experience, that data that was to be treated as *symbolic*, the native language of the spirit, not rarefied to an objective truth. You were attempting to help

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<sup>1</sup> Jung, C.G. (1954), 'The Development of Personality' in *Collected Works*, v17, London: Routledge, p167.

<sup>2</sup> Jung, *Collected Works* 9i, p275.

<sup>3</sup> Jung, C.G., *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, pp264ff.

<sup>4</sup> Jung, C.G., von Franz, M.L., Henderson, J.L., Jacobi, J., Jaffé, A. (1964), *Man and his Symbols*, 1964 Hardback Edition, New York: Doubleday, pp25-26.

<sup>5</sup> Jung, C.G., (1964), *Man and his Symbols*, p27.

<sup>6</sup> Stevens, A. (1995), *Private Myths – Dreams and Dreaming*, London: Hamish Hamilton, p51.

the patient make sense of psychological 'messages' from the unconscious. You were not trying to 'treat' a person as a patient that needed to be 'cured' for '[he] attended to what his psychotic patients said'<sup>7</sup>, to enable them to engage with the unconscious and bring the power of the unconscious with its transformative healing power to ego-consciousness. He posited their psychosis often expressed as dreams represented mythical repetitions of a spiritual character that needed to be understood from their symbolic rather than objective meaning, 'dreams and their symbolic images have a much more important role to play.'<sup>8</sup> They are closely related to the "transcendent function"<sup>9</sup>. The self processes the archetypal "energy"<sup>10</sup> of the tension of opposites of conscious and unconscious, through the personal myth of symbolic dream. The self is the orchestrating principle and the challenge of *becoming* or individuating is to import the unconscious psychic energy resident in the archetypes of the individual and collective self into consciousness. So, for Jung, the transcendent function is necessarily symbolic and subjective, the messages of the unconscious can be of divine origin.

He thus viewed dreaming as a lifelong *human* spiritual activity but also as a *religious* activity, 'God speaks chiefly through dreams and visions.'<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the individuation process came to be explicitly cast using religious ideas drawn from both the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Far Eastern traditions:

'The totality images which the unconscious produces in the course of an individuation process are similar "reformations" of an *a priori* archetype (the mandala). The spontaneous symbols of the self, or of wholeness, cannot be in practice distinguished from a God-image...Christ is an embodiment of the God-image.'<sup>12</sup>

The ultimate aim of life was thus to individuate as the Christ and the Buddha had<sup>13</sup> as examples of those who had fully engaged the material of the unconscious so that their personality had become whole and balanced by the end of their pilgrimage of life. Each individual already has a 'whole but undifferentiated'<sup>14</sup> "self" in their unconsciousness that not only assimilates conscious information but makes

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<sup>7</sup> Stevens, A. (1995), p51.

<sup>8</sup> Jung (1964), *Man and His Symbols*, p28

<sup>9</sup> Jung, C.G. (1954), 'The Transcendent Function' in *Collected Works*, v17, London: Routledge, p69.

<sup>10</sup> Jung describes a novel application of the 'Conservation of Energy' principle regarding psychical energy as energy as a physicist would understand it.

<sup>11</sup> Jung (1964), *Man and His Symbols*, p102

<sup>12</sup> Jung, C.G. (1954), 'Christ, A Symbol of the Self' in *Collected Works*, v9ii, London: Routledge, pp37-40.

<sup>13</sup> Calvin S. Hall and Vernon J. Nordby (1974), 'A Primer of Jungian Psychology', New York, p82

<sup>14</sup> Calvin S. Hall and Vernon J. Nordby (1974), p81.

available the potentiality of the archetypes of the collective unconscious. It is the place in which “God” can be found although the post-Jungian ambivalence on this point is obvious as also to what is really meant by the term “God” reflecting Jung’s ambivalence to traditional formulations of faith. He periodically felt obliged to clarify what he meant (particularly in ‘private’ correspondence) as he often seemed slightly ambiguous and spoke of God both as a psychological image of wholeness<sup>15</sup> and the person of God beyond the individual self as found in religion<sup>16</sup>. His imprecision on this point is almost an expression of Jung’s own individuation and pilgrimage for ‘there is hardly a work from the second half of Jung’s life in which the religious function does not play an important part’<sup>17</sup>. He was concerned primarily with the underlying psychological content of the religious ritual rather than the *signa* or outward form of it.

Thus, the Jungian self is not just an objective construct of consciousness formed through the process of education and familiar relationships or simply the property of an individual consciousness but receives the phylogenetic psychic inheritance of the human race. These symbols are experiences of the ‘human’ archetypes of anima/animus and shadow, the ‘other’ personalities who we carry that work symbolically in and through the unconscious. The ‘shadow’ concept was particularly significant, considered everything else within our personality that was not part of the “mask of our ego” (‘persona’). Even by its name, it frequently takes on the ‘dark’ character, opposite of the moral function, a controversial thesis Jung developed from his concept of complimentary opposites and balance in the personality, ‘one must take evil...substantially..[not] as a mere diminution of good’<sup>18</sup>. He viewed a critical task of individuation was to engage with this ‘shadow’ so that the issues causing psychic conflict could be resolved or the positive potentialities could be brought to consciousness, ‘the Christ symbol lacks wholeness in the modern psychological sense, since it does not include the dark side of things...’<sup>19</sup>.

However, it is too easy to have a too negative a view of the shadow over the controversy surrounding Jung’s rather ‘Gnostic’ ontological interpretation of evil. The

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<sup>15</sup> Wehr, G. (1988), *Jung – A Biography*, Shambala: Boston, p299.

<sup>16</sup> Wehr, G. (1988), p302.

<sup>17</sup> Wehr, G. (1988), *Jung – A Biography*, ‘Again and Again, the Religious question’, Shambala: Boston, pp293-303.

<sup>18</sup> Jung, C.G. (1954), ‘Christ, A Symbol of the Self’ in *Collected Works* 9ii, p41.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

important psychological fact surely is that the shadow seeks to balance the conscious preoccupations by forcing, via the dynamic of self, transformative material into the consciousness necessary for wholeness. If a person is ignoring the spiritual, the unconscious seeks to address the ego through the spiritual language of symbolism to restore health to the psyche. To Jung, this religious function was very much was the concern of the second half of life. These irrational sources of knowledge are necessarily received in a revelatory fashion and not from the inductive and deductive methods of Western science and rationalism, 'Our present lives are dominated by the goddess Reason, who is our greatest and most tragic illusion.'<sup>20</sup>

However, Jung was also keen to modernise religious dogma preferring to recast the demons and "gods" of antiquity into the neuroses and complexes of modern man so giving an empirical "psychological" interpretation of theological 'facts' but it was not with the dismissive negativity of the psychoanalysts where these were simply recast as hysterical or ecstatic breaks because of repression from consciousness. There are involved examinations of why the mandala of Tibetan Buddhism is symbolic of a balanced wholeness and self-completion or why the Trinity of modern Christianity should be considered deficient for representing completeness, 'Three is not a natural coefficient of order, but an artificial one. There are four elements, four prime qualities, four colours, four castes, four ways of spiritual development in Buddhism'<sup>21</sup>. Jung was absolutely emphatic on the point that quaternity not trinity was required, 'there are four aspects of psychological orientation, beyond which nothing more need to be said.'<sup>22</sup> Life was to be considered as the progress of the resolution of complimentary and opposing psychical concepts, good must be complimented with evil.

As such, he was recognising a sequential component in individuation expressed in his essay 'The Stages of Life'<sup>23</sup> using the idea of the arc moving across the sky and dividing life 'into four parts'<sup>24</sup> However, Jung's view was not as linear as first

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<sup>20</sup> Jung (1964), *Man and His Symbols*, p101.

<sup>21</sup> Jung, C.G. (1954), 'Psychology and Religion: West – A Psychological Approach to the Trinity' in *Collected Works*, v8, London: Routledge, pp387-403.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Jung, C.G. (1954), 'The Stages of Life' in *Collected Works*, v8, London: Routledge, pp387-403.

<sup>24</sup> Jung, C.G. (1954), 'The Stages of Life', p403.

suggested here, a better picture is a “spiral” archetypal process iterating the locus of self. There was a continuous pattern of psychical conflict and the resolution of opposing opposites causing the psyche to move to a new level of completeness. This perhaps owes much to Nietzsche and ancient Greek philosophy although Jung was very reticent about admitting this. The congruence with Nietzsche is examined in detail by Huskinson<sup>25</sup> and, this tension of opposites, is a fundamental orchestrating principle of the cosmic Logos in the philosophy of Heraclitus<sup>26</sup>.

In summary, the Jungian taxonomy of the individuation of the psyche is basically metaphysical in character, subjective, spiritual and then explicitly religious:

*Metaphysical* in the sense individuation is all about being and becoming;  
*Subjective* in the sense it is the symbolic life with its personal meaning;  
*Spiritual* in the sense Jung was keen to integrate the “eternal wisdom” of the East with its *a*-theistic (author’s emphasis) concepts such as quaternity and complimentary opposites;  
*Religious* in the sense of the symbolic character of religious rituals expresses and allows communication with the eternal “other” and integration of the transpersonal self.

## Evaluation and Conclusion

There is nothing in Jung’s starting premise on individuation as personality development that any modern psychologist or educationalist is likely to take issue with, these notions well attested to by empirical data and case studies cast within a scientific framework. Jung’s concepts of “psychological types” and developmental stages are well expressed, though in modified forms, in modern psychology. It is perhaps possible to see that his ideas of stages of life originated the common concept of ‘mid life crisis’. However, it is extremely noticeable how Jung is omitted from the vast majority of Introductory and degree level scientific psychological texts. From the theological perspective, Jung’s ideas have lacked traction and acceptance beyond the zealous circles of the Jungian faithful. The obvious question to ask, is, why?

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<sup>25</sup> Huskinson, L. (2004), ‘Nietzsche and Jung - The Whole Self in the Union of Opposites’, Routledge: New York.

<sup>26</sup> Russel, B. (1991), ‘History of Western Philosophy (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)’, pp57-65, Routledge: London.

The answer perhaps lies in the poorly received irrationality and subjectivity of Jung's principle of a "self" as the core of the psyche which has an orchestrating function through life. Un-objective and intuitive concepts are fundamental to his discussion of how this individuation is worked out in practice. Such reliance on subjectivity and non-scientific concepts is where he has suffered the most as being labelled 'unscientific' and in recapitulating superstitions. His psychology, although broadly internally coherent or at least consistent with his premises, cannot claim scientific verisimilitude on that basis alone. To the modern scientist, his theories are weak hypotheses and bear more resemblance to a large number of subjective models of the psyche which will forever remain un-testable as irrational concepts. In this sense, his psychology remains more philosophical than scientific.

Jung's theological thought was keen to establish a common psychological explanation for the symbolic material within the great faiths as in fact being expressions and conscious experience of the same unconscious archetypal substance. It does not, in the author's view, do justice to the historicity of the Christian faith. Christianity is unique amongst the world religions as being fundamentally rooted in specific historical events and people. Christianity bases its claim to truth in the person of Jesus Christ as the Messiah promised to the Jews and in its prophetic eschatology not in its description of mystical processes or in a pantheistic natural theology.

The idea of quaternity as completeness is applied to the biblical narrative, especially in his commentary on Job and his view that God's evil "shadow" personified in the figure of Satan. There is a granting of an ontological status to evil almost in the sense of *necessary existence* that God might Himself evolve. It is unorthodox in its theological foundations ignoring hermeneutical norms, theological context and basic principles of Hebrew interpretation that a theological exegesis would require<sup>27</sup>. Jung seems to be muddling the theological categories with the psychological ones, drawing theological conclusions from a psychological hermeneutic developed in a different context.

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<sup>27</sup> Ellis, B.R and Hunt, H.B., *Hebrew Notes* and R.Young 'Hints to Bible Interpretation' cited <http://www.baptistboard.com/showthread.php?t=22262>

The key hermeneutical points that Jung fails to apply, and which is, the author believes, critical in interpreting the narrative of Job, is that the Hebrew Scriptures must always be brought into the New Testament theological context and that the narrative must be treated within the overall context of scripture rather than using a single book or isolated verses. The crucial prelude in the narrative in which there is an exchange between God and Satan in which it appears that God has been “provoked” by Satan (Job 1:6 and 2:3) does not so much unveil that “Yahweh is notoriously unjust, and injustice is not good”<sup>28</sup> but shows the character of Satan and what it is that annoys Satan so much about Job. It was that Job loved God not for what he could get from God but for who God is and God was going to demonstrate that to Satan and help Job on the next stage of spiritual pilgrimage or individuation in how to deal with the Satan shadow figure. Satan’s character is unveiled in that he believed every man could be bought and ultimately will act in their own ego-interest as he acted when he attempted to usurp God and install himself as God.

The theological message of Job is nothing to do with the redemptive dynamic of suffering in Job’s pilgrimage or of God’s own individuation. When there is an “answer” to Job there is not really an answer in relation to Job’s complaint about his suffering but God demonstrates the “archetypal”<sup>29</sup> principle that runs through the biblical narrative: to overcome evil (or to use a Jungian category, individuate) Job must understand how to be in a covenant relationship with God on a basis of equals demanding of one another what each has.

God speaking to Job:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Job 38:3** Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and demand [author’s edit – the Hebrew is hiphil] thou me.

Job speaking to God:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Job 42:4** Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and demand [author’s edit – the Hebrew is hiphil] thou unto me.

God demonstrates in his answer to Job his Lordship and intimate knowledge of all creation. However, Job is the man and the Earth was given to men. For God to exert His power in the Earth requires permission from a man and Job demanding of God within the terms of their covenant. In other words, the author would assert that

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<sup>28</sup> Jung, C.G. (1954), ‘Christ, A Symbol of the Self’ in *Collected Works* 9ii, p55

<sup>29</sup> Here, and consequently, the author is using archetypal in the sense of a primary pattern.

the *suffering* of Job does not predicate Job's individuation *per se* as Jung would assert. Yahweh is not behaving unjustly or in a fit of "unbridled irascibility"<sup>30</sup>, but dealing with, in light of the New Testament, with Job's ignorance of how to deal with evil via his covenant position in God. As the final chapters of the narrative of Job shows, Job individuated to a better place in God because of the revelation he received through God instruction in God's "answer".

"Suffering" or "trial" as a redemptive agent as expressed in Jungian writing and commentaries on Jung is derived from intuitive Far Eastern thought and is not a Near Eastern New Testament concept, 'you will not lead us into temptation but you will deliver us from evil.'<sup>31</sup> This is from the "archetypal" Lord's prayer and critically, from an exegetical perspective, its mixture of Greek subjunctives and imperatives, contrary to the ancient King James tradition reflected in most English translations, is *not* a petition prayer but a strong, declarative, covenantal expression of faith where God is being directed by an equal partner as God, as in Job.

There is thus no theological difference between Yahweh and the Christian God contrary to the basis of Jung's application of his psychology as a hermeneutic to Job and in his wider theological approach to the Trinity. Jung's attempt to interpret Job falters, in the author's view, because of his lack of understanding of theological categories. However, his basic thesis that both God and Job are moving to a place of further completeness through the confrontation between complementary opposites in the narrative, the author would accept. God does not require further completion in the sense of ontological perfection but is more complete in the sense it enhances God's Self when a man progresses in the development of their self so that the union between God's Self and the man occurs through Christ in all its fullness.

Jung's metaphysical model is thus theosophical rather than theological despite Jung forcefully and repeatedly asserting he was an 'empiricist' and a neo-Kantian with the archetype equivalent to a Kantian category. This, as Huskinson shows, is probably a conceptual philosophical error<sup>32</sup> and Jungians can be assessed rather unkindly, as deriving their spiritual pilgrimage from psychology on unscientific principles, dubious

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<sup>30</sup> Jung, C.G. (1954), Christ, a symbol of the Self, p59.

<sup>31</sup> Authors translation and amplification of Matt 6:13.

<sup>32</sup> Huskinson, L. (2004), pp75-76.



theology and incorrect philosophical assumptions. In other words, the author is arguing that Jung's premise of pilgrimage to the true Self is the correct one but the details of how he understands the dynamics of that Self are not theologically justified and the destination is not as desired.

The subjectivity of Jung's concepts means an internal consistency and for Jungians, may even match the empirical data of psychology. However, much as the physicist Bohm in quantum mechanics provided a model for the "collapse of the wave function"<sup>33</sup> that matches the empirical facts to fit observed reality, his ideas have little acceptance amongst quantum physicists because of their ontological consequences for the view of quantum reality<sup>34</sup>. Jung's psychology may match the empirical facts but the consequences for spiritual reality seem to leave the self at the mercy of the unknowable implying God is limited in ability to reveal to the psychic reality of a self clearly and easily, an untenable view to the author and irrational in any meaningful concept of God as a Creator.

This, however, should not detract *per se* from Jung's conclusion that life has definite stages and that much can be drawn from the many facets of his model of individuation or from the many psychical processes he proposes. It is more the theological framework he tries to fit them all together in that the author finds wanting. Jung's key idea remains supremely insightful: the personality to be whole must be many-faceted, enriched by the spiritual and the religious. Man is not a purely individual rational being and needs the irrational content of the One who is the true Self to be brought to their personal self.

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<sup>33</sup> This is the famous paradox in modern physics known as the 'measurement problem' where the two grand theories of modern theoretical physics, quantum mechanics and relativity collide. The fascinating consequences for the view of physical reality and its relation to theology the author will explore in his dissertation.

<sup>34</sup> Polkinghorne, J.(1991), *Reason and Reality – The Relationship between science and theology*, London, SPCK, p89ff.