

JUNG'S MODEL OF THE PSYCHE

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Jung writes: 'By psyche I understand the totality of all psychic processes, conscious as well as unconscious', (CW6 para 797) so we use the term 'psyche' rather than 'mind', since mind is used in common parlance to refer to the aspects of mental functioning which are conscious. Jung maintained that the psyche is a self-regulating system (like the body).

The psyche strives to maintain a balance between opposing qualities while at the same time actively seeking its own development or as he called it, individuation. For Jung, the psyche is inherently separable into component parts with complexes and archetypal contents personified and functioning autonomously as complete secondary selves, not just as drives and processes. It is important to think of Jung's model as a metaphor not as concrete reality, or as something which is not subject to change.

The ego

Jung saw the ego as the centre of the field of consciousness which contains our conscious awareness of existing and a continuing sense of personal identity. It is the organiser of our thoughts and intuitions, feelings, and sensations, and has access to memories which are not repressed. The ego is the bearer of personality and stands at the junction between the inner and outer worlds.

The way in which people relate to inner and outer worlds is determined by their attitude type: an extraverted individual being orientated to the outer world, and an introverted one primarily to the inner world. Jung also noted that people differ in the conscious use they make of four functions which he termed, thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition. In any individual, one of these functions is superior and is therefore more highly developed than other functions, since greater use is made of it, but each attitude operates in relation to the introversion or extraversion of the person, as well as in conjunction with other less dominant functions, giving a number of different theoretical possibilities.

The ego arises out of the Self during the course of early development. It has an executive function, it perceives meaning and assesses value, so that it not only promotes survival but makes life worth living. It is an expression of the Self, though by no means identical with it, and the Self is much greater than it. Jung compared the nature of consciousness to the eye: only a limited number of things

can be held in vision at any one time, and in the same way the activity of consciousness is selective. Selection, he says, demands direction and other things are excluded as irrelevant. This is bound to make conscious orientation one sided. The contents which are excluded sink into the unconscious where they form a counterweight to the conscious orientation. Thus an increasing tension is created and eventually the unconscious will break through in the form of dreams or images. So the unconscious complex is a balancing or supplementing of the conscious orientation.

The personal unconscious

The personal unconscious is a product of the interaction between the collective unconscious and the development of the individual during life. Jung's definition of the personal unconscious is as follows:

Everything of which I know, but of which I am not at the moment thinking; everything of which I was once conscious but have now forgotten; everything perceived by my senses, but not noted by my conscious mind; everything which, involuntarily and without paying attention to it, I feel, think, remember, want, and do; all the future things which are taking shape in me and will sometime come to consciousness; all this is the content of the unconscious' (CW8, para 382).
'Besides these we must include all more or less intentional repressions of painful thought and feelings. I call the sum of these contents the "personal unconscious"'. (CW8, para 270).

One can see that there is more here than the repressed contents of the unconscious as envisaged by Freud, for while it does include repression, Jung also sees the personal unconscious as having within it potential for future development, and thus is very much in line with his thinking about the psyche.

Complexes

Jung considered that the personal unconscious is composed of functional units called complexes, and he reached the concept of the complex through some important and ground-breaking work he did as a young man on word association. He found that there were internal distractions which interfered with the association of the subjects to the test words, so that their reaction time was longer for some words than others. These responses tended to form groups of ideas which were affectively toned and which he named complexes or 'feeling-toned

complexes'. The word association test suggested the presence of many types of complex not merely, as Freud claimed, a core sexual complex, or Oedipus complex.

Complexes are determined by experience but also by the individual's way of reacting to that experience. A complex is in the main unconscious and has a tendency to behave independently or autonomously so that the individual may feel that his behaviour is out of his control. We probably have all said at one time or another when we have done something seemingly out of character: 'I don't know what came over me'. This sense of autonomy is perhaps most marked in abnormal states of mind, and can be seen most clearly in people who are ill; whom we sometimes think of as possessed, but complexes are parts of the psyche of us all.

Complexes have their roots in the collective unconscious and are tinged with archetypal contents. The problem for the individual is not the existence of the complexes per se, but the breakdown of the psyche's capacity to regulate itself. Jung held that the psyche has the ability to bring into awareness dissociated complexes and archetypal material in order to provide a balance or compensation to conscious life. He thought that the ego was prone to making inappropriate choices or to one-sidedness, and that material arising from the unconscious could help to bring a better balance to the individual and enable further development to take place.

The further development tends to take place in a situation of conflict, which Jung saw as a creative and inevitable part of human life. When unconscious contents break through into consciousness it can lead to increased development in the individual. However, complexes can easily manifest themselves without the ego being strong enough to reflect on them and enable them to be made use of, and it is then that they cause us (and other people) difficulties. Jung was more concerned with the present and with future development than with delving into the past, emphasising a teleological approach and being concerned with the meaning of symptoms and their purpose.

The collective unconscious

The theory of the collective unconscious is one of the distinctive features of Jung's psychology. He took the view that the whole personality is present in potentia from birth and that personality is not solely a function of the environment, as was thought at the time when he was developing his ideas, but

merely brings out what is already there. The role of the environment is to emphasise and develop aspects already within the individual.

Every infant is born with an intact blueprint for life, both physically and mentally, and while these ideas were very controversial at the time, there is much more agreement now that each animal species is uniquely equipped with a repertoire of behaviours adapted to the environment in which it has evolved. This repertoire is dependent on what ethologists call 'innate releasing mechanisms' which the animal inherits in its central nervous system and which become activated when appropriate stimuli are encountered in the environment. These ideas are very close indeed to the theory of archetypes developed by Jung. He wrote:

'the term archetype is not meant to denote an inherited idea, but rather an inherited mode of functioning, corresponding to the inborn way in which the chick emerges from the egg, the bird builds its nest, a certain kind of wasp stings the motor ganglion of the caterpillar, and eels find their way to the Bermudas. In other words, it is a "pattern of behaviour". This aspect of the archetype, the purely biological one, is the proper concern of scientific psychology'. (CW18, para 1228).

The archetypes predispose us to approach life and to experience it in certain ways, according to patterns laid down in the psyche. There are archetypal figures, such as mother, father, child, archetypal events, such as birth, death, separation, and archetypal objects such as water, the sun, the moon, snakes, and so on. These images find expression in the psyche, in behaviour and in myths. It is only archetypal images that are capable of being known and coming to consciousness, the archetypes themselves are deeply unconscious and unknowable.

I have mentioned the biological, instinctual pole of the archetype, but Jung perceived the concept as a spectrum, there being an opposing, spiritual pole which also has an enormous impact on behaviour. Archetypes have a fascinating, numinous quality to them which makes them difficult to ignore, and attracts people to venerate or worship archetypal images.

The Self

The Self for Jung comprises the whole of the psyche, including all its potential. It is the organising genius behind the personality, and is responsible for bringing about the best adjustment in each stage of life that circumstances can allow. Crucially, it has a teleological function: it is forward looking, seeking fulfilment.

The goal of the Self is wholeness, and Jung called this search for wholeness the process of individuation, the purpose being to develop the organism's fullest potential.

It is a distinguishing feature of Jungian psychology that the theory is organised from the point of view of the Self, not from that of the ego, as early Freudian theory was, and the teleological perspective of Jung is also distinctive. The ego, along with other structures, develops out of the Self which exists from the beginning of life. The Self is rooted in biology but also has access to an infinitely wider range of experience, including the whole wealth of the cultural and religious realms, and the depths of which all human beings are capable. It is therefore capable of being projected on to figures or institutions which carry power: God, the sun, kings and queens and so on.

Persona

This is a part of the personality which comes into existence 'for reasons of adaptation or personal convenience'. The origin of the term comes from the mask worn by Greek actors in antiquity and denotes the part of the personality which we show to the world. The persona has been called 'the packaging of the ego' or the ego's public relations person, and is a necessary part of our everyday functioning. One might say that one's social success depends on having a reasonably well-functioning persona, one which is flexible enough to adapt to different situations, and which is a good reflection of the ego qualities which lie behind it.

However trouble comes when a person is identified with their persona, and everyone will have come across people who cannot leave behind their work persona, such as a teacher who treats everyone as though they were still in primary school, or bossily tells people what to do. Although this is annoying to be with, the more serious part of it is that it may leave major aspects of the personality unrealised, and the individual therefore significantly impoverished. The persona grows out of the need in childhood to adapt to the expectations of parents, teachers and peers, and this may well mean that the persona carries traits of personality which are desirable, leaving the opposite, undesirable traits to form part of the shadow.

The shadow

This carries all the things we do not want to know about ourselves or do not like. The shadow is a complex in the personal unconscious with its roots in the collective unconscious and is the complex most easily accessible to the conscious mind. It often possesses qualities which are opposite from those in the persona, and therefore opposite from those of which we are conscious. Here is the Jungian idea of one aspect of the personality compensating for another: where there is light, there must also be shadow. If the compensatory relationship breaks down, it can result in a shallow personality with little depth and with excessive concern for what other people think about him or her. So while it can be troublesome, and may remain largely unconscious, the shadow is an important aspect of our psyche and part of what gives depth to our personalities. The fascination which the differing, contrasting, or opposing aspects of personality hold for us, is illustrated in such novels as Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, or The Picture of Dorian Gray.

The way in which we most immediately experience the shadow is as we project it on to other people, so that we can be fairly sure that traits which we cannot stand in other people really belong to ourselves and that we are trying to disown them. While difficult and painful, it is important that we work at owning our shadow to bring it into relationship with our persona, and so provide some integration of these two complexes within our personality.

Anima and animus

The next two complexes in the personal unconscious are perhaps the most difficult to understand and the most contentious. Jung conceived of there being at another psychic level a contrasexual archetype, designated as anima in the man and animus in the woman. These figures are derived in part from the archetypes of the feminine and masculine, and in part from the individual's own life experience with members of the opposite sex beginning with mother and father. They inhabit the unconscious depths as a compensation for the one-sided attitude of consciousness and a way of rounding out the experience of belonging to one sex or the other.

Just as happens with the shadow, these archetypes are met with firstly in projected form. They carry with them the numinous quality which accounts for falling in love at first sight, which one can think of as a projection in a man on to an unknown woman of an archetypal image and the woman then becomes fascinating and immensely appealing.

While he was influenced by the gender-based thinking of his time, Jung recognised that the “masculine” aspects of the psyche such as autonomy, separateness, and aggression were not superior to the “feminine” aspects such as nurturance, relatedness, and empathy. Rather, they form two halves of a whole, both of which belong to every individual, and neither of which is superior to the other. One can see this as a development of the emphasis on the masculine psyche in Freud’s work. These complexes need to be related to in their “otherness”, and connect the ego to the objective psyche.

Individuation

Jung called the search for wholeness within the human psyche, the process of individuation. It may be described as a process of circumambulation around the Self as the centre of personality. The person aims to become conscious of him or herself as a unique human being, but at the same time, no more nor less than any other human being.

For Jung, conflict is not only inherent in human psychology, but is necessary for growth. In order to become more conscious, one must be able to bear conflict. There are many internal opposites, as well as those experienced in the outside world. If the tension between the opposites can be borne, then out of this clash something new and creative can grow. In Jung’s view, this ‘something’ is a symbol which will contribute to a new direction which does justice to both sides of a conflict and which is a product of the unconscious rather than of rational thought.

For Jung the symbol is something which cannot be fully explained or understood but has the quality of both conscious and unconscious worlds. The symbol may be the agent of transformation which brings about the development which was so important an aspect of his thinking, and which leads towards individuation as the goal towards which humans strive.

References

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