

The Heart of the Matter
Individuation as an Ethical Process

C H R I S T I N A B E C K E R

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Introduction

To be ethical is work, and it is the essential human task. Human beings cannot look “above” for what is right and wrong, good or evil; we must struggle with these questions and recognize that, while there are no clear answers, it is still crucial to continue probing further and refining our judgements more precisely. This is an endless process of moral reflection.¹

- Murray Stein

The subjects of morality, conscience, and ethics have occupied the minds of theologians, philosophers, scientists, and psychologists for as long as human beings have wondered about the nature of the universe. The exploration of these matters is connected with a deep, innate need to understand what it means to be human. In this search, we look for the differentiation between being human and being inhuman and seek answers to fundamental questions such as: Is there a god? What is the meaning of life? How do human beings live harmoniously with each other? What behaviour is acceptable and what is not? And what defines a good person? This journey is deeply embedded in our psyches and influences our emotional responses to life’s situations based on the degree to which we feel guilt, shame, embarrassment, compassion, anger, outrage, gratitude, and/or forgiveness in different situations.

My own exploration of these issues came from a personal experience that involved a profound ethical conflict and defined my whole training as a Jungian analyst. Several opposites were constellated in this psychological crisis: collective ethical codes and my individual conscience; the principles of Logos and the values of Eros ; the desire for a quick and easy collective solution and the need to remain with my own psychological process in analysis. I felt as if I was in a battle between

1. Murray Stein, “Introduction” in *Jung on Evil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 10.

my ego and some Other, and this Other insisted I heed the values of Eros and introversion while the rationality of Logos and of the collective moral/ethical code was absolutely clear about the impropriety of the situation. In analysis, I was forced into my own ethical confrontation with the unconscious as I came to grips with my shadow and aspects of my personality that I had repressed.

This psychological experience constituted a paralysis of sorts, which prevented me from acting according to the dictates of either position. Instead, I vacillated between opposing attitudes and feelings. I came to understand the universality of this experience through Jung's description of a "conflict of duty." In his foreword to Erich Neumann's *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*, Jung writes: "The chief causes of neurosis are conflicts of conscience and difficult moral problems that require an answer."² He goes on to name these conflicts as "conflicts of duty" that arise from a clash between the individual and some outside force. A solution cannot be answered by the collective but must come from somewhere within the individual. For Jung, "the treatment of neurosis is not, in the last resort, a technical problem but a moral one."³

While Freud thought that moral law was an expression of outward value, Jung believed that this law actually came from within as part of the archetypal level of the human psyche. Jung also wrote in the same foreword:

If a man is endowed with an ethical sense and is convinced of the sanctity of ethical values, he is on the surest road to a conflict of duty. And although this looks desperately like a moral catastrophe, it alone makes possible a higher differentiation of ethics and a broadening of consciousness. A conflict of duty forces us to examine our conscience and therefore to discover the shadow. This, in turn, forces us to come to terms with the unconscious.⁴

The seeds of Jung's psychological conception of this moral "conflict of duty" can be found in his personal journey. An early experience of God was the catalyst for his own conflict, which resulted from his attempt to reconcile a personal experience with a collective notion of morality that he had inherited from his father's theology and Christianity. This search would deepen following his break with Freud in 1912. Jung's

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2. C.G. Jung, "Foreword to Neumann: Depth Psychology and the New Ethic" in *The Symbolic Life*, Vol. 18 of *The Collected Works* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), paragraph 1408.
 3. *Ibid.*, paragraph 1412.
 4. *Ibid.*, paragraph 1417.

work during the ensuing three or four years produced many images, fantasies, and other material from the unconscious that he studied for the rest of his life. During those initial years, he was confronted with the conflict between his public position as an academic and psychiatrist and a deeper calling to pursue his scientific experiment in the fascinating unconscious world that he had just discovered. In one of his last papers, “A Psychological View of Conscience”, Jung presents a lifetime of experience and reflections on his personal solution to this “conflict of duty.” The paper makes a clear distinction between Freud’s collective moral code or superego and individual conscience, which Jung identifies as the “Voice of God.” “If the voice of conscience is the voice of God,” he writes, “this voice must possess an incomparably higher authority than traditional morality.”⁵ “Conscience—no matter on what it is based,” he goes on, “commands the individual to obey his inner voice even at the risk of going astray.”⁶

For Jung, this inner “Voice of God” was the voice of individuation and the Self. The Self is the centre of the personality, the inner divinity within each individual that guides one’s life and destiny. Individuation, according to Jung, is a natural developmental process within every individual, which helps him become the person he was meant to be. In other words, it is a process through which an individual becomes more him or herself—more authentic and distinct from other people and from collective values and norms.

The moral tension that Jung outlines between the individual and the collective is an archetypal one. A similar debate can be found between Lao Tzu in the *Tao Te Ching* and the more collective Confucian morality. Jung was deeply influenced by Taoist philosophy. It is here that we find the origins of one of Jung’s major contributions to our understanding of the psyche: the principle of opposition. This concept is imaged in the Taoist Tai Chi symbol showing black and white contained in a circle. It reflects the Eastern philosophy that all psychic life consists of dualities such as light-dark, masculine-feminine, white-black, Sun-Moon, and right-wrong. Jung recognized this principle as “the ineradicable and indispensable pre-condition of all psychic life,”⁷ and said that it “constitutes the phenomenology of the paradoxical self, man’s total-

5. C.G. Jung, “A Psychological View of Conscience” in *Civilization in Transition*, Vol. 10 of *The Collected Works* (Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press , 1958), paragraph 840.

6. *Ibid.*, paragraph 841.

7. C.G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Vol. 14 of *The Collected Works* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), paragraph 206.

ity.”⁸ He saw that it was inherent in a psychic system that was naturally self-regulating and self-healing.

It is this conflict within the psyche that Jung felt was the cause of neurosis or psychological distress and the precondition for psychic development and consciousness. The opposites first appear in an undifferentiated way: they are experienced as irreconcilable with no immediate solution. It is the tension and the irreconcilability of the situation that results in neurotic symptoms. However, when the collision between two opposing forces becomes so intense, a solution must be found, and the two elements are reconciled in a new, more differentiated way. The solution is a non-rational one, that is; it cannot be fashioned by the rational mind. Jung saw the third or reconciling element coming from a symbol that is acceptable to both opposing forces and that can unite the opposites. He named this element the transcendent function and saw it as the mediator of the individual’s conflict of duty. “The resolution of the conflict comes from the appearance of the reconciling motif such as that of the orphan or abandoned child. Rather than opposition, there now appears as a new-born configuration, symbolic of the nascent whole, a figure possessing potentials beyond those that the conscious mind has yet been able to conceive.”⁹

The symbol expressed by the transcendent function has an important teleological function—that is, it has a psychic purpose; it is the psyche’s means of evolution. When the transcendent function can rise above the human condition and carry with it a particularly numinous quality, it is connected to the God-Image or the Self. This connection is the goal of the individuation process, as the Self is the archetype of orientation and meaning. Often it is the symbol of the Child that reflects this new psychic configuration and is the bearer of the Self. The archetype of the Child also embodies the personality’s urge for self-realization. As Jung writes:

It [The Child] represents the strongest, the most ineluctable urge in every human being, namely the urge to realize itself. It is, as it were, an incarnation of the inability to do otherwise, equipped with all the powers of nature and instinct, whereas the conscious mind is always getting caught up in its supposed ability to do otherwise. The urge and compulsion to self-realization is a law of nature and thus is invincible power.¹⁰

8. *Ibid.*, paragraph 4.

9. Andrew Samuels, Bani Shorter, and Fred Plaut, *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1986), p. 103.

The symbol of the child is duplicitous because of its link to the past, remnants of our own childhood and parts of our personality that are undeveloped, infantile and repressed. These aspects of our personality are attached to the Shadow because they are parts deemed to be unacceptable. It means psychologically that the deeper levels of the psyche—of the Self—can only be reached through the undifferentiated childlike parts of ourselves. It is the aspect of our personality that is also the closest to the inferior function, i.e., the typological function that is the closest to the unconscious. The child then becomes the Child-Hero who embarks on the perilous journey and overcomes great obstacles toward wholeness. “Child’ means something evolving toward independence. This it cannot do without detaching itself from its origins: abandonment is therefore a necessary condition, not just a concomitant symptom.”¹¹

Jung’s ethical call in the individual voice of individuation implies finding one’s own path that is separate from the collective. In this way, the Child-Hero becomes the Orphan separated from the World-Parents, isolated, and expelled from the collective tribe. The journey through the forest of the unconscious is a lonely and introverted journey. It is necessary to contend with all the negative, destructive, and unpleasant elements contained there, and to challenge ego ideals, perceptions, and conceptions. The strength and ethical response of the ego are needed to meet and accept the Shadow. It is only through this journey that we develop the “right relationship” to our inner world, find our inner morality, and meet the Self—that is, the carrier of the personality’s wholeness, integrity, and authenticity. This suggests an implicit connection between wholeness and behaving out of one’s integrity, essence, and morality. Individuation is an ethical process.

Identification of this connection is not unique to Jung; it is also found in other writings on ethics and morality. In the context of individuation, as we connect to our wholeness, we also connect to our inner morality and values. Jung’s personal work with the unconscious and his writings on the ethical and moral dimensions of individuation illustrate the specific moral challenges that we face when we begin to work with the unconscious. He has also offered us a moral ideal: a model of the necessary attitude and courage that we need if we embark on the same path.

10. C.G. Jung, “The Psychology of the Child Archetype” in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Vol. 9 of *The Collected Works* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), paragraph 289.

11. *Ibid.*, paragraph 287.

In spite of Jung's strong ethical ideals, he was not above acting out of his own Shadow, and analytical psychology has suffered from this legacy and inherited flaw. It is widely known that Jung had intimate relationships with at least two of his analysands. Specifically, in the case of Sabina Spielrein, his attempts to conceal the nature of their association and to defend himself was far from exemplary, and his career as a young psychiatrist was almost destroyed as a result.

The ethical opposites that Jung outlined in "A Psychological View of Conscience" make up the tension that analytical psychologists face in daily practice today. For many years, a good number of Jungian societies resisted instituting ethical codes governing acceptable behaviour for their members because they felt this would be antithetical to Jung's vision of the individuation process. What was more important, in their view, was the individual's personal code of ethics that would serve to guide analysts through difficult ethical situations. Ethical standards were argued to be ego and rational constructs that would not allow space for the unconscious to speak. Like Freud's collective moral codes, ethical codes were thought to have the potential to be a series of "Thou shalt nots" and they would legislate the Shadow out of existence.

However, the ethical climate that analytical psychology is currently facing is a particularly challenging one. In many parts of the world, analytical psychology has been forced to adapt to collective standards of ethical behaviour as the result of increased government regulation of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. There is a growing recognition that ethical codes are needed to protect analysands and to preserve the integrity of the profession. Such standards reflect the group norm concerning what is and is not acceptable. Ethical codes help to draw the magic circle, or sacred temenos, around analytic work and provide guidelines against which to measure our behaviour.

Individuation as an ethical process affects analysands as they traverse the unknown waters of the unconscious in the struggle for meaning and wholeness; and it affects analysts as they face the ethical dilemmas of practice and struggle with collective moral norms. As Jung wrote, "ethical values must not be injured on either side if the treatment is to be successful."¹²

Ethical action and reflection lie in the precarious balance between individual conscience and the collective moral code. Like the symbol of the Child, the symbol of the Heart embodies this tension. The Heart is the centre of the psyche, and the center of the body. It is the seat of the Self. Both Eastern and Western ancient philosophical traditions have

12. Jung, "Conscience" in *The Symbolic Life*, paragraph 852.

informed this understanding of the Heart. The Chinese refer to the “Heart-Mind” or *Hsin*—the place of a certain kind of ethical thinking that establishes priorities, assigns values, discerns duties, and recognizes obligations. The Hindus refer to the *Anabata chakra*—the place of compassion, forgiveness, and detachment, where the *Purusa* “or the Self” is born.

Psychologically, the Heart performs an integrative psychic function, and carries individual morality. The Heart is the place where opposites converge: Logos and Eros; masculine and feminine; thinking and feeling; the rationality of the ego and the irrationality of the unconscious. It possesses its own knowledge and its own truth. This truth is distinct from the truth of the mind while also containing it. The Heart is the seat of conscience, understanding, forgiveness, grace, and our ethical attitude; it is the place of dialogue. In the Heart, we can be in the ethical attitude of holding both polarities until the new attitude appears.

This book is an inquiry into philosophical and spiritual aspects of individuation’s ethical dimensions. Specifically, these aspects are viewed in the context of people actively engaged in their process and in the practice of analytical psychology. The book is aimed at clients and patients wishing to understand how to live an ethical life when confronted with the amorality of the unconscious and the ethical conflicts of duty that arise. I also hope to serve analysts, therapists, and those in training by providing a framework for thinking and reflecting on these issues. The work spans many aspects of this complicated topic: Is morality learned or is it innate? How do we live in the world ethically, authentically, and with integrity? What is the distinction between the individual “Voice of God” and collective ethical codes? and How do we live this tension in our lives and in day-to-day practice as analysts? Finally, how do we confront the Shadow in individuals and collectives and bring these elements to consciousness?



The book is divided into two parts. The first part looks at individuation as an ethical process as Jung understood it. Included in this examination are Jung’s philosophical influences and personal experiences, which informed his belief that morality is innate in human beings and rests at the archetypal level of the psyche. Our explorations will also present a classical notion of analytical psychology within the philosophical and psychological contexts of ethics, morality, and conscience. They will give us insights into the underpinnings of Jung’s theories and ideas. Particular

moral and ethical challenges will be highlighted—especially related to conscience and the ethical confrontation with the unconscious.

The second part of the book addresses more collective, twenty-first-century implications of Jung's ideas of the "Voice of God". It also explores contemporary issues related to the practice of analytic psychology, given the legacy of Jung's personal relationships with his clients. While supporting individual subjective psychic experience, analysts can side with the psyche to the neglect of collective ethical codes. As a result, many analysts have committed serious boundary violations, all in the name of following the "Voice of God" or the Self. In recent years, the Jungian community has come to the unanimous agreement that sexual activity between analyst and analysand represents a serious rupture in the analytic relationship. However, between the obvious inappropriateness of sexual activity and the institution of strict, rigid rules prohibiting any crossing of analytic boundaries, there exists a field where there are no hard and fast rules, and where the line between ethical and unethical behaviour is difficult to distinguish. It is possible for an analyst to adhere strictly to collective codes of ethics prescribed by governing bodies and still behave unethically. In this space, the subject of ethics is a much more delicate and ambiguous endeavour. Most of the issues that arise within this area involve non-sexual boundary violations.

As part of this discussion, we will examine the archetypal foundations of analytic boundaries and the important role they play in supporting individuation as an ethical process—for both analyst and analysand. I will argue that the therapeutic relationship has an archetypal core that informs our experience of analysis. The constellation of the Divine Healer with its potential to heal also brings with it the potential for the Charlatan and the False Prophet to wound. Central questions within this dynamic are: What is the difference between flexibility and violation? When is the crossing of the boundary experienced as healing by the analysand? When is it experienced as wounding? Case material is provided, which presents both sides of this issue. I have also included the results of a survey I prepared as part of the research for my Diploma Thesis at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zürich. In it, I asked practicing analysts (members of the IAAP) how they lived the tension between individual conscience and collective moral codes in their daily practice. In conclusion, I look at suffering and the ethical attitudes required to live individuation as an ethical process in everyday life and in our practice.