

Lecture: 2015 Personality Lecture 06: Depth Psychology: Carl Jung (Part 01)

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SUMMARY

The discussion centers on Carl Jung's profound insights into the human psyche, contrasting his ideas with those of Freud and Nietzsche. Jung's exploration of the unconscious as a complex, structured entity, rather than merely a repository of repressed experiences, highlights the biological and historical depth of human behavior and imagination.

- Jung is often mischaracterized, facing accusations of antisemitism and forming a new religion, but his work is more radical and nuanced.*
- He engaged deeply with the unconscious, viewing it as a sophisticated structure that shapes human behavior and imagination.*
- Jung's ideas were influenced by Nietzsche and Freud, particularly regarding the implications of the decline of religious belief on morality and motivation.*
- He believed that the unconscious is not just a primitive Id but a rich source of archetypes and symbolic representations that guide human experience.*
- Jung's perspective on history and psychology emphasizes a biological foundation for the psyche, considering evolutionary processes over millennia.*
- The unconscious, for Jung, is populated by living sub-personalities that influence behavior, rather than merely being a collection of repressed memories.*
- He argued that human beings are often "possessed" by instinctual systems, which can manifest in powerful emotions and actions, such as love and aggression.*
- Jung's exploration of archetypes, such as the duality of good and evil represented in stories like Cain and Abel, reflects the complex interplay of human nature and morality.*

So, today we're gonna talk about Jung, and I find that tremendously entertaining I am not sure I've ever read anyone as intelligent as Jung Except, maybe Nietzsche. It's funny, he is accused of many things, such as starting a new religion by some rather unscrupulous biographers But what he did was actually far more radical than anything he's ever been accused of.

One other thing I should tell you too, is Jung is often been accused of antisemitism, but one of things that came into light last year, is that he was working as an agent for the American government during World War II and frequently set updates on Hitler's psychological condition to the highest levels of the American government He never told anybody about that So, you know, that's a little hard on the old accusations on antisemitism, I think which I never thought held any merit anyways So, Jung He (Jung) was a strange guy, in many ways.

Extraordinarily imaginative He could get lost in daydreams and was a tremendously powerful visualizer and a lot of what he discovered was a consequence of engaging in long-term elaborated fantasies and in these fantasies, he could have conversations with figures of his imagination and communicate with them.

I had a client at one point who was a very prolific dreamer and she can talk to her characters in her dreams and ask them what they meant symbolically and they would tell her That was really something I've only seen one person who was capable of doing that I don't know if it helped her that much, in the final analysis but she could do it Jung was very very interested in the depths of the human imagination his body of work can be viewed as an amalgam of many things, but he had deep knowledge of Latin and Greek and he had studied alchemical manuscripts for many many years as an older man so he was very interested in the emergence of the idea of science from what he considered the collective imagination but in many ways his primary modern intellectual influences, I would say, were Nietzsche and Freud.

And Jung really set out, somewhat like Piaget, to address the gap between religion and science but he did it for different reasons than Piaget. Jung took Nietzsche's comments about the death of God very seriously and one of the things Nietzsche predicted at the end of the 19th century was that there were going to be two major consequences of the collapse of formal religious belief he believed that that would lead people to a morally relativistic condition that would prove psychologically intolerable because if you adopt a moral relativist position and you take it to its final conclusion then everything is of equal value and there's no gradient between things there's no better, and there's no worse.

And, in the final analysis, you might say, well, there's no good and there's no evil and the problem with that is you can't actually orient yourself in a world that has those properties because in order to act, as we've already talked about with regards to the cybernetic models, you have to be aiming at something that's better than what you have now or there's no reason to expend the energy and so you need the gradient, you need a value differentiation in order to act and Nietzsche's analysis was predicated on the idea that if the value hierarchy collapsed well not only would people not be motivated to do anything anymore but they would also be extraordinarily confused and depressed because the value would go out of their lives and the consequence of that would be that they would become somewhat nihilistic or maybe absolutely nihilistic or that they would turn to ideological, rigid ideological systems as a replacement.

Now, what Nietzsche offered as an alternative to that was that human beings could create their own values and so his idea was that the Superman, the Overman -- depending on how you look at it would be the person who is capable of transcending the valueless universe that the decline of religion had left with us and creating their own values as a conscious act. The problem with that is that it isn't obvious that you can create your own values as a conscious act because it's not obvious that values are consciously created And I think this is why the psychoanalysts had so much to add to the philosophical debate at least the philosophical debate that developed to the point of Nietzsche's observations.

When Freud entered the scene, the idea of the unconscious was in the air, but Freud formalized it to a much greater degree than anyone else had, and Freud's theory really is deeply biological it's biological, it's social as

well, but his proposition, the proposition that there is an Id is fundamentally the proposition that you're not necessarily... Your consciousness, for sure, is not the master in its own house. Now, I think part of the reason that people like to go after Freud --there's a variety of reasons-- but one of them is, that modern people basically accept radical Freudian presuppositions more or less as givens now So if you are a brilliant thinker and your thought permeates the society to the point where your most radical propositions are accepted by everyone, all that's really left are your errors.

And so it's easy to concentrate on Freud's errors because we've already digested everything he had to say that was particularly profound. I don't imagine --perhaps I'm wrong but I don't imagine that there's anyone in this room to whom the news that many of your motivations aren't conscious comes as a surprise. I mean, even psychologists have admitted that in the last 20 years They talked about the cognitive unconscious which I think is a real slight of hand maneuver to stop them from having to credit Freud with his discoveries and I also think that Freud's notion of the unconscious is far more sophisticated than the cognitive scientists' notion because Freud viewed the unconscious as a place that was basically populated by fragmented personalities not cognitive schemes of one form or another or not processes but things that were like living beings.

You know, you think, 'Well are the living beings in your unconscious?' And the answer to that is, well, 'are you alive or not?' And you're alive so you're composed of living subcomponents and they're not machines, or at least not in any way that we understand machines They're fragmentary sub-personalities and each of them has their own worldview and rationalizations and emotional structure and goals And so that's why when you're hungry you see the world through the eye of a hungry person and you think thoughts about food And your emotional reactions depends on whether the food is available or whether it isn't and maybe whether not the food you want is available and whether it isn't and that's nature, so to speak, imposing its necessities on you as a living being.

For Freud, that was the Id and Freud thought of the Id really as something that was primordial and primitive and that was one of the things that really separated him from Jung. I think Jung is much more accurate from the perspective of evolutionary psychology In fact, I think he's radically underestimated as a thinker whose thought was unbelievably deeply grounded in biology and Jung was a remarkable person because his notion of history and the relationship between history and the human psyche covered spans of time that were really until modern historians and evolutionary psychologists started to talk about 'deep time' and the fact that, you know, the entire 4-billion-year history of the world is in some sense relevant to us as beings or at least the 3-billion, 3.5-billion-year history that there's been life on the planet.

Ancient history for European philosophers was like 500 to 2000 years ago and Jung thought way past that, way back farther than that. and started to take into serious account the fact that the origins of our psyche, the ground of our psyche, is deeply biological and that it's an emergent property, so for Freud, Freud's idea of the unconscious is somewhat difficult to understand because there's sort of two elements to it. There's the ID, which is the source of primordial motivation and Freud concentrated mostly on aggression and sexuality and the reason he concentrated on those two --although he concentrated on what he called the death instinct later in his life-- the reason he concentrated on those two primarily wasn't because he regarded them necessarily as the most compelling of motivations but he regarded those motivations as the ones that were most difficult, for most

people to integrate successfully into the social world So he thought that they were most likely to be repressed and therefore underdeveloped and immature.

And I think that's that's a reasonable proposition I think that modern people would have to add eating to that because since the time of Freud we've gone, I would say, from a high proportion of sexually related pathologies to a very very high proportion of eating related pathologies but that's in some sense beside the point. So that's one part of the Freudian unconscious, sort of an implicit unconscious, and then the other part of the Freudian unconscious is those things that have happened to you that you've repressed because you don't like what they imply.

And, you know, those are very different kinds of unconscious because one of them is dependent on your experience and the other isn't You can think of Jung, actually, as a deep archaeologist of the Id And Freud though about the Id in sort of primordial terms so his angry Id would be like a beast that's out of control but Jung recognized that the unconscious was far more sophisticated, in many ways than the conscious parts of your being.

And that it guided your adaptation in ways that you didn't understand and that the ways in which it guided your adaptations and structured your understanding were universal, hence biological, and far more sophisticated than a somewhat primordial notion of biological drive might indicate. One of the things that you might consider, for example, is that from the Jungian perspective a lot of the forces that ancient people considered deities were personified representations of instinctual systems so here's a way of thinking about it --and this is a way of thinking about the collective unconscious which is Jung's, in some sense, replacement term for the Freudian Id.

So Mars, for example, was the god of war, Roman god of war and you might say, 'well, what does it mean for there to be a god of war?' or Venus as the god of love, actually of sexual attraction, more particularly or of sexual possession, which is even a better way of thinking about it And you say, 'well why would people conceptualize of those phenomena as gods?'

The Greeks said, for example, that the humans were the play things of the gods No, that was Shakespeare! I'm sorry, that was Shakespeare who said that Well, here's one way of thinking about it: what's older, you or aggression? And the answer to that is, well, you're 23 and the system that mediates biological aggression in mammals and their progenitors is tens of millions of years old. And if you think you control it, rather than the other way around you're deluded about your central nature Part of it is that you don't control it at all What happens is that you never go anywhere where you need to use it And so one of the things that happens to soldiers in wartime, for example, is they go somewhere where they could use it and out it comes, and the consequences of its emergence is so traumatic that they develop Post-traumatic Stress Disorder because they observe themselves doing things that are hyper-aggressive, that they could have never imagined that someone like them could have manifested.

And then you think, well, what about Venus as a goddess? Well, if you fall in love with someone is that a choice?

It doesn't look like a choice I mean, if it's a choice it's often an incredibly self-destructive and idiotic choice it's often one that ruins people's entire lives It's more like a state of possession and then you might say, well, possession by what? Well, it's a dynamic, living system and it's also immortal in some sense which is another reason why conceptualizing it as a deity makes sense I mean, the phenomena of love, which is a manifestation of a complex biological system will be around long after you're gone, and was there long before you showed up.

And when it manifests itself, so to speak, within you, you're possessed by it and you do it's bidding and you might do its bidding despite what you most deeply want You know, modern people tend to think that the conscious parts of their brain the, say, the more newly evolved elements of their brain because we don't actually know what the relationship is between consciousness and the newly developed parts of the brain --and the assumption is often made, that the reason we're conscious is because we've developed a very spectacular cortical cap but consciousness appears to be far older than that, so that's an erroneous assumption.

But we do tend to believe that the most complex and sophisticated parts of our brain are the cortical cap --the complex cortical cap-- that's quite enlarged in human beings relative to our body size because it's the newest systems and it's also part of the systems that allow us to do such things as communicate with language and think in abstract symbols. But there's a different way of thinking about this from a biological perspective and that is, what makes you think that the newest system is the most sophisticated one?

Why don't you assume that the oldest system is the most sophisticated one. Because it's been around for... Well, for example, the mechanism in your neurological... The mechanism that underlies your conception of your relationship to the dominance hierarchy, for example, is at least 300 million years old and the reason it's lasted 300 million years is because it knows what it's doing. It's far older than the parts of your brain that make you conscious in the specifically human way and it's so deeply embedded in your brain in some sense, that you have almost no voluntary control over it.

And that's why, for example, one of the things that happens to people who are depressed is that the system that reports their dominance status reports that they're low. Now, sometimes that's true because they're not depressed, they just have an awful life and they're actually at the bottom of the dominance hierarchy, and that's not the same as being depressed. But sometimes it malfunctions, so someone who's competent and well situated in life and who appears to have everything that a person could possibly desire in order to have a decent and meaningful and positive life are still catastrophically depressed.

And what seems to happen in those circumstances is that the dominance counter, for one reason or another, is acting as if they're actually incredibly low status when they're in fact not. And I think that's a good definition of clinical depression. I also think that part of the reason that there's mixed results with regards to anti-depressants trials is because anti-depressants don't help you if you're at the bottom of the dominance hierarchy. How could they? You're not depressed, you just have a terrible life!

That is not the same thing! And they need to be carefully distinguished because if you're unemployed and you're facing the loss of your home, and maybe your partner's going to leave you, and your children hate you, an

anti-depressant is very unlikely to fix that. Now, to the degree that misbehavior on your part caused by impulsivity and increased aggression and decreased mood because of your reaction to that circumstance is making it worse, then the anti-depressant might help you, and maybe the anti-depressant will help you regain enough cognitive control so that you can plan your way out of the situation but as a medication in and of itself, there's no possible way it can lift you out of those often catastrophically complex and disintegrating circumstances. Whereas, if your life is fine but you feel terrible, well, it's much more likely that an anti-depressant can help with that because in some sense what it's going to do is to readjust the reporting of your dominance counter, so to speak to the level that's appropriate for your level of competence, which is really what you want. You know, people say you should have self-esteem. I would say, idiots say that you should have high self-esteem. It's an unbelievably corrupt construct in many ways because it's actually very very highly correlated with baseline levels of neuroticism, negatively, which is a fundamental personality trait, and baseline levels of extroversion so someone with low self-esteem is generally someone who's introverted and has high levels of negative emotion, it's a trait-like phenomena. It isn't clear at all that calling that low self-esteem has any utility whatsoever. But then you also might ask yourself, 'well, how much self-esteem should you have?'

Well, and that's a very complex question because you can clearly have way too much. That's what would make you a narcissist. So I would say your self-esteem should be roughly equivalent to the esteem to which you're held by members of your society. You know, your family and your society, because they're judging you, at least in part, on your competence. And you shouldn't think that you're more competent than you are, and you shouldn't think that you're less competent than you are.

You should think that you're as competent as you are. And sometimes that means that you're not competent at all because you don't know what you're doing and sometimes it means that you're quite competent. Now, I think it's complicated by the fact that you should also regard yourself not only as who you are but as who you could be. And so if you're of lowly dominance status, which for example in some sense you guys are because you're young and, you know, you're starting your lives the fact that there's a lot of potential that you still are able to manifest should tilt the self-assessment balance in your favor, to a fair degree.

Anyways, Jung was very interested in the depths of the psyche and for him the unconscious wasn't a repository of repressed experiences, and it wasn't a repository of underdeveloped and irritated biological systems. It was instead the underlying structure of consciousness itself. So Jung believed that human experience, as it's consciously manifested, was structured by underlying patterns of behavior that were specific and unique to humankind although shared to some degree with other animals. And then on top of that a realm of imagistic and symbolic representation that in part was a consequence of representation of those underlying behaviors. So here's a way of thinking about it: We act in a human way, whatever that means and we've been acting in a human way for as long as there's been human beings and we've been acting in a mammalian way for as long as there's been mammals.

Now, human beings are quite peculiar creatures because, not only do we act, we also watch ourselves act and we represent those actions. And Jung believed that as a consequence of us manifesting a specific set of typically human behaviors over hundreds of thousands --or perhaps millions of years-- we also evolved the cognitive

apparatus that was capable of representing those patterns of behavior and that cognitive apparatus expressed the representations of those fundamental patterns of behavior in imagistic and symbolic form and the basic imagistic and symbolic form is something like drama.

Now, why would that be? Well, it's obvious in some sense What is drama? Drama is the representation, the abstract representation, of patterns of behavior That's what you do when you go to a movie You watch people manifest their characteristic behaviors. And then you might note that there is characteristic, quasi unique patterns of behavior that are portrayed in drama. So, for example, there's the bad guy, and he wears a black hat in a cowboy movie and whenever you go to a movie it's pretty clear to you right away who the good guys are and the bad guys are and you accept the distinction between good and bad guys as an apriori acceptable distinction.

So Jung would say, 'well, that's the action of an archetype' what underlies that is the archetypal story of the hostile brothers and hostile brothers, for example, are Cain and Abel The story of Cain and Abel in Genesis, by the way, is really the second story that's in that origin myth and it's the first story about real human beings, right? Because Adam and Eve, so to speak, were created by God, whereas Cain and Abel were born. The first brothers.

Well, what happened? Well, one of them became insanely jealous of the other and murdered him. So that's a pretty harsh story when you think that the monotheistic religions of the West, roughly speaking, put as one of their foundational stories the idea that there is a twin pair of forces operating in the human psyche that can be conceptualized as brothers who are murderously opposed to one another