

6 The Concept of the Self

In an interesting passage, again taken from his commentary on 'The Secret of the Golden Flower', Jung describes how some of his patients, faced with what appeared to be an insoluble conflict, solved it by 'outgrowing' it, by developing 'a new level of consciousness'. He writes: 'Some higher or wider interest appeared on the patient's horizon, and through this broadening of his outlook the insoluble problem lost its urgency. It was not solved logically in its own terms, but faded out when confronted with a new and stronger life urge.'¹

The attainment of this new level of psychological development includes a certain degree of the detachment discussed in the last chapter; in this case detachment from one's own emotions. 'One certainly does feel the affect and is shaken and tormented by it, yet at the same time one is aware of a higher consciousness looking on which prevents one from becoming identical with the affect, a consciousness which regards the affect as an object, and can say, "I know that I suffer".'²

Characteristically, Jung gives no concrete example of what he means by an insoluble problem, no case-history of an actual individual which might serve as an illustration of what he means. Let us, therefore, guess what he means by taking a common example of an 'insoluble' conflict from psychotherapeutic practice. A middle-aged man with high ethical standards who is reasonably happily married falls passionately in love with a younger woman. If he runs off with her he does violence to his own standards of loyalty, morality, and justice; if he stays with his family he does violence to the most com-

mon; but are usually solved in the obvious way either by the man staying at home and feeling permanently resentful; or else by his going off and feeling forever guilty. What Jung is saying is that, provided the man can detach himself from both sets of emotions, there is a third possibility. His conflict can be solved by 'developing a new level of consciousness'; that is, upon a symbolic level.

In Jungian terms, the man's first task would be to differentiate the young woman from the image which he is projecting upon her; that is, to recognize the subjective nature of his infatuation. If he sees the woman as she actually is, then he will also recognize the 'anima'; the image which originates from within his own psyche. Once this is done, the path is open for an internal process of development, beginning with those dialogues with the anima and other archetypal figures of which Jung was so fond, and which seem peculiar to those who are not Jungians. In other words, this is a technique which precludes 'acting out' emotions in the external world, and transfers the conflict to the inner world of the psyche. Instead of the woman in the external world appearing to be 'the answer'; to give meaning and significance to life, emotional significance is transferred to his inner world of feeling. The internal process of development which is thus set in motion is, of course, individuation. As we have already seen, not everyone is suited to pursue this inner path of development. In youth, the passions may be too strong for the conflict to be contained; and so a one-sided, 'acted out' solution in one or other direction may be the only answer. But the kind of patient with

whom Jung was concerned was not only middle-aged, but comparatively robust psychologically: and therefore possessed the capacity for suffering the conflict and containing the dissonant emotions. It is only when a person is tough enough to tolerate the opposites within that a symbolic solution can make its appearance.

It would, of course, be argued that, ultimately, symbolic solutions are the only appropriate answer to severe emotional problems. Most difficulties in interpersonal relationships – at least between ordinary decent people – are actually referable to the 'inner worlds' of the persons concerned and not to their actual personalities in the world of reality. It is the images from this inner world which are projected upon other people which cause the trouble: and it is coming to terms with these images, or finding some way of dealing with them which is the principal task of any kind of analysis. Therefore, most long-term analyses, whether Jungian or not, are more concerned with symbolic solutions within the psyche itself than with the patient's actions in the external world.

Jung's idea was that, in our theoretical case, a sufficient degree of detachment from feelings (and I mean both the individual's 'moral' feelings and his infatuation) is only possible if the man subordinates his subjectivity to a higher, more objective goal. People who have a living faith in one or other of the orthodox creeds can often do this. The religious person, faced with such a conflict, has a higher authority to whom he can turn, a set of rules or moral principles to which he can subordinate himself, and a promise of eventual redemption and healing, if not in this world, then at least in the next. But what of the person who cannot subscribe to an orthodox creed; who does not believe in a God who will make all well in the end?

In Chapter 3, attempting to explain what Jung meant by archetypes, I quoted his remarks upon 'subjective

aptitudes'. Thus the whole nature of man presupposes woman, both physically and spiritually. His system is tuned in to woman from the start, just as it is prepared for a quite definite world where there is water, light, air, salt, carbohydrates, etc. The form of the world into which he is born is already inborn in him as virtual images, as psychic aptitudes. These *a priori* categories have by nature a collective character; they are images of parents, wife, and children in general, and are not individual predestinations.¹⁸

In Freud's view, religion should and could be replaced by science. In Jung's belief, this was quite impossible. Man had always needed, and would continue to require, some kind of religion or myth by which to live. If this was so, it followed that, inborn in man, there must be a 'virtual image', a 'psychic aptitude' for God himself. As with other archetypes, this was indefinable in itself, the flexible mould which cannot be seen until filled. God has, throughout history, taken on many shapes and many guises. This archetype Jung named the Self. As he writes in the introduction to 'Psychology and Alchemy', 'the soul must contain in itself the faculty of relation to God, i.e. a correspondence, otherwise a connection could never come about. This correspondence is, in psychological terms, the archetype of the God-image.'¹⁹

Jung was fond of quoting that ancient father of the Church, Tertullian, who was a pagan until he was about thirty-five, and who then became converted to Christianity; another example of a mid-life crisis. Amongst other dicta, Tertullian alleged that *anima naturaliter christiana*; the soul is naturally Christian; and, although Jung would not have confined the soul's predilection to Christianity, he would have supported the thesis that it was naturally religious. Above the front door of his house in Küsnacht, Jung had carved a saying originally promulgated by the Delphic oracle which, in Latin,

rather than the original Greek, states: 'Vocatus atque non vocatus, deus aderit'; that is, 'Invoked or not invoked the god will be present.'

Jung believed that only by recognizing some higher authority than the ego, could a man detach himself sufficiently from sexuality, the will-to-power, and the other compulsions of the world (see the death of the hero in Chapter 5). If a man had no god as a spiritual inner experience, he would make a god out of something else, be that sex, or power, or even reason. 'To serve a mania is detestable and undignified, but to serve a god is full of meaning and promise because it is an act of submission to a higher, invisible, and spiritual being.'¹⁵ The god which Jung discovered in the unconscious turned out to be something rather different from the God of orthodox Christianity, and Jung had to pursue somewhat obscure researches into Gnosticism, alchemy, and other repositories of *arcana* to support his finding that his own and his patients' experience of 'wholeness', of the union of opposites, of reaching a point above conflict, was also an experience of God.

This of course explains why so much of Jung's later writings are concerned with the problem of evil. Since man is both good and evil, saint and sinner, resolution of his conflicts must include coming to terms with his 'evil' side. But if God represents a union of opposites, then God must also have His evil or dark side. According to Jung, this actually corresponds with what was taught by some early religious authorities. Clement of Rome, for example, alleged that 'God rules the world with a right and left hand, the right being Christ, the left Satan.'¹⁶ As is the case with so much Jungian psychology, the exploration of what at first appear to be relatively simple ideas leads into philosophical and religious problems which are beyond the reach of any but professional philosophers and theologians. Both ignorance and lack of space

preclude me from following Jung into the complicated recesses of his arguments with theologians upon the *privatio boni*; his elaborate discussion of Satan as a fallen angel, and his portrayal of the injustice and arbitrary nature of God's dark side in 'Answer to Job'. The inquisitive reader is referred not only to this piece of 'pure poison', as Jung called it; which is to be found in Vol. II of the Collected Works, 'Psychology and Religion', but also to 'God and the Unconscious' by Father Victor White, and 'Religion and the Psychology of Jung' by Father Raymond Hostie.^{17, 18}

Religious problems of doctrine are so remote from the conceptual framework of the average Western agnostic that many readers will abandon Jung at this point. Nevertheless, Jung was, in my view, in describing the process of individuation and the experience of the Self, drawing attention to something important which does occur in human psychological development; and is not an unrealistic or delusional phantasy. Because for Jung, religious belief, however unorthodox, represented a supreme value, he was unable to conceive of this process in other than religious terms. 'The highest dominant', he writes, 'always has a religious or a philosophical character.'¹⁹ Although this was true for Jung, I do not think it is necessarily true for everyone. Although Jung would probably not have agreed, it is possible to see something closely equivalent to the individuation process in quite another field; and since, in seeking to understand Jung, I have found the analogy illuminating, I assume that some other people may do so also.

During the time of his self-analysis, Jung records that he was from time to time in contact with an 'aesthetic lady' who maintained that his phantasies, and the drawings and paintings in which he enshrined them, were really works of art. Jung was tempted so to regard them; but writes: 'If I had taken these fantasies of the uncon-

scious as art, they would have carried no more conviction than visual perceptions, as if I were watching a movie. I would have felt no moral obligation towards them. The anima might then have easily seduced me into believing that I was a misunderstood artist, and that my so-called artistic nature gave me the right to neglect reality.¹⁰ In a later passage he writes of a letter from the aesthetic lady 'in which she again stubbornly maintained that the fantasies arising from my unconscious had artistic value and should be considered art. The letter got on my nerves. It was far from stupid and therefore dangerously persuasive. The modern artist, after all, seeks to create art out of the unconscious. The utilitarianism and self-importance concealed behind this thesis touched a doubt in myself, namely, my uncertainty as to whether the fantasies I was producing were really spontaneous and natural, and not only my own arbitrary inventions.'¹¹

It is obvious, from this passage, that Jung put the production of works of art upon a far lower level than he did the emergence of religious ideas. And yet it is hard to see, if one values art, why this should be so. Serious artists agree that the works which they produce are not by any means 'arbitrary inventions' of a personal kind. Moreover, they freely acknowledge that their creations are shaped by, and take origin from, a source beyond conscious control. Novelists report that their characters take on 'lives of their own', and may behave in ways contrary to the author's original, conscious intention. Artists also often describe feelings of 'moral obligation' towards their work, in that they feel compelled to be true to whatever vision has been vouchsafed to them; and recognize that, if they try to alter or correct this too far, disaster follows and the work is a failure.

Graham Wallas, in his description of the creative process, named four stages which have become generally

accepted: preparation, incubation, illumination, verification.¹² These stages are comparable to those described by Jung as belonging to the process of individuation, and are also analogous to some of the stages of 'The Work' delineated by the alchemists. It seems curious that Jung became so irritated with his 'aesthetic lady'. It is true that neither Jung's paintings nor his writings are works of art; but what he describes as taking place in both himself and his patients is closely parallel with what artists describe as the creative process. The fact that Jung and his patients did not produce great art does not, of course, invalidate this thesis. The creative process taking place in bad artists may be much the same as the creative process in good artists, although its results may not be valuable for anyone other than the bad artist himself.

I think Jung's irritation sprang from two different sources. First, although in many ways he was personally humble, he does seem to have believed that his visions, dreams, and phantasies were direct revelations from God. He once said, referring to dreams, 'Every night, one has the chance of the Eucharist.' It will be remembered that, during his period of mental upheaval, Jung was inclined to attribute his own disturbance to a disturbance in the external world. Religious ideas seem, for Jung, to have been in a different category from creative ideas of other varieties, more 'objective' and less 'subjective', no doubt because religion represented to him the supreme value. To have compared the integrative process taking place within him, and the emergence of his own 'myth' with the production of a work of art would have seemed to Jung to denigrate his revelation.

Second, in his writings about artists, which are mostly to be found in Vol. 15 of the *Collected Works*, 'The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature', Jung specifically excluded considerations of artistic form, of 'aesthetics',

from his discussion, as being beyond the range of psychology. He confines himself to examining the content of literary productions, for instance, and neglects to examine that which makes them into works of art, that is, their style and form. It appears that Jung thought of this aspect of creation as being consciously determined, whilst content (at least in the kind of work which interested him) emerged from the unconscious. Hence he was particularly interested in creative works which were often rather naive 'phantasies from the unconscious' and lacked aesthetic value, like Rider Haggard's 'She'. Yet the evidence is that form, as well as content, is largely determined by unconscious forces. Hence Anton Ehrenzweig names his book on creativity 'The Hidden Order of Art', thereby acknowledging that there is an automatic, pattern-making, ordering activity which is at least partly determined by forces beyond the conscious control of the artist.

As we have seen, the production of mandala patterns became for Jung a symbolic expression of having reached a new synthesis within himself, a conjunction of conscious and unconscious, of phantasy and external reality, of thought and feeling. Because this experience was so intensely important to him, he felt obliged to describe it in religious terms, and so the mandala became a kind of symbolic representation of the archetype of God. Considering Jung's predilection for personifying unconscious contents, it is remarkable that the most important archetype of all should appear, not as a person, but as an abstract pattern. It is at least as convincing to regard a mandala as a rudimentary work of art as it is to look upon it as a religious symbol of the deity. For works of art also represent a new synthesis between the inner, subjective world of the artist and external reality. The artist selects, often unconsciously, material both from external and internal reality, and the work em-

bodies and portrays a conjunction between the two. Moreover, there is clear evidence that artists are more divided in nature than most people, and that one force which drives them to be productive is the need to heal the split. Like Jung's advanced patients, artists are in a special category; more tormented than most, but by virtue of possessing strong egos, more able to cope with and to integrate their own disorder.

When an artist paints a landscape for example, he is portraying both external reality, and his own subjective vision of this reality. He is also arranging his perception within a limited 'frame', within which he is concerned to make a satisfying pattern. This pattern usually consists of a balance between opposing masses, lines of tension, and other 'opposites'. As Harrison Gough has put it: 'A creative product must give a sense of reconciliation, of having resolved in an aesthetic and harmonious way the discords and disharmonies present in the original situation. The work of art, for example, for a moment reorders and brings into balance the tensions of form and space, and in so doing, moderates the inner tensions of the observer, giving him a sense of encounter and fulfilment.'¹³

Suzanne Langer, in 'Feeling and Form'¹⁴ reached the same conclusion about mandalas as Jung from an entirely different angle. It is usual to regard these patterns as originating from attempts to portray circular forms in the external world, but she concludes, like Jung, that they are primary patterns taking origin from within the psyche. Moreover, there is evidence from the work of Rhoda Kellog that children's drawings regularly take on mandala form which she considers to be the most important single unit of pre-representational drawing.

This is not the place to elaborate further the function of art as an integrating, healing process. The reader who is interested is referred to the writings of Ehrenzweig.¹⁵

Koestler,¹⁶ and to my own book *The Dynamics of Creation*.¹⁷ What I wanted to make clear was that Jung, in describing the process of individuation and the reconciling of opposites was calling attention to a symbolic process of healing which is of great importance and interest, but which might have been expressed in terms quite other than those which he chose to employ. Jung referred to religions as psychotherapeutic systems. He might equally well have used the same phrase about works of art. Nowadays, more people gain what Jung would have called experience of the Self from one or other of the arts than they do from religion. The picture gallery and the concert hall have replaced the Church as places where the 'divine' can be encountered. There is, throughout the works of Jung, remarkably little reference to any of the arts save literature, with the exception of his essay on Picasso. Wagner interested Jung, because of his use of mythology in the 'Ring', and the religious symbolism of 'Parsifal'. But there is hardly a mention of the work of other musicians. One cannot escape the conclusion that in Jung's scheme of things, the arts ranked very low compared with religious experience.

To my mind, the importance of Jung's description of the process of individuation and the experience of the Self lies in the fact that he recognized that, for many intelligent and able people, the attainment of Freud's goals of 'honour, power, wealth, fame, and the love of women' are not enough. Jung's recognition and delineation of the inner world of the psyche did not include a statement as to why man was so constituted that what went on inside him was so often at variance with the external world that he could not find all his satisfactions therein. But he recognized that man, the symbolic animal, could resolve even the deepest divisions within him upon the symbolic plane; and he invented a technique of

psychotherapy by which this could be accomplished. Jung's contributions to the art of psychotherapy are the subject of the next chapter.

One rather odd consequence of Jung's preoccupation with the union of opposites is his notion of synchronicity. Throughout his life, Jung was preoccupied with what he called 'meaningful coincidences', and, as we have seen, with the relation between the inner world of the psyche and the external world. At times he seems to go so far as to postulate a 'third world' in which 'psychoid' events occur which are neither external or internal but which somehow partake of both. This world is equivalent to the Gnostic 'pleroma'; 'the abode of God and of the totality of the Divine powers and emanations'. As we have seen, Jung was little interested in the causal interpretation of mental disorder by tracing the origin of neurotic symptoms to early childhood, as did Freud. It is not surprising, therefore, that he came to believe that there was an acausal principle, of equal importance with causality, which linked events by their coincidence in time rather than sequentially. This concept of synchronicity was compared by Jung with the Chinese concept of 'Tao'. As Koestler has pointed out, some kind of belief in the fundamental unity of all things is a recurrent theme in the history of human thought, and has begun to reappear in the speculations of modern physicists. The reader who wishes to pursue Jung's ideas on synchronicity is referred first to his introduction to the 'I Ching' which occurs in the 11th Volume of the *Collected Works*, 'Psychology and Religion', and then to Koestler's critique in 'The Roots of Coincidence'.¹⁸ Believers in ghosts, spiritualism, and astrology seize upon this aspect of Jung's thought with avidity; but I must confess that his writings upon synchronicity seem to me to be both confused and of little practical value.