



Mandala Consulting's Jung Pages

by Anthony Wilson

CONSCIOUSNESS: PROMETHEUS MYTH

The Unconscious

Where it fits in: Jung's Model of the Psyche, a very brief tour d'horizon

Carl Jung defined the Psyche as *the totality of all psychic processes, conscious as well as unconscious*. [1] He used the German word "seele" which has no exact English translation, so he also made a point of saying that he distinguished between the Psyche and the Soul by saying that the Soul is *a clearly demarcated functional complex that can best be described as "personality"* [2].

Jung conceptualized the psyche as having two major components, an unconscious element and an unconscious one. The Conscious consists of the **Ego**, *the subject of consciousness* [3] concerned with, for example, personal identity and relationships between conscious and unconscious, and, the **Persona**, the mask we wear to hide our true identity from the world.

The Unconscious consists of a the **Shadow**, *the thing a person has no wish to be* [4], the contrasexual components, the **Anima** or inner figure of a woman (in a man's psyche) or the **Animus** or the inner figure of a man (in a woman's psyche), and the **Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious**, an inherited layer. Jung beautifully expressed this: *The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual*. [5]

The Unconscious

Jung wrote, *Our conscious intentions are continually disturbed and thwarted, to a greater or lesser degree, by unconscious intrusions whose causes are at first strange to us*. [6] This is all rather uncomfortable to some schools of psychology, and often ignored. Jung often tended to think in terms of opposites which complimented each other, the unconscious attitude often offering a compensatory contribution. He said that throughout his life he had tried to honour and give a voice to, his unconscious psyche.

However, Jung also said that the unconscious is really unconscious and, therefore, we cannot truly know it. We have hints and inferences to its existence and some of its contents, but there is no object. We cannot hold the unconscious in the palm of our hand.

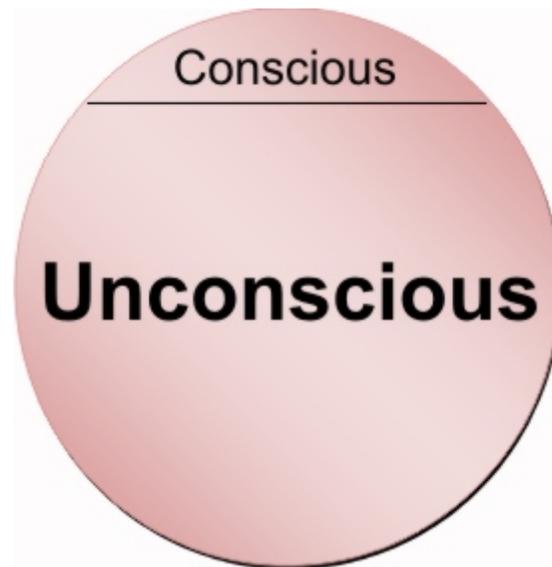
Jung's concept of the Unconscious differs from that of Freud's. In August 1957, Jung was interviewed in English and filmed by Richard Evans. The transcripts are available in a paperback book and make fascinating reading [7]. In the movie Jung explains how writing his 1912 book *The Psychology of the Unconscious* [8] cost him his friendship with Freud, because Freud couldn't accept his views. In the Preface to the fifth edition of *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, written in 1942, in which a thoroughly revised version of *Psychology of the Unconscious* was published, Jung says that a *"difficult and complicated matter like the psychology of the unconscious gives rise not only to many new insights, but to errors as well. It is still a boundless expanse of virgin territory into which we make experimental incursions."* [9]

Jung says in the interview, *..to him [Freud], the unconscious was a product of consciousness, and simply contained the remnants; I mean it was a sort of storeroom where all the discarded things of consciousness were heaped up and left. To me the unconscious, then, was already a matrix, capable of autonomous acts, a sort of basis of consciousness of a creative nature, namely capable of autonomous acts - autonomous intrusions into consciousness. In other words, I took the existence of the unconscious for a real fact, for a real autonomous factor, capable of independent action*. [10]

At this point a diagram or illustration of the model of the psyche might be helpful. I have always found any such illustration falls short of what I need to grasp to concept. Any depiction of the Psyche is never going to be able to represent what is essentially irrepresentable. I have seen several diagrams of the psyche. None quite do it for me. Some seem to gel more than others, some irritate, some click for a while and then fade.

A problem we immediately face in trying to make any representation of the Psyche is deciding on the relative sizes of the Conscious or Unconscious components. We have no idea of the boundaries of the unconscious psyche. My own experience shows me that despite many, many hours of analysis my Unconscious keeps replenishing itself with fresh content. It seems it cannot be emptied. We can see examples of this in projections (which not recognizing one's own psychic contents and ascribing person, thing or place.) How often have you seen the Ego Defense Mechanism of Idealization, do a volte-face and quickly change to Devaluation? Maybe you have experienced this in yourself. Yesterday's hero becomes today's villain. One projection is replaced by another and our illusory world continues to thrive.

If the Unconscious is inexhaustible, we cannot define its size. But I very much like E L Thorndyke's view that if something exists then it must exist in some quantity and therefore, theoretically, be measurable. Challenging perhaps, but true, I suggest. Perhaps the unconscious psyche has limits, but we do not know them. I intuit that the conscious component of the human psyche is dwarfed by the unconscious component, but, of course, I cannot prove it. This is a subjective view.



A representation of the Psyche

The Conscious

Jung regarded consciousness as a product of the unconscious; something that emerges from the depths and takes form. This is quite different from what he says was Freud's view. *Consciousness does not create itself-it wells up from unknown depths. In childhood it awakens gradually, and all through life it wakes each morning out of the depths of sleep from an unconscious condition. It is like a child that is born daily out of the primordial womb of the unconscious. . . . It is not only influenced by the unconscious but continually emerges out of it in the form of numberless spontaneous ideas and sudden flashes of thought.* [11]

This viewpoint is humbling. Are we masters and mistresses in our own house? Can we be always in charge of our behaviours. This viewpoint turns the unconscious from a sort of dustbin or storage cellar for the dusty old, worn out contents of consciousness into a source of fresh raw material. The nature and quality of consciousness is, however, a vast subject and one that we cannot do justice to here. [12] [13]

Jung's contribution to our conceptualization and comprehension of consciousness has influenced many contemporary thinkers, for example Ken Wilber, who developed Integral Theory to go beyond metaphysics to the realms of individual spiritual development. Jung assigned a compensatory function to the Unconscious in relation to Consciousness. He saw Consciousness a necessary step in the development of humankind, and for individual development.

This corresponds to Teilhard de Chardin's concept of hominization, becoming human. de Chardin describes the moment when we, as a species, became human, as the Noogenesis, or the beginning of conscious reflection. He says that at this point humankind could think or reflect, which he describes as, *the power acquired by consciousness to turn upon itself, to take possession of itself as an object endowed with its own particular consistence and value: no longer merely to know, but to know oneself; no longer merely to know but to know that ones knows.* [14]

Jung says, *By consciousness I understand the relation of the psychic contents to the Ego, insofar as this relation is perceived by the Ego. Relations to the Ego that are not perceived as such are unconscious. Consciousness is a function of activity which maintains the relation of psychic contents to the Ego.* [15] He goes on to remind us that the Conscious is not the same as the Psyche, that not all psychic contents are related to the Ego, that is some of the Psyche's content is unconscious. So it would seem that we can never truly know ourselves completely; there will always be parts hidden from us.

Jung maintained that he had empirically demonstrated compensatory functioning of the Conscious and Unconscious in the Psyche that corresponded to the compensatory, i.e. homeostatic, mechanisms in physiology. This self-regulating function works as a way of achieving balance. Those Conscious contents which are forgotten, repressed or inhibited will naturally fall into the Unconscious. Within the Psyche itself nothing is ever forgotten. Every sound, image, thought, emotion, event of one's life is retained in the Psyche. This is demonstrated by hypnosis, or, quite often by people who have Near Death Experiences who report that they recalled their whole life in a very short time.

The counter-position of the Unconscious content is amplified by the attitude of Consciousness. Eventually the Unconscious content will acquire sufficient libido or psychic energy to break forth in the form of dreams, visions or symbols. The process links the Conscious and Unconscious expressions. The need is for the Conscious mind to assimilate and integrate those symbols.

This is illustrated in one of the Biblical stories or myths about Moses. While Moses was away from the Israelites receiving the Ten Commandments, the people made a golden calf and worshipped it. Moses was angry with them (the text says his anger "waxed hot"). *And he took the calf which they had made and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder and strawed [spread, or mixed] it upon the water and made the children of Israel drink of it* [16]. In psychological terms, Moses destroyed the image which obsessed the people, and upon which they had become dependent, and forced them to reassimilate it, by drinking its ashes mixed with water. That which made them sick, healed them, when brought forth or made conscious (i.e. making and worshipping the golden calf) and then when destroyed and taken back into the body as consciousness.

Daryl Sharp illustrates this compensatory relationship between the Conscious and the Unconscious. It is worth reproducing here in its entirety, since the nine steps he describes, help us to grasp one of the key processes Jung's model of the dynamics of the psyche.

The Self-Regulation of the Psyche

1. *Difficulty of adaptation. Little progression of libido.*
2. *Regression of energy (depression, lack of disposable energy).*
3. *Activation of unconscious contents (fantasies, complexes, archetypal images, inferior function, opposite attitude, shadow, anima/animus, etc.). Compensation.*
4. *Symptoms of neurosis (confusion, fear, anxiety, guilt, moods, extreme affect, etc.).*
5. *Unconscious or half-conscious conflict between ego and contents activated in the unconscious. Inner tension. Defensive reactions.*
6. *Activation of the transcendent function, involving the self and archetypal patterns of wholeness.*
7. *Formation of symbols (numinosity, synchronicity).*
8. *Transfer of energy between unconscious contents and consciousness. Enlargement of the ego, progression of energy.*
9. *Assimilation of unconscious contents. Individuation.* [17]

I offer a criticism of Sharp's inclusion of the word, "Individuation" in step 9. I think the point that Sharp misses here is that this process is not a once-and-for-all process. In other words I believe Individuation could only occur once many iterations of the process have been undergone and even then providing always that the previously unconscious contents (as mentioned in step 9) stay assimilated consciousness and do not sink once more into unconsciousness, to perhaps mutate.

Jung offers us an understanding of the Conscious and the Unconscious, which I summarize here. [18]

Conscious	Unconscious
Has a minimum intensity which its contents must have attained.	All elements that are too weak remain in the Unconscious.
Exercises an inhibition (cf. Freud "censorship") on all incompatible material	Material incompatible with the Conscious sinks into the Unconscious
Is a momentary process of adaptation.	The unconscious contains all the forgotten material of the individual's own past, and all the inherited behaviour traces constituting the structure of the mind [i.e., archetypes of the collective unconscious].
	Contains all the fantasy combinations which have not yet attained the threshold intensity, but which may, under suitable conditions, become conscious.

The Myth of Prometheus

No account of Jung's concept of consciousness would be complete without some reference to the myth of Prometheus. Myths, fairy stories, legends, sagas, tales, oral tradition etc. are all illustrative of the Collective Unconscious and thus are grist to the mill to anyone interested in Jungian thought. Prometheus's myth is illustrative of ancient wisdom in discerning the coming to consciousness of the Human Race – or hominization, as de Chardin called it.

As you read the story, treat it as you would a dream, in that every part of it and every character in it, is in some way a part of yourself, an attitude, a tendency, a memory perhaps. Like our dreams, no part of a myth is irrelevant. Each part has meaning. In some mysterious way, the myth resonates with a deep part of what we share in common with all humanity. In Persia, the legend of Ahriman, corresponds the Promethean myth. Is there a similar tale in your own culture?

There were four Titan brothers, Prometheus, Epimetheus, Atlas and Menoetius. Their ancestors had fought against Zeus and had been incarcerated by the Gods in chains in the lower world. Prometheus's name meant "forethought". He was always envisioning the future and what might be. Epimetheus's name mean "afterthought" because he lived in the past not the present. Atlas bore the weight of the heavens on his shoulders. With Menoetius, who was a glorious warrior, he rebelled against the Gods, the Olympians.

Prometheus did not want to live like the Olympians, always in the clouds, idle all the time, eating ambrosia and drinking nectar. He was sad when he saw how humankind lived, poor, miserable and wretched. They dwelt in cold, dark caves, without warmth or light, malnourished and at the mercy of their fellows and of the wild beasts who hunted them down.

Prometheus wanted to better the lives of his people. He thought that if they had fire they could warm themselves, cook their food, have light and, in time, make tools and construct houses to live in, rather than dwell underground. Thus they could have some comfort in the dreary, cold winter months.

So bold Prometheus sought Zeus and asked him for the gift of fire. Zeus refused saying that if humankind had fire they might become strong and wise like the Gods and maybe drive them out of their kingdom. Zeus wanted them to shiver in the cold and live like the beasts. He felt that it was best for the humans to remain ignorant and poor so that the Gods, the Mighty Ones who dwelt on Mount Olympus could thrive and be happy. Prometheus did not reply, but was determined to help humankind.

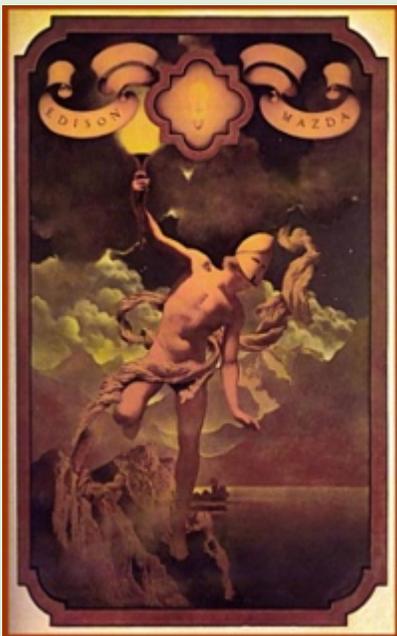
Later, when Prometheus was walking along the seashore, he idly plucked a reed, or it might have been fennel stalk. He noticed how the inside was hollow and contained a soft pithy centre. He thought that this pith would burn slowly and keep the fire alive for a long time. He resolved that Mankind should have fire, even against the wishes of the tyrannical Gods. Taking the long stalk, he started out for the dwelling place of the Sun in the farthest east.

When he got to the place where the Sun lived it was early in the morning. The fiery Sun was just beginning his journey across the sky. Prometheus touched the stalk at the edge of the Sun's flames and the stalk started to smolder. Quickly, he ran back to his own land with the precious spark alive in the centre of the stalk.

When he arrived there, he called forth from their damp caves the first group of shivering men and women that he came across. He showed them how to make a fire and soon they had a warm, cheerful blaze. He taught them to take the coals and start other fires. Very soon every family had a fire and they were happy. They learned to cook their food and be happy and live with dignity and not as beasts. The people were thankful for the wonderful gift of a fuller life that Prometheus had bought them from the Sun. They emerged from their deep underground caves and began to live in the fresh air and daylight.

Prometheus continued to teach them useful things, like how to build houses of wood or stone to protect themselves from the elements and wild animals; how to make the animals tame and to farm them: how to use the wool of the sheep and the leather of the cattle; how to plough the land and plant seeds; how to dig in the earth and find metals like copper and iron and how to melt the ore with flame and to hammer and shape metals into tools and weapons to defend themselves.

Prometheus saw all this and was happy for humankind. He foresaw a Golden Age of prosperity for all, much better than the lives they had lived in the past.



Prometheus by Maxfield Parrish (1919)

The story of Prometheus continues, the Golden Age did not last and Cares and Diseases came upon humankind and Prometheus was punished for what he had done. He was chained to a rock and an eagle ate his liver each day. (The liver is one of the few organisms that is able to regenerate.) But at least humans were conscious, thanks to Prometheus. Fire symbolizes that consciousness. Prometheus's story is the archetypal Hero's Journey. It is the journey each of us must make to become conscious. Without consciousness we have not fulfilled our potential and become who we were meant to be.

Anthony Wilson

[1] *XI Definitions*, CW6, Para 797

[2] loc. cit.

[3] *Analytical Psychology and Education* CW17, para 169

[4] *The Psychology of the Transference* CW16, para 470

[5] *The Structure of the Psyche*, CW8, para 342

[6] *Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype*, CW9(i), para 190

[7] Evans, R I (1979) *Jung on Elementary Psychology: a discussion between C G Jung and Richard I Evan*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Henley

[8] This is contained in CW7 *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*

[9] *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, CW7, Preface to the Fifth Edition (1943)

[10] Evans, R I (1979) *Jung on Elementary Psychology: a discussion between C G Jung and Richard I Evans*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Henley. This is the unedited transcript of the movie quoted here from the appendix of the book. In the main body of the book there is a somewhat easier to read, edited version which remains faithful to Jung's spoken words. I prefer to read both. This book, like Jung's letters, is an interesting and informative, source of information about Jung's ideas.

[11] *The Psychology of Eastern Meditation* CW11, Para 935

[12] To get some idea of this fascinating area of study check out David Chalmers website: <http://consc.net/chalmers/>. Chalmers is a Professor of Philosophy and is Director of the Centre for Consciousness. To read all the papers that can be downloaded from Chambers' website will take a long time. A great resource.

[13] Wilber, K (1997) *An Integral Theory of Consciousness*, Journal of Consciousness Studies contains in its introduction how consciousness is defined and treated by various sciences and fields of study. Ken Wilber's writings are well worth reading if you are interested in spiritual development. This article is freely available at <http://www.imprint.co.uk/Wilber.htm> and Integral Theory is outlined, and many links given on Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integral_theory

[14] de Chardin, T (1961) *The Phenomenon of Man*, page 165

[15] *XI Definitions* CW6, para 700

[16] *The Book of Exodus*, Chapter 32, verse 20 (KJV)

[17] Sharp, D (1991) *Jung Lexicon: a primer of terms and concepts*, Inner City books, Toronto

[18] Adapted from *The Transcendent Function*, CW8, para 132