

Carl Jung: What is the Individuation Process?



The Individuation Process

- “If we understand anything of the unconscious, we know that it cannot be swallowed. We also know that it is dangerous to suppress it, because the unconscious is life and this life turns against us if suppressed, as happens in neurosis.” (Conscious, Unconscious, and Individuation, Carl Jung)
- “[Individuation] presupposes the gradual integration of *unconscious contents that are capable of becoming conscious*. The psyche is the theater of all struggles for development. It is the organ of experience pure and simple. The affirmation of these struggles is “life”; negation of them means isolation, resignation, desiccation.” (The Way of Individuation, Jolande Jacobi)
- “Individuation is a natural process that goes on in everyone. Jungian analysis does not produce the individuation process, but it can often activate it, make it more conscious and accelerate the speed at which it occurs. There are three major differences between a person who is individuating in a natural way or through an analytical experience. The person whose individuation has been stimulated through analysis is 1) more able to consciously grasp and describe the process, 2) less likely to regress into neurotic behavior patterns, and 3) more able to help another (as “midwife”) through the same process.” (The Jungian Experience, James Hall)
- “The individuation process, as the way of development and maturation of the psyche, does not follow a straight line, nor does it always lead onwards and upwards. The course it follows is rather “stadial”, consisting of progress and regress, flux and stagnation in alternating sequence.” (The Way of Individuation, Jolande Jacobi)
- “Individuation is a manifestation in life of one’s innate, inborn potentialities. Not all the possibilities can be realized, so individuation is never complete. It is more a quest than a goal, more a direction of movement than a resting place. The individuating ego comes again and again to points where it must transcend its previous image of itself. This is

painful, for the ego continually identifies with images of itself, believing that the image with which it is presently identified is the “real” person. Thus the answers to the classic question, “Who am I?” are constantly open to modification.” (The Jungian Experience, James Hall)

- “Successful individuation” is never total, it is only an optimal achievement of wholeness. “But it is just the impossibility of this task that makes it so significant,” Jung once wrote in this connection. “A task that is possible, i.e., soluble, never appeals to our superiority.” That is what individuation does, because we are not equal to it. “It appeals to our superiority, and perhaps that is just what is needed. There may be tasks we can solve better with inferiority than with superiority. As long as my superiority is not in absolute jeopardy, a bit of me remains untouched by life.” Jung reverts to his theme in “The Psychology of the Transference”: “The goal [of individuation] is important only as an idea. The essential thing is the opus which leads to the goal: that is the goal of a lifetime.” (The Myth of Meaning, Aniela Jaffe)
- “Individuation appears, on the one hand, as the synthesis of a new unity which previously consisted of scattered particles, and on the other hand, as the revelation of something which existed before the ego and is in fact its father or creator and also its totality.” (Transformation Symbolism in the Mass, Carl Jung)

The Persona and Individuation

- “In becoming an individual, one differentiates one’s psyche from the collective (i.e., the crowd) and affirms the individual differences. Jung’s archetypal concept of the persona as a social mask which a person wears for various roles he or she may play is considered necessary for socially adaptive purposes. To fail to develop a persona would leave the individual vulnerable if not disabled. It is necessary to have a persona in order to have a recognizable place within the social order. However, the persona is not the true self in its most authentic sense: “One could say, with a little exaggeration, that the persona is that which one in reality is not, but which one’s self as well as others think one is” (Jung). Individuation involves a process of methodically differentiating from one’s persona so that one recognizes that it is not the deeper self, and that this deeper self is distinct

from social roles and expectations.” (The Way of Individuation, Jolande Jacobi)

Integrating our Shadow – Facing our Evil

- “When one tries desperately to be good and wonderful and perfect, then all the more the shadow develops a definite will to be black and evil and destructive. People cannot see that; they are always striving to be marvellous, and then they discover that terrible destructive things happen which they cannot understand, and they either deny that such facts have anything to do with them, or if they admit them, they take them for natural afflictions, or they try to minimize them and to shift the responsibility elsewhere. The fact is that if one tries beyond one’s capacity to be perfect, the shadow descends into hell and becomes the devil.” (Visions: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1930–1934, Carl Jung)
- “When evil works unconsciously and emits its radioactivity underground, it possesses the deadly efficiency of an epidemic; on the other hand, evil done consciously by the ego and accepted as its own personal responsibility does not infect the environment, but is encountered by the ego as its own problem and as a content to be incorporated into life and the integration of the personality like any other psychic content.” (Depth Psychology and a New Ethic, Erich Neumann)
- “. . .the goal of individuation is not the perfect man but the complete man with his light and darkness. Evil as well as good is given to man along with the gift of life. It can never be completely conquered, yet man has a chance to hold it in check through self-awareness and struggle, and through confronting it directly. The more conscious he is of his proclivities for evil, the more he is in a position to hold out against the destructive forces within him.” (The Myth of Meaning, Aniela Jaffe)

Archetypes – The Patterns of Human Life

- “The unconscious functions according to the archetypes. When it functions correctly, it could lead to the discovery of the world or to the reinvention of world history. It is not we who have those images, but they are within us, and we are shaped by them. These are preordained modes of functioning. The way it happens in us is how it happens in nature in general. An insect does by itself what it has to do after hatching. It is not welcomed by

benevolent parents or midwives, and all the same it spins its threads correctly. It flies to the plant where it finds its food, and so on. It just does the right thing. Similarly, the mental functioning of human beings is not something that each individual has to learn anew for him- or herself. We do what our ancestors have always done. It is not the school that brings this about. On the contrary, we have to be careful that the school does not destroy the natural functioning of the psyche.” (Carl Jung, Children’s Dreams: Notes from the Seminar Given in 1936–1940)

Dreams

- “A great work of art is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is always ambiguous. A dream never says ‘you ought’ or ‘this is the truth.’ It presents an image in much the same way as nature allows a plant to grow, and it is up to us to draw conclusions.” (Carl Jung, Psychology and Literature)

- “The symbolic expression in a dream is a manifestation of the situation of the unconscious, looked at from the unconscious.” (Carl Jung From an Interview for “The Houston Films”)

- “Jung proposed that dreams play an indispensable role in psychic homeostasis, in that they promote adaptation to the demands of life by compensating the one-sided limitations of consciousness. Repeated night after night, and year after year, this compensatory activity makes recurrent contributions to the individuation process, as becomes readily apparent when one examines a long series of dreams from the same person.
 - Remembering dreams, writing them down, and analyzing them enhances this homeostatic function. But dreams continue to do their work whether we remember them or not. After all, the great majority of dreams occur without anyone being consciously aware of them, yet they must have a crucial purpose since virtually all animals dream, and dreaming brains have been around for 135 million years. It would be an extraordinary waste of nature’s time if dreams did not contribute in some vitally important way to survival.” (Jung – A Very Short Introduction, Anthony Stevens)