

# **A Brief Appraisal of Jung's Contribution**

by Gary Seeman, Ph.D.

On the occasion of the release of Carl Jung's (2009) private journal, the *Red Book*, I offer this brief appraisal of his contribution. Jung's Analytical Psychology has influenced my own thinking, and I benefitted greatly from undergoing his style of therapy. His insights are an important component of my integrative style of psychotherapy.

The release of the *Red Book* has renewed interest in C. G. Jung and is moving reviewers to express their varied opinions. Jung was of course a controversial figure, larger than life, and prone to his own prejudices and errors, as some biographers have attested. But some of those biographers don't appreciate his many contributions and may seek notoriety by demonizing a notable figure who can no longer speak for himself.

As someone who has had the benefit of Jungian analysis, I can say that it profoundly changed me for the better. Most people cannot afford a lengthy Jungian analysis. Others find his writing difficult, and that critique can be well-justified. On this basis and for reasons addressed below, people too easily overlook the contributions of one of psychology's towering innovators. But there are so many penetrating insights in his writing that scholars continue to explore them today. Among the foremost scholars and interpreters of the history of psychology is Dr. Sonu Shamdasani, who helped me research my doctoral dissertation. I know that for Dr. Shamdasani, bringing the *Red Book* to publication is a work of great devotion.

## **Jung's Innovations**

Jung's ideas about psychological types helped create the Myers-Briggs personality test so many people use today. He invented the terms introvert and extravert. His research led to the invention of the lie detector. He inspired the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous. He expanded the theoretical basis of psychoanalysis beyond Freud's theory that our basic life energy is sexuality and opened it up to a broader range of concerns, including the spiritual quest. It was on this basis that he broke from Freud. He was a foremost innovator of transpersonal psychology. And he was the master of helping people understand the emotional power of dreams and imagination. Anyone who does art therapy appreciates Jung's pioneering work. Although this list is incomplete, it gives you an idea of the range of his thinking.

## **Criticized for Looking Inward**

Those who don't know Jung's writing very well criticize him for basing his work mostly on his inner process. Far from mimicking his inner journey, Jung's psychology flowed from many years of intense clinical work. For instance, he simultaneously discovered Melanie Klein's idea of projective identification (he called it "psychic infection"). And like any great explorer of consciousness, Jung practiced his methods on himself and gazed unflinchingly into his own conflicts via the images and intense passions of his unconscious. His journals and eventually the *Red Book* were where he did that very private work. He continuously compared what he was finding on the inside with astute observations of the inner lives of his patients. This combination of objectivity and self-knowledge informs the best psychotherapists.

## **Jung's Psychology Continues to Evolve**

Jung's Analytical Psychology continues to evolve, just as Freud's psychoanalysis has evolved into many schools of psychoanalysis and psychodynamic psychotherapy. Most Jungian analysts now integrate psychodynamic thinking and current developmental and neurological research into their work. It's true that most people today don't pursue a psychoanalysis or Jungian analysis, because this is so time-consuming and expensive. But research shows that long-term therapy is more effective (if one can afford it). I do see some followers of Jungian theory getting too involved in being guided exclusively by their own dream life to the point it becomes an avoidance of facing down one's anxieties to make hard choices. It's a kind of spiritual bypass. But this was not Jung's approach. Although he intensely worked on inner process, he was not one-sided. He counseled balance between thinking and feeling, sensation and intuition, and engagement with life.

I find Jung's writings helpful in understanding the middle ground of psychological life that lies between instinct and spirit. Sometimes his writing is clear and startlingly penetrating. But he can get carried away in his musings and go off track. At times, he writes so extensively about mythological symbolism that he is hard to follow. Jung collaborated and corresponded with the parapsychologist, J. B. Rhine, and the physicist, Wolfgang Pauli. In these collaborations he attempted and succeeded in many ways to penetrate into the mysteries of parapsychological phenomena.\* His interests in this area did not deny the importance of our biological

selves but attempted to integrate that knowledge too. I'll close with a helpful quote that pertains to the *Red Book*.

*"It is high time we realize that it is pointless to praise the light and preach it if nobody can see it. It is much more needful to teach people the art of seeing. For it is obvious that far too many people are incapable of establishing a connection between the sacred figures and their own psyche: they cannot see to what extent the equivalent images are lying dormant in their own unconscious. In order to facilitate this inner vision we must first clear the way for the faculty of seeing."* (Jung, 1980, paragraph 14)

\* Such phenomena have been amply proven, I believe, but threaten people who are more comfortable with a determinism that ignores the paradoxes of modern physics and subjective experience. For the science behind this statement, see Radin (1997) and Tart (2009).

### References

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