



MAGNUM OPUS: RUBEDO

Module 1: Individuation

QUOTE

The act of consciousness is central; otherwise we are overrun by the complexes. The hero in each of us is required to answer the call of individuation. We must turn away from the cacaphony of the outerworld to hear the inner voice. When we can dare to live its promptings, then we achieve personhood. We may become strangers to those who thought they knew us, but at least we are no longer strangers to ourselves.”

– James Hollis

Individuation

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Transcript of Podcast

The focus of Jung's mature work was individuation. The idea that there is a way to realize yourself in the world that is ideal, and it's that realization of this ideal destiny, of this most authentic expression of yourself, that constitutes individuation for Jung.

An important part of individuation is consciousness, about becoming conscious. The development of ego consciousness, growing up, interrupts the sense of wholeness we have as children. And, in addition to consciousness, there is the sense of individuation being about returning to that state of wholeness, returning to the stream of life. The thing about developing consciousness or developing an ego state, is that part of the process fragments you from life, it moves you from the source of life. You're not as connected to the source as you are when you are in an unconscious state. One sees this most frequently in children. Children have not only a physical vitality but a spiritual vitality, and you notice that as you mature, this tends to diminish as we move away from the source of life and vitality. There's a time in one's life where you exist in a state of grace, where you don't necessarily need to understand the meaning and purpose of life, living is enough. Just being alive is purposeful. One doesn't need to question existence. But for most of us that does not last indefinitely, we have a sense of moving away from that state of being in the world, where questions like "why am I alive?" and "is being alive worthwhile?" become very serious questions. And that you can say is part of

that problem or part of the fact that when we come to that condition, it is just because we have egos, because we have consciousness. Consciousness comes at a price; it separates us from what Jung called the Collective Unconscious. This sounds terribly patronizing and I don't mean it that way, but I think it's true, one encounters in the world very unconscious people, and usually they are blissfully happy. Not always, sometimes they are suffering, but there is a kind of an innocence, a naivety, a blissfulness in their existence, that one may often yearn for, that loss of innocence comes at a tremendous price. So the idea of individuation is returning to a state of wholeness, but the significant distinction is that you return conscious. You don't return to a state of wholeness as a regress back into an unconscious state, the idea is you return to a state of wholeness, or you re-imagine or re-engage, rather than return to, wholeness, and do it while being conscious. That is a critical element in individuation.

Often when we deal with individuation the question come up, for example, "Was Mozart individuated?", "Was Gandhi individuated?", "Is Barack Obama individuated" –people who have made some sort of impact on the world. It's a difficult question and I'm not going to propose to answer it, but one of the differentiations that is useful to make is that individuation is not meant to describe simply the idea of making an impact on the world or being a great personality. There is that in it, individuation not purely inner process, it is about actually being engaged with the world, being engaged with society and leading a life that has some meaningful impact in the world, but it's about

doing that consciously. So that's a very important distinguishing aspect for Jung, is that this happens consciously. Now what does it mean to be conscious, of course that's a whole mysterious question all on its own, but individuation is this idea of realizing one's destiny, the unfolding of one's authentic self, and being conscious in the process.

Then the other element that I want to mention is meaning. Meaning is very significant for Jung and is very significant in the individuation process. So to the degree that your life is meaningful is a good barometer of where your life is at in the individuation process. In other words, the journey of individuation is also a journey to living a meaningful life. There's an important distinction between meaning and purpose here. What I mean when we talk about meaning here is that your experience is meaningful; you experience your life as meaningful.

The opposite would be the experience of an absence of meaning. So sometimes in your life, you have the experience that you're going through the motions, or you're in certain relationships or you're pursuing certain projects but you wonder why, you feel a sense of doubt, an absence of meaning or an absence of love and joy for what you're doing. Individuating is increasing meaning for life, that's important to understand. Just now I mentioned making an impact on the world, and I say that because I do think there's a sense of vocation in the individuation project, but it can be misleading. It's not to do with how grand, how spectacular or even the degree of achievement one has in one's life. An individuated person can lead a very simple life, but the experience that they have of life would be intensely meaningful, and so it's a

journey to meaning. It's an important question to ask yourself, if you're going to take individuation seriously, "Where in my life do I experience meaning?", "Where do I feel contained?", "Where do I feel that being alive is most acutely experienced?" And that's a really important question to ask yourself.

Sometimes we fall into a strange, unconscious, masochistic state, living life as if somehow the wind is going to blow us in the right direction, or you're going to be knocked on the head and someone is going to tell you the answers to all your questions or something along those lines. Sometimes we fail to take responsibility for our lives. I know it's a big project to take responsibility for your life, but something that is being pointed to here, is if you become aware of what makes you happy, where do you experience joy, where do you experience love, where do you experience meaning, and you pay attention to that – it tells you something really important about yourself and the direction you should be moving in, and the kind of people you want to spend your time with, and the kind of activities you want to occupy yourself with. As far as we know, we only get this life. I mean, why the fuck do you want to waste it? For whose benefit? What do you think is going to happen at the end of it, they're going to give you a testimonial or something? It's your life. You might as well make it the most meaningful life that you could live, surely that makes sense?

That being said, I think the idea of purpose does play a role as well. This takes us into difficult territory but I am going to try and navigate it for you. Before

we speak about purpose, I return to this idea of this ego/self-axis. The idea that the individuation process is moving closer and closer to what Jung would call the Self archetype, in religious terms you would say moving closer to God. Although it's not certain that the Self archetype and God are the same thing. It's the idea that there's a personal life, you have certain idiosyncrasies, we are not trying to in this method, to overthrow the ego, or deny the ego, or repress the ego or even flagellate the ego, or anything like that. We respect the ego. The ego plays a very central role both in psychology and in Western mysticism. But it must be acknowledged that the ego can be and often is narcissistic. The ego is concerned about the welfare of the ego, of itself, of the personal self, of the smaller self, of one's sense of personal self-identity. The idea is that if individuation is the goal, that is not enough, it can only take you so far, up to a point, but at some point it becomes boring, it becomes empty. Individuation involves moving beyond the narcissistic state and connecting with the Self. When you connect with the self, as Jung describes it, when the small self and the big Self meet, it is a disaster for the small self. But whilst true, it is said to some degree for effect. It doesn't mean that the small self is extinguished or disappears or that it should not play a critical role in the psyche. If it disappears you are technically insane and there are a lot of insane people around, like a lot of politicians or leaders of industry, that's because being insane is quite a charismatic condition. Not everyone that is insane ends up institutionalized but you are insane nonetheless.

Sanity involves the ego being constellated. The ego keeps the Self in check. So when God speaks to you and says, ‘Look this is your mission, you need to leave your family and don sack cloth and go out and be a missionary in dark Africa, the ego is called upon to ask “Well...are you sure about that?” So the ego plays an important role.

The ego represents the personal and the Self the transpersonal. Individuating is a synthesis of the two so that something new is born, a third thing. When the conscious and the unconscious face each other, when they confront each other the possibility of something magical happening becomes very real. It starts with a confrontation with the shadow, it’s a terribly confrontational process, when that happens, the possibility, of what Jung calls the second personality comes about. The possibility of the second personality being born. Now the second personality is what your individuated self looks like. It’s like your grown up self. It’s the idea of growing out of an infantile state in the world and reaching proper adulthood. Taking responsibility for yourself, recognizing who you are, dropping the bullshit and getting on with the process of what you were born to do. This is the concept of the second personality and is as Jung suggests, brought about when the conscious and the unconscious are brought into engagement, when they face each other.

The ideal thing is not the resolution of a paradox (an inner contradiction, say between what you want and what you have). Paradox is perversely or

ironically what you need, in order to give birth to the second personality or the individuated self. You don't deny paradox. When you're trapped in a paradox you want to genuinely resolve it. It's not that you don't want to resolve it. It's not that you are pretending to not care. You feel a genuine sense of inner tension of fragmentation, of feeling frustrated that your conscious ego will is being frustrated by the world, by circumstances, by God. By holding that state, by remaining in that state, by not denying that state, by not anesthetizing that state, by not going off into la-la land but remaining in that space, that is what allows the new thing to come about. That is what allows something genuinely new, to be born, it's the idea that one has to be born again and again.

Purpose, what is there to say about purpose? I think Agent Smith from the Matrix says it far better than I can, so I am going to read what he says, but before that, the idea of purpose is the idea that you are born for a reason, your life is not meaningless, you actually have come here to do something and figuring out what that is, is an important part of what it means to individuate. Part of going past narcissism is recognizing the purpose of your existence.

But I really like this from Smith, I think he says it very well,

“But as you well know, appearances can be deceiving, which brings me back to the reason why we are here. We are not here because we are free,

we are here because we are not free. There's no escaping reason, no denying purpose, because as we both know, without purpose we would not exist. It is purpose that created us, purpose that connects us, purpose that pulls us, that guides us, that drives us, it is purpose that defines us, purpose that binds us." ¹

One more thing about purpose, there's an absolutely wonderful idea from Jung and it's in relation in Christ that captures the idea of purpose better than anything else. He said when Christ was on the cross and he cried out "Father why have you forsaken me?" – the moment of doubt, we've all had that experience, but where Christ asks himself, "Wow, how did I end up here, what was I thinking, maybe I should have just listened to my mom and dad, become a carpenter. This ministry seemed like a good idea when I started out." Now of this experience Jung says, Christ made his hypothesis, his life was a hypothesis. What else can anybody do but that? You don't know. You see if you know, you're basically insane, genuinely, I mean that. I mean it's okay if you are, but you are insane. Being sane means not knowing. It's a necessary condition of being sane, that you don't know, that you have doubt, that you question, that you don't have certainty. So what do you do? You take your best guess. That's a hypothesis. So what he is pointing to there, is the whole of life is a hypothesis, and it could be wrong. You take the information that you have and you do the very best that you can with it. And that to me is the best possible

¹ The Matrix Reloaded.

way of understanding purpose. It is a fatal flaw to wait for your purpose to be revealed to you, to wait for a dream or a sign or voice from above, that's the stuff of myth and fairy tale and there's many people in the insane asylum that have had those experiences. But for the rest of us, it just doesn't work that way. You've got to figure it out on your own, and you don't know, the best you can do is say, well given the evidence in front of me, this is what I think.

I want to talk a little about the road to the Promised Land. Firstly, the idea of resisting objectification. An important aspect of your humanity is that you can never be exhausted by what someone else thinks about you, nor can you be exhausted by what you think about yourself. There's a lovely story from Jung, where he was in his late 70s and he said "I think I understand less about myself now than ever before, I am a complete mystery to myself." And there's a beauty in it because what more terrible thing that can happen to you, than to understand your life fully, can you imagine a worse fate than genuinely knowing yourself? Not being able to surprise yourself, not being able to surprise others, not being able to think new thoughts, dream new dreams, that's a terrible fate, it's kind of like being in hell. The identification with the objectification that happens in the eyes of the other is a way of losing touch with that transcendent principle that lives in you. In order to remain in touch with your freedom, with your possibility, with the fact that you are not your life, you are not just your job, you're not just what you do, yes you are those things, but you're also something more than those things, means not identifying with the objectification. Now for most of us that is not that hard to

do because generally speaking most of the objectification is critical so we want to kick out against it and go “Fuck you, that’s not really who I am”, but for some unfortunate souls that get put into a position of authority, get placed into the limelight, move up in the world, of course the temptation to start to identify what is projected on you becomes increasingly hard and it’s a terrible tragedy.

Then birth and death, the idea that life is definitely cyclical, it’s not a single, linear path. There’s this passage in *The Great Gatsby* where Gatsby talks about his life and says ‘my life needs to follow a single meteoric rise through the night sky’ – that in a sense is what we all aspire to, but that’s not the way life works. Life works in cycles and hopefully we have these meteoric experiences, but then we also have a sense of a death, a sense of the end of a cycle and needing to be reborn. That requires a type of plasticity of being in the world, a plasticity of soul that is able to move with what is happening now, to be able to live with the experience of where you are now, where you are moving to and not to become caught up and calcified in what has been.

This idea from Steiner, ‘Man must complete himself’, from his best book, *Philosophy of Freedom*, there’s a lot in that, I won’t even try to unpack it now, it’s something for you to meditate on. It goes back to this idea of Jung where he calls it a hypothesis, it is not given. Purpose is not given. You need to complete yourself.

Beauty, Play and Imagination, people can become deadly serious, and that is not the way to go. The idea is that as much as possible life should be fun, it should be beautiful, it should be creative, and it should be imaginative. It doesn't mean you are not going to suffer, there's not going to be any pain, any disappointment but that the child in you should remain alive and engaged. Don't ever lose your sense of wonder and enchantment.

And finally, the holographic model of individuation. One of the problems with this topic is that it seems a little overwhelming, where do I start, I think I'll just go out and have a beer, let me put the radio on, it's all interesting but it gave me a headache, it can be a little overwhelming. The principle of a hologram of course is that in every particle that is contained in the hologram, the information of the entire hologram is contained, that's what makes a hologram unique. Every atomic structure has the informational core of the entire hologram. And I think the same principle applies to individuation. One sees this particularly in Japanese culture. They take something very simple, very humble, very unassuming, and devote a lifetime to doing that properly. Watch the documentary Jiro Dreams of Sushi, an 85-year-old sushi master and his whole life has been about perfecting the art of making sushi. He is a very good example of someone who has individuated. The idea I am trying to point to here, is it doesn't matter where you start, you can start with anything, there is nothing that is too humble a project or too modest a project to start with. As

you enter into that process, as you sincerely start to engage with that process, and finally you will wrestle with demons that will come out at you, when you are in that process, you are individuated. That individuated effort will resonate across your entire life. You work on a single thing, and everything else changes as well.

Application

1. Without referring back to the lecture notes or any other reference write 300 to 500 words on what you understand individuation to be. Focus less on accurately representing the classical theory and more on your own understanding and interpretation of individuation. Repeat this exercise until you are satisfied you have accurately captured and expressed your thoughts on the question.
2. Given an ideal set of external circumstances, upbringing, resources, good fortune and so on, what do you believe the most perfect expression of your personality (individuation) would have been in the world. What might you have done, become and been?
3. Given the actual set of circumstances you have lived and live in now, but bearing the answer to question 2 in mind as a kind of true North, what do you think the individuation process looks like for you in this life and this world.
4. What is the single most individuated aspect of your personality?
Describe this, its impact on you, your life and your relationships in some detail.