



MAGNUM OPUS: ALBEDO

Module 1:
Consciousness

QUOTE

“There is no coming to consciousness without pain. People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own Soul. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.”

*C.G. Jung,
Contributions to
analytical psychology,
p. 193*

Consciousness

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Consciousness: A User's Guide

Jungian Psychology like other schools of Depth Psychology is generally and correctly associated with the unconscious. The role of the unconscious psyche is the conceptual keystone of psychoanalysis. That acknowledged, this should not lead us to devalue or marginalize the role of consciousness in the process. Frequently that is an error that people fall into when they engage in Jungian or Depth Psychology, that they tend to typically associate it almost exclusively with the unconscious, and that could be consequent to the legacy that Freud and Jung have left behind, which, necessarily, emphasized the unconscious factor. That said, consciousness, rather than the state of unconsciousness, is very much the goal of psychoanalysis. The idea is that we go into the unconscious to appropriate material for the expansion, fertilization, reinvigoration, and amplification of the conscious personality, rather than remaining indefinitely and sometimes interminably in the realm of the subterranean unconscious.¹

Freud introduced the idea of the psyche being motivated by two juxtaposed principles or registers. The pleasure principle he associated with the unconscious and the reality principle he associated with consciousness. Freud has a simple and elegant model of the psyche. He regards the ego "das Ich" – (we often talk about the ego and consciousness interchangeably, although there is a distinction that will become clear as we work through this stage) - as existing between the Id "das Es", which is the primitive, instinctive self; the animal that we all are instinctively and organically; the most natural default state of our being and the

¹ The myth of Persephone and her sojourn to Hades is instructive in this regard.

Superego “uber Ich” or over self, which is the subjective apperception, impact and role of culture, the institutionalized self, good manners and civilized behavior. Ego consciousness is called on to mediate between this instinctive self - this desire-driven self - and the self, which is the voice of your moral consciousness or, rather, not *your* moral consciousness but the moral consciousness of the culture in which you are embedded. Consciousness then, in the Freudian model, is a mediator of these polarized, juxtaposed aspects of the psyche.

In Jung’s psychic model, like the Freudian model, consciousness navigates between different aspects of the psyche. In Jung’s model of the psyche this the archetypes and complexes; for example, persona (public personality), the shadow (the personified unconscious self), the anima or animus (your relational self), the mana-archetype (your ideal or magical self), the Self archetype (the archetype of wholeness) and other archetypes. Consciousness is called upon to mediate between these different archetypal aspects of the psyche and between the inner and outer worlds.

There is one other characteristic of consciousness that I want to highlight for you by way of introduction. A good way into this is to refer to the work being done by a leading neuroscientist and psychoanalyst, Dr. Mark Solms. Without getting into the technical, and for our purposes tangential, neurophysiology of the theory, in short, Solms argues that consciousness or the spark of consciousness arises in the most primitive part of the brain, the brain stem, as a necessary survival response. Essentially the subject achieves a state of consciousness,

because of a clear biological need. An action, more specifically, a complex action, beyond the ambit of the autonomous physiological function is called for. The subject needs to find food, shelter, safety etc. in order to survive. I am not sure of the long-term robustness of this argument as an explanatory path for consciousness, but in my understanding, this is consistent with long held views of evolutionary psychology.

What is important and relevant from our perspective, is how accurately and usefully this describes the function of consciousness. Two quotes are relevant here, the first is from Freud, “Where Id was, there shall ego be.”² Another way of saying this is ego (consciousness) is a natural response to and development of instinctive needs. The other is from Jung, “There is no coming to consciousness without pain.”³ In other words, consciousness, in essence, is consciousness of pain. This is not claiming that every conscious experience is painful, although of course many are. What it does convey though is pain, distress, and need are at the root of consciousness. No wonder we often seek refuge in unconsciousness! We are as human beings limited in our capacity to bear and endure consciousness.

This is relevant for two important reasons, worth bearing in mind. Firstly, consciousness is inherently and intrinsically an uncomfortable condition. Consciousness is not blissful, as much as certain schools of thought would suggest that bliss is the highest state of consciousness. We may have access to

² Sigmund Freud, in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1932), Lecture 31 : The Anatomy of the Mental Personality

³ C.G. Jung, *Contributions to analytical psychology*, p. 193.

bliss on rare occasions, but it is not characteristic or typical of the condition. Secondly, consciousness is typically and essentially, consciousness of something requiring attention. To put this another way, if consciousness is hell, then it is the Ninth Circle of Hell to the lazy psyche, because it is constantly demanding action!

With these introductory notes made, we move on now to a discussion of the principles of consciousness.

PRINCIPALS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The following are a few of the cardinal principles of consciousness in Jungian psychology. This is far from a complete description of consciousness from the Jungian perspective, but what follows, are among the more significant aspects of consciousness and its application in Jungian psychology.

DIFFERENTIATION AND DISCERNMENT

Differentiation and Discernment are constitutive, for Jung, of consciousness, and I think the same is probably true for Freud. Consciousness makes critical judgments - value judgments; consciousness decides, for example,

“This is appropriate and that is inappropriate”,

“This is good and that is bad”, and

“This has a greater value and that has a lesser value”.

Consciousness therefor is necessarily dualistic in nature and it differentiates.

What Jung considered a primary archetype, or a primary function of the cognition is number. Think about that in relation to something simple, “There are a certain number of objects in the room.” That is a function of consciousness - to count; not only to count but, significantly, to place value and to evaluate, using number. I place higher value on certain things than on others. So, consciousness differentiates and evaluates.

Consciousness doesn't stop at the point of differentiation and evaluation. It also discerns. I choose to behave in a particular way, I choose to speak of certain things and not others, I choose to conduct my life in a particular fashion, I choose with whom to associate, I choose my life projects, I choose my goals, and, to some degree at least, I choose my challenges. That is not to suggest that consciousness has a divine, all powerful and ubiquitous nature whereby it can necessarily create its own reality at will, as many in the “New Age” will have us believe¹. It is not that idea. It is the idea that in as much as I have a choice, am able to direct my life, and I have available libido, I can choose on what and how I wish to direct that libido. It is consciousness that discerns and directs the available libido to that it has determined worthy of that libido, to that I choose to put it very simply.

MORALITY AND ETHICS

The issue of morality and ethics is something we will talk about more as we go along, but I will say something about it now briefly. For Freud, the moral agent

¹ Or, going back to the German idealists, someone like Fichte.

is tied up with the superego; an institutionalized, moral agency closely mapped onto the father, the symbol of the father and of patriarchal, institutional authority. To some degree it has a malevolent, oppressive quality about it. One should not think of the superego as a warm, fuzzy, benign agency, nevertheless it is the Freudian moral agent or agency.

But the idea that I want to emphasize here - the Jungian idea - is that a new ethic and moral compass is born from, and arises in, the conscious agent rather than a morality that is imposed from an external source onto the agent. The conscious self is then called upon to make moral decisions; it has to navigate conflicting impulses. There is desire coming from the unconscious; there is passion, there is fear, there are dreams, there are fantasies, wants, concerns, anxieties etc. that arise spontaneously from the unconscious. And then similarly, for most of us - unless you are a psychopath -, there is the notion of institutionalized morality that says,

“This is appropriate but that is inappropriate,” or

“You can do this but you cannot do that,”

and all of this is, in some sense, external to the conscious agent - even though these impulses come from the inner world - to the extent that externalized, moral authority has been internalized. Consciousness is called upon, not to identify with either impulse the impulse of desire or the impulse of the law. Rather consciousness is called on to ask the questions,

“Is this appropriate; does this fit in with my over-arching, moral self?”,

“Is this something towards which I want to direct myself?”,

“Is this something of which I want to be apart?”,

“Is this something which I am going to be able to justify when I get to the pearly gates and meet St Peter?”

At this point, there is the mythological weighing of the soul; it seems that you are going to be called upon to answer for your choices, and saying, “Well I had certain desires” or, “Someone told me it would be okay” are not really going to be substantive enough answers. One is going to have to sincerely speak from one’s perspective and take responsibility for one’s actions, and the part of you that takes responsibility, in psychological terms, is the conscious agent.⁴

However, it is important to note that the Jungian process is about individuation, the actualization of your ideal, most authentic and honest self. In the process of individuation, Jung differentiates between a morality that is external - a moral value system that I have appropriated from something external to myself, whether or not I invest myself in it - and a personal ethic. There is something about consciousness that moves from the notion of collective morality to the notion of a personal ethic.² I necessarily need to be invested in my own ethical self and that’s what becoming conscious is about. If one is unconscious, then, when one gets to the pearly gates, one can say, “I have followed the Ten Commandments. I have honored my mum and dad, the church and the government.” This would be a natural response. But for the conscious agent that would be insufficient and inadequate. The conscious agent needs to be

⁴ To be clear, this is not meant to espouse any particular canonical view, but simply to invoke the enduring and cross cultural myth of having one’s soul weighed in terms of one’s choices in some divine court post mortal existence.

consciously invested in his or her moral choices. The fact that it is something that I heard or was told or that was imposed on me is an inadequate answer.³ So there is a movement there, from a collective morality to a personal ethic.

MEANING:

The issue of meaning is important to Jung. There is a quote by Jung, *“The sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being.”*⁴

This is central to the Jungian project; Jung associated the notion of consciousness, or of becoming conscious, with the idea of meaning. Jung makes an important distinction between meaning and purpose. I think that sometimes we tend to equate those two notions - meaning and purpose - but “meaning”, in this sense, has a different definition to “purpose”. Meaning is the *experience* of meaning; it is the *feeling* of meaning; it is the feeling that this project of being alive - although filled with much pain, many disappointments and great disillusionment - is worthwhile; it is good to be alive; it is worth being here; it means something to be here. That notion of meaning arises out of the conscious self. Jung speaks about a second act of creation; God created the world but only when the world is present in my soul - when I witness it -, then that is a second act of creation. In reality the world lives in me, and what allows it to live in me is the fact that I am conscious. Meaning is an important aspect which allows this to happen. Or, to put it another way, it is the experience of meaning in relation to creation that is constitutive of what Jung’s means by consciousness.

RELIGION:

Consciousness is a religious agent in the sense of the original etymology of the word. Religion comes from two Latin words, religio and religare. Religio means to closely examine, so in being conscious, I apply the religious function to myself and to my life; I live a reflective life; I live an examined life.

Some people may think you're crazy to be doing this course instead of, say, skiing in the Alps. "Why on earth would you need to embark on a process like this; why would you want to dig up all this stuff about yourself - what is that about? Get on with your life and live it. Why do you want to complicate your life by going through a process like this?"

Sometimes it's a challenging question to answer. Maybe it's not a choice – it's more of an obligation; you feel an obligation to live a reflective life. Socrates had the notion that the unconsidered life is not worth living. But for some people - they seem to live quite well. The point is the notion of self-reflexivity; of examining one's life, and that religious function is tied up with consciousness.

² See Erich Neumann, *A New Ethic*.

³ The not infrequently used defence, "The devil made me do it", would in other words not constitute an adequate

form of defence or justification for the conscious agent. The conscious agent is called on to reflect and consider the

consequences of her actions *herself*. At best the evil invocation from the devil may be used in mitigation of sentence

but certainly not in the aspiration of a not guilty verdict. The conscious agent is by definition always guilty, always

responsible for her actions – that is what it means to be conscious.

⁴ *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*.

OPPOSITES:

Consciousness brings about a dualistic existence in the world in that there is always the classic dualism of subject and object, and that is the inherent, central nature of consciousness in. Consciousness is often used in a generic sense - it's not always clear what is meant when people use the word "consciousness". You go and eat at Consciousness Café or you become a conscious consumer; I am reasonably sure that these uses of the signifier "consciousness", differ in meaning from the way we use the term in psychoanalysis. Jung, at least, had the notion that consciousness brings about the dichotomy of subject and object or, simply, the problem of opposites. Analogously, there is a great line from Sartre⁵ in which he says, *"In life, like football, the game is complicated by the presence of the other team."* I think that sums up the notion quite nicely; it's the nature of consciousness to bring about these juxtapositions of:

known vs. unknown,

conscious vs. unconscious,

good vs. bad,

I am here, but I would like to be there,

I believe that I should conduct my life in a particular way, but I conduct my life not quite according to my lofty ideals of how my life should be conducted, or, to come back to Freud, this juxtaposition of the id and the superego.

⁵ Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905-1980) was a French philosopher, playwright, novelist, screenwriter, political activist, biographer, and literary critic.

This is an important point to get - the paradoxical nature of existence; the fact that for all of us, certainly for most of us, we experience that there is always an “absence” present. The absence always has to do with the notion of, “This is my life but if my life were that then I would be contained, I would be happy and I would be self-realized.” It’s often the idea that, “When I cross this threshold the true life will begin.” This idea of having an absence between what I know and what I don’t know; what I want and what I have; what I am and what I want to be, is the very essence of consciousness. It is consciousness that brings about that state. If one were in an unconscious state, one might have certain organic distress; one may be hungry, cold or distressed in one way or another, but it is that existential angst of, “Why is my life such a disaster?” or, “Why am I not able to realize that which I desperately long to realize?” or, “I’m married to my wife but I’d really like to be sleeping with the next door neighbor”, that is the very nature of consciousness. That is what it means to be conscious. One is necessarily removed from the object of one’s desire, and the desire to have the union; to unite with the object of one’s desire, is the desire to be unburdened from the pain of being conscious. We want to return to an uroboric, unconscious state - the state in which we were in our mother’s womb or when we were suckling at her breast. Of course, the adult equivalent of that would be the experience of orgasm, but, as we all know, that experience is momentary and offers very brief respite before one re-enters one’s state of absence and of dualistic consciousness.

Sartre writes about consciousness in his opus *‘Being and Nothingness’*⁶ in a way

⁶ Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology (French: L’Être et le néant : Essai d’ontologie phénoménologique), sometimes published with the subtitle A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology, is a 1943 book by the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. In the book, Sartre develops a philosophical account in support of his existentialism, dealing with topics such as consciousness, perception, social

that helps to amplify Jung's ideas. He refers to consciousness as the 'for itself', and to the object as the 'in itself', and that the 'for itself' always longs for union with the 'in itself'.

Let me illustrate this by way of the following example.

“Let's go to skiing in Aspen.”

There is this fantasy that I am on the slopes at Aspen (sponsored perhaps by an eternally grateful student). In my fantastical imagination, I ski down the slopes, then after an exhilarating day on the slopes, I am sitting in a hot tub drinking Glühwein alongside my attractive and charming companion, of course. In the bosom of this fantasy my angst and anxiety dissolve. In my fantasy, I fully enter into this realm - into this experience; this fantastical way of being. However, there is a jarring dissonance in the fantasy's actualisation in the world.

A strange thing happens in its actualization. That my sponsor books the ticket, I ask, “Is it coach or is it business class? Because you know coach is cramped - you can't sleep very well.” But then I rationalize, “It's okay because the trip won't endure too long and then I'll get to the ski resort. When I get to the resort I'll need to have a few lessons, of course. The lessons are not that much fun, but I know that when I get the basics and start skiing, then the (true) holiday is going to start.”

philosophy, self-deception, the existence of "nothingness",
psychoanalysis, and the question of free will. - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Being_and_Nothingness

But then, I don't have the greatest and coolest ski's and I'm going up in the cable car and I see all these young, buff guys who have snowboards but I'm this nerd with entry level skis. But it doesn't matter because at some point I am on the slope, and maybe there is a moment when it is euphoric, but, alas, it doesn't last very long. It is over and I now I can't wait to get back to the ski lodge and into the hot tub, drinking my Glühwein. Now reverie really starts to really kick in - now I'm wondering, "What comes next; where am I going to go; who am I going to spend the evening with; I wonder how I looked on the slopes, etc. etc.

In other words, there's always this thing that removes me from the experience, and the thing that removes me from the experience, Sartre referred to as the "for itself". It is a concept that is very useful when reflecting on the phenomenological experience of consciousness.

When Sartre, wrote "Being and Nothingness", or so the story goes, he wrote it in a Parisian café. His girlfriend Simone de Bouvier was also in the café and she would sit on the other side of the café. They would sit there the whole day and nurse a cup of coffee. They were so stingy that when it came time to eat, they would leave, eat somewhere cheaper and then come back to write and drink coffee. They would send the waiter between them with messages. I don't know if you've ever seen the text "Being and Nothingness", but he must have spent a long time in this café. And so, it gave him lots of time to observe the *Garçon*, and he made the observation that the *Garçon* seemed to be acting. And when one thinks of a waiter in a Parisian café, the notion really comes to life; he's acting as the waiter.

A more contemporary example is on a flight and you observe the flight attendants. It is, in some sense, as though the human being is not there; they are acting, and this waiter or flight attendant is never able to completely enter the role. There's something about them that is removed from the role - they have to act the role. Sartre concluded that this is the nature of being a human being; that one is called on to act, and one frequently has an acute awareness that one is acting. It frequently results in a sense of being less than authentic or maybe being a fraud in some sense.

There is a sense that you are not completely that which you make yourself out to be. It's that idea and experience I'm talking about; consciousness is that which removes you from the identification with the "in itself" or with the role in the world. You can never be cashed out by that which you appear to be or that which you do. You transcend that, but that in you, which transcends it, goes beyond the domain of language. Inasmuch as we can sit down and talk to each other until the cows come home - and you may have shared a lot of facts about your life -, ultimately you're going to leave with a sense of there being something important that you weren't able to share; that in talking about your personal history, your anxiety, your dreams, your fantasies, your children, your friends etc. it describes you in a way, but there is something about you which is not fully contained in that description. That is the idea here; that you are never completely identified with that which you wish to be or aspire to be. Sartre does offer some redemption in relation to this seemingly rather dystopian idea, he says, "That is why, to be conscious is to be free, because consciousness cannot

be absorbed by, cannot be identified with, anything; it has a negative function.” It removes one from the experience, so consciousness is the experience that removes you from the identification of that which you think you are or that which you think you’d like to become. Thus, bestowing freedom. Admittedly a freedom of a seemingly dubious character, an apophatic freedom to use the technical term, but on reflection it is not without value. And, if we accept Sartre’s idea here it provides a solid philosophical justification for imbuing consciousness with its transcendent character.

I am going to stop there. I hope this has given you a few interesting and instructive ways to think about consciousness and your experience of being a conscious agent.

APPLICATION

INTRODUCTION

For those of you who are new to the Magnum Opus Programme, I want to say a few words to introduce these applications. With every module, following the module lecture, there are applications. These applications are the sharp end of programme and facilitate the movement from abstract theory to practical application. Along with the concepts from the lecture, this is what allows you to assimilate and apply these ideas. If you find the applications challenging and experience resistance of whatever form to them, understand that is natural.

They are designed to challenge you and expose your unconscious ideologies to the light of consciousness. Stay with them, the work you put into them will repay itself many times over.

I encourage you to share your applications on the Facebook forum, it is an effective way of being audited throughout the programme. Whether or not you do though, ensure you keep a record of all your answers to the applications. You can do this in one or other dedicated journal, either digital or paper. Different methods work for different people and so there is no set way of approaching the applications. I will however suggest a method many have found effective:

1. Read through or listen to the lecture once or twice.
2. Give yourself a few days to digest the ideas discussed without tackling the applications. During this time journal, any thoughts about the concept that come to you.

3. Create a ritual space and time to do the applications. Do not try and squeeze them in between work meetings. You need to have a quiet and reflective space as though you were doing a meditation – this is a Western form of meditation.
4. Time needed varies widely across students and I can offer no prescription. That noted, cap your time investment. Any single application could go on for days, weeks or even months. That however is impractical. I encourage you to try and put each application to bed within a reasonable time period. Were I a student on this programme I would cap my application time to five, maximum six, hours, split over a few days.
5. These applications are of a self-reflective nature and will often require you to recruit your creative imagination. This proves surprisingly challenging for those unused to it. It is a practice, the more you do it, the more adept you will become at it.
6. The textbook error to fall into is self-doubt! Each application is a question to the psyche, think of this as an interview rather than a Socratic dialogue. Note each answer, even if you are not convinced. Mull over it for a substantial time, before re-interrogating the psyche for an answer that is more comfortable to your conscious ideology. The project of building an internal ethic of necessity requires you to afford the psyche's responses with a certain weight, a certain gravitas.

APPLICATION

Reflect on and answer the following questions.

Write a letter to the big G in the sky. Don't use the approach of supplication or prayer in this instance. I want you rather to imagine yourself as a scientist or anthropologist studying the phenomenon known widely as yourself (in case that was a little wordy – you are reporting on yourself). These are the key areas I want you to focus on:

1. A little about your identity, focus on your interiority, your subjective self, how you feel and experience yourself and the world. Not too much, a page or two. The big G is busy, they are looking for an executive summary here.
2. Once that is done, I want you to focus on a few specific areas. Do this after you complete 1). Do this in list form. Your top five:
 - I. Desires
 - II. Beliefs
 - III. Fears.
 - IV. Regrets.
 - V. Personal achievements you take pride in.
 - VI. People who matter most to you in the world (here you can go to 10 if needed).

VII. Things, be they objects, things in the world, or projects that matter most to you.

VIII. Goals – i.e. applied desire in the world.