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ABSTRACT

C. G. Jung never offered a formalized system of ethics, but his analytical psychology is teeming with ethical pronouncements. Jung's ethical theories are introduced and explored in relation to a book written by Dan Merkur centering on the question of morality in human nature, the individuation process, and in psychotherapeutic treatment. Jung struggled to provide a dialectical account of human valuation, yet this is implied in the very process of overcoming oppositions through the negotiation and integration of differences, and in holding balances between internal and external conflicts. The psychologicalization of ethics, particularly the compensatory function of the unconscious, ensures that moral psychology is fraught with ambivalence, uncertainty, and competing dilemmas that are unique to each person, hence no formal or rational system of deontological ethics is possible.

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Jung never offered a formalized philosophical system of ethics. In fact, very scant references to Jung's ethical reflections exist in the literature, and when they do, they primarily center on the question of evil (Naso & Mills, 2016). This may not be surprising given that Jung was focused on psychological phenomena, not philosophy, but ethical aspects of psychological theory abound everywhere in psychoanalytic writings. For instance, the notion of the superego and conscience is a cardinal element of classical psychoanalytic thought. Psychoanalytic ethics usually focus on the interplay of tensions between desire, reason, defense, and moral ideals, whereas philosophical paradigms devote considerable more efforts to systematically delineating a theory and method of ethical inquiry and praxis that has normative consequences for individual behavior, social analysis, and distributive justice. Whereby psychoanalytic theory and observation are largely based on *descriptive* ethics (Mills, 2005), philosophy has historically ventured into *prescriptive* means of thought and conduct that are offered to ameliorate collective anxiety around how one ought or should think and act.

The following review essays in this journal issue have taken up a critique of psychoanalyst and religious scholar Dan Merkur's last book, *Jung's Ethics*. Dr. Merkur was a colleague but not a personal friend, yet I knew his work fairly well. I visited him in palliative care in the hospital where he gave me his final book manuscript just before he died of cancer. It was in rough shape, so I promised I would edit it properly and make sure it

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got published. Although this is not his best work, he was preoccupied with Jung at the end of his life, and systematically read his *Collected Works* and *Seminars* as part of his morning reading, looking for 'inspiration', as he told me. Dan had obtained his PhD in religious studies before his training as a psychoanalyst and was well known in the field of religion for integrating the two disciplines. I had filmed Dan in his final days while he was still lucid, interviewing him on his life's work and views on spirituality for a documentary I am producing. He unpretentiously identified himself as a religious man of Jewish identity where ethics was a paramount aspect of his life philosophy, similar to that of Buber and Levinas. After reading through his detailed compendium and reflections on Jung's specific quotes on a variety of topics and contexts, it was apparent that what he had been primarily focused on while reading Jung was on the implied notions of ethical inquiry.

Merkur's book covers much of Jung's corpus, such as his theories of the personal and collective unconscious, repression, good and evil, dreams, archetypes, synchronicity, the psychoid, the shadow, the paranormal, the Self, and God, not to mention Jung's contributions to clinical method and therapeutic action that centered on individuation, consciousness expansion, moral discourse, and his spiritual pursuit of the numinous that has a tacit aura of religious transcendence. It was only natural that I titled the book, *Jung's Ethics*, with an emphasis on moral psychology and his cure of souls.

By way of further biographical introduction, the Toronto Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis (TICP), where Merkur graduated from and later taught at, developed The Dan Merkur Scholarship after his death. The following announcement issued by the TICP is both a testimony to Merkur's esteem among colleagues as well as his intellectual legacy:

> Genius and polymath, Dr. Dan Merkur, a native Torontonian and clinical graduate of the TICP, died in 2016. Merkur left behind a legacy of intellectual and clinical thought seldom paralleled and often unheralded. As an academic he published over 13 books and countless articles in journals, edited collections and textbooks. Dan, foremost a religious studies scholar, made seminal, uniquely brilliant contributions in the areas of religious history, mysticism and alternate states of consciousness, ecstasy and personality transformation, phenomenology, bible studies and pastoral counselling. He elegantly applied an encyclopaedic grasp of psychoanalytic thought to his religious studies research, as well as penning books and articles devoted specifically to psychoanalytic metapsychology, anthropology and clinical work. Dan was the first clinician at the TICP to offer long term psychoanalytic treatment to the homeless. As both an instructor to candidates, and a well-recognized voice at TICP conferences, Dan distinguished himself as exceptionally memorable, uniquely insightful, and often, controversially provocative. He was a true original. In his personal life, Merkur's intellectual work on moral development reflected, and grew out of, his unflinching ethical commitment to his friends and colleagues, and to his sundry institutional involvements. In memory of Dan, the TICP proudly announces the creation of The Dan Merkur Scholarship awarded to candidates who, like Dan, demonstrate exceptional initiative, facility, passion and inventiveness in the areas of psychoanalytic scholarship and/or clinical work.

Merkur's engagement of Jung's texts was through an ethical lens, not reading Jung as an ethicist. In fact, Jung had made a few proclamations that he was neither a philosopher nor ethicist (Jung, 1949, p. 616), and hence any analysis of ethics would be offered through psychological interpretations of the human being.

Jung's psychology of ethics

Besides Beebe's (1992) classic work on integrity, to my knowledge, Giovanni Colacicchi is the first author who has undertaken an extensive examination of Jung's views on ethics next to Merkur. Colacicchi (2015) places Jung's ethics at the crossroad of a variety of ethical traditions and stresses that Jung's psychology is capable of integrating ethical approaches that are often seen as mutually exclusive. Jung's emphasis on the psychological importance of strengthening the conscious ego (a necessary but not sufficient step towards individuation) is traced back to Kant's deontology: Kant's consciousness of duty becomes Jung's duty to be conscious (pp. 44–48). Secondly, Jung's paradigm is related to Nietzsche's ethical stance, which is characterised as an original form of virtue ethics based on the virtues of courage, knowledge, and health. All these virtues are also central to Jung's psychological outlook. Furthermore, Colacicchi shows that Jung takes from Nietzsche the conviction that ethics is an individual task, which must go beyond collective morality, since it has to take into account the centrality of the (fundamentally irrational) individual self (pp. 89–99). Thirdly, Colacicchi elucidates various points of convergence between Jung's ethics and Aristotle's virtue theory, namely, in their similar notions of wisdom (pp. 125–129). Finally, he argues that Jung can be described as a heterodox Christian due to his belief in the (at least psychic) existence of evil, which 'softens Jung's Nietzschean stance [since] expressing our Self in the world should be done, as far as possible, without harming others' (p. 145). These heterogeneous sources to Jung's ethical positions are shown to be compatible inasmuch as Jung sees ethics as the result of a creative interplay of ego-morality (Jung's Kantian and Christian legacy), ego-immorality (the lesson Jung learns from Gross, see pp. 111–113), and unconscious amorality (i.e Nietzsche's amoral self).

Because Jung provides no formal ethical system, one is confronted with having to peicemeal together where he might fall in philosophical classifications derived from his varied writings on psychology, culture, and the clinic when compared to traditional ethical theories and categories. On the face of things, and this may seem rather unfair of me to mention, comparing Jung's analytical psychology to deontological ethics, where there is an emphasis on absolute right and wrong actions in-themselves, or virtue theory, where ethical behavior is assessed by one's character and habits, may seem rather suspect given Jung's polyamory, anti-Semitic and racist writings, such as those of Africans, black Americans, and indigenous cultures, not to mention his European male chauvinism. Here, he would be more inclined to embrace a system of psychological subjectivism or moral relativism that echoes natural law theory when speculating on human nature and ethics. But let's give him a little slack. After all, we should not condemn a person based on their personal life when critiquing their theories, or we would have never read the greatest minds in the history of ideas.

Merkur's (2017) focus is to tease out Jung's views on the psychological complexity of morality, the struggle of conscience and integrity, the integration of opposites within the psyche, the compensatory function, and the relation of religion and the numinous as a plea for the pursuit of ideality. One also appreciates from Merkur's analysis the notion that psychotherapy is itself an ethical stance, where an implicit goal is to cure a sick soul, hence the ethics of treatment. Not only does this open up a discourse on therapeutic action and the ethical intentions of the analytic encounter, it also imports an ethic

of method and technique, relational engagement, modes of communication with patients, and so forth, where the process of individuation, the pursuit of wholeness, and consciousness expansion (as self-in-relation to ideals and the attainment of these possibilities) remains an undercurrent in any therapeutic dyad.

On moral discourse, taming the shadow, and dialectics

Jung's (1966) moral discourse centers around the desire to be good and suppress evil (p. 277), both as a virtue and as a prescriptive sanction or ethical duty, but most of his references to negative valuation implicitly asks us to confront and tame our shadow-side of life, or to control our uninhibited instinctual dispositions (much like Freud does), as if we should renounce our natural sin for ethical self-consciousness, a salient deposit of his Greco-Christian sensibility, but with a pragmatic agenda. Here, we can see its roots in virtue theory, for becoming a better person is an end-intself, an identification with the good as an ideal worthy of worship and emulation, and hence in the spirit of seeking harmony within oneself.

Everyone struggles with their shadow, destructive intentions, and in finding balance between opposites. Jung identified this trusim early on as presaging his life's work (Jung, 1961, p. 192). In the 'The Transcendent Function', as well as the *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*, both written in 1916, Jung highlighted the problem of opposites, and particularly how they could be resolved. In the *Seven Sermons*, living out his own Gnostic myth (see Segal, 1992), he particularly identifies 'pairs of opposites' in the psyche that produce a clash of values: 'We labor to attain to the good and the beautiful, yet at the same time we also lay hold of the evil and the ugly' (Jung, 1916/1992, p. 184). Although Jung stressed a 'union' of conscious and unconscious opposition as a transcendental principle, this in not without problematics, as he lacked a rigorous philosophical foundation in his approach to dialectics. In fact, the simple binary of evoking opposities may be viewed as a philosophical embarrassment as it does little to illuminate their dynamic complexities, much like New Age reinventions of yin yang. What we may say is this: just as Jung was facing his own existential crisis at this time in his life, so too was he exposing a universal psychodynamic process. Through coming to terms with the 'distinctiveness' of one's personality, that is, being an individuated or discrete person from the masses, one must always grapple with their own intrinsic being and process of becoming. Wanting to intimately and genuinely know and experience one's inner being is a striving for authenticity. It is this subjective and solitary journey through the particularity of lived experience that sets us all apart from others.

Although Jung struggled to provide a dialectical account of human valuation, this is implied in the very process of overcoming oppositions through the negotiation and integration of differences, and in holding balances between internal and external conflicts. The psychologicalization of ethics, particularly the compensatory function of the unconscious, ensures that moral psychology is fraught with ambivalence, uncertainty, and competing dilemmas that are unique to each person, hence no formal or rational system of deontological ethics is possible. In fact, Jung (1949) concludes that a formula for providing ethical rules is 'impossible' (p. 618). There are too many complexities and diversities that drive the human condition, so much so that we can scarcely lay down a general or universal theory that governs ethical behavior for collectives. At most we can offer are orienting guideposts that court ideality and act as an aspirational striving informing our moral choices mediated

by context and contingency. Here ethics becomes broached through the *via negativa*: knowing what *not* to do is better than nothing, despite the fact that it may simply beg the question of what is morally good.

Jung's amateur ethics

In Jung's (1949) 'Foreword to Neumann,' he provides a pithy reflection on ethics that is rather elementary, establishing his argument in response to deontological commandments or absolutist statements ('must' and 'ought') that direct one to act, hence glossing over the sundry ethical systems engaged by formal philosophy. He then jumps to ask, What is it meant by 'good?', followed by a few contextual ambiguities, only then to conclude that it is 'better to leave it alone' (p. 616) due to the difficulty of evaluating every possible ethical scenario one could potentially face. Hardly satisfactory, but honest. Jung also acknowledged how difficult it was for the therapist to establish ethical principles. We must remember his time, when psychotherapy was a relatively new field, and has since then come a long way in establishing ethical codes of conduct, such as not having sexual relations with patients; but Jung was addressing how the psychotherapeutic experience was really a moral confrontation with one's interior, and hence, by extension, the analytic frame was implicitly an ethical initiative. He even goes so far as to state that the 'chief causes of a neurosis are conflicts of conscience and difficult moral problems that require an answer' (p. 616). Notice the use of the term 'require', as if it is an ought, a demand, a necessity. What Jung then pin-points, as Merkur does, is the problem of the shadow – our inherent aggressivity and destructiveness, the evil within.

Setting aside the fact that Freud also emphasized the ethical dilemma in the human psyche, in the consulting room, and in the process of civilization, Jung emphasizes the *compensatory* function of our dark side that works against ethical principles in our conscious minds. This demands (once again, an 'ought') a response by the various aspects of our divided nature. Jung then extends this tension to the purpose of treatment itself as 'a moral one' (p. 617). This is when he introduces his own 'new ethic' as the pursuit and value of wholeness, namely, of the integration of the whole personality, including its honorable and evil characteristics, hence a mediation of opposites. Here his ethical theory rests on the presumption of wholeness – whatever that is; that we can achieve wholeness; that it is desirable and good, presumably in-itself; that mediation is good; that unity is good, when it may be experienced as bad, or intrusive, or as a nemesis to differentiation, hence its own evil, and so forth. And by the way, What is Jung's definition of evil? Due to his unsystematic reflections on the matter, it remains unclear.

Despite these ambiguities, Jung thinks that the psychologist can help in this matter, either by providing an answer or helping the patient to discover one. But ultimately the patient is alone and is abandoned to his or her own thrownness as an existential subject in search of an appropriate moral choice. Jung states that the ethical 'solution, in my experience, is always individual and is only subjectively valid' (p. 618). This hints at a radical subjectivity or moral relativism operative at the base of all existential conundrums, but it does not favor a moral stance on the outcome. Cold-blooded murderers have their reasons and desires to kill that are 'subjectively valid', but it does not make their actions virtuous, just, or morally right. That is why we have systems of social justice that take into account the radicality of subjective freedom that offends a

democratic or utilitarian philosophy of right. But in Jung's signature fashion, he cannot help but import the notion of the collective.

The collective ethos

Jung first takes as his starting point the subjectivity of the individual, then extrapolates to collective phenomena but with a perspectival twist: despite the fact that regular features and patterns may be observed in collectives where we can abstract certain ethical rules governing behavior, none are 'absolutely valid' due to the dialectical complementarity of mind and the complexifications of unique situations. Here, Jung shows common sense mirroring American pragmatism. This is the reason why integration of oppositions is so arduous. We may even ask, Is it really even possible? We subsist in a sea of self-states with no guarantee that any of our inner experiences will ever be mediated let alone embraced within a grand (if not grandiose) scheme of integration. This absolute scheme of the grand synthesis is a psychic fantasy – the myth – that compels us to keep on living. 'Because others endure such ambiguity and anxiety, it must be a collective phenomenon!', but with little solution or solace.

Ethics is always conditional. Just as a person must confront their own modes of self-deception, repression, or dissociation, the therapist must point out the defenses that keep the patient blind to their own inner wishes, fantasies, and resistances, even if this ethic –the psychoanalytic method – induces moral judgment in the intersubjective field. What Jung prizes most of all – and this could be his own unconscious speaking (yet reflective of an ideal humanity), is the integration of the shadow. Here is where Jung appreciates the ancients in their quest for virtue and the cultivation of character. We must become aware of our own negativity and destructive processes and attempt to transcend them the best way we can. And this is always a subjective endeavor, never one that fits cleanly into an intellectual formula, recipe, or step-by-step method that ushers one into the kingdom of heaven. But despite these stipulations, Jung (1949) predictably enlists the 'archetypal' that is 'deeply embedded in human nature' (p. 619), a return to the collective unconscious as the source of ethical value and revolt. Despite the fact that ethical parameters and injunctions arise from culture, education, teachings, and personal experience, a main point is to bring conscious and unconscious experience into a 'responsible relationship'. In the end, Jung affirms, there is no collective morality that can deliver the individual subject from the life within. We are all condemned to bear a private moral crusade.

Expanding self-consciousness

Observing his Nietzschean influence, Jung (1949) avows that 'no one stands beyond good and evil' (p. 620), rather life is a perennial balance of opposites. What Jung ultimately advocates for is a broadening, refinement, and improvement of self-reflection where there are higher differentiations or sublimations of the ego that are achieved through elevated gradations of self-consciousness by contemplating the ethical mediated through inner conflict in creative fashions fumbling toward the pursuit of wholeness, whatever that may entail, hence a totally subjective, teleological trajectory. This requires inner negotiation between the rich and divergent aspects of our interior enveloped in conflict within one's individuation process, namely, the struggle for *unity*, 'the real core of the ethical problem' (p. 622). Here we may not inappropriately conclude that ethics simultaneously

parallels metaphysical preoccupations with reconciling the one and the many, the particular within the rubric of the universal.

The following essays by John Beebe and Rogert Segal take up Merkur's project in varying ways of interpreting Jung's random comments on ethics. Written independently, we all address variations on similar themes. Beebe highlights the complementariness between conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche, between ethical values versus personal desire and pride, and between the dialectical tensions that pressurize the mind. Focusing on Jung's position that the 'unconscious insists on taking up moral questions', Beebe brings Jung into dialogue with Freud where each insist that morality, conscience, or the superego is the best part of us. The Self is the totality of wholeness – itself an ethical ideal as the ultimate culmination of the human being. But we are merely feeble creatures on an individual path of self-awakening while broaching the ethical through an authentic struggle with conflict.

Segal offers us an overview of Merkur's professional life work before taking up his analysis on Jung's ethical theories. In doing so, he educates us on Merkur's background and on how psychoanalysis illuminates our understanding of mysticism, how Jung's psychology is tied to religion, and in turn how it is tied to mysticism. In many of Merkur's books, the striving for unity, the value of unitive thinking in religion and psychoanalysis, and the conclusion that psychoanalysis is both religious and mystical cannot be under-emphasized. Segal further highlights Merkur's psychoanalytic approach to myth, how he systematically contrasts Jung to Freud throughout his final book, explores Jung's views on human nature, evil, the shadow, and dreams, and differentiates his own views on the ethics of the *is* from the *ought*. In the end, Segal argues that Jung's psychologicalization of religion is tantamount to a religiosity of psychology.

If Jung has anything to offer a philosophy of ethics, it is in the wisdom that there is no such thing as a purely moral person, only the striving to become a better one.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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