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Reading About . . .

Jung

by Paul Kline

In reading about Jungian theory and psychotherapy (for the two are inextricably intertwined, far more so than in orthodox Freudian theory) I find myself, as an academic, rather than practitioner, beset by two conflicting feelings: on the one hand I am sometimes carried away by the profundity of the ideas, the realization that truly important human topics are dealt with: on the other I am jolted into disbelief, by the lack of critical evidence, by the looseness of the language and the ultimate irrefutability of the concepts. My suggestions for readings reflect this conflict.

For anybody whose knowledge of Jung is slight or for those who have dipped into the collected volumes and plunged no further, put off by the initially difficult style, there is no better or easier introduction to the work than Jung's autobiography, *Dreams, Shadows, Reflections*, dictated by Jung near the end of his life. This is a fascinating book for it is far more a biography of Jung's ideas than his life but, of course, in so writing it, Jung reveals much of his introspective nature. In addition he describes experiences which to my mind cast doubt on his rationality but, as Dryden pointed out, great wit and madness are close relatives.

One of the attractive features of Jung is his Arcane learning. One of his books *Psychology and Alchemy* is particularly impressive. The way Jung develops the analogy between alchemy and the search for meaning is an intellectual tour de force. It is particularly fine in this book because the alchemical knowledge is *per se* interesting and of the kind not usually taught in psychology and psychiatry. In addition the alchemical metaphor is useful for helping the reader gain insight into Jung's notions of mental development and individuation. Finally it is an outstanding example of Jung's unique approach to understanding human behaviour.

Alchemy, of course, for Jung is a symbol. In the Jungian notion of mind, symbolism is hugely important. An edited book *Man and his Symbols*, contains a number of interesting papers on this topic and is well worth consideration.

So far these books have given us the full flavour of the mystical Jung: books to read uncritically, to blow the mind in modern parlance, to extend our ill developed left hemispheres. If I were to read all these books in succession, I would need the antidote of reason.

First, in a recent volume *Advances in Psychological Assessment* (Vol. 5) can be found a chapter "Jung's theory of psychological types and the Myers Briggs Type Indicator" by McCaulley which surveys the work carried out with the Myers Briggs test which attempts to classify subjects into the Jungian typology. The Myers Briggs type indicator constitutes an impressive attempt to apply standard psychometric, scientifically respectable, methods to investigate a Jungian hypothesis concerning personality. It certainly demonstrates, if nothing else, that this aspect of Jung's work is refutable and hence in Popperian terms scientific.

Another recent book which also claims that much of Jungian theory is scientific is that by Stevens, *Archetype: A Natural History of the Self*. This book, although itself uncritical, apart from being easily readable stimulates the critical faculties by the *prima facie* unlikelihood of many of its arguments, even the central one linking the theory to ethology. As its title suggests this book is useful as an aid to understanding what Jung meant by archetypes.

Orthodox psychoanalysts after the break with Jung have tended either to ignore him or vilify him. It is interesting to get a feeling for this controversy and Glover's *Freud or Jung?* although highly pro-Freudian is a good account of this matter. Similarly the Letters of Jung and Freud merit dipping into.

Finally I should like to mention briefly two books which I have found interesting from the many works written by those raised in the arts rather than sciences, men like Jung of huge and curious learning, usually Europeans, scholars to whom Jung is especially appealing. *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* by Eliade (all of Eliade's books are stimulating) and *The Problem of the Puer Aeternus* by Von Franz. These give a good idea of the scope of Jung's ideas.

It will be noticed that I have mentioned nothing specifically concerning psychotherapy. This is because it depends so much on the theory that must be first

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grasped. If this is done, the psychotherapy should follow. If the full richness of all these recommended books is absorbed, then the reader must have become an adept in Jungian theory: this however is no light undertaking.

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