

Weaving Voices Article (July-Dec 2002)

Contributions of the Members of the C. G. Jung Society of Sydney

We are always on the lookout for material for Weaving Voices. If you would like to submit an article of 1700 words or suggest something, please contact one of the committee members.

JUNG IN THE DOCK

BY PATRICK BURNETT

“Jung in the Dock” was a mock trial in February of this year by the UWS School of Psychology as part of their Master of Analytical Psychology programme. This article is the gist of the presentation I made to the “court” as part of Jung’s “defence team”. The charge was:

“That Dr Jung and those that follow in his footsteps, by perpetuating the dichotomy of mind and body and claiming the existence of the psychic reality, have seriously jeopardized the development of Western intellectual life (not to mention the health and welfare of society).”

The mind-body relationship is a “hot topic” in the contemporary science of consciousness and from a scientific perspective I think it is fair to say that no definitive answers are at hand. The science of consciousness and the mind-body conundrum, in particular, are the last great bastions for science and are probably its greatest challenge. How is it that we experience the mind as independent from the body, when rationally science tells us that this cannot be so? We simply do not know the answer to this question. So to claim that Jung is “guilty” of any charge in this regard is a non-sense, as science itself has no idea either.

Moving specifically to the first charge against Dr. Jung, it is patently wrong to claim that he “perpetuated a dichotomy of mind and body.” Jung did not believe that there was a separation of mind and body: far from it. He believed that psychic elements are experienced as being separate to the body but that there must be a connection. Jung was not optimistic of our finding this link, because the mind that was looking for the link does not have an objective outside point of reference – despite what science says about its objectivity, it is still housed inside the minds of scientists.

As a psychologist, Jung was more interested in experiences than discovering the mind-body connection. In this sense, he had a legitimate phenomenological outlook. He openly claimed to be a phenomenologist in his methodology. I would hope that in the 21st century we could be pluralistic enough in our intellectual stance.

Notwithstanding Jung’s phenomenological stance, I believe that some contemporary scientific models of consciousness support his conception of the human mind. Jung confronted the mind-body connection early in his career and came back to it in his later life. He believed that our instinctual body nature, i.e., our body elements and our instinctive responses that we cannot ultimately control (like the needs of sex, sustenance, attachment, protection, acceptance, belonging, self-assertion, anger, sadness, creativity, etc) produced what Jung referred to as “typical modes of action” which had a “compelling necessity [and] a reflex character”. In other words, there were instinctive impulses over which we have no conscious control. We may be able to repress these elements to some extent but fundamentally we know these elements well because they partly make us who we are as humans.

Jung argued that there is a complex relationship between these body impulses and consciousness itself. Just as we cannot control our instinctual nature, Jung believed that we cannot control our conscious apprehension of the world and ourselves.

In Jung's schema, the structuring process of consciousness takes place through inborn forms of "intuition" which he called archetypes. These he regarded as the instinct's perception of itself. Just as the body was governed by instincts so our consciousness was governed by archetypes. Far from being a division of mind and body, Jung viewed the two as being two sides of the same coin. Archetypes provide the meaning to our human bodily experiences.

Jung noted that bodily instincts are not an amorphous mass but are situational and specific: "...the instinct bears in itself the pattern of its situation". Conversely the mind, through consciousness, takes this situation specific energy and creates images that provide us with potential meaning in our lives. Images created by the mind represent the meaning of the instinct. The interpretation of the energy in the mind will depend on the development of consciousness. An undeveloped consciousness will impress by concrete reality whereas a developed consciousness will see the spiritual and philosophical side. Conversely, a consciousness that is devoid of instinct will see only distorted spiritual facts and misinterpret healthy instinctual urges.

The analogy of the light spectrum was used by Jung to illustrate the relationship between mind and body. The body and the instincts were at the infrared end of the spectrum and the mind and images were at the ultra violet end. Both ends of the spectrum were regarded as extending into the same realm of unknowable experience, which Jung termed (borrowing from Bleuler) the "psychoid". Jung infers that the psychoid has a relationship to the lower cortical functions of the brain and disappears into the area of the brain where psyche meets body and where body meets our human phylogenetic inheritance. When pushed, Jung hypothesized the location of the archetypes as being in the brain stem. It is interesting to note that in some scientific models of dreaming, dreams are seen as starting with massive electrical signals from the pons area in the brain stem which then spread up through the higher brain (e.g., Michelle Jouvet's theory).

Jung viewed the psyche as being a scale along which consciousness slides, from the instinctual (unconscious, unalterable and compulsive), to the imaginal (more conscious yet diffuse, unfocused and spontaneous) and on to thought processes (conscious, focused, under the control of the will and based on language for communication). Some contemporary brain research studies would concur with this idea. Jung simply and consistently pointed out the danger of consciousness sliding into a one sidedness that excluded the instinctual realm and the realm of images; a consciousness overly focused on external reality and social roles and devoid of creative input from its own inner resources and uniqueness.

So we can see that Jung did not believe in a dichotomy of mind and body. To suggest so, merely confirms that those that argue in this way have not read what Jung has had to say on the matter.

WHAT THEN IS PSYCHIC REALITY?

On the mind end of the mind-body continuum, Jung proposed that there are two types of thinking. He noted that conscious processes are usually "thinking in words" and he called these processes "directed thinking", (also referred to as "logical thinking" and "reality thinking"). This activity is to be regarded as being "directed outwards to the outside world". Directed thinking is based on "language and verbal concepts" and is a bridge to the outside world via its purpose of communication.

By contrast, “undirected thinking”, (also referred to as “fantasy thinking” and “dreaming thinking”) “leads away from reality into fantasies”. It is analogical, imagistic, spontaneous and guided by unconscious processes. This type of thinking is also to be seen as the basis of dreaming. This form of consciousness tails off into the semi-conscious areas of the psyche and eventually into unconsciousness. Its nature is elusive and can therefore only be inferred indirectly. Perhaps this is why it is so resoundingly rejected by those of a more scientific ilk. For Jung, it is through undirected-fantasy thinking that our directed-logical thinking is brought into connection with the deeper and older layers of the human mind and its instinctual sub-strata.

The evolutionary development for the faculty of speech and the accompanying conceptualization processes of language necessitate minute and very fine control of certain motor skills (tongue, larynx, lips, etc). In the evolution of the brain, the motor skills of precise and controlled hand movements (perhaps itself developed from the precision making of hand tools, etc) were overlaid with the neural areas for speech probably because the same minute control was needed. I believe that this led to the development of a form of consciousness that revolved around “control” and one that was based primarily on a focus on the objective world. This form of consciousness leaves out more than it includes (i.e. our subjective reactions). In addition, speech with its need for conceptualization, structure and logic required a consensus reality that may, again, leave out more than it includes (the subjective, the imagistic and the subtle).

Jung pointed out that biologically the processes of directed thinking eventually leave one in a state of exhaustion whereby undirected thinking takes over. There is now objective biological evidence for this idea in what is scientifically termed the “basic rest-activity cycle” or BRAC. This cycle of active, focused attention and its eventual slide into non-focused awareness occurs every 90 minutes in both sleeping and waking. During sleep, the BRAC equivalent for Jung’s directed thinking is the REM phase.

Jung’s description of the two types of thinking is almost identical to some of the functioning of the two hemispheres (which is where our main language centre is situated) tends to be logical, structured and controlling when compared to the right hemisphere which tends to be more imagistic, intuitive, emotional and spontaneous. The right brain is, in the main, non-cognitive and more artistic. One researcher regards its cognitive ability as being less than that of a chimp. Another credible researcher seriously considers the brain as having two completely distinct personalities located on the two hemispheres.

The left-brain tends to override the right brain because of its need for control and logic (referred to by one researcher as “left brain imperialism”). For Jung, the more imaginal right brain compensates for this one-sided nature of the left-brain by presenting fantasy/imaginal material that if appreciated and developed in a symbolic and emotional way can produce meaning and depth in the personality (Jung’s theory of psychic compensation).

Jung’s theory of psychic compensation simply but tellingly points out that our objective and subjective worlds have to be given their proper entitlements in a balanced and fully human way if we are to live fulfilling and meaningful lives. Far from seriously jeopardizing the development of Western intellectual life and the mental health and welfare of society, Jung’s insistence on the reality of psyche may just save humanity from itself.