

# **Jung's insights on ethics in business and work organisations: Examining the 'moral nature of present-day man'**

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## **Abstract**

Business can be likened to an institution of archetypal stature, influencing not only how work organisations are managed but also what society values both socio-economically and morally. As such, it also carries a significant shadow which pervades the psyche of individual agents. The significance of this collective shadow raises important moral questions usually discussed under the term 'business ethics'; however, too little attention is given to the unconscious influences that underlie most moral conflicts in business and within the context of work organisations. Jung's insights into the moral dimension of the psyche and the ethical value of individuation have much relevance to a better understanding of the various types of moral tension in business and at work. In particular, Jung's comprehension of the inherent moral struggle between the individual and the collective is discussed, and its value for reviewing the state of ethics in business is explained.

## **Keywords**

Business ethics, collective psyche, conscience, individuation, morality, work organisations

## **Introduction**

Business is undeniably a shaping force in contemporary society. Business interests influence policies, organisational values, culture and structure, as well as the meaning and value of work. Business interests corrupt and divide as much as they free the 'entrepreneurial spirit' that supposedly drives economic and social progress. Business, then, is an archetype with a dual face: it creates and destroys; it enables growth, but this comes at a cost, as is typical of the compensatory dynamic of the psyche (Jung, 1969b; Morgan, 2000). Business is an institution which manifests itself in the form of individual organisations, themselves composed of individual agents. Business values run throughout, part of the collective psyche which mirrors and intertwines with the psyche of individuals. In this purview, business is worthy of closer scrutiny since its pervasiveness in society can greatly influence how individuals feel, think and behave. As Moore (1996) writes: 'Business reaches so far into the concerns of the heart that perhaps we should investigate the soul of commerce and the state of the soul in the workplace' (p. 125).

Investigating the soul of commerce is a vast project, so I will here focus on the ethical dimensions and implications of business. From a dynamic perspective, we could say that what is ethically good is what nourishes the soul and enables its manifestation and development; likewise, what is ethically bad is what constrains the full expression of the soul or what deprives the soul from its necessary nutrients. Ethics is at the core of human life, and it is a most significant source of self-understanding. It has been noted before (Proulx, 1994; Solomon, 2001) that Jung placed much emphasis on ethics in his work, arguing that moral conflicts can trigger psychological imbalances and physical ailments (see notably the examples given in the Tavistock lectures 1935/1977, including paras. 107-108). Equally, he suggested – though never so explicitly – that individuation is a moral task and that the archetypal self is central to the ethical attitude (Jung, 1963/1995, notably p. 359ff; Solomon, 2000).

Although Jung's writings on ethics are scattered and often broad in scope, I argue that he has much to offer to enable better understanding of ethical issues in business, and to identify a hopeful way forward. The psyche's dynamics are particularly valuable when analysing moral tensions within business organisations, and within the mind of individual agents. As we are left dismayed by the endless abuse of human dignity in the workplace, increasing wealth inequality, recurring financial scandals and abusive corporate lobbying, it is essential to examine the ethical nature of business and explore more systematically how business people (which here includes both managers and workers, as both have a vested interest in business and at least implicitly endorse business values) experience moral tension and deal with it. The analysis needs to be done concurrently at the collective and individual level, for the two interrelate, but the groundwork necessarily occurs within the psyche of each individual as it requires the conscious engagement of the ego in understanding the issues and making choices.

To do such analysis effectively, we need to look beyond traditional moral theories, especially those inherited from the Enlightenment which place Reason above all else. Business indeed is also about the soul, and therefore needs to be apprehended more holistically. In his compelling essay *The undiscovered self* (1957/1970), Jung clearly outlined the ethical challenges of our modern epoch – and the same challenges remain today:

It is not that present-day man is capable of greater evil than the man of antiquity or the primitive. He merely has incomparably more effective means with which to realize his propensity to evil. As his consciousness has broadened and differentiated, so his moral nature has lagged behind. That is the great problem before us today. *Reason alone no longer suffices.* (para. 574, original emphasis)

Shaped by organisations, acculturated into a consumption-based and profit-driven society, present-day people – at least in the West – suffer from a moral malaise which suggests our ethical 'toolbox' has not kept up with the other advancements we have achieved, in

technology and beyond. In what follows, I will outline how and why Jung's insights remain most significant some 60 years later to enable us to understand the ethical problems of 'present-day' men and women whose lives are very much shaped by business.

### **Setting the context: The place of business in society**

A few clarifications on the context ought to be made first. Business here encompasses all activities relating to trade and commerce, with the aim of generating a profit of some sort. It therefore includes the management of the entire supply chain, from activities necessary for the manufacturing of goods to those relating to the distribution of goods, stretching to the disposal and recycling of used goods. It also includes the financial transactions which underlie and relate to the production and distribution processes. Business is thus central to the sustenance of any economy, and it affects a vast range of people in many ways: capital owners, employers, employees, traders, investors, as well as customers or consumers. As business does not operate in a vacuum, it also matters to political leaders and elected bodies as well as citizens; to public servants who work with, compete with or regulate privately-owned businesses; and to activists who are usually concerned with the effects of business activities on the social or environmental sphere both locally and globally. In effect, business' business is everybody's business, for all of us are affected in one way or another by what business does.

Its social impact is equally significant: what markets sell – and what marketers want people to buy – often ends up changing our consumption habits and our lifestyles, sometimes for the better, sometimes at a dear cost (Hastings, 2013; Kasser, 2002). The way social media have changed how people relate to one another, what they expect from one another (Graham, 2016), or how we present ourselves and narrate our lives to others (Replogle, 2014) is not just a technological change or a sociological issue. It has become so important because first and foremost there were tremendous business opportunities (for which one

might read 'profit-making opportunities') attached to social media, and many companies have seized these opportunities to drastically change habits, norms and values under the guise of greater freedom and more effective communication tools. Hidden advertising in sponsored educational programmes, the harnessing of data under the guise of information and better customisation of products and services, the emotional manipulation of attachment needs through the promise of joining a like-minded community have all been significantly helped by the spread of digital media. Hastings (2013, p.94) points out the cynicism of such techniques and discourses through the example of the expertly branded drinks company Innocent, which invites 'you' the customer to join the family and help make the company one which you are a significant part of through signing up for newsletters and giving extensive feedback and data about your lifestyle; once the marketing veil is removed, this invitation can be read as: 'we want to get as much information about you as possible so that we can sell more of our products than ever, but we are going to be all cutesy and hick because that way you might forget we are a rapacious corporation. Indeed that we are part of the Coca-Cola Corporation' (ibid).

Are we happier now? Perhaps, although probably not; Schumaker (2016) indeed outlines the widespread demoralisation that infects the cultural foundations of our communities. Have social and moral norms of expression and of behaviour been affected by the rise of social media and the incredible spread of mobile technology? Definitely yes. This is not always perceived as a problem, for it is argued that customers would not embrace a product or a service if they did not actually want this product or that service. Rejecting accusations of manipulating markets, business claims that it offers innovation, progress, prosperity, welfare and that customers are the ones who have the last word. Yet it is no secret that wants and needs are manufactured, and that the growth of an economy is not left to the hands of supposedly discerning customers but is determined by the (short-term) interests of conglomerate corporations (Grey, 2013; Hastings, 2013; Klein, 2000). The raging yet complex controversy over the opaque Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

(TTIP) agreement demonstrates the power of 'corporate overlords' by means of intense lobbying, and the influence they possess (and aim to expand further) on the political and social spheres (Coltrane, 2016a; 2016b). Business thus occupies a central place in an economy and in society, but the awareness we have of its *actual* scope of influence is likely small. This suggests a significant power lies in the shadow of the collective psyche, illustrated by the abuse of business against other spheres of human life.

The rise of business ethics as a distinct conversational field, dated from anywhere between the 1920s (notably with the rise of the 'human relations' movement and the discovery of the 'emotional worker' – Hollway, 1991) to the 1960s (stimulated by the civil rights movement and the beginnings of environmental activism), could suggest an attempt to bring to consciousness the pervasive influence of business and the impact of business values on non-business affairs. To this date, however, there remains much work to be done to develop business ethics as a core conversational field. Still a somewhat controversial or derided concept, business ethics has so far not proved able to question the place of business in society, thereby leaving significant complexes unexamined in the collective psyche. The power imbalance, the unsustainable rhetoric of constant growth, the cynical discourse praising the ever-increasing wealth gap as beneficial for everybody: all point towards an unhealthy psyche, not merely a depressed one. We witness far too many recurring cases of 'conscious corruption' and 'perverse dynamics' in those organisations that set the tone for our work-life and, more generally, for much of our social and personal life (Long, 2008, p. 2). This overwhelming shadow of business in the collective psyche undoubtedly resonates within the psyche of individuals (Jackall's 1988 oft-quoted enquiry into managerial ethics illustrates this well) though we are left with few tools to adequately comprehend this phenomenon.

One of Jung's major contributions to our understanding of human behaviour was to recognise that the psyche could not be approached rationally; instead we had to be more

creative, more imaginative to engage with it, to grasp its language. Denhardt (1981, p. 36) echoed Jung's position when he declared that '...in an effort to serve our own purposes...we no longer experience the world in its fullness, but only in the stagnant categories provided by our organizations and other institutions'. It therefore seems appropriate to turn to analytical psychology to reconsider the moral content of business and its ethical implications on individuals and the communities they live in. Work organisations are especially relevant communities to explore as they are the playing field for business relations between multiple stakeholders. Furthermore, work is an activity of socio-economic and psycho-emotional importance which contributes to the formation of one's conscious identity (Moore, 1992). The workplace, that is the organisation in which work takes place and which is itself structured around some business principles (at minimum, trading work for pay), is a major source of moral tension and dilemmas that need to be explored. Starting from this context, I will expose how Jung's understanding of the psyche not only helps to identify and explain such moral tension, but also offers very practical insights to address the tension and integrate it.

### **Jung's framework to understand ethical issues**

Proulx's review (1994) of Jung's views on ethics is one of the few papers that have explored this specific aspect of analytical psychology. Although much has been written on ethical standards and guidelines in the consulting room (e.g. Allphin, 2005; Solomon, 2000; 2001), very few authors have systematically engaged with Jung's contribution to ethics. Neumann's seminal work on the new ethic (1969/1990) brought forth by a more conscious grasp of the depths of the psyche, is helpful to contextualise Jung's own writings on the matter, and to appreciate the moral relevance of analytical psychology as practice and process. Samuels (1989) has also offered his own interpretation of the moral question, which I will discuss in a later section, although he did shy away from Jung's specific terminology. Nonetheless, despite the fact that many acknowledge the ethical undertone of Jung's proposals, it is often argued that he 'did not write much explicitly on the subject' and that to some extent 'Jung's

analysis does not do justice to the rich diversity and vividness of moral problems in daily life' (Proulx, 1994, pp. 102; 117).

I would challenge this position. I believe Jung wrote very explicitly on the practical aspects of ethical dilemmas in more papers than is usually noted. *Civilization in transition* (1970, CW10) is in fact a rich volume that includes several essays tackling the question of ethics in a so-called modern society, with many of these essays written in Jung's later years: beyond the obvious texts 'A psychological view of conscience' (1958) and 'Good and evil in analytical psychology' (1959), one should also consult 'The fight with the shadow' (1946), the earlier essay 'The spiritual problem of modern man' (1931), and most importantly 'The undiscovered self' (1957). Other relevant writings worth mentioning include 'Crime and the soul' (1932/1977, CW18), 'The transcendent function' (1958/1969b, CW8), *Aion's* sections on the shadow and the self (1969a, CW9ii), 'The development of personality' (1934/1954, CW17) and much of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963/1995).

I would summarise Jung's contribution to the ethical debate in the following terms: he understood that individual moral agency is complex and fragile, and needs to be consciously nurtured: this is the meaning and value of inner work. I argue that Jung provided us with a more thorough understanding and appreciation of the challenge of being an individual moral agent living in an im/moral collective. The experience of being a conscious individual in a collective of beings is, in fact, one of the most significant sources of moral tension. It is particularly evident in the workplace, or in the context of our relationships with the groups and communities we associate with. To further unpack the content and experience of those moral tensions, I will delineate below what I believe is Jung's framework to help us understand ethical issues.

Moral tension can manifest in different forms, which either involve some degree of projection or inflation, or reflect a conflict between the two kinds of conscience discussed by Jung (see



Table 1). In the former category, moral tension can be related to the persona, whereby the ego falls into a role-identification and loses track of other aspects of the personality. The need to present oneself in a bright light, to hide the darkness, to be the best, overtakes every other concerns; the ego becomes uni-dimensionally identified with a pre-defined (collective) persona, seemingly obliterating the depths of the self (Rozuel, 2010). Tensions can also reflect an ego-inflation of some sort, leading to narcissistic, Machiavellian or sociopathic behaviours that normalise manipulation, trickery and instrumentalisation of others. Another variation of such moral tension consists in shadow projection (counterpart to the persona), through which the external 'other' is made to carry the rejected, the unacceptable. This also enables the ego to avoid responsibility for the perpetuation of hurtful or evil actions.

The other broad category of moral tension includes what Jung called 'conflict of duty'. In simplified terms, the tension here emerges from the perceived contradiction between the norms of social conformity and the desire to pursue one's own creative intuition. The moral consequences of an unresolved conflict of duty lead to a tendency to blindly follow the herd (or being 'one of the million zeros' as Jung eloquently puts it – 1957/1970, para. 535) even when this path is destructive. I will further develop how each of these aspects is considered by Jung, and illustrate their significance in relation to business and work organisations. Of course, this categorisation has its limits because the actual experience of moral tension is frequently less clear-cut than portrayed here. Nonetheless, a better understanding of the various dynamics at play enables the ego to recognise more effectively the nature of the tension and elicit a more individuated response.

**Table 1. Overview of moral tension and its manifestations**

	<b>Projection/Inflation</b>	<b>Conflict of Duty</b>
<i>Articulated through...</i>	Persona/Shadow	Moral and Ethical Conscience
<i>Manifested as...</i>	Repression Rejection Hubris Violence (moral, psychological, physical)	Breakdown and Burn-out Isolation (lone voice) Fear
<i>Some Responses and Modes of Coping</i>	Compartmentalisation Scapegoating	Corruption and compromise Whistleblowing

***Projection, inflation and compartmentalisation***

I shall start with discussing the shadow as the most noticeable moral hurdle in one’s psyche. In *Aion* (1969a, paras. 14-16, original emphasis), Jung thus outlines the moral tension created by shadow projection:

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality... [To become conscious of dark aspects of the personality] is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. ...These resistances are usually bound up with *projections*, which are not recognized as such, and their recognition is a moral achievement beyond the ordinary.

The shadow is the repository of the repressed, but, more so, it captures the otherness in ourselves. The rejection of the internal other parallels the rejection of the external other, and leads to a heightened intolerance for alterity (Kafka’s short-story *The metamorphosis* offers a classic illustration of this behaviour – see e.g. Rozuel, 2014 for its socio-economic significance). Instances of scapegoating, discrimination or stigmatisation are traces of shadow projection, which can lead to extreme forms of violence expressed morally, psychologically or physically. This behaviour signals an unconscious fantasy of perfection which sets the bar for normalcy; yet perfection is not only illusory but very much subjective too. What is perfect for one is imperfect for someone else. That said, collective values play a part in setting the bar on what is normal and what is perfect, so that the individual ego may

feel the need to reject or repress what it would have spontaneously or intuitively found normal or 'perfect' on its own. The fear of inadequacy and, subsequently, the fear of being alienated from the group, further triggers a need to project one's shadow onto an external other. Until the ego accepts responsibility for the shadow, projections will pave the way for harmful behaviour and intolerance. Jung made this point very clear (1957/1970, para. 577): 'Nothing has a more divisive and alienating effect upon society than this moral complacency and lack of responsibility, and nothing promotes understanding and *rapprochement* more than the mutual withdrawal of projections.' Johnson (1991, p. 27) concurs: 'The tendency to see one's shadow 'out there' in one's neighbor or in another race or culture is the most dangerous aspect of the modern psyche.'

While the moral significance of shadow projection expands far beyond the realm of business<sup>1</sup>, many examples of shadow projection can be drawn from the workplace, and their cost is high in terms of moral decency and human dignity. On the market front, marketers have a fair share of responsibility in imposing a quest for perfection and differentiation that is often based more on mere perception than on the actual content of products or quality of services (see for example Spurgin's interesting discussion of 'real' compared with 'perfect' images in advertising, 2003). Within the human resource department, gender discrimination remains high despite policies purported to tackle the issue and apparent goodwill from employers and politicians (Kirchmeyer, 2002). Other forms of rejection of otherness (on disabilities, race, education, weight...) are all too common, even more so at the top management levels where strategic decisions are made. It is not that this is a new

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<sup>1</sup> Zweig and Abrams (1991, p.xx) poignantly depict the collective shadow as follows: 'The collective shadow – human evil – is staring back at us virtually everywhere: It shouts from newsstand headlines; it wanders our streets, sleeping in doorways, homeless; it squats in X-rated neon-lit shops on the peripheries of our cities; it embezzles our monies from the local savings and loan; it corrupts power-hungry politicians and perverts our systems of justice; it drives invading armies through dense jungles and across desert sands; it sells arms to mad dealers and gives the profits to reactionary insurgents; it pours pollution through hidden pipes into our rivers and oceans, and poisons food with invisible pesticides....This may help explain why we are riveted to violent news stories of warmongers and religious fanatics. Repelled yet drawn to the violence and chaos of our world, in our minds we turn these *others* into the containers of evil, the enemies of civilization.'

phenomenon. Rather, the problem is that shadow projection endures and the 'others' continue to be denied basic moral rights. Jung wisely said that: 'Recognition of the shadow...leads to the modesty we need in order to acknowledge imperfection' (1957/1970, para. 579). A good starting point to tackle the shadow is thus to come to terms with the fact that the human community is made up of individuals who need the support of one another *because* we are imperfect. The business rhetoric of winners and losers, of being the best, of ultimate challenge and ever-so-perfect images in fact encourages shadow projection – by implying that those who fail are not worthy of their humanness. More modesty is indeed what we need, but modesty grounded in a deeper sense of our own worth as imperfect and singular human beings.

Modesty is also a suitable remedy for ego-inflation when it loses its creative quality. By ego-inflation, I here refer to cases where the ego becomes quasi-identified with an archetype (likely in its complex form), so much so that the ego believes it is omnipotent. Some of the risks associated with a long-lasting inflation include the loss of connection with one's humanity, notwithstanding the fact that the ego may be so consumed by the archetypal image that it cannot return to a normal state of consciousness thereafter. Instances of ego-inflation are widespread in the business world, often manifested through a fascination with 'heroes' (the captains of industry or the CEOs with a magical touch) whom everyone aspires to resemble and moulds one's behaviour upon, as well as a tendency to dominate discourse (Matthews, 2002) and control the game. The story of the bank Lehman Brothers, which epitomises the 2008 financial crisis, is a perfect example of inflation becoming normalised and institutionalised (the BBC documentary *The fall of Lehman Brothers* offers a thorough analysis of the case). Many of the recent large-scale bankruptcies (Enron, WorldCom) or hefty corporate fines (BP for pollution, Royal Bank of Scotland for several dodgy practices, Amazon or Starbucks for tax evasion) due to immoral practices and to what commentators sum up as 'hubris' (Stein, 2013), portray senior managers with a characteristic ego-inflation, which did not seem to them abnormal because it appeared in line with the norms of

business. Furthermore, business norms reward excess in the form of bonuses and compensation packages that reinforce the gap between reality and phantasm, whereby an employee aspires to be the special one and feels they deserve what they are paid. A recent report outlined how on average a CEO in large publicly-listed firms earns 204 times the median worker pay, although this ratio can easily reach the thousands in some cases (Chamberlain, 2015).

Cases where the ego identifies with the persona is another variation of individuality yielding to the collective. Jung described the persona as 'a mask of the collective psyche. Fundamentally the persona is nothing real: it is a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be' (Jung, 1966, para. 246). Although the persona plays a necessary role in preserving one's identity in different, sometimes challenging milieus, there also are instances whereby the persona is given far too much power and the mask overshadows the more complex self in the eyes of the conscious ego. This, again, is particularly well illustrated in business, where competition is a virtue, and judgements can be ruthless. The pervasive rhetoric of perfection suggests that there is no place for actual weakness. Some flaws can be rephrased as strengths, but only if they were not actual flaws in the first place, according to prevailing norms. In order to fit in, to be accepted, to achieve one's goals, the persona becomes essential. We obsess about being the person that we are supposed to be, shutting off what we feel we actually are.

The pressure can be voluntary (i.e. I want to fit in and be successful within this organisation) or imposed by the environment (i.e. I have no choice but to embrace the values of this organisation if I want to survive/keep my job). The expectations set out in work roles also affect our behaviour and the presentation of the (social) self, slowly numbing the holistic nature of the moral self. That phenomenon of compartmentalisation itself carries strong moral risks, as I will explain below. The lack of moral grounding in a whole self especially challenges our ability to feel responsible for our actions. Jung stressed that 'every man is, in

a certain sense, unconsciously a worse man when he is in society than when acting alone; for he is carried by society and to that extent relieved of his individual responsibility' (1957/1970, para. 240).

Studies or tales of moral exemplars (e.g. Colby and Damon, 1992; Press, 2012; Rochat and Modigliani, 2000; Rozuel, 2013; Schwartz and Comer, 2013) tend to suggest that the unity of self and morality supports greater consistency between moral judgement and moral action. When our sense of identity intrinsically carries moral values, we are more likely to spontaneously live according to these values even when the situation becomes strained. The self is a moral anchor, a moral guardian almost. Hence, when this unity of self and morality exists, we tend to have a greater awareness of the moral component of a situation, and a greater perception of our responsibility as a moral agent. We also show greater certainty about our actions (Colby and Damon, 1992). People who exhibit this unity usually state: 'I know that I have to do something, I know what I should do, and I do it', not out of external duty (for example religious beliefs) – although this can be an additional motivation – but primarily because they would not be themselves if they did not act according to the calls of their conscience. Moral exemplarity, in this purview, is a matter of psychological unity at least as much as a moral achievement (Rozuel, 2013). This is in line with Solomon's view (2000) that, for Jung, the self possesses an innate capacity for ethical behaviour.

The opposite state is summed up in the notion of compartmentalisation. This refers to a process of fragmentation of one's personality for a given purpose, conscious or unconscious. For example, when I enact a role (be it a professional role or a social role with set expectations), I put aside other parts of myself that do not suit the role or fit my enactment of the role (see Rozuel, 2011). Although compartmentalisation has its advantages, notably when dealing with traumatic events, it nonetheless facilitates moral flexibility and alters the ability to perceive inconsistent moral behaviour as a self-betrayal. If different roles involve different sets of values (e.g. being competitive and impersonally ruthless in business are

positive values, whereas acting in such a way would not be considered so positively in a family or community setting), then one would shift from one mode to another and have to deal with the ambiguity of acting based on contradictory values. If the way we deal with such tension is to compartmentalise, the risk is real that we will develop a blurred sense of moral identity and, potentially, a greater acceptance of behaviours we would otherwise condemn if in a different role. In other words, when the ego-self axis is weakened by compartmentalisation, the ethical foundations of the psyche dwindle and the individual is more likely to accept the unacceptable. This phenomenon has been extensively reported in the world of work and management, under the label of moral muteness (Bird and Waters, 1989) or moral blindness (Moberg, 2006; Palazzo et al., 2012). Both are significant factors in the pervasive process of moral disengagement (Bandura, 1990; 2002) which numbs our sense of right and wrong to such a degree that we eventually condone immoral or inhumane actions.

The importance of the self in moral behaviour, as well as the location of conscience and moral values within the self, as outlined by the studies mentioned above, validate Jung's insight that the self is the moral repository and ethical centre for each individual. Of course, the archetypal self encompasses every aspect of the psyche – the shadow and the gold. But in the self lies a potential for extraordinary moral commitment which could be activated in the same way that we can activate moral cowardice. Besides, awareness of the moral resources of the self helps temper the sense of guilt that can emerge when we do not act according to how we feel we want to act in a given situation. Often, this guilt points towards a betrayal of the self, a breach of psychological integrity which also involves a breach of moral integrity. It becomes obvious that, for Jung, individuation is fundamentally a process of moral development, and that a greater understanding of the self uncovers new ethical strengths and pathways that enrich both the individual's life and the community he or she lives in. This developmental process, however, is not straightforward, as even relying on conscience proves tricky.

### ***Conscience and conflict of duty***

Jung's ethical approach was more carefully developed through the dual view of conscience. For Jung (1958/1970, para. 844), conscience exerts a transcending function, raising opposites to the level of consciousness. Jung reminds us that consciousness and conscience are etymologically related to the Latin word 'conscientia' meaning *knowledge* or *to know with*. The knowledge that it elicits, however, is twofold. Jung continues (ibid., para. 825): '...conscience is a complex phenomenon consisting on the one hand in an elementary act of the will, or in an impulse to act for which no conscious reason can be given, and on the other hand in a judgment grounded on rational feeling'. The numinous quality of conscience is evident when Jung refers to it as an 'autonomous psychic factor' and as 'a demand that asserts itself in spite of the subject' (ibid., para. 842). But conscience is also fundamentally and necessarily paradoxical. It is both the *Vox Dei* (the voice of God) as the guiding daemon (or the 'genius, guardian angel, better self, heart, inner voice, the inner and higher man'), and the more dangerous 'devil, seducer, tempter, evil spirit' (ibid., para. 843). Conscience thus does not guarantee moral purity, but confronts us with the inevitable ambivalence of human nature and consciousness itself. As Jung (ibid.) concluded: 'Everyone who examines his conscience is confronted with this fact, and he must admit that the good exceeds the bad only by a very little'. That is why a conflict of duty is often associated with a sense of being stuck, of being alone faced with an impossible conundrum whose solution will mark one for life. The tension is such that, left unattended or unresolved, one can suffer burn-out or fall into a state of depression, as one is caught between two major forces in the psyche: the unique demands of the self on the one hand, the attachment to the nurturing collective on the other hand.

Jung interestingly stated that conscience is subject to unconscious influence, as if an unconscious personality performs 'the act of conscience' in place of the conscious ego (ibid., para. 829), paradoxically shaking the ego's confidence whilst enabling it to further develop



and individuate (1934/1954). As a psychic reaction, conscience is moral when it stirs the ego towards the mores or the moral codes (thus implicitly suggesting conformity with collective norms). Conscience becomes ethical when the decision is reflective and inspired by 'the creative power of the ethos that expresses the whole man' and flows from both consciousness and the irrational unconscious (1958/1970, para. 855).

This confirms that inner work to develop consciousness has a strong moral dimension, for it is through greater ego consciousness that we can understand and work with (or work through) the primitive and paradoxical form of conscience originating from the unconscious. It is a hazardous exercise to distinguish the 'right kind of conscience' from the 'wrong one', when the latter 'exaggerates, perverts, and twists evil into good and good into evil just as our own scruples do; and it does so with the same compulsiveness and with the same emotional consequences as the 'right' kind of conscience' (ibid., para. 835). From a moral perspective, it is therefore absolutely essential to recognise the paradox and sustain consciousness of the possible ambiguity of our motives:

No one can guarantee that he has only noble motives. We know – some of us – far too much about ourselves to pretend that we are one hundred per cent good and not egotists to the marrow. Always behind what we imagine are our best deeds stands the devil, patting us paternally on the shoulder and whispering, 'Well done!' (ibid., para. 837)

Nonetheless, when a decision must be made, the moral challenge is to take a chance on the self, without being sure of what the self exactly wants, nor whether the whisper comes from the right or the wrong kind of conscience. Integrity here means commitment to the self, the archetypal centre that makes each unique and one (Beebe, 1992). In the self lies conscience, both of the right and the wrong kind, which informs what we can and should do irrelevant of what society might consider is right. To ignore the call of the self infers both a psychological trauma and a moral betrayal of oneself (Jung 1958/1970, para. 841).

One of the main objections to Jung's apparent slip towards unwarranted subjectivism (Proulx, 1994, p. 118) is that such a statement seems to discard the moral value of socially prevalent, collective codes and norms. However, Jung merely outlines how, despite the practical wisdom of external codes and norms, which over time have helped regulate human behaviour in communities, the codes do not sufficiently account for the unconscious. This is a significant weakness in so far as the unconscious is disruptive and creative in its own terms, so that even our most committed conscious choices may be hijacked by unconscious dynamics, and the ego left shattered by the occurrence. I believe that what Jung was proposing was that a life lived entirely relying upon external codes and norms is not only illusory but dangerous; for in the self lies an ethos, unique to the individual but not necessarily elitist nor devoid of shared concern for humanity, that possesses even greater strength and authenticity than the collective mores. An excessive attachment to the mores can actually impede ethical behaviour if the individual then surrenders their moral consciousness to the collective, allowing the collective to decide what is the right thing to do. In Jung's view, conflicts of duty emerge when the mores (the moral codes) fail to provide clear answers or possibly come into conflict with more subjective, emotional responses triggered by the unconscious. As hinted earlier, to face a conflict of duty is a most hazardous task, made even more difficult by the fear that one may become estranged or excluded from the safe arms of the community if one follows what one's conscience says. Hence Jung's remark that '...it needs unusual courage or – what amounts to the same thing – unshakable faith for a person simply to follow the dictates of his own conscience' (1958/1970, para. 835).

Samuels has offered an interpretation of the modern ethical attitude articulated around the complementary notions of original morality and moral imagination (Samuels, 1989). The former is depicted as a black-and-white, vertically-oriented authority regulating behaviour through codes and a process of differentiation through inclusion/exclusion, whilst the latter is defined as the more ingenious, intuitive and flexible understanding of moral principles that justifies exceptions and casuistry, and promotes forgiveness and moral pluralism. Samuels

suggests that socially-contextualised moral problems are more easily understood through the lens of the complementarity between the aspirational perfection of original morality, and the adaptability of moral imagination. His reworking of Jung's dual view of conscience is interesting to the extent that he focuses on how we can morally justify exceptions to the rules; we can nonetheless ponder on whether such reinterpretation is necessary, as the dynamic of individual versus collective imperatives somehow covers – albeit in lesser details – what moral imagination here encapsulates.

Besides, Samuels ultimately acknowledges one of Jung's great insights: that the inner voice, originating in the archetypal self and warrant of moral integrity – in whichever form – is potentially plural in its nature (1989, p. 205). This means that universal principles of love, care, and compassion can co-exist with more individualised expressions of 'goodness', and that the suspicion that we will condone moral subjectivism by grounding moral integrity in the self is misguided. How I express goodness and moral commitment can be different from how my neighbour expresses goodness and moral commitment; but that does not mean that these two individual expressions are necessarily antagonistic, nor that the collective dimension of the archetypal self cannot contain shared moral values that infuse each individual expression of goodness. In the archetypal self is the sublime, which has no less weight than the fantasy of aggression in shaping human behaviour, both individually and collectively. What matters, though, is how we engage with the self and its *prima materia* – and *that* is an individual moral choice.

### **Implications for business and work organisations**

It becomes evident that Jung's view of moral issues can be best captured through a fundamental tension between the individual and the collective. Jung seems to suggest that, just as individuation is about coming to terms with one's own individuality, the process of moral development is about navigating through collective norms and expectations (either

present in the external community, or internalised in the form of the moral conscience) whilst asserting one's own individual ethos encapsulated in the ethical conscience and rooted in the self. Only greater understanding of the self can bring forth greater moral sensitivity and commitment, though it will never be a guaranteed route to happiness and moral heroism (*cue* the devil patting us on the shoulder). Nevertheless, it is the most promising and enduring way towards a greater tolerance of oneself and others, which encompasses the wise and humble recognition that we are not perfect and need others to be.

How is this relevant to work organisations and business ethics? First and foremost, it helps us to comprehend more systematically the moral and psychological implications of organisational culture, notably business values, for individuals. It denounces the pressure which many workplaces put on their employees to 'leave feelings at home' in order to become an efficient performer at work, and highlights the heavy moral cost of such a stance (see for example Kantor and Streitfeld's 2015 exposé of Amazon's management practices). It also explains why formal codes of conduct fail to sustain good behaviour amongst staff, and where we could turn our attention to instead for the sake of enhancing moral awareness. In this respect, Wilcox's study of three senior Human Resource managers (2012) is illustrative of the perversity of market capitalism and its structural logic (a narrowly defined cost/benefit assessment, a reward culture centred around downsizing and cost-cutting) that constrains behaviour by manipulating moral distress in ways that make people feel they have no choice but to follow the music. Wilcox (*ibid.*, pp. 93-94) goes on suggesting that the possibility for 'relational spaces' helps negotiate these tensions with peers and nurture a group identity (in this case, a professional identity) even when it deviates from the demands of the dominant organisational culture. Having a space to meet and relate becomes a form of moral support and ethical resistance nurturing moral agency. In Jungian terms, this practice would translate into a need to establish a ritual for self-reflection and shadow work within the community so as to activate the ethical resources of the individual archetypal self.

As mentioned earlier, work organisations are overwhelmingly rationally designed to pursue a specific (occasionally narrow) purpose, which is supported throughout by the organisational structure, culture, norms, roles and policies (Denhardt, 1981). In this context, personal relationships are regulated and instrumental, while expressions of individuality are discouraged for they are perceived as disruptive to the overall efficiency of the system. Consequently, 'the capacity for unmediated experience, that sense of openness which permits the most complete growth of the individual personality are lost or at least severely diminished' says Denhardt (*ibid.*, p. 38). Even the so-called creative and innovative workplaces that market themselves as encouraging and nurturing towards individual ideas (Google being an oft-cited example, see for instance Girard's 2009 uncritically enthusiastic endorsement of its business model) still control the behaviour of their staff, and only offer them snapshots of freedom so as to better harness their individuality to further the interests of the organisation. There is in fact little tolerance for non-conformity, nor for individual moral integrity, if it questions the underlying principles upon which the organisation is built – which generally include profit-making, market expansion, oligopolistic dreams and a great degree of opacity when it comes to the governance system. Those who do not agree are deemed 'unfit', and seek a way out or are asked to leave. Here is the first source of tension between the individual and the collective, albeit one hardly acknowledged as a moral problem of social significance.

Within organisations, further conflicts between the individual and some degree of collective patterns can be found. In principle, companies rely on a more or less formal code of ethics to regulate behaviour and establish a 'clear' boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Usually, such codes resonate with widely accepted values such as honesty, service, care, transparency and so on. Therefore, such codes permeate the moral conscience of the individual worker. However, codes are never comprehensive and do not provide guidance for every situation encountered by employees (Coughlan, 2005; Somers, 2001). In this respect, organisational culture and the collective psyche play an important role

in how rules, norms and mores are interpreted and actually put into practice by organisational members. Furthermore, the psyche of each individual agent can influence the relative strength or stringency of the prevailing moral codes. The quality of leaders is a clear example of this process: if leaders act in a 'do as I say and not as I do' manner, the norms embedded in moral conscience will not be as easily embraced by other employees (e.g. Clement, 2006); by contrast, if leaders actually demonstrate consistent individual integrity in their behaviour, the meaningfulness of the moral code will increase amongst the staff. That said, possible conflicts of duty may still emerge if the moral code implemented in the organisation contradicts one's individual ethical conscience.

This can be particularly painful when the individual is pressurised to show loyalty to the common good (i.e. the organisation's goals) even though those differ from his or her personal ethos. Beyond the question of power and interpersonal relationships, there arises an issue of self-assertion that is a psychological and moral matter. We find these dynamics in cases of implicit or explicit retaliation against whistle-blowers (e.g. Baird, 2014; Henik, 2008; Near and Miceli, 1986), but also on a minor scale when we experience occasional ambiguity in our motives for action. This ambiguity, when left unexamined, is thrown back into the shadow and can manifest in subsequent situations of scapegoating or intolerance for otherness, experienced either internally or externally. In the former case, we turn to self-hatred or self-rejection; in the latter case, we project our moral distress onto an external other who helps the ego find relief by concretising a split. Collectively in work organisations, this is illustrated by a rejection of those who denounce ill-doings or blow the whistle when we did not dare to do so despite feeling the twinge from our ethical conscience demanding we do something similar.

Perera (1986) indeed suggests that scapegoated individuals are somehow more sensitive to what is being played up in the collective unconscious, and become bearer of what the community refuses to acknowledge as its own dark shadow or its own shortcomings. The

scapegoats are perceived 'as dangerous viewers of shadow material best left unseen. ...Because they arouse unconscious discomfort, their perceptions may be disregarded or denied, while they themselves are shamed and rejected, made to feel a dis-ease comparable to that aroused in those they seem to see through' (ibid., p. 35). When the ego of an individual or of a collective of individuals (e.g. a work group) does not face its own moral ambivalence and therefore its own failings, the psychic energy is thrown back into the unconscious but resurfaces through a scapegoat who, by denouncing this very same shadow material, symbolises a need for purgation (Perera, ibid.). However, as our modern world lacks a developed consciousness of this symbolic process, the scapegoat pays the price: be it through bullying, harassment, unfair dismissal, slandering, suicide or death, the shadow expresses itself concretely, yet not in a creative manner; indeed, the scapegoated individual becomes identified with a victim archetype, and the community carries on identifying itself as good and righteous.

Clinical and work psychologist Pez  (2008, pp. 33-44) tells the story of Mr B, diagnosed with depression due to persecutions by his work colleagues. This offers a relevant example of the cost of 'being the first who tells the truth': Mr B experienced a deep moral unrest (a conflict of duty) when he witnessed his colleagues misbehaving at work, a work that itself was morally and emotionally taxing (working in a cemetery) and which led his colleagues to drinking during work shifts and stealing personal items from the bodies as a form of coping – hugely inappropriately – with the stress. Mr B's refusal to adopt the norms endorsed by his peers and his decision to report the misbehaviour to his supervisor led him to be quickly bullied and scapegoated; yet, he effectively listened to his ethical conscience (values of honesty, of respectful work, of dignity and integrity) when the moral conscience might have been more ready to compromise or find a middle-ground. The story, though, also signals an important collective problem, as Pez  notes (ibid): that the work itself, and relatedly the working conditions are inherently a cause of suffering that remains unrecognised and thus sent back into the shadow. Inasmuch as the misbehaviour of Mr B's colleagues was morally

condemnable, it was also symptomatic of a deep suffering at work that work organisations are at best ill-equipped to address, at worst blind to.

Work organisations therefore provide a fertile ground for experiencing conflicts of duty, and individuals are usually neither encouraged nor supported in using the creative power of the transcendent function to solve the conflict or tension. Instead, the pervasiveness of business values that further encourage split and competition, and have little patience for the disorder and ambivalence that accompanies the process of individuation, make conscious moral development even more arduous. And yet, we need to pay much more attention to the psyche's dynamics in the workplace and in the business arena, for that is where our soul lives and grows for a fair chunk of adulthood. The context (workplace) and content (job) of work intertwine with individual psychological growth: 'an employee who feels fulfilled offers more to the work environment; the fulfilling workplace offers the individual more' (Auger and Arneberg, 1992, p. 40). In contrast, when the soul's demands are ignored, destructive behaviours emerge as an expression of the shadow, or as a clumsy attempt from the naïve ego to consciously solve the tension. From what I have discussed, a fulfilling organisation is one that supports and values the growth of the individual. It is one that does not unconsciously and uncritically embrace business values. It is one that remembers it is a vessel for complex, messy, ambiguous, small but occasionally sublime human lives. Life is not a business competition, and should not be reduced to a market value (Sandel, 2012). Organisational development would do well to account for the needs of individuals to develop individually within a collective, even when this is more disruptive than it would like. Basic steps would include: searching for projections and stories that carry patterns of the organisation's psyche; accepting that transformation and change are a normal process better experienced when we engage with it consciously and willingly; working through 'shadow stuff' which manifest through power games, resentment, rivalries, or the mere stiffness of practices and policies; and promoting integration and inclusion rather than compartmentalisation amongst staff, including greater consideration of stakeholders'



experiences. The language of the psyche is neither well-known nor welcome in the corporate world; yet it is a language that speaks to all organisational actors as individuals and as members of a living community. It enables us to uncover what lies beneath and beyond the roles and the artefacts that make up our material world; it tells us that the very fact that we are 'irregular phenomena' and statistical anomalies is precisely what makes our moral greatness (Jung, 1957/1970, paras. 494-504); it sheds light onto darkness, connects suffering to meaning and gives us the impetus to discover what we are made of. As an embodied psychological framework, Jung's approach is invaluable to ethics, and critical to work-life.

## **Conclusion**

I mentioned at the start of the paper that Jung's ethical perspective is hopeful. The lesson we can draw from his writings is that even when caught in a mob, there is always somehow a conscious individual choice and a possibility for consciousness to grow. The flipside of this is that it takes work to become aware of this choice, and faith or courage to embrace this choice. Jung made it very clear that social (and moral) progress cannot happen in society if it does not happen within each individual member of that society. This applies to business as a community, as well as to work organisations. We cannot expect significant improvements in the ethics of business if individual business agents fail to attend to their own psyche to start with. As Jung said: 'It is, unfortunately, only too clear that if the individual is not truly regenerated in spirit, society cannot be either, for society is the sum total of individuals in need of redemption' (1957/1970, para. 536). He most eloquently developed this comment in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963/1995, p. 362):

As a rule...the individual is so unconscious that he altogether fails to see his own potentialities for decision. Instead he is constantly and anxiously looking around for external rules and regulations which can guide him in his perplexity. ...Every effort is made to teach idealistic beliefs or conduct which people know in their hearts they can

never live up to, and such ideals are preached by officials who know that they themselves have never lived up to these high standards and never will. What is more, nobody ever questions the value of this kind of teaching. Therefore the individual who wishes to have an answer to the problem of evil, as it is posed today has need, first and foremost, of *self-knowledge*, that is, the utmost possible knowledge of his own wholeness. He must know relentlessly how much good he can do, and what crimes he is capable of, and must beware of regarding the one as real and the other as illusion. Both are elements within his nature, and both are bound to come to light in him, should he wish – as he ought – to live without self-deception or self-illusion.

No doubt the task is frightening, and no doubt there are further hurdles along the way. No doubt we may prefer to flee from this challenge and tell ourselves we are content as we are, or that the cause is already lost because the task is impossible to achieve. Yet, turning to Jung again, I put my faith in the belief that even when we seem to see only violence, exploitation, corruption and despair in ourselves and in our communities, the good is also already there:

...as the conscious mind can put the question, 'Why is there this frightful conflict between good and evil?' so the unconscious can reply, 'Look closer! Each needs the other. The best, just because it is the best, holds the seed of evil, and *there is nothing so bad but good can come of it*' (1966, para. 289, emphasis added).

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