

THE ERUPTION OF THE SHADOW IN NAZI GERMANY

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There is an old joke about the division of labor in heaven and hell. In heaven, we are told, the English are the police, the French are the chefs, the Germans are the engineers, the Swiss are the bankers, the Italians are the lovers, the Russians are the ballet dancers, and the Japanese are in charge of electronic media and technology. In hell, the English are the chefs, the Italians are the bankers, the Germans are the police, the Russians are in charge of media and propaganda, the Japanese are the ballet dancers, and the Swiss are the lovers.

Jokes of this kind, when they are based not merely on crude and cruel stereotypes, derive their humor from what we all know to be true about different nations. We know that every nation or ethnic group seems to have a distinct temperament, with unique qualities, talents, and predispositions. The term most commonly used to describe this sort of collective identity is *national character*. Yet nobody really knows what national character is. Is it genetic, or is it acquired? Is it a fixed thing, or does it change over time? Does it exist in the psyche, or is it a purely social phenomenon? What is it rooted in—climate, geography, historical events? It was probably such questions that prompted the historian Jacques Barzun to observe that, “of all the books that no one can write, those about nations and national character are the most impossible” (p. xi).

Certainly, national character is one of the vaguest and most mysterious notions in the history of ideas. It was the predecessor to a host of ideas that attempted to fathom what it is that makes a nation unique. David Hume’s writings about national character in the eighteenth century stressed that moral backbone is the factor most responsible for a nation’s character. Voltaire, by contrast, spoke of the subtle spirit that constitutes the “genius of a people.” And then there was the much touted idea of Hegel, the notion of *Volksgeist*, which died an infamous death when the Nazis took hold of it, along with Nietzsche’s Superman idea, and twisted it to suit their nationalistic purposes. But in its original form it remains a potent idea that indirectly led to Freud’s and Jung’s thoughts on this subject.

Volksgeist literally means “people’s spirit” and refers to the inner life of a people. This idea suggests that every nation has a very real spirit force with ontological status, and that it is this that produces a nation’s culture and identity. *Volksgeist* is a cousin of *Zeitgeist*, or “spirit of the times”; both are manifestations of *Weltgeist*, or “world spirit.” The latter is the living entity and moving force behind human history.

By the early part of the twentieth century *Volksgeist* had come to mean a common ego—that is, a single, collective mind. From this it was only a short leap to Freud who applied his theories of individual psychology to collective psychology. In *Totem and Taboo* he acknowledged “the existence of a collective mind, in which mental processes occur just as they do in the mind of an individual” (p. 157). Freud believed that this

collective mind is essentially a dangerous, unruly force that tends to exhibit a mob mentality because it operates according to the lowest common denominator. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* he proposed that the cultural refinement, civilization, and moral integrity that may exist among individuals are reduced in the mass to the baser level of instincts that commonly bind us together.

Jung's View of the Collective Psyche

Jung very much agreed with Freud on this point, as expressed in his essay on “Phenomena Resulting from the Assimilation of the Unconscious.” Both men had lived through the First World War and had seen the rise of Nazi Germany. Both were inoculated with a healthy dose of pessimism in regard to what human beings are capable of when they fall prey to the impulses of mass consciousness. Where Jung departed from Freud was with his formulation of different levels of the collective psyche. First there is the level of collective consciousness, consisting of all the consciously held values, belief systems, information, and knowledge that together form a society’s identity. For example, our society’s beliefs and institutions of democracy, its commercial practices, its religions, its media, its sense of its own history, all constitute what we know about ourselves. This level is readily accessible to all.

Beneath this level is the collective unconscious, itself divided into two layers. The first contains the basic character traits of the group. These include national and racial characteristics of temperament—basic ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. (The joke I told above speaks to this layer of the collective unconscious.) Some of these features are inherited, others are in the cultural milieu and simply absorbed by the individuals exposed to them. Yet all are collective traits that are acquired unconsciously. And, needless to say, a group may be quite unconscious of its subtler character traits because they are all-pervasive. As Marshall McLuhan said, a fish is the last to know that it is in water.

The second and deeper layer of the collective unconscious is a universal layer. It is like a storehouse or memory of the many experiences that *all* humanity has had. These experiences are etched into the collective unconscious not in any actual, experiential way, but as blueprints or models that are the underlying forms or patterns of these experiences. Jung called these psychic blueprints *archetypes* because they are primary or general *types* of experiences and not specific experiences. If we dream of a snake biting us, for example, our dream is, in addition to whatever personal meaning it may have, a variation of an archetypal or universal experience that stretches back eons in history. The archetype of the serpent has been depicted in countless folk tales and religious stories, such as the story of Adam and Eve. When we dream of this archetypal image, it evokes a hidden level of meanings and emotions. (Indeed, the strange terror and yet fascination many of us feel when we see a snake can be attributed to the deep, archetypal feelings this image arouses.) The collective unconscious is, of course, full of archetypal images and motifs like that of the serpent.

The role of the collective unconscious in collective behavior, and particularly the behavior of nations, is not easy to determine. Yet, as Jung voiced in a 1939 interview, “there is such a force as the collective unconscious of a nation” (p. 143). The two layers

of the collective unconscious here merge to create a distinct national disposition and mode of experience. Unlike the *Volkgeist* of the German philosophers, the collective unconscious of a nation moves *beneath* the collective consciousness of its citizens. Similar to the parts of an individual's personality that are unconscious, it is the unconscious part of a people's spirit. It may be said that the three-layer division of the psyche in the individual—the ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious—is paralleled in collective psychology by collective consciousness, the group layer of the collective unconscious, and the archetypal layer of the collective unconscious. And just as the unconscious parts of an individual's personality influence his or her identity, the inherent character traits and archetypal forces of a nation's collective unconscious influence its identity.

The archetypes affecting one nation can be quite varied and can differ significantly from those affecting another nation. In a nation's collective unconscious the wide range of possibilities of the universal collective unconscious is narrowed down to those that tend to be particularly active for that nation. To examine these forces is like looking into the hidden soul of a nation, if one can speak of a nation in this way. The example with which Jung best illustrated how this national unconscious might manifest is, as one could probably guess, Nazi Germany. As a Swiss German who lived through both World Wars, he could hardly have been unaffected by what was going on just next door to his country and all around on the European continent. But I imagine that his real interest in this phenomenon, as in the case of other psychologists who wrote about it, was in the fact that it was such an irrational and unprecedented extreme in human behavior. Never before or since has there been such a collective atrocity.

Nazi Germany demonstrated, *par excellence*, what can happen when the demonic forces of the collective unconscious are unleashed. Jung's efforts as a pioneer in psychology were generally more inclined toward emphasizing the wisdom of the unconscious. However, his interest in the darker side of the unconscious was, he would have argued, no less in the service of wisdom, for to entertain one side without the other would be foolish. Human nature is complicated, and, as the adage goes, what we don't let in the front door sneaks around and breaks in through the back door. One could say that this is exactly what happened in the case of the German people.

How could a nation, which was one of the leaders of the Enlightenment only a couple of centuries earlier, descend into such darkness as that which created the Holocaust? The question is not purely a historical one that applies only to Germany fifty years ago. It is also a psychological one that applies to us now, here in America, and in the rest of the world. It is a question about the human condition. For if what happened to a people like the Germans, whose genes and genius produced not only Hitler but Goethe, Kant, Kepler, Mozart, and Schweitzer (to mention only a few), what does this say about the rest of us? Hopefully, Americans will never become as militant, fanatical, and inhumane as the Germans became, though as this nation's treatment of indigenous peoples and African slaves indicates, it, too, is quite susceptible to the demonic side of the unconscious. The plain fact is, Americans can be quite violent and cruel. (Cont'd...)

Collective Complexes

What the German case illustrates is that collective complexes can become all-consuming and can have massively destructive consequences. In some regards, the formation of a collective complex is not so different from that of an individual complex. The term *complex* was first coined by Theodor Ziehen to describe emotionally loaded representations or ideas. Jung used it to denote contents of the unconscious that are split off from consciousness. The concept became so central to his thinking that, for some years, he referred to his emerging school of psychology as “complex psychology.” Up until Jung used the term in this way, Freud spoke of complexes as “circles of thoughts” or “traumatic reminiscences.” Adler also borrowed the term for his purposes and made it a household word with his concept of the inferiority complex. Everybody is familiar with this notion, and certainly it relates to our subject. A person feels inferior but may not know it, since this feeling can be repressed into the unconscious. It can also be projected outside onto others, so that the person compensates by becoming, in his or her mind, superior, perhaps even persecuting others for what has now become *their* inferiority, further bolstering a much needed sense of adequacy. But the true feeling of inferiority is never seen by the individual for what it is, for it is a part of the psyche that has been split off from consciousness. Others might more easily detect that this individual has a problem of feeling inferior, but the person in question would never guess it. Such a set of unconscious dynamics is basically what is meant by a complex. That it can occur in the collective psyche only goes to show that a complex can work on multiple levels so that an entire mass of people can be gripped by the same complex.

The most common explanation put forth for the rise of Nazism is that the Germans were gripped by a collective inferiority complex. They had lost the First World War, were humiliated by a punitive Versailles Treaty, and were suffering under oppressive conditions of unemployment and poverty during the Depression. These were the seeds that gave birth to the Third Reich. In a 1938 interview, however, Jung placed the original source of the German inferiority complex far earlier than in this century, attributing it to when the Germans emerged from the Danube Valley and founded the beginnings of their nation. Because this initial consolidation took place long after the French and the English were well on their way to nationhood, the Germans were too late in the acquisition of colonies and in the establishment of an empire. When they did finally become a united nation, Jung says, “they looked around them and saw the British, the French, and others with rich colonies and all the equipment of grown-up nations, and they became jealous, resentful, like a younger brother whose older brothers have taken the lion’s share of the inheritance” (p. 129).

In *Childhood and Society* Erik Erikson added to these explanations by connecting the rise of Nazism to the German’s sense of being oppressed by an aloof but harshly authoritarian father. This could only contribute to an inferiority complex that was, if Jung were right, already deep-seated. The reactions to this sense of oppression had the basic features of adolescent rebellion, and some of these were more extreme than others: self-aggrandizement, lofty idealism, delirious passion, megalomania, rage, and violence. Hitler’s personal history, as Erikson shows, captured the conflicts of this rebellion in quintessential form, and thus did his struggle and histrionic pleas for a new political order resonate so deeply in the souls of the German people.

Jung saw the German inferiority complex as rooted in the basic character and temperament of the German people and thus a complex of the group layer of the collective unconscious. However, this was not all that Jung saw. He also discovered an archetypal complex acting upon the German psyche. As a complex of the universal layer of the collective unconscious, it adds another dimension to the question of what happened to the German people. Of course, *no* complex can satisfactorily explain the evil of a war that took the lives of 6 million Jews, 27 million Russians, and millions of others, or that made possible the horrors that were perpetrated in the death camps. Evil of this kind is so awesome that it defies classification. But understanding archetypal complexes can shed some light on such evil, for these complexes come from the same inner dimension as do good and evil. The “problem of evil,” as theologians call it, is also an archetypal experience, as old as the human condition. It is no accident that the Old and New Testaments begin and end with it.

Jung basically understood archetypal complexes to be the “inner persons” of our psyche. Many, if not most, of the people who populate our dreams represent our complexes. The fact that they may be people whom we know in our daily lives is often of significance only for the associations they provide, or because those people carry the projections of these complexes and thus become symbols for them. But the complexes themselves are primarily inner phenomena. In our dreams, these people often act in ways and say things that they never would in our daily lives and, of course, we have no control over what they do and say. They are independent forces with wills and voices of their own. The ideas, attitudes, and atmosphere they bring into our dreams come from another realm and are so “out-of-this-world” that we are often imbued with the mysterious feelings and moods long after we have awakened.

Such a cluster of ideas, attitudes, and affects is what Jung called a complex. He showed that behind the people who personify these clusters are the archetypes; they are presented as people so that we can recognize and relate to them. And they also appear as the multitude of magical beings who inhabit our dreams: superhuman heroes and villains, angels and demons, witches and nymphs, talking animals, monsters, and so forth. Jung viewed these figures as autonomous agents of the archetypal imagination, originating in the collective unconscious and existing in their own right with distinct personalities. Thus, such complexes are also parts of the psyche that are split off from consciousness. But unlike the complexes Freud and Adler spoke about, they do not originate in either individual or collective consciousness. How does this apply to collective psychology, and in particular, Nazi Germany? In an essay called “Wotan,” which was written as early as 1936, Jung identified the archetypal Wotan complex of the German people.

The Life and Times of Wotan and Other Gods

Wotan is a god in the form of a person (like the Greek and Roman gods) and the chief deity of the early Germanic Teutonic tribes. He is the same being as the Viking god Odin, for the Vikings were also descended from the Teutones. He shares much in common with Dionysus and was transformed by Christian missionaries into the devil. In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung wrote, “he is an important god—a Mercury or Hermes, as the Romans correctly realized, a nature spirit who returned to life again in the Merlin of the

Grail legend and became, as the *spiritus Mercurialis*, the sought-after arcanum of the alchemists” (p. 313). Wotan is the god of art, culture, wisdom, hunting, war, and the dead. Of these, war is his favored specialty: the root word *wot* means “to be mentally excited” and is connected to the German *Wut*, “rage.” Wotan is the lord of warriors, seizing their spirits and making them go berserk in the heat of battle. He guides them to victory, and when they die, he receives them into Walhalla, the hall of the slain. In his 1936 essay on Wotan, Jung described him as “the god of storm and frenzy, the unleasher of passions and the lust of battle; moreover he is a superlative magician and artist in illusion who is versed in all secrets of an occult nature” (p. 182). Jung could just as easily have been speaking about Hitler. The Stormtroopers, too, were very much an incarnation of Wotan who roamed the earth as a restless wanderer, creating strife and unrest everywhere he went. His spirit of conquest and turbulence, Jung hypothesized, eventually seized the entire German nation.

It is important here to appreciate the notion of a god and the challenge it poses to the modern mind. We do not know anymore what it means to have a god, to serve a god, to be inspired by a god, or for that matter, to be assaulted or seized by a god. We no longer have gods in the ancient, traditional sense; and even from our familiar Judeo-Christian perspective, we no longer recognize the real forces implied in the First Commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” But what *were* the gods, and what does their disappearance signify?

Speaking of the Greek god Pan, James Hillman raises an interesting point that illustrates the nature of the gods. Hillman notes that when Pan appeared at his sacred noonday hour or in a nightmare, he aroused great panic. (Indeed, the word *panic* is derived from Pan.) But Pan was *not* a symbolic representation or personification of the concept of panic, for “he was seen to be in headlong panic himself. The person of Pan was witnessed in the state of panic before the concept ‘panic’ was born” (p. 34). In other words, the Greek experience of panic *was* Pan. Before panic became an internalized, psychological state, it was a god. The sharp division between the inner and the outer that results from a discursive, discerning ego is a late development in the history of consciousness. The world was alive with the gods. Through the imagination—that is, the image-making faculty—our more primitive emotions and instincts were experienced as very real images of the soul. After all, what could be a more gut-level encounter with panic than the sight of a horned god, part human, part goat, stamping his hooved feet and hysterically screaming as if he himself just awoke from a nightmare?

Today we would call such an experience a projection. But in their day, the gods were the living embodiment of the soul’s innermost anxieties, fears, aspirations, and passions. The gods also embodied the terrors of nature and, in this regard, were unlike the later gods that the Roman poet Lucretius revered when he wrote that they

Must, by their nature, take delight in peace,
Forever calm, serene, forever far
From our affairs, beyond all pain, beyond
All danger, in their own resources strong,
Having no need of us at all, above
Wrath or propitiation.

The modern poet Rilke had a more accurate picture when he said that in the gods “the deadly and menacing and destructive and terrifying elements in life were contained—its violence, its fury, its impersonal bewilderment—all tied together into one thick knot of malevolence” (p. 179). And how well he understood the enormous power of these gods: “. . . since they were an overflow of our own being, its most powerful element, indeed were too powerful, were huge, violent, incomprehensible, often monstrous—: how could they not, concentrated in one place, exert an influence and ascendancy over us? And, remember, from the outside now” (p. 179).

The human psyche needed—and one may argue, still needs—the mythopoetic imagination to mediate these unbearable and incomprehensible forces. It is easier to have a relationship to a “god” than to an impersonal “force.” The gods carried our worst fears of the unknown—indeed, they carried the unknown itself. By relating to the gods through homage and ritual, the ancients were able to relate to their own fears, thereby better enduring the mysterious forces of the unknown. In this way did the gods serve humankind as well as the other way around. It was a mutual if not equal relationship.

But without the gods, who will make the inner and outer terrors of life endurable and meaningful? Not only are the gods gone, but in the twentieth century God himself has disappeared—or, at least he did in Germany. The trail of disenchantment began with the very Enlightenment that made the Germans a people of great culture. The code of reason that propelled the Enlightenment may have explained the gods, but in doing so, also explained them away. The Romantic movement was more of a reaction to this than any real antidote to it. The rise of a rigid, one-sided rationalism, Jung felt, meant that the primitive, irrational side of the psyche was repressed into the unconscious. It was only a matter of time before this reign of rationality led to Nietzsche’s claim that “God is dead,” and finally to a Godless Germany. And, as Dostoevsky said, without God, anything is permissible. The primitive, irrational side was thus left no choice but to break in through the back door—and it did so with a vengeance.

This trend of demythologization (to borrow a term from the theologian Rudolf Bultmann) doesn’t change the fact that whatever forces one conceives the gods to be, they still must exist. Hillman, modeling his thought upon Jung’s, sees our modern symptoms of psychopathology—our phobias, obsessions, and other “dis-eases”—as the secular form of the gods. If Pan is gone, now we experience panic as a symptom within ourselves. However, our pathos or suffering is all caught up in the intricate web of our personal dramas, which we don’t understand any better than our ancestors understood Pan. In fact, we understand our suffering far less, since we no longer have a larger religious context in which to view it. Our panic no longer has cosmic significance. It is not existential panic, to which the Greeks felt we as humans were entitled; it is “only” neurotic panic, in regard to which modern psychology tells us we’re sick. In sacrificing the gods, we have lost a valuable, well-trodden path to redemption, to reconnection of the soul with its natural and spiritual roots. This is what D. H. Lawrence meant when he said that the only thing more terrible than to fall into the hands of the living God is to fall out of them; the same is true for any living god.

The Wotan complex is the spirit of the depersonalized or demythologized god Wotan manifesting in the collective psyche of the German people. Without the person and myth of the god to identify and mediate its force, Wotan appeared invisibly from within as a disease of the mind and soul. His true identity remained concealed in the

annals of history and in the collective unconscious. Even Nietzsche, who was unfamiliar with Germanic literature, as Jung pointed out, misconstrued the identity of Wotan, on different occasions calling him Zarathustra, Dionysus, the “mistral wind,” and simply the “Unknown God.” In his essay “Wotan” Jung cites Nietzsche’s poem “To the Unknown God”:

I shall and will know thee, Unknown One,
Who searchest out the depths of my soul,
And blowest through my life like a storm,
Ungraspable, and yet my kinsman!
I shall and will know thee, and serve thee. (p. 182)

And, speaking most prophetically, from the point of view of Zarathustra, Nietzsche proclaims: “. . . like a wind shall I come to blow among them, and with my spirit shall take away the breath of their spirit; thus my future wills it” (p. 182). At least Nietzsche *knew* he was worshipping a god, an autonomous force; the German people a half century later were unconscious even of this. Their spirit was indeed overtaken by Wotan’s.

It was with Wotan’s soul-empowering qualities that Nietzsche was so impressed. Jung also recognized the positive aspects of this god, for he appeared to reanimate the depressed spirit of the Germans. This accounts for Jung’s initial hopes, in the very early days of the Nazi movement, that it might turn into something positive—a view he quickly abandoned when he saw the negative effects this god was having upon German society. Even well before Hitler’s arrival on the scene, Jung suspected that the German psyche was headed for catastrophe, based on his clinical work with German patients, particularly their dreams. As early as 1918, in his essay, “The Role of the Unconscious,” he warned about “the blond beast” menacingly “prowling about in its underground prison, ready at any moment to burst out with devastating consequences” (p. 13). At times, Jung felt negatively about the Wotan impulse, at other times, hopeful and optimistic. Until events demonstrated otherwise, he remained ambivalent, in accord with the dual nature of the archetype. He did not wish to summarily dismiss either side of Wotan. Remember, Wotan is not only a god of hunting, war, and death, but of art, culture, and wisdom. He inspires divinely as well as demonically.

We come here to an important premise: that every archetype has two sides, positive (light) and negative (dark). Actually, these are neutral attributes; like the constructive and destructive sides of nature, their intent is neither good nor evil. Rather, it is the human experience of them that is either positive or negative. In *The Practice of Psychotherapy*, Jung notes that the positive side of an archetype is experienced as superhuman, spiritual, and divine; the dark side as bestial, semihuman, and demonic. The former represents our higher nature, the latter our lower or primitive nature. “And the further the conscious situation moves away from a certain point of equilibrium,” Jung writes, “the more forceful and accordingly the more dangerous become the unconscious contents that are struggling to restore the balance” (p.195). Again, Jung cites the example of the movement toward a rigid, one-sided rationalism as creating a disequilibrium that eventually set the stage for the primitive, instinctual side of Wotan to rise up in a compensatory manner. However, this only partially explains why the demonic side of

Wotan won out over the divine side, why the god of war was constellated and not the god of art and culture. There are two other reasons.

The Historical Context of Wotan in the German Collective Psyche

The first reason has to do with the history of Christianity in Germany. Jung explains that Christianity came rather late to Germany compared to other European countries, and consequently had never penetrated deeply enough into the German psyche to assimilate the different elements of the Wotan myth. The Reformation also emerged from Germany for this reason: Catholicism simply did not have that strong a hold on the mythos of the people. The Wotan myth went underground—that is, receded into the collective unconscious—but with the weakening of Christianity that occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to the rise of rationalism, broke out again in an unrecognized form at the first opportunity. Walter Odajnyk writes that what in fact occurred was a regression “on the part of the masses to a more primitive German consciousness, to a time when Wotan and not the Christian God ruled” (p. 88). The regression was destructive precisely because of the people’s unconsciousness of the complex. In *Civilization in Transition* Jung warns: “If an archetype is not brought into reality consciously, there is no guarantee whatever that it will be realized in its favourable form; on the contrary, there is all the more danger of a destructive regression” (p. 237).

It should be added that Christianity was introduced into Germany like a thunderclap with the invasion of Charlemagne. It may be that the forcible entry of Christianity into the Germanic psyche disturbed the former balance of the positive and dark sides of Wotanism. Apart from Wotanism, the role of Christianity in the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany, as elsewhere, cannot be dismissed. Indeed, the earliest records of anti-Semitism in Germany date from around 1060, some three hundred years after the Frank invasion. In the fifteenth century Martin Luther was so offended when the Jews did not accept his offer for salvation through baptism that he vilified them in a treatise, *The Life of the Jew*; the Nazi publisher Julius Streicher used this as the basis for his defense at the Nuremberg trials. And, of course, it is well-known that the Vatican did little to deter the spread of anti-Semitic acts in Nazi Germany.

The other reason the dark side of Wotan was constellated involves the collective inferiority complex. If a feeling of inferiority or of having been spited looms over a people, a god of war and retribution is likelier to be more appealing than a god of art and culture. It is human nature—and particularly *collective* human nature—to opt for quick and dramatic results to ameliorate a bad situation.

The events of Nazi Germany illustrate a nation’s possession by a collective complex. This possession was a psychic inflation, an excessive identification with the god who is at the core of the complex. Because the god could not be seen and experienced *as a god*, the identification occurred entirely on an internal and unconscious level. Due to the high suggestibility and infectiousness that exist among the masses, this possessed state of mind spread like a wildfire. Jung describes it as a psychic epidemic and a mass hysteria and psychosis. Being caused by a collective complex, it struck the Germans at the collective level of the psyche rather than the individual level, *beneath* the ego and the individual personality. In their book *The Nuremberg Mind*, Florence Miale

and Michael Selzer commented on the enigma of how the Nazi leaders seemed to be such ordinary, well-intentioned people. It was in a social, collective context that their values and behaviors became warped beyond recognition. This is how a collective complex works: individuals are but stepping stones for its designs and purposes.

The Neutral Nature of Archetypes

It needs to be said that the kind of pathology we are talking about does not originate in the collective unconscious, or at least in the archetypal layer of the collective unconscious. Jung asserts that the collective unconscious does not have pathology. The archetypes are forces of nature and the spirit, incapable of being “sick” in and of themselves. Furthermore, they are two-sided and thus balanced. The pathology arises from collective consciousness or the group layer of the collective unconscious, or both. Both these layers of the collective psyche are conditioned by a nation’s experience and are not immune to pathological twists. When an archetype emerges from the collective unconscious and interfaces with some disturbance in the collective consciousness or the group layer of the collective unconscious, it gets filtered, so to speak, through that disturbance. This both constellates the dark aspects of the archetype and draws the disturbance into the sphere of the archetype. One may think of the complex as a bubble of air released from a fissure at the bottom of the ocean, gathering into itself other particles of air—contents of the upper layers of the collective psyche—as it rises. This is what happened with the Wotan complex: It acquired, and was filtered through, features of collective experience in Germany, including the nation’s inferiority complex, its one-sided rationalism, and its diminishing relationship to Christianity.

The Problem of Evil

There is a widely held view, derived from the Enlightenment, that evil is only ignorance or woundedness coming out in a pathological form; that is, that evil is a *privatio bono*, merely the absence of good. But anybody who has had a direct confrontation with willful evil, either in him- or herself or in others, knows that it exists as a real force or principle in the psyche. Our Western religious traditions have always posited evil as a metaphysical force. Jung’s provocative essay, *Answer to Job*, attempted to address this age-old problem: What does it mean that God allows evil to exist? Does this not imply that God himself has a dark or evil side? There is much to suggest this in the Hebrew Bible. As early as Abraham’s encounter with God, in which he bargains with him to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if even ten righteous people live there, we see that God needs to be held accountable. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?,” Abraham pleads with his Maker. In other words, not only does man need God for redemption, but God needs humans for his redemption. A mutual partnership brings moral wholeness to both. Jung argues that there is an unconscious side to God, as there is to humans, and that both parties need each other to attain a more complete consciousness.

Whatever it is, the principle of evil cannot be denied. We see it historically in the Crusades, in the Inquisition, in the purges and pogroms, in the World Wars and all the

“lesser” wars, then and now; we see it in the crimes of our time—in the demonic actions of Jeffrey Dahmer, in the Oklahoma City bombing, in the O. J. Simpson episode, in the news every night. Evil needs to be recognized in each and every one of us; we each need to see it clearly within ourselves, instead of projecting it onto the other person or group of people or conveniently onto the devil who supposedly made us do it. As Mick Jagger sings in his song, “Sympathy for the Devil,” “I shouted out ‘Who killed the Kennedys?,’ when after all it was you and me.” Indeed, that force that traditional religion has always called the devil *might* have made us do it, for evil is not only a *given* principle, it is an *autonomous* principle, with a life and will of its own. Yet in the end, it is we who do it, who consent to it, consciously or unconsciously. It is only consciousness that can help us in our battle with evil. This is a battle that should be aimed not so much *against* evil in an effort to make it disappear, as if it ever could, but rather at keeping it in view and understanding how it operates. In this way we become aware of our own impulses without being dominated or overtaken by them. This is a battle that must take place within the individual soul. A nation can only be as conscious and moral as its individual citizens.

One of my patients has given permission to share an active imagination, a vision, she had in her struggle to come to terms with the problem of evil in her life. It illustrates the idea that one must accept the existence of evil and learn to live with it consciously. It also illustrates how the god Wotan surfaces in modern times as an incarnation of evil, precisely because he is split off from his other side. The patient is a Catholic-born American woman in her late thirties. She entered analysis in a state of severe depression, which she connected to her experience of having been sexually molested by her father when she was a child. In addition to suffering from symptoms of obsessiveness and self-mutilation, she was plagued by an overwhelming conviction that God must hate her and is punishing her.

Her active imagination or vision occurred at a turning point in her treatment. In it her father appears as a Viking holding a sword in his hand. He says he hates her because he hates all women—his mother, his grandmother—for what they did to him. He then tries to cut his daughter’s throat. She is not afraid and does not resist, but neither does she emotionally submit. “You cannot win,” she says simply. At this moment, a globe of radiant white light, like the sun, emerges from behind him. She intuitively perceives this light to be emanating from a compassionate, loving God whom she recognizes as the real authority here. She is bathed in the light. And there the vision ended. Reflecting upon it, she said that this was her first experience of God as a positive force.

As in any dream or visionary experience, one could look at everything in it as a part of oneself. The Viking father with sword in hand is akin to the dark father-complex or Wotan complex, and the radiant globe of light is a symbol of the higher Self, the God within. These are not parts of the personal psyche but the objective or archetypal psyche, though they are, of course, filtered through the personal psyche and one’s lived experience. Together they make up the dark and light sides of the Self or the God-image. For this patient, bringing them into relationship with each other and with the ego began the long process of healing the deep wound and split in her psyche.

The archetypal shadow, this dark aspect of the Self, is always a tricky problem. Firstly, we tend to take it personally, as this patient did. But it’s not personal; it’s intrinsic to the human condition. Secondly, we tend to unconsciously confuse it with the positive

aspect of the Self. An equal sign is placed between good and evil, and then, of course, all hell breaks loose. Does anyone doubt that Hitler or Timothy McVeigh were not acting with a firm belief that they were serving a good and higher purpose?

It was no accident that not long after her visionary experience, this patient, who had no immediate connection to either the Germanic or Jewish traditions, had a powerful dream which took place at Auschwitz: She witnessed a young couple being burned to death by the Nazis. Whenever the dark Wotan complex or Nazi shadow comes up in a manner that is all-consuming, it is signaling some kind of profound split and confusion in the psyche. In such a condition, everything can go up in flames and, quite literally, often does. When we ponder all the recent outbreaks in the world that contain elements of the Holocaust travesty, this is what we see. Most often, the perpetrators are unconsciously evil. They *believe* they are doing good. But this is how evil operates. As Charles Henkey put it, the devil does not come to your door looking like the devil. He is dressed in a tuxedo, holds a bouquet of flowers, and has a friendly, inviting smile. Only when we, as individuals, can bear to look in the mirror and see that part of ourselves can we begin to truly fathom and manage the evil in the world.

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