

A conversation on the “Dark Side”: The Shadow or just who we are?

by Eugene Mc Hugh

“*Light by its nature creates Shadow, if we care to see*”

Eugene Mc Hugh 2014



How comfortable am I with my dark side and can I allow it to be seen? This question arose when a personal process diary was removed and read by a family member.

Self Knowledge or Self Deception

In evolutionary terms we, as a species, had to be able to survive by any means possible. Carl Jung named this ability as “*Archaic, meaning primal or original*” (Sabini, 2008, p. 99). This ability has got humanity to the level of sophistication that the species has reached. Has the perception that we must be good in the last millennia, facilitated a pushing underground of part of

our psyche which is important, and which has caused a split that one can see in clients? Though we use the term ‘Shadow’, this author agrees with Jung, it is just what we are, encompassing all that we are, as human beings. Jung (2006) tells us, “what is commonly called self knowledge is a very limited knowledge as most of it is dependent on social factors” (p. 6). Terms like Ying and Yang, Light and Dark allow us to niceify what is, an integral part

of ourselves as humans. Using these terms, do we run the possibility of thinking that we are safe and that “evil” is in someone else, but not in us? In the therapeutic environment, how would this belief affect the relationship with a client who may be very aware of this shunned side of man? When looking at these human qualities Costello quotes Freud,

The inclination to aggression is an original, self subsisting instinctual disposition in man, ... It constitutes the greatest impediment to civilisation ... man's natural aggressive instinct, the hostility of each against all and of all against each, opposes this programme of civilisation (2002, p. 23).

Treatment:

Jung commented on the persona as being useful in a professional sense, “... because the persona is usually rewarded in cash” (cited in Matoon, 2005, p. 18). The persona is highly visible; it is the face we show the world, it allows the adaptations which one needs to be in the world. Without the development of this social face it is hard for the person to adapt to the social environment they find themselves in. Jung spoke of the formation of the ego as being a conflict between a person's bodily needs and their home environment. This developing ego carries the early experiences in which we connect to the past and provides cohesion for us in the present. There are a number of forces that determine what we think and feel. The family environment sets up specific learning that, through the eyes of a child, can have a different perspective than what may actually be happening. This individual perspective sets up a template for what is good, proper and moral, and what is mean, shameful, and immoral. Zweig & Abrams (1991, p. xvii) tell us that “The Shadow acts like a psychic immune system,

defining what is self and what is non self”.

In therapy, the visible persona is the one that most people try to understand to resolve the conflict between the internal and external world. This author considers that a client may find resolution for their life issues at this point and will end therapy. However, is this end point enough for a therapist, if a client wants to go deeper in the search for the self? How can a therapist accompany them if they have not gone further into their whole being, into the hidden psyche? Carl Rogers points out that, “... this can only be done by persons who are secure enough in themselves that they know they will not get lost in what may turn out to be the strange and bizarre world of the other, ...” (1995, p. 143). Irvin Yalom also comments on the same point when he states, “Therapists must be familiar with their own dark side and be able to empathize with all human wishes and impulses” (2001, p. 40). The persona will do its best to hide or block the shadow and the perceived evil that might be visible to the outside world to present a socially acceptable face. Storr (1983) quotes Jung commenting on

Freud’s embracing of Eros (Love), its opposite, hate, and Phobas (Fear), Jung postulates that consciousness seeks its unconscious opposite, stating that “*Life is born only of the spark of opposites*”. Jung comments that without this opposite the mind is “doomed to stagnation, congestion, and ossification” (in Storr. 1983, p.159). He goes on, “*We refuse to endow it with any positive life force; hence we avoid and fear it*” (p.160).

Hidden Psyche

The shadow tends to remain invisible for fear of been seen as wicked or evil, but is it really? Jung talked of the shadow as being “*collective – part of humanity’s heritage*” (Mattoon, 2005,

p. 28). This shadow may not even be acknowledged due to fear. This side of a person may only be seen when alcohol or drugs are present, the ego is suppressed allowing the alter ego to take over. Mattoon quotes Jung as “*the shadow is a necessary component of a three dimensional body*” (2005, p. 29). He goes on to speak about Germany’s experience and how Nazism reflects unconscious contents that have potential in all of humanity. In Jung’s work ‘The Undiscovered Self’ he tell us “*the bigger the crowd the more negligible the individual*” (2006, p. 14). It is, as if, when the Zeitgeist allows, it is permissible to unleash it. We see this in many of the world’s areas today where ‘normality’ is what is considered as evil to our developed World.

Awareness of personal darkness allows a position of understanding for the darkness in the other, which may not be evil. This author is drawn towards Nietzsche’s expression for these inner turmoil’s when he wrote,

*Among a hundred mirrors before
yourself false ...
Strangled in your own net
Self knower!
Self –executioner!
Crammed between two nothings,
A question mark ...*

(cited in Kaufman, 1975, p. 197)

Zweig and Abrams quote Jungian analyst Liliane Frey-Rohn saying, “*this dark treasury includes our infantile parts, emotional attachments, neurotic symptoms, as well as our undeveloped talents and gifts*” (1991, p. xvii). She goes on to state “The shadow retains contact with the lost depths of the soul, with life and vitality – the superior, the universally human, yes, even the creative can be sensed there”. When Mark Hederman discusses the idea of art in ‘Underground Cathedrals’ and how it can open up thinking and a way forward for humanity. He talks

of the historical establishment, civil and religious, imposing a type of censorship on free expression of the artist who seeks to express their individual quality. Hederman poses the view that this free expression can evoke two reactions, one which can become “a vision statement of a group” or “public uproar”, but how it can become a valid expression of an, “... excavation of a reality which lies in the underbelly of the life of each one of us” (2010, p. 128). Antonio Damasio also comments on art being important to the understanding of the full organism, “Ultimately, because the arts have deep roots in biology and the human body, it can elevate humans to the greatest heights of thought and feeling ...” (2010, p. 296).

Dramatic Portrayal of the Dark Side

Looking at the portrayal of this “underbelly of life” by the artist, one can see that even before Freud, Robert Louis Stevenson in 1886, developed the idea of Jekyll and Hyde from a dream. The kind Jekyll turns into the violent Hyde. Recently this author considers a similarity in the film, *The Black Swan*. In the film one can see the battle that happens when the personality is split. Albeit dramatised, one can see Schizophrenia, Dis-associative Disorder, and depression, however, it is a useful metaphor for the purpose of this discussion.

The film shows Lily in her pink and fluffy bedroom, the good girl, striving to be the perfect ballerina, no ability to be passionate holds her back. The director observes that to get the part as the Swan Queen she must lose the good girl and allow herself to be taken over by the Black Swan. We see her looking in a mirror where she sees her dark side. This happens in the wardrobe department and again in the studio where her reflection separates. After a night of alcohol

and drugs we see her making love to her alter ego which tries to smother “the sweet girl”. Throughout the film we can see her being taken over by her shadow where black feathers seem to sprout from her back and mother asks “where’s my sweet girl gone”, Lily’s alter ego replies “she’s gone”. The director commands her to “lose herself” before she goes on stage. This progresses to the point that she tries to kill her good side shouting “it’s my turn, it’s my turn” hiding the good girl’s body. However, she notices she has stabbed herself, but continues to the end as the Swan Queen where she throws herself off a cliff. Ending the scene stating “I was perfect”, passionately bringing the White and the Black Swan together to become perfect.

While the film depicts the battle between the black and white with the idea that one side must die in order to be present, there is a more positive possibility between these two complimentary energies. Bringing these two elements of the psyche together can facilitate Individuation where a person can assimilate the Persona and the Shadow, the anima and the animus, and the typology (dominant and non dominant functions) of the individual. This allows better functioning in the life of the person in their internal and external worlds. It is important for mankind, that we do not see the other as the only one that has the capability to be evil. When Jung (2006) reflects on historic atrocities in dictator states he comments,

... the evil, the guilt, the profound unease of conscience, the obscure misgivings are there before our eyes, if only we could see.

Man has done these things, I am a man ..., he goes on, we do well to have some imagination in evil (p. 95).

He speaks of the benefit of having this personal insight which involuntarily impacts on the environment

around them. On this he says “It is an unintentional influence on the unconscious of others” (2006, p. 109).

Working with the Dark side

How can we work with the dark side with our clients or with ourselves? Using the physical body as a metaphor, we look in a mirror we only see our front side; we have to turn around to see our back fully. One side is outside our full awareness at all times even though we obviously know its there. Likewise, we can see this other side in other people as a projection or reflection; we dislike or hate the other person when we recognise something that we reject in ourselves. Owning these projected traits we can start to befriend our dark side, we can then use the positive aspects of the shadow, e.g. anger becomes assertiveness. However, if, as a therapist, the “stagnation congestion and ossification” is present, how can this facilitate flexibility in working with the client? Storr informs us that Jung writes on this development of personality as being “... much more than the hatching forth of monsters, or of isolation. It also means fidelity to the law of one’s own being” (1983, p. 197). Jung in his work ‘Modern Man in Search of Soul’ talks of clients being stuck at a period in therapy where treatment ends, but where development begins. As mentioned, this may be the point where clients decide they have had enough of therapy and leave.

Vocation or Existential Growth

What is it then that pushes somebody internally to go that extra mile? Jung writes that he considers this extra drive is about vocation “an irrational factor that destines a man to emancipate himself from the herd and its well worn paths” (cited by Storr, 2006, p. 199). Speaking on this he explains that the person is following his own law,

the internal voice that calls him (the original meaning of vocation) to delve deeper. It is at this point in time that the therapist must be able to accompany the client in that deeper exploration of the shadow that may hold fear and terror for both. So how else do we access this side of ourselves? Jung tells us that “dreams are an expression of your inner life, and can show you through what false attitudes you have landed yourself in this blind alley” (cited in Sabini, 2008, p. 188). These spontaneous dream narratives are outside our conscious control so are directly accessible as a way into the unconscious.

From personal and professional experience one can see the creativity of these unconscious made conscious processes. Processes as individual as each client, but yet holding a common theme when explored. It is astonishing how alike these archetypal images are for each client. They talk of locked doors, tidal waves, trees in oceans, cliffs, caves, churches, mansions, etc. etc., but one thing that is held initially for these images is fear sometimes bordering on terror. As they process these fears, a core is found which enables them to find a trust and integrity which facilitates free expression without fear. It is not a place without feeling, it is a place full of feeling, but without fear. A natural flow of thoughts, images, urges, and emotions can be experienced without guilt. In this, one can speculate that this is the language of the arts where expression is the individual being expressed without censorship either internally or externally. Stephen Diamond writes,

Psychotherapy is one way of coming to terms with the daimonic. By bravely voicing our inner “demons” – symbolizing those tendencies in us that we most fear, flee from, and hence, are obsessed or haunted by – we transmute

them into helpful allies, in the form of newly liberated, life giving physic energy, for use in constructive activity (Zweig & Abrams. 1991, p. 185).

The person can allow the flow of thoughts without censorship and guilt of the persona and society. The individual can use this liberated energy to explore the world in a new way where they have the ability to choose a way of being which is right for them.

The one big change in this existential place is choice. The purpose of therapy is to enlarge choice so that the person can navigate the journey between the poles with ease. When van Deurzen-Smith talks of recognising these opposite sides of the person she says, "... recognizing opposites is not about choosing one or the other: it is about making movement between these two poles" (1988, p. 60). This movement allows a more holistic experience for the person, and in the therapist, allows an understanding of the clients' world as they grapple with coming to terms with their whole range of experience rather than compromising their way of being. This author can resonate with the sentiment of Friedrich Nietzsche when he writes "The great epochs of our lives are at the points when we gain courage to rebaptize our badness as the best in us" (cited in Zweig & Abrams. 1991, p. 238).

The Question

In answering the initial question posed as to how comfortable is one with the dark side and can one allow it to be seen? The reply that surfaces is that one is comfortable with this darker side of self. The author has chosen a profession that requires one to be in contact with this side of humanity. If one shies away from this holistic self, then one would suggest that the client is not served as fully as possible. This position allows one to adopt a

position of being non-judgemental in a more informed human way, still connected to the Persona, but also present to the possible in another environment. However, another part of the question then comes to light in how comfortable one is to have this part of self, publicised or used in another environment. Again, like the artist one must have the courage to face society and be open to an important part of being human in how one exists in present day society. As Jung says if one is true to self and exists with the full potential of being human it will have "an unintentional

influence on the unconscious of others". This influence may be the way we consciously choose to be in the world, which can have a positive influence on the people that surround us, which in turn influences the people around them. Surely this exploration then is a gift not just for us as therapists, but all that we come in contact with. Madisyn Taylor an inspirational thoughts author writes "When we present ourselves to the world without a mask and keep it real, we offer the same opportunity for others to do the same" (www.dailyom.com/articles/2014/45691.html).

References

- Costello, S. J. (2006). *The pale criminal: Psychoanalytic perspectives*. London: Karnac.
- Damasio, A. (2010). *Self comes to mind: Constructing the conscious brain*. London: Vintage.
- Hederman, M. P. (2010). *Underground cathedrals*. Dublin: The Columba Press.
- Jung, C. G. (2001). *Jung; Modern man in search of soul*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jung, C. G. (2006). *The undiscovered self: The dilemma of the individual in modern society*. New York: Signet.
- Kaufmann, W. (1975). *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. New York: Meridian.
- Matoon, M. A. (2005). *Jung and the human psyche*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Rogers, C. R. (1995). *A way of being*. New York: Mariner Books.
- Sabini, M. (Ed) (2008). *C. G. Jung on nature, technology & modern life*. California: North Atlantic Books.
- Storr, A. (1983). *The essential Jung*. New York: Barnes & Noble.
- Taylor, M. (2014). Retrieved 19 November 2014. <http://www.dailyom.com/articles/2014/45691.html>.
- Van Deurzen-Smith, E. (1988). *Existential counselling in action*. London: Sage Publications.
- Yalom, I. D. (2001). *The gift of therapy: Reflections on being a therapist*. London: Piatkus Books Ltd.
- Zweig, C. and Abrams, J. (1991). *Meeting the shadow: The hidden power of the dark side of human nature*. New York: Tarcher/Penguin.

Eugene Mc Hugh

Eugene Mc Hugh, MIACP EAC. B.A.(Hons) Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy, Dip Humanistic & Integrative Counselling, Post Grad in Integrative Body Psychotherapy, N.U.I. Certificate in Addiction Studies, Certificate in Therapeutic Mindfulness, Certificate in Hakomi Body Psychotherapy and has undergone training in working with P.T.S.D. with Babette Rothschild. Eugene is a lecturer in Dublin Business School on the B.A. in Counselling and Psychotherapy and currently undertaking a Certificate in Integrative Supervision at IICP. He is in private practice and owner of Wicklow Counselling Service in Bray, Co Wicklow.

Contact Details:

info@wicklowcounsellingservice.ie
087 135 7891
www.wicklowcounsellingservice.ie