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Review Article

Jung: Narcissism is Healthy and Sometimes, Genius

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Abstract

The concept of the Knowledge Economy was initially presented by the OECD in 1996 to name the set of industrialized countries in which knowledge was recognized as the key factor in economic growth. It is defined as the new economy linked to the Internet and whose foundations are the creation, dissemination and use of knowledge. The education index is one of the four indicators of the knowledge economy index and includes the number of years the population has spent in school, as well as current enrollment. The objective of this research is to calculate the education index as part of the knowledge economy index of each state of the Mexican Republic to identify the regions with areas of opportunity for the development of sustainable government projects that allow the inclusion and transformation of the community in an information society in the short and medium term. Using the System for the Census Information Service (SCINCE) of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico, low levels were found in various regions of the country, as well as marked inequality between the states, concentrating low rates of education and access to ICT in some regions, historically lagging behind in development.

Freud and Object Relations Theorists

The narcissist's True Self has relegated its functions to the outside world but is not in touch with the outside world: it is only the False Self is in touch with it instead. How do we settle this apparent contradiction? The narcissist's True Self is introverted and dysfunctional. In healthy people, Ego functions are generated from the inside, from the Ego. In narcissists, the Ego is dormant, comatose. The narcissist needs the input of and feedback from the outside world (from others) in order to perform the most basic Ego functions (e.g., "recognizing" of the world, setting boundaries, forming a self-definition or identity, differentiation, self-esteem, and regulating his sense of self-worth). This input or feedback is known as narcissistic supply." Only the False Self gets in touch with the world. The True Self is isolated, repressed, unconscious, a shadow. The False Self is, therefore, a kind of "hive self" or "swarm self." It is a collage of reflections, a patchwork of outsourced information, titbits garnered from the narcissist's interlocutors and laboriously cohered and assembled so as to uphold and buttress the narcissist's inflated, fantastic, and grandiose self-image. This discontinuity accounts for the dissociative nature of pathological narcissism as well as for the narcissist's seeming inability to learn from the errors of his ways. In healthy, normal people ego functions are strictly internal processes [1-3]. In the narcissist, ego functions are imported from the surroundings, they are thoroughly external. Consequently, the narcissist often confuses his inner mental-psychological landscape with the outside world. He tends to fuse and merge his mind and his milieu. He regards significant others and sources of supply as mere extensions of himself and he appropriates them because they fulfil crucial internal roles and, as a result, are perceived by him to be sheer internal objects, devoid of an objective, external, and autonomous existence.

Forcing the narcissist's False Self to acknowledge and interact with his True Self is not only difficult but may also be counterproductive and dangerously destabilising. The narcissist's disorder is adaptive and functional, though rigid. The alternative to this (mal) adaptation would have been self-destructive (suicidal). This bottled up, self-directed venom is bound to resurface if the narcissist's various personality structures are coerced into making contact [4-6]. That a personality structure (such as the True Self) is in the unconscious does not automatically mean that it is conflict-generating, or that it is involved in conflict, or that it has the potential to provoke conflict. As long as the True Self and the False Self remain out of touch, conflict is excluded. The False Self pretends to be the only self and denies the existence of a True Self. It is also extremely useful (adaptive). Rather than risking constant conflict, the narcissist opts for a solution of "disengagement." The classical Ego, proposed by Freud, is partly conscious and partly preconscious and unconscious. The narcissist's Ego is completely submerged. The preconscious and conscious parts are detached from it by early traumas and form the False Ego.

The Superego in healthy people constantly compares the Ego to the Ego Ideal. The narcissist has a different psychodynamic. The narcissist's False Self serves as a buffer and as a shock absorber between the True Ego and the narcissist's sadistic, punishing, immature Superego. The narcissist aspires to become pure Ideal Ego. The narcissist's Ego cannot develop because it is deprived of contact with the outside world and, therefore, endures no growth-inducing conflict [8,9]. The False Self is rigid. The result is that the narcissist is unable to respond and to adapt to threats, illnesses, and to other life crises and circumstances. He is brittle and prone to be broken rather than bent by life's trials and tribulations. The Ego remembers, evaluates, plans, responds to the world and acts in it and on it. It is the locus of the "executive functions" of the personality. It integrates the inner world with the outer world, the Id with the Superego. It acts under a "reality principle" rather than a "pleasure principle." This means that the Ego is in charge of delaying gratification. It postpones pleasurable acts until they can be carried out both safely and successfully. The Ego is, therefore, in an ungrateful position. Unfulfilled desires produce unease and anxiety. Reckless fulfilment of desires is diametrically opposed to self-preservation. The Ego has to mediate these tensions [10-12].

In an effort to thwart anxiety, the Ego invents psychological defence mechanisms. On the one hand the Ego channels fundamental drives. It has to "speak their language." It must have a primitive, infantile, component. On the other hand, the Ego is in charge of negotiating with the outside world and of securing a realistic and optimal "bargains" for its "client", the Id. These intellectual and perceptual functions are supervised by the exceptionally strict court of the Superego. Persons with a strong Ego can objectively comprehend both the world and themselves. In other words, they are possessed of insight. They are able to contemplate longer time spans, plan, forecast and schedule. They choose decisively among alternatives and follow their resolve. They are aware of the existence of their drives, but control them and channel them in socially acceptable ways. They resist pressures–social or otherwise. They choose their course and pursue it. The weaker the Ego is, the more infantile and impulsive its

owner, the more distorted his or her perception of self and reality. A weak Ego is incapable of productive work. The narcissist is an even more extreme case. His Ego is non-existent. The narcissist has a fake, substitute Ego. This is why his energy is drained. He spends most of it on maintaining, protecting and preserving the warped, unrealistic images of his (False) Self and of his (fake) world. The narcissist is a person exhausted by his own absence. The healthy Ego preserves some sense of continuity and consistency. It serves as a point of reference. It relates events of the past to actions at present and to plans for the future. It incorporates memory, anticipation, imagination and intellect. It defines where the individual ends and the world begins. Though not coextensive with the body or with the personality, it is a close approximation.

In the narcissistic condition, all these functions are relegated to the False Ego. Its halo of confabulation rubs off on all of them. The narcissist is bound to develop false memories, conjure up false fantasies, anticipate the unrealistic and work his intellect to justify them [13-16].

The falsity of the False Self is dual: not only is it not "the real thing" it also operates on false premises. It is a false and wrong gauge of the world. It falsely and inefficiently regulates the drives. It fails to thwart anxiety. The False Self provides a false sense of continuity and of a "personal centre." It weaves an enchanted and grandiose fable as a substitute to reality. The narcissist gravitates out of his self and into a plot, a narrative, a story. He continuously feels that he is a character in a film, a fraudulent invention, or a con artist to be momentarily exposed and summarily socially excluded. Moreover, the narcissist cannot be consistent or coherent. His False Self is preoccupied with the pursuit of Narcissistic Supply. The narcissist has no boundaries because his Ego is not sufficiently defined or fully differentiated. The only constancy is the narcissist's feelings of diffusion or annulment [17,18]. This is especially true in life crises, when the False Ego ceases to function. From the developmental point of view, all this is easily accounted for the child reacts to stimuli, both internal and external. He cannot, however, control, alter, or anticipate them. Instead, he develops mechanisms to regulate the resulting tensions and anxieties. The child's pursuit of mastery of his environment is compulsive. He is obsessed with securing gratification. Any postponement of his actions and responses forces him to tolerate added tension and anxiety. It is very surprising that the child ultimately learns to separate stimulus and response and delay the latter. This miracle of expedient self-denial has to do with the development of intellectual skills, on the one hand and with the socialisation process, on the other hand.

The intellect is a representation of the world. Through it, the Ego examines reality vicariously without suffering the consequences of possible errors. The Ego uses the intellect to simulate various courses of action and their consequences and to decide how to achieve its ends and the attendant gratification. The intellect is what allows the child to anticipate the world and what makes him believe in the accuracy and high probability of his predictions. It is through the intellect that the concepts of the "laws of nature" and "predictability through order" are introduced. Causality and consistency are all mediated through the intellect. But the intellect is best served with an emotional complement. Our picture of the world and of our place in it emerges from experience, both cognitive and emotional. Socialisation has a verbal-communicative element but, decoupled from a strong emotional component, it remains a dead letter [19-21].

An example: the child is likely to learn from his parents and from other adults that the world is a predictable, law abiding place. However, if his Primary Objects (most importantly, his mother) behave in a capricious, discriminating, unpredictable, unlawful, abusive, or indifferent manner– it hurts and the conflict between cognition and emotion is powerful. It is bound to paralyse the Ego functions of the child. The accumulation and retention of past events is a prerequisite for both thinking and judgement. Both are impaired if one's personal history contradicts the content of the Superego and the lessons of the socialisation process. Narcissists are victims of such a glaring discrepancy: between what adult figures in their lives preached - and their contradictory course of action. Once victimised, the narcissist swore "no more." He will do the victimizing now. And as a decoy, he presents to the world his False Self. But he falls prey to his own devices. Internally impoverished and undernourished, isolated and cushioned to the point of suffocation–the True Ego degenerates and decays. The narcissist wakes up one day to find that he is at the mercy of his False Self as much as his victims are.

Jung

In the previous section, I dealt with the classical, Freudian, concept of the Ego. It is partly conscious, partly preconscious and unconscious. It operates on a "reality principle" (as opposed to the Id's "pleasure principle"). It maintains an inner equilibrium between the onerous (and unrealistic, or ideal) demands of the Superego and the almost irresistible (and unrealistic) drives of the Id. It also has to fend off the unfavourable consequences of comparisons between itself and the Ego Ideal (comparisons that the Superego is only too eager to make). In many respects, therefore, the Ego in Freudian psychoanalysis is the Self. Not so in Jungian psychology. The famous, though controversial, psychoanalyst, C. G. Jung, wrote [all quotes from C.G. Jung. Collected Works. G. Adler, M. Fordham and H. Read (Eds.). 21 volumes. Princeton University Press, [1960-1983]. "Complexes are psychic fragments which have split off owing to traumatic influences or certain incompatible tendencies. As the association experiments prove, complexes interfere with the intentions of the will and disturb the conscious performance; they produce disturbances of memory and blockages in the flow of associations; they appear and disappear according to their own laws; they can temporarily obsess consciousness, or influence speech and action in an unconscious way. In a word, complexes behave like independent beings, a fact especially evident in abnormal states of mind. In the voices heard by the insane they even take on a personal ego-character like that of the spirits who manifest themselves through automatic writing and similar techniques." (The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, Collected Writings, Volume 8, p. 121) [21].

And further

"I use the term 'individuation' to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual,' that is, a separate, indivisible unity or 'whole.'" (The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, Collected Writings, Volume 9, i. p. 275) "Individuation means becoming a single, homogeneous being, and, in so far as 'individuality' embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, also implies becoming one's own self. We could, therefore, translate individuation as 'coming to selfhood' or 'self-realization.'" (Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, Collected Writings, Volume 7, par. 266). "But again and again I note that the individuation process is confused with the coming of the Ego into consciousness and that the Ego is in consequence identified with the self, which naturally produces a hopeless conceptual muddle. Individuation is then nothing but egocentredness and autoeroticism. But the self-comprises infinitely more than a mere Ego… It is as much one's self, and all other selves, as the Ego. Individuation does not shut one out from the world, but gathers the world to oneself." (The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, Collected Writings, Volume 8, p. 226) [22].

To Jung, the self is an archetype, the archetype. It is the archetype of order as manifested in the totality of the personality, and as symbolised by a circle, a square, or the famous quaternity. Sometimes, Jung uses other symbols: the child, the mandala, etc."… the self is a quantity that is supraordinate to the conscious Ego. It embraces not only the conscious but also the unconscious psyche, and is therefore, so to speak, a personality, which we also are.... There is little hope of our ever being able to reach even approximate consciousness of the self, since however much we may make conscious there will always exist an indeterminate and indeterminable amount of unconscious material which belongs to the totality of the self." (Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, Collected Writings, Volume 7, par. 274). "The self is not only the centre but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious; it is the centre of this totality, just as the Ego is the centre of consciousness." (Psychology and Alchemy, Collected Writings, Volume 12, par. 44) "…the self is our life's goal, for it is the completest expression of that fateful combination we call individuality…" (Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, Collected Writings, Volume 7, par. 404) [23]. In his essay "Puer Aeternus: The Narcissistic Relation to the Self", Jeffrey Satinover sums up the differences between Freud and Jung thus: "Freud considered that all people begin life in a blissful state he called 'primary narcissism.' In this state, no distinction between self and world exists, hence no painful tensions in the form of as-yet-unfulfilled desires of the subject for any object; and therefore no conscious experience of drives and frustrations. As the infant develops, it separates itself from its surroundings, and begins to experience needs for other things. As it grows, these needs put pressure on the developing ego to acquire the skills necessary to fulfil them, and so the ego adapts to object-reality. All the energy which in infancy was bound to the subject in this way slowly extends out and becomes bound up in the subject's pursuit of objects. This process is normal development. Freud originally described the essence of neurosis as an interruption in this smooth transition from subject-bound to object-bound libido ... The childhood libido reaches out, fascinated by the objects of its desire. But being as yet insufficiently adapted to succeed, it fails to attain its goal. To compensate for this failure in adaptation, and for the consequent lack of gratification, an alternate, easier form of gratification is sought, one with which the ego is already familiar: The libido regresses and reactivates an earlier form of adaptation; it reactivates the blissful state of narcissism, now called 'secondary narcissism.' In this view, a narcissistic neurosis consists of the habitual seeking of gratification through self-stimulation, and the consistent refusal to take the more difficult path of adaptation, or work ... The grandiose fantasy is preferred to the modest accomplishment; the brief, idealized affair, or masturbation is preferred to the rocky, long-term commitment.

Jung's ... modification of this idea is that the retreat to earlier forms of psychic life and behavior, to secondary narcissism, is not only or even primarily an alternate means of gratification. It is rather the necessary way that as yet unused instinctive modes of adaptation, latent within the psyche, are released. Thus, the retreat to the narcissistic state

releases archetypal fantasies, and these fantasies are the representations in consciousness of inherited, but as yet unused, adaptive behaviors. The regression, therefore, is not in itself neurotic, but, rather, it is the sign of a compensatory process of the psyche, whose purpose is enhanced adaptation [24]. Early in his career, Jung equated narcissism with introversion. The general notion that introversion per se is pathological stems from the early Freudian idea that narcissism is a substitute employed where adaptation to object-reality, or extraversion, has failed. In consequence of his expansion of Freud's conception, Jung separated the two terms, and the general turning inward of libido–introversion–was recognized as a servant of psychological development rather than as an enemy to it. (In his book, Psychological Types, Jung suggested) that introversion does not occur only in response to failures of extraversion, but that the habitual turning of attention inward to the self is a normal function of the psyche which, in some individuals, actually predominates in degree over the habitual turning of attention outward to objects. To summarize, narcissism or introversion can be

i. A pathological state.

ii. A compensatory response (regression in the service of the ego).

iii. A normal form of psychological development.

This last idea of Jung means that there is such a thing as normal narcissism. It implies that, to some extent, narcissism or introversion is a necessary aspect of all individuals and that, like adaptation to the outer world, there is such a thing as better or worse sorts of adaptation to the inner world. That neuroses can develop which are narcissistic not in the sense that the narcissism per se is the neurotic response to failures of external adaptation, but narcissistic in the sense that they are failures to develop healthy introversion, failures to develop a proper form and degree of narcissism." Jung postulated the existence of two "personalities" (actually, two selves), one of them being the Shadow. Technically, the Shadow is a part (though an inferior part) of the overarching personality (one's chosen conscious attitude).

The Shadow develops thus

Inevitably, some personal and collective psychic elements are found wanting or incompatible with one's personality (narrative). Their expression is suppressed and they coalesce into an almost autonomous "splinter personality." This second personality is contrarian: it negates the official, chosen, personality, though it is totally relegated to the unconscious. Jung believes, therefore, in a system of "checks and balances": the Shadow balances the Ego (consciousness). This is not necessarily negative. The behavioural and attitudinal compensation offered by the Shadow can be positive.

Jung

"The shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet is always thrusting itself upon him directly or indirectly – for instance, inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies." (The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, Collected Writings, Volume 9, i. pp. 284 f.). "…the shadow is that hidden, repressed, for the most part inferior and guilt-laden personality whose ultimate ramifications reach back into the realm of our animal ancestors and so comprise the whole historical aspect of the unconscious… If it has been believed hitherto that the human shadow was the source of all evil, it can now be ascertained on closer investigation that the unconscious man, that is, his shadow, does not consist only of morally reprehensible tendencies, but also displays a number of good qualities, such as normal instincts, appropriate reactions, realistic insights, creative impulses, etc." (Ibid.). It would seem fair to conclude that there is a close affinity between the complexes (split-off materials) and the Shadow. Perhaps the complexes (also the result of incompatibility with the conscious personality) are the negative part of the Shadow. Perhaps they just reside in it, on closely collaborate with it, in a feedback mechanism. Perhaps whenever the Shadow manifests itself in a manner obstructive, destructive or disruptive to the Ego–we call it a complex. They may really be one and the same, the result of a massive split-off of material and its relegation to the realm of the unconscious.

This is part and parcel of the individuation-separation phase of our early childhood development. Prior to this phase, the infant begins to differentiate between self and everything that is not self. He tentatively explores the world and these excursions bring about a differentiated worldview.

The child begins to form and store images of his self and of the World (initially, of the Primary Object in his life, normally his mother). These images are distinct. To the infant, this is revolutionary stuff, nothing short of a breakdown of an erstwhile unitary universe and its substitution with fragmented, unconnected, entities. It is traumatic. Moreover, these images in themselves are split. The child has separate images of a "good" mother and a "bad" mother, respectively associated with the gratification of his needs and desires and with their frustration. He also constructs separate images of a "good" self and a "bad" self, linked to the ensuing states of being gratified (by the "good" mother) and being frustrated (by the "bad" mother). At this stage, the child is unable to see that people are both good and bad (that an entity with a single identity can both gratify and frustrate). He derives his own sense of being good or bad from the outside. The "good" mother inevitably and invariably leads to a "good", satisfied, self and the "bad", frustrating mother always generates the "bad", frustrated, self. But the image of the "bad" mother is very threatening. It is anxiety provoking. The child is afraid that, if it is found out by his mother, she will abandon him. Moreover, the "bad" mother is a forbidden subject of negative feelings (one must not think about mother in bad terms!). Thus, the child splits the bad images off and uses them to form a separate collage of "bad objects". This process is called "object splitting". It is the most primitive defence mechanism. When still used by adults it is an indication of pathology [25].

This is followed by the phases of "separation" and "individuation" (18-36 months). The child no longer splits his objects (bad objects to one, repressed side and good objects to another, conscious, side). He learns to relate to objects (people) as integrated wholes, with the "good" and the "bad" aspects coalesced. An integrated self-concept inevitably follows. The child internalises the mother (he memorises her roles). He becomes his own parent (mother) and performs her functions by himself. He acquires "object constancy" (he learns that the existence of objects does not depend on his presence or on his vigilance). Mother always comes back to him after she disappears from sight. A major reduction in anxiety follows and this permits the child to dedicate his energy to the development of stable, consistent, and independent senses of self and introjects (internalized images) of others. This is the juncture at which personality disorders form. Between the ages of 15 months and 22 months, a sub-phase in this stage of separation-individuation is known as "rapprochement". The child, at this stage, is exploring the world. This is a terrifying and anxiety-inducing process. The child needs to know that he is protected, that he is doing the right thing and that he is gaining the approval of his mother. The child periodically returns to his mother for reassurance, affirmation, and admiration, as if making sure that his mother endorses his newfound autonomy and independence and accepts his separate individuality.

When the mother is immature, narcissistic, or suffers from a mental pathology, she withholds from the child what he needs: approval, admiration, and reassurance. She feels threatened by his independence. She feels that she is losing him. She does not let go sufficiently. She smothers him with over-protection and indulgence. She offers him overpowering emotional incentives to remain "mother-bound", dependent, undeveloped, a part of a mother-child symbiotic dyad. The child, in turn, develops mortal fears of being abandoned, of losing his mother's love and support. His unspoken dilemma is: to become independent and lose mother–or to retain mother and never have a self? The child is enraged (because he is frustrated in his quest for his self). He is anxious (fearful of losing mother), he feels guilty (for being angry at mother), he is attracted and repelled. In short, he is in a chaotic state of mind. Whereas healthy people experience such eroding dilemmas now and then–to the personality disordered they are a constant, characteristic emotional state. To defend himself against this intolerable vortex of emotions, the child keeps them out of his consciousness. The "bad" mother and the "bad" self plus all the negative feelings of abandonment, anxiety, and rage–are "split-off."

But the child's over-reliance on this primitive defence mechanism obstructs his orderly development: he fails to integrate the split images. The Bad parts are so laden with negative emotions that they remain virtually untouched throughout life (in the Shadow, as complexes). It proves impossible to integrate such explosive material with the more benign Good parts. Thus, the adult remains fixated at this earlier stage of development. He is unable to integrate and to see people as whole objects. They are either all "good" or all "bad" (idealisation and devaluation cycles). He is terrified (unconsciously) of abandonment, actually feels abandoned, or under threat of being abandoned and subtly plays it out in his/her interpersonal relationships. Is the reintroduction of split-off material in any way helpful? Is it likely to lead to an integrated Ego (or self)? To ask this is to confuse two issues. With the exception of schizophrenics and some types of psychotics, the Ego (or self) is always integrated. That the patient cannot integrate the images of objects, both libidinal and non-libidinal, does not mean that he has a non-integrated or a disintegrative Ego [26].

The inability to integrate the world (as is the case in the Borderline or in the Narcissistic Personality Disorders) relates to the patient's choice of defence mechanisms. It is a secondary layer. The crux of the matter is not what state the self is in (integrated or not)–ut what is the state of one's perception of the self. Thus, from the theoretical point of view, the reintroduction of split-off material does nothing to "increase" the Ego's integration. This is especially true if we adopt the Freudian concept of the Ego as inclusive of all split-off material. But does the transfer of the split-off material from one part of the Ego (the unconscious) to another (the conscious) in any way affect the integration of the Ego? Confronting split-off, repressed material is still an important part of many

psychodynamic therapies. It has been shown to reduce anxiety, cure conversion symptoms and, generally, have a beneficial and therapeutic effect on the individual. Yet, this has nothing to do with integration. It has to do with conflict resolution. That various parts of the personality are in constant conflict is an integral principle of all psychodynamic theories. Dredging split-off material to our consciousness reduces the scope or the intensity of these conflicts. This is so by definition: split-off material introduced to consciousness is no longer split-off material and, therefore, can no longer participate in the "war" raging in the unconscious.

But is it always recommended? Not in my view. Consider personality disorders. Personality disorders are adaptive solutions in the given circumstances. It is true that, as circumstances change, these "solutions" prove to be rigid straitjackets, maladaptive rather than adaptive. But the patient has no coping substitutes available. No therapy can provide him with such a substitutes because the whole personality is affected by the ensuing pathology, not just an aspect or an element of it. Bringing up split-off material may constrain or even eliminate the patient's personality disorder. And then what? How is the patient supposed to cope with the world then, a world that has suddenly reverted to being hostile, abandoning, capricious, whimsical, cruel and devouring – just like it was in his infancy, before he stumbled across the magic of splitting? [27].

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