

## Individuation

### CJS Core Concepts 2018

#### Definition

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.” (CW9i:490)

Many collectives: one’s family, one’s church or religion, the educational system that shaped us, one’s profession, one’s society and culture. Individuation involves becoming distinct from all of those, yet retaining appreciation and regard for each and all of them.

Individuation is a process of psychological differentiation – differentiating who one naturally is from the socialization we have received. The goal of individuation is the development of the unique, personal individual personality.

Several words sound similar to individuation and some even relate to, or are part of, the individuation process. “Individual” and “individuality”, for instance.

The *individual* is precisely that which can never be merged with the collective and is never identical with it. (CW7:485)

These individual characteristics and orientations cannot be subsumed by the group norms. For psychological health, they must be recognized and accepted by the person to whom they belong. This is our responsibility, for these very elements of ourselves affect the collectives to which we belong.

The *individual* is determined on the one hand by the principle of uniqueness and distinctiveness, and on the other by the society to which he belongs. He is an indispensable link in the social structure. (CW7:519)

Therefore the individual standpoint is not antagonistic to collective norms, but only differently oriented.

Individuality is different from individuation. It is the qualities or characteristics that distinguish one person from another.

By *individuality* I mean the peculiarity and singularity of the individual in every psychological respect. Everything that is not collective is individual, everything in fact that pertains to one individual and not to a larger group of individuals. (CW6:755)

Individual and individuality are closely related to individuation and must not be confused with individualism. The latter is antithetical to individuation by virtue of its attitude toward the collective. Whereas individuation involves separating oneself out from various collectives, it does not turn us against the collective. Individualism is a belief in the **supremacy of individual interests over those of the collective.**

*Individualism* means deliberately stressing and giving prominence to some supposed peculiarity rather than to collective considerations and obligations. But individuation means precisely the better and more complete fulfillment of the collective qualities of the human being, since adequate consideration of the peculiarity of the individual is more conducive to a better social performance than when the peculiarity is neglected or suppressed. (CW7:267)

*Individualism* sets a person apart from society in an antagonistic way, and often leads to the formation of another collective. **Individuation** on the other hand distinguishes a person from the collective while also enhancing society through some contribution springing out of what sets the person apart.

Jung himself is, of course, an example of individuation. He is one of the few psychologist in the twentieth century to maintain that development extends beyond childhood and adolescence through mid-life and into old age. It was this lifelong developmental process that he called individuation. He believed that although individuation is never finished, it can be brought to its highest fruition through working with what comes to us through the unconscious.

As Jung observed, “Individuation does not shut one out from the world, but gathers the world to itself.”

Many people who encountered Jung during his lifetime have testified to the change that came over him as he entered middle age. As a young man, he was rather aloof and prickly. Gradually he became a genial and wise old man. Physically, he was a big man. Beyond that, he had a huge personal presence that exuded both the peasant and the genius. People remarked on his humanness.

Though never losing his taste for seclusion, Jung developed a talent for getting on with people from all walks of life. Those who came to consult or visit him were impressed by his courtesy and humour as much as by his wisdom and brilliant mind. It was the degree of individuation that he achieved that drew people to Zurich from all over the world, that attracted millions when they saw him interviewed on television in old age, and which accounts for the interest in him and his theory since he died.

Individuation means becoming an “in-dividual,” and in so far as “individuality” embraces our innermost, last and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self, We could therefore translate individuation as “coming to selfhood” or “self-realization.” (CW7:266)

### The Horizontal Process

Individuation is the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology. (CW6:756)

Individuation is a process informed by the archetypal ideal of wholeness. It depends on a vital/lively relationship between ego and unconscious. The aim of the individuation process is not to become perfect, but to become familiar with one's personal psychology. This includes limitations as well as strengths, one's wounds and warts as well as one's beauty, one's demons as well as one's angels.

Life itself presents us with opportunities to come more fully into who we naturally are. Jungian analysis is sometimes referred to as "assisted individuation" for it attends to the activity of the unconscious.

In general, this process involves a horizontal progression:

ego >> persona >> complexes >> shadow >> anima/animus >> Self

First we construct aspects of our personality, and then, over time, we need to get to know what we have constructed.

- Constructing an ego, a major task throughout childhood
- Developing a functional persona, typically actively created in adolescence and early to mid adulthood;
- Recognizing activation of complexes
- Encountering the shadow, seeing what we have rejected, neglected, failed to develop
- Relating to the anima/animus, who can be reached only after attending to shadow contents
- Establishing communication with the Self, which relativizes the ego and moves it into service to the Self

Every step involves differentiation of some part from its source...

Consciousness requires differentiation, so as we differentiate aspects of our personality, we become more conscious. This separates us, bit by bit, from the unconscious which is the source of life and of energy. Therefore, when we achieve a certain degree of consciousness, we must reconnect with the unconscious – that wellspring of inspiration and motivation.

Here are the differentiations that take place as we move further into consciousness:

- Ego differentiates from the Self
- Persona/shadow – the ego separates out what is suitable to show to the outer world (persona) and what to hide from the outer world (shadow)
- Certain archetypes have been activated through the ego's interaction with the outer world and they draw psychic energy to themselves, creating complexes
- When shadow contents begin to come into consciousness, the anima/animus are free from the smokescreen which the shadow has cast over them; they now have the chance to connect the Self to ego-awareness

I want to address the emphasis that I put on men and women last week in talking about the anima and animus. These concepts are best treated as fluid, flexible containers for psychological principles present in both

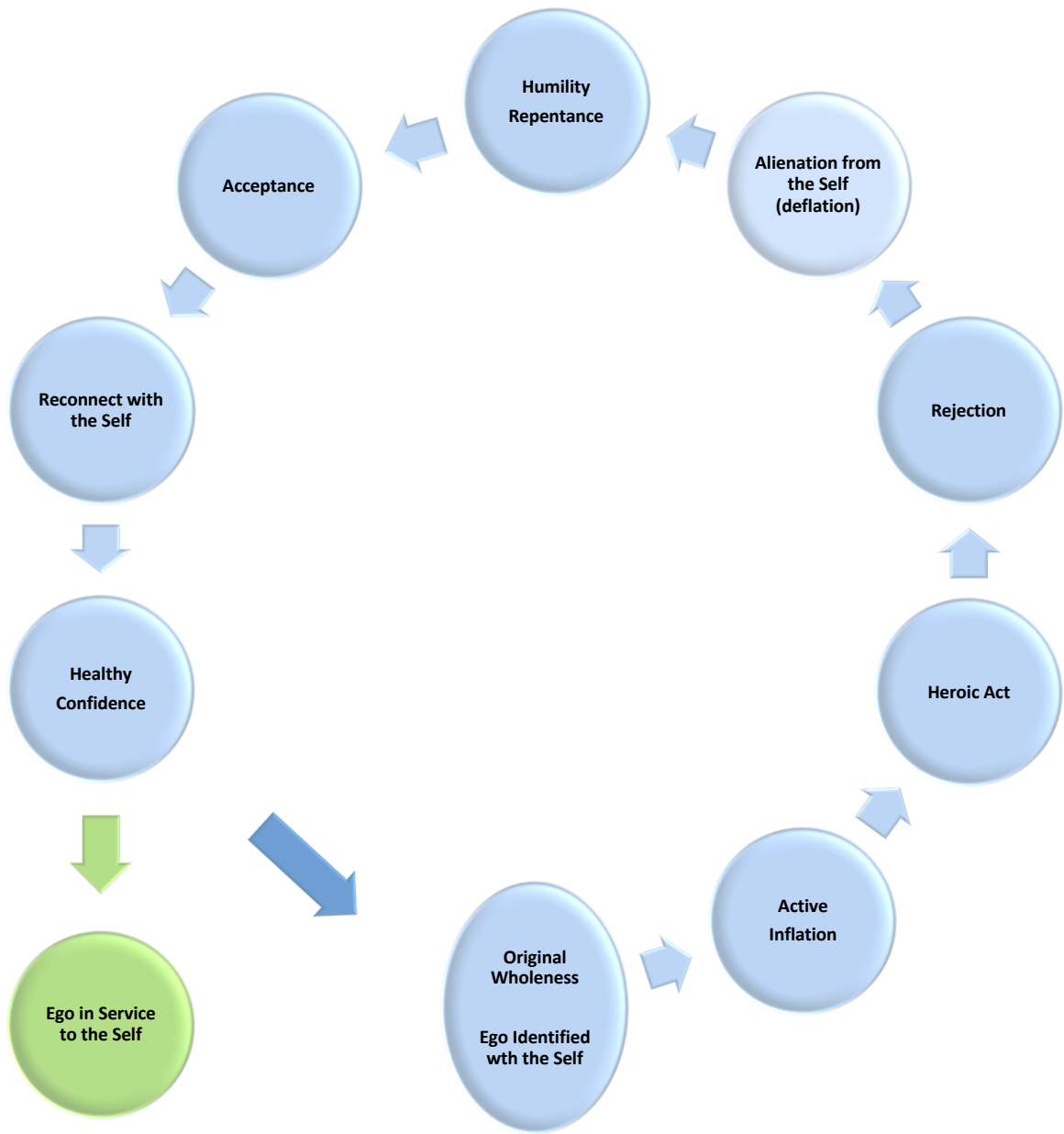
men and women. The masculine and feminine principles are foundational opposites in the human psyche. They need to be treated seriously yet understood lightly, tentatively, loosely. When I teach this class again, I intend to handle this subject matter differently. Less concretely.

- The differentiated ego comes into communication with its source. The conscious attitude begins to shift, giving authority to the Self rather than to solely ego desires.

In the process of individuation there is first a symbiotic muddle, then the work of separating certain elements out from each other, and then a reunion between Self and ego in which the ego remains an entity unto itself and comes into a new relationship with the Self – one in which the ego serves the Self rather than merely serving itself.

### The Circular Process

Individuation is about coming to a deep awareness of who we are by nature. Jungian analyst Edward Edinger observed that the process of individual consciousness seems to follow a cyclic course.



Psychic Life Cycle  
adapted from *Edinger Ego and Archetype*

Starting at the bottom of the circle in the diagram above, we have the early submersion of the infant ego in the flies of non-differentiation – ego-Self identity. The infant floats in the original unity of body and psyche, of inner and outer worlds. It is one with the Self, with the unconscious.

Toddlers are notoriously self-absorbed, assuming that what they want is to be granted. This is a form of active inflation. By this stage, they have performed numerous heroic acts, and have been praised for most of them: excitement over sitting on their own, standing, using the potty, taking the first steps, speaking a sentence.

As we move through life, psychological heroism means doing something in spite of fear or self-doubt or ridicule. Doing something despite some inner or outer limitation when that “something” sits so right that we know we must do it, trust it. Therefore, heroic acts are very individual. What is a heroic act to one person is everyday stuff to another.

Once a child’s ego begins to show itself through saying “no” and autonomous acts of disobedience, s/he meets with disapproval. This feels like rejection and there is a little wound to the ego. As the child’s expectations of praise are challenged by parents and others, the ego identifies a bit less with that state of wholeness and comes into more definite form. And so it goes through adolescence – trying out autonomy and meeting with disapproval. Over time, the ego moves further out of, and sometimes further away from, its source, the Self.

As a child, as an adolescent, as an adult, rejections of our assumed supremacy creates a wounding to the ego. Gradually we develop an internal morality that moves us (our ego) toward an attitude of remorse and repentance. As we humbly accept our imperfection, the way opens for us to reconnect with the Self.

Like all archetypes, the Self carries an overpowering energy. We are attracted to its numinosity and often become somewhat inflated, or puffed up, by virtue of its visitation in our life. Usually inflation as an adult is more subtle than that of a child. It shows up as an attitude. As our ego becomes identified to some degree with an aspect or quality of the Self, we are again humbled by circumstances or by recognizing something disturbing about ourselves. Feeling cut off from the Self, become deflated and discouraged. This is the difficult process by which we increase a depth of self-knowledge.

This alternation between inflation and alienation occurs during the early stages of coming to consciousness. With psychological maturity, the cycle is superseded. Once the ego has reached a certain level of development, it does not have to continue repeating the cycle, at least not in the same way. The repetitious loop is then replaced by a more or less conscious dialogue between ego and the Self.

### Moral Conflict

Coming more completely into who we are both presents us with moral issues and demands moral choices. Moral conflicts start fairly early in life, and sometimes result in the formation of complexes.

Complexes are in fact “splinter psyches.” The aetiology of their origin is frequently a so-called trauma, an emotional shock or some such thing, that splits off a bit of the psyche. Certainly one of the commonest causes is a moral conflict, which ultimately derives from the apparent impossibility of affirming the whole of one’s nature. (CW8:253)

...one of the most common causes in the birth of a complex is a **moral conflict, which ultimately derives from the apparent impossibility of affirming the whole of one’s nature.**

Examples? Perhaps you have some...

...an early fascination with the stars gets aborted because you don’t have the money or the smarts to become an astronomer

...an natural bent toward finding out what your body can do goes nowhere because you’ll “never make it to the Olympics”

...a gift for thinking outside the box gets belittled as “weird” thinking

...an interest in other cultures gets put on the back burner when you marry a home-body

...an accident renders you immobile or inarticulate

...old age arrives before you’ve seriously pursued something you knew you had to do

Earlier in life, an inferiority complex, or a perfection complex or a money complex may evolve out of the seeming impossibility of developing these interests or abilities that are an integral part of us. At midlife, they may come knocking, presenting us with moral choice. Will I be who I am?

Well-to-do man who wanted to go to Africa as a volunteer

Would destabilizes his career, financial security

Threatens marriage, relationship with grown children

In the grip of intense dissatisfaction and feelings of self-betrayal

Even when approaching old age, or in old age, the moral conflict is the same. Given the little time I have left – given this one day – will I be who I am?

Example:

Jane Goodall – fell in love with stuffed gorilla from father

married a baron and became a baroness, had a child

visited a friend’s farm in Kenya

friend suggested she contact an archeologist & palaeontologist she knew

became secretary to him, then sent on research herself

eventually scientist Leakey paid her way to Cambridge University where she received PhD without first earning BA or BSc  
removed from society when devoted life to studying chimpanzees  
last of couple of decades, she is back in society  
working for nonhuman rights  
established Roots and Shoots which promotes environmental, conservationist and humanitarian programmes in schools – now in her 80s

There is an inner urge to be “individual,” to be undivided within ourselves, to be an indivisible human being, to become as complete a human being as we can within the limitations of our culture, to contribute to the well-being of society as much as to the fulfillment of our personal lives.

### Individuation

The psyche is a self-regulating organism. When we adapt too much and too long to the demands of the outer world, the psyche tries to compensate. It generates warnings through unsettling dreams. If this one-sidedness continues, we may start having accidents, persistent headaches or become ill. Likewise, if we become too solitary for our own psychological health, we may become fatigued or depressed or even agoraphobic. Both the outer realm and the inner world demand their due.

Only our own psyche can really tell us when we are out of balance. Other people often have opinions about how we live, telling us that we need to be more outgoing or more actively involved in things. Psychological balance is unique to each person, we need to listen to our energy levels, our intuitions and feelings about life to guide us in that. When life turns bland or we feel stuck or depression descends, we are often being cued to make some changes in our behaviours or activities or attitude.

This journey toward wholeness, toward harmony with our own selves, is sometimes likened to a hero's journey. It is heroic because we enter the dim woods or forest of our own unknown psyche. There is no path to follow, for only each of us can enter our own psyches. We go alone, even if we have an outer companion such as an analyst or a spouse or a friend or a guidebook. There we find our fears, our complexes, our enemy and our helper, our incompleteness and our yearning. We come out of the woods with a trophy or a radiance or a calling. We have to both protect and offer up that victory to others.

As the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation.  
(CW(CW6:758))

The hero's journey is one of leaving the collective – its rewards and wisdom, its priorities and perspectives, its familiarity and disturbance. We leave in order to find our own rewards and perspectives, our own priorities and wisdom. And then we must bring



those things back, in the hopes that they will be accepted on some level. It's risky. It's scary and difficult. However, if carried through to its last stage, it benefits the collective that we abandoned.

Individuation cuts one off from personal conformity and hence from collectivity...he must therefore bring forth values which are an equivalent substitute for his absence in the collective personal sphere. (CW16:448)

The moral obligation for each of us – our personal cross to bear, if you will – is to accept and consciously realize our own particular pattern of wholeness.

Individuation does not shut one out from the world, but gathers the world to itself. (CW8:432)

It takes courage to grow up and become who we really are.

Close with an image from Nature that models for us an individuated state. Close your eyes or dim your focus and listen to “When I Am Among Trees” by Mary Oliver.

When I am among the trees,  
especially the willows and the honey locust,  
equally the beech, the oaks, and the pines,  
they give off such hints of gladness.

I would almost say that they save me, and daily.  
I am so distant from the hope of myself,  
in which I have goodness, and discernment,  
and never hurry through the world  
but walk slowly, and bow often.  
Around me the trees stir in their leaves  
and call out, “Stay awhile.”

The light flows from their branches.  
And they call again, “It’s simple,”  
they say, “and you, too, have come  
into the world to do this, to go easy,  
to be filled with light, and to shine.”