

Morality and Its Function in the Collective
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“A Community is like a ship. Everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm.”
(Henrik Ibsen)

“ Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”
(Martin Luther King)

I. Introduction

This paper is a continuation of the work that I started with my thesis for the C.G. Jung Institute, Zurich called “*The Heart of the Matter: Individuation as an Ethical Process*” and it arose from Jung’s paper in Vol. 10 on “*A Psychological View of Conscience.*” In Jung’s paper, he talks about true and authentic conscience that rises above moral code. (CW10 para 838) For Jung the moral code was the collective “Ten Commandments,” the common stock of thoughts and beliefs, and true conscience possessed a higher authority than collective morality, or in Freud’s terminology, the superego. True conscience for Jung was ‘the voice of God’ and the individual’s expression of psychic truth.

I had originally looked at Jung’s paper on conscience from the point of ethics and boundary violations in analytical psychology. It has also captured my attention because of my interest in groups because it highlights the tension between the individual and the group/organization /collective with which he or she interacts, and the nature of that interaction in light of individuation. Before I went into training, I was an organizational consultant working with various kinds of groups, and organizations trying to help them to achieve their goals and to become more effective. So I am interested in this because of the question of can and how does the individual individuate in groups and organizations. The other dimension of this topic comes from my observation of our community as Jungian Analysts and the conflict that analysts seem to have when entering into group or organizational processes. It seems that in our attempt to become more professional and the need to adapt to collective pressures, we are looking at these issues as a community.

So in my thinking to date these interests all seem to fall into a broad topic which I have titled “Morality and its relationship to the collective” and is summed up in Jung’s notion of a “conflict of duty.” Morality, conscience and ethical values reflect by their very nature a tension of the opposites, a dialectic between self-interest and some “Other.” This other usually reflects something that is higher or superior to ego-self interest. This dialectic is experienced as a dilemma, a neurosis or some kind of psychological distress arising from the collision of two opposing forces. The third therefore must be constellated through the activation of the transcendent function.

Jung writes in the forward to Neumann’s *Depth Psychology and the New Ethic.* :

“the chief causes of neurosis are conflicts of conscience and difficult moral problems; these conflicts constitute conflicts of duty usually arising from a clash between the individual and some outside force. Such moral issues cannot be answered by the collective and therefore must come from somewhere within

the individual to find a solution. In such cases, the treatment of a neurosis is a moral one. It is possible that such conflicts of duty arise when there is a strong established moral order within a society and when the individual is particularly sensitive to ethical matters. ¹

As a Canadian, I live within 30 km from the border of the United States. Canadians have a strange and ambivalent relationship to the United States. We are deeply affected by many of their actions while we attempt to maintain our uniqueness and detachment. The closeness to the border means that we have access to the American media and so in the wake of 9/11, I watched as collectively Americans projected their dark shadow onto al-Qaida and the Muslims. As American government focussed a large amount of energy battling terrorism in the middle east, two interesting phenomenons were happening inside the country. Corporate leaders left their own worst impulses lost sight of their societal responsibility, lined their own pockets, and sold false promises to the public and to their shareholders. The Washington Sniper was recking havoc within the countries own borders. There seemed to be a deep tragedy with the projection of the terrorist shadow onto the middle east, the same energies were being acted out inside the country.

And then in December 2002, Time Magazine proclaimed that Persons of the Year as “The Whistleblowers” - Cynthia Cooper of Worldcom, Colleen Rowley of the FBI and Sherron Watkins of Enron Corporation. In Time’s announcement the editors said the choice was based on “for believing - really believing - that the truth is one thing that must not be moved off the books, and for stepping in to make sure that it wasn’t. “ It was a reflection of a critical struggle how to restore trust in many disgraced institutions.

We seem to have a certain fascination with people who are able to stand out and tackle large organizations or collectives -the whistle blower - such as Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King, and others. They are the social activists and dissents that challenge the status quo and facilitate change. One newspaper columnist asked whether the fascination was “partly because we wonder whether we would do that same thing. We want to know whether whistle blowers have a higher ethical calling than we do, or whether they are just a little sharper and braver.” Globe and Mail -April 16, 2003.

As a cultural and as a psychological phenomenon I am quite fascinated by the motivation of the three women who spoke out against the unethical and immoral practices of their companies, and about the Time Magazine announcement to name them as “Persons of the Year”. This may be a unique North American phenomenon. This pick was noted as unusual for the magazine and indeed in an informal survey done by Time 65% of more than four million votes cast did not agree with the choice.

I. Persons of the Year - The Whistleblowers

Cynthia Cooper - 38 years old - was an internal auditor with Worldcom, the telecommunications company. Worldcom had grown very quickly to become the 25th largest company in America. By the end of this whole ordeal, the scandal was called the largest accounting fraud in history. The profits of the company were inflated by \$3.8 billion.

The discovery came by happenstance when a colleague called to say that something wasn’t right in the way that the financial information for his part of the company was presented. In her role as an auditor, Cooper asked Worldcom’s outside accounting firm about this and was told that it wasn’t a problem. But there was something in the response that alerted her to the fact that something wasn’t right.

¹ Erich Neumann, *Depth Psychology and the New Ethic*. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969) p.14.

Cooper is presented as relentless in searching for the truth. She was driven to continue the search when her superior was openly hostile toward her. She says “ when someone is hostile, my instinct is to find out why.”

She decided with several of her staff to find out what was going on. In fact, she was called the “Night Detective.” They worked secretly and often at night until they found that senior executives with the help of their outside accounting company have purposefully misrepresented the financial position of the company to make it appear that it was doing better than it was actually doing. It was rationalized under the pretext of creativity! She alerted the Board, and several senior executives were arrested on fraud charges. They face as much as 65 years in prison if convicted. The largest State pension fund is suing the company for \$600 million that is lost in the process.

In the Time Magazine article, Cooper describes how painful the experience was. She was verbally attacked and patronized by people inside the company. At some point, she walked into her office and found investigators searching through her files and confiscated her phone and email messages. She talked about the very dark place she was in. She often would read the 23rd Psalm - “I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. I will fear no evil.” She continued to work for the company feeling the commitment to see the process through some kind of conclusion - this despite social isolation that she experienced within the organization.

The second woman is Colleen Rowley of the FBI, 48 years old was stationed in a regional office in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her office had identified from early on the suspiciousness of a man who arrived in their community speaking little English and had signed up at a local flight school. Her office had been trying to get approval for a search warrant of his computer because they believed that he was part of a larger plot to hijack commercial airliners. This man was later identified as one of the pilots involved in the attacks on the World Trade Centre. Her office’s concerns were ignored. And when she went into her office on the morning of September 11 to see the tower crumbling, she immediately thought of this man.

In the days following the attacks, the FBI Director expressed shock that the pilots had been training in the country and was adamant that there were no warning signs. Rowley knew that in fact there were attempts to investigate one of the pilots and felt that Director should be made aware of this before he made any further public statements. However, any attempts she made to contact him were responded to with silence.

Her decision to write a 13-page memo outlining what she knew arose not out of design but because “she couldn’t keep the words inside anymore.” It felt to her to be more of an act of redemption rather than a criticism. In her description of the FBI she described an organization where there was a very strong hierarchy, where people were reluctant to call superiors because of fear and the people were more interested in protecting themselves from the internal politics than they were in doing their jobs. This memo has since been portrayed as the FBI’s conscience.

Like Cynthia Cooper, she also experienced a tremendous back lash from inside the FBI. She found out that senior executives were considering filing criminal charges against her and she was the victim of a campaign for others agents to pressure her to resign.

Finally, Sherron Watkins of Enron, 43 years old. Watkins sent memos to the Chairman of her company - Kenneth Lay - warning that the Enron had adopted improper accounting processes to conceal the true extent of how much the company owed. The culture of the Enron was described as one of excess and it had no defining organizational structure. People within the company could basically do anything that they wanted.

The turning point in her story came when she was assigned to work for one of senior financial officers and charged with trying to finding assets to sell. Every asset that she looked at was found to be questionable. She found that many of the company's partnerships were not properly supported financially. She said that "No one she asked could - or cared to - explain what was going on." In addition the organizational culture did not tolerate challenging the Chief Executive Officer.

At first she felt that she needed to leave the company. She planned to confront her boss on her last day. However, fate seemed to have intervened with the CEO's abrupt resignation. It was the beginning of her attempt to warn Kenneth Lay of the accounting scandal that she was aware of. She made several attempts including a personal interview with him. She says that she felt after the meeting "there was a feeling that I had done the hardest thing in my life."

Watkins persistence led to an inquiry of the CEO's activities and eventually lead to the collapse of the company. The process also discredited its outside accounting agency which also went down in its own scandal.

Like the other two "whistleblowers," something in the organization was constellated to silence her voice and to marginalize her. Her superiors were trying to find ways of firing her, her computer had been confiscated and she was demoted from her Executive Office to a "shanky office with a metal desk and given a series of make-work projects. She says this "there were some very bleak moments throughout when you're just so disappointed with human nature with the power of greed and the power of denial, trying to rationalize that you've done nothing wrong."

The actions of these women led directly to the government inquiries into the organizations that they belonged to and have led to an intense discussion regarding corporate governance.

There is something extraordinary about these women who would risk a great deal - their jobs, their health, their sanity - to raise the alarm of the trouble within their institutions. There are some similarities among them.

- C They were not looking for limelight or for media attention;
- C They all believed that where they worked served the larger community and when their higher ups didn't live up to that mission, they took it to heart.
- C they all grew up in small towns to families who were not wealthy or affluent
- C they were first born
- C They were the bread winner of their family; two of the women have stay at home husbands.
- C Their character was strong enough that they refused to be intimidated by their bosses and their colleagues.
- C They all said that they wouldn't do it again and suffered a great deal from the experience.

I. Ethics and the Nature of Groups and Organizations

The nature of this discussion relates to the precarious connection between the individual and the group/ the collective, and the exploration of the psychological experience that individuals have when they are in a group situation versus when they are alone. What does it mean to go through the process of separation from the collective or the group psychology for the analysands that we work with - many of whom work in organizations? Is the power of the group stronger? What is the power of the group? And to take it one step further and to apply it to the task of individuation and our own profession as Jungian Analysts what are the implications of us as analysts who are involved in our local societies.

In 1921, Freud initiated the discussion of a psychoanalytical study of groups when he made

some observations about "mobs" and mob psychology. He suggested that individuals in mobs feel a certain intimacy because they project their ego ideal onto the leader of the group. This projection then absolves individuals of having to make moral decisions because the leader then carries the superego functions of self-criticism and responsibility. As a consequence, individuals lose their sense of identity and experience a reduction in ego functioning. The result is the unconscious takes over and the mob or group falls under the sway of drives and affects.

Jung wrote about groups and collective systems at several places through the collected works. In looking at the evolution of human consciousness, Jung observed that ethical awareness is related to the development of the ego and ego consciousness. Both Freud and Jung observed that at the lowest level of consciousness, there is a participation mystique of the ego with the group or collective that contains it and therefore, the group carries the ethical responsibility for each individual member.

Jung recognized that psychic epidemics of a group can destroy the individual and that by its very nature, a group or collective consciousness has the ability of lowering the consciousness of the individual. In Vol. 10, in his introduction to Toni Wolff's studies in Jungian Psychology, he makes several important observations about groups and their effects on individual consciousness.

"The bigger the group, the more the individuals composing it function as a collective entity, which is so powerful that it can reduce individual consciousness to the point of extinction, and it does this more easily if the individual lacks spiritual possessions of his own with an individual stamp. The group and what belongs to it cover up the lack of genuine individuality, just as parents act as substitutes for everything lacking in their children. In this respect, the group exerts a seductive influence, for nothing is easier than a preservation of infantile ways or a return to them." Vol 10 Para 891

"Group observations have confirmed over and over again that the group subtly entices its members into mutual imitation and dependence, thereby holding out the promise of sparing them a painful confrontation with themselves." Vol 10 Para 892

The spiritual and moral value of a group is measured by the average value of its individual members. If they are without value, then no group ideal can help. Group experiences therefore always lead back to the question of the value of the individual and his development." Vol. 10 para 898

In Vol. 7, he writes:

"It is a notorious fact that the morality of the society as a whole is in inverse ratio to its size; for the greater the aggregation of individuals, the more the individual factors are blotted out, and with them morality, which rests entirely on the moral sense of the individual and the freedom necessary for this. Hence every man is, in a certain sense, unconsciously a worse man when he is in society [or in a group] than when acting alone; for he is carried by society and to that extent relieved of his individual responsibility. Any large company composed of wholly admirable persons has the morality and intelligence of an unwieldy, stupid and violent animal. The bigger the organization, the more unavoidable is its immorality and blind stupidity." (para 240)

"In small groups, individual members are better safeguarded and the greater their relative freedom and the possibility of conscious responsibility. Without freedom, there can be no morality.

This idea of the effect that groups and organizational processes have on the lowering of the individual moral or ethical choice is elaborated by Otto Kernberg in his book *Ideology, Conflict and Leadership in Groups and Organizations*. Kernberg is a psychoanalyst and the director of several medical institutions in the New York Area. He makes several important corollary observations about the effect

that groups have on individual consciousness. Kernberg suggests that organizational structure, key definition of tasks and clear understanding of the purpose of the group has a direct bearing on the degree to which individuals regress into a lower level of consciousness. That is that organizational structure like the boundaries around the analytical container help to support the ego and its ability to make informed decisions. He even suggests that healthy and well-adjusted people working on groups or organizations which lack these organizational boundaries will begin to regress. It is the degree to which the group is closed and unstructured is the determining factor on the discrimination of the individual.

Working in an organization or being part of the group constitutes a significant “conflict of duty” for the individual. Individuals depend on groups and organization for many needs - their livelihoods, social contact, retirement funds and family economic security. What can be gleaned from all of this work is that groups and organizations do not tolerate individuality. It is likely that any sign of individuality within a group or within an organization will move the group toward destruction of that individuality. Definition used for this would be the ability to think seriously about what one is doing”, i.e. ego consciousness. What is moral, good or evil originates from the ego which has the responsibility for making subjective judgements and for being detached in the face of the regressive pull of the unconscious.

I. Scapegoating and Whistleblowers

So now I would like to look a little bit of the psychological dynamics of whistle blowing and scapegoating. They appear to me to be aspects of the same dynamic that reflects the relationship of the individual to the group, and the individual’s expression of individuality.

The Scapegoat comes the Jewish story that is connected with Yom Kippur ritual of atonement and the riddance of evil. The ritual is described in Leviticus 16:21-22 and involves the sacrifice of the scapegoat and its exile into the desert. “The goat shall carry all its [groups] iniquities of the Israelites upon itself into some barren wasteland and the man shall let go there in the wilderness.” This ritual serves to exile or extract the sin and guilt of the group that accompanies the knowledge of some transgression of a moral code. The goat therefore holds and carries the knowledge of Israelites sins and is then banished into the unconscious. It reflects a state of falling out of a state of oneness with the collective and its shared values. Through the ritual, it is then possible for the members of the community to stand purified and united with each other.

It is as if the collective or the group unconsciously identifies an individual to recognize and to carry its sins. At that point, the individual has the choice to carry it with consciousness or to be banished into the desert. Whistleblowers seem to actively engage in the process of suffering and something in them compelling them to speak out, they experience the true authentic voice of conscience as Jung defined it. While the scapegoating dynamic, the individual carries the immorality of the group into the desert.

C. Fred Alford, has written a book on this phenomenon of Whistleblowers by looking at the stories of many people who have who have found themselves in similar situations as the three women explored in TIME. Alford is a political scientist at the University of Maryland and he book is titled *Broken Lives and Organizational Power*.² In it, he explores why they do it and what do they learn from the experience. He makes a very interesting point. He suggests that Individuality is not a solitary endeavour but a group one and a social one.

² Alford, C. Fred. *Broken Lives and Organizational Power*. (Cornell University Press, 1991).

The experience of these people is what we might understand as individuation. Whistleblowing is described “like a space walking astronaut who had cut his lifeline to the mother ship.” One gets the image of intense aloneness and the experience of free floating without an anchor, a feeling of being set a drift from outside some kind of transpersonal order than is being expressed by the organization or collective. It thrusts the individual into an in-between space and isolates them from the anchor of the meaning that is embodied by the organization that they work for or belong to.

The stories of “whistleblowing” seem to have two essential components that reflected both an inner and outer dialogue.

First, the whistleblower needs to have the ability to self-reflect, to have an inner dialogue with oneself. Alford says that “it is the whistle blower’s ability to talk to himself about what he is doing that explains, if anything can, why he blows the whistle” (page 13) or more accurately it is the individual’s inability not to talk to himself.

Second there is the need to have an outer dialogue with others, particularly with those who understand to receive some outside validation. This dialogue is necessary so that the inner dialogue doesn’t chase its tale and picking up shadow material with each successive go around. Yet when this happens there are the dangers that people outside gently pull the individual back into the norms of the shared world and that individual loses the connection to himself and his inner standpoint.

There also seems to be an inner compulsion toward the experience. One whistleblower describes this compulsion as the means to prevent him from “going to crazy” He writes:

“It was amazing. Here we were dumping poison into the environment and nobody wanted to talk about it, as if talking about it would make it real. Well it was real all right but we went around pretending that it wasn’t. I thought I was going crazy like it wasn’t happening. You think I am some kind of hero cause I blew the whistle. The only reason I spoke up is because I didn’t want to go crazy.” pg 13.

The fate of whistleblowers is not great. Instead of rewarding people for this kind of behaviour, the collective often mobilizing itself to shun, isolate and make irrelevant these individuals. Forcing them into the desert like the scapegoat to carry its sins. Many of the people Alford spoke to came out of the experience feeling that their lives were somehow broken, and unable to assimilate the experience and unable to come to terms with what they have learned about the world, and almost all said that they wouldn’t do it again if they had a choice

I. Reflections - Loyalty and Truth

The issues presented here reflect the ethical dilemma of loyalty versus truth. From an organizational perspective, loyalty keeps people inside something - a group, a relationship, friendship or an organization. The notion is that loyalty is a moral virtue and there is the implication of allegiance or fidelity. Its meaning is faithful in allegiance to one’s lawful sovereign or government, and b: faithful to a cause, ideal, custom, institution, or product. Yet in its use, we become acquainted with the marketing notion of “brand loyalty” or the “loyalty oath” invoked in many situations which we might call immoral. Indeed, it was the slogan of Hitler’s SS. Somehow, we have don’t equate loyalty with judgement or the critical thinking or question but with what might be called thoughtlessness.

An organizational or group culture which is based on loyalty can easily be a defence mechanism as it is a virtue. And the question arises loyalty to what or to whom? The three Time whistleblowers believed in their loyalty to larger organizational mission and purpose, and its responsibility to society

and to its shareholders. Their critics would claim that they were not loyal to the organization.

Within this conceptual perspective, the implication is that loyalty is about silent acquiescence. In our daily lives, loyalty suggests that there is something that we owe to others which binds us to them. C. Fred Alford suggests that this kind of loyalty is needed for the organization to survive. Indeed Colleen Rowley the woman who worked for the FBI talked about the importance of other values and the culture was based more on the goal of protecting itself rather than protecting the public.

In this dynamic, the “whistleblower” might reflect a loyalty to the principle rather than the group - loyalty to some higher moral order that somehow takes precedence over something else. The stories that have been researched suggested that “whistleblowers” were loyal not just to the principles involved but to ideal selves (i.e. the Self) who embodied these principles.

I. Reflections - Relevance for the Jungian Community

I think that there are several issues related for Jungians as practitioners on a number of different levels. The nature of individuation creates a moral dilemma for Jungian Analysts and pits them against the extant standards of society or as Jung said “collective moral code.”

- how does the moral loyalty to oneself which Jung saw as the healing factor fare in light in the light of group or organizational conflict among our organizations.

- how do we raise the level of the ethical discourse facing the profession and how do we create ethical organizations

- how are we silenced in our organizations particularly concern issues of ideology and philosophy of training

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The author would welcome any comments or feedback regarding these ideas. Please direct them to cj@cjbecker.com