

JUNG'S DREAM THEORY

The dream theory of Carl G. Jung (1875–1961) is one of the most important and widely influential dream theories in modern depth psychology (that branch of psychology that studies the unconscious as its main object). Jung, a Swiss medical doctor, was at one time Freud's closest friend and leading student; however, Jung and Freud had a bitter falling out in 1914, in part because of

their different theories of the nature and function of dreams (see FREUD'S DREAM THEORY).

In Jung's view, dreams are the direct, natural expression of the current condition of the dreamer's mental world. Jung rejected Freud's claim that dreams intentionally disguise their meanings; rather, Jung believed that the nature of dreams is to present "a spontaneous self-portrayal, in symbolic form, of the actual situation in the unconscious" (Jung, 1967, Vol. 8, par. 505). Jung claimed that dreams speak in a distinctive language of symbols, images, and metaphors, a language that is the unconscious mind's natural means of expression. We have trouble understanding dreams, Jung said, only because this symbolic language is so different from the language of our waking consciousness.

Dreams sometimes portray the dreamer's relation with the external world, that is, with the people, events, and activities of the dreamer's daily life. Jung called this the *objective* level of a dream's meaning. At other times, dreams portray the dreamer's inner world; the dream figures are personifications of thoughts and feelings within the dreamer's own psyche. This, Jung said, is the *subjective* level of a dream's meaning. Jung criticized Freud for acknowledging only the objective level; the true nature of dreams, Jung believed, is to portray both these levels of the dreamer's life.

Jung stated that dreams serve two functions. One function is to *compensate* for imbalances in the dreamer's psyche. Dreams bring forth unconscious contents that consciousness has either ignored, depreciated, or actively repressed. For example, if a person is overly intellectual, his or her dreams will work to balance this conscious excess by bringing forth images of the psyche's more emotion-oriented contents. According to Jung, when the dreamer recognizes and accepts these unconscious contents, greater psychological balance is achieved. The second function of dreams is to provide *prospective* images of the future. Jung agrees with Freud that dreams may look backward to past experiences, but he argues that dreams also look forward to anticipate what the dreamer's future developments may be. Jung did not mean that dreams predict the future, only that dreams can suggest what might happen, what possibilities the future might hold. Ultimately, Jung believed that dreams function to promote the most important developmental process of human life, namely, the uniting of consciousness and the unconscious in a healthy, harmonious

state of wholeness. Jung calls this process *individuation*, the "complete actualization of the whole human being" (Jung, 1967, Vol. 16, par. 352).

One of the most distinctive features of Jung's theory of dreams is his claim that dreams express not just personal contents, but also collective or universal contents. Jung believed that dreams frequently contain *archetypes*, universal psychic images that underlie all human thought. (Common archetypal figures described by Jung are the wise old man, the great mother, the trickster, the divine child, and the shadow.) Archetypes reflect a natural wisdom deep within the human unconscious; archetypal images in dreams can provide the dreamer with special insights and guidance along the path toward individuation. Jung believed that the world's religious and mythological traditions contain a wealth of archetypal images, and he refers to these traditions in describing the nature and function of dreams.

Jung's dream theory has been criticized for being perilously close to mysticism and the occult. Jung insisted, however, that his theory of dreams is based on strictly empirical observations. He claimed to have interpreted over 80,000 dreams during his almost 60 years of clinical practice; Jung said his theory simply attempts to describe and classify the dream phenomena he had observed.

REFERENCES

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- . 1967. *Man and his symbols*. New York: Dell. Jung's last work, an explanation of his psychology in nontechnical terms.
- . 1967. *The collected works of C.G. Jung*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967. Jung discusses dreams throughout the 18 volumes of his writings. The key works on dreams are the following: General Aspects of Dream Psychology, Vol. 8; On the Nature of Dreams, Vol. 8; The Practical Use of Dream Analysis, Vol. 16; Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy, Vol. 12; Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, Vol. 7.

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Kelly Bulkeley