

## The Question of Conscience: Morality and Ethic

London October 15<sup>th</sup> 2009

Jung's concept of ethic is one of those points from which we can feel his whole system of thought and practice rise like a great animal out of the waves, speaking not with the voice of Jung only but far beyond him, the voices of all things that seek simply to *be*: to come into their own being: plants, animals, human beings, all those mortal things which (and Hopkins' words were written before Jung was born)

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same  
Deal out that being indoors each one dwells:  
Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells;  
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

Another such point would be simply to meditate on what he means by individuation, which is the same thing. Individuation is exactly that dealing 'out the being indoors each one dwells'. Ethic is the *ethos* by which things do that, the spirit by which they grow into themselves, the nose for what is good and healthy and what is poisonous and stinks. Ethic is the *spiritus rector* of individuation, , the guiding spirit. Jung called it also 'the inexorable command' of his being. The key value is *being*: as something which unfolds from within itself and needs no justification but itself, as in the first creation myth of Genesis God-Elohim makes the world for its own sake, looks on what has been made and feels that it is good; and as in that myth all creation joins in and shares; for male and female created he them and that, in the many forms it takes, is their power to create, makes them kin with Elohim (who is also male and female): made in his-her image. (The language we have doesn't have the grammar for such paradox: but paradox is the essence of being.)

Morality is different. It comes from the Latin *mores*, which are the customs of a society, the rules by which it holds together. It is important because society is important and we need society to work. But it depends on a police-force to impose it, and psychologically on the inner police which Freud so admirably described as the super-ego. The super-ego guards the rulings of the tribe. It is not placed within us by nature, like compassion, let us say, or kindness of heart, but by culture. And in

Western culture it has been like a command post set up in what was always seen as the savagery of the human heart, by a colonising power bent on saving it. When past generations beat their children it was to instil the super-go. It was a moral imperative: spare the rod and spoil the child. The idea was that nature was the abode of the Devil and must be driven out. The natural child would be replaced by a culturalised child, a good child. The penal system with its courts and prisons was for driving out the devil in society. The religious doctrine of redemption by baptism, without which even the newborn child would go to hell, was not the cause of this: it was merely one of its one of its aspects. There was a war between nature and society and it is still with us; the police station is still there. And there are benevolent policemen inside, even loving policemen so long as you do what they say. And what they say is exactly as good as the society that placed them there; and that is one of the problems, though certainly not the only one.

Thus, in Apartheid South Africa the act of parliament that outlawed sexual relations between races was called the Immorality Act. There you have it all.

Nature greatly approves of miscegenation, so many people broke that law; but it was 'moral' to report them. In Nazi Germany it was moral to report on Jews: if you did that you were a good citizen. Others, of course, hid Jews.

What was the difference between those who conformed and those who didn't?

A major on the staff at Auschwitz was asked what he *felt* when he gassed a group of seventy two women and children. He answered that he felt nothing. He had received an order to kill these inmates in this manner and that 'by the way', he added, ironically, 'was how I was trained.'

He might have said he felt terrible about it but feared for himself and his family. Or that he felt terrible but believed that the Fuhrer must know better than himself. But he felt nothing, and this makes his

tragedy, we may will think, greater than that of the victims, for they could still feel, they were still human beings.

We might ask of all combatants on any side in any war, what did they feel? When bombers over Dresden, let's say, looked down on the crowded streets beneath and dropped their bombs into them? Some felt a great deal and others just did what they'd been told to do.

Ethic rises out of the feeling function and is literally not to be distinguished from it. This was a point which Hopkins also took. He doesn't say 'what I am is e'; he says 'what I do is me.' The next line goes 'The just man justices'. It makes the link between being and doing which is the link between what the unconscious is telling us and what we do about it. If that link fails we are in a serious state of splitting off. There is no such thing as an abstract interest in something unless there is such a split. Feeling and doing come out of the same life-spirit which makes that same cry:

*What I do is me: for that I came.*

*Ethos* comes from the same family as *ethology*, *ethnic* and so on. They are nature-words which come back into the language because we need the whole spectrum of meaning that nature-words bring. Think of human rights. They are not nature words but the whole concept rises out of nature. For they are not rights granted by contract with a lord, as in feudal times, or with the State as later. They state the natural right of any organism to follow its *telos* : that end in the sense of completion, fulfilment. 'My life is a story of the self-manifestation of the unconscious'. That is, in the human, the *telos*. It is autonomous; it does its own thing, independent of the ego and sometimes opposed to it. Ethic would be the ability to listen to it. A tree does the same thing; it is a process that comes always from within, from within out; from the secret to the manifest; all creation goes the same way. That takes us inexorably into the *mysterion*, the hidden thing; for we don't know what is that centre, that core, except in so far as it shows itself, comes out, manifests itself, comes into realisation, becomes real, is made flesh as the Word, in St John's Gospel, is made fleshy. What is that seed of it all? Definitely we can't know. All we can know is that when it falls into the earth, or a womb, or the egg of some great or tiny bird, the process of *unfolding*

begins. And we can say yes to it or no, but it is an autonomous activity; and it is in our respect for what is unfolding that there resides the ethical.

Thus nature itself is a continuous education in the ethical. Every gardener knows it; every gardener, feels for the potential of the plants he grows, she grows: each one unique, not happened before and the more obviously unique the further it unfolds from that unknown centre. And the more its own unique character is shown the more personality it takes on for us, like a friend.

The psychotherapist is, of course, a gardener. Put away everything you ever learnt, says Jung, and look at the patient. The exhortation echoes that of Wittgenstein, about the same time, to his pupils in philosophy: it was something that the culture needed and appeared about the same time in exceptional teachers. 'Don't *think*, but *look!*' said Wittgenstein; and then often enough he would replace a logical concept with an organic image, such as a family or the tangled streets of an old town. For the therapist it is always a matter of what is trying to unfold, and that itself is an organic image. What is blocked? What is starved of nourishment? With always a sense of the essential secrecy of the centre. It is no different in the therapist and the gardener; and when Jung describes the feeling function he means all this. The world of nature, prior to the rise of any super-ego, expressed itself in the folk tale. So let us look at the question of ethic as it appears there, in the depth-psychology of that ancient world, in which nature and the unconscious were to all intents and purposes the same.

It was a pre-political world, therefore no super-ego, no *magisterium* to tell the people as much as was good for them to know about the deity: instead a tradition of empirical investigation, of voyages down towards the centre of the mystery, always to find something that was lost, expressed in images such as water, the water of life; or apples, the golden apples which a tree bore once but now no longer; or a waiting bride. It was always over their boundary, into that great unknown that they went. Sometimes expelled into it by some wicked step-mother or tyrant king, without whose activities there would be no journey and no story. And there, in a trackless forest, they met talking animals, maybe a fox who knows exactly what they should do to get on the quest, and the question arises, do they listen to him? And they meet animals that are in distress, often starved of something, fish without water, small ravens

without flesh. What do they do about it? And the people who grew up with these stories acquired a good sense of what to do on that side of that boundary and indeed on this side too, and that what is needed on both sides is something very simple, a kindness of heart, and that this is the same thing as the golden apple and the lost princess.

There is a line in the I Ching that goes: 'If in truth you have a kind heart, ask not. Supreme good fortune.' The kind heart values what is, for its own sake. It looks at the creation as Elohim looked at it, and sees that it is good.

The story I shall tell you now is both extremely simple and eternal. In English it is called Mother Holle. She is the nature-goddess of the German peoples, as Baba Yaga was of the Russians. She is identical with nature, neither good nor bad but both; and it is those who meet her who constellate one or other. The word Holle comes from the same root as Hell for she inspires fear, and rightly, since the meeting with her is the test, the judgement, the touchstone of our reality. She waits perpetually for an encounter, so that she can show us who we are—so she can make us conscious. She is the inner side of nature, its dimension as *meaning*. She is that forest that awaits us in the folk-tale. We have now a scientific word for it, so much less than the images of nature, it is the unconscious.

### The Story

There was a woman who had two daughters, one of whom was beautiful and hard-working, the other lazy and ugly; but she much preferred the lazy one since she was her own daughter. The other girl had to do all the work. Each day she had to sit by the well on the highway and spin till her fingers bled. One day the spindle got blood on it and she dipped it in the water to wash it away but the spindle leapt out of her hand and dropped down to the bottom. In great distress she went to her mother and the mother said simply: 'Since you have lost your spindle you had better go down and fetch it!'

(Like all evil figures in fairy tales, the mother is an absolutely necessary to the story. She makes the girl where she already has to go.)

So she went back to the well and in the despair of her heart jumped in.

(This was a common form of suicide in the country, especially among young women; and you can see why. It is a return straight to the mother, not this earthly one but the mother behind all mothers. In modern terms it is less likely to be a well than a syringe of heroin; but both are main-line back to the mother.)

She comes to the bottom and finds herself in a flowery meadow (as we may well think that going back to the Mother is). She walks through it. Then two things happen. We come to the nugget of wisdom that the story has to give. She comes to a bread-oven and the loaves inside call out to her: 'Take us out, take us out! We are quite cooked!' And she takes the bread-shovel from where it leans up against the oven, pulls out the loaves, builds them into a nice, tidy pile beside the oven and goes on.

Then she comes to an apple tree covered with apples and they call out, 'Shake us down, shake us down, we are quite ripe'. And she gives the tree a good shaking until the last apple is down. Then she puts them in a nice tidy pile beside the tree, and goes on.

Ripeness, cooked-ness, time, the unfolding process which is the nature of time, when if we are conscious we feel the right moment when we must take action, because the apples cannot pick themselves, or loaves cannot get themselves out of the oven; but if we do nothing the apples spoil, the bread burns. It is a metaphor for the place of consciousness in nature

And when the girl goes on she comes to a small house, with an old, old lady peering out of the window, who has such long teeth that the girl wants to run away but she speaks kindly. She is, of course, the very ethos of nature herself. 'Would you like to enter my service?' she asks, 'and clean he house and shake out my mattress so that the feathers fly, for then the snow falls upon earth. For I am Mother Holle.'

They recognise each other and they both know that they are kin. The great principle they share is ripeness. And the making of ripeness is the only point there is in this great world of time and space: it gives time an essential part in the revelation of the godhead.

So the girl cleans the house and shakes the mattress so that the feathers fly; and every day she has boiled or roast meat to eat—which is, I think, instinctual feeding, building up, preparation for whatever takes in life await her.

(What does this correspond to in our own experience?)

At last she feels sad and she knows that she has to go home. No matter how much better off she is down here, she must go back again. And this is the instinct too, and Mother Holle is pleased and takes her by the hand to a door in a wall; and as they stand there waiting a shower of gold descends upon her so that she is covered with it from head to toe. Then Mother Holle opens the door and when she goes through it, she finds that she is not far from home; and when she goes in through the yard the cockerel calls out ‘kikeriki, kikeriki, our golden girl is home again.’ She will, we feel, be a wholesome influence in the world.

Now, her mother would like to have that gold for her own daughter. Wanting to get that gold for her own child, so she sends her out to sit by the well and tells her to get spinning; but of course no blood comes, so she tells her to prick her finger with a needle and make sure that it goes onto the spindle; but the spindle doesn’t leap out of her hand move: it will not do the jump out of her hand and down the well. So she throws it down and leaps down after it.

You can do this with the unconscious and you can even get results of a sort. But it is manipulating it for your own benefit—that is ego-benefit—It is like witchcraft, the black sort, and its reward is given at the end of the story.

(What might it correspond to in our own world?)

She does indeed come to the meadow with all the flowers but what is lacking is the resonance in herself. Without that they will mean nothing. She does come to the bread-oven and the loaves do cry out to her, she doesn’t feel that either, so answers ‘Way is that to me? Why should I dirty my hands with it?’

And when the apples cry out to be shaken down so that people will eat them, she answers ‘And what is that to me? You might all fall on my head!’

And when she comes to Mother Holle there is no instant kinship between them and neither doesn’t even feel fear, for she wants the gold. her whole instinctual system is un-nourished and dormant. She does the work, but it is very difficult to keep it up., for it has in itself no meaning.

On the first day she cleans the house well and shakes the mattress, but she is very unpracticed since her sister had done it all, so soon gets lazy. Eventually she goes to Mother Holle and asks if she can go home now, to which Mother Holle agrees, and takes her to the same door in the wall. But as they stand there it is not gold that descends upon her but black, pungent, smelly pitch; and as she walks back through to the yard the cockerel calls, ‘Kikeriki, kikeriki, our dirty girl is back again.’

Now we must look at the words ‘beautiful’ and ‘ugly’, ‘lazy’ and ‘energetic’, because in the German they are closer to nature words than in the English. It is always good to check up on such things, and you don’t need much German to be able to do that.

When the cockerel cries out in the original, he says ‘unsere schmutzige jungfrau ist wieder hie’; but *schmutzige* mean more than dirty. It has smutty in there too, overtones of pornography, nature unvalued, insulted; therefore gone putrescent. And when the lazy girl is described as *hässlig und faul* there is the same overtone of rotting *because* lazy. If one is lazy the right moment to act passes, and we rot. What Jung means by the ethical would include a consciousness of that time.

The principle of *ripeness* has in it all the mystery of time, its role in consciousness by which the apples become, perhaps for only a moment, golden, and the princess with them.

In real life the apples themselves would not call out to her, but the situation does. Jesus makes the same point in one of the parables. It is of course the Good Samaritan. A man has been robbed and wounded and lies by the roadside while good citizens pass by and on. Mustn’t get involved, they say. It would always be troublesome and sometimes dangerous. Then a man comes along who is not a citizen but a human

being. He is not a citizen because he is a heretic Samaritan, a non-person who doesn't worship at Jerusalem but on a mountain. The Samaritans were descended from a people who had migrated there from Mesopotamia, Sumeria in fact: bringing, we must think, some of that goddess culture into the hard-line patriarchy of the Jews. Jesus has more than a soft spot for the Samaritans. The woman he speaks to by the well is both one of them and immoral as well. She has had many husbands, as Jesus tells her, and the man she's with now is not her husband. The disciples are amazed that he should speak to her. But he does. Some of the most important things in the Gospels are said to her, including that the time is coming when people will not worship in the Temple at Jerusalem or in Samaria (or Canterbury or Rome, or Mecca we might add) but in their hearts.

The morality-ethic distinction was very prominently that of Jesus too, and Jung was fully in the Christian tradition—though not the ecclesiastical. The ecclesiastical comes from the second myth.

In the two creation myths of Genesis which I discussed with you last year, you may remember that the value judgement, when God looked at what he had made and saw it was good, is a repeated refrain throughout the first myth and does not appear at all in the second. The God of the first myth was called Elohim, if you remember, and was far closer to Frau Holle, the nature goddess of the German forests, than to the Lord Yahwe of the second myth. Elohim was male and female together, which could never be said of Lord Yahwe; destructive and creative together, which could never be said of Lord Yahwe; one and many together, which was among the last things that could be said of Lord Yahwe who is transcendent of his creation. In Elohim, the One becomes articulated in the many as the creation proceeds. It is as if he/she/they comes (comes) progressively into sight in this majestic procession of what is made. And maybe this is the deepest meaning of that repeated refrain, 'He looked at what he had made and saw that it was good'; for that looking would be the deity itself arriving at consciousness of itself, for which it would be necessary to be reflected in matter. We can't say this because the grammar of the language won't stretch to it. We may know the identity of male and female which are still male and still female, but we can't say it. We may know the identity of the One and the many—which are still one and still many—but we can't say it. We may know the identity of

life and death which are still life and still death; but we can't say it. The world says all these things only by its being.

Elohim comes from the oral tradition, as does much in the first five books of the bible called the Pentateuch. It is the same world as the folk-tale, prior to the emergence of political lordship into any sort of lordship of the ego. In that world creation and creator have not separated out. That is why the plants and animals, by reason of their sexuality, share at once in the creation. They are not just the created: they become at once the creators.

In the second myth everything becomes much simpler and this identity vanishes. Man is man and woman is woman; and man is made first. The nature of their relationship is vertical, from higher to lower. Their equality, in which resides their creativity, vanishes too. The garden is planted up around Adam and there is no Eve with him. Obedience is now the highest value and all relations have moved into the vertical mode. And this makes things much, much easier. What is there easier than to obey?

One is tempted, in fact, to understand the extreme importance of logic of our culture (it was even assumed to be the nature of God) as a massive avoidance of the problem of consciousness, which is that the world we live in is composed of paradox at every point and that and small family of fox-cubs playing outside their earth are more conscious than the thinker lost in the unrealities of logic. It is perhaps only when we say to a stranger met in the street 'What a beautiful morning!' that we start on the long journey to consciousness..

And would not that consciousness be the same thing as love—including the wonder at what is for ever unfolding around us and an instinct to help it unfold, certainly to marvel at it, certainly to let it be?

How is it that the fullness of a person's own being grows in the precise degree that they marvel at what is around them?

When we say that God is Love we can only mean Elohim. We could mean Old Mother Holle too, but never the Lord Yahwe, whose love requires our obedience first. The controversy between faith and atheism

is rendered meaningless by the unanswered question, which God do we mean when we say that we don't believe or that we do?

The consensus that love is what matters includes the so-called atheists, but love is a mystery as deep as the world itself. It is the creative *phenomenon* itself, something which is just there, an instinct within us and in the world itself, to create for its own sake which runs throughout nature like the presence of the first God, Elohim, who made it, looked at and saw that it was good.

In the conscious care for the apple-tree and the bread-oven (something of which only the human is capable) unconscious love moves over a threshold and becomes deliberate, intended, conscious.

The dilemma is central to all patriarchal religion, not just the so-called Christian one but to all the Religions of the Book with the monotheistic father-god and always a monolithic political structure. That is why their inner conflicts are so terrible. The dilemma is that if God is a God who gives out a Law, the very concept of the law of a person's being is out. This is met by the dogma of original sin, that we are in sin from the beginning, *in iniquitatem conceptus sum*, I was conceived in iniquity: I am in need of rescuing out of it, in need of re-education and a good, strong super-ego.

But with Elohim the dilemma disappears.

c