



A Jungian conscience: Self-awareness for public relations practice



Johanna Fawkes*

Charles Sturt University, Panorama Avenue, Bathurst 2795, NSW, Australia

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ABSTRACT

This article relates Carl Jung's theories of consciousness and conscience to contemporary public relations practice, applying Jungian methods of self-awareness to public relations as a field. The chapter concludes with challenges for practitioners, individually and as a profession, to increase self-awareness, an essential prerequisite for ethical practice. It takes an interpretive approach, drawing on literature from Jungian scholarship, organisational psychology and moral philosophy. These explorations are developed at book-length in Fawkes (2014. *Public relations ethics and professionalism: The shadow of excellence*. London and New York, NY: Routledge), but here the focus is on practice and practitioners' access to conscience through consciousness. After a brief summary of the Jungian psyche and the role of consciousness in activating conscience, this paper suggests questions and reflections for the profession and its constituent practitioners. This discussion is strongly linked to developing an ethical attitude (Solomon (2001). *Journal of Analytic Psychology*, 46(3)), one based not on rules or codes but on individual and collective self-awareness.

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1. Introduction: Approaches to conscience and consciousness

Consciousness and conscience are complex concepts explored from philosophers such as Descartes to the creation of modern artificial intelligence, often centrally concerned with the “problem of self-knowledge” (MacIntyre, 2004, p.2). During this long discussion, interpretations have merged and sub-divided. As Zeman puts it (2002), “Consciousness, self-consciousness and conscience bear close family resemblances. Over the centuries their shifting meanings have mingled and worked upon one another” (Zeman, 2002, p. 14). For example, the British philosopher, Julian Baggini (2011) explores multiple avenues to the inner self, concluding we can only be understood as material physical beings; US novelist Marilyn Robinson (2010) pursues similar territory, coming to the opposite conclusion and calling for greater engagement with the “inner” self in modern culture. This article will not arbitrate on these debates but does offer a Jungian approach for taking up Robinson's challenge, as is discussed below. While the notion of corporate conscience is proposed by some business ethicists (Goodpaster, 2007) and opposed by others (Singer, 2007) Singer and Kimbles (2004), and outlined below, illustrates how depth psychology can have meaning for the inner life of groups, organisations and professions, as well as individuals. Self-knowledge is essential for institutions too.

The urgency of this debate is heightened by scandals throughout professions, which have led to an increased interest in ethical approaches as a counter-balance to abuses of power (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007, 2009; Sama & Shoaf, 2008),

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: jfawkes@csu.edu.au

including a recent call to ethics in the financial sector from the Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney (Monaghan, 2014a). The choice of this theme for the 2014 World Public Relations Forum is itself evidence of a desire to engage with a deeper ethical approach than that commonly offered by codes and idealised statements.

2. Public relations and the ground for ethics

Most public relations textbooks (e.g. Chia & Synnott, 2009; Johnston & Zawawi, 2009; Theaker, 2012) offer readers a choice between ethics based either on the consequences of actions as the ground for ethics (Bentham/Mills' utilitarianism) or the duty of professionals to groups such as clients, patients or society generally (Kantian), or even more often, an ad-hoc combination of both. There are problems with both, too complex to explore here, such as the appearance of impartiality in calculating relative harms and goods issuing from actions (Lucas, 2005) and the inflexibility of Kantian ethics in managing conflicts of ethical duty. Dominant approaches have their origins in western philosophy and treat ethics as normative and positivist, often with an emphasis on rationality, rules and procedures, especially in their application to professional ethics. In recent decades this position has been challenged by feminist (Benhabib, 1992; Gilligan, 1982), postcolonial (Appiah, 2005) and postmodern ethics (Bauman, 1993), among others. Moreover, the western domination of ethical thought has been expanded by the introduction of Asian ethical approaches to professional ethics (Koehn, 2001). While some of these ideas have recently made an impact on public relations ethics (Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Holtzhausen, 2012), generally these new (er) directions are not present in PR text books or chapters on ethics. The main ground of public relations ethics derives from the Excellence school's use of systems theory, which Bowen (2007) claims has a Kantian validity, a claim disputed by L'Etang (1992). Additionally, rhetorical scholars (mainly based in the USA) embrace virtue ethics (Baker & Martinson, 2002; Edgett, 2002; Harrison & Galloway, 2005; Pater & van Gils, 2003), which highlights character and reflection rather than regulation, suggesting a negotiation between competing virtues as an ethical *process* not outcome, and locating ethics in the agent not the act. However their application to practice has led to some glib assertions where virtues are presented as unproblematic in phrases like the Arthur Page Society's "Tell the Truth" or the Global Alliance's "Adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth in advancing the interests of clients and employers" (GlobalAlliance, 2009). The only one which hints that these might be conflicted issues and turns inward comes from the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) which suggests "Be honest not only with others but also and most importantly with yourselves as individuals" (IABC, n.d). This echoes the central theme of conscience as an aspect of consciousness, ethics as the product of self-knowledge.

My argument, as expounded at length in Fawkes (2014), is that public relations ethics has, like most professional ethics, tended to elevate externalised rationality above internalised guidance, relying on codes not conscience. A Jungian approach can assist those groups and individuals who wish to be honest with themselves.

3. Jung's notion of psyche, consciousness and conscience

Jung's work forms the basis of analytical psychology, also called depth psychology, as practised throughout the world (Samuels, 1985) and has deeply influenced cultural studies, especially literature and film and the study of genre. Yet many consider his contribution to thought was undervalued by academics in the twentieth century (Proulx, 1994) and suggest his ideas are better suited to this fractured time (Hauke, 2000; Rowland, 2010).

Adler outlines four types of analysis and their relation to Jungian analytic psychology as:

- (1) confession or *catharsis*, a process that occurs in all psychotherapy;
- (2) elucidation or *interpretation*, the major stage in Freudian analysis;
- (3) *education*, adaptation to social demands and needs [Adlerian]. . . ; and
- (4) transformation or *individuation*, in which the client discovers and develops an individual pattern of life. . . the most specifically Jungian (Adler, 1967, cited in Mattoon, 2005:107, emphasis in original).

These methods are not solely confined to clinical practice: they are relevant to Jung's broader ideas, grounded in his own and patients' experiences and moving to more general theories. There are contradictions between different parts of Jung's voluminous writing over a very long life and he never wrote a definitive summary of his thoughts. Moreover, the different schools of Jungian thinkers and therapists also emphasise different aspects of his writing. These caveats aside, he can be said to perceive the psyche as consisting of (a) personal consciousness—everything of which the individual is aware, with the ego acting as the main organiser; (b) personal unconscious—forgotten and repressed material; and (c) the collective unconscious—all the possibilities of human culture. The psyche is envisaged as a self-regulatory (homeostatic) system, comprising entities known as archetypes, pairs of opposing qualities within the conscious and unconscious, which continually negotiate to generate a fluid meaning, or personal mythology, in the individual or group. The unconscious is perceived as potentially beneficial, a source of insight and healing.

The opposing pair of relevance to this study is that of Persona/Shadow.

Persona is a kind of mask designed to "impress and conceal", and to meet societal demands (Jung, 1953, CW7/305-9)¹. Jung describes the two sources of the persona as 'on the one hand the expectations and demands of society and on the

¹ Note: Unless otherwise stated, all Jung citations refer to the *Collected Works*, edited by H. Read, M. Fordham and G. Adler and published in London by Routledge, Kogan Page. Citations are to paragraphs not page numbers.

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