Review Essay

A JUNGIAN VIEW OF EVIL

by Robert A. Segal

Abstract. On the one hand Jungian John Sanford criticizes Carl Jung for underestimating the importance granted evil by at least some strains of Christianity. On the other hand Sanford follows Jung in assuming that psychology is entitled to criticize Christianity whenever it fails to grant evil its due. Like Jung, Sanford contends that he is faulting Christianity on only psychological grounds: for failing to cope with evil in man—the shadow archetype. In fact, Sanford, like perhaps Jung as well, is also criticizing Christianity on metaphysical grounds: for failing to acknowledge not just psychological but also ontological evil. Whether Sanford is thereby using psychology to assess Christian metaphysics is the issue.

The social sciences, it is commonly said, deal with only the origin and function, not the truth, of religion. They determine why believers believe, not whether what believers believe is true. The social sciences, it is granted, can assess the truth of believers' explanations of their beliefs but not the truth of their beliefs themselves. The truth of a belief is independent of the reason for holding it. A believer's belief can thus still be true even if his reason for holding it is false. To say otherwise would be to commit the genetic fallacy or its functionalist counterpart.[1]

On the one hand Carl Jung maintains relentlessly that he is only a social scientist and is therefore concerned with only the psychological, not the metaphysical, significance of religion: "I approach psychological matters from a scientific and not from a philosophical standpoint. Inasmuch as religion has a very important psychological aspect, I deal with it from a purely empirical point of view, that is, I restrict myself to the observation of phenomena and eschew any metaphysical or philosophical considerations. I do not deny the validity of these other considerations, but I cannot claim to be competent to apply them

Robert A. Segal is assistant professor of religious studies, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803.

[*Zygon*, vol. 20, no. 1 (March 1985).]
 ISSN 0044-5614

correctly" (Jung [1958] 1969a, 6. See also [1956] 1967, 231; [1961] 1962, 349-50; 1976, 663-70).

On the other hand Jung at times does venture beyond psychology to metaphysics. The question invariably asked is whether he uses psychology to settle metaphysical issues. In, notably, the case of synchronicity, or the coincidence of a psychological state with an external event, he does not: he argues for the principle on more than psychological grounds (see Jung [1960] 1969b, 417-519, 520-31). Whether he does so in other cases—above all that of evil—is the question.

Evil, by Jungian John Sanford, prompts this question anew. On the one hand Sanford criticizes Jung's understanding of the Christian view of evil. On the other hand he follows Jung in using psychology to evaluate that view. Whether he, or Jung, is using psychology to evaluate the view merely psychologically or outright metaphysically is the issue.

The Social Scientific Evaluation of Religion

As a social scientist, Sanford can legitimately evaluate, not just explain, religion. He can legitimately evaluate not only believers' explanations of religion but also the utility of religion itself. He can determine whether religion is functional: how well it accomplishes its function and how important the accomplishment of that function is.

As a social scientist, Sanford cannot, however, evaluate the truth of religion. Utility and truth are distinct. One has no necessary bearing on the other. Religion can be true yet dysfunctional or functional yet false. To be functional religion must be *believed* true by believers, through whom it must operate, but it need not be true in fact. Its efficacy depends on only the *belief* that it is true, not on its actual truth. A belief believed true is no less efficacious when really false than when true.

Many classical social scientists do assess the truth as well as the function of religion, but usually they do so on other than social scientific grounds. Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, for example, deem religion false as well as dysfunctional but ordinarily not false *because* dysfunctional. Usually, they deem religion false on metaphysical or scientific grounds and dysfunctional on social scientific ones. By contrast, Max Weber and contemporary social scientists like Peter Berger, Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, and Mary Douglas shun the issue of truth altogether—on exactly the same grounds as Jung: that it is beyond their social scientific ken.

Religion, for Jung, is doubly functional. It both does and should serve its function. It provides a most effective, if still unconscious, release of archetypal energy, and the release of that energy makes humans psychologically fit. Ordinarily, Jung favors religion not be-

cause it is true but because, true or not, it is most helpful. Jung even skirts the issue of the truth of any religion which is effective psychologically:

> If, therefore, a patient is convinced of the exclusively sexual origin of his neurosis, I would not disturb him in his opinion because I know that such a conviction . . . is an excellent defence against an onslaught of immediate experience with its terrible ambiguity. So long as such a defence works I shall not break it down, since I know that there must be cogent reasons why the patient has to think in such a narrow circle. . . . In the same way and for the same reason I support the hypothesis of the practising Catholic while it works for him. In either case, I reinforce a means of defence against a grave risk, without asking the academic question whether the defence is an ultimate truth. I am glad when it works and so long as it works (Jung [1958] 1969a, 44-45).

Jung's Criticism of Christianity

Jung faults Christianity on two counts. He argues, first, that Protestantism in particular, by eliminating most sacraments and other rituals, has eliminated outlets for the release of archetypal energy:

> Protestantism, having pulled down so many walls carefully erected by the Church, immediately began to experience the disintegrating and schismatic effect of individual revelation. As soon as the dogmatic fence was broken down and the ritual lost its authority, man had to face his inner experience without the protection and guidance of dogma and ritual, which are the very quintessence of Christian as well as of pagan religious experience. Protestantism has, in the main, lost all the finer shades of traditional Christianity: the mass, confession, the greater part of the liturgy, and the vicarious function of priesthood (Jung [1958] 1969a, 21).

Jung argues, second, that Christianity in general, by excluding from the Trinity both Mary and Satan, has denied outlets to what he calls the anima archetype in males and the shadow archetype in all:

> Medieval iconology . . . evolved a quaternity symbol in its representations of the coronation of the Virgin and surreptitiously put it in place of the Trinity. The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary . . . is admitted as ecclesiastical doctrine but has not yet become dogma. . . . But the Christian definition of God as the *summum bonum* excludes the Evil One right from the start, despite the fact that in the Old Testament he was still one of the "sons of God." Hence the devil remained outside the Trinity as the "ape of God" and in opposition to it. . . . The devil is, undoubtedly, an awkward figure: he is the "odd man out" in the Christian cosmos. That is why people would like to minimize his importance by euphemistic ridicule or by ignoring his existence altogether; or, better still, to lay the blame for him at man's door (Jung [1958] 1969a, 170-72).[2]

Because the shadow is composed of antisocial, Freudian-like drives which oppose the persona archetype, or public image, it corresponds to what Jung and Sanford call humans' evil side.[3]

Sanford's Assessment of Jung's Criticism

Sanford considers neither Jung's criticism of Christianity in general for ignoring the anima nor his criticism of Protestantism in particular for ignoring the unconscious as a whole. Jung's criticism of Christianity for ignoring the shadow he deems one-sided. Christianity, he argues, has various, disparate views of evil rather than a single, doctrinal one.

Sanford distinguishes, first, between the view of the Synoptic Gospels and that of both Paul and Revelation (Sanford 1982, 35-48, 67-84). The Synoptic Jesus' acceptance of sinners, acceptance of the body, and refusal to blame sin on a Satan distinct from God all symbolize, for Sanford, the Synoptics' acceptance of evil within good and thereby the acceptance of the shadow. By contrast, Paul's intolerance of sin in himself and others, his Gnostic-like rejection of the body, and his ascription of evil to Satan rather than to God all constitute, for Sanford, a denial of evil within good and so a denial of the shadow. The same, for Sanford, is true of Revelation.

On the one hand Sanford criticizes Jung for overlooking the Synoptic view, which acknowledges evil. On the other hand he grants that Paul and Revelation deny it and that, moreover, their view has become the dominant one in Christianity.

Sanford distinguishes, second, among three distinct Patristic views of evil (Sanford 1982, 129-55). The first blames evil wholly on humans and thereby preserves God's sheer goodness. The second, that of both Irenaeus and Origen, ascribes evil to God but considers it a necessary means to a good end. The third, that of Origen as well and above all of Augustine, relegates evil to *privatio boni*, or the denial of good.

On the one hand Sanford criticizes Jung for taking the Augustinian view of evil as the sole Patristic one. On the other hand he criticizes Jung for taking even the Augustinian view as a dismissal of evil. On the contrary, he argues, Augustine presupposes the reality of evil and uses the denial of good to explain it. Evil vis-à-vis good is like illness vis-à-vis health: real, just parasitical on its opposite.[4] Consistently or not, Sanford argues that all three Patristic views acknowledge evil yet that the view of Paul and Revelation has become the main Christian one.

Sanford: Social Scientist or Metaphysician?

The issue at hand is not whether Sanford correctly characterizes the Christian view of evil—to cite a single instance, Paul does not, like the Gnostics, reject the body as evil—but whether he, like Jung, is entitled to criticize Christianity for failing to accord evil its due. "Jung," he says, "justly criticizes the Church for neglecting the task of dealing with evil" (Sanford 1982, 145). Is Sanford thereby criticizing Christianity on only

psychological or outright metaphysical grounds? Does he consider the denial of evil merely dysfunctional or outright false? Does he want evil acknowledged in order to serve only human needs or also cosmic truth?

On the one hand Sanford, like Jung, says repeatedly that he is restricting himself to the psychology of religion: "the theme that runs throughout the book is the nature of evil as seen from the vantage point of religion and psychology . . ." (Sanford 1982, 2). Thus he distinguishes between the metaphysical issue of the ultimate nature of evil and the psychological one of its place in humans: "Again, we are talking the language of metaphysics. We cannot know scientifically what the Ultimate Plan of life is, or even if there is such an Ultimate Plan. . . . The only empirical knowledge of these things we have is the psychological fact that *if* a person's life is grounded in the wholeness of the Self, then there does seem to be a certain permanence and indestructibility about it, and a protection that keeps that person's soul from succumbing to evil" (Sanford 1982, 152).

On the other hand Sanford, whether or not Jung as well, in fact discusses metaphysics as if psychology bore on it. For example, he says that his book may help elucidate the nature of God: "if we can gain a deeper insight into the nature of and reasons for evil, we may also learn more about the nature of God. It is with this hope that this book has been written" (Sanford 1982, 3). How psychology can reveal anything about God it is hard to see—unless psychology is more than psychology.

Evil in humans, asserts Sanford, reveals evil in God:

> When we first encounter the dark side of the Self we may feel that we are confronting evil. Certainly the problem that is tormenting us—our illness, anxiety, depression, or phobia—is experienced as an evil condition. . . . Most conventional Christian training today encourages us to dissociate this evil state of affairs with [*sic*] God. God's intentions, we are assured, are too benign to send such darkness upon us. . . . The biblical story of Balaam, though, is only one of many parts of the Bible which tells us that God has this dark side too, and that if we persevere in the wrong course in life we can run into the Wrath of God which will destroy us (Sanford 1982, 32).

In the fashion of Ludwig Feuerbach, Sanford argues that the evil ascribed to God matches too closely that in humans to be merely coincidental: "Yahweh has His dark side. . . . This image of God as light and dark corresponds so closely to the archetype of the Self . . . that we cannot simply dismiss it as primitive. Rather, we must look to the ancient Hebrew image of God as a totality of light and dark, as an [projected] expression of one aspect of the truth about the relationship between [human] good and [human] evil" (Sanford 1982, 32-33).

God may in fact be evil, but evil in humans does not automatically prove it—unless God is only a projection of their shadow. But psychology can scarcely settle that metaphysical question.

Elsewhere Sanford waxes undeniably metaphysical. "In Revelation," he says, "we see revealed not God's ultimate nature, but man's unresolved problem projected into the metaphysical realm" (Sanford 1982, 81). Dualism in the cosmos is, for him, a projection of the dualism of good and evil in humans: "The extreme Dualism of the Book of Revelation suggests a violent and unsolved split in the psychological attitude of the early Church. It is as though the psyche of the early Church was split, and this split projected itself into the metaphysical apocalyptic imagery of the teaching of the Antichrist" (Sanford 1982, 43-44). Satan is a projection of the human drive for power: "the devil is a personification of the power drive of the ego. There is within us something that wants to set the ego against the Self, the human against the Divine Will. Legend personified this as Lucifer, whose power drive led to his expulsion from heaven" (Sanford 1982, 127).

At most, psychology can explain evil in humans, not the world. Not coincidentally, then, Sanford, like Jung, concentrates on evil done *by* humans. Evil done *to* them—for example, diseases and natural catastrophes—he notes (Sanford 1982, 133) but ignores, for it is obviously less easily reducible to human evil.

Yet even human evil may exceed the bounds of psychology. As a social scientist, Sanford, or Jung, can evaluate humans only functionally, not morally. He can determine whether something in humans is dysfunctional but not immoral: he cannot make "value judgments." Sanford does distinguish between "relative" and "absolute" evil: relative evil serves a good end; absolute does not (Sanford 1982, 126-28, 143-46). Both, however, are moral, not merely functional, assessments.

NOTES

1. For a contrary view see Segal (1980, 403-13).

2. On the exclusion of evil in Christianity see Jung ([1958] 1969a, 107-200, 355-474; [1959] 1968b, 36-71). See also Philp (1958, passim), White (1960, 95-114, 141-65), Bertine (1967, 54-67, 243-63), Jaffé (1975, 95-127), Moreno (1970, 85-101, 145-60), Hostie (1957, 188-209), Dry (1961, 203-6), Heisig (1979, 54-59, 76-78), Cox (1959, 271-84).

3. On the shadow see Jung ([1959] 1968b, 8-10; [1959] 1968a, 255-72).

4. On the view of evil as *privatio boni* see Jung ([1958] 1969a, 168-80, 304-5; [1959] 1968b, 41-71). For a similar criticism of Jung's interpretation of *privatio boni* see many of the references in note 2. For a defense of Jung see Lambert (1960, 170-76).

REFERENCES

Bertine, Eleanor. 1967. *Jung's Contribution to Our Time*. Ed. Elizabeth C. Rohrbach. New York: Putnam.

Cox, David. 1959. *Jung and St. Paul*. London: Longmans, Green.

Dry, Avis M. 1961. *The Psychology of Jung*. New York: Wiley.

Heisig, James W. 1979. *Imago Dei*. Cranbury, N.J.: Bucknell Univ. Press.

Hostie, Raymond. 1957. *Religion and the Psychology of Jung*. Trans. G. R. Lamb. New York: Sheed & Ward.

Jaffé, Aniela. 1975. *The Myth of Meaning*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. Baltimore: Penguin Books.

Jung, Carl G. [1956] 1967. *The Collected Works*. Ed. Sir Herbert Read and others. Trans. R. F. C. Hull and others. Bollingen Series XX. Vol. V, *Symbols of Transformation*. 2d ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.

_____. [1958] 1969a. *The Collected Works*. Vol. XI, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*. 2d ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.

_____. [1959] 1968a. *The Collected Works*. Vol. IX, part 1, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 2d ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.

_____. [1959] 1968b. *The Collected Works*. Vol. IX, part 2, *Aion*. 2d ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.

_____. [1960] 1969b. *The Collected Works*. Vol. VIII, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*. 2d ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.

_____. [1961] 1962. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Ed. Aniela Jaffé. Trans. Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Vintage Books.

_____. 1976. *The Collected Works*. Vol. XVIII, *The Symbolic Life*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.

Lambert, Kenneth. 1960. Review of Philp, *Jung and the Problem of Evil*. *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 5 (July): 170-76.

Moreno, Antonio. 1970. *Jung, Gods, and Modern Man*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press.

Philp, H. L. 1958. *Jung and the Problem of Evil*. London: Rockliff.

Sanford, John A. 1982. *Evil: The Shadow Side of Reality*. New York: Crossroad.

Segal, Robert A. 1980. "The Social Sciences and the Truth of Religious Belief." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48 (September): 403-13.

White, Victor. 1960. *Soul and Psyche*. New York: Harper.