

Appraising the Role of the Individual in Political and Social Change Processes: Jung, Camus, and the Question of Personal Responsibility—Possibilities and Impossibilities of “Making a Difference”

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ABSTRACT *The paper is an attempt to open discussion on the role of “the individual” in contemporary progressive and radical political discourse and criticism. Academic stress on the contexts in which individuals operate, while necessary and useful, cuts us off from sources for thinking about such a role. Jung’s ideas about the relations of individual and social/collective are important and suggestive yet require extensive revision. Camus’s book *The Rebel* is useful in making such revisions. Centrally, the paper proposes new thinking about “broken” and “fractured” individuals as it probes the limits of personal responsibility. Questions of individual political “type” or “style” are posed, intended to provide a novel account of how political attitudes, engagements and behaviours may be conceptualised. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

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When presenting this material in lecture or workshop format, I begin by playing Ennio Morricone’s theme music from the 1966 spaghetti western *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (Leone, 1966). The Man with No Name, the Clint Eastwood character, is the consummate individual: he needs no name. Readers with access to the internet could perhaps go now to YouTube to listen (again?) to the music: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQGGQ-FCe_w

The direct and interactive approach of this article is maintained also by a series of experiential exercises. I am sure that this article could only have been written by a man in his sixties, enabled by time and its ravages to be less cautious and correct. The music is also a bit of self-mockery: ironic and, I hope, suggestive.

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It may seem perverse to call for a return to the notion of the individual in progressive political theorising at a time when so many bemoan the collapse of social and communal ties in Western societies. Families don't go bowling any more – and you (the author) want *more* individualism when everyone is already looking after “Number 1”, in an ethos of *saive qui peut*?

I hope I may appear less weird if I say that, in a nutshell, I am wondering if there is a place still in radical politics for *individualism* and *the idea of the individual*. My enquiry is into whether or not there can be a theoretical back-up to ideas of “making a difference” via individual entry into political activism. This is a rather emotive topic, as I have encountered it in the clinical situation and in workshops under the general rubric of “Political Clinics”. Citizens may want to make a difference, and they know that, in order to do so, they must join with other like-minded citizens. In which case, what will become of their individuality? Even actively engaging in political activism cannot really silence doubts about the limits of personal responsibility. Then there are questions of impact and efficacy. Clients speak about these themes, ruefully and sometimes cynically: everything seems so “massive”, so “wrong”, so “unchanging”. I confess that it was very hard to write this paper. It came from an inner place, and is quite contrary to what I usually think in my roles as political consultant, activist, and academic. In those situations, how many times have I explained that there is no such thing as an individual and that individuals are socially constructed, even when they believe themselves to be autonomous and inner directed entities?

I still think the political world and the social class that an individual inhabits are vitally important. We need also to move beyond the social and the human to consider what is being developed in terms of eco-psychology and eco-criticism (Rust & Totton, 2012) – but it is the *experience* of being an individual that interests me at the moment, no matter how illusory that might be on an intellectual plane. Here, much of the contemporary sociological project on the rise of a self-invented identity, cut off from traditional contexts, strikes me as experience-distant, notwithstanding the many ways in which it is challenging and useful. As Layton (2013) has shown, sociologists today, such as Giddens (1991) or Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), have reached the conclusion that the individual needs to be better theorised, though this is usually in order to make a deeper and more fecund contribution to their own discipline of sociology. Nevertheless, the realisation that subjectivity and the individual need to be understood with reference to the social sciences chimes with my project.

Crucially, Layton (2013) has explained how ideas about individuals, collectives, culture, contexts, and constructions have themselves got a particular history and are themselves subject to the relativising they propose for individuals. Reading some of this literature, it has occurred to me that the “sociological individual” of the past twenty-five years could be summarised as being interested mainly in her or his life and issues, and not in the life of the times and its issues. As Layton put it:

Rose (1989), for example, has critiqued the work of Giddens and Beck, arguing that “individualization” has not just been about the expansion of autonomy to an ever-widening portion of the population, but rather has been about the creation and extension of a certain version of subjectivity and autonomy. (Layton, 2013, p. 139)

The problem I am addressing is that the sociologically perceived narcissism and plasticity of that kind of individual actually depotentiate her or him as far as political activism is concerned. I am sure that this is not deliberate but, rather, inadvertent. Hence, in a fresh effort to bridge the gap between the self-invented individual and his or her entry into political

activism and engagement, I introduce later in the article some material about “political types”, showing how political activity itself may be explored from an individualistic perspective. The hope is that this kind of contribution will lead to a reconfiguration of “individual” and “collective” or “social”. Then we might be in a position to revisit in contemporary terms the notion of “organic” solidarity in a society as opposed to “mechanical” solidarity, to use Durkeim’s (1893/1997) words.

BEYOND CONTEXT

In academic discourse – and also in politics, whether mainstream, progressive or reactionary – the idea of the individual *tout seul* simply does not pass muster these days. Context and construction are all: family, community, society, culture, nation. This contemporary discourse stresses that individuals are embedded and constructed by and in social relationships, communal networks, task-oriented groups, and ecosystems. This isn’t wrong, of course, but has the potential of an individual to contribute actively to what happens in the collective been underestimated by this set of assumptions? Is there an overreaction in which the desire to be intellectually correct has meant that we now refer to contexts within which individuals exist – but not to those individuals themselves?

Amongst the psychoanalytic writers who most vividly foregrounded the question of the relations between the individual and the collective was Carl Jung (1875–1961). His writings are peppered with iterations of this question. My proposal is that, if Jungian psychology could refashion its approach to the individual, then *it could become a source of support and inspiration to embattled citizens whose experience of their battles is often that they are in it on their own*. Jung was one of the first to explain that “there is a human desire to ‘belong’, to conform, to relinquish individual responsibility and find a king, a dictator, a boss who will tell you what to do” (Helena Bassil-Morozow, personal communication, July 2012).

Exercise 1. We can all think of individuals who have “made a difference”. Sometimes, you may feel you have yourself made a difference. Think of times when you personally as an individual have made a difference in some situation or other, whether an important situation or something relatively less important. What happened?

Has the academy gone too far in stressing the contingent and context-bound nature of an individual person? Are the professors saying “There’s no such thing as an individual”? What does it mean that Cushman (1995) titled a book *Constructing the Self, Constructing America*? Is the consensus that the idea of individuals is just another bit of constructivism? Is Levinas right, with his ethical stress on alterity, on the other, on someone other than the individual (Levinas, 1995)?

I think it is important to explore these questions because many of the horrid conformist features of contemporary Western societies rest on the idea that “you belong”. This easily becomes “you *should* belong”, and then slips into some variant of “you belong *to us*”. Society does its bit to get us all to stay in context – even the bankers! Joining the system is more or less compulsory.

The opposites of constructionism and contextualism are essentialism, universality, and eternity. As some Jungian commentators, including myself (Samuels, 1993) have noted, these can lead to a kind of “archetypal determinism” which, in its own way, can be massively damaging to the idea of the individual whom Jung said he valued so much.

Here's a bit of self-criticism. I have written about and conducted a workshop exercise called "Where did you get your politics from?" We look at parents, family, ethnicity, class, nationality, and all imaginable other influences, but what about the accidental, or even the constitutional factor, the *individual* factor: some ineluctable and irreducible piece of chance or fate that enters into the realm of political choices and actions, something that cannot be explained by context?

Just thinking about what we could call "political style" or "political type" enables us to recuperate the idea of the individual with regard to social responsibility. I come back to this question of political type later.

Anyway, the conventional wisdom is that we are always in groups, networks, contexts. By now this may have become banal and, without critique, destructive. Where has the individual gone in progressive discourse? In the spoken version of this article, I sing as follows, to the tune of "Where have all the flowers gone?" (Seeger, 1955):

Where have all the individuals gone, long time passing?
 Where have all the individuals gone, long time ago?
 Where have all the individuals gone?
 Professors have banned them every one.
 Oh, when will they ever learn?
 Oh, when will they ever learn?

Of course, economic and ethnic factors inform "subjectivity". Of course, we are relational beings, and it is important to assert that we are not atomised, split up entities sitting in empty space, but the Shadow aspect of this is that it plays into the ever-increasing centralisation of society. British readers will assuredly not have been fooled by the fantasy of involvement in "the Big Society", the flagship policy of the 2010 UK Conservative Party general election campaign, which then formed part of the legislative programme of the Conservative–Liberal Democrat Coalition Agreement, which aims to create a climate that empowers local people and communities, building a "big society" that takes power away from politicians and give it to the people. Rather, it's all about central control; individuals are coerced into neighbourhood groups and societies: join or die! your society needs you!

All of this adherence to "the context" is the *Zeitgeist* for the industrialisation of psychotherapy that is going on in many countries: they want to legislate, regulate, manualise, and standardise us; they want to get the power to decide which individuals are "fit to practise" and which are not.

Even the clinical encounter itself seems to exclude individuals. Everyone is "relational" nowadays. "It's the relationship, stupid!" was seriously proposed as the banner headline for a campaign in favour of the "Talking Therapies". Again, it's not my experience that the clinical encounter really excludes individuals; it's the discourses on the clinical that sometimes seem to do so.

Relational intersubjectivity may undermine or exclude individual subjectivity. It's "the therapeutic relationship" that is supposed to take the strain, not the sweating individuals who compose it. It's all about dyads, dialogue, communication, attachment, attunement, rupture and repair, transference–countertransference. This refusal of one-person psychology has gone too far. The therapeutic relationship has become an oppressive, conventional, moralistic norm (see Samuels, 2014).

I hope my argument becomes clearer: it is that the Shadow of understanding ourselves as group beings in contexts is that we unwittingly support many of the things we hate. We norm, we conform, but we very rarely storm.

Solidarity becomes a curse as well as a blessing, a *cul-de-sac*, not the way ahead. Although I am a supporter of ecopsychology, I think this Shadow groupishness and enforced belonging stalks many ecosystemic approaches to politics. Where's the individual when the discourse is planetary? Can the Earth really be so hostile to the individual?

Let's explore the old liberal idea of the individual, the individual subject, and root it in a new critical anti-relational discourse. Let's see if we can refresh our idea of political action by engaging with the individual and individualism a bit. Classical individualism stresses the moral worth of the individual who is its focus. The fundamental premise is that the human individual is of primary importance in the struggle for liberation. Individualism is thus also associated with artistic and bohemian interests and lifestyles: self-creation and experimentation as opposed to tradition or mass opinion. This is what analysis and psychotherapy used to be before they got bourgeoisified and subjected to *déformation professionnelle*.

I'd like to suggest that we can revise this monolithic and overly solid approach quite a bit to take in the idea of the individual as fractured. The fact that an individual is fractured is *not* an obstacle to radical politics; rather it is a source of them. The individual is a bridge: between the inner and outer, between the personal and the political, between introverted solitude and being in a network; an individual who is more of an uprooted anti-hero than a hero: a bum, a schlemiel, a nomad. Someone who *feels* "self-begotten", just as Milton's (1667/2003) Satan said he was, *pace* the psychoanalytic strictures against "parthenogenetic delusion", never mind the ablation of God. Why not be inflated? Has there ever been a successful revolutionary who was not necessarily, gloriously and insanely inflated?

Clearly, there is more to psychology than the isolated individual human being and much has been usefully done to get rid of that idea, but academics have set up a false situation here. If we simplistically equate the idea of the individual with the conscious ego, or with sentimental Jungian, romantic ahistorical trumpeting of the supremacy of the individual, then hurrah for the intellectuals who've got rid of a dangerously misleading conception! This unthinking and reactionary version, however, is not the only possible playing out of the individual.

The individual who needs our attention today has never been like that, has never been solely the product of Puritanism, nor snowy-white, nor a romantic cliché, nor the unified being of orthodox psychology, nor Freudian ego, nor Jungian Self, nor a humanistic ideal. Do those pristine creatures, who would certainly deserve critique, really exist? No. I suggest that the individual who stalks contemporary culture, and who is trying to return to its politics, has *always been* a decentred subject, an actor performing many roles in many scripts, characterised by lack, somewhat faded as well as jaded: jerky, marginalised, alienated, split, guilty, empty, Imaginary. The individual has *always been* a Trickster in his or her practice of politics.

I think there is something we can do with this de-idealised, putrefied, violent and marvellously rebellious individual. The internally pluralistic individual is the *means* to an engagement with politics and culture, not an *obstacle* to it.

Make no mistake, individuals in the West are today in agony. It is an agony that politics is so broken. It is also an agony how political language has collapsed. George Orwell was prescient in his novel *1984* (Orwell, 1949) when he tells us that Ingsoc and the Thought Police had a project to *reduce* the size of the dictionary, hence banishing the nuanced conversation needed for intimate and political life alike.

In both clinical work with clients and in political clinics (workshops open to the public), I've found that individual bodies bear this agony just as much as individual minds and psyche – *agon* means to writhe. In a sense, today's body is more than ever a writhing body politic, and is always armoured against attack or loss; people cannot breathe because of pollution, there's a constant state of adrenalisation; consumerist pressures tyrannise us into thinking we are either too fat or too thin, and we are obsessed with medications that we know will fail us.

RECUPERATING THE JUNGIAN INDIVIDUAL

Those of a Jungian persuasion may be smugly thinking that this argument is preaching to the choir. Such critics would be thinking that they already have a coherent theory of the individual firmly in place, for Jung is well known for having linked the idea of personal individuation and collective phenomena (Jung, 1935/1953, para. 267). I have to say that I am not convinced.

Be that as it may, when Jung wrote about “the individual”, academics turn away and snigger. The Jungian individual doesn't cut the intellectual – or political – mustard. The way in which Jung positioned the individual in relation to society, and the way in which society is reduced to “the mass” or “the masses”, simply assumes that societies and individuals are inevitably antipathetic. Never mind that, at times, Jung seemed to suggest that a society or a nation is simply made up of the individuals in it, and there is nothing more to be said. In 1956, Jung wrote of:

the agglomeration of huge masses in which the individual disappears anyway ... the individual [is robbed] of his [sic] foundations and his dignity. As a social unit he has lost his individuality and becomes a mere abstract number in the bureau of statistics, He can only play the role of an interchangeable unit of infinitesimal importance. (Jung, 1956, para 301)

It's hardly surprising then, that he continues in sardonic, sceptical and depressive vein:

Looked at rationally and from outside, that is exactly what he is, and from this point of view it seems positively absurd to go on talking about the value or meaning of the individual. Indeed, one can hardly imagine how one ever came to endow human life with so much dignity when the truth to the contrary is as plain as the palm of your hand. (Jung, 1956, paras 301–302)

I think that this sense of the impossibility of the individual in relation to society represents a premature concession by Jung; it is just too pessimistic and melancholic, though the rhetoric is splendid: “an interchangeable unit of infinitesimal importance”.

Can we recuperate the Jungian idea of the individual? To do so would involve critiquing the relationship between individual and society as Jung set it out. In a recent discussion, David Tacey (2012) succinctly summarised Jung from his book *The Undiscovered Self* (Jung, 1957/1956)) as making “a romantic defence of individuality and a warning against collectivism – [but] it makes for an odd kind of sociology if Jung sees the social mass only as something that wants to swallow the individual”.

Commenting on the draft doctoral manuscript that eventually became Ira Progoff's (1952) *Jung's Psychology and Its Social Meaning*, Jung (1978) said: “the individual in society may

be understood as a piece of the archetype ... The archetype of the individual is the Self. The Self is all-embracing” (p. 211). Tacey is correct: it is an odd approach to the social.

The way I see the same passage, Jung also got a lot of it right, and specifically the way in which the individual is ruined and controlled by the state: “It is small wonder that individual judgement grows increasingly uncertain of itself and that *responsibility is collectivised as much as possible, i.e., is shuffled off by the individual and delegated to a corporate body*” (Jung, 1978, p. 118, emphasis added).

Unfortunately, there is more than Jung’s “odd sociology” to hold back the evolving of links between his ideas and a progressive, humane politics. Jung’s ideas on the individual are aristocratic, elitist and supercilious. I am thinking here about his awful reference to “stunted individuals”:

It is obvious that a social group consisting of stunted individuals cannot be a viable and healthy institution; only a society that can preserve its internal cohesion and collective values, while at the same time granting the individual the greatest possible freedom, has any prospect of enduring vitality. As the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation. (Jung, 1921, para 758)

I want to go head to head with Jung here:

“Look, CG, the stunted individual is the only bloody individual that there is. Just as you taught us about alchemy, we begin political struggle with base materials: citizens who are far from individuated, who inhabit a world you’ve told us does not want them to individuate.”

Similarly, from his paper on “Adaptation, Individuation, Collectivity” (Jung, 1916/1977): “Whoever is not creative enough [to individuate] must re-establish collective conformity with a group of his own choice, otherwise he remains an empty waster and a windbag” (para. 1098).

So we have stunted individuals here, wasters and windbags over there, and truly individuated people in the first-class cabin. No wonder Sonu Shamdasani (2003) summarised Jung as saying “individuation was for the few” (p. 307), but there are a lot of people in the world, not just “the few”, and not just the Jungian 0.1%.

Here Jung is like Marx, that is, the Marx who considered that the lowest of the low, the lumpenproletariat, were incapable of making a revolution. We should join the liberation theologians in their challenge to this Marxian elitism. For Boff (1988) it is the poorest, most downtrodden, most out-of-it who will make the revolution: “God is in the poor who cry out. And God is the one who listens to the cry and liberates, so that the poor no longer need to cry out” (p. 166). Orwell (1949) got it too: “If there is hope, it lies in the proles” (p. 89), as did the Psalmist: “The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone of the Temple” (Psalms, 118: 22).

REBELS AND INDIVIDUALS

To this point, I have discussed whether contextualism and constructivism have gone too far; the “fractured” and “stunted” individual; and considered the advantages and disadvantages of Jung’s conception of the individual for a progressive politics.

I now turn to Albert Camus and his working out of the intricate connections between existence, oppression, freedom, action – and the individual. I draw for the most part on

Camus's (1951/1953) *The Rebel*, a book I first read at school, aged 16, and used as a base for numerous attempts to get out of my cage; *plus ça change ...*

Camus stated succinctly that rebellion and revolt are critically important to the making of meaning and hence to what we could call the birth of an individual. He reaches no conclusions about the purpose and meaning of life. He is relentlessly sceptical. Hence his position is that there is a fundamental absurdity to life and that attempts to create meaning, which are innate and valuable, are also – crucially – attempts to avoid the unavoidable absurdity of existence. Here Camus's twinning of despair and a kind of ironic hope reminds us of Beckett, but he is also, suggestively, very like Jung, as this quote from *The Red Book* shows: "Meaning is a moment and a transition from absurdity to absurdity and absurdity only a moment and a transition from meaning to meaning" (Jung, 2009, p. 242).

The Rebel is a history of humanity in revolt. Over time, humans have displayed a basic rejection of injustice; hence they rebel. All one can believe in is the value of protest and the protester's life. Crucially, for Camus (1951/1953), the impulse to rebel is inborn! "To breathe is to judge" (p. 8). The act of rebellion is a primary given of human life. Revolt creates dignity and the ethical life – and solidarity. Individuals who rebel against oppressive state are transformed into a collective force: "*I rebel, therefore we are*" (ibid., p. 111; original emphasis). The rebellious individual is the progenitor of the social movement.

Now, if the impulse to rebel is inborn and hence archetypal, then any idea that Jung and Camus are total opposites may not be the case. Camus's default position is that human nature is made by decisions and acts whereas Jung's conception of human nature is different – but Jung is not only about archetypal determinism either. Remember: "every confrontation with the archetype is a moral confrontation" (Jung, 1957/1956, para. 210) – and there are many references to "free will" throughout Jung's *Collected Works*.

I find Jung and Camus as writers rather similar: neither is rational or linear; both use metaphor, and are interested in psychological experience; both write in the face of the catastrophes of the twentieth century. Camus, however, rejects the collective as a given; for him, rebellion creates whatever is more-than-personal.

What I take from Camus for this discussion on "the individual" is that, while the original motivation to rebel may be inborn and individual, it becomes buried because of social and other repressions. Political individuality arises from rebellion which then may lead to joining others in solidarity. Camus admitted that people have a longing for something *social*, but also in the *spiritual* area. He called it "religion" or "philosophy" (Camus, 1953, p. 237), but I think it is more accurately termed "social spirituality".

In social spirituality, individuals come together to take action in the social sphere, doing this in concert with other people. When this happens, something spiritual comes into being. Being actively engaged in a social, political, cultural or ethical issue, together with others, initiates the spiritual. This is a very different perspective from one that would see social spirituality as being something done in the social domain by spiritual, i.e. individuated, people. On the contrary, there is a kind of spiritual rain that can descend on ordinary individuals who get involved in politics and social issues with others, and hence "social" spirituality (see Samuels, 2001).

The difference from Jung's elitist conception of the individual should be clear: this is by no means an elitist perspective. Social spirituality embraces people who get involved with other people in political and social action: for example, the Occupy movement or the protests

against global capitalism that the young people are into. What they're doing when they get involved in the anti-capitalist movements and the environmental and ecological movements is to participate in a general resacralization of culture (Samuels, 1993). To play on the word "politicised", many of them are becoming "spiritualised". When one gets involved in idealistic politics, sometimes, not always, one gets spiritualised, and so the anti-capitalist movement is creating its own spirituality and, in turn, is being informed by the spirituality that it creates. Political action leads to spirituality of some kind and spirituality informs political action. Of course, eventually it all falls to pieces: either the police wreck it or people (allegedly) "grow up", but there is a basic resacralising tendency worth recognising.

Exercise 2. Think of times you feel someone or something was trying to prevent you from being an individual – family, society, peer pressure, shame, whatever. Did you rebel – or not? In either case, what happened?

INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL TYPES

Now, as promised, I introduce a frankly individual and experiential element into the discussion. I mentioned that there are questions of *individual political style or political type* to consider.

What follows was first fashioned out of working with a mixed group of Israeli Palestinians and Israelis Jews in Jerusalem in the early 1990s. It became clear that, aside from the obvious irreconcilable differences in how the Middle East political scene was understood, there were individuals on both sides of the divide who were participating in the group in very similar or identical ways. I pointed this out and divided the larger group differently along style and type lines rather than content lines. I put the war-like with the war-like, the historically minded with the historically minded, the diplomatic with the diplomatic, the visionaries with the visionaries. The basic disagreements were there but the participants were now in groups with others whose political type or style resembled their own. There were discernible improvements in comprehension and even in goodwill.

The warring factions were presented not with an analysis of what they were saying (that came later), but with a panorama of *the ways in which they were saying it*, that is to say, with the style or type of politics they were using – for "It ain't what you *say* but the *way* that you say it ... that's what gets results."

So the various people in conflict are operating in very different political styles or types. My inspiration for this was, in general terms, Jung's model of psychological types: extraversion, introversion, thinking, feeling, sensation, intuition. As in life generally, for a variety of reasons, some of them to do with their personal backgrounds, some to do with their inborn political constitutions, people will live out the political aspects of their lives in different ways.

Over time, I've developed a list of images of differing political types as follows, in a spectrum ranging from active styles to passive ones: warrior, terrorist, exhibitionist, leader, activist, parent, follower, child, martyr, victim, trickster, healer, analyst, negotiator, bridge-builder, diplomat, philosopher, mystic, ostrich.

Some individuals will be violent terrorists; some pacifists. Some will want empirical back-up for their ideas; others will fly by the seat of their pants. Some will definitely enjoy cooperative political activity; others will suffer the nightmare of trying to accomplish things in a group only because they passionately believe in the ends being pursued. Let's not make the mistake of insisting that everyone do it in precisely the same way. If we are to promote political creativity, we need to value and honour individual political styles and types, and to think of ways of protecting such diversity.

As described, the notion of political type is particularly useful when addressing conflict, whether interpersonal or within organisations or even between nations or between parts of nations. Just as introverts and extraverts suffer from mutual incomprehension, individuals or groups that employ a particular political type often have very little idea about how the other person or group is actually “doing” their politics. This is not to say that political content per se is irrelevant, only that there may be more that divides opponents than their different views.

When working on questions of political type, it isn't necessary to encourage anyone to stick to just one type. In fact, the opposite holds true. Some individuals will use one political style in one setting and quite another in a different one. A *negotiator* at work may be a *terrorist* at home, or people may have, to borrow Jung's words, a “superior” political type, an “inferior” political type and “auxiliary” styles; thus a *warrior* may have neglected his *philosopher*, or a *diplomat* his *activist*.

The idea is to become comfortable with as vast a range of political types as possible. Jung said that individuation involved activating all the types, and both extraversion and introversion.

Exercise 3. Reflecting on the political types, (a) choose the one you do the best/more often; (b) choose the one you are poor or ineffective at and might work on in order to develop; and (c) reflect on whether there are any you cannot imagine using.

THE LIMITS OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

It is now time to probe the limits of individual responsibility – to think about *not* making a difference.

What, then, is the scope of our individual responsibility for others and for the world? The roots of the word “responsibility” lie in *spondere*, to promise or pledge, but what happens if we promise too much? In politics – and, I suppose, in life – there is a problem of people being too demanding of themselves. If we cannot live up to these demands, our idealism and energy go underground and are self-suppressed. We seem politically apathetic but, secretly, we are not: secretly, we are in touch with our “inner politician”.

Let us think about how this banishing of political energy and idealism affects *tikkun olam* – Hebrew for the repair and restoration of the world. We are back to the problem of “the stunted individual”. If one tries to do *tikkun* from too perfect a self-state, it won't work because the only possible way to approach and engage with a broken and fractured world of which one is a part is, surely, as a broken and fractured, stunted individual: an individual with death in mind.

I call the broken and fractured one the “good-enough individual”, using Winnicott's epithet, albeit out of context, but not overlooking his interest in how the parent helps the baby to steer a path between idealisation and denigration of the parent. Here, we are talking of the individual's own path between self-idealisation and self-denigration.

Winnicott said that “the mother will fail the baby but in the baby's own way” (cited in Rodman, 1987, p. 8). Thus the individual will fail him or himself but in his or his own way – and failure to make a difference in the world to the extent one hopes becomes much less shameful, one becomes less self-denigrating. This is important because shame at failure is what leads to depression and guilt and so destroys the impulse and the capacity for action.

Individuals need a different attitude to their failure, particularly the failure of their political hopes and aspirations and projects. Here's a selection:

- “Failure is the key to the kingdom.” (Rumi)
- “Every attempt is a wholly new start and a different kind of failure.” (T. S. Eliot)

- “Fail again ... and fail better.” (Samuel Beckett)
- “There’s no success like failure and failure’s no success at all.” (Bob Dylan)

Perhaps this is the kind of thing Camus (1953) meant when he wrote that: “The rebel can never find peace. He knows what is good, and despite himself, does evil. The value which supports him is never given to him once and for all – he must fight to support it, unceasingly.” (p. 206)

Exercise 4. Think of times when you yourself made a difference and also of times when you wanted to but failed in the attempt.

Before we pack up in despair and go home let us recall that the official politicians and the governments of the world, with all possible resources at their disposal, have not done such a terrific job of managing things. Governments constantly try to improve things in the political world, usually by redistributing wealth or changing legislative and constitutional structures or defusing warlike situations. It is *not* that nothing is being tried to make things better, but a materialist approach deriving exclusively from economics, or one that depends solely on altering the structures of the state, will not refresh those parts of the individual citizen that a psychological perspective can reach. There is disappointment at societies that fail to deliver the spiritual goods and a sense of meaning and purpose. We can change the clothes, shift the pieces around, but the spectre that haunts materialist and constitutional moves in the political world is that they only ruffle the surface. They do not – because, alone, they cannot – bring about the transformations for which the individual political soul yearns. For that we may have to turn to “the man with no name”.

I end with an untitled poem by Jerzy Ficowsky (1979/1981), working on the theme of the Holocaust and with individual responsibility in mind:

I did not manage to save
a single life
I did not know how to stop
a single bullet
And I wander round cemeteries
which are not there
I look for words
which are not there
I run
to help where no one called
to rescue after the event
I want to be on time
even if I am too late

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