



Erich Neumann and the Crisis of Western Ethics

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Published online: 19 May 2020
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Abstract

This article explores Erich Neumann's *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic (Tiefenpsychologie und Neue Ethik, 1949)*. Nine years after Erich Neumann left Nazi Germany for Palestine in 1934, he began writing *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*. In 1942, he was living in Tel Aviv when the news came that Panzerarmee Afrika under Field Marshal Erwin Rommel had started the second phase of its advance toward Egypt, aiming to seize the oilfields all the way to the Caspian Sea. Already aware of the Holocaust, the small groups of Jewish settlers in Palestine could only expect the worst. In this crucial existential moment, with Rommel "at the door", as Neuman put it, he began *Depth Psychology* to reveal the psychological antecedents of the triumph of Nazism and the horrors of the Second World War.

Keywords Psychology · Ethics · Holocaust · New ethic · Shadow

This book ... was conceived during the Second World War and under its direct impact.
Neumann, *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic, 1949*

Nine years after Erich Neumann left Nazi German for Palestine in 1934, he began writing *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic (Tiefenpsychologie und Neue Ethik)*.¹ During the 1930s, he spent most of his time on *The Origins and History of Jewish Consciousness*, a two-volume study that remains unpublished.² Now, in 1942, he was living in Tel Aviv when the news came that *Panzerarmee Afrika* under Field Marshal Erwin Rommel had started the second phase of its advance toward Egypt, aiming to seize the oilfields all the way to the Caspian

Sea. Already aware of the Holocaust, the small groups of Jewish settlers in Palestine could only expect the worst. In this crucial existential moment, with Rommel "at the door", as Neuman put it, he began *Depth Psychology* to reveal the psychological antecedents of the triumph of Nazism and the horrors of the Second World War. *Depth psychology* refers to therapeutic approaches that explore the subtle unconscious and transpersonal aspects of human experience, including dreams, complexes, and archetypes. He would provide a psychological interpretation of the vicissitudes of his time and history, or the "Age of Catastrophe" in Eric Hobsbawm's words.³

The attempt to explain modern Western history at this dire juncture was not unique to Neumann. Many fellow exiles from Nazi Germany, mostly Jews, strove to expose and define the course and decline of Western history in general and the success of the Nazi Revolution in particular in terms of their various disciplines. Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno built a sociological scaffold in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944, rev. ed. 1947); Erich Auerbach traced developments in philology in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946); Ernst Cassirer interrogated philosophy in *The Myth of the State* (1946); Karl Popper and Leo Strauss reconceptualized political philosophy in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) and *Natural Right and History* (1953), respectively; Erich Fromm turned to psychology in *Escape from Freedom* (1941); and Thomas Mann wrote the novel *Doktor Faustus* (1947) among many other fictional and polemical works.

¹ *Tiefenpsychologie und neue Ethik* (Zurich: Rascher, 1949); *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*, trans. Eugene Rolfe (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969).

² The first volume was *Contributions to the Depth Psychology of the Jewish Man and the Problem of Revelation*, and the second, *Hasidism and Its Psychological Relevance for Jewry*. See Martin Liebscher, "Uncertain Friends in Particular Matters: The Relationship between C. G. Jung and Erich Neumann," in *Turbulent Times, Creative Minds: Erich Neumann and C. G. Jung in Relationship (1933–1960)*, eds. E. Shalit and M. Stein (Asheville, NC: Chiron, 2016), 27.

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³ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

Neumann made Jungian concepts the heart of his book, especially the archetype of the “shadow”, or the animal side of our personality, like Freud’s notion of the id, which he conceived as the source of twentieth-century brutality and upheaval. The “old” Judeo-Christian ethic pursued an impossible perfection by repressing the shadow; hence, it lost its power to negotiate modern Western ambiguities and reaped the whirlwind. “Suppression or regression” of the Shadow “leads to hostile reactions which disturb the life of the whole community and keep it in a state of continual unrest.” (102) Neumann associated the old ethic with a “scapegoat” psychology he deemed “the deadliest peril now confronting humanity.”⁴ The reason is that “scapegoat psychology produces the most disastrous effects on the life of the collective (where it leads to wars and the extermination of group holding minority opinions.)” (139. Emphasize added) For Under the pretext of upholding morality over evil, it led to campaigns of annihilation against neighbors. More specifically, “Wars are the correlative of the old ethic, and warfare is the visible expression of the breakthrough of the unconscious shadow side of the collective.” (58. emphases added) The only alternative to the disastrous consequences of projecting this shadow onto others was recognizing its true origin and integrating it with the totality of the self.

In Neumann’s “new ethic,” we all must “accept the evil within” us, not “cast it away” or “repress” it, but suffer it, sometimes act on it, and pay the price” in sorrow and guilt.”⁵ Neumann envisioned a new human condition based on consciousness as well as the collective unconscious, which accepts darkness and negativity. Neumann cast the shadow shared by all across the divide between perceptions of who is good or evil that plagued modern history. Like a Copernican revolution, depth psychology looked at the shadow to locate the true origin of light. It discovered the “essence of human nature” and “the structure of human nature” that “everywhere, in essence, is the same,” laying the basis for a new human solidarity or the “brotherhood of man” in the ruins of the Second World War. Acknowledging the shadow as the basic, common dimension, humanity has no other option than to huddle closer together.

Neumann’s Life and Thought

Meeting with you always brings me a substantial affirmation that cannot be found anywhere else in the world.
Neumann to Carl Jung, 11 October 1958.

⁴ Neumann, *Depth Psychology*, back cover.

⁵ Micha Neumann, quoted in Aviva Lori, “Jung at Heart,” Haaretz, November 2017; <https://www.haaretz.com/jung-at-heart-1.148506>.

Erich Neumann (1905–1960) was a psychologist, philosopher, writer, and student of Carl Jung (1875–1961), the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded the field of analytical psychology. Neumann was born in Berlin. His close friend, the philosopher and historian Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), wrote that his “Jewish identity was profound and unequivocal.”⁶ Another childhood friend, Gerhard Adler (1904–1988), a major figure in the world of analytical psychology, known for his translation and editing of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, wrote that “the Jewish question . . . touched us deeply in our hearts.”⁷

Neumann studied psychology, philosophy, and other disciplines at the University of Berlin from 1923 to 1926, at which time, he went to Nuremberg to finish his studies at the University of Erlangen. His doctoral dissertation examined the mysterious language philosophy of Johann Arnold Kanne (1773–1824), a German philologist and linguist whose “speculative etymology” sought the one primordial mythology that determined all others. Neumann also wrote a commentary on Kafka’s *The Castle (Das Schloss)*, 1926) at a time when Kafka was still a minor figure in the literary world as well as 15 short stories that he sent to Martin Buber (1878–1965), the Austrian-born Jewish philosopher best known for his philosophy of dialogue. Later, Neumann’s interest in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy led him to study medicine at the Friedrich-Wilhelm-University in Berlin. He completed his studies in 1933, but the implementation of the Nazi race laws prevented him taking an internship.

He first met Carl Jung in 1933 at a seminar Jung was conducting in Berlin. Jung was 57 years old and already famous for his own brand of psychotherapy. The two men started a correspondence that would continue until Neumann’s death in 1960⁸; Neumann said that for him it was like “an ‘analytic session,’” and he constantly referred to Jung as “my inner leader.”⁹ He admitted that his own writing was “truly a type of compulsion and addiction – I have been writing almost constantly since my twelfth, certainly since my sixteenth year.” It was “part of my nature,” he continued, though “it sometimes seems to be a true paper hell.”¹⁰

Neumann, his wife Julia, and their little son Micha left Nazi Germany for good in 1933. They went first to Switzerland, where Neumann spent 6 months in analysis with Jung, while Micha and his mother immigrated to Palestine in 1934. Erich followed several months later. Lifelong Zionists, they settled in Tel Aviv, and Neumann established himself as a Jungian analyst,

⁶ See Scholem’s obituary for Neumann; <http://www.erehsalhit.com/2014/07/gershom-scholem-obituary-for-erich.html>.

⁷ Adler, quoted in Martin Liebscher, “Introduction,” to *Analytical Psychology in Exile: The Correspondence of C. J. Jung and Erich Neumann*, ed. Liebscher, trans. Heather McCartney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), xii.

⁸ An important discussion of Jung and Neumann’s correspondence can be found in Nancy Swift Furlotti, “Companion on the Way: Consciousness in Conflict,” in *Turbulent Times*, 45–69.

⁹ Neumann to Jung, 15 November 1939, and 26 July 1950, in *ibid.*, 153; 267.

¹⁰ 28 December 1953, *ibid.*, 301.

practicing here until his death. He also began writing in German about his Jewish experience and Jungian ideas. Eventually, he would become the founding father of analytical psychology in the future state of Israel. For years, he regularly returned to Zürich, Switzerland, to give lectures at the C.G. Jung Institute. He also lectured frequently in England, France, and the Netherlands and was a member of the International Association for Analytical Psychology and president of the Israel Association of Analytical Psychologists.

In his long correspondence with Jung, Neumann constantly lamented his isolation, loneliness, solitude, and sense of remoteness in Palestine and later Israel. “My isolated work here makes the slow but not interminable rhythm of my life more audible to me,” he wrote in 1935, “so you must, please, not lose patience with me as I will also not do.”¹¹ In 1937, he complained about “isolation that is only barely compensated for by work. Apart from my wife ... no one here” in Tel Aviv “understands anything” about analytical psychology.¹² In 1947, he declared that no “one knows how torturous the isolation is in which we live here.”¹³ In 1950, he wrote about his “state of remote isolation” and “enforced isolation.”¹⁴

During his youth, Neumann had searched for his Jewish roots. He had been deeply intrigued by Martin Buber’s writings on Hassidic Judaism, a pietistic religious movement centered on renewal and spiritual energy that emerged in eastern Europe during the eighteenth century. It was led by a mystical rabbi, Israel ben Eliezer (1698–1760), also called the Baal Shem Tov, or “master of the good name”, who is widely considered Hasidism’s founder. Neumann believed that ben Eliezer and his successor, Rabbi Dov Baer ben Avraham of Mezeritch (1704–1772), or the Mezeritcher Maggid, could see through the outer realities to perceive the Divine in the world.¹⁵ According to Lance Owens, who chronicled their long relationship, Neumann found in Jung the *tsaddik*, a righteous spiritual master, leader, and guide. After 6 months of analysis with Jung, Neumann affirmed that it was *the* transformative event of his life, and he could not imagine what his life might have been like without it.¹⁶ “Meeting with you,” he wrote Jung in 1958, “always brings me a substantial affirmation that cannot be found anywhere else in the world.”¹⁷ Over the years, his praise soared; Jung’s analytical psychology was “the bearer of a new consciousness of humanity for modern man”; Jung was “the healer of modern man.”¹⁸ We can only imagine

his feelings when the outbreak of World War II in 1939 broke off their correspondence until the war was over.

When they reconnected in 1945, Jung appreciated Neumann’s creative application of depth psychology. He highly praised *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*, which focused on confronting the shadow we see in the other in ourselves.¹⁹ One reason Jung raved about the study was that both he and Neumann felt humanity was on the edge of a great transformation. Later, when Neumann sent Jung a copy of *Origins and History of Consciousness (Ursprungsgeschichte des Bewusstseins, 1949)*, an exploration of the mythological stages, like the creation myth and the hero myth, in the evolution of consciousness, Jung deemed it “brilliant”.

Jung’s Influence on Neumann

Neumann was particularly influenced by Jung’s personality theory. Jung thought Sigmund Freud’s concept of the unconscious as a reservoir of repressed thoughts and motivations was limited. He argued that it could also be a source of creativity. By far the most important difference between Jung and Freud is Jung’s notion of the collective, or transpersonal, unconscious, his most original and controversial contribution to personality theory. It comprised latent memories from an ancestral past shared by all human beings. He wrote: “The form of the world into which [a person] is born is already inborn in him, as a virtual image.”²⁰ Innate characteristics or universal predispositions are “imprinted” on the human mind as a result of evolution. Jung called these ancestral, primordial memories and images *archetypes*. Fear of the dark, snakes, or spiders might be examples, but more important than isolated tendencies are the “structural elements of the collective unconscious” that develop into separate subsystems of the personality.²¹

Archetypes, Jung believed, are images and thoughts with universal meaning across cultures. They appear in dreams, literature, art, and religion. Symbols from different cultures are often similar because they emerge from archetypes shared by the whole human race. For Jung, our primitive past directs and influences our present behavior. He claimed to have identified a large number of archetypes but paid special attention to four. The “persona”, or mask, is the face we present to the world, like actors. It conceals our real self, and Jung describes it as the “conformity” archetype.

Another archetype is the “anima/animus”, which is the mirror image of our biological sex; that is, the unconscious feminine side in men and masculine tendencies in women.

¹¹ 10 October 1935, *ibid.*, 114.

¹² 23 July 1937, *ibid.*, 131.

¹³ 1 February 1947, *ibid.*, 178.

¹⁴ 26 July 1950, *ibid.*, 266–67.

¹⁵ See <http://www.depthinsights.com/blog/the-c-g-jung-erich-neumann-connection-an-interview-with-dr-lance-owens/>; and Tamar Kron, “Erich Neumann and Hasidism,” in *Turbulent Times*, 367–83.

¹⁶ See <http://www.depthinsights.com/blog/the-c-g-jung-erich-neumann-connection-an-interview-with-dr-lance-owens/>.

¹⁷ Neumann to Jung, 11 October 1958, in Liebscher, *Analytical Psychology in Exile*, 342.

¹⁸ Neumann, *Depth Psychology*, 140.

¹⁹ Neumann’s book “caused harsh reactions and criticism in Zurich,” despite the fact that Jung praised it. See Liebscher, “Uncertain Friends,” 27.

²⁰ Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, in *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 12, trans. Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull (1953; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 188.

²¹ Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (1949; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), xv.

After centuries of living together, each sex manifests attitudes and behavior of the other. The psyche of a woman contains masculine aspects (the animus archetype), and the psyche of a man contains feminine aspects (the anima archetype).

The “shadow” is the animal side of our personality, like Freud’s concept of the id. It is the source of both our creative and destructive energies. In line with Jung’s understanding of evolutionary theory, it may once have had survival value. It is the locus of Neumann’s *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*.

Finally, the “self” provides a sense of unified experience. For Jung, the ultimate aim of every individual is to achieve a state of selfhood, similar to self-actualization. Here, like the German-born American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1902–1994), he is moving toward a more humanist orientation than Freud’s.

Neumann’s contributions to the field of developmental psychology and the psychology of consciousness and creativity build on Jung’s framework. He is best known for his theory of feminine development, formulated in numerous publications, most notably his book *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (*Die große Mutter. Der Archetyp des grossen Weiblichen*), which deals with mother goddesses and is dedicated “To C. G. Jung friend and master in his eightieth year.”²² It strove to provide “a structural analysis of an archetype” and to show “its inner growth and dynamic, and its manifestations in the myths and symbols of mankind.”²³ The critic Camille Paglia described it as “Jungianism at its learned best,”²⁴

In *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, Neumann charts the “mythological stages in the evolution of consciousness,”²⁵ which include the creation myth, the hero myth, and the transformation myth. His theories were based on his clinical experience and a study of creation myths from around the world. He proposed that the ego emerges from a primordial condition of self-contained unconsciousness in a circle symbolized by a snake devouring its own tail. The book was strongly criticized. The philosopher Walter Kaufmann singled it out as a “perfect illustration” of the “utterly tedious, pointless erudition coupled with a stunning lack of even elementary concern with objections and alternatives” that distinguishes “most of the literature on archetypes and the collective unconscious.” Further, according to Kaufmann, it is

quintessentially dogmatic and operates with a notion of evidence not far different from the tracts of theologians

²² Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (1955; rpt. New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1963), v.

²³ *Ibid.*, xli.

²⁴ Paglia, *Sex, Art, and American Culture: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 114. The psychotherapist Robert H. Hopcke called *The Origins and History of Consciousness* and *The Great Mother*, “Neumann’s most enduring contribution to Jungian thought” (*Jung, Jungians and Homosexuality* [Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1989], 70–72).

²⁵ Neumann, *Origins and History of Consciousness*, xv.

who ‘prove’ points by citing a few Biblical verses that are far from proving what they claim. He is delighted when he finds something ‘in Syria, Asia Minor, and even in Mesopotamia.’ Diffusion is never even considered as an alternative explanation.²⁶

The psychologist James Hillman wrote that Neumann’s identification of consciousness with the “heroic-Apollonic mode” forced him to posit that consciousness is masculine even in women, which Hillman found absurd.²⁷

Depth Psychology and a New Ethic: Historical Context

The alliance between Faust and Mephisto is the alliance of modern man with the shadow.
Neumann, *Depth Psychology*, 1949

Neumann’s *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic* appeared in 1949. It reflects on human destructiveness and the way the human mind relates to its own shadow, or the animal side of our personality. As stated on its back cover:

The modern world has witnessed a dramatic breakthrough of the dark, negative forces of human nature. The ‘old ethic,’ which pursued an illusory perfection by repressing the dark side, has lost its power to deal with contemporary problems ... the deadliest peril now confronting humanity lay in the ‘scapegoat’ psychology associated with the old ethic. We are in the grip of this psychology when we project our own dark shadow onto an individual or group identified as our ‘enemy,’ failing to see it in ourselves. The only effective alternative to this dangerous shadow projection is shadow recognition, acknowledgement, and integration into the totality of the self. Wholeness, not perfection, is the goal of the new ethic.²⁸

What may seem like an overly pessimistic view is based on Neumann’s existential condition in the city of Tel Aviv. More specifically, he wrote to Jung that “the problems that compelled me to this work back then in the Second World War” hinged on “Rommel at the door.”²⁹

²⁶ Kaufmann, *Discovering the Mind*, vol. 3, *Freud, Adler, and Jung* (New York: Routledge, 1980), 353–54.

²⁷ Hillman, *The Myth of Analysis: Three Essays in Archetypal Psychology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 289.

²⁸ Neumann, *Depth Psychology*, back cover.

²⁹ Neumann to Jung, 25 May 1957, in Liebscher, *Analytical Psychology in Exile*, 324.

from February to May 1942, the Axis North African frontline was poised to take Tobruk, Libya, where they thought they could bring in fresh troops and move on to “secure the oilfields of the Middle East, Persia, and even Baku on the Caspian Sea.”³⁰ Neumann and other Jewish inhabitants of Palestine were aware of the Holocaust and terrified by Rommel’s advance. Neumann told Jung that “*New Ethic* was an attempt to process a series of phantasies that roughly corresponded time wise with the extermination of the Jews, and in which the problem of evil and justice was being tossed around me.”³¹ A new ethic was necessary because “the old concept of sin has become untrue, it is no longer effective, and that is not due to the decline of man but to his new understanding of himself and God.”³² The horrors of World War II, the Holocaust, and the threat of Rommel’s imminent invasion of Palestine led Neumann to believe that the “problem of evil is one of the most central problems of modern man ... we are living in a world in which evil in man is emerging from the depths on a gigantic scale and confronting us all” (25). Hence, he argued for rejecting the old ethic, based on failing or refusing to see our own dark shadow and projecting it onto an individual or a group identified as our enemy. Only recognizing the shadow within would transform the human psychological condition by integrating our good and evil psyches into the larger self. The true remedy for the human condition would come from, not social or political means, but the psychological transformation of our understanding.

While other German intellectual exiles, such as Erich Auerbach, Hans Baron, Ernst Cassirer, and others, praised and defended the Judeo-Christian humanist tradition in their *Kulturkampf* against Nazi barbarism,³³ Neumann developed the radical notion that in seeking to repress evil, Judeo-Christian morality led to “scapegoat” psychology, separating and demonizing individuals, groups, and nations: the “shadow side of the human race towers over us all, darkening the sky with its death-rays and its atom bombers” (19–20). He believed he was living in “an age dominated by a dance of death” (19) and sought a solution in the inner abysses of the soul.

Persuaded that the basic problem of modern man is the problem of evil, he thought “conventional ethics have proven incapable of containing or transforming its destructive forces.”³⁴ First and foremost, man must become aware of “his own ‘dark’ inferior personality, his own shadow,” or it would be “projected into the other person – one way of satisfying the well-known need to find

a scapegoat for one’s own shortcomings.” In practical terms, it split “the world into ‘good’ and ‘bad’, superior and inferior nations, races, or individuals, with catastrophic consequences.”³⁵ It “produces the most disastrous effects on the life of the collective” in the form of “wars and the extermination of groups holding minority opinions” (139). Here is the inextricable association between psychology and history in Neumann’s thought. He believed that man must learn “to live with his dark side” to achieve fuller consciousness of the fundamental, intrinsic ambivalence of his nature.³⁶

Like other intellectual exiles from Nazi Germany who fashioned new systems or modes of thought in response to Nazism and Fascism, Neumann looked for a turning point in history, an *Ansatzpunkt*, or point of great epistemological departure.³⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno argued that “the Jewish question would indeed prove the *turning-point* of history” in the transformation from an anti-Semitic to a human society.³⁸ In *Mimesis*, Auerbach depicted the progress of Western literature as a series of major literary, semantic, cultural, and historical turning points described in each chapter. “The procedure I have employed – that of citing for every epoch a number of texts and using these as test cases for my ideas – takes the reader directly into the subject and makes him sense what is at issue long before he is expected to cope with anything theoretical.”³⁹ Elsewhere, Auerbach said: “My own experience, and by that I mean not merely my scientific experience, is responsible for the choice of problems, *the starting points*, the reasoning and the intention expressed in my writing.”⁴⁰ For Neumann, “the ambiguity of one’s own existence, the awareness of both positive and negative forces within the individual and the collective becomes *the point of departure* for the new ethical attitude.”⁴¹

In another context, he echoed Martin Buber’s famous “I and Thou,”⁴² claiming that acceptance “of the shadow is the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Wilhelm Dilthey, German historian, sociologist, and hermeneutic philosopher, coined the concept of *Ansatzpunkt* in *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung: Lessing, Goethe, Novalis, Holderlin* (1914; rpt. Göttingen: Wandenhoek Ruprecht, 1968).

³⁸ *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr; trans. Edmund Jephcott (1944; rpt. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 165; emphasis added.

³⁹ *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 556; emphasis added.

⁴⁰ *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Manheim (1965; rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 30; emphasis added.

⁴¹ Adler, “Foreword,” 8; emphasis added. On intellectual exiles from Nazi Germany who strove to explain history as a series of turning points, see Zakai, *Erich Auerbach; Pen Confronts the Sword*; and Weinstein and Zakai, *Jewish Exiles*.

⁴² Buber, *I and Thou (Ich und Du)* (1923; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1937). According to Buber’s biographer, Professor Paul Mendes-Flohr, “Buber and Neumann knew ... and corresponded with each other. Neumann regarded himself a disciple of Buber. He wrote at least one essay on one of Buber’s Hasidic stories” (letter to the author, 11 November 2017).

³⁰ Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War, 1939–1945* (New York: Allen Lane, 2008), 467.

³¹ Neumann to Jung, 14 June 1957, in Liebscher, *Analytical Psychology in Exile*, 331.

³² *Ibid.*, 333.

³³ See Avihu Zakai, *Erich Auerbach and the Crisis of German Philology: The Humanist Tradition in Peril* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017); *The Pen Confronts the Sword: Exiled German Scholars Challenge Nazism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018); and David Weinstein and Avihu Zakai, *Jewish Exiles and European Thought in the Shadow of the Third Reich: Baron, Popper, Strauss, Auerbach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

³⁴ Adler, “Foreword to this Edition,” in Neumann, *Depth Psychology*, 7–8.

essential basis for the actual achievement of an ethical attitude toward the ‘Thou’ who is outside me.”⁴³ Buber believed that human life finds meaning in relationships and that all of our relationships ultimately bring us into relationship with God, the Eternal Thou.

The revolutionary dimension of Neumann’s new ethical system should not be underestimated. It is at odds, not only with the traditional Jewish and Christian ethic but with traditional collective values and morals or, more generally, Western humanist tradition based on shared values and beliefs about innate human goodness. With him, decisive ethical authority, the locus of ethical behavior, “no longer rests with collective values of good and evil and with conventional ‘consciousness’ but with an inner ‘Voice’ – a constant challenge to individual decision and responsibility, even where it may lead to a rejection of collective morality.”⁴⁴ It shifted the core of morals from the external, traditional, communal realm to the uncharted abysses of the individual soul. His ethics is an individualistic system bereft of any historical context of morals. The book’s title is most appropriate: an ethic grounded, not in shared social and political values, but exclusively on positive and negative forces, or subjective perceptions thereof, in an individual’s soul. As Neumann argued, the “individual must work through his own basic moral problem before he is in a position to play a responsible part in the collective.”⁴⁵ Jung, who clearly recognized the revolutionary ramifications of Neumann’s approach, wrote to him in 1948, after reading *Depth Psychology*, that its “effect would be like a bomb.”⁴⁶

Ironically, transferring the ultimate locus and goals of ethics from the public, collective sphere to the human soul has an important humanist dimension. Admitting that no one is perfect, we can no longer divide the world into good and bad, superior and inferior nations, races, or even individuals. Absolute, binary morality lost its significance, power, and validity.

Depth Psychology and a New Ethic

The dark shadow of World War II atrocities hovers over *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic* from beginning to end. “This book,” wrote Neumann on the first page, “was conceived during the Second World War and under its direct impact.” It was “an age dominated by a dance of death, to which National Socialism in Germany was little more than a prelude” (19). However, his aim is to show how the depth psychology approach can achieve human solidarity. He concludes with a great prophetic vision: “mankind, gripped as it is by the icy

cold of empty, lifeless, cosmic space, which stares at it horribly from every side, sans God, sans soul, and sans humanity, has no other option than to huddle closer together, if it is to hold its own against this tyrant power” (135), the shadow.

Neumann’s mission became more pressing in view of “the louring spectre of a third world war” and the “production of atomic bombs” by the United States and Russia. He believed that “the highest endeavor of the human species has always been devoted to the creation of the individual,” and that the “Community of Free Individuals is the next goal of evolution – still remote, but already visible on the horizon” (19). His agenda was purely psychological: placing a mirror before the tormented soul to reveal its well of evil.

He was not the first to see the crucial importance of the shadow’s reign. Before him, various modes of thought and religious beliefs, most notably Judaism and Christianity, acknowledged the dark side of the psyche and strove to overcome it. According to Neumann, they lost their power, meaning, and validity in modern times. The “old religious and ethical values have lost their grip on modern man,” and “he in turn has lost the grip on life which they used to give him.” Consequently, he “finds himself in a position of the *gravest danger*,” which appears not only “in the sick people who the psychotherapist meets in his consulting-room every day, but which equally affects those so called normal persons who wage our wars, conduct our recurrent persecutions, and plan and prepare the necessary means for carrying these purposes into effect” (21; emphasis added). The psychological problems afflicting the leaders of nations, like Hitler, cut a wide swath. Clearly, the solution must be found in the methods of psychology.

An important dimension of the “grave moral crisis,” argued Neumann, is the “nihilist despair about man which is an essential characteristic of the art and philosophy in our period.” Nihilism was clear evidence of the decline of traditional religious beliefs and ethical modes of thought that undammed the “lake of blood which swallowed Europe” (25). However, in all the discussions about humanity’s “gravest danger” in modern times, something important was missing: “the creative capacity of man and (though this is really the same thing) the creative ability of the human psyche is deliberately overlooked.” In response, he declared, “depth psychology is essentially concerned with this very subject” (21).

In the introduction, Neumann stresses the connections between the problem of evil, modern history, and the Age of Catastrophe. We were living in a world in which “evil in man is emerging from the depths on a gigantic scale and confronting us all” (25). Compare these words to Ernst Cassirer’s:

We are always living on a volcanic soil and must be prepared for sudden convulsions and eruptions. In the

⁴³ Neumann, cited in Adler, “Foreword,” 8.

⁴⁴ Adler, “Foreword,” 8; emphasis added.

⁴⁵ Neumann, quoted in Adler, *ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁶ Jung, cited in Adler, *ibid.*, 9.

critical moments of man's political and social life myth regains its old strength. It was always lurking in the background, waiting for its hour of opportunity. This hour comes if the other binding forces of our social life, for one reason or another, lose their influence; if they can no longer counterbalance the demonic power of myth.⁴⁷

Likewise, Erich Fromm argued that people looked on the periods before Nazism as “a volcano which for long time has ceased to be a menace,” but this complacency was shattered “when Fascism came into power.”⁴⁸ During modern history, humanity mastered nature, but in Neumann's view, “man's incapacity to deal with psychic nature, with the human soul, has become more appallingly obvious than ever before. Clear evidence of such disability and its plain result is the current spilling of blood,” which “is the result of this incapacity” (25). He defined the first half of the twentieth century as “a collective outbreak of the evil in man, on a scale never before manifested in world history.” All traditional explanations - ideological, political, and sociological - “never grasped the real cause of the matter” and “cannot explain away the fact that it has been possible for evil to seize hold of hundreds of millions of human beings.” The “old ethic of the Judaeo-Christian epoch has proved itself incapable of mastering the destructive forces of man” (25–26). Again, compare his view with Cassirer's:

In the last thirty years, in the period between the first and second World Wars, we have not only passed through a severe crisis of our political and social life but have also been confronted with quite new theoretical problems. We experienced a radical change in the form of political thought ... the appearance of a new power: the power of mythical thought.⁴⁹

Neumann mythologizes “the moral crisis of the twentieth century,” positing that “the human race is in danger of being annihilated by the ‘moral insanity’ which has taken possession” and which is “a symptom of transitional period lacking ethic.” On the one hand, “the front lines in the conflict at present dividing mankind are clearly delineated,” like the political and military forces that fought in the two world wars. On the other, “man's present state of possession by evil is a phenomenon that transcends political and military frontiers and enters into the heart of each one of us.” In other words, the “murdered are also guilty – not only the murderer” (26).

⁴⁷ Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (1946; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 280.

⁴⁸ Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1941), 8.

⁴⁹ Cassirer, *Myth of the State*, 3.

Victims - of the Holocaust, say, or domestic violence - might contest this conclusion. In contrast, Adorno identified what would later be conceived as “blaming the victim” as “one of the most sinister features of the Fascist character.”⁵⁰

To lay the ground of his new ethic, Neumann had to minimize and, in fact, abolish the difference between perpetrator and victim.

Those who saw and failed to act, those who looked away because they did not want to see, those who did not see although they could have seen, and those, too, whose eyes were unable to see – each and every one of these is actually in alliance with evil. *We are all guilty – all peoples, all religions, all nations, all classes. Humanity itself is guilty.* (26; emphasis added)

This radical relativization of evil phenomena, making both perpetrator and victim share the blame, could be expressed only by someone living far away from the bloody horror and daily cruelties of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Note the squeamishness in “those, too, whose eyes were unable to see”; does he mean the blind or the absent or the dead or the beaten unconscious? Then the insufferable and infuriating jump to *we*.

Evil is evident in spheres of modern life other than Nazism, such as discrimination against black people. “The evil that broke through in the Nazi's claim to world domination is the same evil” that prevented the “solution of the social problem and self-determination of the colored people in the civilized world.” This evil attempts “with all its might to destroy the reality of the unity of mankind and the consciousness of a single destiny for culture and the human race” (26). How can we counteract it? Clearly not by political or social means, according to Neumann. The “people of our time are in an unenviable position” because “they have nothing with which to confront the deliberate annihilation of the world by evil except an ethic,” the Jewish and Christian ethic, “which has already lost its psychological efficacy.” Consequently, “[t]he inner insecurity of the individual who relies on the values of the old Judaeo-Christian ethic, but no longer feels its validity in his heart and experience, its impotence in his everyday life, renders him an easy prey to infection” (27). It is responsible for the “scapegoat psychology, in which the individual eliminates his own evil by projecting it onto the weaker brethren,” as evident in modern nationalism (130). The only healthy psychological response is to clearly acknowledge our positive and negative sides, forging a new awareness, a shadow awareness, which will make us whole and more understanding of others.

⁵⁰ Adorno, “Wagner, Nietzsche and Hitler,” *Kenyon Review*, 9, 1 (1947): 158.

In the past, “the ‘old’ ethic in its Judaeo-Christian form molded the character of Western man.” Its loss of efficacy is “the cause, the effect and the expression” of the present “catastrophe” (28), or “the crisis of the twentieth century” (30). To confront it, Neumann argued, “study in depth of the psychological development of the individual in whom the problem of evil becomes manifest is in a much better position than any research into collective events to detect those first attempts at synthesis which are the basic elements of a new ethic.” In order to survive at all, the individual needs “the aid of the forces of the deep conscious; in them and in himself he may be able to find new ways, a new form of life, new values and new guiding symbols”(29). Depth psychology transposes the evil that confronts modern man both collectively and individually from external historical events and human actions to the individual’s conscious and unconscious mind.

Faithful to the premises of Jungian psychology, Neumann argued that the reality of evil that possesses an individual is not derived merely from his personal reality: “it is also, at the same time, the individual expression of a collective situation”; namely, “the creative side of the collective – that is, universal human – unconscious” (29). The individual is the center, the receiver, of the collective history of consciousness and unconsciousness and thus can be the solution to “the moral crisis of the twentieth century.” In other words, “the creative stirrings which enable him to find his own solutions and salvation are the initial stage of future values and symbols for the collective” (30). Here lies the essential connection between the psyche and the course of history, for the “future of the collective lives in the present of the individual” (30). The connection between “the problems of the individual and those of the collective is far closer than is generally realized.” Each individual “is an organ of the collective, whose common inner structure he bears in his collective unconscious” (31).

The scope of the old ethic “comprises the most variegated human ideals and includes a whole gamut of degrees of perfection.” Ultimately, it asserts “the absolute character of certain values which are represented by this old ethic as moral ‘oughts.’” In such an old-fashioned moral system, the ideal “can and ought to be realized by the elimination of those qualities which are incompatible with this perfection” (33). Neumann’s goal is to investigate, not the validity of values as such, but rather “the psychological effects of this old ethic on Western man” (34).

Two practices enable “implementation of the old ethic” – suppression (*Unterdrückung*) and repression (*Verdrängung*). He defines the first as “the deliberate elimination by ego-consciousness of all those characteristics and tendencies in the personality which are out of harmony with the ethical value”; namely, “the denial of the negative.” It is accomplished by “discipline and asceticism” and is “a conscious achievement of the ego ... usually practiced and cultivated in a systematic way.” It entails “a sacrifice ... which leads to

suffering” (34). In contrast, repression, or the action of subduing someone or something, is “the instrument most frequently used by the old ethic to secure the imposition of its values.” Repressed thoughts “are withdrawn from the control of consciousness and function independently.” According to depth psychology, “they lead to an active underground life of their own with disastrous results for both the individual and the collective” (35; emphasis added).

Consciousness, Neumann emphasized, “is the representative of the collective norm, and changes its content and demand” (36). In this context, suppression and repression “are the two main techniques employed by the individual in his attempt to achieve adaptation to the ethical ideal.” The result is “the formation of two psychic systems in the personality.” One, the shadow, usually remains “completely unconscious, while the other” – the persona – “develops into an essential organ of the psyche, with the active support of the ego.” The persona corresponds to “one’s adaptation to the requirements of the age, of one’s personal environment, and of the community” (37; emphasis added). Those qualities, capacities, and tendencies that do not harmonize with the collective values – everything that shuns the light of public opinion – come “together to form the shadow, *that dark region of the personality which is unknown and unrecognized by the ego.*” In other words: “The shadow is the other side. It is the expression of our own imperfection and earthliness, the negative which is incompatible with the absolute values” (40; emphasis added). Neumann’s psychology is Manichean, based on a simple dualism in the content and form of the human soul, described as the opposition of, and struggle between, a good psyche and an **evil** psyche.

Neumann argued that “the ego has repressed the shadow side and lost touch with the dark contents, which are negative and for this reason split off from the conscious sector” (40). In the process, the ego becomes “good conscious” - in harmony with the values of its culture - but causes “the individual to forget his shadow.” The ramifications for modern history are tremendous. “Western man’s illusory self-identification with positive values,” which reached its height with the “bourgeois epoch,” is “now coming to an end” with the Second World War (41). Ironically and sadly:

The positive belief in progress was one of the precursors of the First World War, and the arrogation of modern man, regarding himself as the meaning and evolutionary culmination of creation, was a prelude to the bestial arrogation of the Aryan *herrenvolk* [master race] under National Socialism. (42)

In these sad historical events, “mankind confronted” the problem that “the world, nature and the human soul are the scene of a perpetual and inexhaustible rebirth of the evil” (46)

based on “the *projection of the shadow*.” Since the shadow “is in conflict with the acknowledged values,” it “cannot be accepted as a negative part of one’s own psyche and is therefore projected – that is, it is transferred to the outside world and experienced as an outside object.” Instead of treating it as “one’s own inner problem,” it is “combated, punished, and exterminated as ‘the alien out there.’” The old ethic’s “*elimination of these feelings of guilt and the discharge of the excluded negative forces is in fact one of the gravest perils confronting mankind*.” The result is “the institution of the scapegoat” (50; emphasis added), in which the individual eliminates his own evil by projecting it onto the weaker part of society (130).

Suppression and repression, denial of the negative, lead to a “*scapegoat psychology*,” which “shapes the inner life of nations just as it does their international relationship.” More specifically, “[t]he unconscious psychic conflicts of groups and masses find their most spectacular outlets in epidemic eruptions such as wars and revolutions, in which the unconscious forces which have accumulated in the collective get the upper hand and ‘make history’” (50–51). If “evil cannot be acknowledged as ‘his own evil’ at all,” it “is invariably experienced ... as something alien, and the victims of shadow projection are therefore, always and everywhere, the aliens.” In the “economy of the psyche, the outcast role of the alien is immensely important as an object of the projection of the shadow” (52). In sum, “no war can be waged unless the enemy can be converted into a carrier of a shadow projection, and the lust and joy of warlike conflict ... is derived from the satisfaction of the unconscious shadow side.” For Neumann, “*wars are the correlative of the old ethic, and warfare is the visible expression of the breakthrough of the unconscious shadow side of the collective*” (58; emphasis added). This analysis motivates him to construct a new ethic on the foundation of depth psychology. He sees the whole world exclusively in terms of psychological problems and solutions.

The New Ethic and its Blessing

After considering the shortcomings of the old ethic, Neumann turned to the content and form of the new ethic. He argued that since 1800, or the Age of Enlightenment, we have witnessed “the *breakthrough of the dark side* into Western consciousness.” He believed that “the discovery of the primitive element in human nature” showed man “the dark soil in which his roots are embedded,” “radically destroyed his godlike nature,” and “unmasked his central position in the universe as an illusion” (82). In this important process of disenchantment, Charles Darwin, Biblical criticism, Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, Sigmund Freud’s *Future of an Illusion*, as well as secularization, materialism, empiricism, and relativism all played a role. “In no previous epoch of

human history,” Neumann claimed, “has the dark side occupied the foreground of attention to such an extent as it does today” (83). He saw “ugliness, dissonance and evil ... forcing their way into art” – music, literature, painting. He points to Fyodor Dostoevsky, “in whose work man – sick, evil, and abandoned – stands naked at the very heart of despair.” Moreover, “detective stories, crimes, films and thrillers belong to the same uncanny context” (83).

However, the outburst of darkness in modern times, “most clearly exemplified in National Socialism,” where “faith in dogma, the leader and the redeemer” leads to “disintegration of individual consciousness” and the “insanity of the collective” (88), “also contained the germs of any possible future development in the West” (84). In the new ethic, the “only person who is morally acceptable” is “the person who has accepted his shadow problem – the person, that is to say, who has become conscious of his own negative side” (91). Psychology has the right tools to achieve this crucial inner, emotional transformation because “the unconscious is often, if not always, a more powerful determinant in the life of a man than his conscious attitude, his will and his intentions” (92). As its goal, the new ethic “rejects the hegemony of a partial structure of the personality, and postulates the total personality as the basis of ethical conduct” (92). It was born under “the ruling star of the fuller insight, deeper truth and cleared-sighted awareness of human nature as a whole which is the real achievement of depth psychology” (93).

If the moral problem of the individual is “constellated in the first place by the coexistence of ego and shadow,” then he can deal more adequately with the vicissitudes of history by understanding the psychological causes behind them (93). Neumann believed that the individual must “become conscious of both the positive and the negative forces” related to both “the individual and the community” (94). This belief supports the inseparable connection between depth psychology and the course of history:

My own shadow side is a part and a representative of the shadow side of the whole human race; and if my shadow is anti-social and greedy, cruel and malicious, poor and miserable – if he approaches me in the form of a beggar, a negro or a wild beast – then my reconciliation with him will involve at the same time my reconciliation with the dark brother of the whole human race. (95)

Acknowledging the dark side is the cornerstone of depth psychology’s therapeutic solution for modern man. Living in good relationship with the shadow brings ego to “its solidarity with the whole human species and its history as known in subjective experience.” This encounter makes him more “conscious of group psychology,” by which he means that “the conscious mind” is only a small part of the “whole vast

universe of the psyche.” What is specifically “human and individual only constitutes the topmost layer of *the collective unconscious which extends right down to the animal level*” (96; emphasis added).

The social and political consequences of acknowledging the shadow are tremendous: depth psychology and the new ethic required an assimilation of “the primitive side of our own nature before we can arrive at a stable feeling of human solidarity and co-responsibility with the collective.” In more practical terms, more closely related to modern human beings’ psychological condition, it would initiate a new Age of Understanding: “*the projection of this component will cease, and together with it the psychology of the scapegoat and the campaign of annihilation waged under the pretext of morality against evil in the person of one’s neighbor*” (97; emphasis added).

Based on these contentions, Neumann formulates a psychological law according to which the “instability of a group or individual varies directly with the extent of the era occupied by unconscious contents and inversely with the scope of the consciousness.” This law “can be verified everywhere and in everyone,” he claimed, and he stressed time and again that since “primitive and mass psychology are to be found deep-rooted in each individual,” they have direct, serious, and tragic consequences for modern history (98).

New Ethic’s Aims and Values

Depth Psychology and a New Ethic envisions a new human condition based on individual and collective consciousness of primitive impulses. While the old ethic was founded on “partition, differentiation and dichotomy, as formulated in the mythological projection of the Last Judgment under the image of the separation of the sheep from the goats, the good from the evil,” the new ethic’s ideal “is the combination of the opposites in a unitary structure” (101). Its goal is “the achievement of wholeness, of the totality of the personality,” or the integration of “the two systems of the conscious mind and the unconscious.” Strangely, Neumann equated “the totality of the personality” with the League of Nations, established in 1920, and notoriously incapable of addressing Axis aggression in the 1930s: “ego-consciousness becomes the locus of responsibility for a psychological League of Nations, to which various groups of states belong, primitive and pre-human,” and so forth. It will have succeeded when “the assimilation and use of the negative forces to be found in every psychic system takes place as far as possible consciously, within the process of self-realization” (102).

On the “basic tasks of modern man,” Neumann’s glorious vision of the new ethic would build a “new human standpoint which accepts darkness and the negative side.” It proposed that modern man “has reacted to the collapse of the

anthropocentric cosmos with a shift in emphasis toward super-personal human values and the brotherhood of man which is becoming clearer every day” (134).⁵¹ You can almost hear Beethoven’s setting of Friedrich Schiller’s “Ode to Joy” (*An die Freude*, 1785):

Thy magic powers re-unite
What custom’s sword has divided
Beggars become Princes’ brothers
Where thy gentle wing abides.

This utopian view of brotherhood clearly has no relation to reality, especially after the horrors of the Second World War, yet Neumann stressed it. He believed depth psychology would find the “essence of human nature.” It would expose the “limitation of the human condition” and “must inevitably lead, in the course of the next few centuries, to an increased sense of human solidarity” since “*the structure of human nature is everywhere, in essence, is the same.*” Despite different archetypal constellations, “*the human species is nevertheless one and indivisible in the basic structure of its mind*” (134–35; emphasis added). The psychologist turned utopian offered a psychological solution to the problems of history that was very far from real human life and its complex, diverse experience.

At the end of his book, he indulges in many cosmic speculations about, not only the “solidarity of our species,” which “accounts for the inner history of mankind,” but “the unity of the planet earth,” which “will determine the history of the future” (135).

Slowly but surely, the human race is withdrawing the psychological projections by means of which it had peopled the emptiness of the world with hierarchies of gods and spirits, heavens and hells; and now, with amazement, for the first time, it is experiencing the creative fullness of its own primal psychic Ground. (135)

Like many utopian projections over the centuries, which often emphasize egalitarian principles in economics, government, and justice, Neumann’s *Depth Psychology* emphasized the egalitarianism of a unified, common human psychological system. His belief that “the structure of human nature” is “everywhere, in essence ... the same” led him to claim the

⁵¹ It is very interesting to compare Neumann’s vision of the “brotherhood of man” with the invention of Esperanto by the Polish-Jewish ophthalmologist L.L. Zamenhof (1859–1917). Zamenhof grew up fascinated by the idea of a world without war and believed it could happen with the help of a new international auxiliary language, Esperanto, which he developed in 1873. See Esther Schor, *Bridge of Words: Esperanto and the Dream of a Universal Language* (New York: Metropolitan, 2016); and Joan Acocella, “Return to Babel: The Rise and Fall of Esperanto,” *New Yorker*, 31 October 2016, 90–95.

essential solidarity of the human race, or the “brotherhood of man”, as opposed to the murderous elitism of Nazism and Fascism. History relentlessly refutes the dream of oneness and solidarity; perhaps our next vision should accommodate – celebrate! – difference and constructive debate.

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