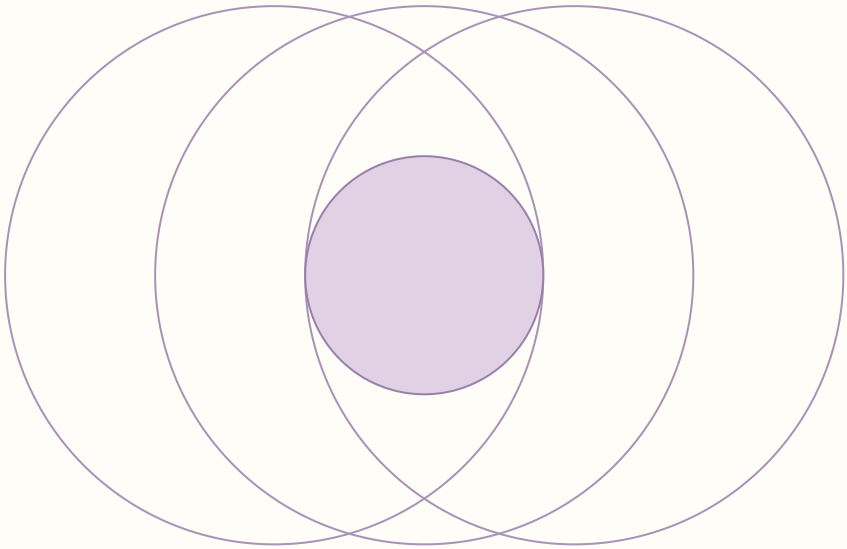


READING EDITION

Shadow

A reading edition

A figure, an idea, a history. Read the full reference entry away from the immersive page, with its distinctions and sources intact.

Edited by Rob Browton
All of You Limited

1 November 2026
Original text / complete sources

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A reference to come back to

The complete reference entry: definition, history, debate, evidence, appearances and sources. This edition contains the complete authored reference text from the listed records. The immersive site's decorative scenes, audio, poems and changing interactive states are not part of this reading edition.

Shadow

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Shadow

Jung's name for the part of the personality that the conscious ego rejects and does not see in itself, which it then tends to meet in other people. The most accessible of his archetypes, and the one he said must be faced first.

Editor	Rob Browton
Originator	C. G. Jung
First text	Analytical Psychology: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1925 (1925)
Source note	Princeton edition (2012); the seminar is not in the Collected Works. The figure is set out in print in 1934, CW 9i.
Classification	classical / empirical status: none
Wikidata	Q286363
Other names	shadow side (1912); the dark half of the personality
Citation / record	https://archetype.guide/shadow. Browton, R. (ed.), 1 November 2026 edition.

Definition

The shadow, in Jung's usage, is the side of a person that their conscious self-image leaves out. It is made of the traits, wishes and capacities that were unacceptable to the family, the culture or the ego's own ideal, and were pushed out of awareness rather than lived. Because it is unconscious, it is rarely met directly. It is met in projection: in the intense dislike of a quality in someone else that one cannot admit in oneself. Jung treated the shadow as personal in most of its content, which is why he called it the easiest of the archetypes to experience, and he made recognising it the first step of any serious self-knowledge.

Two things follow from that definition and are often lost in popular use. The shadow is not simply evil; it holds whatever the ego rejected, and Jung noted that in some people the rejected material is their better qualities. And it is not fixed; what goes into it depends on what a particular ego, in a particular society, has decided it cannot be.

History

The word came before the figure. Jung wrote of the "shadow side" of the psyche as early as his 1912 essay "New Paths in Psychology" (CW 7), meaning wishes a person declines to look at, and *Psychological Types* (1921) uses *Schatten* for the unconscious counterpart of the conscious attitude. The earliest place he speaks of a shadow in so many words, as a figure, is the seminar he gave in

English in 1925, where he identifies a companion in one of his own dreams as his shadow. A caution for anyone citing the standard sources: the essay "On the Psychology of the Unconscious" is usually dated 1917 and quoted for the first definition, but Jung revised it repeatedly up to 1943, and the sentence on the shadow that reference works quote belongs to the later wording.

The figure took its printed shape in the essays of the 1930s. The 1934 Eranos lecture "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious", published in English in 1939 and collected as CW 9i, introduces it through the image of looking into water:

> The man who looks into the mirror of the waters does, indeed, see his own face first of all. Whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself. The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it; namely, the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the persona, the mask of the actor. — C. G. Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious" (1934), in *The Integration of the Personality* (1939), p. 69

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A page later: the meeting with oneself is the meeting with one's own shadow, and the shadow is "a tight pass, a narrow door" that no one who descends into the unconscious is spared. In the same volume's opening chapter Jung called the shadow the inferior and less commendable part of a person, and pointed to Faust's Mephistopheles and to Hoffmann's *The Elixirs of the Devil* as literary portraits of it.

Psychology and Alchemy (1944) restates the idea in a sentence, as "that dark half of the psyche which we invariably get rid of by means of projection", either onto neighbours or onto a divine mediator, and adds a clinical warning: the contents of the personal unconscious are merged with those of the collective unconscious, and bringing the shadow into consciousness can drag archetypal material up with it (CW 12 ¶36–38).

The fullest statement is the second chapter of *Aion* (1951), the one source most reference works cite. There Jung ranks the shadow, the anima and the animus as the archetypes with the most frequent and disturbing influence on the ego, and the shadow as the most accessible, because its nature can largely be inferred from the personal unconscious (CW 9ii ¶13). He calls it a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality (¶14), describes its contents as emotional, autonomous and possessive (¶15), and gives the mechanism of projection in a line that has become the standard summary of his view:

> Projections change the world into the replica of one's own unknown face. — C. G. Jung, *Aion* (1951), CW 9ii ¶17

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Two shorter passages round out the mature view. In *The Practice of Psychotherapy* (CW 16) the shadow is simply "the thing a person has no wish to be", and later in *Aion* Jung insists it is not only reprehensible: it also holds normal instincts, appropriate reactions, realistic insights and creative impulses (CW 9ii ¶422–423, as quoted by the Society of Analytical Psychology).

The chapter ends with a distinction that matters for this entry's provenance. The shadow is always of the same sex as the subject and represents "first and foremost the personal unconscious", so it can usually be seen through with a little self-criticism. But when it appears as an archetype, Jung says, it is as hard to face as the anima and animus, and to look at absolute rather than relative evil is "a rare and shattering experience" (¶19). The personal shadow and the archetypal shadow are therefore two uses of one word, and later writers separate them.

The debate

Within analytical psychology the shadow is unusual in being the concept almost everyone accepts in its personal form, since it names an everyday observation about projection. The disagreement is about what, if anything, lies beneath it.

The classical reading keeps Jung's two levels. Edward Whitmont (1969) describes the shadow as the archetypal experience of "the other fellow", the urge for a scapegoat and the enemy, and insists that it is also the door to individuality: there is no access to the unconscious except through it. Daryl Sharp (1987) ties it to typology, so that the inferior function and the opposite attitude fall naturally into the shadow, and pairs it with the persona in a compensatory relation. Murray Stein (1998) calls it the unconscious side of the ego's own operations of intending, willing and defending, the backside of the ego, and notes that once faced it is often not as bad as imagined.

The evolutionary reading, in Anthony Stevens (2003), treats the shadow as an archetypal enemy complex built on an inherited disposition to divide the world into in-group and out-group, which culture then fills with its own villains. The trauma literature draws a different line. Donald Kalsched (1996) argues that the violent inner figures of early trauma should not be called shadow at all in Jung's sense of a coherent ego's dark alter-personality, because they belong to a more primitive level of ego development; he reserves "archetypal shadow" for them. The emergent and developmental school has little to say about the shadow as an archetype, because on its account the contents are entirely the products of a particular life, and nothing inherited needs to be posited to explain them.

Empirical status

None. No study has tested the shadow as a psychological construct, and no instrument measures it. The adjacent phenomenon, attributing to others what one denies in oneself, is studied in mainstream psychology as defensive projection. The best-known experimental account, by Newman, Duff and Baumeister (1997), explains it through thought suppression and accessibility rather than through any inherited figure, and it tests a mechanism, not Jung's ontology.

The popular practice of "shadow work" rests on Jung's clinical description and on the books that followed it, not on outcome research. The line runs from Robert Bly's *A Little Book on the Human Shadow* (1988) through the anthology *Meeting the Shadow* (Zweig and Abrams, 1991) and Robert Johnson's *Owning Your Own Shadow* (1991) to Keila Shaheen's self-published *Shadow Work Journal* (2021), whose 2023 success on TikTok and 2024 trade edition made the phrase a publishing category. None of these is a clinical trial, and publishers' claims of therapeutic effect are marketing.

Appearances

Jung's own examples were literary: Goethe's Mephistopheles, and the double in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Elixirs of the Devil* (1815). The nineteenth century is full of the figure. Adelbert von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl* (1814) sells his shadow and loses his place in the world. Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) is the case most often read through Jung, and Stevens uses it alongside Faust as a study of a one-sided intellectual possessed by what he refused. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) moves the shadow into the portrait. Ursula K. Le Guin wrote *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) as a deliberate working of the idea, with the hero's unnamed pursuer turning out to bear his own name, and explained the debt to Jung in her essay "The Child and the Shadow" (1975). Readers should note that in every one of these cases "shadow" is a reading, applied after the fact; only Le Guin wrote with the concept in hand.

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