Freud-Jung controversy: a failed intercultural dialogue

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1. Nietzsche's challenge

The role of the so-called oedipal crisis was always at the core of Freud's virulent struggles with his rebellious disciples. The question whether that crisis was universal or specific to "patriarchal" cultures was at the root of their specific dispute. The question is why the universality of that crisis was so important to Freud, and why Jung insisted that there were "matriarchal" societies with non-oedipal myths. It may be fruitful to examine how the dispute was related to the latter's opinions.

Both Freud and Jung were deeply influenced by Nietzsche. Both did not take for granted the traditions of their respective ethnic groups and their place in their respective multi-ethnic environment. Both rejected the religious beliefs and practices of their close ancestors, and tried to define their own personal identity by a radical re-interpretation of their own cultural heritages as well as those of others. Both were challenged by Nietzsche's battle cries against the dominant culture in Germany, and impressed by his use of myths in his genealogies. But their reactions were totally different.

Freud took Nietzsche's myths for what they were probably meant to be – argumentative (or persuasive) *fictions*; i.e., counter-myths to "canonized" European meta-narratives, in order to challenge dominant European values. Although he did not reject all the old narratives, he accepted some of Nietzsche's counter-claims, and explained the old myths as well as Nietzsche's genealogy of "slave morality" in a radically new way. He contributed his own discoveries (or inventions) – the Oedipal dramas - and created his own genealogies, which gave those of Nietzsche an ironic twist. Those genealogies – the "phylogensis" of civilization, religion and morality and the "ontogensis" of civilized individuals - had philosophical functions, over and above their roles in his professional thinking. One of them was to answer to the Nietzschean challenge as he - an atheist Viennese with a rather positivistic background and humanistic convictions, born in Moravia to a Jewish *maskil* father - had understood it. He accepted Nietzsche's claims about the genealogy of "slavish" morality, and his opinion about the "Super Ego": The Oedipal theory (together with the theory of the unconscious) was supposed to explain the never fully achieved process of its formation, its developmental function and its socio- and psychopathological side-effects. He disagreed with Nietzsche's attribution of the "slave morality" to a "Jewish" influence, yet he thought that the Jews shared some of those traits. The *theory* about the oedipal process and his oedipal *myths* (about the prehistoric roots of the oedipal fantasies (Freud 1914) and the "historic" pre-Jewish "patricide" roots of Jewish monotheism and moral consciousness (Freud 1939), were his answer to that challenge.

Jung adopted many of Nietzsche's counter-values, took his myths for reflection of historic and recurrent events and as a call for a future action. He was Christian, but rejected the "patriarchal" religion of his Protestant father, and wanted, like Nietzsche, to "re-include" the "Dionysian" element. He was Swiss, but identified himself as a "German", claimed to share with other "Indo-Europeans" an allegedly prehistoric but self-perpetuating "collective sub-conscious" heritage, different than those left by the ancestors of other "races".) He was close to the Pan-Germanist ideology (Noll, 1994), and was inspired as such by some ideals of *some* anti-positivist German philosophers and poets. The admired Nietzsche sounded to his camp as a louder voice in that chorus. They heard him announcing the German "destiny". Jung had, however, to reconcile his own religious views with Nietzsche's atheistic declarations, and to cope with the fact that the Germans as Nietzsche had described them did not seem to fit for the mission. His assumption that there were "matriarchal" societies that did not experience the oedipal complex was supposed to do the job, and help him to justify his revolt against his father.

2. Incommensurable worldviews

Freud studied philosophy from Brentano, who shared with his teachers in the faculties of science and medicine a very negative attitude to many of the ideals of the philosophers and ideologues that had inspired the Pan Germanists. Among those ideals was the "return" to "*the authentic*" *religion*, or its *Aufhebung* to a new conception: Freud was an evolutionist atheist, and interpreted such ideals as regression to infantile wishes and fantasies. Another ideal was the "restoration" of a mythical cosmic, cultural and personal well-balanced "*wholeness*", *free from the dualities, conflicts and struggles* that were allegedly introduced by alien or self-alienating one-sided agents, which were responsible for taking the part for the whole - and putting an end to that "intervention". Freud thought in terms of biological, social and psychic evolving systems, and believed that conflicts etc., which were inevitable, were due to the interplay between opposing forces within the system. He opposed to that ideal not only as a positivist but also as a Jew, for the "alien" intervention was often attributed to Judaic ideas, Jewish mentality or activities of Jews. The "wholeness" ideal was involved with the recognition of allegedly "alienated", "projected" or "suppressed" parts of the "whole" and their *re-integration* in one's personal, collective and spiritual identity. Freud agreed that people "repressed" and project to others parts of their mental life, but he thought that "repression" had a defensive function, and becoming aware of the "repressed" was necessary only when it interfered with the ability for self-control and disrupted the functioning of the system. The recognition of *non-intellectual* "sources of wisdom" that were beyond the reach of science or intellectual philosophy, and their the interpretation, especially that of dreams and myths, as transmitters of symbolic "messages" from some "absolute" and "whole" reality that is somehow psychic and physic, metaphysical and spiritual at once, was another "Germanic" ideal. Freud was a rationalist and his ideal was an intellectual self- control. He believed the function of dreams and myths was to contribute to the maintenance of social and personal systems despite inner conflicts, and assumed that their interpretation could reveal unconscious conflicts and not secret wisdom. Jung shared with other Pan-Gremanists the conviction that nations or "races" have their specific mentality and role, and the belief that the realization of the above-mentioned ideals was the "destiny" or "mission" of the Germans. He was perhaps more eager than many of them in his attempt

to combine the notion of a collective "mission" with the "Germanic" ideal of individualism, according to which *conscious* "self-realization" was not a right but a duty, as if the individual was "called" by the Gods to become by his own free will what he was pre-destined to be. Freud did not believe in "destiny" and pre-destined "missions" and "calls". He thought that the *feeling* of having them, which was connected with narcissistic aspiration and neurotic compensation, should not be confused with a *fact* or *duty*. His ability to make the Augustinian distinctions (which he had learned from Brentano) - between the thought and the asserted, the desired and the rationally willed, the intended and the done – and judge rationally enables one to be realistic despite his awareness to contrary wishes, emotions and ideals. That was the sign of mental maturity, and the ideal towards which psychoanalysis should strive.

The common denominators between the two psychiatrists were very few. They tried to collaborate because both were interested at that time in the interpretation of free associations and in myths, and both believed that their cooperation would advance their respective cause. But the only thing that that was common to their methods of interpretation was their circularity: They helped them to "discover" what they had already presupposed. Jung "discovered" the remote existence of "matriarchal" societies through the interpretation of "the great goddess" myths as an echo of the struggle between invading "patriarchal" tribes and earlier "matriarchal" tribes. He had no other evidence for their prehistoric existence. Freud "discovered" that the story of Abraham's sacrifice, for example, was oedipal thanks to the presuppositions that all the Isaacs and all the narrators wanted to kill the father, but associative defensive mechanisms could exchange the roles of the subject and the object. None of them could persuade the other.

3. Freud's response

Freud, like many other non-religious European Jews that were quite assimilated in the "general" environment, chose to "stay Jewish" nevertheless. He therefore had to define a sense of "being Jewish" that would be meaningful to him, make his own selection of Jewish and non-Jewish norms, values and ideals. He also had to find his own response to the anti-Jewish traditions and fashions in contemporary Europe, and among them the claim that a Jew, however assimilated (or even converted) "would always be a Jew". The same claim, though on the level of duties and not of alleged behavioral facts, was made by Jews who were more loyal to the traditional way of life. Freud's father was among them, and his personal father-son conflict, no less than that of Jung, was involved with disagreements about *culture*. His oedipal theory implied answers to all those issues.

The attribution of the European defects and troubles to a "Jewish" influence was traditionally fostered by the Church, but it was also frequent among modern intellectuals, who had invented a variety of secular versions or counter-versions of the Christian meta-narrative, and found accordingly new "Jewish" defects. Freud admitted that some dark aspects of the modern European culture were indeed common among Jews. He insisted, however, that they were universal rather than specifically Jewish traits. For that purpose he picked two targets that were central both in the traditional Christian theology and the secular modern anti-*Judaic* attacks. He did not think that the anti-Semitic attribution of *personal* character traits and behavior to *individual* Jews, or

conspiracies to groups of Jews, deserved anything beside the diagnosis of a projective xenophobia, and that was his attitude to Jung since the latter started to analyze the "Jewish psychology". He responded, however, to Jung's non-original identification of the "one-sided", "partial", "over-intellectual", "alien" or "alienated" factor with the Jew or with Jewish influence, by a theoretical dismissal of Jung's ideals. (He did not live to see Jung's forgetting his anti-Jewish attacks and returning to anti-Judaic insinuations.)

The first anti-Judaic target was the *authoritarian* ideal of blind obedience to *heteronymous* commandments. The alleged influence of the rabbinical-Judaic attitude to the allegedly Divine decrees of the Torah was held responsible not only for the refusal of some secular Jews to assimilate completely in the Christian environment. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche "found" it responsible, respectively, for the Pauline or the Augustinian contribution to the "distortion" of the "pre-Jewish" spirituality. Anti-democrats linked it with the "slavish" acceptance of the *vox populi* in European societies, and partisans of individual or racial "self-realization" blamed it for the conventionalist tendencies of the "philistine" German majority. The second target was the alleged Judaic *insensitivity to "Christian love" and "spirituality"*.

Freud agreed with Nietzsche that the "slavish" obedience and humility of the pious, Jew or "Jewish" non-Jew, was motivated by feelings of guilt and fear of punishment rather than pure respect of, and love for, a celestial Father. The Oedipal theory, which explained the dynamic tension between the former and the latter feelings, said, however, that such a conflict-ridden acceptance of rules and values, which is indeed explicit in the Jewish tradition, is common to members of any civilization. Any "super ego" was a social product, i.e., was an uncritically internalized "other-directed" morality. Its psychological genealogy was based on a defensive "identification" of the child with the loved-hated-feared father, who thereby transmitted his own ancestral heritage as well as conventional norms. He conceived it, however, as Nietzsche did, as an essential and necessary step in the development of *any* (male) child towards the next stage. In that (never completely achieved) stage the individual was supposed to be cognitively and emotionally capable of a critical attitude towards the blindly and rigidly adopted morality, and therefore have a certain measure of "inner-directness". The mature person was supposed to obtain his *autonomy,* but a more or less Kantian rational - "ego" – moral autonomy rather than selfless Pauline love, Humian selfish benevolence, or the "self-realization" of a "Self" whose "wholeness" was supposed to be "beyond good and evil".

Freud agreed with Nietzsche that the "slavish" morality was not the first stage. But he reduced the prior stage to the "narcissistic" and "object-love" of the still amoral child, who was indeed a "master", but only in his imagined motherly world... He agreed with Nietzsche that the original attitude to any desired "object" was an "un-Christian" instinctual, corporeal and egotistic lust rather than Platonic inborn longing for the sublime and spiritual curiosity or an *a priori* Kantian "rational respect". The point was, however, that the "erotic energy" which had to be first "detached" from the original motherly "object" and "transferred" to other "objects", "condensed" (with the "ego-drives") into search for knowledge and dedication to work or "sublimated" to "higher" forms of love for "higher" objects, *could not be so transformed unless the child had lived through the oedipal process*, with its "obscene"

wishes, anxiety, guilt and hatred, and its authoritarian and heteronymous results. His answer to the modern interpretation of the traditional Christian claim – the claim that the Jews "got stuck" with their acceptance of a "transcendent" authority and failed to developed towards the conception of religious and moral "immanence" – was that having developmental "fixations" was universal. The Jews ("who still felt unconscious guilt for the murder of the "original" Moses"(Freud,1939) had, however, accomplished the last stage of the Oedipal process, whereas Christian cultural heroes such as Jesus and Saint Augustine were "fixated" in its earlier stages. The believers in "immanence", the modern version of the idea of incorporation of the Divine, were "fixated" at, or "regressed" to, the stage where one still did understand that eating the clan's totem was a taboo… It was also a response to the supporters of the counter-narrative, like Jung, according to which the "authentic religion" was "distorted by a "Judaic" influence, who advocated a "return" to the Pre-Jewish "pagan roots" of Christianity (or Judaism) and "restoration" of the primordial "wholeness": That was a "regression" to even earlier fantasies.

The mature person would, thanks to his post-oedipal ability to transfer the desire-transformed-to-love from the "primordial", maternal, object to others, be capable of *responsibility*, *i.e.* readiness to work, care for dependent family members, solidarity with community members, concern for other people and good citizenship – and the required self-control. He would therefore realize – and that was the answer for the a non-traditional Jew, that being civilized meant obedience to universal and innate taboos of the human race, but also the freedom to abandon ancestral religions, select rationally their moral elements, and adapt only to the reasonable among the conventional norms and rules in one's environment. It would be a stage of *individualism* which would consist in a (partial) self-knowledge and (limited) self-determination by the "Ego", and not in the "realization" of his pre-destined "Self". Although the precarious *rationality* of the mature Freudian person would be limited to his conscious level, he should be able to avoid the confusion between a *feeling* of having an innate mission with a *fact* or a *duty*. It would enable him, finally, to come into terms with the fact that civilized persons would always live in tension with the world and carry the traces of past conflicts, while "wholeness", just like the "oceanic feeling" (Freud 1926) of "oneness" or the restoration of a mythic "pre-Jewish", "well-balanced" culture, whether Germanic and whether Hebraic, or establish a conflict-free post-capitalist society, was an illusion, a wish to return to the maternal uterus or to the paternal protecting paradise that existed only in the infantile wishes.

4. Jung's way

Freud's conception, which reflected in its peculiar way one of the versions of the secular Jewish adaptation of the Kantian conception of *Enlightenment*, was incompatible with Jung's "Germanic" ideals, and his personal revolt against specific conventional norms. He did not believe, moreover, that persons with no religious longing, but with oedipal guilt feelings and "slave mentality", could fulfill the "mission" of counter-cultural liberation. He mixed therefore the claim, which had already made by Schopenhauer, that "real" Christianity" was Indo-European, and Jesus was just one of many *avatars* - whereas the Pauline narrative, which had connected him to the notion of an Original Sin and the need for salvation through suffering, was a Judaic distortion - with the Nietzschean "anti-Judaic", i.e., anti

Augustinian, longing for Dionysus. He claimed (Macguire, 1974) to have discovered that the "original" Last Supper was a kind of a Dionysian feast of love and Joy, a merry event that was commemorated by the ancient *Agape* rites of the early Christian sects. At an early stage of his correspondence with Freud, when he was still unaware of Freud's attitude to Schopenhauer's speculation, Judaism, religion or marital commitments (and the Pan Germanist movement was still opened to "anti-Judaic" Jews), he suggested to mobilize the psychoanalytic movement to the campaign for "true" Christianity, and the struggle, with joyful feasts, for the cause of "free love". At that stage, when Freud was eager to "prove" that child-scarifying myths expressed the repressed fantasies of patricidal children, he seemed still to believe that he will welcome the "discovery" of non-Oedipal myths, (Macguire, 1974) and accept the thesis that they reflected developmental stages in "matriarchal" societies. It is not altogether clear whether at that stage he still assumed that Freud shared the Nietzschean opinion about a "race" free from hereditary guilt feelings that would be capable and ready to liberate the world from the allegedly Judaic mentality of the Augustinian legacy in the Protestant world. Freud's reaction to his presentation of the "discovery" of ancient societies with a "matriarchal" legacy as a scientific event does not tell whether Freud understood the subtext; but he recommended to stop sailing (with anthropological speculations) far away from the "scientific harbor" (of psychiatry). A little bit later, in his published presentation of the psychoanalytic theory, Jung (Jung explained that psychoanalysis was generalized by limiting the oedipal theory to "patriarchal" societies and replacement of the materialist hypothesis of two drives, "sex" and "ego", by the simpler assumption of underlying "pure energy" (which could be the basis for spiritual activation as well). The generalization and publication were done without Freud's knowledge or consent. Only the non-initiated could still think that he expected Freud to appreciate his contribution.

5. The failed dialogue

The conflict started when Freud rejected the suggestions, but it took Freud some time to realize that the "student" was not on a short juvenile excursion. Jung needed the formal interdiction to call his approach 'psychoanalysis', in order to understand that he could not continue to describe the disagreement as a matter of rigid "patriarchal" *pedagogy*. There were no more direct dialogues between the two, but the controversy went on. Jung began to claim, in the name of cultural relativism, that the Oedipal theory was a "Jewish theory": Its "Jewishness" would consist not only in the "fact" that the traumas with which it dealt were specific to Jews, but also and mainly in its acceptability: Such a theory was acceptable to people with a "Jewish mentality", but not to German minds. Among the "Jewish" mental traits that were insinuated thereby was the preoccupation with sex, with incestual and patricidal tendencies. In response to Freud's reaction – the(Freud 1914) "description" of an imaginary unique *prehistoric* trauma that was the basis for the allegedly *universal* incest and patricide taboos and oedipal fantasies, he elaborated his counter-theory of a *racial-specific* self-perpetuating "collective sub-conscious" that reenacted *psychologically* the archetypes of frequent experiences in the remote *history* of its common ancestors, for those experiences reflected processes of socialization that were specific to the social structure of their tribes. The claim, based on "evidence" from "Aryans" myths, that Germans had and Jews had not a "matriarchal" remote ancestry some helped him to give the blow: Psychoanalysis was acceptable to

Jews because oedipal deeds were frequent among their remote ancestors. Freud answered by the remark, in some of his public lectures, that the "sex drive" was actually Plato's Eros, and he latter unified the two drives in the "Eros". His reaction to Jung's insinuations was his analysis of anti-Semitism as the self-defensive projections of anxiety-ridden xenophobes. The analysis of the "ego-less" mass- psychology, he addition of the aggressive and self-destructive "death" drive, and the theory of the "return of the repressed" can be also read as ironic responses to Jung's claims. Jung in the meantime recommended to his German Jewish followers that had to immigrate to Palestine to recognize that "sub-consciously" they shared with Jews from other cultural backgrounds was stronger than their ties to the German culture. The myth that Freud developed in his last book, which "based" the alleged Jewish sense of guilt that was responsible for their "slave" morality on the murder of a *foreign revolutionary legislator*, (rather than a conventionalist father) was his last ironic reaction to Jung's insinuations. Jung retorted (Jung1929) by an enlarged comparison between "Jewish" and "German" psychology. In Jung's 1952 "Answer to Job", however, Freud was described as a contributor to Jung's theory by his studies of the "patriarchal" aspect of the "whole", and the "matriarchal" aspect, which was missing in Protestant theology but present in the Jewish Cabbala, had to do with the mediatory function of the female aspect of the Godhood. There were neither pro-German nor anti-Semitic remarks, but it was suggested that the Jews, together with the stuck "patriarchal" Protestants, join the "development of God himself" towards Jung's new version of revived Christianity. Was

The controversy was about incompatible worldviews, and incommensurable criteria for the legitimacy and validity of arguments and evidence. But the dialogue failed not only because each of the rivals was a prisoner of his own hermeneutic circle, and used analytical "methods" that presupposed the truth that he tried to prove. It failed because each of them needed the negation of the other's culture, and the negation of the other's attitude to that culture, in order to define his own and his group's identity. Both used the *ad hominem* tactic in order to dis-validate the other's theory – Jung by attacking Freud's ethnic group, and Freud by "diagnosing" the mental immaturity of Jung's ideological groups and their cultural heroes. Each pretended to know better than the other what the members of the other's group "really" thought, wished and felt, and had, moreover, a theory of mind that pretended to explain why they had those "distorted" ideas, and why they were not aware of having them. Both based their respective pretension on their ability to decipher unconscious thoughts.

Freud and Jung are famous – or notorious – for their erudite *systems*, but they were not the first to assume that people have non-conscious thoughts, wishes and feelings, nor the first to pretend to know those latent contents, explain why they were unconscious and how they were related to conscious thoughts and overt behavior, and understand the intended as well as unintended acts of other persons better than the agents themselves. Both followed Nietzsche, who competed with other interpreters of socio-cultural phenomena – such as Schelling, Schopenhauer, Comte, Hegel, Feuerbach or Marx – on a job that was formerly reserved to the earthly representatives of gods and demons. Both (and Nietzsche *via* Foucault) are followed today by socio-cultural theorists that take part in controversies between supporters of different cultures or sub-cultures, and campaigns for new attitudes to culture itself. Those who pretend, in the name

of "modernism" or humanism, to represent universal truths and values are accused with refusal to let the present "captured" birds fly away from the "cage" and speak for themselves. They are attacked by "pre-modern" fundamentalists as well as post-colonialists, neo-Marxists, anti-orientalists, feminists and other post-modern liberators of particular groups. Whatever they say, their critics "know" that unconsciously they represent the perspectives, ideas and interests of the "dominant group" to which they belong, or by which they are still influenced. Many of the universalists tend, indeed, to ignore opinions that are expressed in the name of "non-dominant" groups, and pretend to know that what is wrong with the "primitive", "immature" or "distorted", minds that hold them. Both sides pretend to know not only that the opponents are wrong, but also why they are wrong. i.e., what is wrong with their minds. That "knowledge" does not allow any fruitful dialogue.

The Freud-Jung controversy is typical of many conflicts between groups also for other reasons. The disagreements about cultural interpretations and values and the evaluation of culture itself are also typical to such conflicts. Such conflicts are often involved with a self-identity that requires the negation of the identity that is attributed to the other. They are often involved with confusion between the culture that is attributed to the other group and the personal position of the individual that is considered its member. They become malignant when at least one side demands the other's conversion to its "religion", recognition of its "truths", awareness of its "sins" and "repentance". They become lethal when even "converted" individuals are suspected for unconscious loyalty to the ancestral "mentality". The dialogue between a Jew with Freud's convictions and a German with Jung's convictions was perhaps pointless; and so would be any dialogue between a Jew with a "Jewish" version of the Jungian ideology and a German with those of Freud's: Their worldviews are incommensurable, and their similar demands follow from incompatible needs. But that does not mean that Germans and Jews (and *mutatis mutandi* Bosnian and Serbs, Israelis and Palestinians, Sunnis and Shites etc.) cannot have fruitful dialogues, for there are many Jews and many Germans, with a great variety of conceptions of their own and the others' identities and of attitudes, more modest claims to knowledge and less urgent need for the others' self-denying conversion.

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