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Childhood and Youth: Taking Up the Problem of the Father

Jung's own account of how he arrived at the epistemological views which were to characterize his psychology is set down in two early chapters of his autobiographical memoirs, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. He grew up in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as a country parson's son in small parishes along the Rhine near Basel. Writing as a very old man, Jung's memory was flooded with the images of his early childhood. His experience of that world was of Sunday sermons in which his father spoke of the "good" God, "praising God's love for man and exhorting man to love God in return." Yet, he remembered, no one spoke of the unrest in his parents' marriage, and the fact that they now slept in separate bedrooms. At lunch on Thursdays in the home of his uncle, pastor of St. Alban's in Basel, there was sophisticated talk about various points of religion. But Jung dared not bring up the subject of the powerful dreams which had troubled him since earliest childhood, or the worrying episode of the dead man washed up by a flood on the Rhine. On the day of his first communion he wore a new black suit and a new black felt hat, and all the members of the congregation were suitably solemn and correct. "My father, too," wrote Jung, "seemed to be chiefly concerned with going through it all according to rule, and it was part of this rule that the appropriate words were read or spoken with emphasis...[but] I saw no sadness and no joy...I knew that God could do stupendous things to me, things of fire and unearthly light; but this ceremony contained no trace of God—not for me, at any rate."

Jung suffered as a child from the Pharaesic, stultified "religion by the rules" that German-speaking Protestantism had become in those years. But it was his father whom he saw as the chief victim of a professionalized religious tradition which he could not connect to meaningful, living experience. His "dear and generous father"

became ever more moody and irritable. Jung tried to talk with him about problems of faith but these talks were always failures. Jung came to understand years later that "my poor father did not dare to think, because he was consumed by doubts." He counseled his son on no account to opt for a religious profession, but if on the other hand he studied medicine he "should in Heaven's name not become a materialist." At last the abdominal symptoms of which his father had hypochondriacally complained for years became clearly worse and he died early in 1896, during Jung's first year of medical studies at the University of Basel.¹

How much the story of his father's fate actually became connected in the mind of the young student Jung with his own vocational choice we can of course never know. In the last years of his life Jung in any case chose to devote nearly eighty-five pages of his memories to the theme of his childhood religious dilemmas, to his philosophical readings as a young student, and to their connection with his experience of his father. He was able to write only four of the twelve chapters of the book from his own hand, the rest being written from interviews and previous material by Aniela Jaffé. But of those four chapters, two were devoted to his father and to religion. In an earlier letter he had written to Pastor Walter Bernet that "it was the tragedy of my youth to see my father cracking up before my eyes on the problem of his faith and dying an early death."² I believe that Jung quite literally took on as his own the unsolved problem of inner belief of his father and made the *reality of the psyche* the motive of his life.³

Jung's autobiographical memoirs are very late. Their referential accuracy with regard to some details cannot be guaranteed, but they are important just because they serve as Jung's own retrospective view of the significant features of his early history. The publication of the Zofingia Lectures has however provided a direct bridge from those late memories of childhood to Jung's actual theoretical formulations as a young man. We can now follow the entire course of Jung's development, from the youth who sought answers in the libraries of his father and his father's friends, to the student who lectured on philosophy to his comrades, to the physician who invented a terminology of his own to express what he understood of human experience. What the Zofingia Lectures reveal is a thoroughgoing consistency of philosophical attitude. Jung's earliest convictions were also his last ones.

The first of these student lectures ("The Border Zones of Exact Science," 1896) is a passionate exhortation against the claims of

mechanistic science to exhaust the limits of reality and a plea in favor of a vitalistic view. Life, thought Jung, cannot possibly spring from dead matter; "the first cell must have come about through contact with pre-existent life."⁴ Chapters 4 and 5 of Part III of this essay have to do with the relationship between Jung and vitalism. This lecture is considered in the context of the discussion in those chapters (see esp. p. 251), and will be passed over with this brief mention for the time being.

In the second lecture ("Some Thoughts on Psychology," 1897), Jung continues his arguments for a non-mechanistic world view, plunging directly into the grand philosophical questions of the origin of life and the origin of consciousness. The focus of his attack is the so-called empiricism of modern science, most especially that of the physiologist Du Bois-Reymond.

Four famous German physiologists, Carl Ludwig, Hermann von Helmholtz, Emil Du Bois-Reymond, and Ernst Brücke (the so-called Berlin group because of alliances of friendship formed during their student days at mid-century), together with the French Claude Bernard, practically created the modern science of physiology. As physiological reductionists they held to a strict Darwinian hypothesis and struggled to establish a non-vitalistic interpretation of organic nature in the university system.⁵

In a famous and often cited speech to the forty-fifth assembly of German Naturalists and Physicians in Leipzig in 1872, Du Bois-Reymond had attempted to set the limits of knowledge, and he distinguished between the things that we do not now know (*ignoramus*) and things that we will never be able to know (*ignorabimus*). What we *can* know is everything which has to do with matter in movement; we must only assume that matter does exist and that a perceiving mind also exists. What we *cannot* know is what matter is in itself and what mind is in itself:

Despite all the discoveries of science, man has made no more significant progress in understanding the derivation of psychic processes from their material conditions than he has made in understanding force and matter.⁶

This speech gained a tremendous currency within the intellectual class in Europe. Over two thousand people were present at its first reading and a quarter century later it was still being mentioned. Both those in favor of religion and those against religion found it objectionable. Theologians might object to the premise that we can know only about matter. But confirmed materialistic monists like

Ernst Haeckel objected too. Haeckel, who thought he knew that mind is ultimately only a form of matter, reproached Du Bois-Reymond for leaving a door open to a "defence by all representatives of the mythological view of the world... [who] extolled it as a refutation of 'monistic dogma.'" Du Bois' view was antiquated. "For my part," wrote Haeckel, "the fact of consciousness and the relation of consciousness to the brain are to us not less, but neither are they more puzzling than the fact of gravitation, than the connection between matter and energy."⁷

For Jung, Du Bois-Reymond was one of the "esteemed scientists" who had closed the door to knowledge of the spirit. His entire lecture is a refutation of the type of authority and the evidence of Du Bois and his ilk. In the opening paragraph he sets forth his challenge:

No doubt people will call it an act of mad adventurism to abandon the safe path laid out for us by esteemed science and accredited philosophy, to make our own independent raids into the realm of the unfathomable, chase the shadows of the night and knock on doors which Du Bois-Reymond had locked forever with his little key that says "Ignorabimus." People will accuse us of fancifulness and superstition... Those who will do this are the same people who fill every Sunday of their lives chockful of edifying words, deeds, and thoughts, but on weekdays parade around with a sign that says, "We will never know"... Despite all this, and despite the danger of arousing the keenest displeasure, I have chosen to speak on this theme before all others.⁸

The speech reveals with all possible clarity exactly what Jung was aiming at; the object of his attack is scientific positivism of the end of the nineteenth century, together with the pious anti-intellectualism of the Sunday morning church-goer. "They will claim that ours is a fruitless and a hopeless enterprise, a self-tormenting brooding on the absurd," says Jung. He apparently intends to offer something with which to combat both scientific and religious doubt.

The further importance of these lines is that they show us Jung at a psychologically crucial period of his development—a year after his father's death, in the heroic mode of the young man seeking his future, beginning to experience his strength and laying down the ground-motives of his future life's achievement. It is a period of what recent psychological terminology would call "grandiose narcissism."⁹ The connection of the motives here declared to the problematic of Jung's father, as Jung himself saw it, is unmistakable.

What Jung proposes in his lecture is that psychology itself has its own kind of empiricism—that there are factual data with which the skeptical authority of the sciences can be positively countermanded, and which support the first principle of *rational* psychology, namely the proposition that “the soul is an intelligence independent of space and time.”¹⁰ The evidence which Jung adduces is that of spiritualism (he mentions the famous names of Carl du Prel, Johann Karl Friedrich Zöllner and Sir William Crookes), of hypnotism, and of telepathic phenomena. It is possible in fact, thinks Jung, to prove the existence of spiritual or psychic phenomena which are independent of the space-time contingencies of material phenomena. As allies in his cause he cites David Strauss’s book on Justinus Kerner and the Seeress of Prevorst, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Immanuel Kant.

Kant’s essay, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* (1766), may well be taken as the motto for this period in Jung’s life.¹¹ He quotes from it seven times in the course of his lecture. *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* is itself an interesting document of a transitional period in Kant’s own life, written at a time when Kant was beginning to move away from rational views of the possibility of metaphysics in the direction of a more critical assessment. The essay records both intense interest and intense skepticism concerning the idea of a psyche independent of space and time.

The occasion of the book is well known. In a letter to Fräulein Charlotte von Knoblauch, Kant reports receiving a letter from a friend who had personally verified the amazing telepathic experience of Emmanuel Swedenborg in Gothenburg. Just arrived from England in 1759, Swedenborg had been invited for dinner in the home of friends. He soon became pale and alarmed, went outside, came back and announced to the party that a great fire had broken out in Stockholm. Over the next hours he told the assemblage just how the fire was progressing, whose houses were destroyed. Then at eight o’clock he said with great relief that the fire was extinguished, just three doors from his own house. Two days later, with the arrival of couriers from Stockholm, the entire report was confirmed in every detail.¹² Kant was gripped by this report. He went to the trouble and expense of obtaining Swedenborg’s eight-volume *Arcana Coelestia* (London, 1749–56), studied it carefully, and wrote to the great Swedenborg. He awaited the reply with anticipation, but received none. Swedenborg was at that time at the pinnacle of his career, rich and world-famous. Kant was an exceedingly poor docent at a provincial university. *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* is the work which resulted from Kant’s encounter with Swedenborg. It intersperses

eager consideration of a pre-substisting immaterial world of spiritual beings entirely independent of material substances "and capable of animating the dead matter of the material world"¹³ with bitterest irony, so that one is never quite sure which side of the issue Kant endorses:

How could I blame a reader who instead of regarding the spirit seers as half citizens of another world, merely considers them without further ado as candidates for the nearest lunatic asylum?

And again:

The soul must be regarded, even in this life, as linked to two different realms simultaneously. . . . As soon as the union with the body ceases, the soul continues to remain in communion with the spiritual world. . . . It becomes more and more difficult for me to express myself in the language of careful reasoning. But then why shouldn't I be permitted to write in an academic style which is far more decisive and which allows the author and the reader to dispense with the painful task of thinking, a task which in the long run can only lead to frustration (and disappointment)?¹⁴

The *Spirit Seer* is still a rather marvelous book to read. In it one can see Kant involved in what today might be termed a profound exercise in self-analysis, struggling to emerge from rational philosophy and deeply caught in the reality of his own experience: "I confess that I, too, am inclined to affirm the existence of immaterial beings in the universe and to include my soul in the class of such beings."¹⁵ Yet Kant understands that it is not reason, as such, which provides the basis for that belief, but "the specific bent of the human mind" which tends to decide the case in a manner which is "prejudiced beforehand":

The scale of reason is not quite as impartial as we might think: the lever carrying the inscription "Future Hopes" has mechanical advantage; it always succeeds in outweighing, even with the smallest weights on its side, the speculations of far greater weight placed in the opposite tray.¹⁶

The historian of philosophy may discern in the *Spirit Seer* the seeds of Kant's mature critical philosophy which would reach fruition only fifteen years later. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* the role of reason in the human mind would receive a thoroughgoing re-evalu-

ation. Yet Kant's roots were in Leibniz's doctrine of the supremacy of rational reason. In this small polemical essay Kant feels those roots as still very powerful.¹⁷

Jung, however, as a young man of twenty-two, completely passed over the evidence of doubt and struggle in the *Spirit Seer*. He quotes only the passages which seem to be evidential in favor of spirits, and in favor of an immaterial soul.¹⁸ His mood is missionary. What Jung got from Kant at this stage of his life was surely a) Kant's increasing interest in an empirical standpoint and b) Kant's willingness at least to consider that inner, psychic experience might be a part of reality. The ringing tones of Jung's heroic conclusion reflect these motifs:

We must combat crass sensualism with the weapons of certain transcendental truths. But whence are we to derive these truths? From religion? What use is all the idealism in the world? *Deeds* are needed to wake up religion, miracles are needed, and men endowed with miraculous powers. Prophets, men sent by God! Religions are created by men who have demonstrated with deeds the reality of mystery and the "extrasensory realm."¹⁹

From the light of this early student lecture the whole of Jung's future theory of knowledge and, actually, the basis of his unique psychological point of view, becomes clear. As he matured Jung soon came away from the idea that hypnotism, telepathy, or spiritualism might match the kind of science that Ludwig and Du Bois-Reymond were doing in the physiology he so much despised. What remained for him however was the emphasis on *experience*. We may summarize those elements of Jung's epistemology which have already become visible. 1) The primary orientation of Jung's career will have to do with experience of a religious nature. What this means can probably best be indicated by referring to the original, etymological sense of the term, which means to bind back (into one's ethic or inner faith). On a personal level the motivation of that career is connected back to Jung's childhood and to his relationship with his father. 2) No rational or formulaic expression, that is, no dogmatic formula, will suffice to achieve the goal of a religious point of view. 3) Real knowledge is based on real experience, and that means experience in which the individual is moved by numinously felt inner feelings which convince him/her of the reality of the mental/psychic/spiritual sphere.

One question remains unanswered in the above summary. What is the *reason* for Jung's religious point of view? To say that it stems from the crisis of faith which Jung observed in his pastor-father, and from the fact that he could then never fully assume his place in the world as a man among men is to say no less than the truth which the evidence supports. But this is a reduction to material causes which cannot, I believe, adequately explain the mountain of impassioned creative work which Jung produced over the next sixty years.

A year following his lecture on psychology, in the third of his lectures to the Zofingia Society, Jung did make a statement about the broader, underlying basis for his emphasis on knowledge as personal experience. This statement is extremely important, for Jung's work was in later years subjected to the ministrations of philosophers, theologians, and psychologists of various breeds who thought they saw in Jung everything from a positivist to a man caught in obscurantist mystical twaddle:

It is the gratification of two *a priori* requirements—the categorical imperative and the category of causality—that, under certain circumstances, makes a person happy and gives him a feeling of contentment which no external factor can confer. The frail and transitory nature of all the external factors in human life is so apparent that there is no need to discuss it. A man can survive all his friends and relatives, bury what he loves most and lead a lonely existence as a stranger in an alien time; but he cannot survive himself and the inner factors of his life, for they are his very self, and thus are inalienable. . . . Do philosophy and pure science really represent an intellectual luxury in the transcendental sense, and can metaphysical reality be attributed to the as yet ideal goal of gratifying the need to think in causal terms? Radical subjectivists, i.e. those who regard the world as illusion, and multiplicity as a show of flittering nothingness, deny any objectivity of purpose. That is, they do not acknowledge the existence of any teleology external to man, and instead claim that we ourselves have projected onto the world, out of our own heads, the idea of the purposefulness of nature. At least the epigones of Kant have this much in common with the materialists. . . . It means despair to any healthy person of heart and sensibility. The only true basis for philosophy is what we experience of ourselves and, through ourselves, of the world around us.²⁰

Jung inquires in this lecture whether a philosophical standpoint, which is to say an attitude based on the factors of mental life, has not become superfluous in the modern world of scientific and exteriorized facts. His answer is no, for the *objective needs* of the human person cannot be satisfied in this way. It is important to examine this passage, for it contains the first intimations of Jung's later doctrine of the *self*. The passage also reveals the final use to which Jung will in future years direct his doctrine of knowledge through experience; through acknowledgment and acceptance of the realities of personal experience we come at last to true self-knowledge and to the transcendent center of the personality, to the self. Jung's doctrine is not hedonistic, and not pragmatic.²¹ It is inspired by Kant's conviction that through our experience of innate moral knowledge we come as close as is humanly possible to knowledge of reality in itself.²²

While in his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant had reduced the role of reason to a merely *regulative* function, aiding the judging mind by providing transcendental principles that enable us to unify the knowledge gained by the understanding, in his moral essays that same reason finds its authority—its proper *constitutive* function—as determiner of the moral law and guide to action in the world. In this role as moral arbiter reason is independent of the interlocking relationships between knower and thing known which necessarily determine our knowledge of phenomena. The will is free.²³

The will must indeed be free if we are even to speak of the possibility of moral action, or to think of ourselves (of human beings) as intrinsically valuable. Being free means having choices: to go to war or not to go to war, given a certain level of provocation. To buy this piece of goods or not to buy it, given that there are a number of ways in which the money can be used. Of course, the individual's sense of being a free agent does not rest on any metaphysical certainty, either a *posteriori*, by way of experience, or as a result of purely logical analysis. There are no guarantees, certainties coming from outside ourselves, which would ensure our status as free. If there were, we would by that very certainty be robbed of the dignity and the reality of our freedom.²⁴ But we do experience ourselves as free.

The fact is, in each instance where a moral decision must be made and a course of action taken, we do know what it is that we *ought* to do. There is something in us (pure practical reason) which knows, a *priori*—before the fact of outer experience—what action would express the value of the human person. The formal law expressing this value is that one should “act only according to that

maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (*Foundations*, p. 39; Akademie Edition 421). The experience of this inner moral knowledge, of the "categorical imperative," as Kant called it, over against such other facts of our experience as are determined by interactions with the environment—desire, jealousy, anger, hunger, disgust, impulses of all kinds—means that we are not entirely of a piece with the world in which we live. There must be something in us, namely the moral faculty, which is different in kind from the material world.²⁵

Of course we cannot always act in accordance with our moral knowledge. We are so closely bound to ourselves as phenomenal beings in a merely phenomenal world that we scarcely approximate the truth we actually know. But if we can conceive of the truth we must also be able to achieve it, if not in this life then in an eternal realm. The human being must be thought of as immortal. And if there is a non-material, moral first principle in us, there must also be a *summum bonum*, a Highest Good, if we are to make sense of our experience. Kant did not however intend a metaphysical argument for God. He disdained all knowledge not based on experience and he had shown in the first *Critique* that there is no knowledge of what is beyond our experience. We do not even need to consciously believe in God or immortality. But in the moment when we act in accordance with the inner moral imperative we implicitly acknowledge a belief in the ultimate reality of that moral principle. The only theology was therefore moral theology, for Kant. It was based on the individual's experience of an inner center of consciousness and will which is not identical with, or bound to, outer experience.²⁶ The phrases of Kant's moral convictions ring through Jung's student lectures. They will be heard throughout his entire career in the form of Jung's emphasis on the authority of individual experience, and they find their final formulation in his doctrine of the self.²⁷

With this background on the Kantian context in mind, as well as a forward glimpse of the way in which Kant would appear in Jung's later theory, we may now return to the crucially important passage from Jung's student lecture on "Speculative Inquiry." We are looking not only at the central source reference of Jung's doctrine of the self, but at an epistemological claim for *experience* which has not been well understood by students of Jung. Much confusion has arisen in the attempt (as we shall see in later texts) to understand Jung's description of himself as an empiricist and at the same time his insistence on the ultimate reality of psychic life. We are helped by the realization that Jung adopted a stance which was deeply

influenced by his reading of Kant. In his ethical treatises Kant proposed a concept of experience as a non-empirical, a priori organizing factor. The experience of moral knowledge was for Kant the central fact of life.

Jung later on adapted late nineteenth-century versions of Kant's first *Critique* to the doctrine of moral experience expressed in the ethical works, thus conflating what Kant had most carefully differentiated, namely moral and phenomenal knowledge. But in Kant's ethical writings we see Jung's own most basic philosophical orientation.

After saying that it is after all the validation of the categorical imperative (the conviction of inner freedom and the capacity to make moral choices) and the category of causality that make life seem worthwhile Jung goes on to deny the subjectivist epistemology of some Kantian followers who claim that such ideas are mere human illusion, even that the empirical world itself is so far unknown that we see it only as a projection of internal states of mind.²⁸ Inductive science *together* with religious convictions stand or fall on the question of the reliability of "what we experience."²⁹ This experience is not primarily the experience of objects in the empirical world. It is an experience of internal states.

Secondly, the kind of happiness which results from adherence to a priori factors in life is for Kant, as for Jung, not of the "hypothetical" kind which says, If I do thus and so I will obtain that pleasure or that advantage. It is rather of a kind which results as an accident of moral action. Certainly it is a fact, said Kant, that fulfillment of duty "instills a feeling of pleasure or satisfaction."³⁰ One cannot really conceive how this is possible. All we know is that what we do "is valid for us not because it interests us...but that it interests us because it is valid for us." The happiness that results from the experience of the inner moral law has more to do with the realization that the human being is of immense value. In his famous conclusion to the second *Critique* Kant spoke of this:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing awe and admiration the more frequently and continuously reflection is occupied with them; the starry heaven above me and the moral law within me.... The first... expands the connection in which I find myself into the incalculable vastness of worlds upon worlds, of systems within systems over endless ages.... The second starts from my invisible self, from my personality, and depicts me as in a world possessing true infinitude.... [It] raises my value infinitely, as an *intelligence*,

through my personality . . . [and] is not restricted to the conditions and limits of this life, but radiates into the infinite.³¹

True happiness, then, for both Kant and Jung, is connected with "the inalienable inner factors of a man's life which are his very self" (word order transformed). It has to do with self-knowledge and with the capacity to feel that the human person has permanent, even universal value. Jung once remarked many years later that "man is worth the pains he takes with himself, for he has something in his soul that can grow."³² As a very young man Jung was already convinced that we must take our longings for the final value of the human person entirely seriously.

I propose that the evidence reveals, and will continue to show in the texts of his later years, that Jung's emphasis on the primacy of inner experience grows from a philosophical root that values moral feeling. His first hero of the mind was surely Kant. Kant was soon replaced by Schopenhauer and by Eduard von Hartmann, and then, as Jung matured, by any of a myriad of scholars and philosophers, mystics and alchemical physicians who offered support for his point of view.

Of course these student lectures are not in themselves the stuff of Jung's later fame nor the cause for his thousands of devoted followers. The lectures are the eager reflections of a young medical student, seeking to understand his own heart and his own purpose in life. The thoughts they contain were later forgotten for a number of years during which Jung became a professional psychiatrist and earned a reputation with his work on hysteria, on schizophrenia, on the unconscious complexes revealed in association experiments, and as a close associate and protégé of Sigmund Freud. But about the time that Freud's and Jung's confidence in each other began to fade, the ideas of the early lectures began to re-emerge as the structural elements of Jung's own psychology. One way of 'reading' Jung's psychology is to see it as an eminently practical instruction manual with directions on how to get there from here—"there" being a state of mind in which one lives with hope and a conviction that one's own life process is of ultimate value, and "here" being a state of mind in which skepticism prevails, along with a sense that one's own life is neither meant nor needed. It is on account of the quality of Jung's work as a manual of instruction that he gained his followers.