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Unresolved Questions in the Freud/Jung Debate. On Psychosis, Sexual Identity and Religion

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Patrick Vandermeersch
Unresolved Questions in the Freud/Jung Debate
On Psychosis, Sexual Identity and Religion

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Due to the fact that the phenomenon of religion has been set aside as being something 'different', a number of key problems within psychoanalysis have been unwittingly lost from sight. This is especially true for the central theme of the Freud-Jung debate: the experience of reality. The experience of reality in psychosis is different from that in religion. Both of these differ still from the way in which one is 'really' affected by fantasy, daydreaming, a fairy tale, passionate love or bodily symptoms diagnosed as non-existent. Within this problematic of the experience of reality, one question should definitely not be overlooked: what is the specific reality experience of transference?

This work resumes the theoretical debate between Freud and Jung with the intention of presenting the connections - connections which have been lost along the way - between the problematics of identity, reality/-psychosis and religion in their full complexity as well as their full acuity.

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Preface

Surely, no one would consider challenging the statement that the collaboration between Freud and Jung constituted an important chapter in the history of psychoanalysis. The manner in which their relationship developed to the point of an eventual rupture has often been the subject of research. These two pioneers in the discovery of the unconscious apparently had to experience in person the significance of a transference relationship. Contradictory mutual expectations, the ambivalence of love and hate, the entanglement of admiration and envy, the impossibility of rational self-control and each one's blindness for his own unconscious motives ... all of these have been elaborately described. Often, this was undertaken out of a sense of curiosity, although sometimes it was done in order to critically approach that personal experience on the basis of which the psychoanalytical knowing and not-knowing were first put into words.

The theoretical side of their debate, however, was far less frequently the subject of research. Would it be worthwhile to reconsider these theoretical discussions? What was current then now seems hopelessly dated. Moreover, the fact that both authors combined various types of problematics without maintaining the clear-cut distinctions which we employ to delineate our thinking, highly disturbs us. Within the same breath, Freud and Jung made use of the yet to be clarified notion of schizophrenia, and they linked it with problems such as individual identity, relation to reality and religion. In their search, all themes seemed to be mingled. Moreover, they made use of concepts which had not yet received their final definition. At that time, Freud had not developed his theory of narcissism and Jung had not mentioned the archetypes. However, was not religion, that special domain which had always intrigued psychoanalysis while always clearly remaining a separate domain, the primary topic of their discussions?

Here lies the problem. Due to the fact that the phenomenon of religion had been set aside as being something 'different', a number of key problems within psychoanalysis had been unwittingly lost from sight. The term 'reality principle', for example, has become a common expression but who recalls that Freud coined it because he was unable to clearly define the distinction between delusion, dream, daydream, fantasy and religious representation? The related term 'projection' is in an even sorer state. In line with Anna Freud, the concept is nowadays usually considered as a defense mechanism whereas this was definitely not the case for Freud himself. The topic apparently became too complex for Freud when projection seemed to be linked to a distinct libidinous organization which was related to something along the lines of homosexuality (though not homosexuality in the 'real' sense). Freud hesitated to publish his meta-

psychological study on the problematic and even ended up throwing his manuscript away.

This is one of the forgotten problematics which are of the utmost importance for understanding both the psychoanalytical practice and the psychology of religion. Along with the deeply rooted fear of homosexuality, which never ceased to amaze Freud, the influence of the cultural school and of sociology have ensured that much has been written concerning sexual identities. Much less was published, however, with regard to the link with transference love and with regard to the way which a patient ultimately acknowledges 'reality' and 'unreality' within a love relationship. Psychoanalysis would benefit if the investigation into this problematic was resumed.

The same is true for the psychology of religion. It does not suffice to merely notice the resemblance between the representations of a delusion, a fairy tale, a dream, a myth and the symbolism of a recognized religion. Let us take Jung's example: of course, it is remarkable that a schizophrenic patient perceives the phallus of the sun when staring at the sky, while the same representation is found in the initiation rite of a mystery cult. Yet nothing much can be asserted by this. The reality experience of people differs depending on whether they dream, listen to fairy tales, fall into daydreaming, recognize a religious reality or hallucinate. The psychotic who hears voices knows perfectly well that his therapist does not hear them. This, however, does not render the voices less real. 'They are more real than real', a patient once said. The religious person knows just as well that the truth of the narrative which he is meditating is not the truth of the physical event. The experience of reality in psychosis is different from that in religion. Both of these differ still from the way in which one is 'really' affected by fantasy, daydreaming, a fairy tale, passionate love or bodily symptoms diagnosed as non-existent. Within this problematic of the experience of reality, one question should definitely not be overlooked: what is the specific reality experience of transference?

In each of these cases, unconscious phantasms and also sexuality with its typical polymorphy are at stake. Yet each time, the phantasms are 'real' in a different way. Moreover, there might be a connection between those different forms of reality experience and the different forms and layers of the human experience which we for convenience's sake, call 'sexuality'.

This problematic of the reality experience, however, disappears when sexual identity, the reality test and the religious problematic are treated separately as if, from the beginning, they led an isolated existence which only secondarily and in certain cases could become interconnected. In fact, isolating religion as a specific field is a violent act which raises more problems than it solves. This is not only true for the problematic of the reality experience. The entanglement of love and hate - with regard to which Freud ultimately covered up his ignorance when he appealed to the mythic Eros-Thanatos dual unity - is a very important issue for understanding both the psychoanalytical practice and the psychology of

religion. This problematic as well was abandoned. Are we not becoming more and more aware of the fact that the depth of religious experience harbors violence and that religion, to the degree that it preaches love, does not bring this love about by banning violence but rather, by bending violence into something new?

I believe that the interwovenness of religion with other aspects of the human experience is so fundamental that the basis itself of the psychoanalytical experience is mutilated if one accepts the premise that religion is a separate domain. The first chapter of the present work defends this position and deals exclusively with religion. It also sketches the broader perspective within which the book as a whole was written. Nevertheless, the scope of the actual project remains somewhat more limited. It intends to follow the theoretical discussion between Freud and Jung as systematically and as accurately as possible and to indicate in detail which problems remained unresolved.

The groundwork for this book was laid more than 15 years ago, in my doctoral dissertation which was composed under the guidance of Prof. Dr. A. Vergote. I sincerely wish to thank him for the way in which he taught me, and many others, to link psychoanalysis to a philosophical and religious-psychological reflection.

Besides the experiences of my own psychoanalytical practice, many of my students helped me develop my thinking. The close collaboration with my attentive translators, Vincent Sansone en Anne-Marie Marivoet, has shown me the degree of precision to which the transition from one language to another can lead. Matthias Vienne and Bart Pattyn were most helpful with a great deal of practical work. I would also like to express my gratitude to the personnel of the Jung Institute and of the *Wissenschaftshistorische Sammlungen* of the ETH in Zurich, and especially to Dr. Lorenz Jung for his permission to use the Jung Archives.