

Philosophical Influences on Freud and Jung

Virtually no great thinker has ever spontaneously produced an innovative theory or system of thought without an influence from previous or contemporary great minds. Innovators transform and synthesize their ideas using the foundation of the accumulated wisdom of the ages.

Innovators in the field of psychology are no exception. Many of the fundamental precepts of the field are predicated on metaphysical and epistemological doctrines that have formed gradually and been expanded upon for millennia. The science of psychology can be thought of as applied metaphysics in many respects. It is a discipline grounded in behavioral dynamics and relational interactions tenets elaborated on at an archetypal or theoretical level.

Two prominent psychologists of the early 20th century, Freud and Jung, owe a tremendous amount of their “unique” doctrines and perspectives on human psychology to the works of the numerous salient minds that preceded them. Both men grew up and were educated during a period when western speculative philosophy reached its culmination in many respects.

Fundamental ideas stemming from Leibniz, Spinoza, Hegel, and Nietzsche (to name a few) played a significant role in the development of Freud’s and Jung’s respective ideologies and subsequent psychological perspectives. The intent of this short commentary is to show the manner in which philosophical thinkers and their ideas inspired these two men. In particular, it highlights the Platonic and Schopenhauerian influences on Freud’s ideas and that of Kant on the work of Jung.

Plato’s metaphysics can be seen in the writings of almost every major genius in many fields of study over the last two and a half thousand years; this is certainly true of Freud. For

instance, the tripartite model made up of the id, the ego, and the super ego illustrates his account of the unconscious, multiple facets of consciousness, and the application of these concepts in psychoanalytic therapy. This model demonstrates many similarities with the accounts of the mind offered to us in Plato's Republic.

Peter Gay (1988) states that "Plato had envisioned the soul as two spirited winged horses, one noble and beautiful, the other coarse and insolent, pulling in divergent directions and virtually beyond their charioteer's control". This metaphor reflects in many ways the struggle between that aspect of the super ego (associated with idealistic tendencies) and the unconscious primal urges of the id.

Freud references Plato's Symposium to illustrate Eros, which poetically illustrates our innate desire to fulfill a sense of separation from the divine through love. He, of course, interprets Plato's dialogues in the Symposium as a need for the individual to mitigate sexual tension coming through and out of the unconscious id.

Similarly, there is no doubt in the minds of those familiar with the main works of Arthur Schopenhauer, especially "The World as Will and Representation", that Freud's ideas mirror some of the overall underlying concepts associated with and conclusions drawn from that doctrine.

Schopenhauer painted a very somber picture of life and the world. Generally speaking, his philosophy expresses a darker (shadow) side of humanity. According to him, the Will (the non-anthropomorphic God) is the ultimate source of consciousness, and it is fundamentally irrational. The timeless and imperishable nature of Divine Will manifests in spatial/temporal reality through the individual, for instance, who represents and expresses conflict and contradiction as evident by his or her behavior. Existence, for Schopenhauer, is the expression of

an insatiable, all-pervasive unconscious and irrational essence, thus creating a world of conflict and suffering in order to fulfill its need to procreate. Essentially, the only reason to live is to act out the sexual impulse, which ultimately provides the impetus to propagate the species in the phenomenal world. Schopenhauer's philosophy may be reduced to a primal "will to live" and "sexual impulse". His view of the world and reality is quite pessimistic, and his writings are noted for their misanthropic undertones.

Freud was attending university at a time when Schopenhauer's ideas were very much in vogue throughout Germany and the rest of the European continent. He read Schopenhauer as a young man, gaining exposure to many of the philosopher's ideas in the universities he attended and elsewhere in intellectual circles. Furthermore, in the article "Freud's Burden of Debt to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer", published in the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, Eva Cybulska writes

There were powerful cultural influences on the *Weltanschauung* of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Freud, as all three were subject to a *Zeitgeist* imbued with the psychology of the unconscious, the demise of religion, and the meteoric rise of science. They shared a passionate interest in literature, philosophy, and the natural sciences, albeit to a variable degree. All three thinkers had a deep reverence for the ancient Greco-Roman world.

Some categorize Freud's psychology/philosophy as being rather cynical. His works seem to express the notion that life is difficult, and the best that one may hope for is to hold in check the incessant ongoing battle among the three elements constituting the psyche. Individuals are by and large at the mercy of insentient impulses stemming from the id. Many of these impulses are sexually based, and thus, a preponderance of motivation is determined by sexual impulses.

Once again, Peter Gay (1988) states that Freud's particular contribution was "to take the shadowy, poetic notion, lend it precision, and make it into the foundation of a psychology by

specifying the origins and contents of the unconscious and its imperious ways of pressing toward expression”. This interpretation of Freud’s work demonstrates accord with the irrational nature and paramount position of Schopenhauer’s Will in determining the operative mechanisms in this reality.

Jung’s theory of psychology was more connected to metaphysical undertones than was Freud’s. His ideas are deemed more encompassing and thus provide a broader perspective on some of the dynamics associated with phenomenal expression in the cognitive/emotional and behavioral realms. Jung draws heavily from the works of Immanuel Kant, particularly in “The Critique of Pure Reason”, which helps him bridge the gap between the more subtle psychic realms of the collective unconscious and the “concrete” emotional reality of the individual.

Kant’s monumental epistemological work helped lay the foundation for modern-day psychology in many ways. In it, he distinguished between things as we know them, which are derived from the senses, and the “thing in itself”.

We learn to know and understand various things (i.e., thoughts, objects, feelings) in the phenomenal world through our experiences. However, unlike David Hume, who affirmed that individuals come into this reality with a clean slate and then subsequently acquire knowledge through events, Kant held that the mind contains *a priori* elements or modalities of knowing, which he classified into twelve categories.

In William Clough’s article (1997), he states that Jung’s version of Kantianism “shows up in his high respect for the objective reality of the interior life and his clear, constant emphasis on human continuity with the rest of nature and natural laws.” He uses the notion of *a priori* forms to explain his archetypal theory. Jung comes close to making an equivalency between his archetypes and Kant’s categories in his work “Psychological Types” (1921), in which he says,

“the archetype would thus be, to borrow from Kant, the noumenon of the image, which intuition perceives and, in perceiving, creates.”

It is clear that Freud and Jung drew upon previously established ideas and thoughts in the development of their own personal theories, as innovative thinkers and their creative endeavors do not exist in a vacuum. The science of psychology in many ways can be viewed as applied metaphysics. Jung and Freud were adept synthesizers and established practical ways of utilizing certain philosophical concepts early in the 20th century during a period when the field of psychology was just beginning to burgeon.

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