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Giorgio Mosconi and Mario Trevi

Junghism in Italy: An Epistemological and Hermeneutic Approach to Jungian Psychology

Summary:

Among the various post-Jungian schools is that founded by Mario Trevi, one of the pioneers of analytical psychology in Italy and follower of Ernst Bernhard, who introduced Jungian psychoanalysis in Italy. Mario Trevi approaches Jungian theory, however, placing the accent on its epistemological and hermeneutic aspects, thus eliminating the entire “deadwood” produced during the course of the development of Jungian thought.

Giorgio Mosconi: Despite the considerable evidence as to their validity, the theoretical models of depth psychology are often at odds with practical application. What is the relationship between the various types of psychotherapy, between the reference theory of psychotherapy and its general practice?

Mario Trevi: The oppositions are not radical, but partial. The various psychotherapies attempt to approach both the pathological as well as the physiological aspects of the psyche from various points of view, and this does not necessarily imply a counter-position. Also—at least as regards analytical psychotherapies (although it would be difficult to give an exact definition for “psychotherapies of an analytical character”)—there have been filiations throughout the century. The first heretical psychotherapies were offshoots of Freud, which in turn generated others. All of these have a common basis, which is however found less in the explicit theory of Freud, than in one of his profound conceptions: the psychic dynamic, which goes beyond the various postulations embraced as schools of thought by Freudians.

The relationship between the reference theory and its practice is twofold. On the one hand, there is a fairly explicit relationship; on the other, however, the practical application springs from experience, is empirical, and as such inevitably outdistances theory. There is a considerably elastic relationship, which makes possible continual renewal. New psychotherapies continuously arise out of the individual experience of the psychotherapist, who—depending on whether or not he succeeds in communicating his own ideas—sooner or later will establish a school.

Mosconi: Certain psychologists sustain the possibility, in the future, of unifying not only all models of psychotherapy, but also all those theories as regards the mind, genetics and environment, organism and the “talking cure”, which at present often are in conflict. Is this advisable?

Trevi: Advisable, yes. But whether or not it is possible is another question. How could such varying points of view be united in a general theory? Unless, of course, one were to make recourse to the simple thesis that all psychotherapies, with few exceptions, are based on dialogue. At that point, one would have to ask whether or not their common denominator were not in the dynamics of dialogue, which would then have to be studied with the aid of the neurophysiologist. He would have to explain to us what occurs in the human

mind when it opens to another mind and establishes a dialogical relationship.

Mosconi: In your latest book, *Riprendere Jung*, written together with Marco Innamorati, you pose the question as to what sense speaking of analysis still has, making a distinction between objectifying analysis and a psychotherapy which “respects the dialogic inter-subjectivity”.

Trevi: Freud invented the word analysis conjugated with psyche–psycho-analysis–and in that sense it should be used strictly in relation to Freudian psychotherapy. However, it has been extended to include the other analytical psychotherapies. The word analysis comes from a chemical metaphor. Freud, who desired a psychology which would possess the same rigor as the sciences, was legitimate in exploiting this metaphor. As the chemical analyst observes a compound and individuates its constituent elements, both in the qualitative and the quantitative sense, so does the psychoanalyst approach the psyche of the patient, breaking it down into its constituent elements. These, for Freud, were above all the drive elements, sex at various levels of development, aggressiveness, and so forth. All this is eminently valid for the type of psychotherapy founded by Freud and advanced by his immediate followers (to a more or lesser degree heretics), but it is no longer valid for certain forms of contemporary psychotherapy, in which the patient is no longer considered as the “object” to be analyzed, according to the positivist vision of Freud. Today the intention is above all for a dialogic interactivity in that one does not present himself before the other as one who knows and breaks down the psychic unity of the other, but an interactivity in which both individuals are at the same time object and subject.

Mosconi: In 1985, Andrew Samuels classified the post-Jungian schools, dividing them into classical, evolutive and archetypal. To these, Luigi Zoja, in his introduction to the VI Congress of the CIPA (Centro Italiano di Psicologia Analitica), added a fourth type (specifically Italian and little known abroad due to linguistic difficulties) “characterized by the epistemological reflection; that is, the critique of the very foundations of Jungian psychology and hermeneutic research”, which you conducted together with Umberto Galimberti. Do you agree with this classification?

Trevi: Zoja was very generous with the small group to which he belonged, which remained small and had no followers abroad, a group which attempted to grasp, in Jung’s theories, those epistemological and hermeneutic aspects. I mostly agree with Zoja’s classification; however, I don’t believe that a fourth school has been established, at least as regards numerical importance, alongside those listed by Samuels. On the other hand, neither Galimberti nor I ever proposed the founding of a new school, but intended only to encourage our colleagues to make a more careful consideration of the strongly epistemological aspects and deeply hermeneutic nature of Jungian psychology, and we were at least partially successful. Galimberti subsequently retreated somewhat from these problems and I now have other collaborators. We all insist on the epistemological and hermeneutic aspects of Jung. The effects have been forthcoming: for example, judging from presentations made by Concetto Gullotta, the current President of AIPA (the other important Jungian school in Italy), in certain conferences, even AIPA tends towards a critical reformulation of some Jungian concepts in an epistemological context. An interesting example is Gullotta’s current work on Jung’s ambiguous, contradictory and nebulous concept of the Self.

Mosconi: Within this axis of schools of thought, your epistemological and hermeneutic approach and the archetypal approach of Hillman are diametrically opposed. What is the point of contact between them in the context of analytical psychology?

Trevi: The point of contact is Jung’s text, which is extremely rich, stratified, multiple and manifold, allowing many different reading. Hillman’s archetypal approach actually moved away from the Jungian matrix precisely because of this exclusive attitude. His autonomy from Jung was amply demonstrated in the Italian Enciclopedia del Novecento—an extensive appendix to the Enciclopedia Italiana—in which Hillman appears as the author of a separate entry, “Archetypal Psychology”. He is totally indifferent to the epistemological and hermeneutic aspects which my colleagues and I brought to light. However, this type of opposition is frequent in all schools.

Mosconi: There is a part of Jung to be put aside, that which you call the “deadwood of Jungian thought”, and a part to be developed, prospectivism—that is, a “relative wholeness”. What is the “deadwood” and what is the “relative wholeness”?

Trevi: One is aware of the deadwood more in the subsequent development of Jung’s thought than in Jung himself. The fact that he dedicated many years to the study of comparative mythologies, above all to that form of relatively modern mythology which is alchemy, is comprehensible. He possessed the philological instruments and a certain aptitude in that direction. The deadwood of Jungian thought would in fact make those studies absolute as the explanation of modern man’s the psychic life. It would be far more useful to utilize Jung’s constant position, which always speaks of a perspective point, *Gesichts Punkt*, embraced by the psychologist to conceptualize the psychic life. Prospectivism does not imply absolute relativism, which would lead to skepticism. Prospectivism—a term which we find in Nietzsche and Ortega y Gasset—does not imply reducing all science to relative position-taking as regards reality, which would subsequently lead towards a skeptical renunciation, but rather it implies insisting on the perspective of the researcher in his research. This was explicit in Jung: in the sciences of culture, the perspective of the researcher necessarily becomes part of the research itself. Jung was in line with the criteria of the science of culture of our century. Not all psychology must be reduced to the science of culture: psychology of sensory perception, psychology of perception, even certain aspects of cognitive psychology, etc., can be considered natural sciences. However, the study of the human personality as a whole demonstrates that side of psychology oriented in the direction of the sciences of culture. This does not imply that psychology is a false science; it implies that it is a more difficult science, a science which must be practiced with extreme caution and the methods of which require continuous revision.

Mosconi: You are very critical as regards the concept of archetypes. However, in *Riprendere Jung*, as regards the dialogic relationship between individuals in the therapeutic relationship, which is fundamental to a cure, you write: “It is in any case in the course of the dialogue that the drives and perhaps also the archetypes become manifest, no longer as cages but as the possibility of integration, and in the dialogue, they are subordinate to that constitution of responsible subjects which is intrinsic to the dialogue itself”. Are the archetypes then considered deadwood, or can some aspects of them be utilized?

Trevi: The “perhaps” in what Marco Innamorati and I affirmed implies almost an opposition: drives can be observed, archetypes cannot be directly observed. Into the dialogue enter the examination of the drives and eventually also the archetypes, intended as a priori structures which condition human behavior. This indicative criterion can conveniently be maintained—however, neither as dogma nor hypostasis, but simply as working hypothesis. Neither was the existence of the archetypal structures negated by Freud, who condemned Jung for radicalizing them a priori as conditioning both the behavior and the imagination in human thought. Certain archetypal hypotheses can be utilized in the psychotherapeutic dialogue, if this is beneficial to the patient. The psychological theory, in order to function as practice, must become subordinate to the principle of therapeutic advantage. The typological disposition of the patient (for example the prevalence of intuitive imagination or, to the contrary, critical thinking) can or must induce the therapist to utilize a particular interpretative device. The advantage to the patient is decisive in the choice of one working hypotheses over another.

Mosconi: In your essays *L’altra lettura di Jung* (1988), you wrote, “Neither types nor archetypes liberate the psychologist from relativism or its epistemological consequences”. How much in the theory of “psychological types” is derived from archetypes and how much can be linked instead to perspectivist pluralism?

Trevi: I approached two different hermeneutic instruments taken from the vast and disordered storeroom of Jung’s ideas: types and archetypes. Types (Max Weber first spoke of “types” scientifically) must be founded rigorously on empirical data and provide a minimum of orientation in the infinite diversity of individuals. The typological criterion is intrinsic to the sciences of culture, and is extremely useful, for example, in the study of religions. Archetypes are instead hypotheses that spring from a comparative method, often slightly

generic, and at times superficial. I approached types and archetypes in order to indicate two antithetic aspects of Jung's thought. If we avoid making dogma of Jung's typology, and instead assume only the typological principle of orientation in the irreducible diversity of individuals by means of a typological schematization, then this manner of proceeding with research is beyond criticism. The types in psychology serve above all to anchor the relativism (which otherwise could lead either to skepticism or the complete dissolution of psychology) to a reasonable perspective; that is, broad but limited.

The typological criterion is thus the most evident application of perspectivist pluralism. On the other hand, I am unable to link the theory of types with that of archetypes—even though, in scientific research, they are both considered useful working hypotheses. Reducing types to archetypes would lead to a dangerous alteration of the absolutely empiricist sphere of the typological criteria.

Mosconi: Could utilizing Jungian typology in the psychotherapeutic relationship introduce the danger of limiting or predetermining the personality of the patient?

Trevi: In my analytical practice, I rarely use either the concept of type or that of the archetype. However, the typological criteria, if well presented, can be useful in helping the patient understand that there are other perspectives besides his own and, furthermore, to avoid making dogma of his own perspective, while recognizing it as valid. Perspectivism has one great advantage: every perspective is evidently relative and comparable to others, all the while respecting them and recognizing that there are many points from which to view the same thing.

Mosconi: Another subject which you have studied—and to which you have also dedicated a journal, *Metaxù*—is the symbol. How much longer can symbolic images be effective in enriching our unconscious in our entertainment-permeated culture? Aren't images today being constantly debased by the vast networks of mass communications, and reduced to mere signs, allegory, metaphor?

Trevi: The symbol, as Jung intended it (as opposed to sign), above all signified function: it is an activity capable of producing useful transformation in the psychic life of the individual. There are great collective symbols in every culture, and perhaps also universal symbols, which however remain—from a psychological point of view—inert (“dead” as Jung would say) until a single psyche uses this in a synthesis which results in useful transformations; for example, in the process of individuation. The vast systems of mass communication can degrade or debase the collective symbols superficially, however they cannot influence to any significant degree the intimate symbolic function which is manifested in the individual psyche—at least it would be legitimate to hope so. On the other hand, the research of Jung resists all “massification” characteristic of today's society.

Mosconi: What is the future for psychoanalysis and analytical psychology, especially in light of recent discoveries as regards the genome? And what importance should be given to the environment in the formation of the psyche?

Trevi: Despite its strict connection with the soma, the psyche is far more influenced by the environment. A newborn Italian, brought to Japan and raised in a Japanese family, will always retain considerable traces of Japanese culture in his psyche. We can however make a distinction—to facilitate our study—between natural, presumably hereditary, factors of the psyche, and cultural factors. The interplay and reciprocal determination between the two types of factors is intensified during individual development in an extremely complex way. Cultural anthropology and social psychology attempt to resolve, at least partially, these problems. Freud tended, given his positivist training, to suppose a psychic structure that was universal and permanent over time. Malinowski was the first to place that structure seriously in doubt. Jung was far more sensitive to cultural problems and hypothesized different “points of view” in the construction of psychological models. Not only the personality, but also the culture (in the anthropological sense) of the psychologist influenced the model he proposed.

At present, much caution should be used as regards the influence which the environment might have on the genome, underlying or subordinate to the “natural” components of the psyche. We have had a modest cognition and control as regards the nature of the psyche only in the last four thousand years—which is, relatively speaking, a modest portion of the entire history of the homo sapiens. In any case, in scientific research in this sector, freedom from all preconceptions is absolutely essential.

Translated from the Italian by Joan Tambureno