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# THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE IN FREUD'S AND JUNG'S WORKS

**Elena Vladimirovna Ledeneva<sup>\*</sup>, Vera Albertovna Terekhova,  
Elena Nikolaevna Shadrina, Zakir Agayevich Kuliev and  
Galina Alekseevna Gvozdeva**

*I.M. Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, 8-2 Trubetskaya st., Moscow 119991, Russia*

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## Abstract

The article compares the concept of culture in two versions of psychoanalysis: Freud's and Jung's. The carried out comparison is based on three main parameters: the problem of the origin of culture according to Freud and Jung works, the problem of its further development and the problem of the relationship between culture and nature. The article proves the thesis that the difference in understanding of culture in the concepts of Freud and Jung should not obscure the fact of their fundamental similarity, connected primarily with the commonality of the worldview assumptions. This resemblance lies first of all in assurance of both Freud and Jung that culture as it develops strives for its own integrity and rational transparency (although perhaps this goal can never be achieved). This approach undoubtedly has its advantages: it sets a clear teleological dimension to culture and it is supported by a strong philosophical tradition. At the same time as it is revealed in the article such approach has its flaw being unable to reconcile with others even when there are no major differences between them. Tragic but at the same time creatively productive gap between Freud and Jung is one example of this.

*Keywords:* mind, archetype, myth, initial crime, solipsism

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## 1. Introduction

Unlike the revolutionary theories of Copernicus and Darwin, with which Freud compared his teachings, psychoanalysis originated as the revolution in therapeutic practice, and, accordingly, all theoretical problems and concepts, such as culture, Freud saw through the prism of psychoanalysis as practice. As one researcher wrote, "Freud's identity was so fused with psychoanalysis that almost anything he did as part became somehow psychoanalytic" [1]. This is also said by Freud's patients of the "early period", "he not at all interested in politics, ethics or philosophy of life" [1, p. 526] and him himself of course, for example in his autobiography, where he writes about his conviction that human history and culture "are no more than a reflection of the dynamic conflicts

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<sup>\*</sup>E-mail: ledenevaelena72@mail.ru

between the ego, and the id and the super-ego, which psychoanalysis studies in the individual” [2]. In fact, Freud never gave up this point of view. But with the development of the psychoanalytic movement, he had to make the subject of special consideration such issues as the functions of culture, the emergence of religion, society, state. As Freud wrote in the *Postscriptum* to the above-mentioned *Autobiographical study*, “after a life long detour over the natural sciences, medicine, and psychotherapy, my interests returned to those cultural problems” [2, p. 315]. One of the reasons of this turn was the desire to keep up with his students, for whom, for example, for Jung, the psychoanalytic practice was originally associated with the problems of culture and was inseparable from them. The purpose of this article is to show that, for all the differences in Freud’s and Jung’s approaches to culture, both approaches retain the same formal premises.

Understanding of a man’s ‘Ego’ as a totality of that what is realized and the power existing beyond and uncontrolled by the consciousness, which is alien to ‘Ego’ - this is the initial supposition uniting the theoretical approaches of both thinkers. Even before the personal acquaintance that occurred in 1907 both Jung and Freud appreciated the importance of each other’s work to justify the method they were developing. For Jung it was first of all Freud’s book *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) where Freud, contrary to the prevailing opinion, proved the significance of dreams for revealing the work of psyche with impulses coming from the unconscious. Freud’s view of dreaming corresponded to Jung’s position considering dreams as an individual manifestation of the unconscious collective.

As for Freud, equally important for him was the book of Jung published in 1907 about the method of the Word Association Test which being based on the collected by Jung research material revealed the mechanisms of suppression giving the necessary empirical material to the concept of ‘Ego’ developed by Freud. Later Freud even more than Jung resorted to the same or similar problematics (forgetting foreign words, slips of tongue, etc.) showing the impact of the unconsciousness in seemingly insignificant features of everyday life. Personal knowledge of Freud and Jung shortly after publication of the book on verbal associations grew into a real ‘scientific symbiosis’ (the intensity of communication between Freud and Jung can be judged by the number of letters they wrote between 1907 and 1913: 359 ones [3], which, however, revealed not only the proximity but also significant divergences of the positions which existed between the two theoreticians of the revolutionary breakthrough in psychology initially. Correspondingly the main scientific result of the collaboration between Freud and Jung was not a co-written fundamental publication covering various aspects of a new psychological theory but two fundamental and polemic to each other works: *Transformations and Symbols of Libido* (1912) by Jung and *Totem and Taboo* (1913) by Freud. Both works go beyond psychology of personality: Freud and Jung seem to have come to a conclusion that the psychic organization and mental problems of the individual go beyond the empirical horizon of the individual, demanding participation of a vast historical and anthropological context. That said, with regard to myths and

fairy tales Jung in his book uses Freud's dream interpretation methodology whereas Freud in his work develops the concept of 'complex' and associated to it image of father (the concept of 'complex' as well as the significance of father's image can be found in Jung's earlier works [4]).

Nevertheless, publication of both works led to a final gap between Freud and Jung because of the incompatibility of understanding of culture contained in them, its connection with nature, its origin and development. These exact discrepancies deepening in further works of Freud and Jung are at the centre of the research on comparing the two versions of psychoanalysis and that determines the emphasis on the aspect of the differences which is typical of the majority of them (however, it is necessary to admit that the authors hereby follow Freud and Jung, who after their break in every way emphasized on the theoretical differences between them, perhaps sometimes exaggerating).

## **2. Freud and Jung about the origin of culture**

In the matter of the origin of culture the differences between Freud and Jung are indeed striking. Freud speaks of a one-time event that radically separated the natural state of a person from a cultural one, whereas Jung understands creation of culture as an (indefinitely) long process of symbolizing the initial human experience of relations with the surrounding world, creation of a kind of a secondary reflexive system, which is what according to Jung myths and other similar entities are. This process, which often occurs similar with the principle of "creative evolution" by Henri Bergson [5], is characterized by gradualness and does not involve stadal 'leaps'.

For Freud, the beginning of culture is based on an event which has in a way catastrophic character: collective killing of a despotic father committed by the sons, when "after they fulfilled their hate by his removal and had carried out their wish for identification with him, the suppressed tender impulses had to assert themselves. This took place in the form of remorse, a sense of guilt was formed which coincided here with the remorse generally felt. The dead now became stronger than the living had been, even as we observe it today in the destinies of men. What the fathers' presence had formerly prevented they themselves now prohibited in the psychic situation of 'subsequent obedience', which we knew so well from psychoanalysis, they undid their deed declaring that the killing of the father substitute, the totem, was not allowed, and renounced the fruits of their deed by denying themselves the liberated women." [6] This event was the act of establishing culture – by the sons but on behalf of their father who during his lifetime personified triumph of a natural but not a cultural beginning in a man.

After having read the first part of *Totem and Taboo* Jung wrote to Freud that in his opinion the prohibition of incest was not connected either with any actually happened event or even with a desire, and was necessary for establishing the institution of the family and in the long term, religion and the state. Freud on the contrary insisted on the reality of both 'the initial crime' and

the incestuous desire forbidden by the act of the beginning of culture. According to one researcher for Freud “in the beginning was the Action” [7] - a real event that caused a real sense of guilt and it was reproducing itself under similar circumstances. Without reliance on reality the theory of ‘the initial crime’ was in dangerous proximity to the theory of Jung’s archetypes - steadily reproducing themselves cognitive or behavioural models receiving their reality from the world of ideas rather than real events. However, it is not difficult to notice that Freud never managed to radically distinguish his concept from the Jung’s archetypes theory.

Researchers have repeatedly paid attention to the similarity of the hypothesis or ‘vision’ of Freud as he himself called it in one of his later works (“the following hypothesis, or, I would rather say, vision”) [2, p. 68] with Thomas Hobbes’s ‘social contract’ theory although they interpret this similarity in different ways: sometimes they consider both theories as analogous [8], sometimes as antithetical. Indeed, Hobbes and Freud talk about a one-time event but Freud’s ‘cultural state’ is the result of the death of a ‘sovereign’ [7, p. 135].

If Freud’s hypothesis can be compared to Hobbes’s theory, Jung’s position can be likened to criticizing Hobbes Rousseau whose social contract is not a one-time act that gives the ‘sovereign’ despotic rights towards all the others but a permanent institution correcting and improving its establishments.

But the reality of parricide and a significant degree of incestuous desires are not the only causes for Jung’s objections against Freud’s hypothesis. In the story told by Freud, it remains unclear what role was played by women in those events: how they treated despotism of the father, sons’ rebellion against him and their decision to abandon him. According to the sense of the story their role in all situations remained passive; according to one of Freud’s later works (*Dissatisfaction with Culture* (1930)), as culture was developing, women more and more moved to the camp of opponents of culture, representing kind of a personified discontent with culture from nature. Jung on the other hand relying on plentiful female images in mythology and religion emphasized on the importance of the pairing principle - both for the Universe and for the formation of the individual [3, p. 562].

### **3. The development of culture in the theories of Freud and Jung**

Differing on the matter of the origin of culture the views of Freud and Jung are also to differ in regard to its further development. And indeed, Freud’s culture development theory is often called ‘repressive’ and his views are considered ‘pessimistic’; Jung’s theory, respectively, is called ‘evolutionary’ and ‘optimistic’. Freud himself pointed out this difference too, ironically calling Jung’s teaching “the message of salvation” [2, vol. XIV, p. 140]. In fact, according to both Jung and Freud development - whether cultural or individual - is realized through a change in the relation of the original pair ‘consciousness-unconscious’. According to Jung, however, a positive change is represented as a desire of the unconscious for self-manifestation and the desire of the personality

for self-realization when “Everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestation, and the personality too desires to evolve out of its unconscious conditions and to experience itself as a whole” [9]. Due to Freud the development of culture is motivated by the internalization of external authority when the individual becomes more and more identified with the father increasingly sacrificing his freedom and sexual energy for the sake of culture. Freud writes “Culture is obeying the laws of economic necessity, since a large amount of the psychical energy which it uses for its own purposes has to be withdrawn from sexuality” [10]. The unconscious in this model is increasingly constrained, as society develops, by the external force of culture.

But what kind of justification is each of these theories based upon? Both Freud and Jung refer in this case to the history of civilizations and the history of religions, what is more, it turns out that almost any example taken can be interpreted in two ways - both in favour of Freud and in favour of Jung. The rapid progress of civilization at the beginning of the twentieth century, which seems to be an argument in favour of Jung, was interrupted by the world war (as Freud did not fail to mention speaking of the naivety of Jung's evolutionism). On the other hand Jung himself explains the catastrophes of the first half of the twentieth century through the ‘ejection’ of the uncontrolled and aggressive collective unconscious - and this explanation is not so far from Freud's model of the suppressed unconscious. Besides Jung, with respect to the development of civilization, is in a sense more cautious than Freud since he warns about the dangers of the detachment of the ‘technical mind’ of civilization from its mythological roots; from the point of view of some researchers for Jung reading of *Faust* by Goethe had the same meaning as for Freud the myth about Oedipus where from Jung's point of view the image of Gretchen had the meaning of “compensation for the inhumanity of Faust” [11] who was ridden by a man's thirst for power and wealth. While Freud illustrated his model of progressive suppression by comparing the stories of Oedipus and Hamlet: in the Greek myth the theme of parricide is mixed with other themes and is represented as a killing by mistake whereas in Shakespeare's tragedy this theme is presented as the main and a plot-forming one and Hamlet's sufferings are shown as a consequence of the duality of his relationship to the father. Jung, however, could object to this that chez Shakespeare the theme of parricide definitely became more conscious.

As for the history of religion Jung speaks of the evolution in relation to God in monotheistic religions namely in Judaism and Christianity in which from his point of view there is a fact of cultural-historical evolution from the ‘childish’ attitude of dependence on God as a formidable and punitive force, which is typical of the Old Testament, to a relationship involving freedom of love, which is the basis of the relationship to God in Christianity. But Freud considered this evolution quite differently: as one of the researchers wrote: “This development is both cultural and historical as well as individual and is, in fact, a question of self-realization an individual liberation from childhood dependence and submission to parents by their repression... Freud recognized an increase in

repression through history while Jung saw increasing personal development and sublimation.” [7, p. 91]

If after all that has been said to compare the models of the origin and further development of culture due to Freud and Jung it is difficult not to conclude that Freud’s view leans toward a mythological paradigm and Jung’s one toward a narrative model of a fairy tale. Indeed, the initial event of the beginning of culture due to Freud has a direct analogy in the myth of the theft of fire as a result of which people became capable of creating cultural goods but the price to pay for this was the loss of direct connection with the heavenly world of the gods. This model can be called not only ‘catastrophic’ but also an ‘equivalent exchange’ model where for any advantages that have been achieved it is necessary to pay and due to Freud this principle applies to the whole history of the development of culture which inevitably challenges any possible progress.

Due to Jung individual’s development as well as the development of culture corresponds to the adventures of a fairy-tale hero which Jung treats as a movement of the spirit on the path to self-realization. Meeting of the fairy-tale hero with the ‘magic assistant’ (ambivalent wisdom of his ancestors), overcoming obstacles and ‘evil spirit’ (his own ‘shadow side’) and finally saving the princess (reunion with his ‘anime’ - the female ideal) metaphorically outline the path to oneself predestined both for the individual and for the whole mankind.

But even according to Freud culture taking more and more sexual energy away from a man gives him more and more benefits and what is meant by these is not material wealth, production of which requires less and less effort as technology develops, but the benefits of self-awareness: for good reason Freud speaks about disappearance of the ‘religious illusion’ in future, which of course implies the achievement by the person of a new level of understanding of oneself, relative to the time when the work was written. With regard to religion Jung who believed that it would retain its value as a most important ‘archetype’ seems ‘more conservative’ than Freud. Freud’s negative attitude to religion is connected with the fact that the concept of God remains an obstacle on the way of internalization of paternal functions by man and mankind. But Jung’s position according to which God is a necessary element of collective representations beyond which no reality is revealed, demonstrates the achievement of this kind of interiorization, at least theoretically.

#### **4. Philosophy of culture in Freud and Jung - two sides of the same worldview?**

The differences between Freud and Jung in the matter of the origin and development of culture can be interpreted as essential or on the contrary as superficial, belonging to the same worldview, called by T. Adorno by the ‘spirit of the Enlightenment’. As noted by many researchers, Freud and Jung understood differently the relationship between culture and nature, more specifically - how they correlate in a person. It is easy to see that Freud adhered

to the confrontational model of their interaction: the nature of a man is immutable: it is his sexual desires; human nature does not want to know anything about the culture which appears to be an external overwhelming force. While culture not only suppresses but also exploits nature redirecting its energy to culturally-creating activities, that is, ultimately, against nature itself. According to Jung culture is self-aware nature; as such, the natural principle requires awareness, not suppression. In the interpretation of Jung Freud's place of nature is occupied by a mechanistic culture that has separated from its natural roots; as R. Aziz noted: "Very much in contrast to the Freudian Paradigm in which culture constitutes a necessary line of defence against nature, the Syndetic Paradigm holds that self-organizing nature is that to which we must necessarily turn to defend ourselves against culture" [12]. Jung's view of the relations of nature and culture is close to that which takes place in the philosophy of Hegel, while Freud's position to a greater extent follows the philosophy of Schopenhauer (although it was Jung, not Freud, who referred to Schopenhauer in the book *Libido: Its Metamorphoses and Symbols* interpreting the Schopenhauer's concept of will in a positive meaning of the will to live that is far from being the spirit of Schopenhauer's philosophy [7, p. 119]).

At the same time Freud and Jung adhered to the position of the fundamental unity of human culture: this point of view determines the general attitude to culture contained in the *Libido* and *Totem and Taboo*. This corresponds to the point of view of evolutionary anthropology in the second half of the nineteenth century (G. Spencer, E. Tylor, etc.) but it contradicts or even is, as some scholars believe, directly polemical in relation to the position of F. Boas who insisted on the irreducibility of various cultures to single models and samples. Freud and Jung could get acquainted with the theory of Boas during a conference at the University of Clark (USA) where both theorists of psychoanalysis were invited to in 1909 [13]. Researchers dealing with the history of the relationship between Freud and Jung in the context of developing their theoretical differences always pay attention to the American tour of Freud and Jung in 1909 as an event that accelerated their break. But perhaps it is worth taking into account another aspect of the trip to America: the anthropological theory of Franz Boas became a 'challenge' for Freud and Jung and having returned to Europe they took this 'challenge' by writing their own anthropological works.

The principle of cultural unity mattered for both Freud and Jung since it fit into the solipsistic model within which the notions of them both were progressing. This solipsism appears to have three aspects: the unity of the object, the unity of the principle which organizes it and the unity of purpose. The first principle is realized in the above-mentioned thesis of the unity of culture. The second one is determined by the fact that culture in the understanding of Freud and in the understanding of Jung is based on a single basis: due to Freud it is the principle of pleasure, due to Jung - the principle of mind. The suppression and shackling of the pleasure principle by the culture, which Freud speaks of, is nothing else but the economic policy of culture in relation to pleasure; according

to Freud, a cultural man refuses pleasure not for the sake of some other principle, but for the pleasure itself but distributed in such a way as to deprive him as far as possible of its destructive power. In this sense, the attempt of G. Marcuse (*Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955)) to separate the ‘repressive’ aspect of Freud’s psychoanalysis from the ‘positive’ one does not look very successful: for Freud the very possibility of consuming cultural goods is connected with a repressive beginning without which almost no one would have received anything. With regards to the economy of pleasure Freud’s theory is very close to the theory of European capitalism of M. Weber according to which the capitalist is ordered to abstain from excessive consumption - but for the sake of an even greater potential profit.

As for Jung, his reference to the collective unconscious as an inexhaustible resource of human experience is nothing else but the expansion of rationality beyond the narrow instrumental sphere into which it was encapsulated by the mechanistic paradigm of Science in early modern period. Jung’s expansion of the notion of individuality beyond the boundaries of its own life experience led to the fact that Jung’s theory was reproached of mysticism, primarily by those who considered myths only as a reflection of a primitive worldview of a primitive man and treated traces of myths in modern life as ‘relics’. But Jung, calling myth “a transparently expressed revelation” [14, p. 218], likens it to instincts which exactly “are typical modes of action, and wherever we meet with uniform and regularly recurring modes of action and reaction we are dealing with instinct” [4, p. 135]. Accordingly, the collective unconscious is called by Jung: “The collective unconscious, being the repository of man’s experience and at the same time the prior condition of this experience, is an image of the world which has taken aeons to form” [15]. Thus, according to Jung referring to the resources of the unconscious does not discredit but enriches the rational; moreover, the rational in its separation from the unconscious begins to change its own nature acquiring destructive features reflected in Goethe’s image of Faust.

Finally, the unity of purpose is declared by Freud and Jung cultural movement in the direction of overcoming and in the limit of eliminating all sorts of ‘other’ towards oneself. It should however be admitted that it was Jung’s concept which was more often criticized for solipsism. In particular, M. Buber stated that in Jung’s theory ‘metaphysically real’ Other, meaning God, was missing and was considered by Jung as an idea developed by human experience [16]. In reply to Buber, Jung wrote that being indeed an empiricist, “I am aware that I am dealing with anthropomorphic ideas and not with actual gods and angels” [4, vol. 18, p. 8513]. But the question of the absence of the ‘Other’ for Jung can be raised more broadly: as a question of the absence of the ‘Other’ in general. Indeed, according to Jung, an individual aspiring to expand his cognitive horizons turns to his own experience, albeit in his expanded interpretation; the other individual has nothing that he himself does not have. And the development - both of an individual and of culture - lies in the fact that expanding his experience he adopts that what he perceived as something

different inside of his own world. Therefore, an individual turns out to be a sort of Leibniz's evolving monad.

Similarly, according to Freud there is a gradual identification of an individual with the most significant manifestation of the 'Other' in his concept: with his father's will which directs his behaviour. In consequence of the 'the initial crime' event, the sons who rebelled against the father endowed him with culture-forming functions which the real despotic father in no way possessed. At the same time, as one of the authors noted, Freud is not particularly interested in the consequences of the 'the initial crime' in a social aspect, i.e. subsequent relations between brothers; Freud's whole attention is drawn to the relationship of each of the brothers with the deceased father. The further development of an individual and culture, according to Freud, is in the progressive acquirement of the father's functions by the individual; the individual himself becomes his father, exactly through this identification the power of the father demonstrates the ability to grow.

## 5. Conclusions

Certainly, the difference between the concepts of Freud and Jung is not as minor that it can be ignored: the philosophy of culture according to Freud looks more authoritarian, more categorical, more rigid in the distribution of social roles. While the concept of Jung, which reveals a wide range for self-constructing before the individual, seems more creative. Many researchers believe that the difference between the concepts of Freud and Jung is due to the difference between their own personalities, as well as the situation of 'father and son' in which they, albeit involuntarily, turned out to be to each other. But another explanation is also possible: despite the relatively small age gap (19 years), Freud and Jung were still representatives of different generations and this was due to the rapid historical changes taking place in Europe in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

But whatever explanation to assume, one thing is clear: Freud and Jung turned out to be 'Others' towards each other which made them who they were and this shows the limitations of that solipsistic ideal to which in a varying degree they were both aspiring.

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