

## Bachofen, Evolution, and Epistemological Boundaries: Comment on “The Destiny Concept in Psychotherapy”

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As one of the mottos for his paper, Whitmont chose a quote from Jung, ending with the statement, “The man without *amor fati* is the neurotic.” Though these words are certainly Latin, and Roman, Greek and Norse mythologies have a number of stories about the workings of Fata, Moira or Norn, I think that Jung is using the term here to resonate with the famous dictum of Nietzsche: “Amor Fati—‘Love your Fate,’ which is in fact your life.”

Nietzsche’s understanding of Fate is a radically secularized one that is diametrically opposed to a Christian notion of fate understood as providence or the will of God. Nevertheless, Fate is to Nietzsche an abstract ordering principle and the highest ideal for man. Instead of struggling against *fatum*, the highest affirmation of life for Nietzsche is to be capable of loving not only *fatum* (*amor fati*) but also the inevitable recurrence of events that it will create. Nietzsche (1888/1967) says:

My formula for greatness in man is amor fati: that a man should wish to have nothing altered, either in the future, the past, or for all eternity. Not only must he endure necessity, and on no account conceal it—all idealism is falsehood in the face of necessity—but he must love it. (“Why Am I So Clever,” sect.10)

Whitmont, in his paper, adopts this view but carries it a good deal further and suggests destiny as a psychotherapeutic concept with clinical implications: “What we suffered as children or adults . . . may be seen . . . as a destined emotional impasse essential for the actualization of our own particular pattern of wholeness” (p. 26).

Googling the words “destiny” and “fate” produce 11,700,000 hits for destiny, and 30,400,000 for fate, so there can be no question that these notions occupy the human mind in a great variety of ways. The problem therefore is whether the notion of destiny really can be transformed from, say, superstitions, a belief system, or an attitude to life into a proper psychotherapeutic concept.

Realizing that his proposition does not really conform to scientific thinking, Whitmont evokes modern physics. Using a number of quotations from Jacques Choron, a French philosopher rather than a physicist, Whitmont seems to agree with Choron’s speculations that the implication of the asymmetry of radioactive emission of atomic nuclei leads to the conclusion that a future state can in some way “intervene to guide phenomena situated in the present.” Next, Choron moves on to imply that an evolutionary field governs the biosphere and that evolution as such is therefore goal-oriented. The title of Choron’s paper is clear

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enough in that respect: "Physics Reveals that Evolution Has a Goal." I don't think a physicist would put his name to such a statement. It reminds me a bit of the current anti-evolutionary theory of "intelligent design."

Next, Whitmont draws on Jung's concept of synchronicity. There is a curious mix-up here. It is true that Jung in his paper on synchronicity included an experiment with astrology, and he also described the workings of *I Ching* as based on a synchronistic principle. And, historically, both of these systems have been used as divination techniques for telling people their fate or destiny. But in Jung's paper on synchronicity the word "destiny" is not used at all and "fate" only once where he discusses Schopenhauer's thesis "On the Apparent Design in the Fate of the Individual." This originally inspired him, but was later rejected. Jung (1952) writes:

Since this problem is concerned with the foundations of our epistemology, he [Schopenhauer] derived it in accordance with the general trend of his philosophy from a transcendental premise, from the Will which creates life and beings on all levels, and which modulates each of these levels in such a way that they are not only in harmony with their synchronous parallels but also prepare and arrange future events in the form of Fate or Providence. . . . One of the most problematical and momentous centuries the world has ever known separates us from that still medievalistic age when the philosophizing mind believed it could make assertions beyond what could be empirically proved. (p. 427f.)

To illustrate his idea of an unfolding pattern of destiny-synchronicity, Whitmont uses the model of the drama as he imagines it was before the development of a written tradition, that is, more like a child's play, where a certain theme is set up but partially improvised interaction among the actors is permitted. He refers to Alfred Baumler's idea that the Greek tragedy is a "mirror of the soul." Baumler's book *Das Mytische Weltalter* in the list of references seems to be from 1965, but I believe it is a reprint of a work published earlier, in 1926, *Bachhofen der Mythologie der Romantik*. I found it strange that Whitmont used this reference, since Baumler seems to have been a devout and influential Nazi philosopher from the early thirties onwards, but I imagine Whitmont is taking an explicit stand here. According to Kirsch (2000, p. 126), Whitmont was in analysis with Gustav Heyer in the 1950's and thought highly of him. Heyer was reputed to be a Nazi Party member and no other Jungian saw him after the war.

I haven't read Baumler, but J. J. Bachofen (1815–1887), whom his work refers to, is a well-known author on the subject of the history of religions (especially *Das Mutterrecht*, 1861). Bachofen applied evolutionary theories to the development of culture in a manner that is no longer considered valid, based as it is on German Romanticism and Hegelian idealism. He believed in a *Weltgeist* whose "stages" were manifestations of underlying ideas that unfolded in specific points in time and space. He postulated an evolutionary sequence of symbolical, mythical, and logical modes of thought. He also assumed an evolutionary sequence of primitive promiscuity, leading to (lunar) matriarchal and finally (solar) patriarchal forms of social organization. In *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, Erich Neumann (1954) took up Bachhofen's ideas and developed them in Jungian psychology.

Whitmont translates the drama model with its claim to awareness both of the sequential chain of events and of the underlying meaning of the play into the analyst's attitude to his work. This, Whitmont says, requires both a mythological perspective and a personalistic, clinical, reductive approach. Within his view, it is not difficult to hear echoes of the longstanding variation amongst Jungian analysts that was first classified by Adler in 1968, into three main groups of Jungians—the orthodox, the neo-Jungians and a middle group (Samuels, 1985, p. 11f). Whitmont would probably have belonged to the middle group who, according to Adler, placed greater emphasis on dreams rather than active imagination.

Whitmont hints at an earlier time where “it was assumed that the unfolding of the archetypal images would ipso facto resolve the petty personal details.” But Whitmont makes clear that he is critical of such an assumption: “The neglect of this reductive dimension and the failure to analyze transference reactions can make an analysis a mere intellectual exercise or a purely intuitional concept without living emotional reality” (p. 31).

Whitmont chose to share dreams when he presented a case vignette. The young woman patient is having trouble in her relationships with men, with her feminine identity, and also in developing her creative ambitions. She had archetypal dreams and fantasies relating to a Love Goddess, but to find their meaning, Whitmont found it necessary to delve into her personal history and her relationship with the mother. At first he had luck. Laying his theoretical approach clearly on the table, Whitmont says:

The implication would then be that the narrow-minded mother . . . might have been evoked by the Great Goddess Aphrodite herself to bring forth that particular crisis in the early life of the patient and its compensation in later life by the collective unconscious. A further implication would be that the evolutionary needs and intents of the Self are the prime factors in the constellation of child-parent relationships—that is, in the particular archetypal patterns which are set up in early life to provide, as it were, the staging for the play: it is as though we, or rather the Self, selected the parents needed for our particular life drama. (p. 34)

As the archetypes and their ostensibly inadequate personal actualizations were given equal value and an encompassing third position needed to be found, the young woman had a dream where she found herself searching through the rubble of a broken-down temple of Venus, whom she was to serve as a priestess. This, says Whitmont, was the beginning of her *amor fati*. She experienced a renewed flow of libido and she gained a greater trust in herself.

When reading this description I have wondered why Whitmont did not mention Jung's concept of the *transcendent function*, which, as Jung (1921) defined it, is the result of the ego's ability to keep two sides of a conflict in consciousness until a symbolic third appears:

If the mediatory product remains intact, it forms the raw material for a process not of dissolution but of construction. . . . The standstill is overcome and life can flow on with renewed power towards new goals. (p. 480)

Jung (1931) considered that the aim of his psychotherapy is precisely to try to move on from a stuck position:

To bring about a psychic state in which my patient begins to experiment with his own nature—a state of fluidity, change and growth where nothing is eternal fixed and hopelessly petrified. (p. 46)

Another expression for this is “the symbolic attitude” with its “as if” quality, similar to play. The ability to symbolize is not so much about understanding and interpreting the content but about the process that is set in motion. The process of individuation therefore builds upon the transcendent function. I wonder if the understanding of the nature of the transcendent function at that time was so bound up with the method of active imagination that it was not considered to be a separate concept with value in its own right that could be just as useful in relation to any other psychological material?

When I first read this paper without knowing the author, I felt that the forty years since it was first presented at the fourth IAAP Congress in 1968 was truly a long time, and that it really needed to be updated. When I was told that the author was Edward C. Whitmont, I realized that an update on the same theme written by the author himself probably already existed. I am thinking here of Whitmont’s 1983 book *Return of the Goddess*. Chapter 13 is called “Individuation and Destiny,” and Whitmont even uses the same *amor fati* quotation from Jung. I have found it interesting to compare the two texts separated in time by fifteen years.

First, Jacques Choron and quantum mechanics has wisely in my view been left out; so has the argument about synchronicity as well as the reference to Baumler. The nature of his argument has also shifted. Whitmont (1983) writes:

Yet it is the very nature and evolutionary intent of our being—our individual “historical process” of individuation—that limits our freedom and prefigures our course through life. Thereby our individuality becomes also our destiny. As individuals we are genetically preprogrammed in terms of constitution, disposition, reaction patterns, drives, and motivations *in potentia*, namely, as typical ways of response readiness which yet are specific and unique for each person. Through awareness, their effects can be modified to varying degrees. As long as we remain unconscious or deny their existence they become our “fate.” . . . The Self operates *as though* [my italics] generating an evolutionary will and intended pattern of its own, quite often at variance with the conscious ego.” (p. 205f.)

I must say that I like this approach much better—I have no problems with concrete, individual limitations or the “as if” operation of the Self with the implication that we human beings can, and certainly often do, have experiences like that. I am a Jungian and I value the symbolic attitude.

But as we read on, it becomes clear that Whitmont (1983) has just toned down, rather than abandoned, his theory of a concrete evolutionary goal:

Whatever problems, difficulties, pleasures or possibilities our destiny happens to bring us can be just as much *in order to* help us to a new realization as they are *because of* what happened before. . . . Consciousness and differentiation of consciousness, in both the extroversion of relationship encounters and the introversion of self-confrontation, seem to be the universal human—perhaps even cosmic—goal toward all destiny moves. (p. 207)

His comparison between life and a dramatic play has been retained. Whitmont (1983) says: “In one respect our life drama differs importantly from those we see on stage. It includes the freedom to modify, if not alter, the script. It includes the necessity to improvise” (p. 211). This time-destiny aspect of life is ascribed to “consciously accepting and honoring the Goddess.” In a way, this Goddess is already present in the first paper as the helping symbol for the young patient who dreamed about serving the Goddess, and Whitmont (1968) did suggest that the patient’s crisis may “have been evoked by the Great Goddess Aphrodite herself” (p. 34).

Many Jungians, especially many female Jungians (and I include myself here), have been drawn to the study of those mythological images presenting to us symbolic feminine figures exercising wholly other functions and with very different attributes than the traditional gender roles of women allowed. Whitmont’s book is a testimony to that. What I am uncomfortable with is a conglomerate construct of *the Goddess* of which all goddesses are seen to belong; it is as if Whitmont here replaces the (masculine) Will of a Schopenhauer with a feminine version. I am more in agreement with Jung when he argues against Schopenhauer’s philosophy; however intuitive-poetic and holistic Whitmont’s vision is, I cannot see it as converging with current scientific thinking.

To my mind, Jung’s own model of the structure of the psyche is more modern than Whitmont’s, although preceding it by several decades. Jung anticipates current ideas about the systemic evolution in living organisms. Jung saw the psyche as a system with self-regulating properties, composed of interacting subsystems. Jung (1948, p. 4) also introduced the concept of finality (as a replacement for teleology), without any suggestions of fate or destiny, describing rather the energetic aspect of the psychological process, and later, when discussing his theory of synchronicity, Jung (1952) connected a psychoid property to the moving body which in his words:

. . . like space, time, and causality, forms a criterion of its behavior. We must completely give up the idea of the psyche’s being somehow connected with the brain, and remember instead the meaningful or intelligent behavior of the lower organisms, which are without a brain. Here we find ourselves much closer to the formal factor which, as I have said, has nothing to do with brain activity. (p. 505)

To Jung then, synchronicity is a category which “not only enables us to understand synchronistic phenomena as a special class of natural events, but also takes the contingent partly as a universal factor existing from all eternity, and partly as the sum of countless individual acts of creation occurring in time” (p. 519).

To my mind all of this is close to the notion of emergence, a concept not yet in use in Jung's time in the way it is used today. This theory has been found useful in the domains of philosophy and political philosophy, physical and biological systems, economics, www, architecture, mathematics and games theory—as well as for Jungians. I am thinking here of the title of the 2004 Barcelona Congress: *Edges of Experience: Memory and Emergence*. Emergence remains controversial to many scientists because of its associations with something mysterious.

Jesper Hoffmeyer (1996), a biologist, writes on this point:

The only mysterious thing about the term emergence is, if you like, that it forces us to accept the fact that Nature is comprised of a hierarchical system in which, at every level, we are faced with a set of boundary conditions which must be acknowledged as independent factors in the evolutionary process. Should we not at least keep open the option that the world is in the purest sense a creative place, the future of which, by that very token, is impossible to predict (after all, being predictable would mean being void of creativity)? And, that being the case, emergence cannot be mathematically pliable, since that would imply that the same initial conditions could lead to different endings in different drives within the computer. This would not prevent mathematical models from remaining indispensable tools in limited areas of real life. (p. 37f.)

To Whitmont evolution has a goal, hence there is implied within it destiny. Whether this is or is not the case, it is a matter of belief and speculation rather than a scientific theory. Jung has given analytical psychology a profoundly valuable heritage, drawing material as it does from fields other than the strictly clinical. But in my view we must also respect epistemological boundaries. When we move across such a line to discuss such matters as the evolution of living beings, it is advisable to become oriented in those fields of science where evolution is of prime concern. Using Bachofen as an example, we are in danger of taking a theory formulated more than one hundred years ago too much at face value. I think that Whitmont did just that in his paper on "The Destiny Concept in Psychotherapy."

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