



Jung's uncertain separation of psychology from philosophy: a response to Segal

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With characteristic rigour, erudition, and clarity Robert Segal develops in his paper a most ingenious argument that, if accepted, has unsettling implications for understanding Jung. He argues (especially pp. 378–81) that, for those who accept them, social scientific explanations of belief in God make it improbable that God exists. The social sciences provide naturalistic explanations. If one accepts that one's belief in God has a natural cause, such as in Freud's theory a projected wish, then one must also accept that any supernatural cause of the belief (such as God's existence) is redundant and, moreover, that one's holding of the belief is based on faulty reasoning (such as the error of projection). God's existence is made improbable because it is unlikely that a redundant cause (God) postulated on the basis of faulty reasoning (projection) actually exists. Since Segal includes psychology among the social sciences (p. 363) and claims that Jung aspires to make his psychology as scientific as a natural science (p. 364), he can treat Jung's psychological explanation of belief in God (that it stems from projection of an archetypal God-image) as a naturalistic social scientific explanation and so can apply to it the argument summarized above. Segal's professed aim in his paper is mainly to show that 'Jung was wrong to deny that the psychology of religion can bear on the issue of the existence of God' (p. 362). However, the bearing that Segal shows psychology – or any other social science – can have is negative only: reducing the likelihood that God exists. He does not draw attention to the contradiction that this exposes between the atheistic implications of Jung's professional work and Jung's private belief that God exists (affirmed by Segal on p. 374).

In this brief response I shall suggest that some of the claims on which Segal bases his argument need to be qualified. I acknowledge that the evidence in Jung's work to which Segal appeals does, on its own, tend towards the conclusions he draws. But I think one can point to other evidence, also in Jung's work, which indicates that Jung, rather than being outright split between his professional and private views, was simply more ambivalent than Segal depicts about the relationship between psychology and philosophy.

Segal claims that Jung deliberately and rightly kept separate the domains of psychology and philosophy (p. 370–71). However, in 1931 Jung wrote: ‘philosophy and psychology are linked by indissoluble bonds [...]. Neither discipline can do without the other, and the one invariably furnishes the unspoken – and generally unconscious – assumptions of the other’ (Jung 1931, para. 659). Elsewhere, far from keeping philosophy and psychology separate, Jung subsumes philosophy within psychology: ‘I always think of psychology as encompassing the whole of the psyche, and that includes philosophy and theology’ (1916/1948, para. 525; cf. 1927/1931, para. 342).

Segal argues that Jung does not believe he is entitled to enlist psychology to support philosophy (pp. 362, 370–71). But on occasion Jung seems to have viewed his work as precisely such an enlistment: ‘I endeavour in a scientifically responsible manner to point out those empirically graspable facts which make the justification of Christian and, in particular, Catholic dogma at least plausible’, he wrote to a correspondent in 1944 (Jung 1973, pp. 349–50). More particularly, in his paper ‘The psychological foundations of belief in spirits’ (1920/1948) Jung notes, sceptically enough, that he has ‘no proof whatever of the existence of real spirits’ and acknowledges that ‘when we work with the intellect, we must proceed scientifically and adhere to empirical principles until irrefutable evidence against their validity is forthcoming’ (1920/1948, para. 600). But in the same paragraph he writes that to give ‘a complete picture of the world’ we also need feeling and ‘subliminal perceptions of the unconscious [i.e., intuition]’ which offer ‘convictions that are different from those of the intellect’ and which ‘we cannot always prove [...] are necessarily inferior’ (1920/1948, par. 600). Here Jung’s psychological theory of the functions of consciousness is invoked to relativize the claims of a purely intellectual understanding and to lend credibility to metaphysical beliefs, such as that spirits exist or that God exists, stemming from feelings or intuitions.

There is even clearer enlistment of psychology for philosophy in relation to Jung’s writing on synchronicity. Segal states that for Jung ‘Synchronicity refers to the coincidence itself, not to its cause, and the coincidence is an entirely empirical matter, not a metaphysical one’ (p. 374) – a view for which one can readily enough find textual support (e.g., Jung 1951, para. 995; 1952, para. 960). However, in the ‘Foreword’ to his principal synchronicity essay, Jung also recognizes that synchronicity ‘open[s] up a very obscure field which is philosophically of the greatest importance’ (1952, para. 816), and it is clear that for him synchronicity refers not only to the coincidence itself but also to a principle (‘an acausal connecting principle’) and even, with allusion to Kant, to a ‘category’ that it is ‘necessary to introduce, alongside space, time, and causality’ (1952, para. 968). These philosophical issues may be epistemological rather than metaphysical. But Jung does not eschew metaphysics either. He acknowledged to Michael Fordham that, as well as being interested in the psychologically important archetypal implications of synchronicity, he was ‘equally interested, at times even more so, in the metaphysical aspect of the

phenomena' (1976, p. 344). And a reading of his later work shows that this interest could not be entirely restrained. For he draws inferences from the empirical data of synchronicity to metaphysical assertions such as that it is possible to have a kind of 'absolute knowledge' that transcends what can be arrived at empirically (1952, paras. 912, 923, 931, 948), that 'there is an interconnection or unity of causally unrelated events, [...] a unitary aspect of being which can very well be described as the *unus mundus*' (1955-6, para. 662), that the psyche 'exists in a continuum outside time and space' and 'possesses relative eternity' (1976, p. 561; cf. 1963, pp. 335-6) and that the psyche may in some sense survive death (1963, pp. 343-4; cf. 1934, paras. 813-15). Whether or not Jung's theory of synchronicity is correct or the inferences he draws from it are sound, it is clear that this aspect of his psychological thinking is being used to support metaphysical statements.

Segal's argument depends on viewing Jung's psychology as a naturalistic social science. But is it naturalistic? Not entirely, it seems, if the above non-naturalistic, metaphysical assumptions and implications of his concept of synchronicity are taken into account. Synchronicity aside, we can also note Jung's later formulation of archetypes as having a spiritual as well as a biological aspect, both 'located beyond the psychic sphere': 'The ultimate nature of both [spirit and matter] is transcendental', writes Jung (1947/1954, para. 420).

Segal's argument is strengthened by, even if it may not entirely depend on, the role of projection in the social scientific theories he discusses and the error that projection entails. Indisputably projection does entail error. But the error is to confuse the object onto which the projection is made with what is projected; it is not to deny the reality of what is projected. For Jung, the projection of something, whether personal or archetypal, can even be a first step in realizing it. If someone projects an archetypal image of God, it is erroneous to identify the object, person, experience, conception, or story onto which the projection is made as being God. But with insight the person can dissolve the projection and thus come to realize that the archetypal image of God exists in his or her psyche (1928, paras. 398-9). Moreover, because for Jung archetypes are capable of manifesting synchronistically, that is, acausally both in the psyche and in the outer world, it should be possible, in Jung's view, for an intrapsychic God-image to correspond to a reality beyond the psyche. Gilles Quispel reports that, with his concept of synchronicity, Jung believed he had 'forced a breakthrough from the soul to the cosmos' in the light of which 'the concept of projection should be revised completely' (Quispel, in Segal 1992, p. 249).

For Segal, should God prove to exist, the relationship between God's reality and beliefs in God's reality based on projection would constitute not insight but just a 'remarkable coincidence' (p. 379): 'The extraordinariness that the coincidence would represent is what [...] challenges the truth of religious belief', he states (p. 379). Jung does not deny the general value of probabilistic reasoning in science, which much of his work assumes. But he does suggest, with his concept of synchronicity, that in certain cases probabilistic considerations can

be subverted by acausal connection through meaning. Whether one such case is the correspondence between an intrapsychic God-image and God's reality beyond the psyche is a big question. But a positive answer to this question is for Jung a real and present, not just a hypothetical and remote, possibility.

I think the above examples are sufficient to indicate that Jung both was uncertain about the separation of psychology from philosophy and sometimes ventured into metaphysical speculation. His ambivalence and transgressions against his professed Kantian epistemology (1973, p. 294) may partly have their origins in an intimation of his vulnerability to the kind of argument that Segal so compellingly unfolds. In any case, I suspect that Jung would have preferred his private beliefs and his lifetime's professional work to be consistent with each other. Whether and how he might have achieved that consistency without being ambivalent or engaging in metaphysics is another question.

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