

## **C.G. Jung and the Inheritance of Immanence: Traces of Spinozistic, Nietzschean, and Freudian Influence in Analytical Psychology**

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### **Abstract**

*Carl Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, was heavily influenced by both Nietzsche and Freud, both of whom were influenced, as Yovel notes in his *The Adventures of Immanence*, by Spinoza. Through his years of collaboration with Freud and his long-lasting fascination with Nietzsche (combined with Jung's own semi-mystical tendencies, Jung became more of a Spinozian, than Nietzschean or Freudian. These Spinozistic traces can be detected in the framework of analytical psychology. A comparison is presented on the views of Spinoza, Nietzsche, Freud, and Jung on historical religion, the source of human motivation, and the liberating power of self-knowledge.*

This investigation explores the intellectual genealogy that links seventeenth-century rationalist and Jewish ex-communicant, Baruch Spinoza, to the founder of analytical psychology, Carl Gustav Jung. In *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Adventures of Immanence*, Yirmiyahu Yovel describes Spinoza's influence upon Nietzsche and Freud. In *Philosophical Issues in the Psychology of C.G. Jung*, Marilyn Nagy investigates the inspiration of Plato, Kant, Schopenhauer and others on Jung. However, no effort has been made to investigate the possibility that Spinozism might have trickled into Jungian thought through Nietzsche and Freud. Not only do I plan to shine a light on these Spinozistic traces, but I also plan to show that Jungian thought parallels that of Spinoza more closely than that of Nietzsche or Freud.

It should be noted that these Spinozistic traces in analytical psychology are likely present because of intellectual inheritance rather than deliberate appropriation. In the entirety of Jung's Collected Works there are only a handful of mentions of Spinoza. In *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, Jung briefly laments that Spinoza was one of the first philosophers to devalue the "metaphysical value" of the archetype (*Structure* 136). Then, in *Psychological Types*, Jung points to Spinoza as a perfect representative of the "intrinsic certainty," or "conviction" that accompanies intuitive knowledge (*Psychological* 453). Clearly, Jung had some level of exposure to Spinoza, but his grasp and overall opinion of Spinozism remains unclear.

While Jung gives Spinoza only a couple brief and seemingly ambivalent mentions within his *oeuvre*, Jung mentions the name of Nietzsche, the man who enthusiastically referred to Spinoza as his own "precursor" no less than nine times in Jung's autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Only Goethe and Freud are mentioned more frequently. Jung was fascinated by Nietzsche, but he hesitated to read Nietzsche's work for many years, for fear that he might turn out too much like the German philosopher. In some ways, Jung was correct. Both he and Nietzsche were raised by clergymen, and both men had "inner experiences" they found difficult to share with the rest of the world. Jung even attended Basel University, where Nietzsche had been made a professor years earlier. Jung feared their similarities might run deeper, and that he, like Nietzsche, might go mad. Curiosity eventually overcame Jung's fear, and he described his first reading of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a "tremendous experience" (*Memories* 102). The reading left such an impression on him that he would deliver a series of lectures on *Zarathustra* years later. It is difficult to overstate Nietzsche's influence on Jung, yet another figure looms even larger in his history.

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, Carl Jung's mentor, and the man who would proclaim Jung the "crown-prince of psychoanalysis," mentions Spinoza rarely, but, when he does so, it is typically to remark on their similarities. In a letter to Dr. Lothar Bickel, a Spinozist interested in the practice of psycho-analysis, Freud admits his debt to Spinoza, but he tempers his admission with the remark that, "I conceived my hypotheses from the atmosphere created by him, rather than from the study of his work" (Yirmiyahu 139). Freud clearly appreciated Spinoza, even if he denied a need for "philosophical legitimization." Freud, like Jung with Nietzsche, recognized the numerous similarities between

himself and Spinoza: both he and Spinoza were Jewish men separated from their tradition, both challenged gentile society with their rationalism, and both were met with tremendous resistance. Freud suspected that, in his own case, the resistance could be the result of his heritage. Therefore, he looked to his gentile disciple, Jung, to promote psychoanalysis.

Jung owes much to each of these predecessors. From Nietzsche, Jung would draw his love for individualism and a deterministic viewpoint reminiscent of *amor fati*. From Freud, Jung would inherit not only his technical expertise, but also the basis for many of the concepts he would refine within his own school of Analytical Psychology, concepts such as libido, the unconscious, and defense mechanisms. From both men, Jung would, perhaps unknowingly, inherit a great deal of Spinozism. The Jungian ideas that are most closely related to those of Spinoza are his concept of God, especially in connection with historical religion; his understanding of *conatus*, will to power, and libido; and his belief in the transformative and liberating power of self-knowledge.

### God and the Problem of Historical Religion

Spinoza was excommunicated for ideas that were interpreted as atheistic, but the language he utilizes in the *Ethics* opens the door for plenty of semi-mystical, metaphysical possibilities. For example, Spinoza claims that God is "...an absolutely infinite being, that is, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence" (*Ethics* 31). This, at least, seems to eliminate the possibility of a personal, yet transcendent God who creates matter *ex-nihilo*. Consider the following as well: "...all things are in God and are so dependent on him that they can neither be nor be conceived without him..." (Spinoza, *Ethics* 57). One might argue that Spinoza is describing a pantheistic God, but this is not necessarily so. Spinoza is describing God's participation in the universe and it in him, but he is not necessarily equating the two. In a letter to Henry Oldenberg, Spinoza plainly states, "As to the view of certain people that I identify god with nature (taken as a kind of mass or corporeal matter), they are quite mistaken" (*Correspondence* 73).

This letter, when taken into context, suggests that Spinoza likely held a pantheistic view of God, rather than a strictly materialist or pantheistic view. In other words, a single source exists that permeates the universe, but it is neither separated from the universe, as a pantheistic view would suggest, nor is it *simply* matter, as a materialist thinker would perceive the Divine. This pantheistic view is not a completely unique point of view among Jewish thinkers at the time; Cordovero, writing a full century before Spinoza, speculated that "God is all reality, but not all reality is God" (Scholem 252). It is well worth noting, when one considers the overwhelming atheism of Jung's influences, that Jung would share this pantheistic view with Spinoza when his explanation of the collective unconscious matured.

Spinoza's opinion on the matter of historical religion is far clearer than his theology. Without a doubt, Spinoza detested historical religion, insulting it as *superstitio* and *vana religio*. One can almost feel Spinoza's abhorrence when reading the *Ethics*: "So it came about that every individual devised different methods of worshipping as he thought fit in order

that God should love him beyond others and direct the whole of Nature so as to serve his blind cupidity and insatiable greed” (58). Spinoza wanted traditional religion eliminated and he had just the thing to replace it: a universal religion guided by reason instead of dogmatic belief. Spinoza believed that through *amor dei intellectualis*, man would discover a state of freedom from his passions.

Nietzsche famously proclaimed, “God is dead,” in both *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. For Nietzsche, there was no Divine Being pronouncing moral commandments from on high, demanding blood sacrifices, and encouraging the stoning of individuals for relatively minor offences. It should come as no surprise then, considering Nietzsche’s blatant atheism, that he held an unfavorable view of historical religion. Nietzsche did not even share in Spinoza’s immanence. Nietzsche saw no reason or order to the universe, whatsoever. However, one might be surprised to note that in *Will to Power*, Nietzsche briefly reveals a desire to embrace pantheism, but he quickly disregards it as a temptation to believe in the shadow of the old, dead God.

Far more in line with Nietzsche than Spinoza, Freud declared the notion of God to be an illusion, an outward expression of an inner need for a father figure. Furthermore, Freud believed that although religion might have once been useful in promoting social unity, it was now a “mass-delusion” that should be eradicated (26). Like Spinoza, Freud believed he had discovered the replacement for historical religion, but for Freud, this replacement was the “dogma” of psychoanalysis. Freud likened himself to Moses, who would never see the Promised Land to which his teachings would lead all humanity. Unfortunately for Freud, his gentile Joshua did not adhere to some of his most fundamental doctrines.

Jung’s understanding of God is far more difficult to pin down than the three described above, because, throughout his long life, Jung’s concept of evolved significantly. For example, with only a cursory glance, we might become convinced that Jung shared Freud’s atheism. Jung, in fact, often described himself as a strict empiricist. However, Jung was convinced he had psychological reasons for at least entertaining the idea of a God, although he would never commit to knowledge of whether God was an actual entity or merely a psychic construct. However, in a mystical treatise never meant for publication, *Septem Sermones ad Mortuam* (which one might call an early experiment in active imagination and/or a gnostic-hymn), the narrator Basilides plainly contradicts Nietzsche’s famous proclamation by telling his ghostly audience, “God is not dead. Now, as ever, he liveth” (Jung, *Memories* 382).

Early in his career, Jung aligned himself closely with Freud. However, following their schism, Jung grew ever more and more comfortable with situating the collective unconscious and its archetypes outside of neurological structures, genetics, or socio-cultural programming, and into the metaphysical realm. Eventually, he all but explicitly identified the collective unconscious with God. If we regard the collective unconscious as the source and entirety of psychic reality, with psychic reality constructing what we might perceive as “external,” then another look at the *Sermones* should be quite illuminating: “Moreover, God is the *pleroma* itself, as likewise, each smallest point in the created and uncreated is the *pleroma* itself” (Jung, *Memories* 382) and “[the *pleroma*] is both the beginning and the

end of created beings. It pervadeth them as the light of the sun pervadeth the air” (Jung, *Memories* 379). Of course, this singular essence of all things should remind us of Spinoza’s panentheistic God.

If Jung indeed held this view that God, the *pleroma*, and the collective unconscious were the same, then it makes sense that Jung would share a similar Spinozistic disapproval for historical religion. Referring again to the *Sermones*, Jung writes, “Least of all availeth it to worship the first God, the effective abundance and *summum bonum*. By our prayer we can add to it nothing and from it nothing take...” (*Memories* 386). To Jung, no religion would be literally true, nor useful, to God Himself. In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung recalls a childhood dream, which he was too terrified to share with any adults, in which God defecated on a church. I doubt I can find a better description of Jung’s feelings for historical religion.

Of course, just because Jung believed no historical religion was to be taken literally did not mean he found religious practices to be completely worthless. In fact, Jung often used religion as part of his treatment for neuroses. In *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Jung shares with the reader that among all his patients over the age of thirty-five, not one of them had a problem that was not, at its core, an issue of lost religion. In his opinion, religion could bring meaning to a patient’s life, but he takes great care to note that this has “nothing whatever to do with a particular creed or membership of a church” (Jung, *Modern* 264). It is important to remember that although Jung did not share Freud’s conviction that religion was simply an illusory crutch, he also advocated his own therapeutic method over any historical religion.

#### *Conatus*, Will to Power, and Libido

Another Jungian concept that meshes better with Spinozistic thought than Nietzschean or Freudian is the source of human drive, affect, and motivation. Spinoza called the source of all human behavior *conatus*. All psychic traits spring from *conatus*, including aggression, empathy, and even *amor dei intellectualis*. Perhaps most importantly, *conatus* is responsible for self-preservation. Spinoza explains that *conatus* is the drive through which, “Everything endeavors to persist in its being” (*Ethics* 108). This is important to note, when comparing Spinoza’s work with that of Freud, that *conatus* is monistic. Therefore, *conatus* can only lead to self-destruction through individuals’ misunderstandings of their own *conatus*, because “Nothing can be destroyed except by causes external to itself” (Spinoza, *Ethics* 108).

Nietzsche also espoused a single principle that guides all human behavior, which he christened the *will to power*. *Will to power* might best be understood as a sense of ambition. It is purely egoistic, never altruistic. However, *will to power* is not simply the desire to succeed in mating or business. It is the drive always to strive for a better position in life. This is not unlike Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Once one has found food, one secures shelter. If one has secured shelter, one seeks out friendship and so on. Nietzsche was convinced that all these acts were performed, not because an organism wished simply to perpetuate itself,

but because all beings wished to become more than they are at a given time. Spinoza might counter this argument by pointing out that one's *conatus* would indeed lead one to pursue a better position in life, but this would be accomplished in an effort better to preserve oneself.

Libido, or fundamental psychic energy, is the driving principle in Freudian thought. It arises from the id and is therefore primarily sexual in nature. Just as with *conatus* or will to power, libido is a purely naturalistic principle – it presupposes no “soul,” “spirit,” or any other transcendental quality. Unlike *conatus*, however, it is not monistic, but dualistic. Libido consists of two instincts, *eros* and *thanatos*. *Eros*, which may seem quite similar to *will to power*, is the pursuit of life and growth. *Thanatos* is primarily destructive in nature, even self-destructive. Because of this capability for self-destruction, it is of the utmost importance, in Freud's mind, that an individual redirect and externalize one's *thanatos*. Whenever externalization becomes impossible, as it often will in our society, *thanatos* must be sublimated. Spinoza would no doubt find this absurd. As mentioned above, in Spinozistic theory, only something external to a thing can destroy it. Therefore, no being can actually have a will to destroy itself.

While Freud drifts into dualism with *eros* and *thanatos*, Jung maintains the monistic nature of Spinoza's *conatus*: “...there is only *one* striving, the striving after your own being” (*Memories* 382). However, Jung would maintain Freudian nomenclature. To Jung, libido was neither purely sexual (although it could be), nor did it involve any particular instinct for self-destruction (although, again, this was a distinct possibility). Libido was, instead, all psychic energy. The source of this energy was not the id or even the ego, but the tension that exists between an individual's ego and the collective unconscious. In a view that is again closer to Nietzschean individualism or Spinozistic *conatus* than that expressed by Freud, Jung describes the primary function of the libido as individuation: a drive for constant betterment and greater psychic balance. The key to individuation is self-knowledge.

#### Transformation and Liberation via Self-Knowledge

Spinoza, Nietzsche, Freud, and Jung each saw self-knowledge as the key to liberation/salvation, but what that meant to each individual is quite different. According to Spinoza, knowledge of God and one's place within his essence will lead to salvation (*Ethics* 23). Therefore, within Spinoza's approach, one learns and grows through observation of the external world, which is part of God. In other words, through science one develops an understanding of God/nature and is thereby liberated from one's passions, but only if science (1) can be “conceived and felt as explicating a basic metaphysical truth, namely the identity of nature with God and of the individual's essence with the nature-God” (Yirmiyahu 148), and (2) “discursive scientific progress must eventually give way to the synthetic intuition” (Yirmiyahu 148). Spinoza advocates this process, science, as a means to probe the immanent universe and to understand one's own place within it.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, was not concerned with liberation from the passions, but rather with freedom from moral-slavery. Ethics or morality would not, for him, be bound by a transcendental concept like God, but simply by our natural tendencies of self-

overcoming. If this path of self-overcoming were to reach its eventual end, one would become the *Übermensch*, a man with no need for religion. As an *Übermensch*, one would finally embrace the world with *amor fati* and a willingness to submit to “eternal recurrence.” Nietzsche’s self-knowledge, which is closer to disillusionment than anything, may initially lead to suffering, but it should eventually be overcome by joy. This is the central theme of the *Gay Science*.

Freud wrote that there were three sources of human suffering: the body, which is “doomed to decay and dissolution,” the external world with “its merciless forces of destruction,” and our relationships with other humans (26). Humanity and civilization put great strains on the individual, who then begins to repress desires and painful memories. These memories are forced down into the unconscious and arise later in life in the form of neuroses. Freud advocated focusing on one’s inner, psychic states (instead of external factors as Spinoza instructed). By this method, as Freud taught, neurotics might expose repressed psychic material and cure themselves. It is important to note, however, that Freud did not believe this process would bring about any special, enlightened state. He believed only that through a willingness to embrace one’s impotence in the world, one might find peace enough to “love and to work.”

Jung, on the other hand, saw therapy as the key to freedom from complexes and to a special, semi-enlightened state of psychic-balance. Jung called this process individuation. A fully individuated person is capable of juggling the needs of the collective unconscious, the personal subconscious, the ego, and the Self. In other words, one is able to become a complete human being. One could reach this state of fullness by means of various practices that might include traditional talking and dream therapy along with other forms of creative expression possibly including painting, poetry, dance, etc. In this manner, one could unravel the negative emotions surrounding his/her archetypes and edge the seat of one’s consciousness away from the ego, toward the Self, one’s subconscious God-image. Keep in mind, Jung was not suggesting we identify with our God-image (which would lead to ego-inflation); we should simply bring our own desires and values into alignment with it. Only then, Jung taught, would one be freed from the control of the passions.

While Nietzsche saw self-knowledge as a means of creating meaning in a meaningless existence and Freud saw it as a panacea for psychic disease, Spinoza and Jung saw the acquirement of self-knowledge as something of a religious experience. Although Jung clearly draws his terminology from Freud, his individuation process bears a greater resemblance to Spinoza’s method than Freud’s. Like Freud, however, Jung turns Spinoza’s search for self-knowledge inward. This inner work is the purposeful re-organization of psychic contents in order to discover the proper place of one’s ego within the universal expanse of *mind*.

### From Spinoza to Jung

This essay has shown the effect Spinozism had on the development of analytical psychology through the dual-influence of admitted admirers of Spinoza, Nietzsche and Freud, which led to Jung becoming closer to a Spinozist than either of his influences. Al-

though Spinoza and Jung held slightly differing opinions on historical religion, they shared a panentheistic view of God (a view not shared by Nietzsche or Freud). Jung's unique understanding of *libido* as the source of human drive resembles the singular essence of *co-natus* far more than it resembles Freud's overly-sexualized concept of *libido* or Nietzsche's *will to power*. Finally, while Nietzsche saw self-knowledge as a source of personal meaning and Freud saw it as psychological remedy, Spinoza and Jung saw the acquirement of self-knowledge as a religious experience. Spinoza advocated this pursuit as a means to probe the immanent universe and to understand one's place within it. Jung's individuation process, although similar, takes the search for self-knowledge down to the microcosmic level.

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