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# A Jung-Bateson Correspondence

Andrew Relph\*

*C. G. Jung, founder of Analytical Psychology, has had a major influence on 20th century thinking and on psychotherapists in particular. Gregory Bateson's ideas have similarly found a wide and influential application, but family therapists in particular have made use of his concepts to begin the construction of a theory of family therapy. The relationship between the individual and the system does not surprise us, but the interface between individual psychotherapy and family therapy is seldom addressed.*

**Dear Bateson,**

Today I am heavy hearted. There seems to be a whole generation of people who reject my ideas without considering them. Also, I feel my work in danger of being misunderstood. This is always the case I suppose (and you would know) — what one thinks and writes is not always what others see. People so easily pick on one aspect and do not see the whole. So I welcome the idea of corresponding with you. The opportunity to leave aside the complex mass of my volumes and say a few things about specific ideas that have become central to my way of thinking and doing psychotherapy. I shall try to limit myself to one or two ideas in any one letter so that I don't get sidetracked. I very much look forward to hearing what you have to say about these and of course to hearing more about your work.

First let me say something about the structure of the psyche. As you know we see the psyche as divided into two complementary but antithetical spheres: the conscious and the unconscious. The ego seems to stand between these two spheres and to have a share in both. It represents the part of the psyche which is primarily oriented towards adaption and outward reality. Consciousness of course is only a small island on the ocean of unconsciousness. I see the unconscious as being much more than merely a repository of repressed objectionable and especially infantile aspects of the person. Let me say it in terms of the family. Consciousness bears the same relationship to unconsciousness that the individual bears to the family. The unconscious, like the family, is a much larger source of information than consciousness and the individual. Attending only to conscious material would be like doing therapy blindfolded. I think you would say the same about interpersonal therapy done without access to the person's family. So the unconscious is the context, the matrix for consciousness and contains all the new possibilities of life. It is because of this that I pay so much attention to it.

What I have termed the collective unconscious I am sure will interest you greatly. This universal unconscious

is made up of images and ideas which are common to all people. These archetypes, as I have called them, form the connecting thread which joins people across cultures and across times at the most basic level.

The archetypes are modes of psychic functioning or patterns of behaviour — psychic processes transformed into images. So in dream analysis I am, you see, not only interested in the personal symbols and associations of a person but also in those that are common to everyone. I have built up a picture of some of these universal themes over the years of analysing many people's dreams. I have sought them in my own unconscious and I have identified them in the writings of the gnostics and alchemists, and in the primitive tales and myths from around the world.

Maybe at a later stage I could elaborate on some of the central archetypes I have discovered.

**Dear Jung,**

*Your letter about the unconscious demands a reply. First of all I am not as naive to the concept of the unconscious and to some psychoanalytic writing as you may think. However you are probably right to be cautious and introductory about such matters when talking to some of those who are known as family therapists. Family Therapy is a radical change but some people have taken this to mean that everything which happened before family therapy must be irrelevant to it. As pioneers of the interactional model we could talk like that because we had already studied the other psychotherapies. The danger might be that 2nd and 3rd generation family therapists who did not make the switch from one form of thinking to another, will disregard important foundations in other forms of psychotherapy for the work they do with families.*

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†Dates, places of writing and several personal sections have been removed from the letters for clarity of the exchange of ideas.

As for me, I have read a lot of psychoanalytic writing including some of your own work: Freud, Fenichel, Erikson and so on. Of course the whole area of psychotherapy is bound up with the unconscious processes of which you wrote. The clearest examples from the family therapy field lie in the extensive use that is made of metaphor and metaphorical tasks. (e.g. Milton Erickson). In my own writing I have usually talked about primary and secondary process rather than the unconscious and the conscious. This reflects, I suppose, my inclination to pursue processes rather than structures. What interests me is the difference and interface between these two processes. In primary (or unconscious) process the language is metaphorical with a focus on the relationships between things or between people. Also in this process there are no markers to indicate to the conscious mind that material is metaphorical. When these indicators appear one is into the realm of secondary process. (The "as if" or "like" in a simile; the marker statements of consciousness; "that was a dream" or "this is play".) This is about map-territory relations which are so central to therapy. In primary process map and territory are equated, in secondary process they can be discriminated. In play, and maybe in psychotherapy, they are both equated and discriminated.

Some family therapists don't seem to have grasped the importance of this distinction and relationship between primary and secondary process. They have sometimes ignored what you call the unconscious and have consequently missed (or worse discredited) large and potentially very useful areas of themselves and their clients. After all, therapists who are dominated by conscious purpose still have primary processes. A car still has gears even if it's only driven in third. But why am I going on about this, it's not you of all people I should be writing this to.

For me the idea that Freud seemed to espouse, that everything which is unconscious should be brought to consciousness, is all wrong, and I think you'd agree with this. The essence of being human is the continued juxtaposition of conscious purpose with nature (or the unconscious?). Those therapists who are obsessed with conscious purpose and focus only on problem solving are essentially arrogant and one-dimensional. On the other hand, perhaps the originators of problem solving therapy did not make this error; rather those that took their techniques and tried to apply them and teach them universally made the mistake. But then I've always been suspicious of applied social science: problems can so easily be made worse by attempts to solve them.

Perhaps the part of your theory that most intrigues me is the collective unconscious and the related idea of the archetypes. This is probably because of my anthropology work. I find it fascinating to think of a similar process image occurring in an ancient folklore tale and the dream of a modern patient. This is very close to a central issue I've been taken up with for a long time. I call it the pattern which connects. When I wrote about the patterns of vicious cycles and related self-corrective mechanisms in the Iatmul tribe of New Guinea I was hoping to find common threads with modern, Western patterns of interaction. In a way this has

happened and some of those patterns have now become integral aspects of cybernetic theory which is applied in family therapy and elsewhere.

So you see, I think that your archetypes of the collective unconscious may in fact be similar in nature to those patterns which are to be observed in relationships between people the world over, and which would be useful to know about when intervening in a family or any other social system.

Write to me some more about these archetypes of yours.

**Dear Bateson,**

You are right to draw a comparison between those interpersonal 'patterns' you have researched and my archetypes. Partly because of the popularization of my work there is a misapprehension that archetypes are only static figures — the hero, the old wise man, the earth mother and so on. The fact is the symbols sometimes look static and descriptive, especially when they are personified like the ones I mention. But the archetypes are actually psychic processes which are universal — like hate and love; and birth and death. They are sometimes interpersonal in nature like: the struggle against a superior power, relations between the sexes and between parents and children, and so on. So I think the patterns you have described like schizogenesis are precisely archetypal. The fact that you talk about these patterns in interpersonal terms does not exclude them from occurring also at an intrapsychic level. The processes which take place in the mind must mirror those that occur outside it (and especially in the interpersonal context).

A man of 32 is referred to me because of a severe depression. Though his sleep is disturbed, he tells me about a dream in which he is on a train out of war-torn Germany to America. He has left behind his mother and father. On the train he meets a young woman who has been injured in the war and is going to America to convalesce — this is just a bit of his first dream. Intrapsychically his journey out of his depression seems to have begun. He is leaving behind conflict and going to a new psychic state. He has left behind some restricting dependency and is making close connection with his damaged feelings. In the interpersonal context, sense can be made of these images too. You would probably not be surprised to hear later that the young man recently left home where he'd lived with his unhappily married parents and had started a relationship with a young woman who had previously been in a psychiatric hospital.

There seems no reason at all why several different levels of meaning and pattern might not occur simultaneously. (A father who talks about his child is also talking about his childhood.)

Your preference for the interpersonal context would appear to mark you as an extravert. I should think that the majority of family therapists with their emphasis on power and influence and strategy would be extraverts. I on the other hand focus on the internal and the unconscious and am as clearly marked an introvert.

I better explain, though you may be familiar with this already. I have described two attitude types into which people can be divided depending on the way they react to

inner and outer experience. Extraverts act and orient themselves in relation to the object and the outward (Freud was typical) while introverts act and orient themselves in relation to subjective factors and inward experience.

People can be further characterised by the dominance of their particular psychic function. There are four basic functions which characterise consciousness — primary modes of apprehending and assimilating information. Thinking is the function which encounters the world and adjusts to it via thought and cognition. (I would think both of us have thinking as our primary function.)

Feeling is the function which makes evaluations based on feelings of pleasant or unpleasant and so on. As determinants of behaviour these two functions (thinking and feeling) are both concerned with making judgements but are mutually exclusive and either one or the other predominates. The other two functions, sensating and intuiting, are primarily ways of perceiving rather than evaluating and interpreting. Sensating is concerned with perceiving things precisely as they are (i.e. with reality). Intuiting perceives things at a more global level and is concerned with inherent characteristics and inner meaning rather than reality. As with thinking and feeling these two functions are mutually exclusive.

Of course I discovered these principles about psychic functioning relatively early on in my investigations. In latter days I have concentrated my effort on the collective unconscious and this has led me in directions not unlike those of an anthropologist. I have travelled widely and collected observations on the psychic functioning of many cultures. We could compare impressions regarding some of these later.

**Dear Jung,**

*Your letter about types and the four functions came this week. One thing concerns me very much. It is that you talk about your theories as discoveries rather than as constructions and formulations. This produces an expectation that the right construction, viewpoint, method of treatment, whatever, exists, and should be sought after. On the other hand my view of this is that your, or my, construction of things — hedgehogs, language, the human psyche and so on — is a transitory phenomenon which is a product of a particular context and should be judged by its usefulness rather than its proximity to something regarded as 'the truth'. Such a difference will of course strongly influence the way we respectively teach our students and is bound up with the difference between epigenesis and creativity.*

*This comment leads straight on to and is in a way the same as my main difficulty with introverts/extraverts, feeling/thinking and so on. I have come to the strong view that behaviour and so called personality characteristics displayed by an individual (or for that matter a group of individuals like a family) is contextually based. A person is not an extravert, as you make it sound, though a person acts in an outgoing manner in certain contexts or relationships. Some behaviours that in some contexts might*

*be described as reserved, suddenly take on a very sociable quality in an altered context. So there is a problem I think in describing behaviour as if it were free of context and dependent rather on a 'personality trait', so called, like 'extraversion' or 'dominant function thinking'. My view is that a particular action or behaviour comes out of relationship and cannot be viewed in isolation.*

*As to family therapists being extraverts, again it is presumably the fact that they are frequently seen to be with families that makes it seem so. They have good parties and their conferences constituted to talk about new ideas in family therapy are always extremely lively and entertaining — does this make them extraverts?*

*I agree with your summary that there is no reason why different levels of meaning might not occur simultaneously. This is one of the bases of my writing about what I have called double description — that is, the increase of information or learning which flows from two descriptions rather than one. I have cited many examples of this in my book 'Mind and Nature'. Simply put, newness can only emerge from combining two or more things. Therefore, in attempting to introduce change, it is crucial to develop a double description or one that can be viewed simultaneously from more than one side. This is the basis of describing things in terms of systems — cybernetic explanation. Also, I suppose it forms the basis of all psychotherapy, which will work to the extent that the therapist can bring a second or new description to the client/s, while not being so different from them that they are alienated or don't understand.*

**Dear Bateson,**

I am not a philosopher but an empiricist. I do talk about 'my discoveries' rather than my constructions and I do in a way pursue a truth about how the psyche works. Maybe it's wrong. I have on the other hand read your references to the fact that an epistemology (maybe mine) can be false or incorrect. Is this not a similar construction?

I was very intrigued to read what you had to say about relationship — double description: the information got from combining two things. A very similar formulation indeed forms the basis of much of what I have written about in 'Mysterium Coniunctionis (1963)'. This concerns the idea that all things live by relation to their opposites. When I was talking about introversion-extraversion, thinking-feeling and so on, I needed to say clearly that probably the most important aspect of this formulation is that those people who are characterised by one of these types and functions are also, at an unconscious level, characterised by the opposite. Much of my work with patients is directed at bringing about a resolution (through dream analysis) of some of these opposing tendencies. Not, as you have said, slavishly making whatever is unconscious conscious, but in maximising the creativeness of people which seems often to be expressed in the combining of opposites. I think that this aspect of things actually comes quite close to what you said about relationship and double description. In the same way as you maintain that a certain behaviour exists or has meaning only in terms of the context or relationship frame

in which it occurs, so I believe that a person's capacity for cool and rational thinking only exists in relation to the measure to which his or her feeling function is relegated to the realms of the unconscious. I am saying in a way that I regard the unconscious as a context for what is conscious. In interpersonal relations this fact will emerge when you observe the sparks that so often fly between people of opposite function.

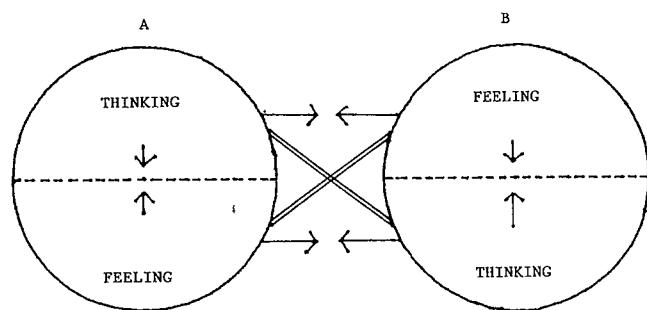


Figure A

Of course person 'A' will seem even more of a thinker in the context of person 'B' (I agree with you on that) but 'A' will also seem more of a thinker in relation to his/her own repressed feeling, i.e. the degree to which the feeling function is absent. Your 'double description' may work on an intrapsychic level too, in which case it is similar to my theory of the opposites. The best example of this connection between our work comes from our chapter on the 'Multiple Versions of the World' which I have now read. In 'The Case of the Two Sexes' you have talked about the duality of fission and fusion between the two sexes and the importance of the latter for both limiting genetic variability and ensuring requisite variety. On a biological or interpersonal level this is an account also of the anima and animus: the female and the male representations or archetypes in the psyche. A man will always have a more or less deeply repressed feminine side, the anima; a woman, a masculine side the animus. The difference and conflict experienced intrapsychically between these two forces will be the source of much creativity (as well as neurosis) and the attempt to integrate these two opposites will often lead to newness, psychic newness this time, not genetic newness. However, a measure of their separateness is important also for the individual to be functional, especially with respect to interpersonal relationships. A person experiences their contrasexual component through another. The world of relationship reflects the internal psychic world.

Leaving aside this example, a general principle must be that one cannot recognise or realise anything without separating and dividing. Once again, there is a corresponding pattern on two or more different levels.

**Dear Jung,**

*Regarding your last letter, from my point of view, MIND — the sort of principles and patterns we have been discussing — can be recognised as easily in a person, a group or family, or an entire ecosystem.*

*This letter is a short one just to say that a very important notion on the subject of cybernetic explanation is restraint. In the cybernetic or systemic view, explanation is negative rather than positive. Behaviour or events happen because they are restrained from taking alternative courses. Without these restraints events and behaviour would be random. Inequality of probability of one behaviour happening over another is determined by 'restraints'. I have gone into all of this in my paper 'Cybernetic Explanation' so I won't repeat myself. All I wanted to say was that your view of the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious expressed in your last letter is at least one example of negative explanation and restraint. I'm not sure you see it this way but really according to your theory of opposites, if you say a woman is a thinker for example then she is so because she has relegated feeling to her unconscious, and can therefore be seen as 'not a feeler'. In a particular response from a person feeling, thinking, sensing and intuiting could be seen as all being discriminatively restrained. It is, in a way, a good example since your theory suggests four functions and so it is easier to see than to talk about the myriad of relational and behavioural possibilities that did not occur in an interpersonal situation.*

*Enclosed is a copy of 'Cybernetic Explanation' — I suppose we should be cautious about seeing too many similarities, becoming too abstract or moving towards too high a level of generality. Others could just as happily focus on the dissimilarities between our views.*

**Dear Bateson,**

Yes, too many similarities is a problem. It comes I think from concentrating one's attention on the archetypes and the collective unconscious. At one point everything can be seen as similar to everything else, as in the equivalence of opposites in dream imagery and myths. (In the unconscious, for example, content is contaminated so that everything is everything.) There must always be a balance between the general and the specific. The general or the unconscious taken too far becomes devoid of useful meaning. The specific or the conscious, taken too far makes transfer of meaning from one situation to another impossible. I suspect you would call this nature versus conscious purpose and I note in your paper with that title you argue for the difficult synthesis of both, rather than the easy swapping of one for another.

This makes me think of what people have done with my theory and what they might do with yours. In a way I have been categorised as too much interested in the unconscious — mad as a hooty owl — whereas in fact that is what people see in my theory. I have on the contrary based everything on a synthesis of opposites, an adequate balance of conscious and unconscious. I am often maddened by so called Jungians and what they see in my writing and more importantly (talking of restraints) what they ignore. *You* on the other hand, while also arguing for a synthesis of conscious purpose with nature, will probably be talked about from a conscious purpose point of view as if you'd never dealt with 'nature'.

A whole group of people calling themselves family therapists may then be in danger of taking the simple, the cognitively useful and the consciously digestible ideas of you and your colleagues and applying them as a new technology, a commodity to be exchanged and bought. This would be as sad a day for the art of psychotherapy as it would be if enthusiasts of my writing were to all become as unconscious and as mad as hooty owls.

I feel that by writing to each other we have begun the process of relating some ideas which in spite of their correspondence have so rigidly been kept apart by all but a few followers of the psychoanalytic and family systems traditions. Maybe with growing security, exchange of ideas and the acknowledgement of commonalities and differences between the two traditions may become more fruitful.

Dear Jung,

*In a way Separatists and Purists have done a disservice to the advancement of psychology and psychotherapy. Things move forward in a co-evolutionary manner. Two or more views, theories, or models interact like species. Changes in Theory 'A' set the stage for a new understanding or emphasis (natural selection if you like) in Theory 'B'. Later, change in Theory 'B' will set the stage for selection and emphasis in theory 'A'.*

*This is why it is vital to ensure that models and ideas get talked about and brought together rather than excluded or isolated. Like your 'Eranos Conferences', I have participated in, and recently helped to organise, conferences between people of diverse background, discipline and interest which have given rise to unexpected creativeness and inspired new ideas.*

*Newness comes from integrating. On that we are agreed. In interchange we should prize discrepancy as a source of the new — constantly changing and adding to ideas rather than rejecting what is different.*

*Much can be said for Purists though — they supply rigor and discipline. But the mixture of ideas, the imagination, the noise, is the source of new patterns.*

*I look forward to our continued if noisy correspondence.*

#### POSTSCRIPT

As far as the author knows, these two men never actually wrote to each other, but it is intriguing to imagine such a correspondence between them and the systems of thought they represent.

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