ON PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING ¹

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In studying cases of dementia præcox we are astonished at the overwhelming wealth of carefully elaborated symbolic phantasies. In 1903, for the first time, I attempted the analysis of a case of paranoid dementia præcox. It is the case I published in my book on the "Psychology of Dementia Præcox" four years later. Even though working at that time with a very incomplete technique, I was extremely astonished to find that all these utterly incomprehensible ideas and delusions can be understood in a comparatively simple way. At that time—following *Freud's* theory—we considered the delusion as a kind of wish fulfilment. But it also became quite obvious that this wish fulfilment could not be of a simple nature, owing to the fact that there were two distinct kinds of delusions, first: positive wish fulfilling delusions of grandeur, and then: negative delusions of persecution and depreciation. Both could be considered as infantile wish fulfilments, but they seemed to be of a different nature.

Later on, in 1911, *Freud* himself published a similar case; a case well known in the German literature, the so-called "*Schreber*" case. It is a careful study upon the foundation of a very refined analytical technique. The patient himself could not be analysed personally, but having published his most interesting autobiography, all the material wanted for analysis was here provided.

In this work *Freud* has shown out of which infantile foundations the delusion is built up. Thus, for instance, he was able in a very ingenious manner to reduce the patient's most peculiar delusions about his doctor, whom he identified with God himself, or at least with a godlike being, and some other most curious and even blasphemous ideas, to the infantile relationship between the patient and his father. As the author himself says, his work confines itself to the task of pointing out those universally existent foundations upon which any psychological creation is built.

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This reductive process, which is the essence of analysis, did not, however, furnish such enlightening results in regard to the rich and surprising symbolism in patients of this kind as we might have expected from experiences with the same method in the realm of the psychology of hysteria. The reductive method seems to suit hysteria better than dementia præcox.

If one reads the recent researches of the Zürich School — I mention the names of *Mæder*, *Spielrein*, *Nelken*, *Grebel'skaja*, *Itten*, and quite recently *Schneiter* — one gets a very good idea of the simply enormous symbolic activity of such a diseased mind. Some of these authors, applying, like Freud, an essentially reductive method, explain the complicated system of delusions on a basis of a simpler and more general nature, but this way of explanation doesn't seem to be entirely satisfactory. It is true the reduction to a simpler and more general model is explanatory to a certain extent, but it doesn't seem to do entire justice to the overwhelming abundance of symbolic creation.

Let me illustrate with an example. We are grateful to a commentator of *Goethe's* "Faust," if he explains the manifold figures and scenes of the second part of "Faust" by reference to their historical origins, or if a psychological analysis shows how the conflict in the drama corresponds to a personal conflict within the poet himself, and how this personal conflict is itself more broadly based upon those ultimate, elemental human things strange to none of us since we carry the seeds of all of them within our own hearts. But still we are somewhat disappointed. We don't read "Faust" just to discover that things everywhere are only "human, all too human." We knew that but too well already. Let any one who does not yet know it go and look at life for once without prejudice and with open eyes. He will return convinced of the prevalence and the power of the "too-human," and he will seize hungrily upon "Faust," not to find yet again that which he has just left, but in order to see how a man like Goethe deals with these elemental human things, and how he redeems his soul from bondage to them. Once we know to which historical individuals and events the symbolism in the second part of "Faust" refers, and that

it is all closely interwoven with the human personality of the poet, we go on to consider the question of historical determination as less important than the problem — what is the poet's real purpose in his symbolic creation? But the investigator whose method is purely reductive finds the final meaning in those ultimate human things and he demands nothing else from an explanation than that it should reduce the Unknown to the Known and Simple.

I should like to designate this kind of understanding as *retrospective understanding*.

But there is still another way of understanding, that is not of an analytical or reductive, but of an essentially *synthetic* or *constructive* nature. I propose to call this kind of understanding *prospective understanding* and the corresponding method a *constructive method*.

It is generally recognised that the modern scientific method of explanation is founded entirely on the principle of causality. Scientific explanation is causal explanation. So we believe we have understood and explained a thing, if it is analytically reduced to its cause and its general principle. In so far, *Freud's* method of explaining' is based upon a strictly scientific principle.

Yet, if we apply this method of understanding to "Faust," it becomes obvious that it is insufficient. We realise that we do not come within measurable reach of the deepest thought that the poet strove to express, if we only find universal foregone human conclusions in it. It seems to us as if we could see those everywhere; we don't need "Faust" for the purpose. What we really want is to find in "Faust" how this man has redeemed himself for his *individual* existence, and when we have comprehended so far, then we have understood the symbol, through which Goethe has allowed us to see the solution of the problem of individual redemption. It is true, we may then easily make the mistake of thinking that we have understood Goethe himself. But we must be cautious and modest, and must content ourselves with saying that we have understood ourselves by the aid of "Faust." I remember *Kant's* thoughtful definition of comprehension. He says that comprehen-

sion means: *to realize a thing to the extent which is sufficient for our purpose.*

Certainly, this kind of understanding is subjective, and not scientific, according to the view of those to whom scientific explanation is identical with causal explanation. But the validity of such an identification is decidedly a matter for discussion. I have to emphasize my doubts about it in the realm of Psychology. It is true, we speak of "objective" understanding when we explain by the principle of causality. But, in reality, understanding is a subjective process under all conditions. We ascribe the "objective" quality to this kind of understanding to distinguish it from another kind, to which we ascribe "subjective" quality. The attitude of to-day ascribes scientific value to the "objective" understanding on account of its general validity. This standpoint is unquestionably right, wherever it is not a question of the psychological process itself, and hence it is right for all scientific realms which are not pure Psychology.

To interpret Faust objectively, *i. e.*, from the causal standpoint, is as though a man were to consider a sculpture from the historical, technical and — last but not least — from the mineralogical standpoint. But where lurks the real meaning of the work itself? Where is the answer to the most important question: what aim had the artist in mind, and how have we to understand his work for ourselves subjectively?

It seems to the scientific mind as if this were a superfluous question that has nothing at all to do with science. The question itself interferes with the principle of causality, in so far as the question is clearly speculative and constructive. It has been a merit of the modern mind to have overcome the speculative spirit of Scholasticism. Yet, if we really want to understand our psyche, we have to realize the fact that comprehension is subjectively determined. The world is not merely objective; it is also as we see it. When we speak of mind or soul, it is still more true that it is as we see it. Of course it is possible to look at the mind objectively, no less than at Faust and a Gothic cathedral and the Confessions of Saint Augustine. The worth and

the worthlessness of modern experimental Psychology and of *Freud's* Psychoanalysis repose on the "objective" understanding. The scientific mind, thinking causally, is incapable of prospective understanding, its only way of understanding is *retrospective*. This kind of understanding is only one-half of a complete comprehension. The second half is *prospective* or *constructive*. And if we are unable to apply the prospective understanding, we have not understood the one essential function of the psyche.

If Psychoanalysis, following *Freud's* doctrine, were able to demonstrate the existence of an indisputable connection between the Faust and the development of infantile sexuality in Goethe, or, following *Adler's* doctrine, between the infantile desire of power and the adult man and his work, a very interesting problem indeed would be solved, and it would be demonstrated how a wonderful masterpiece can be reduced to the final elements, which are universal and to be found within the depths of everything and everybody. But did Goethe build up his work for this kind of interest or for such a purpose? Was it his desire to be understood in such a way? It is evident that such understanding is undoubtedly scientific, but none the less absolutely insufficient.

This statement is valid for Psychology in general. To understand the psyche causally means to understand one-half of it only. The causal explanation of Faust gives us light as to the way in which it has become the finished work; but in this way we have not yet understood its living meaning. That meaning only lives, if we experience it in and through ourselves. In so far as our actual life, the life we live here and now, is something new essentially, and not a repetition of the past, the main value of such a work cannot be found in its causal development, but only in its living influence upon our own life. It were depreciating such a work if we regarded it only as something that has been perfected and finished with. "Faust" is understood only when it is conceived as something that becomes living and creative again and again in our own experience.

In the same way we have to consider the human psyche. Only one side of our mind has been already built

up and is an historical result. This side can be submitted to the causal viewpoint. The other side is creative, and can only be comprehended synthetically or constructively.

The causal standpoint asks: How has this actual psyche, as it presents itself to-day, been built up?

The constructive standpoint asks: How can a bridge be built from this actual psyche to its own future?

The two viewpoints can be illustrated by the difference in their treatment of Dream-symbols.

(All I said about the constructive understanding of the delusions of dementia præcox is also valid for symbols in general.) *Freud* says, in his *Dream Interpretation*, that stick, spear, gun, sword, etc., in a dream are nothing but phallic symbols. No one can deny that, from the standpoint of the reductive method, this is certainly true. But the same symbols have a very different meaning from the constructive standpoint.

A patient of mine, a man of extremely feeble will-power, lazy and inactive, had the following dream: "A certain man gives him a peculiar old sword, ornamented with old and weird ciphers. The dreamer enjoys this gift immensely." At the time of the dream the patient suffered from a slight physical disorder, which had made an exaggerated impression on him, so that he had fallen back into complete despair and inactivity. He had lost at once all pleasure and interest in life.

It is perfectly true that the patient was very much under the influence of the so-called father-complex, and that he wished to have the phallic power of his father. That was precisely his infantile mistake, he wanted nothing better than to conquer life in an archaic sexual way. In so far, the reduction of the dream-symbol is perfectly satisfactory. Only the patient knows this fact very well and is able to interpret his dream in this way without any difficulty. He has learned nothing through his interpretation.

The association he gave to the man in the dream is: A young friend, who has been very sick with tuberculosis, and was even considered a hopeless case. The patient says: "It was marvellous to see how my friend stood all

tortures; he had simply tremendous endurance, courage, and hope; he used to say: 'I will not die, I am decided to live.' His will-power was so strong that he finally overcame the disease and got cured. He was really a model of courage." The associations to sword are: "An old bronze sword handed down from time immemorial. The ciphers remind me of old languages and old civilization. The sword is an old heirloom of mankind, a weapon, an instrument of defence and aggression, a shield against the dangers of life."

We understand: The young friend gave him the invaluable example of how one can stand the dangers of life through firm and brave decision. The words: "I-will" are the old inheritance of mankind, that has helped it through innumerable dangers. Those words are the palladium of civilized humanity, differentiating it from the animal, that only obeys dumb instinct and natural law. Through this dream a way is opened to the patient, a way to a more idealistic viewpoint, which redeems him from a childish self-bemoaning and brings him up to an attitude that has always helped mankind in face of threats and dangers.

As through Analysis and reduction the causal method finally brings back the individual fact to the fundamental and universal principles of human psychology, so through the synthesis of individual trends the constructive method aims at universal goals.

Psyche is transition, hence necessarily to be defined under two aspects. On the one hand the psyche gives a picture of the remnants and traces of the entire past, and, on the other, but expressed in the same picture, the outlines of the future, inasmuch as the psyche creates its own future.

The psyche at any given moment is at one and the same time result and summit of the past and a symbolic formula of the future. The future is only *similar* to the past, but in its essence always new and unique; thus the actual formula is incomplete, germlike, as it were, as regards the future. We may say: the formula or the picture of the future is symbolic, in so far as it expresses the future by way of an analogy. The future can be predicated only

to a certain extent, in so far as things of the future are but partially expressible in things of the past. But if we conceive the actual content of the psyche as a symbolic expression for future happenings, we have to apply a constructive interest to it. I was tempted to say: a "scientific" interest. But modern science is identical with the causal principle. But if we consider the psyche scientifically, *i. e.*, causally, the psyche as a creative function escapes. If we want to comprehend this other side of the psyche, we shall never do it by the exclusive application of the causal principle, but only by help of the constructive standpoint. The causal standpoint reduces to a simpler model, the constructive standpoint elaborates the complicated actual contents. This latter standpoint is necessarily speculative.

Scholastic speculation claimed general validity, but this constructive comprehension has a subjective validity only. If a speculative philosopher thinks he has a concept of the world through his system, he deceives himself, because he has only conceived himself and has made a naïve projection of himself into the world. This is a well-known fundamental error of speculative philosophy. The scientific temper of modern times is an extreme reaction from it. Modern science tried to create an objective psychology. *Freud's* doctrine is a definite reaction once more against this "objective" psychology, insisting upon the overwhelming importance of individual psychology. This is its immortal merit. This doctrine points out the immense importance of the Individual and the Subjective in the development of the objective psychological process.

Subjective speculation does n't claim any universal validity, it is identical with constructive understanding. It is a subjective creation; considered from the outside it may easily seem a so-called infantile phantasy or at least an unmistakable outcome of it. From an "objective" standpoint it has to be judged as such, in so far as objective is identical with scientific and causal. But considered from the inside, this subjective creation means redemption. *Nietzsche* says: "Creation — this is the great redemption from suffering and easiness of living."

If we apply the "objective" viewpoint to the phantastic creations of dementia præcox, we have to reduce them to elementary and generally valid foundations. *Freud* has done this in the paper mentioned before. But this is only half of the work to be done. The second half is the constructive comprehension of this system of phantasies. The question is: What is the goal the patient tried to reach through his creation?

This question seems queer to a scientific thinker of to-day. Certainly the psychiatrist will smile, for he is profoundly convinced of the general validity of his causalism. He knows the psyche merely as something made, descendant, reactive. Not too rarely we even meet the prejudice that the psyche is somewhat like a secretion of the brain.

But if we consider such a morbid system without prejudice, we soon become aware of the fact that it is striving towards a goal and that the patient himself devotes all his will-power to the completion of his system. There are patients who conscientiously elaborate their system with the aid of a tremendous material of comparison and proof. Others content themselves with an accumulation of synonymous expressions for the goal towards which they strive.

Freud understands this striving retrospectively; he judges it as a gratification in phantasy of infantile desires. *Adler*, a former pupil of *Freud's*, reduces it to the desire of power. He conceives the creation of the morbid system as a "manly" or "male protest," as a means to render secure the menaced superiority of the patient. This striving, and the morbid system invented to gratify it, are alike infantile. Hence one easily can follow *Freud*, when he rejects *Adler's* view; because *Freud* subordinates this infantile desire of power to his concept of the infantile wish-fulfilment.

But if we consider the morbid creation from the constructive standpoint, it is neither infantile nor eo-ipso pathological, but *subjective*, hence entirely justified in its existence. The constructive standpoint absolutely rejects the idea that the subjective creation is nothing but a symbolically veiled infantile desire or an obstinate maintaining of the fiction of the patient's own superiority.

One can judge the subjective mental process from the

outside, as one can judge everything. But such a judgment is inadequate, because it is of the nature of the subjective that it cannot be judged objectively. We cannot measure a distance with a weight. The Subjective can only be understood subjectively, *i. e.*, constructively. Any other judgment is inadequate. The absolute credit the constructive standpoint gives to the Subjective naturally appears to be an act of violence against human reason, if we consider it from the objective standpoint. But as soon as the construction is openly subjective, there is no more any argument against it.

The constructive comprehension analyses also, but this analysis is not strictly reductive. It decomposes the morbid creation into typical components. Even the most individual delusions are not absolutely unique, but show some obvious analogies with other systems and phantasies. The comparative analysis of many delusions gives average types. In the analytical part of the constructive method it is a question of reduction to general types of phantasy, but not of reduction to a universal principle such as "sexuality" or "desire of power."

We draw a parallel between individual creations and general types in order to enlarge the basis of our construction. At the same time the parallels aid the purpose of objective communication. Did we not draw these parallels, our construction would remain entirely subjective; we should construct with the language and the material of the patient, and thus we should elaborate a line of thought which would be intelligible to the patient and his explorer only, but not to the public, which cannot be expected to be *au courant* with the individual thought and language of the case. The researches of the Zürich School mentioned above give careful records of individual material. There we find many typical images and concatenations which are perfectly clear parallels to certain *mythological creations*. These parallels between historical and ethnical creations and individual delusions have become a most important source for the comparative exploration of morbid mentality. It is not easy to accept the possibility of such a comparison right away. The only question is, whether the

creations to be compared are similar or not. You will be inclined to object that pathological and mythological creations can't be directly compared. But this objection is not valid *a priori*, in so far as only a careful comparison can show whether there does exist such a parallelism or not. At present we only know that both are products of the creative phantasy of the unconscious. Experience may teach whether such a comparison is valid or not. All that we actually know so far encourages me to believe in the possibility of further important progress in this realm.

I gave a practical example of the constructive method in my book: "*Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*." I elaborated the phantasies of a case originally published by *Flournoy*, the eminent psychologist of the University of Geneva. My book has caused many misunderstandings, comprehensible if we consider the unusual difficulties of the objective demonstration of the constructive method. I should like to discuss some of the most easily misunderstood points.

If we study a case like the Schreber case worked out by *Freud*, it is not difficult to see that such patients suffer from an exaggerated tendency to create a system of the world, or better, of their world; what we call in German, *Weltanschauung*. Their obvious effort is to produce a system that helps them to assimilate a series of unknown phenomena in their own psychology, or, in other words, that helps them to adapt their unconscious to the world. This attempt produces a subjective system, which has to be considered as a necessary transition on the way to a definite adaptation. The patient, however, remains in that transitory stage and takes his merely preliminary and transitory formulation for a definite conception of the world. Thus he remains sick. He is unable to get rid of his subjectivism, and thus he never reaches objective thought, *i. e.*, the generally valid thinking of human society. He never reaches the summit of understanding, for he remains with a merely subjective comprehension of himself, which excludes a generally intelligible communication; as *Feuerbach* says: Understanding is only real *when it is in accord with that of some other reasonable beings*. Thus only do we reach the adapta-

tion to real human life. Perhaps you question whether the process of psychological adaptation does take place by this method of first creating a philosophical conception of the world, and you may even think that it is a sign of a morbid mental disposition to make the attempt to adapt one's self by means of a philosophical conception.

Undoubtedly, there are innumerable human beings who are capable of adaptation without creating any view or conception. If they arrive at all at a general view, it is only afterwards. But on the other hand, there are equally many who are only capable of adaptation by the aid of a previously formed conception or formulation of the task they are going to accomplish. To all that they don't understand they are unable to adapt themselves. And, as a rule, it comes about that they do adapt themselves just as far as they can grasp the situation intellectually. To this latter type seem to belong all the patients with whom we are dealing here. Medical experience has taught us that there are two large groups of functional nervous diseases: The one contains all those cases usually called *hysterical*; the other contains all those designated by the French School as *Psychasthénie*. Although the differential diagnosis is not always sure, still two psychological types are pointed out as unmistakably different. Their psychology is characterized by diametrical opposites. I called the hysterical type the *extraversion* type and the psychasthénic type the *introversion* type. Dementia præcox belongs to the latter type, as far as we know its psychology today.

The terminology — *extraversion* and *introversion* — depends upon my energetic conception of mental phenomena. I assume a hypothetical energy, which I designate as *hormé*. In my German publications I have used the word *Libido*, which seems to be too easily misunderstood in English. *Hormé* is the Greek word — *ὁρμή* force, attack, press, impetuosity, violence, urgency, zeal. *Hormé* is related to Bergson's conception of the "*élan vital*." The concept *hormé* is an energetic expression for *psychological values*. A psychological value is something active and determining, hence it can be considered from an energetic standpoint.

The introverted type is characterized by the fact that

he applies his *hormé* chiefly to himself, *i. e.*, he finds the Unconditioned Values within himself, but the extraverted type applies his *hormé* to the external world, to the object, the *Non-Ego*, *i. e.*, he finds the Unconditioned Value outside himself. The introverted considers everything under the aspect of the value of his own *Ego*; the extraverted depends upon the value of his object.

Unfortunately, my time doesn't allow me to go here into more details. I only should like to emphasize the fact that the question of the types is a vital question of our psychology. It seems to me as if any further progress would have first to go through this problem. It is not yet worked out satisfactorily. There is one little paper of mine: "*Contribution à l'étude des types psychologiques*" in the "*Archives de Psychologie*." William James has given an excellent description of the two types in Philosophy in his book on "Pragmatism," and our German Poet, Friedrich Schiller, has done the same for Æsthetics in his essay on the Naïve and the Sentimental. In scholastic Philosophy the School of the Nominalists and that of the Realists represent our types. In the realm of our medical Psychology Freud represents the doctrine of extraversion and his pupil, Adler, that of introversion. The irreconcilable opposition between Freud's and Adler's views is simply explained through the fact that there exist two kinds of psychology, which view things from totally different aspects. Extraverted and introverted Psychology are as different as day and night.

An extraverted individual can hardly understand the necessity that forces the introverted to accomplish his adaptation by first formulating a general conception. Still this necessity exists, else we never would have philosophical systems and dogmas presumed to be universally valid; civilized humanity would consist of empiricists only and the sciences of empirical sciences only. There is no doubt that causalism and empiricism are prevailing powers in the scientific culture of to-day. But we are not yet on the summit of evolution, and many things may be different in the future. The difference of the types is the first great obstacle on the way to a general *entente* concerning the fundamental con-

ceptions of our psychology. The second obstacle, that touches more nearly the constructive method, is the fact that this method has not to follow some doctrine or expectation, but has to adapt itself to the leading lines of the delusion itself. The direction of the morbid thought has to be accepted and followed up. Thus the explorer puts himself on the standpoint of the psychosis. This procedure may expose him to the risk of being regarded as mentally deranged himself, or at least of being suspected of having himself a philosophical conviction. This is still a critical point to-day. But it is well to know that every one possesses a philosophy, only there are people who aren't yet aware of it. The unaware simply have an unconscious, hence an inadequate and archaic view. For everything Psychological, neglected and not developed, remains in the primeval state. A famous German historian has given a particularly striking example of the way in which unconscious archaic views influence the conscious judgment. This author assumes it as a natural fact, that mankind once propagated itself through incest; because, in the first human family, there was no choice for a son among women. He only had his sister. This extraordinary theory is based exclusively upon the still existing unconscious belief in Adam and Eve, the first human couple.

It is wise to have a well elaborated philosophical standpoint, if one prefers to avoid such accidents.

The result of a constructive elaboration of a system of delusions is a sort of philosophy. But this kind of philosophy has nothing to do with a scientific theory of the world. It is a subjective psychological theory. It is even incorrect to use the term "theory." It is rather a *line of subjective psychological evolution*, which is the result of the constructive method.

The reductive method has the great advantage of being much simpler. It reduces everything to generally-known principles of a simple nature. The constructive method has to build up towards an unknown goal. The elements with which it works are the complicated components of the actual mind. This kind of work forces the explorer to take all those powers, which are at work in a

human mind, into his account. The reductive method tries to replace the religious and philosophical needs of mankind by a more elementary viewpoint, following the principle of the "nothing-but," as *James* nicely says; but the constructive method acknowledges them "*tel quel*" and considers them as the indispensable elements of its work. It is in the nature of things that such work should reach out far beyond the fundamental concepts of empiricism; it is in accordance with the essential nature of the human mind, which never contents itself with pure experience. The mother of a new thought is speculation and not mere experience. Experience without speculation leads nowhere.

I am conscious of the fact that, as the conception of *hormé* corresponds to *Bergson's* "*élan vital*," so the constructive method also corresponds to his intuitive method. But I confine myself to psychology and to practical psychological work, realizing the fact that every conceptual formula is psychological in its essence. Not only the conception of *hormé*, but even *Bergson's* "*élan vital*" are age-old conceptions of primitive mankind. Among primitive people we find nearly everywhere an identical conception of a dynamic soul-substance or a psychic energy. Its definition corresponds perfectly with the definition of *hormé* if one is able to overlook the unavoidable difference between civilized and uncivilized expression. The idea of the soul substance is chiefly found in the very primitive dynamistic religions. Considered from the objective or scientific standpoint, such a concept as *hormé* would be an impossible regression into primeval superstition. But considered from the constructive standpoint the existence of this concept through illimitable ages guarantees its practical usefulness, because it belongs to those primeval symbolic images which have always helped the process of transformation of our vital energy.