

Ambiguity and contradiction – the outlines of Jung's dialectics

Pauli Pylkkö

15th Conference of Research in Jung and Analytical Psychology;
Complexity, Creativity, and Action;
Arlington, Virginia

June 22 – June 25, 2017

- The manner (habit) in which Jung deals with contradictions separates his work from normal current science
- Classical logic (in text books, university courses of critical thinking) adheres to the law of noncontradiction: *ex contradictione sequitur quodlibet*

- deductively: from a contradiction can be deduced anything
- semantically: contradictions describe nothing (a contradictory set of sentences has no model)
- normal science: ambiguity is the breeding ground of contradictions
- the prevailing *credo*: get rid of ambiguities and contradictions

- Jung: psychic experience is ambiguous
- archetypes are ambiguous, and often contradictory
- yet, the psychic, including archetypes, is *real* (*wirklich*)
- therefore: reality is contradictory

Analytic Philosophy (since Frege and Russell) abhors ambiguities and contradictions, and recommends disambiguation.

Only sentences (or propositions), not reality or real things, can be contradictory

Jung: this one-sidedness forces us to diverge from *truth (Wahrheit)*: "Ich bestrebe bewußt und absichtlich nach dem doppelsinnigen Ausdruck, weil er der Eindeutigkeit überlegen ist und der Natur des Seins entspricht. Ich könnte meiner ganzen Veranlagung nach sehr eideutig sein. Das ist nicht schwer, geht aber auf Kosten der Wahrheit." *Aus einem Brief an einen jungen Gelehrten*, written originally in 1952, included in his *Erinnerungen*

The prevailing academic text book logic and its reasoning conventions must be disputed because Jung's dialectics, whatever its rules actually are, is indeed able to interpret and analyze contradictions and ambiguities without demeaning their expressive content or diminishing their psychic energy.

Post-Kantian German Idealism had faced similar problems with contradictoriness:

- Kant's antinomies
- the paradox of self-consciousness (Hegel)
- the conceptual inaccessibility or inexhaustibility of *Sein* (Hölderlin's *Seyn*)
- the Absolute, or God, with contradictory properties (Schelling; young Hegel's theology)
- the notions of infinity, movement... (Hegel)
- nonconceptuality of immediate sensuous experience (Hegel)
- the Unconscious (Schelling; Schopenhauer; Wagner)

Jung's dialectics is closely related to (or is even a version of) the dialectics of German Idealism

But the dialectics of German Idealism is inscrutable, studied only by few specialists, and dismissed by the academia: not a serious alternative for scientific reasoning and concept formation

Alternatives: (i) paraconsistent logic (Graham Priest's systems, for example), but not applicable in depth psychology; (ii) Adorno's Negative dialectics, promising, but committed to materialism, Marxism and Freudianism

Hegel's *Geist* as collective unconsciousness of *Volk* (Charles Taylor, 1975, translates Hegel's *Geist* as Universal Spirit)

Jung's strong dismissal of Hegel's work with expressions like 'Wörtergebäude,' 'megalomaniac language of schizophrenics' with 'crackpot power words' (Hull's translation: CW 8, p. 170))

and yet, similarities:

- energy originates from contradictions, experiential polarities, and conflicts
- with Hegel the principles of *Vernunft* (Reason; the rationality of *Geist*) doesn't equal formal logic

(similarities continued...):

- Contradictions can be dissolved by unification, that is, with Hegel by *Aufhebung*; with Jung by integration

The Hegelian *Aufhebung* as an ascending movement of *Geist* corresponds to the Jungian individuation process if the latter is realized on broad cultural or social scale

Analytic therapy for a culture or civilization?

And what is the most serious problem and the most obvious contradiction of our European-American or Western culture today?

It is our perplexed relation to nature (reveled as the extinction of species) due to one-sidedness of our (unwittingly contradictory) notion of rationality

How would the Hegelian-Jungian dialectics help us analyzing this problem?

but still, dissimilarities:

- 'archetype of progress' is active in Hegel's thinking; whereas Jung is antimodernist
- Jung's collective unconsciousness, its archetypes, do not progress
- With Hegel the world-history has a hidden plan though *Geist* may use *cunning* to realize it
- *Geist* may be too 'intellectual' for the Jungian purposes though *Geist* is not always fully conscious of itself; it is trying to comprehend hidden thoughts, not representations of instincts

Schelling's *Absolute* or Schopenhauer's *Wille* might suit better for the Jungian use: they are unconscious, partly nonconceptualizable, and instinctively energized

But still, unlike Schelling and Schopenhauer, Hegel has put explicitly forward (in *Wissenschaft der Logik* in particular) the principles of his dialectics:

Every thing (*Dinge*), and every subject matter (*Sache*) is contradictory: all energy, movement, life, change, and meaning arises from contradictions