



Philosophical and Psychological Aspects in Jung's Conception of Myth. The Schellingian Influence

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Abstract

Jung's concept of myth combines philosophical and psychological aspects. He was inspired by Schelling's ideas, including the relationship between myth and the process of development of reality. Myth not only refers to the human mind, but reflects the dynamism of reality processes. This is the meaning of the relationship between myth and the unconscious in Jung's grasp, because he understood the latter as a basis and matrix of reality. The psychological and psychoanalytical aspects of his conception of myth relate to patterns of human experience, which are also contained in myths. Thus, through the concept of myth is expressed the relationship of man and the world, the experience and the reality in which it happens.

Key words: conceptions of myth, philosophy of myth, psychology and myth, psychoanalytical conceptions of myth

Słowa kluczowe: koncepcje mitu, filozofia mitu, psychologia i mit, psychoanalityczne koncepcje mitu

Myth in psychoanalysis

It seems to be obvious that psychoanalysis was not a movement of thought that was especially devoted to research on myths. It was and is considered to be a movement within the history of psychology, with its philosophical assumptions, layers and the impact of 20th-century philosophical thought. The professional interests of Freud or Jung were medical; they were medicine men: a neurologist (Freud) and a psychiatrist (Jung); their medical beginnings led them to psychology. In both conceptions, the basis of the psychic sphere is the unconscious conceived as a part of the natural processes in the human mind, part of "nature," beyond the arbitral and voluntary manipulations of the conscious ego and also beyond the dilemma of the method of

introspection in psychology. This sphere is not a transparent and passive medium perceiving the outer world, nor encapsulated organic inner life; it is evolutionary in nature, and includes phylogenetic layers of human psyche development, its archaic phases with their strong impact on individual and socio-cultural life. Although the unconscious is not transparent and obvious, it provokes the question of how it can ever be manifested, grasped and – last but not least – proved.

It was the philosophy of Romanticism that was the source of the idea of the unconscious sphere penetrating the whole of reality, a hidden essential basis of reality development; unknowable yet manifested through pre-rational forms of activity of the mind – dreams, fairy-tales, myths, mental disturbances and creative processes. Both Freudian and Jungian conceptions are supported by the importance of the unconscious and the involuntary manifestations of its activity. It is possible to understand the unconscious through its manifestations. Thus dreams were conceived as a *via regia* to grasp the unconscious because the sequence of images generating in them reveal the core meaning that indicates the unconscious itself. Myths are also a relatively direct indication of it. They are a better material than dreams for researching the hidden sphere, because they are more understandable – we can understand dreams better if we know myths, as Freud wrote in one of his early works.¹ Myths are the language of the unconscious.

The role of myths is very important for the whole psychoanalytic movement because they become pillars of the unconscious conceptions, which are crucial for Freudian and post-Freudian researchers; however, they were not devoted to the study of myth itself. Thus psychoanalysis became a perspective in myth research: many investigators studied myths in the Freudian, Jungian, and Frommian ways of understanding. Some researchers were also influenced by the psychoanalytic perspective, such as Karl Kerényi, Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade, yet their domain of research did not have a psychoanalytic character.

Jung was a psychiatrist and researcher on schizophrenia under the supervision of the famous psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler at the Bùrgholzli hospital. Jung's first attempt to understand myth was closely connected with the specific symptomatology of schizophrenia and its symbolic and quasi-mythical imagery. He perceived the images created by patients as autonomous. The conscious ego has no control on them; they are coherently bound by some sort of "adhesive"; what is their meaning and what is this adhesive? These are the very first impulses to research in the mythological domain.

Jung and the conception of the unconscious

Jung introduced a new range of the concept of the unconscious: it is not only individually valid, but also anthropologically important as a common threat of the hu-

¹ S. Freud, "The Theme of Three Caskets" [in:] *idem, The Standard Edition of Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, J. Strachey (ed.), London 2001, v. XII, p. 292.

man mind, the most essential factor determining a collective level of human life and a philosophically conceived basis for the whole development of reality. Jung took this last idea from the convictions of Romantic philosophy. There is no other researcher in psychoanalysis that shares such a statement about the wide range of the definition of consciousness; only in philosophical conceptions can they be encountered, such as Carl Gustav Carus, Arthur Schopenhauer or Eduard von Hartmann. Jung developed this way of understanding the unconscious in the mature and late stage of his writings. Earlier definitions are much more psychological in character (*Psychological Types*, 1921):

The notion of unconscious is purely psychological for me, it is not a philosophical concept in the metaphysical meaning. The unconscious is a boundary psychological notion overlapping all those contents or mental processes which are not conscious; this means that they do not refer in a perceptible way to 'I'.²

The later writings, however, stress the philosophical perspective – the unconscious is a hidden sphere, the basis of psychical and beyond-psychical dimensions of reality. This is clear in his text from 1939:

The unconscious is a root of all experiences of wholeness (*dharamakaja*), a matrix of all archetypes and structural forms (*samhogakaja*) and a *sine qua non* condition of the world as a phenomenon (*nirmanakaja*).³

The term *psychoïd*, which he introduced in his late writings,⁴ also allows us to think about the unconscious penetrating physical and material reality.

Many accusations are levelled at psychoanalytical research on myth: that it is a kind of reductionism and psychologism, for instance, or that it would never understand myth as itself but as a phenomenon connected with the unconscious. Gilbert Durand wrote that the Freudian hermeneutic is a reductive one, and the Jungian one is constituting.⁵ Durand considered the paradoxical character of the psychoanalytic term “individual myth,” maintaining that a myth is always a product of the collective level of human life, and an “individual myth” simply does not exist.⁶ Both remarks refer to the essential problems connected with psychoanalytical methods in exploring myths.

In the Jungian frame of references, myth expresses the unconscious; to understand the unconscious it is necessary to understand the language of myth. This is also comprehensible as a product of development of the psyche, yet this is conceived as some specific form of organic life process; for Jung, the psyche is not an individual life

² C.G. Jung, *Typy psychologiczne*, transl. R. Reszke, Warszawa 1997, p. 534.

³ *Idem*, *Komentarz psychologiczny do Tybetańskiej Księgi Umarłych* [in:] *idem*, *Podróż na Wschód*, transl. W. Chełmiński et al., Warszawa 1989.

⁴ *Idem*, *On the Nature of Psyche* [in:] *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* [CW], Princeton–London 1953–1979, v. VIII.

⁵ G. Durand, *Wyobrażenia symboliczne*, transl. C. Rowiński, Warszawa 1986.

⁶ G. Durand, *Potęga świata wyobrażonego, czyli archetypologia Gilberta Duranda*, K. Falicka (ed.), Lublin 2002.

island. He compared it to Schopenhauer's unconscious will or Bergson's *élan vital*.⁷ "Mental" means "specifically formed," "high differentially developed." Psyche is "latent" for the matter in his late philosophical grasp (*unus mundus*). One cannot confuse this perspective with psychologism; on the contrary – it is rather "philosophism" of psychological conception. The unconscious is not a psychological phenomenon, but a hidden essence of reality.

Schelling's philosophy of myth

It was Schelling who influenced Jung's grasp of the myth. Schelling introduced a new way of understanding myth, yet he achieved this in the framework of reevaluation of myth in Romantic ideas, and also followed the precursory conception of Giambattista Vico. One can trace Plato and neoplatonics, Jamblich, Vico and Schelling in the philosophical understanding of the importance of myth. It achieved the highest position in Romanticism after previously having the lowest (Georges Gustorf⁸).

Schelling's conception can be considered as "the largest cathedral ever built for the glory of mythology."⁹ He was the possible author of *Eine Ethik*, also called a manifesto of "new mythology"; however, his authorship was never certain, and rather the whole problem is actually resolved in favour of Hegel.¹⁰ Schelling's philosophy indicated myth at the centre of the process of reality development; he rejected all rationalist, agrarian explanations of it. Myth is "the possession of the truth" – this is the main philosophical assumption.

The truth is expressed in a symbolic way by the autonomous language of myth, and also autonomous is his "totality of meaning."¹¹ The basis of all dimensions of reality development is a gradual loss of the "blind principle of nature," growth of consciousness and birth of self-consciousness. Myth expresses this in the succession of religious representations, the triadic scheme of "god, goddess and their son" relations, the confrontations of gods, heroes and monsters, half-animal, half-human figures of gods, etc. A human consciousness also has a symbolic form, which is why the process of reality development also manifests itself in the form of symbols, images and representations. Philosophy operates at the level of notions: "What ideas are for philosophy, that gods are for art, and vice versa."¹²

Myth is therefore some kind of unique instrument that grasps meanings in the process of reality development.

⁷ C.G. Jung, *Znaczenie psychologii dla współczesności (1933/69)* [in:] *idem, Przełom cywilizacji*, transl. R. Reszke, Warszawa 2009, p. 159.

⁸ G. Gusdorf, *L'homme romantique*, Paris 1984.

⁹ F. Chenet, *Schelling et l'Orient* [in:] F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophie de la mythologie*, transl. A. Prenet, Grenoble 1994, p. 449.

¹⁰ B. Markiewicz, *Omówienie wyników ekspertyzy rękopisów 'Eine Ethik'*, "Studia Filozoficzne" 1984 (7).

¹¹ R. Marszałek, *Mitologia a rozum instrumentalny. Fundament procesu dziejowego w dziele późnego Schellinga*, Warszawa 2004, p. 14.

¹² F.W.J. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, transl. D.W. Scott, Minneapolis 1989, p. 35.

In his earliest works, Schelling understood mythology as a sphere of symbolic appearances of meanings. Researching “philosophemes,” one should discover the symbolic meaning of myth connected with them; for example, the meaning of evil emerges in the symbol of a snake in many sources in our culture. However, this symbol is not monolithic – the snake is also the “giver of knowledge.” A symbol can represent the fact that human knowledge of evil should be understood in the form of its first emergences: “a disobedience.” Mythical stories are rooted in times immemorial, when they are spoken and not written ones.

For Schelling in *Philosophy of Art*,¹³ mythology is some universal source of meaning patterns that art develops in an infinite series of works; it is a “world of prototypes.” Thus it can be conceived as a basis of art.

In his later work, *Philosophy of Mythology*, he concentrated on the manifestation of “hyper-real” potencies of reality development through the involuntary movement of symbols. Mythology is not a stationary corpus of archaic symbolic stories, but a living process of elaborating symbolic meanings which every folk has undertaken and developed inside its culture realities.

In *Philosophy of Revelation*,¹⁴ Schelling thought that this unique expression of the mythological process influenced the whole history of a given folk. The forms of succession of polytheistic representations are considered *ex post* as a preparatory field for the “true monotheism”; mythology manifests a crisis of unity and development of splitting potencies into diversity. Myths are a sequence of phenomenology of the spirit spectrum. They are not constructed, nor “invented,” but a spontaneous revelation of the human spirit.

Schelling’s conception can be understood as a real beginning of a new understanding of mythology. The meanings of his work for mythology research are numerous:

1. The primacy of myth in cognition of non-transparent “blind principle of nature” (the unconscious) which acts pre-rationally, spontaneously, involuntarily.
2. Myth is considered in the framework of phenomenology of spirit; it is one of the highest achievements of human beings.
3. Myth indicates the unity of human nature.
4. It is priceless in the reconstruction of acts of human spirituality.
5. The dynamic character of the mythological relation in the “god, goddess, their son” triad, which makes the basis of comparative studies of mythology possible.

Jung and the problem of myth

Jung was an apologist of myth; he was a true successor of the Schellingian philosophy of mythology. He discovered its meaning in the centre of the psyche or the psychological dimension of reality and its importance for human life. Myth is a manifestation

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ F.W.J. Schelling, *Filozofia objawienia. Ujęcie pierwotne*, transl. K. Krzemieniowa, Warszawa 2002.

of an essential dimension of reality itself; the unconscious, however, is a specific autonomous, a spontaneous pattern of the unconscious flux. It is not voluntarily “created,” but rather manifests a hidden flow of the unconscious process.

Nothing could be more mistaken than to assume that a myth is something ‘thought up’. It comes into existence of its own accord, as can be observed in all authentic products of fantasy.¹⁵

Myth indicates the unconscious, but it is not only a hidden dimension of the human mind but also a matrix of reality; myth is connected not only with the human psyche but also with reality that is experienced through the psyche.

There are many connections between psychological, anthropological and philosophical perspectives in different Jungian works. His conception developed from the understanding of an evolutionary instinctive basis with its archetypal structures founded on instincts (archetype¹⁶ as a self-portrait of an instinct; a correlation to biological patterns of behaviour) to a basic sphere of reality with its archetypal and *psychoïd* factors. The development of the unconscious conception influenced his understanding of myth. The myth works in all these dimensions:

1. It is an “individual myth,” gathering symbolically transformed experiences of individual life experiences; it contains half-memorised, meaningful images of the unconscious activity of an individual. The myth has a diagnostic and therapeutic psychological function.
2. The myth induces anthropological layers of specific human experiences, expresses a streaming of self-becoming as a central process of human spiritual development with its archetypal supports, a basic human experiences. It is a more general anthropological dimension.
3. The myth is a manifestation of the unknown patterns of the unconscious process that determine reality. The knowledge of these patterns connects with general insight into metamorphoses of the historical-cultural process.¹⁷ For Jung, the myth is a *sine qua non* condition of collective unconscious assumption.

Jung applied a comparative method in research on mythology. His *Symbols of Transformation*¹⁸ is teeming with myths and mythological motifs from Hindu, Greek,

¹⁵ C.G. Jung, *A Psychological View of Conscience* [in:] CW, vol. X, 2nd ed., Princeton 1970, p. 443.

¹⁶ In interpretations of Jung’s main category, the archetype, researchers frequently associate it with the notion of *Urbild* coming from German Romanticism; in French it is connected with *images matricielles* – J.J. Wunenburger, *Philosophie des images*. It is Jung’s habit to differentiate trial between an archetype and archetypal, primeval image. In itself an archetype cannot be represented and it is *facultas praeformandi* – “The archetype in itself is empty and purely formal, nothing but a *facultas praeformandi*, a possibility of representation which is given *a priori*” – C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (1934–1954)* [in:] CW, IX.1, Princeton 1969, p. 79. G. Durand applied Jung’s notion to his conception of general archetypology, but defined an archetype as an “affectivo-representative bundle” – G. Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l’imaginaire: introduction à l’archétypologie générale*, Paris 1984.

¹⁷ Jung wrote in *Symbol of Transformation*: “Myth, says a Church Father [Vincent of Lerin] is ‘what is believed always, everywhere, by everybody’ [*Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*], hence the man who thinks he can live without myth or outside it is an exception” – C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* [in:] CW, v. 5, p. XXIV.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

Babylonian, Hellenistic mythologies, mythological structures of the Bible, and mythological layers of religious or even philosophical texts. He enriched it in his studies about alchemy and gnosis. The mythological material is very important for his way of thinking. It provides the universality of archetypal structures, a kind of confirmation of them. Myths are similar because they come from the universal anthropological structure of the psyche. The mythological imagery and so-called primitive mentality express some kind of human species data.¹⁹ The investigations on this domain were very fruitful for Jung, because they constructed social and anthropological perspectives in his conception. Archetypes “recall” for him the *représentations collectives* of Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert. They “recall” a collectively structured way of world understanding, ordering and reacting. They are inherited, but archetypal images are acquired through participation in cultural tradition. Jung took the problem of *mentalité pre-logique*,²⁰ pre-logical primeval mind, and *participation mystique* from the ideas of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. “Primeval mind” (“primitive mentality”) is understood here as the unconscious itself, which is active in a traditional society and in a modern contemporary one. The “primeval mind” (the unconscious) is therefore a basic one. Jung thought that the laws governing the unconscious are the same as in Lévy-Bruhl’s pre-logic mentality.

Jung applies two methods in understanding unconscious material: *circumambulation* and *amplification*.²¹ These are both based on comparative connections of the associations of an interpreted image, motif or symbol. The material is frequently and mainly mythological. Myths let us understand, but it follows in a circular and approximate way; this is the reason why Jung is called a “natural hermeneut.”²² The understanding approximates the character of historic-cultural symbolic meanings.

Archetypes are not myths themselves.²³ Myths develop archetypal meanings in their story creation. Psychoanalysts often interpreted hero cycle myths; for Jung, the myths of the hero were connected with an archetype of that figure. A kind of specialisation of psychoanalysis is noticed.²⁴ There are interpretations of the hero in the texts of Otto Rank,²⁵ Sigmund Freud,²⁶ Carl Gustav Jung,²⁷ Erich Fromm,²⁸ Charles

¹⁹ *Idem*, *On the Psychogenesis of Schizophrenia (1939)* [in:] CW, v. III, p. 249.

²⁰ L. Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, Princeton 1985.

²¹ Amplification in the Jungian psychology dictionary for example is conceived as connected with use of mythical analogies to establish metaphorical contents of dreams – A. Samuels, B. Shorter, F. Plaut, *Krytyczny słownik analizy jungowskiej*, transl. W. Bobecki, L. Zielińska, Warszawa 1994, p. 31.

²² J.J. Clarke, *Jung and Eastern Thought. A Dialogue with the Orient*, London 1994, p. 47.

²³ T. Olchanowski wrote that one or more archetypes are hidden in every myth. *Idem*, *Jungowska interpretacja mitu ojca w prozie Brunona Schulza*, Białystok 2001, p. 20.

²⁴ R. Segal, *Introduction* [in:] O. Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero. A Psychological Exploration of Myth*, Baltimore–London 2004.

²⁵ O. Rank, *op.cit.*

²⁶ Freud interpreted this figure many times; S. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* [in:] *idem*, *The Standard Edition of Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, J. Strachey (ed.), London 2001, v. 23.

²⁷ Jung also paid much attention to the figure of hero – *idem*, *Symbols...*; *idem*, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious...*

²⁸ E. Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, New York 1976.

Baudouin²⁹ and Joseph Campbell.³⁰ They differ in form, but share the assumption of a strong connection between myth and unconscious and create an intertextual level: for example, Campbell “provides the classically Jungian counterpart to Rank’s *Myth of the Birth of the Hero*.”³¹ Freud himself had read and quoted Rank’s book.

The main figure of psychoanalytical interpretation of the hero is the understanding of him as a prototype of human self-portrait: the emerging of human ego from the unconscious, conflict within the natural instinctive sphere, building autonomy in the confrontation with socio-cultural values. “The finest of all symbols is the human figure, conceived as a demon or hero”;³² Jung interpreted (following Leo Frobenius’s model of the hero’s journey³³) his solar attributes. He “sets his own courses by immutable laws and, his journey over, sinks into darkness, to rise again in his children and begin the cycle anew.”³⁴ He transgresses instinctive chaotic drives and forms a new spiritual dimension, a realisation of self. The secret of the hero consists of his representation of the individuation process and the last one concern to every human being.

The hero myth is thus a prototype of the process of forming a man, his development of the spiritual level of his psyche in an image of half-man, half-god existence. Jung underlined the meaning of a heroic task, the battle with a monster, and descent to the underground world (*descensus ad inferos*).³⁵ In *Symbols of Transformation* he focused attention on the experience of death and sacrifice. The unconscious flux of *libido* is self-perceived in images and symbols.³⁶

Jung rejected the Freudian interpretation of the Oedipus complex (incest and inhibition). Oedipus is a myth about the *hybris* of intellect. The hero overestimated his intellect and wanted to solve the riddle of the Sphinx by words; he had to answer by his acts. Jung preferred the myth of Jonah’s journey in the whale’s body (“Jonah-and-the-whale complex”) as more specific for the human situation in the world. This biblical myth presents the struggle and deliverance from overwhelming unconscious power. Jonah is a hero who overcomes the paralysis of his vital streaming to become an autonomous individual.

The hero myth is therefore a sequence of the process of transgression from the biological, instinctive,³⁷ compulsive unconscious to self-knowledge and the possibility of free choice of mode of existence.³⁸

²⁹ C. Baudouin, *Le Triomphe du héros. Étude psychanalytique sur le mythe du héros et les grandes épopées*, Paris 1952.

³⁰ J. Campbell, *The Hero with the Thousand Faces*, New York 1956.

³¹ R.A. Segal, *Myth. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford–New York 2004, p. 104.

³² C.G. Jung, *Symbols...*, p. 171.

³³ L. Frobenius, *Das Zeitalter des Sonnengotten*, Berlin 1904.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ Jung also conceived it as a regression, “gradual submersion in the abyss of memory” – *ibidem*, p. 407.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 175.

³⁷ On instinct, Jung wrote: “the instincts in general, which are the vital foundations, the laws governing all life” – SP. p. 180. During the development of his conception, Jung never renounced this point of view about the instinctive basis of life.

³⁸ The “mystery” of a hero is “the stock of primordial images which everybody brings in him as his human birth right [...] inborn forms peculiar to the instinct. I have called it ‘potential’ psyche or collective

Jung and Kerényi evaluated the myth as priceless to the understanding of psyche and human cultures. The myth achieves the depth of the human world rooted in nature.³⁹ Kerényi defined mythology as stories describing gods, divine beings, battles of heroes and the descent to hell. It creates a trans-human connection with immense realities of the spiritual world. Jung confirmed that all attempts to understand mythical figures by referring to the external environment, to solar or astral myths failed; myth is rooted in the human situation in the world.⁴⁰ It expresses the human psyche in the experience of the outer world.

Psychological and philosophical approaches towards myth

In Jung's conception, then, one can perceive the procedure of imposing many different perspectives; this concerns not only the problem of myth but also his main categories – the unconscious and the archetype. According to this conception of myth:

- I. It is an essential manifestation of phenomenology of spirit (Schelling, Jung).
- II. The true and unique carrier of spirit is only the human psyche (“living book of spirit”) (individualism of psychological heredity).
- III. Every human psyche has its idiosyncratic, subjective, unique features, and thus is a sort of a “melting-pot” which operates on mytho-symbolic archetypes (psychoanalysis and its “individual myth”).
- IV. The development of reality assumes the gradual fall of the “blind nature principle” (“blindness of the first god” according to Schelling; the unconscious as *materia prima* in Jung's conception).
- V. The crucial stage of this process is the birth of consciousness (figure of goddess in Schelling's writings; the conscious ego-Jung).
- VI. The final stage is self-consciousness and the figure of son of god, the saviour (Schelling, Jung).

One cannot deny that Schelling indicated the logic of all process of development; as a psychologist, Jung underlined the value of the dynamism of the individual psyche and the life of the myth within it.

Myth as cognition and as a pattern of experience. Summary

In this mixed half-psychological and half-philosophical approach to the problem of myth, it is understood as one of the most important factors constituting the connection between the outer and internal, human world rooted in the world as such. Myth is at the same time an instrument of cognition expressing the unique connection be-

unconscious.” The hero is able psychologically to answer to them for reactivation and reorganisation of their contents – SP, p. 408.

³⁹ C.G. Jung, K. Kerényi, *L'introduction à l'essence de la mythologie. L'enfant divin. La jeune fille divine*, transl. H.E. Medico, Paris 1968, pp. 11–13.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 236.

tween the human mind and the world and is a pattern of experiences; it is a matrix of being-in-the-world. The mind and its connection with the world are located on such mythical patterns.

However, this kind of attitude toward the value of myth has certain limitations. It is extremely difficult to say where the limits are between myth, fairy-tale and legend; the notion begins to become liquid. The psychoanalysts are not interested in shaping definitions and creating conceptual instruments in myth cognition. It has great value as a mode to the unconscious, but not as a specific phenomenon. Its importance for psychoanalysis influenced the very difficult position of so-called “psychological truth” and all dilemmas connected with psychoanalytical understanding of truth as a kind of Heideggerian *aletheia*,⁴¹ a gradual way of recognising the relationship between an individual and its form of perceiving himself and the world. Whole discussions about the hermeneutic core of that movement are rooted in the problem of possibilities of knowledge about meanings of the unconscious contents.

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⁴¹ J. Mills, *Toward Psychoanalytical Conception of Truth*, introduction to a lecture at the Institute of Philosophy, University of Wrocław, 2013.

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