

Are Epicurean Gods Compatible with Carl Jung's Collective Unconscious and Archetypes?

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 4, 2024 at 1:54 PM

According to the extant texts, Epicurus believed that gods existed and that they are blessed and incorruptable, do not interfere with humans, and did not create the universe. And we are given Epicurus' theoretical understanding of why: "images" of gods are received by humans.

Lately I just can't shake the correlation that I see with this idea of Epicurus and Carl Jung's idea of the collective unconscious and archetypes. (This must have already come up before on the forum).

Here is the opening of the Wikipedia:

Quote

Collective unconscious (*German: kollektives Unbewusstes*) refers to the [unconscious mind](#) and shared mental concepts. It is generally associated with [idealism](#) and was coined by [Carl Jung](#). According to Jung, the human collective unconscious is populated by [instincts](#), as well as by [archetypes](#): ancient primal symbols such as [The Great Mother](#), the [Wise Old Man](#), the [Shadow](#), the Tower, Water, and the [Tree of Life](#).^[1] Jung considered the collective unconscious to underpin and surround the unconscious mind, distinguishing it from the [personal unconscious](#) of [Freudian psychoanalysis](#). He believed that the concept of the collective unconscious helps to explain why similar themes occur in mythologies around the world. He argued that the collective unconscious had a profound influence on the lives of individuals, who lived out its symbols and clothed them in meaning through their experiences. The psychotherapeutic practice of [analytical psychology](#) revolves around examining the patient's relationship to the collective unconscious.

Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_unconscious

Quote

Jungian archetypes are a concept from psychology that refers to a universal, inherited idea, pattern of thought, or image that is present in the [collective unconscious](#) of all human beings. The psychic counterpart of [instinct](#), archetypes are thought to be the basis of many of the common themes and symbols that appear in

stories, myths, and dreams across different cultures and societies. Some examples of archetypes include those of the [mother](#), the child, the [trickster](#), and [the flood](#), among others. The concept of the collective unconscious was first proposed by [Carl Jung](#), a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst.

According to Jung, archetypes are innate patterns of thought and behavior that strive for realization within an individual's environment. This process of actualization influences the degree of [individuation](#), or the development of the individual's unique [identity](#). For instance, the presence of a maternal figure who closely matches the child's idealized concept of a mother can evoke innate expectations and activate the mother archetype in the child's mind. This archetype is incorporated into the child's personal unconscious as a "mother complex," which is a functional unit of the personal unconscious that is analogous to an archetype in the collective unconscious.

Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jungian_archetypes

If I understand it correctly the archetypes are the conscious expression of aspects of the collective unconscious.

I may add more to this thread eventually, and I hope that anyone else with thoughts and ideas on this will post as well.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 4, 2024 at 2:03 PM

Quote

Jung believes that the archetypes are the unconscious images of the instincts themselves. In other words, archetypes are **patterns of instinctual behaviour**. The hypothesis of the collective unconscious is, therefore, no more daring than to assume there are instincts. While many have called this mysticism, Jung's concept of the collective unconscious is neither a speculative nor a philosophical matter, but an empirical one. The question is: are there or are there not unconscious, universal forms of this kind? If they exist, then there is a region of the psyche which one can call the collective unconscious.

[Source](#)

Post by “Novem” of September 4, 2024 at 3:00 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/4026-are-epicurean-gods-compatible-with-carl-jung-s-collective-unconscious-and-archet/>

I was reading this Sedley article on [Epicurean theological innatism](#), which argues that the prolepsis of gods is universal and innate to all humans. I think there is a strong parallel there to Jungian collective unconsciousness.

Post by “Eikadistes” of September 4, 2024 at 9:17 PM

I've often supposed that Jungian *archetypes* could be meaningful points of reference against *prolepseis* (in particular). In *Epicurean Philosophy: An introduction from the “Garden of Athens”*, Christos Yapijakis agrees, and connects *prolepseis* with “images from the subconscious”. Elsewhere, he connects supposes that “the non-rational part of soul [...] was later named 'subconscious' by Sigmund Freud” (92). I caution comparison with Jung, if for no other reason than for his fondness for Plato, but also for his celebration of metaphor (versus Epicurus' frankness). *Still*, I think it would be very reasonable to suggest that “god” is the “archetype” of a blessedness and imperishability, and that the universal, human spiritual experience is grounded in universal, evolutionary precursors.

Post by “Cassius” of September 4, 2024 at 9:59 PM

Twentier since you seem to have read into this, any comment on Joseph Campbell and his work? (I've heard of him but know virtually nothing.)

Post by “Eikadistes” of September 5, 2024 at 6:42 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Twentier since you seem to have read into this, any comment on Joseph Campbell and his work? (I've heard of him but know virtually nothing.)

I love Joseph Campbell; his approach to mythology helped provide me with personal orientation when it came to spiritual propositions and religious idea. He shares a tremendous in common

with Jung, both of whom admire non-traditional spiritual influences, both of whom I would contextualize within the Freudian tradition of psychoanalysis. In general, the approach of each of these thinkers is grounded in the proposition that there is a common, psychological territory through which all humans travel, and that Freud and Jung, among others, could map that territory.

There is something of a double-edged sword here that keeps nagging me from the back of my mind, and I think that is, that, on one hand, the general notion of the "collective unconscious", if we are to mean that common, psychological territory we share (for example, the fear of death), then that is totally coherent with Epicurean Philosophy, and, in my mind, presents us with more accessible ways to interface with ideas like *prolepseis*. On the other hand, I think that Epicurus would be very critical of the ways that Freud, Jung, and Campbell relied on metaphor. That group of thinkers attempted to provide us with dream analysis, which Epicurus, I think, would have cautioned against (if not necessarily rejected). They also laid the foundations for the idea of personality typologies, which are by no means objective, or even always useful. Joseph Campbell's heroic archetypes are often so general and numerous that they (with respect, because I love Joseph Campbell) seem to me *not* to have value as predictive tools, scientifically or medically.

A lot of these ideas are ground-breaking and brilliant in that, in the post-Darwin era, they contextualized human psychology within evolutionary theory. They were bold enough to explore taboo, and provided rational explanations for religious experiences, for criminal behavior, for alternative sexuality, and were willing to admit common value with Dharmic traditions.

But the specific *features* they designate on their *psychological maps* to define the *territory of the human mind* are sometimes more so grounded in by cultural metaphors than neurology and psycho-biology. They can still be meaningful, but without relying on frank vocabulary, some of these ideas, as I see it, get robbed of their usefulness, again, as objective, psychological tools. Clearly psychoanalysis has value ... but so does the placebo affect (in a significant way). That does not mean that the objects of one's belief are real, only that belief, itself, is powerful.

I find the greatest correspondence between these thinkers and Epicurus to be in their attempt to ground the religious experience within the context of being an animal, and in generally evaluating the similarities of human beliefs and behavior across cultures. *Archetypes might be a useful way to understand prolepseis*, but there are differences, and Jungian archetypes would not necessarily align with Epicurean archetypes. They also had soft spots for Plato and tantric, Indian practices, so that demonstrates a difference in terms of inspirations, as well.

Post by “Kalosyni” of September 5, 2024 at 9:56 AM

Thank you @Twentier for your posts and good information and ideas you shared here in this thread in support of some of these aspects.

In last night's Zoom I didn't get as much agreement/understanding on this topic as I had hoped.

Perhaps the main contention with Jung is that his studies weren't done scientifically enough and some last night seemed to say it is too "woo-woo".

I haven't studied it enough of it myself yet.

Another reason, perhaps, could be due to variations in perceptions of reality and experiences of consciousness -- potentially just as there are different blood types, perhaps there are different brain types...especially the brains of "creatives" compared to brains of "scientists" and "data processors" (just throwing out unsubstantiated hypotheses as to why 😎).

And different brains may dream differently. I would propose that the major source of the "images" of the gods is from dreams (or another source is psychedelics as has been posted in another thread).

An interesting idea came to me, based partially on Epicurus...that perhaps even though there are many "images" coming into the psyche, it is only the "blessed and incorruptable" which are those of the gods. So those other images which are dark, painful, and ugly are not considered (or not labeled) to be the gods.

Post by “Godfrey” of September 5, 2024 at 10:54 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

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This immediately brings up, for me, the vengeful and angry Old Testament god. While I can find value in the Epicurean notion of a god, it's difficult for me to accept this idea as universal. I do, however, think that it can be a universally beneficial way of idealizing the notion of god, or of perfection.