



The reception of psychoanalysis in Piaget's early work¹

A recepção da psicanálise no pensamento inicial de Piaget

La recepción del psicoanálisis en el pensamiento temprano de Piaget

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Abstract

Early in his career, Piaget had a keen interest in psychoanalysis. He studied psychoanalysis, was analyzed, attended psychoanalytic conferences, and was a member of the “Swiss Society for Psychoanalysis.” In 1919, he delivered a lecture in Paris on pedagogical trends in psychoanalysis, in which he discussed key assumptions of Freudian theory, critiqued some of them, and stressed the importance of psychoanalysis for the psychology of intelligence and for pedagogy. Although many publications have discussed the relationships between Piagetian and psychoanalytic theory, Piaget's views on psychoanalysis in the early part of his career have not yet been systematically addressed in studies in the field. The objective of this article is to present and discuss the main topics of the 1919 lecture in order to recover this seldom-remembered episode in the history of psychology and education and contribute to the understanding of how Piaget's reception of psychoanalysis took place.

Keywords: Jean Piaget; Psychoanalysis; Pedagogy.

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Resumo

No começo de sua carreira, Piaget possuía grande interesse pela psicanálise. Ele estudou psicanálise, foi analisado, realizou análises, frequentou congressos de psicanálise, e foi membro da “Sociedade Psicanalítica Suíça”. Em 1919, proferiu uma palestra, em Paris, sobre as tendências pedagógicas da psicanálise. Nela, discutiu pressupostos fundamentais da teoria freudiana, criticou alguns deles, e enfatizou a importância da psicanálise para a psicologia da inteligência e para a pedagogia. Embora existam muitas publicações que discutam as relações entre a teoria piagetiana e a psicanalítica, seus pontos de vista sobre a psicanálise no período inicial de sua carreira ainda não foram sistematicamente abordados nos estudos da área. O objetivo desse artigo é apresentar e discutir os pontos centrais da conferência de 1919, tendo em vista resgatar esse episódio pouco lembrado da história da psicologia e da educação e contribuir para o esclarecimento de como se deu a recepção da psicanálise por parte de Piaget.

Palavras-chave: Jean Piaget; Psicanálise; Pedagogia.

Resumen

Al principio de su carrera, Piaget se interesó mucho por el psicoanálisis. Estudió psicoanálisis, se analizó, realizó análisis, asistió a congresos psicoanalíticos y fue miembro de la "Sociedad Psicoanalítica Suiza". En 1919, pronunció una conferencia en París sobre las tendencias pedagógicas del psicoanálisis. En él, discutía los supuestos fundamentales de la teoría freudiana, criticaba algunos de ellos y destacaba la importancia del psicoanálisis para la psicología de la inteligencia y para la pedagogía. Aunque hay muchas publicaciones que discuten la relación entre la teoría piagetiana y la psicoanalítica, sus puntos de vista sobre el psicoanálisis en el período inicial de su carrera aún no se han abordado sistemáticamente en los estudios de este campo. El objetivo de este artículo es presentar y discutir los puntos centrales de la conferencia de 1919, con el fin de rescatar este episodio poco recordado de la historia de la psicología y de la educación y contribuir al esclarecimiento de la recepción del psicoanálisis por parte de Piaget.

Palabras-clave: Jean Piaget; Psicoanálisis; Pedagogía.

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Early in his career as a researcher, Piaget had a keen interest in psychoanalytic theory and practice. In his autobiography (Piaget, 1976), he recalls that his mother's poor mental health sparked his interest in this discipline. According to Vidal (2001), Piaget's initial contact with psychoanalysis occurred at a lecture on *Religion and Psychoanalysis* delivered by Théodore Flournoy in 1916 at a meeting of the *Swiss Christian Students Association*². However, in his autobiography, Piaget says that his first contact with psychoanalysis took place between 1918 and 1919, when he spent six months in Zürich, where he worked in the laboratories of Lipps and Wreschener, as well as at the Burghölzli psychiatric hospital (Piaget, 1976). Harris (1997) mentions that Piaget studied experimental psychology in that city and attended lectures by Eugen Bleuler, Carl Gustav Jung, and Oscar Pfister. In the theoretical part of his novel *Recherche*³, published in 1918, he had already incorporated certain hypotheses of the Zürich School and had critiqued Freudian concepts, indicating that his contact with psychoanalysis preceded his time in Zürich.

Switzerland was the first place outside of Vienna to assimilate Freud's theory (Delahanty, 2000). Haynal and Falzeder (2014) observe that Bleuler, chief physician at Burghölzli, the famous psychiatric clinic in Zürich, brought psychoanalysis to that institution, recruiting a staff open to the new theory and method, one of whom was Jung. In 1907, a "Freud Society" was founded, whose meetings were devoted exclusively to discussing Freudian topics and which counted Bleuler, Jung, Pfister, and Claparède among its members. The first international gathering of psychoanalysts, which took place in 1908, in Salzburg, and was organized by Jung, strengthened the psychoanalysts' ties with Bleuler. However, as Harris (1997) recalls, by 1918, when Piaget arrived in Zürich, the situation had changed considerably: Freud and Jung had already ended their friendship, Bleuler had left the *International Psychoanalytic Association*, and only Pfister remained associated with Freud.

In 1919, Piaget went to Paris, where he spent two years at the Sorbonne (Piaget, 1976). That same year, as reported by Vidal (1986), Theodore Simon invited him to give a lecture at the *Alfred Binet Society* on pedagogical trends in psychoanalysis.⁴

The lecture was given on December 15, 1919, and its published version (Piaget, 1920a, 1920b) was Piaget's first published paper on psychology. In it, he demonstrates his familiarity with psychoanalytic theory and practice, his admiration for some of the contributions of this discipline, but also his critical approach to key concepts of Freudian thought. In a review of that lecture, Pfister (1920) asserts that the psychoanalytic movement could certainly expect great contributions from Piaget.

Piaget's relationship with psychoanalysis in the early part of his career is not a subject of much interest to scholars of his thought. Although there are many publications that discuss the relationships between Piagetian and psychoanalytic theory, most of them examine the conceptual relationships between Piaget's later thought and psychoanalytic hypotheses. In studies on the history of psychoanalysis, the encounter between Piaget and psychoanalysis is also seldom remembered. The objective of this article is to recover some of this history, presenting and discussing a few central points of the published version of the lecture he gave

² As Cifali (1983) explains, Flournoy was a central figure in the introduction of psychoanalysis in French-speaking circles. He was associated with the Zürich School, which included, among others, Eugen Bleuler, Carl Jung, and Oskar Pfister.

³ In his autobiography, Piaget describes this book as a philosophical novel, whose final part contains his ideas. He says that he decided to write this book to express his ideas, as he was not willing to present hypotheses without the necessary experimental foundation, due to his earlier contact with biology. Nevertheless, he recognizes that some of the ideas present in this text would underpin the entirety of his theory (Piaget, 1976).

⁴ Cifali (1983) observes that at this time, psychoanalysis was better known and more seriously discussed among academics in Geneva than among those in Paris.

in 1919. In doing so, we intend to contribute to the understanding of how Piaget's reception of psychoanalysis took place. The primary methodology consisted of an internal, structural and conceptual analysis of Piaget's texts *Psychoanalysis and its relations to child psychology I* (Piaget, 1920a) and *Psychoanalysis and its relations to child psychology II* (Piaget, 1920b). As an additional methodology the contextual conditions of these articles were also researched. Material used to do this contextualization included Piaget's autobiography, the interview done by Claude Bringuier and published in 1977, some works by Fernando Vidal, as well as other texts that contain biographical and contextual information about the early years of the Piaget's career. This methodology assumes that theoretical research needs historical contextualization in order to reconcile both internalist and externalist approach (Simanke & Caropreso, 2018).

Psychoanalysis in its relations to child psychology

Piaget begins his presentation on *Psychoanalysis and its relations to child psychology* (Piaget, 1920a) by advocating the need for a closer relationship between psychoanalysis and the psychology of intelligence. He argues that consciousness and the unconscious are often inextricably entangled, making the boundaries between the two disciplines unclear. To place psychoanalysis in opposition to the psychology of intelligence would, in his opinion, be a simplification of reality, useful for researchers, but superfluous, as the mechanisms that psychoanalysis has discovered in studies of feelings have an important effect on the development of reason. He observes that although psychoanalysis already had an advanced doctrine concerning the unconscious, intellectual development was being studied using metric methods and its correlation with unconscious development remained largely unknown, and therefore, research that sought to bring these two disciplines closer together would be promising.

Piaget presents and discusses what, according to him, would be the three key postulates of Freudian psychoanalysis: the hypothesis that dreams are a coherent system of associations of ideas; the hypothesis that the unconscious is active and able to influence the conscience; and the hypothesis that the entire unconscious is sexual in nature. Based on his presentation, it is clear that he accepts most of Freud's conceptions but also takes a critical stance. He rejects a dogmatic position and argues that Freud's ideas should be integrated with those of other authors, such as Adler and Jung, to achieve a more coherent theory.

The first principle addressed is that "the dream is a symbolic narrative under whose images we find the unconscious desires (and fears) of the subject and, consequently, the core of their psychic conflicts" (Piaget, 1920a, p. 22). Piaget argues that the guiding threads of the search for the latent content of dreams are sometimes hypothetical but that the conflicts discovered are not and stresses that this proposition concerns not only dreams but all forms of thought that are not strictly logical or objective.⁵ The thought of the child, of the neurotic, of the dreamer, of the artist, of the mystic, is an inextricable network of symbol associations, in which the only logic is that of feelings. This would also be the case of what Lévy-Bruhl called pre-logical thought, whose main characteristic in primitive peoples is its fusion with magic. Between symbolism, which ignores logical nexuses, and magic, which ignores natural chains, there would only be a difference in material, argues the author.

Piaget (1920a) emphasizes that psychoanalysis has done a great service by demonstrating the fundamental unity of these ways of thinking, by showing that they are all governed by the same laws of dreams. He proposes that this general activity of the mind, which unlike scientific thought is strictly personal and incommunicable, should be called autistic thought or non-directed thought, as proposed by Bleuler (1911/1950). This form of thought would remain essential in each of us, throughout our lives, and only its role would change with age.

⁵ This psychoanalytic conception regarding dreams is illustrated with a dream that, according to Vidal (1986), was had by Piaget himself.

In “Symbolic Thought and the Thought of the Child” (Piaget, 1923)⁶, Piaget again says that “one of the merits of psychoanalysis is that it has shown identity among dreams, daydreams, artistic, mystical, and mythological imagination, delusions, etc.” (p. 18). In this text, however, the thought of the child is no longer included in this category of autistic or symbolic thought. Based on research carried out at the *Jean Jacques Rousseau Institute*, Piaget concludes that the thought of the child is somewhere between autistic and adult thought.

The second key principle of psychoanalysis, discussed in the 1919 lecture, is that the unconscious is active and has the power to influence consciousness without the latter being aware of it. Piaget explains that according to Freudian theory, the unconscious tendencies that act upon consciousness could escape the latter’s control. They could manifest themselves in consciousness as long as they were able to pass through a pre-existing censorship, which concealed their real nature under the symbolism of autistic thought⁷. There would thus be an antagonism between consciousness and the unconscious, which would be a consequence of what, according to him, would be the third key postulate of psychoanalysis: the hypothesis that the entire unconscious is sexual in nature and that there is only one type of psychic energy, i.e., libido.

Piaget presents the Freudian hypothesis of the Oedipus complex and infantile sexuality and justifies it based on his own experience. The need to practice psychoanalysis in order to be able to understand it is emphasized by the author. With regard to the Oedipus and Elektra complex, he states that it is possible for us to doubt a priori the generality of these elementary complexes and confesses that he himself had doubts for a long time, but the facts ultimately convinced him. Of five subjects who he analyzed, four expressed incestuous desires. Furthermore, experiments with associations of ideas revealed the presence, in all love, of the unconscious maternal image.

Despite accepting the existence of the Oedipus complex, Piaget critiques Freud’s assumption that this complex has its origin solely in sexual instinct. He states that it is undeniable that the Freudian doctrine is of great interest, as it poses new problems, is remarkably rich, and is a valuable method of investigation. Nevertheless, he considers it necessary to question the principle that seems to constitute its strength, namely pansexualism:

There is something obsessive in wanting at any cost to reduce to the sexual instinct certain tendencies that seem even more primitive, such as the revolt of the son against his father, often a simple outcome of the instinct of self-preservation. At the same time, pansexualism has the merit of showing that in psychology as elsewhere, everything is in everything [“*tout est dans tout*”]. There are no parts of the psychic life that do not nourish some relation with the whole of personality. But in reducing this complex whole to one fundamental tendency exposes oneself to insurmountable difficulties. (Piaget, 1920a, p.34)⁸

Piaget recognizes that developmental disturbances in children are greatly illuminated by the theories of Freud and his followers and argues that one of the merits of psychoanalysis is to investigate symbolic thinking and show that it is at the root of dreams, delusions, and other psychic manifestations. Nevertheless, he disagrees with the assumption that this type of thought

⁶ This text corresponds to the presentation, with some modifications, that Piaget made in 1922, at the *International Psychoanalytic Congress* in Berlin.

⁷ Piaget says that it would be interesting to try to establish a coefficient of personal consciousness, which would make it possible to determine the level of censorship present in oneiric thoughts. He suggests that this determination could be sought through associations, the degree of their symbolism, and the abundance of intermediaries between the dream object and its manifest content.

⁸ This critique had already been presented in “Recherche” (Piaget, 1918). In this book, through the story of his character, he tries to argue that the sexual instinct cannot be the basis of all mental life.

is always a covert manifestation of content with a sexual nature, which would imply that there is an antagonism between the unconscious and consciousness, underpinned by a pansexualism. He thus considers that the Freudian theory of sexuality and the Oedipus complex are very valuable but that it is not possible to accept the assumption that the libido is the sole motor of the latter phenomenon and of psychic processes in general. The hypotheses of Adler and the Zürich School, to a certain extent, would be immune from this misunderstanding, in his opinion, which leads him to propose that it is necessary to reexamine some of the assumptions of Freud's theory and incorporate the theories of those authors.

The alternative of Adler and the Zürich School

In the theories of Adler and the Zürich School, Piaget finds hypotheses that seem to allow him to surmount some of the difficulties of the Freudian theory, including the supposed pansexualism present in it; however, he also considers that there are limitations to those theories.

He notes that the Freudian concept of sublimation leads to a paradoxical conception, according to which everything that is moral in civilization comes from the censorship of sexuality, while censorship comes from civilization. Sublimation would be a compromise between the demands of unconscious instincts, on the one hand, and censorship, on the other, which would prevent the instinct from manifesting itself as sexual, forcing it to don a symbolic envelope, which constitutes autistic thought. Piaget thus considers that "autism is a product of the unconscious, which satisfies the condition of removing the sexual character of love" (Piaget, 1920b, p. 53). However, because censorship itself would be a product of repression and repression would result from the moral will, which would in turn be a consequence of sublimation, the following circularity would be present in Freud's conception: censorship between the unconscious and the conscious is a product of repression, which in turn results from the moral will. The moral will, however, is a consequence of sublimation and is what leads to censorship. In other words, repression produces censorship, which leads to sublimation, which results in the moral will, which is the cause of repression.

By rejecting pansexualism, Adler would have been able to escape this circularity. Piaget (1920b) explains that according to the Adlerian theory, at the origin of all the work of the unconscious, in both healthy people and in psychoneurotics, would be a feeling of an organic inadequacy linked to a particular organ or to a fragile constitution. He considers this conception to be irrefutable for childhood, as the child necessarily suffers from a feeling of inadequacy due to their physical fragility, their lack of stable psychic adaptations, or the incessant comparisons they make between themselves and their elders. The child would have a nostalgia, not for the past, as in Freud, but for the future because despite their psychic development, they would realize that they are not at the ideal age, which would be adulthood. Out of this feeling of incompleteness would emerge a compensation, the desire to grow, which would be proportional to the feeling of inadequacy. Consequently, the child would present a proliferation of different imaginations, of autism, which would seek to forge an ideal world in which they could play the role they desire. Piaget notes that this phase corresponds to the narcissism described by Freud (1914/1998); however, according to the Adlerian theory, its engine would not be sexuality but rather the will to power. The damaged instincts would be the most fertile, from the imaginative point of view. With these hypotheses, Adler proposed an original idea about the genesis of symbolic thought⁹.

⁹ Piaget explains how Adler conceives phenomena linked to childhood sexuality, the Oedipus complex, repression, the emergence of psychological disturbances, and dreams, all of which would ultimately be driven by the primitive will to power. Different possibilities for applying this theory to children's behavior are mentioned.

Adler would thus have broken the vicious circle present in Freud's theory, by substituting sexuality with the will to power or conservation. This will, says Piaget, "liberates the unconscious in the direction of ambition and desires for domination, but is also able to sublimate them in the direction of values and to constitute the moral will, repression, and censorship" (Piaget, 1920b, p. 53). He considers, however, that this raises a question for Adler's theory concerning the relationship between the will to power and consciousness. Either the latter would always prevail over the former and would be able to control it, or there would be no antagonism between them. According to him, the opposition between consciousness and the unconscious, as posited by Adler and Freud, would conceal a psychological truth, namely the continuity between these two entities.

Piaget recognizes that Adler's theory seems to presuppose an evolutionary tendency incompatible with the Freudian theory, but he argues that these conceptions should overlap with Freudianism rather than be excluded from it. For him, there would be a close correlation between Adler's ideas and what is correct in Freud, and a third doctrine would be necessary to reconcile these two branches of psychoanalytic thought. This third doctrine, in his opinion, could be found in the Zürich School, the leader of which was Jung¹⁰. In particular, the Jungian conception of libido would have the potential to bring about this reconciliation, although it had not yet been achieved.

After presenting some basic hypotheses of Bleuler's and Jung's thought, Piaget explains that for the Zürich School, the unconscious cannot be reduced solely to the sexual instinct, just as it cannot satisfy Adler's overly simple schema. The libido is conceived as a neutral energy that can take different forms, just as physical energy is sometimes heat and sometimes electricity. This theory thus contains both a rejection of pansexualism and of Adler's idea that the primitive will to power is at the root of all mental phenomena. The author emphasizes, however, that despite this conciliatory potential, up to that point there had only been a juxtaposition of doctrines; a real conciliation would require a reworking of the Freudian mechanisms. Although the Zürich School had already set itself to this task, it had not yet accomplished it, and it would therefore be necessary to wait and see the result of this endeavor.

Despite his critiques, Piaget argues that the gaps and misunderstandings of the Freudian theory could be accounted for by the stage of that knowledge. In the following passage, this position becomes clear:

There is not a single one of the schemas they employ—libido, repression, censorship, sublimation, symbolism—that does not appear to have a certain psychological paucity or misconception. Is this a problem? Undoubtedly not, as of yet. It is a privilege for a doctrine to be able to begin in chaos, owing to the richness of the facts it has brought to light. Clarification will come in its own time. As Kronfeld, the author who most clearly judged psychoanalysis, has observed, Freud's followers have thus far had better things to do than clarify his schemas. Their objective has been practical, and their attention has been focused primarily on individuals. It matters little to the physician that sublimation is a poorly-defined mechanism, if it actually works. We should therefore not allow these shortcomings to trip us up; we should instead turn them into new problems. (Piaget, 1920b, p. 52)

¹⁰ Piaget stresses that the Zürich School should not be confused with psychoanalysts in Zürich as a whole and notes that Pfister, one of the most eminent psychoanalysts in that city, remained a committed Freudian.

The gaps and inconsistencies in Freud's theory would thus be natural at the discipline's stage of development. Piaget expressed his belief that these shortcomings would be overcome with further psychoanalytic investigations. Although he considered that psychoanalysis was at an early stage, still full of gaps and inaccuracies, he recognized that it already had made significant contributions to child psychology.

Applying psychoanalysis to child psychology

In addition to discussing theoretical aspects of psychoanalysis, Piaget also discusses its application to child psychology. As we mentioned at the beginning of the text, he argues that one of the merits of psychoanalysis is the possibility of applying the psychoanalytic method to the affective psychology of children and to the study of intelligence. The potential contributions of psychoanalysis to the latter area, in particular, would have been considerably neglected, due to a lack of interest in the key mechanisms of unconscious life by researchers on the subject. He says he believes that the knowledge supplied by psychoanalysis is capable of redeeming pedagogy.

In relation to affective psychology, Piaget asserts that psychoanalysis is rich in practical applications, as it can provide both a method of investigation and a therapeutic method for nervous and sexual disorders in childhood. Although it is more difficult to penetrate the mind of a child than that of an adult—given that the latter speak and open themselves up while the child does not understand what is being asked of them—the effect of analysis is much more rapid in the child, for their soul is so fluid that no complex is ever isolated or deeply rooted, says the author. He emphasizes that when analyzing children, it is essential to understand their environment, for they react only in a close association with it, unlike adults, who create an internal environment by withdrawing into themselves or are able to dominate their external environment.

For Piaget, psychoanalysis would also be of vital importance from the moral point of view. He explains that the character of the child has two poles—obedience and revolt, from the perspective of Adler's theory, or love and hate, from the perspective of the Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex—between which oscillates an entire range of possible nuances. In the past, the child would have been approved or punished based on an extremely simplistic and brutal point of view: that of pure and simple guilt. Psychoanalysis, however, would have offered a completely different lesson, teaching educators to cherish and to heal, according to unconscious complexes for which the child is often only marginally responsible.

The author mentions the possibility that failures in repression throughout childhood development may cause psychoneuroses and argues that education plays a key role in this, as the smallest shortcoming on the part of the parents or educators can exacerbate the effects of those failures. In his opinion, in education, punishment should be replaced with understanding, for revolt or hatred does not vanish if the child is simply punished, but, on the contrary, grows deeper¹¹. He also emphasizes that understanding transference is essential, as it often causes the teacher to become a symbol of the parent, such that the student directs their unfulfilled desires and rebellion toward them.

Piaget emphasizes that affect has an essential role in the functioning of intelligence, for without it there would be no interests, needs, or motivation; consequently, questions or problems could not be formulated, and there would be no intelligence. Affectivity would thus be a necessary condition for the constitution of intelligence, albeit not a sufficient one. Given the importance of affect, he says he believes that “psychoanalysis is bound to have a certain

¹¹ A case analyzed by Pfister is mentioned to illustrate this aspect.

future in the study of intelligence. It has already done much by proving the constancy of the processes of symbolism in all varieties of autistic thought” (Piaget, 1920b, p. 56).

The importance of investigating the relationships between the study of intelligence and the autistic or unconscious life in each individual is emphasized in the following passage:

What interest, for example, would Binet have in knowing the unconscious life of Armande and Marguerite, the two subjects of his *Experimental Study of Intelligence*, of whom he will recall that the former was more imaginative and subjective and the latter more observant and concrete. Obviously, these two turns of mind did not happen without Armande having a more dependent unconscious, in relation to his own past, more introverted, and Marguerite a more liberating unconscious. One can see from this just how important that relationship would have been if the associations of ideas resulting from their dreams had been the subject of a thorough analysis. (Piaget, 1920b, p. 58)

Souza (2011) says that Piaget’s hypotheses about the relationships between affectivity and intelligence move “beyond a dichotomous view of the human being, for he proposes a correspondence between the cognitive and affective evolution, transcending the causal and complementarity-based formulations of other approaches” (p. 252). The inextricable relationship between cognition and affectivity, advocated by Piaget, was later emphasized by a number of researchers, such as Panksepp (1998), Damásio (2000), and Kernberg (2011).

Piaget’s critique of the Freudian theory

Piaget’s account of Freud’s theory contains some inaccuracies and misunderstandings, which compromise its legitimacy on certain points. In his description of the concept of the unconscious, in particular, he presents a partial view of Freud’s theory, for at no time in his work did Freud ever argue that the unconscious is entirely sexual in nature and that the sexual instinct is the only motor of psychic activity, as Piaget asserts.

Since his first theory of the psychic apparatus, originally presented in the book “The Interpretation of Dreams” (Freud, 1900/1998), repressed sexual content would only comprise part of the unconscious system. As early as this text, he argues that there is a core of the unconscious that is made up of drives that never became preconscious and, therefore, were never the target of repression, a mechanism understood, at this point, as something that excludes the preconscious—representations and drives that produce conflict and displeasure—from the field of the psyche that is susceptible to consciousness (Caropreso, 2010). Furthermore, the Freudian drive theory presupposed a dualism from its very beginning. According to the hypothesis advocated by Freud prior to the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, there would be two classes of drives in the psyche, ego and sexual, that would be in opposition and would be the engines of mental processes. However, in 1919, this drive dualism already presented a series of contradictions that made it difficult to support and therefore pointed to the need to suppose a monism, a hypothesis vehemently rejected by Freud in all his work. These impasses led him to reformulate his theory and to introduce the second drive dualism, between life and death drives, in 1920. With this in mind, we do not know if Piaget’s assertion that Freudian psychoanalysis is pansexualist is due to a misunderstanding of this theory or if he makes that claim because he is aware of the problems presented by the first drive dualism. Nevertheless, the Oedipus complex was indeed understood by Freud as exclusively deriving from sexual drives, as Piaget claims in his critique of the concept. Accordingly, in this latter aspect, his critique is justified.

Nor does Piaget's interpretation, in his 1919 presentation, that there would necessarily be an opposition between the conscious and the unconscious in the Freudian theory seem entirely accurate. From the point of view of the repressed unconscious, this statement is correct, but from the very beginning of his theory of the unconscious, Freud maintains that the difference between the unconscious and the preconscious/conscious lies in the difference between two types of processes, the primary and the secondary, and that this difference is primarily due to the failure of the first type of process to enable survival and adaptation to the external world. In the meta-psychological article titled *The Unconscious*, published in 1915, he states that the difference between the unconscious and the preconscious stems from the constitution of word representations and that it is these latter representations that facilitate the logical organization of ideas and the presence of temporality, among other characteristics of the preconscious¹². From this point of view, then, there would not necessarily be an opposition between the unconscious and the conscious.

In 1923, in the text *Symbolic Thought and the Thought of the Child*, Piaget recognizes that the unconscious and the conscious are not necessarily in opposition in the Freudian theory, as this theory contains a conception of the unconscious as a more primitive form of mental functioning. Thought with words and concepts would be preceded by a disarticulated thought with images, a pre-conceptual thought, which would be a more primitive form of mental functioning. At this point in time, Piaget therefore presents a more precise interpretation of the Freudian theory.

Cifali (1984) observes that Piaget's reflections on psychoanalysis illustrate how psychoanalysis arrived in Switzerland, where it was initially received by liberal Protestant intellectuals, including pastors and educators, for whom religion had to be discussed in terms different from those of Freud's materialism. Vidal (1994) also stresses that Piaget's initial reception of psychoanalysis bore the imprint of the Zürich School, which is evidenced, among other things, by his critique of Freudian pansexualism. Schepeler (1993) suggests that Piaget's knowledge of psychoanalysis may have been only second-hand and indicates that his critique of psychoanalysis echoes that of leading contemporary Swiss thinkers, such as Flournoy and Jung. In his autobiography, Piaget (1976) recounts that he read Freud and the journal *Imago* and occasionally attended lectures by Jung and Pfister.

Piaget's later position on psychoanalysis

In 1920, Piaget became a member of the *Swiss Society for Psychoanalysis*, in which he remained until 1936 (Vidal, 1986). In his texts published in the early 1920s, in particular in "Symbolic Thought and the Thought of the Child" (1923) and "The Language and Thought of the Child" (1923), he includes a number of psychoanalytic concepts in his theory. During those years, he maintained contact, at the *Jean Jacques Rousseau Institute*, with the Russian psychoanalyst Sabina Spielrein, who even analyzed him for eight months. At the time, Spielrein was investigating the thought and language of children, as was Piaget, and there is evidence that there was a reciprocal influence between them (Santiago-Delefosse & Delefosse, 2002; Vidal, 2001). In 1922, he attended the *International Psychoanalytic Congress* in Berlin, alongside Spielrein, where he presented a paper on symbolic thought, in the presence of Freud. In a 1922 letter to the Geneva psychoanalyst Raymond de Saussure, Freud (1986) says that he hoped Piaget would explain the numerous advantages of his project to them at the Berlin congress.

¹² This idea that the preconscious is organized according to word representations was already present in the meta-psychological theory in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In the 1915 text, *The Unconscious*, Freud specifies that it is the constitution of word representations that differentiates between primary and secondary processes.

Schepeler (1993) remarks that in an interview conducted by Evans in 1981, Piaget recalled that Freud was sitting next to him during his presentation and that the audience, which consisted of devout Freudians, did not look at him but only looked at Freud to see whether or not he was enjoying the lecture¹³. This was a historic meeting of two giants, with an audience that knew only one of them. Piaget's greatness was ignored. This type of reaction from the psychoanalytic milieu seems to have been one of the factors that led Piaget to distance himself from psychoanalysis. His independence, originality, and intellectual greatness would never allow him to remain in the submissive position often expected of Freud's disciples.

As is widely known, Piaget ended up distancing himself from psychoanalysis in the years that followed. Although he continued to recognize the importance of the affective plane for cognitive development, in his later work, he began to focus only on the latter. In his autobiography (Piaget, 1976), he mentions that although the study of psychoanalysis and pathological psychology had helped him to achieve independence and broaden his cultural grounding, he felt no desire to delve deeper in that particular direction, preferring always to study normality and the workings of the intellect rather than the unconscious. Vidal (2001) observes that Piaget never situated himself entirely within the field of psychoanalysis and pursued an epistemological objective, seeking to confine himself to the study of objective thought and its progress. In an interview conducted in 1969, Bringuier (1977) asks him if he is interested in the evolution of the human being and the stages solely from the point of view of intelligence, without considering the affective plane. Piaget agrees with this statement and says that this is because the affective plane does not interest him. The following justification is given for this position:

The problem doesn't interest me as a scientific inquiry because it isn't a problem of knowledge, which is my specialty; and then, too, all the theories produced about affectivity seem to me totally provisional, awaiting the time physiologists will give us accurate endocrinological explanations. (p. 71)

Later in the interview, Piaget says that “[o]bviously, for intelligence to function, it must be motivated by an affective power. A person won't ever solve a problem if the problem doesn't interest him. The impetus for everything lies in interest, affective motivation” (Bringuier, 1977, p. 71-72). He goes on to say that in the study of feelings, when structures are found, they are structures of knowledge. In feelings of mutual affection, for example, there is an element of understanding, of perception, which is cognitive. In behavior, there is a structure of behavior and an energy of behavior, there is the motor and the mechanism, and he is interested in the structure.

This question is revisited in an interview conducted some years later, in 1975 and 1976, in a context in which Piaget is asked about his interest in and opinions about psychoanalysis. He says:

I have no reason to consider problems of affect; but it isn't because of a disagreement but because of a distinction, a difference of interests. It isn't my domain. Generally speaking—and I'm ashamed to say it—I'm not really interested in individuals, in the individual. I'm interested in what is general in the development of intelligence and knowledge, whereas psychoanalysis is essentially an analysis of individual situations, individual problems, and so forth. (p. 123)

¹³ Vidal (2001) notes that in a review of the lecture that Piaget delivered at the 1922 congress by the “Swiss Christian Students Association,” he was called a “master of psychoanalysis.”

Piaget goes on to say that he is nevertheless always interested in psychoanalysis, noting that three or four years earlier, he had given a lecture on the affective unconscious and the cognitive unconscious¹⁴. He recalls that in this lecture, he had argued that much of the individual's cognitive work, the work of problem-solving, remains unconscious when the action is successful, such that awareness occurs well after the action itself; the individual only becomes aware when there is a need for it. He notes that when an individual, be it a child or a scientist, constructs a concept and a theory, there is a tendency to unconsciously reject what does not fit neatly into their system, and he says that this rejection is, in a sense, the cognitive equivalent of Freudian repression. In the same interview, Piaget states that he agrees with Freud about the general outlines of his theory and that his disagreement lies in the interpretations of the details.

Final considerations

Piaget's opinion, in his 1919 lecture, is that psychoanalysis brought to light facts that were immensely valuable but that it did not yet have a sufficiently developed and scientifically grounded theory to support its conclusions. He argues that this was not a problem but rather a stage in the construction of knowledge that should be surmounted as it advances. He thus sees many merits in psychoanalysis and expresses his belief that the discipline was at its beginning and would become more consolidated in the future, among other things, by incorporating hypotheses proposed by different theoreticians, who at the time were part of divergent groups, such as Freud, Jung, and Adler.

As is common knowledge, the incorporation sought by Piaget never took place. Psychoanalysis maintained a dogmatic position and never made any progress toward the construction of an empirically grounded theory. The argument that the ideas of rival authors should be incorporated would never be looked upon favorably by the psychoanalytic movement or by the followers of Jung and Adler. Piaget's anti-dogmatism and his belief that psychological theories should contain formalized models, based on experimentation, would never allow him to remain in the psychoanalytic field. Vidal (1986) observes that in Piaget's relationship with psychoanalysis, "the consideration of affective and intellectual origins is inextricably intertwined with a philosophical, psychological, and fundamentally moral critique of all that involves the 'tricks of the unconscious'" (p. 187).

Even if Piaget's appropriation of psychoanalysis was, to a certain extent, second-hand or even if his interpretation of Freudian theory was biased, on certain points, by the views of the Zürich School, his discussion, and in particular his emphasis on the importance of psychoanalytic knowledge for pedagogy and on the need to consider unconscious processes when investigating cognitive development, is extremely important. His critiques of psychoanalysis also raise interesting reflections, particularly concerning the dogmatism of this discipline. This is undoubtedly an episode in the history of Piaget's thought and of psychoanalysis that should be remembered.

¹⁴ Souza (2014) notes that this lecture (Piaget, 1954) contains Piaget's most complete account of the relationship between cognition and affectivity.

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