

Moral autonomy according to Jung: A review of this concept in Jung's Collected Works

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis on moral autonomy in the Collected Works of Carl Gustav Jung, with a focus on personality development and the concepts of morality and autonomy. Although Jung was not an educational theorist, his theory offers important insights into the way these aspects develop in the individual. We performed a review of Jung's Collected Works, discovering the correlation the author makes between morality and self-knowledge, suggesting that true morality is not imposed from outside but arises within the individuals, as they integrate the conscious and unconscious aspects of their psyche. We concluded the article discussing the way these ideas can be applied in an educational context to foster autonomous moral development. Besides, we considered the importance of education and social interaction in the construction of autonomy, highlighting the relevance of this approach for the formation of more aware and autonomous individuals.

Descriptors

morality, autonomy, Jung, Carl Gustav, 1875-1961, education, development.



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Autonomia moral em Jung: uma revisão do conceito nas Obras Completas

Resumo

Este artigo apresentou uma análise sobre a autonomia moral nas obras completas de Carl Gustav Jung, com foco no desenvolvimento da personalidade e nos conceitos de moralidade e autonomia. Embora Jung não tenha sido um teórico da educação, sua teoria oferece importantes *insights* sobre como esses aspectos se desenvolvem no indivíduo. Realizamos uma revisão das Obras Completas de Jung, por meio da qual identificamos que o autor correlaciona a moralidade com o autoconhecimento, sugerindo que a verdadeira moralidade não é imposta externamente, mas surge de dentro do indivíduo, à medida que este integra os aspectos conscientes e inconscientes de sua psique. Encerramos o artigo discutindo como essas ideias podem ser aplicadas no contexto educacional para promover o desenvolvimento moral autônomo. Além disso, refletimos sobre a importância da educação e das interações sociais na construção da autonomia, destacando a relevância dessa abordagem para a formação de indivíduos mais conscientes e autônomos.

Descritores

moral, autonomia, Jung, Carl Gustav, 1875-1961, educação, desenvolvimento.

Autonomía moral en Jung: una revisión del concepto en las Obras Completas

Resumen

Este artículo presenta un análisis sobre la autonomía moral en las obras completas de Carl Gustav Jung, con enfoque en el desarrollo de la personalidad y en los conceptos de moralidad y autonomía. Aunque Jung no ha sido un teórico de la educación, su teoría ofrece importantes *insights* acerca de la forma en que esos aspectos se desarrollan en el individuo. Realizamos una revisión de las Obras Completas de Jung, y por medio de ella descubrimos que el autor correlaciona a la moralidad con el autoconocimiento, sugiriendo que la verdadera moralidad no es impuesta externamente, sino que surge desde dentro del individuo, a medida que este integra los aspectos conscientes e inconscientes de su psique. Concluimos el artículo discutiendo la forma cómo estas idea puede aplicarse en el contexto educativo para promover el desarrollo moral autónomo. Además reflexionamos sobre la importancia de la educación y de las

interacciones sociales en la construcción de la autonomía, destacando la relevancia de este abordaje para la formación de individuos más conscientes y autónomos.

Descritores

moral, autonomía, Jung, Carl Gustav, 1875-1961, Educación, desarrollo.

Introduction

This article aims to explore the theme of moral autonomy in the Complete Works of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961). Jung was not a theorist in the field of education, having addressed topics such as personality formation, human development, symbols, and meanings, with a focus on the adult development process. Nevertheless, we can identify contributions to the field of education at various points, as shown by Byington (2003), Saiani (2002), Teixeira (2006), and Vergueiro (2009), among others, mostly dealing with teacher-student relationships in the learning process or the issue of psychological types. This article mentions these aspects, but first and foremost seeks to identify the importance of autonomous morality in Jung's work. Although morality and autonomy are not the main themes of his work, several references to these concepts can be found throughout his writings. Based on this analysis, the breadth of the Swiss author's work became even more evident.

It was noticed that Carl Gustav Jung's writings dialogue significantly with authors of moral psychology literature (Piaget, 1932/1994; Kohlberg, 1984). These theories offer valuable tools of knowledge for teachers, educators, and parents, applicable in everyday life in the pursuit of building moral autonomy.

In reading the authors in question, we see a teleology that points to the need to develop consciousness and a sense of collectivity, integrating both conscious and unconscious aspects into a free, intelligent, dynamic, and autonomous being, capable of living in society, making decisions, and taking responsibility for their actions and their consequences. On the other hand, individuals who remain unconscious and heteronomous have difficulty evolving in the essential aspects of their development and, therefore, suffer the consequences of this limitation.

Morality is not learned through stories, but rather built from daily experiences, through which individuals, when relating to others, develop their beliefs and values, needing meaning for these actions. In relationships, conflicts are inevitable and play a fundamental role in growth and development. As the authors of this article are particularly involved in the school environment, it should be noted that the conflicts experienced in this context may be related to cultural complexes. It is important for educators to observe and work with their students on the need to understand others, which is essential for the development of autonomy, as it involves, above all, mutual respect.

A review of Jung's works was carried out, cataloging all relevant quotations, numbered as paragraphs, found in his collection, which consists of 34 volumes, divided into 18 parts. This review made it possible to identify aspects of morality

in various parts of Jung's work, elucidating his interest in this theme. In some cases, the term is used only as a brief reference to a state of mind or human morality in a very broad sense, while in other cases it allows for an understanding of the concept of morality that is constructed throughout the work. Chart 1 presents the works selected for this study, the volume number, the title of the work, the number of citations, and the paragraphs in which some reference to morality appears (Jung, 1921/2013, 1917/2012, 1928/2012, 1940/2013, 1954/2013, 1951/2013, 1957/2013, 1933–1939/2013, 1918–1959/2013).

Chart 1. Selected works of C. G. Jung

Volume	Title	Number of occurrences	Paragraphs
6	Psychological Types	98	20, 27, 28, 63, 110, 112, 159, 165, 183, 193, 204, 206, 211, 281, 312, 316, 317, 318, 337, 378,399,401,431, 433, 438, 453, 479, 518,519, 520, 523, 524, 527, 540, 591, 612, 629, 652, 656, 675, 677, 678, 681, 697, 728, 731, 772, 921, 985,1032, 1033, 1034.
7/1	The Psychology of the Unconscious	43	12, 18, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 35, 75, 110, 128, 159 e no Apêndice.
7/2	The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious	65	202, 218, 224, 237, 240, 264, 281, 286, 289, 296, 307, 319, 332, 333, 394, 401, 402 e no Apêndice.
8/2	On the Nature of the Psyche	9	144, 162, 179, 204, 209, 219, 238 e no prefácio.
9/1	The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious	42	53, 59, 60, 61, 66, 72, 76, 77, 84, 135, 177, 189, 225, 236, 243, 261, 277, 288, 399, 410, 420, 449, 453, 479, 480, 619.
9/2	Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self	39	14,15, 16, 22, 34, 35, 36, 46, 47, 48, 49,62, 84, 126, 150, 177, 248, 253, 256, 281, 299, 403, 422, 423.
10/1	Present and Future	35	499, 507, 510, 511, 516, 522, 524, 529, 534, 536, 555, 559, 563, 569, 570, 572, 573, 574, 577, 578, 586.
10/2	Aspects of the Contemporary Drama	31	402, 403, 406, 408, 409, 410, 412, 418, 423, 428, 433, 440, 442, 451, 460, 463, 472, 475a, 483, 905, 937.
10/3	Civilization in Transition	144	3, 5, 20, 32, 108, 162, 181, 186, 187 a, 210, 211, 212, 217, 219, 229, 235, 239, 248, 250, 263, 273, 342, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 850, 831, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 840, 841, 843, 844, 845, 850, 855, 856, 857, 869, 870, 871, 872, 877, 898, 962, 966, 1013 e no prefácio.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

Note: the number of occurrences does not match the citations because the word morality appears several times in the same paragraph.

In all of these books, we find quotations related to morality; however, in view of the objective of this article—to discuss aspects of moral autonomy for the development of the individual and its applicability in educational and social spheres—we excluded those passages that refer to the stages of construction of Jung's writings and are based on religious and social concepts, such as the period of the world wars.

Thus, after selecting the relevant quotations, we highlighted the referenced works, especially those related to the construction of analytical psychology theory, considering the volumes and the historical and social contexts in which Jung was immersed. We do not aim to exhaust all aspects of morality in the author's work; rather, for the purpose of developing this research, we selected key points from each book.

Volume 6 – *Psychological Types* (Jung, 1921/2013) is a milestone in Jung's work and one of his best-known books, as it introduces concepts that are now part of everyday language, such as the attitudes of extraversion and introversion, as well as the four psychological functions: thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition. There are several moments in which Jung addresses the question of morality and autonomy in this work. We selected one particularly noteworthy passage:

We are still so poorly educated that we need external laws and a disciplinarian, or rather a father figure, in order to know what is good and to act rightly. And because we are still so barbaric, confidence in the laws of human nature and the human path seems to us a dangerous and unethical naturalism. Why? Because in the barbarian, beneath the thin cultural veneer, the beast soon appears—rightly feared. But this animal will not be conquered simply by keeping it in a cage. **There is no morality without freedom.** When a barbarian unleashes his beast, this is not freedom but a lack of freedom. In order to be free, one must first overcome barbarism. This occurs, in principle, when the foundation and driving force of morality are perceived and felt by the individual as intrinsic parts of their own nature, and not as external limitations (Jung, 1921/2013, p. 276, para. 400, emphasis added, our translation).

Historically, humanity has gone through periods of barbarism, characterized by the absence of rules and actions driven by the instinct for survival. However, Jung suggests that merely conditioning people to obey external rules does not solve the problem of barbarism, since an individual “caged” by coercive norms is not truly free and, therefore, cannot develop genuine morality. For Jung, true morality arises only when the individual recognizes the foundations of morality within their own nature. In other words, the individual must develop an autonomy of the will—a desire for self-knowledge and liberation. Here, we see the distinction between morality (obedience to rules) and autonomy (recognition of one's own nature, internal rules). But what nature and what internal rules would these be?

Morality is not a misunderstanding discovered by an ambitious Moses on Sinai, but belongs to the laws of life, which are built up in the normal course of life, like a house, a ship, or any other cultural tool. The natural flow of libido—precisely this middle path—means full obedience to the fundamental laws of human nature, and it would be difficult to establish a higher moral principle than this agreement with natural laws, whose harmony directs the libido toward optimal vitality (Jung, 1921/2013, p. 275, para. 399, our translation).

These internal rules are not the result of a “mere egoism” (Jung, 1921/2013, p. 275, para. 399); they arise from the flow of psychic energy—they are universal, or better said, universalizable. It is important here to point out a distinction between this understanding and that of the authors of moral psychology. Piaget (1932/1994) and Kohlberg (1984) attribute universality to rationality, whereas Jung roots the issue in psychic energy. When Jung refers to Kant—the starting point of moral psychology according to both Piaget (1932/1984) and Kohlberg (1984)—he classifies him within a type of introverted thinking, emphasizing the rationalist basis of moral psychology:

“Darwin could represent the normal type of extraverted thinking and Kant, the normal type of introverted thinking.” (Jung, 1921/2013, p. 506, para. 704)

Still focusing on the *Collected Works*, Volume 7 is divided into two books. In the first, *The Psychology of the Unconscious*, Jung (1917/2012) presents the early formulations of the fundamental concepts of analytical psychology, such as the personal and collective unconscious, persona, shadow, animus, and anima. These concepts permeate all of his work.

With regard to the process of childhood development, the child is initially more unconscious than conscious. As they undergo the process of socialization, the child develops both socially and biologically and, consequently, may begin to develop consciousness—including moral awareness. For example, a newborn child does not know whether or not to harm an animal (an unconscious aspect), but as they grow, they learn that such an action is not morally accepted (bringing forth conscious elements).

Morality is not imposed on us from the outside; we definitively have it within us, a priori—not the law, but the moral being, without which it would be impossible to live together in human society. That is why morality is found at all levels of society. It is an instinctive regulator of actions, also organizing the coexistence of animal hordes. However, moral laws are only valid within a group of human coexistence. Outside of it, they cease to exist, for the ancient truth still prevails *homo homini lupus* (man is a wolf to man). As a culture develops, it becomes possible to subject ever larger masses of people to the rule of the same morality. However, it has so far proven impossible to establish a moral law that would assert itself beyond the boundaries of society - that is, in the free space of groups that are not dependent on one another. (Jung, 1917/2012, p. 38, para. 30, author's emphasis, our translation).

Morality is here defined as an “instinctive regulator of actions,” which aligns with a concept introduced by Piaget (1932/1994) of functional invariants. These can be understood as dispositions or *a priori* structures that are constructed in their content through concrete experiences. It is clear that the author is referring to something that is potentially universal and, at the same time, constructed through cultural grouping. When addressing the cultural, he is obviously referring to external rules learned by the group, and not to the individual dimension.

This work also addresses the issue of autonomy, especially in *The Ego and the Unconscious*, in volume 7/2. In this book, Jung (1928/2012) explores the unconscious and reflects on the psychological immaturity that persists in many adults, who remain unconscious in various aspects of life. This leads to submission to authorities, external rules, or laws, resulting in alienation. Jung emphasizes the importance of overcoming this unconsciousness and seeking one's own nature, making choices and following autonomous paths:

I refer here to a much more significant problem than these few simple words express: humanity, in its essence, remains in a childish state, psychologically speaking. This phase cannot be omitted. The vast majority need authority, guidance, law. This fact cannot be ignored. The Pauline overcoming of the law only serves those who are capable of placing the soul in the place of the moral conscience. (Jung, 1928/2012, p. 134, para. 401, our translation).

Another important aspect is the concept of the Self, which can be understood as the *self*. The term refers to a complex set of psychic phenomena present in all individuals. The Self is a process of self-reflection on one's existence in the world. Through this practice, unconscious aspects—previously unknown and undefined—can be integrated into consciousness.

Often, the process of developing the Self comes into conflict with the moral norms internalized by the individual. In such cases, a dilemma arises, as the individual cannot fully express their desires (Self) without violating the moral rules imposed by society. As Jung observes:

The Self may be characterized as a kind of compensation for the conflict between inner and outer. This formulation would not be incorrect, given that the Self has the character of something that is a result, a goal gradually attained through many efforts. Thus, it represents the aim of life, being the full expression of that combination of fate that we call the individual: not only of the individual person, but of a group, in which one completes the other, forming the full image. (Jung, 1928/2012, pp. 135–136, para. 404, our translation).

Jung argues that the full development of the Self requires a balance between the individual's inner aspects and the external demands of social morality, resulting in a continuous process of individuation.

When the individual reflects on the encounter with the Self—highlighted above as the goal of life—they face the process of autonomy and the freedom to be who they truly are. Along this path, the individual confronts their own inner conflicts—desires repressed due to moral laws—with the aim of prioritizing the common good over personal desires. In this conflict, they recognize their psychological inferiority in relation to others, as well as their own selfishness and lack of awareness about the situation. This recognition increases their consciousness of existence, expanding the process of self-knowledge. As a result, the psyche's development is broadened, promoting deeper integration. According to Jung (1928/2012, p. 24, para. 218, our translation):

The nature of this inferiority would not be psychological in the sense of an organic mutilation or congenital defect, but rather an omission that produces moral resentment. The feeling of moral inferiority always indicates that the missing element is something that ought not to be missing in relation to feeling, or in other words, it represents something that ought to be made conscious, if we gave ourselves to that task. The feeling of moral inferiority does not arise from a clash with the generally accepted and somewhat arbitrary moral law, but from a conflict with the Self, which, for the sake of psychic balance, demands that the deficit be made good. Wherever there is a feeling of moral inferiority, there is a need to assimilate an unconscious component and also the possibility of doing so.

Thus, the encounter with the Self involves the integration of both conscious and unconscious contents, which expands and develops the psyche, making it more integrated. The axis between the ego and the Self guides the process of individuation, which is the full realization of the Self. The goal of the individuation process is the Self, the central archetype that drives major individual transformations and constitutes the core of the entire psyche. The Self encompasses the entire psychic system, radiating its force and luminosity.

Volume 8 is also divided into three parts: *"The Energetics of the Psyche," "The Nature of the Psyche,"* and *"Synchronicity."* This volume (Jung, 1916–1954/2013) is fundamental to the understanding of analytical psychology, as it addresses the concepts of consciousness and the unconscious. In this context, the total psyche is regulated by a center—the Self—which maintains a constant dialogue with the center of consciousness, the ego. With regard to morality, Volume 8/2, which deals with the nature of the psyche, introduces an important element for the understanding of moral autonomy, which is the etiology of complexes, based on the "apparent impossibility of adhering to the totality of human nature" (Jung, 1940/2013, p. 30, para. 204). When a part of what we are is torn away from us, we become incapable of autonomy, and in that case, it is the complexes (partial and torn away) that assume autonomy.

In Volume 9, divided into two books, we find *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* and *Aion: Studies on the Symbolism of the Self* (Jung, 1933–1955/2012–2014). One of the main pillars of these works is the study of

childhood and the development of archetypes and the collective unconscious. In the first book, the aspects of morality and the child archetype stand out.

In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Jung (1954/2013, p. 241, para. 287, our translation) describes the fundamental role of the new, the unexpected, and the unknown in the development of the individual:

Child means something that develops toward autonomy. It cannot become without detaching itself from the origin: abandonment is, therefore, a necessary condition, not merely a secondary phenomenon. The conflict is not overcome simply because consciousness remains trapped in opposites; for this reason, it needs a symbol that shows it the demand for detachment from the origin. As the symbol of the 'child' fascinates and seizes the unconscious, its redeeming effect passes to consciousness and accomplishes the exit from the conflict situation, which consciousness alone could not resolve (emphasis in original).

The child, in the context of its archetype, needs to be alive within us, integrating aspects of the unconscious and consciousness, promoting the unification of opposites. As highlighted in the quote, it is necessary to overcome the phases of the maternal and paternal complexes, allowing both to fully develop within the individual.

In *Aion: Studies on the Symbolism of the Self* (Jung, 1951/2013), Jung's main studies on archetypes and the shadow are presented, which we will explore further.

The shadow represents the darkest and most repugnant aspects of our being, which are relegated to the unconscious because they are not consciously accepted. The more unilaterally we perceive only the qualities we judge positive, the more autonomous the shadow contents become, arising from the unconscious where they have been repressed. For Jung, the shadow is "the negative part of the personality, that is, the sum of hidden and unfavorable properties, of poorly developed functions and of contents of the personal unconscious" (Jung, 1951/2013, p. 58).

Thus, the shadow reflects aspects of the individual's personality. According to Jung (1951/2013, p. 22, para. 14, our translation):

The shadow constitutes a moral problem that challenges the personality of the ego as a whole, for no one is capable of becoming conscious of this reality without expending moral energy. In the awareness of the shadow, it is about recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as they actually exist. This act is the indispensable foundation for any kind of self-knowledge and, therefore, generally encounters considerable resistance. Although self-knowledge is a therapeutic means, it often involves hard work that can extend over a long period of time.

Jung (1951/2013e) also highlights the importance of integrating the complementary counterpart of consciousness, the unconscious. The first step is to look at the unconscious and recognize the shadow, which is initially concealed by the persona — the mask we wear to protect ourselves from the outside world and to hide parts of ourselves. When we have the courage to look beyond the persona, we begin to see aspects of our personality that we consider evil, but which we must recognize and integrate. It is there that our shadow resides.

The shadow primarily reflects the personal unconscious; however, it is often permeated by associations and projections of collective archetypal elements, which makes its recognition difficult. As Jung observes (1951/2013, p. 31, our translation):

The shadow, however, is a living part of the personality and, therefore, seeks to appear in some form. It cannot be nullified by arguments or rendered harmless through rationalization. This problem is extremely difficult because it not only challenges the person as a whole but also alerts him to his impotence.

Like the contents of the unconscious, the shadow is part of ourselves, even if we deny it. According to Jung (year/1986), self-knowledge requires confrontation with this internal evil. In the past, man projected his shadow onto personalities and collective objects, avoiding facing these individual aspects. However, in modernity, with the advent of technology, man increasingly finds himself lonely, which prevents him from hiding his shadow in the collective. In this context, many still resort to archaic means of projecting evil onto those around them, neglecting the power of evil and relegating it to the unconscious, where it becomes autonomous. Modern man is called to look at himself and confront his shadow. As Jung states (1951/2013, p. 33, our translation):

Since the stars fell from the sky and our highest symbols have faded, a secret life governs the unconscious. That is why we have psychology today and speak of the unconscious. Everything would be superfluous, and indeed it is, in an age and form of culture that possesses symbols.

Sanford (1981/1988) points out that by personifying evil forces, human beings placed evil in a position of respect, quite different from the modern view, which tends to deny the existence of internal evil. According to Sanford (1981/1988, p. 25), "Our modern, materialistic, and rationalistic view denies the existence of gods and demons, ignores the reality of the psyche, and consequently tends to neglect the power of evil."

As Jung (1951/2013, p. 23, para. 16, our translation) highlights:

With understanding and goodwill, the shadow can be integrated into the personality. However, certain traits stubbornly resist moral control, escaping any influence. Generally, these resistances are linked to projections that cannot be recognized as such, and whose recognition demands a moral effort that exceeds the individual's usual limits.

By recognizing the shadow, the individual takes the first steps toward better self-knowledge and integrating the missing aspects of their personality. This also leads to recognizing the dark aspects of the anima and the persona, reducing the autonomous potential of these complexes and, consequently, avoiding projecting their difficulties onto the external world. This process of self-knowledge promotes the expansion of consciousness and the differentiation from the collective. As Jung emphasizes (1951/2013, p. 48, para. 46, our translation):

The rooting of the ego in the world of consciousness and the strengthening of consciousness through as adequate an adaptation as possible are of utmost importance. Virtues such as attention, conscientiousness, patience from a moral standpoint, and the accurate consideration of unconscious symptoms and objective self-criticism are equally fundamental.

However, it is important to note that confrontation with the inner evil does not always generate growth. Sanford (1981/1988) agrees that, although the development of life depends on recognizing our shadow reality, this process must be accompanied by a genuine desire for transformation; otherwise, it will not result in individual growth.

Moreover, although we mainly refer to the negative aspects of the shadow, it also contains qualities and potentialities that are unconsciously denied by the individual. The integration of these traits judged as negative can often be accompanied by the discovery and integration of essential qualities that were also repressed.

Volume 10 is divided into four parts: "Present and Future" (1957); "Aspects of the Contemporary Drama" (1954); "Civilization in Transition" (1954); and "A Modern Myth about Things Seen in the Sky" (1958). This volume reflects the historical process Europe was undergoing during the world wars. The influence of this context is evident throughout Jung's reflections in the volume, especially concerning morality and consciousness.

In the third part, "Civilization in Transition," Jung (1954/2013) highlights the impacts of the First World War and the processes Europe was experiencing. In this volume, the author proposes a reflection on moral consciousness, bringing an important perspective regarding the expansion of consciousness and its relationship with morality. As Jung observes:

In summary, I would like to say that consciousness is a psychic reaction that can be called moral because it appears when psychological awareness abandons the path of customs, of morality (the mores), or resorts to it. Therefore, consciousness also means, primarily and in most individual cases, a reaction to a real or supposed deviation from the moral code and corresponds largely to the primitive fear of the unusual, the uncommon, and therefore the "immoral." Since this behavior is, so to speak, instinctive and, at best, only partly the result of reflection, it can still be moral but cannot claim to be ethical. It only

deserves this qualification if it is reflective, that is, if it is subjected to conscious understanding. This is only possible when a fundamental doubt arises between two possible modes of moral behavior, therefore a conflict of duties. Such a situation can only be resolved when a previously unreflected moral reaction is suppressed in favor of another. In this case, the moral code will be invoked in vain, and the judging intellect will be in the position of Buridan's ass between the two bundles of hay. Here, only the creative force of the ethos, which represents the whole person, can make the final decision. (Jung, 1954/2013, p. 217, para. 855, emphasis added by the author, our translation).

Jung introduces the concept of the transcendent function, which represents the connection between the conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche. This function is crucial for promoting morality, as it allows for the integration of these two dimensions within the individual, facilitating the development of autonomy. The transcendent function is thus a driving force in organizing the processes of autonomy in the human being.

To further elaborate on this theory, it is important to highlight the theoretical assumptions of the Jungian approach, focusing on the development of autonomy, the formation of personality, and, ultimately, Jung's contributions to education.

So, what would autonomy be according to Jung? What are the main aspects of his theory that can help promote freer and more conscious individuals?

Autonomy in Jung

When observing child development according to Analytical Psychology, we can explore several important aspects, especially the accounts Jung described in his studies, highlighting experiences of his adult patients during childhood, as well as his personal reports. Although the focus of his theory was the psychic development in the second half of life, the child is addressed symbolically, as an archetype or metaphorical image. Nevertheless, we also find significant concepts regarding the infantile psyche.

Jung (1925–1951/2016) revealed that he considered the child's psyche dependent on the parents' psyche, immersed within the collective psyche. Later, after the 1940s, he revised this concept by introducing the idea that the *Self* (the *Self*) already manifests in childhood, contrary to his earlier view that this would only occur in the second half of life.

To understand all the theoretical concepts related to autonomy proposed by Jung, it is important to highlight that the process of developing autonomy begins in the early years of life, gradually evolving throughout early childhood and extending into adolescence. This developmental process occurs consciously until reaching adulthood.

Helwig et al. (1990) emphasize that as children develop their competencies and skills, they begin to understand their choices and exercise their function according to what the environment offers. As Brownell and Kopp (2007, p. 289, our translation) state:

Preschoolers, however, are necessarily dependent on their primary caregivers both instrumentally and emotionally. The closeness of this relationship can promote competence, which in turn enables later development of autonomy.

The socialization process, especially within the school environment, fosters individual independence and autonomy by providing a space for socialization, communication, and the promotion of knowledge. Through toys and symbolic resources, the child expresses their personality and development, contributing to the formation of their identity.

These manifestations of progressive independence are also due to the child's use of toys as symbolic representations of ideas and fantasies, facilitating independence and developing social relationships through an objective means of communication (Fordham, 2001, p. 115, our translation).

As the child progresses, their achievements and experiences in the quest for autonomy become evident. Ramos and Posternak (2004) introduce the concept of the "family placenta," a support network that assists the child's survival and development in their autonomy process:

By providing children with security, appropriate boundaries, and developmental opportunities, parents enable them to become individuals with their own strengths. From this 'launching base,' which is the family, the child can acquire other capacities that will facilitate the conquest of autonomy and maintain it throughout their ongoing development process (Ramos & Posternak, 2004, p. 163, emphasis added by the author, our translation).

For Jung, child development is a gradual process of the evolution of consciousness: "The child develops from an initial state of unconsciousness, similar to that of animals, until it reaches a primitive consciousness and, gradually, a civilized consciousness" (Jung, 1925–1951/2016, p. 78, para. 105, our translation).

He also points out that, from a psychic perspective, before puberty, the child does not yet possess complete individuality:

It can be said that, from the psychic point of view, a child before puberty does not yet exist. Certainly, when a six-year-old child enters school, they are still, in every sense, a product of the parents; they undoubtedly possess a sense of 'self' in an embryonic state, but in no way are they capable of asserting their personality (Jung, 1925–

1951/2016, p. 79, para. 107, emphasis added by the author, our translation).

Jung emphasizes the importance of education in the integral development of the child, highlighting that the educational process should not be limited to the transmission of knowledge but should also promote the evolution of the individual's total personality (Jung, 1925–1951/2016).

He argues that the success of teaching lies not in modern didactic methods but in the relationship between the educator and the student:

As long as the personal relationship between the child and the teacher is good, it matters little whether the didactic method meets the latest standards. The success of education does not depend on the method. What matters most is not to stuff the child with knowledge, but to help them become a true adult (Jung, 1925–1951/2016, p. 79, para. 107, our translation).

Jung (1925–1951/2016) proposes that the educational process should foster individual awareness and promote autonomy by observing the individual as a whole. He emphasizes that to educate effectively, the educator must have a commitment to themselves, not merely to methods or techniques.

In this sense, Jung (1925–1951/2016) suggests that education should help the child break free from their identification with the family, allowing them to become self-aware. Without this awareness, the individual remains dependent and tends to imitate others, feeling unknown and oppressed.

Thus, the process of developing personality and autonomy profoundly impacts educational development and is crucial for forming free, conscious, and autonomous individuals.

Final considerations

After reviewing the works of Carl Gustav Jung, we focused on the volumes most closely aligned with the research interest on autonomy - particularly volumes 5 through 10/3 of the *Collected Works*. These volumes highlight fundamental aspects of the development of individual personality and include the texts in which Jung addresses the development of autonomy, consciousness, and responsibility for one's own actions.

The aim of this article was to explore the intersections between these theories in order to apply them to the educational field, enabling the use of this knowledge to foster more conscious and autonomous individuals.

The educational process, much like psychotherapy, can be seen as a re-education process, oriented toward the development of autonomy. This process empowers individuals to adequately face their developmental stages and to pursue their individuation. Education can provide not only intellectual and social emancipation, but also full autonomy. To believe that school and educational

processes transform individuals is to believe in the possibility of preparing people to live in society and, more importantly, to become complete and free individuals.

According to these theories, autonomous morality arises from a relationship of mutual respect, in which individuals recognize one another as equals. This mutual respect is the art of self-governance, always considering the other, by one's own will. It is not merely about doing whatever one wants but rather weighing what is best for all when making decisions.

Jung (1925–1951/2016) emphasizes that the individual begins in an unconscious state, incapable of perceiving their own decisions. From that point, the person progresses toward consciousness, initiating the process of choice and accountability for their actions. Their choices, initially shaped by the collective, gradually lead them to seek their inner center, governing their own decisions and, consequently, their life in the process of individuation. Piaget (year/1994) highlights the importance of interactions with the environment and peers, in a cooperative relationship, as essential for the individual to reach moral autonomy.

With this article, we hope to have contributed to the promotion of an education that not only instructs but also transforms the individual into an autonomous and conscious being, capable of living in harmony with themselves and with others.

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