

CONSCIOUSNESS IN CLASSICAL PSYCHOANALYSIS AND ANALYTICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

This paper explores the evolution of the concept of consciousness in the psychoanalytic and analytical traditions, focusing on the works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. Freud's theory of the psyche redefined consciousness as a derivative, adaptive process—an emergent phenomenon shaped by repression, instinct, and the dynamics of the unconscious. His model dismantled the Cartesian notion of self-transparency and replaced it with a view of the mind as conflictual and multilayered. Jung, while grounded in the same psychoanalytic foundation, transformed this framework by introducing the concepts of the collective unconscious, archetypes, and individuation. For Jung, consciousness serves as a site of integration and meaning-making, guiding the individual toward psychic wholeness. Through comparative and philosophical analysis, this study demonstrates that both Freud and Jung, despite their divergences, converge in rejecting reductionist models of mind and advancing a dialectical understanding of consciousness as both limited and generative. Their legacy continues to inform contemporary debates in philosophy of mind, phenomenology, and depth psychology.

Keywords: Consciousness, Unconscious, Psychoanalysis, Individuation, Archetype, Selfhood, Depth Psychology, Philosophy of Mind.

Introduction

The concept of consciousness occupies a pivotal place in both philosophy and psychology, serving as the foundation for understanding human subjectivity, cognition, and identity. At the turn of the twentieth century, psychoanalysis emerged as a revolutionary framework for rethinking the human mind—not as a transparent unity, but as a layered and dynamic structure, deeply shaped by unconscious processes. Within this intellectual transformation, Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung articulated two of the most influential and contrasting accounts of consciousness in modern thought.

Freud's theory of the mind, grounded in a mechanistic and quasi-biological model, defined consciousness as a marginal phenomenon—a fragile “surface” of the psyche that masks the deeper, irrational currents of the unconscious. Jung, conversely, expanded this conception by introducing the idea of a collective unconscious populated by archetypal forms and symbols, proposing that consciousness is not merely the product of repression but the site of integration and individuation.

This study aims to examine how the Freudian and Jungian traditions conceptualise consciousness, tracing both their shared foundations and their divergent metaphysical assumptions. The central questions addressed are: What role does consciousness play in Freud's dynamic and topographical models of the psyche? How does Jung reinterpret the relation between the conscious and unconscious in terms of individuation and self-realisation? What philosophical implications do these frameworks carry for our broader understanding of subjectivity and self-knowledge?

Research Methodologies

Methodologically, the paper adopts a conceptual-comparative approach, analysing primary texts such as *The Interpretation of Dreams*,¹ *The Ego and the Id*,² and *Psychological Types*³ alongside key commentaries by philosophers of consciousness and psychoanalytic theorists. The discussion situates these models within the broader evolution of modern thought, particularly the transition from nineteenth-century scientific psychology to twentieth-century philosophical anthropology.

Discussion and Results

The late nineteenth century witnessed a decisive transformation in the study of the mind, as psychology began to emancipate itself from speculative philosophy and establish itself as an empirical science. Thinkers such as Gustav Fechner and Wilhelm Wundt sought to measure mental phenomena through experimental methods, marking the rise of psychophysics and introspective analysis.⁴ However, these early efforts, though innovative, left unresolved the fundamental problem of subjectivity—the very phenomenon of consciousness that resists objectification.

The philosophical lineage of this problem reaches back to Immanuel Kant, who had already emphasised that consciousness cannot be reduced to an empirical object because it constitutes the transcendental condition for the possibility of experience itself.⁵ The “I think”, according to Kant, must accompany all representations, serving as the unifying function of self-awareness. Yet Kant's transcendental model offered no account of the unconscious, an absence that would later become the entry point for psychoanalysis.

Franz Brentano's *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* reintroduced intentionality as the defining mark of mental phenomena—the notion that

¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. London: Hogarth Press, 1953: 607-608

² Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*. Vienna: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1923: 26–27.

³ Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychological Types*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971: 437.

⁴ Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Elemente der Psychophysik*. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1860: 3.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998: 1.

every act of consciousness is directed toward an object.⁶ This idea profoundly influenced both Freud, who studied under Brentano's intellectual circle in Vienna, and Jung, who inherited its descriptive rigour through his engagement with phenomenology. Brentano's descriptive psychology served as a bridge between philosophical and empirical approaches, paving the way for Freud's reconceptualisation of the psyche as a dynamic field of conscious and unconscious intentions.

Simultaneously, the intellectual climate of fin-de-siècle Europe was marked by the influence of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, whose philosophical pessimism and emphasis on the irrational, instinctual forces of life profoundly shaped Freud's and Jung's respective projects.⁷ Schopenhauer's concept of the "will" as the hidden ground of all phenomena prefigured Freud's notion of instinct (Trieb), while Nietzsche's reflections on self-overcoming and the multiplicity of drives anticipated Jung's vision of psychic wholeness.

In this milieu, the transition from introspective psychology to psychoanalysis represented more than a methodological shift—it was a radical rethinking of the very ontology of mind. Consciousness was no longer viewed as the transparent mirror of experience but as a fragile epiphenomenon arising from deeper, non-rational strata of psychic life. The Freudian revolution thus initiated a new scientific and philosophical paradigm: a view of consciousness as secondary, derivative, and perpetually in tension with the unconscious forces that sustain it.⁸

Freud's conceptualisation of consciousness is inseparable from his theory of the psyche as a layered and dynamic structure. In his early works, particularly *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud distinguishes between conscious, preconscious, and unconscious processes. Consciousness (Bewußtsein) functions as the perceptual surface of mental life, the interface between internal psychic energies and external reality.⁹

In his later writings, notably *The Ego and the Id*, Freud reformulated this model in structural terms, dividing the psyche into the id (Es), the ego (Ich), and the superego (Über-Ich). Consciousness belongs primarily to the ego, which mediates between instinctual drives and the demands of reality. Yet, paradoxically, the ego itself is largely unconscious—"the ego is first and foremost a body-ego," Freud writes, "and it arises from bodily sensations."¹⁰

⁶ Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. London: Routledge, 1973: 45.

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002: 73.

⁸ Sigmund Freud, "The Unconscious," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, London: Hogarth Press, 1915: 170.

⁹ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 608.

¹⁰ Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 26–27.

Thus, even self-awareness is conditioned by material and instinctual processes beyond its own reflective control.

Freud's topographical model presents consciousness not as an autonomous faculty but as a derivative function of deeper psychic mechanisms. The unconscious, characterised by primary process thinking, condensation, and displacement, operates according to the pleasure principle, seeking immediate satisfaction of drives (Triebe). Consciousness, by contrast, operates through secondary processes governed by the reality principle, delaying gratification and translating instinctual impulses into coherent, socially acceptable forms.¹¹

Dreams, symptoms, and parapraxes reveal the fragile and porous boundary between conscious and unconscious life. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud famously describes dreams as the "royal road to the unconscious," demonstrating that disguised desires constantly infiltrate conscious thought.¹² Language, likewise, becomes the primary medium through which unconscious wishes find distorted expression—thus introducing an implicit semiotics of consciousness.

Philosophically, Freud's model implies a radical decentering of the Cartesian subject. Consciousness no longer guarantees self-transparency or rational mastery; rather, it is an epiphenomenon emerging from conflictual, biological, and symbolic processes. In this sense, Freud's notion of the psyche challenges both empiricist and rationalist epistemologies, replacing them with a dynamic conception of the mind as a theatre of forces.¹³ The human being becomes, in Freud's own words, "not master in his own house."¹⁴ a recognition that would profoundly alter subsequent philosophical reflections on subjectivity and self-knowledge.

Carl Gustav Jung's theory of consciousness represents both a continuation and a transformation of Freud's psychoanalytic project. While Jung accepted the fundamental premise of the unconscious, he rejected Freud's reduction of unconscious processes to repressed sexual instincts. For Jung, the unconscious is not merely a repository of forbidden desires but a vast reservoir of psychic potential that extends beyond the personal to encompass the collective dimensions of the human psyche.¹⁵

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 12. London: Hogarth Press, 1911: 219.

¹² Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 608.

¹³ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970: 32–64.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. London: Hogarth Press, 1917: 143.

¹⁵ Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959: 42–79.

In Jung's model, consciousness is centred around the ego, which functions as the locus of identity and self-awareness. However, the ego is only a small island within a much larger psychic sea. The unconscious, comprising both personal and collective layers, continuously interacts with consciousness through symbols, dreams, and archetypes. These archetypes—universal, inherited forms of psychic organisation—manifest as mythological motifs, religious images, and recurring symbols across cultures.

Whereas Freud conceived consciousness primarily as adaptive—mediating between instinct and reality—Jung regarded it as transformative. Consciousness evolves through the dialectical tension between the ego and the unconscious. This process culminates in individuation, the psychological and spiritual development toward the realisation of the Self (Selbst), which transcends the ego and integrates opposites within the psyche.¹⁶ The Self, in Jung's view, is both the centre and the totality of the psyche; it symbolises wholeness, purpose, and the reconciliation of conscious and unconscious contents.

Jung's understanding of consciousness also introduces a symbolic and teleological dimension absent in Freud's model. The psyche is not merely driven by past causes but also oriented toward future goals and patterns of meaning. Dreams, for Jung, are not simply wish-fulfillments but prospective communications from the unconscious, guiding the ego toward greater integration. Consciousness, in this sense, functions as an interpretive space where the individual translates archetypal messages into personal understanding.

Philosophically, Jung's conception resonates with phenomenology and existentialism. His emphasis on meaning, symbol, and experience parallels Husserl's notion of intentionality and Heidegger's idea of Dasein as a being that interprets itself through its world.¹⁷ Jung's consciousness is thus not merely a register of perception but a living, interpretive relation to reality. The psyche, as he famously remarked, "is not of this world but creates it."¹⁸

In contrast to Freud's model of repression and conflict, Jung proposed a psychology of integration and expansion. Consciousness becomes the arena of individuation—the gradual harmonisation of opposites such as persona and shadow, reason and instinct, masculine and feminine. The ultimate aim is not the mastery of the unconscious but participation in its creative unfolding. Through this process, Jung redefined consciousness as a dynamic field of

¹⁶ Carl Gustav Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951: 114–116.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1962: 185.

¹⁸ Carl Gustav Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960: 59.

becoming, rooted in the depths of the collective human spirit and oriented toward the realisation of meaning.

The conceptual divergence between Freud and Jung on consciousness arises from their fundamentally different metaphysical and epistemological premises. Freud's psychoanalysis rests on a naturalistic and deterministic foundation, viewing mental life as governed by the economy of drives and repression. Jung, by contrast, introduces a symbolic, teleological perspective in which the psyche strives toward meaning and integration. Both models, however, share a common departure from classical rationalism: they dismantle the Cartesian notion of a unified, transparent self and replace it with a dynamic system of partially unconscious processes.¹⁹

In Freud's system, consciousness is primarily adaptive. It functions as an organ of orientation, mediating between instinctual impulses and external demands. Freud's reality principle thus positions consciousness as a pragmatic compromise between inner necessity and social regulation.²⁰ The human being is conceived as a biological entity subject to the conflict of drives (Triebe), and consciousness merely translates these conflicts into the language of reason and representation.²¹ In this framework, consciousness does not reveal the truth of the self but conceals it; knowledge is necessarily partial and symptomatic.

Jung's model reverses this emphasis. For him, consciousness is not a defensive adaptation but a process of transformation. Its purpose is not repression but integration. Jung's concept of individuation introduces a moral and teleological dimension: the development of consciousness through engagement with unconscious contents is a path toward wholeness.²² The unconscious, therefore, is not an adversary but a potential ally. The dialectic between the ego and the Self parallels the philosophical idea of dialectical synthesis, where opposites are reconciled through higher-order unity—a notion reminiscent of Hegel's dynamic conception of the spirit (Geist).²³

Another crucial distinction lies in their ontological assumptions. Freud's framework remains materialistic and causal: the psyche is a product of organic life, subject to energetic and mechanistic laws. Jung's model, however, incorporates symbolic causality and finality; the psyche expresses itself through meaning, images, and myths. This shift introduces a quasi-metaphysical dimension absent in Freud. While Freud speaks of "psychic

¹⁹ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996: 78.

²⁰ Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," 219.

²¹ Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 26–27.

²² Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951: 114–116.

²³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977: 82.

energy,” Jung translates this into the language of libido as a general life-force—creative, transformative, and purposive.²⁴

Epistemologically, Freud’s method of analysis aims at uncovering the hidden determinants of behaviour, leading to an interpretive hermeneutics of suspicion, whereas Jung’s approach tends toward a hermeneutics of meaning, emphasising symbolic interpretation and existential understanding.²⁵ In this sense, Freud’s consciousness is a theatre of repression; Jung’s is a field of revelation. Both, however, share the conviction that consciousness is historically and culturally conditioned—a view that situates them within the broader currents of modernity’s crisis of subjectivity.²⁶

Philosophically, their differences echo two enduring paradigms in Western thought: naturalism and idealism. Freud’s naturalism aligns with the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment, while Jung’s symbolic idealism draws from Romanticism and German Idealism. Freud seeks to explain consciousness through its causal antecedents; Jung seeks to understand it through its teleological orientation toward meaning. The result is not merely a psychological debate but a profound metaphysical divergence concerning the nature of human existence and the role of consciousness within it.

The psychoanalytic revolution initiated by Freud and extended by Jung redefined the philosophical understanding of consciousness. Both thinkers undermined the traditional assumption that consciousness provides direct, transparent access to the self. Instead, they introduced the notion of opacity: consciousness is a mediated, interpretive process shaped by forces that exceed its grasp. In doing so, psychoanalysis inaugurated a new epistemology of the subject—one grounded in conflict, interpretation, and transformation.²⁷

Freud’s discovery of the unconscious revealed that self-knowledge is always partial and mediated by desire. The Freudian subject is a divided entity, simultaneously the agent and the object of its own investigation. This paradox situates psychoanalysis at the intersection of epistemology and hermeneutics: to know oneself is to interpret one’s own distortions. As Freud wrote, “the ego is not master in its own house,”²⁸ signalling the end of the Cartesian project of certainty.

²⁴ Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959: 42–79.

²⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970: 32–64.

²⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989: 289.

²⁷ Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, 32–64.

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. London: Hogarth Press, 1917: 143.

Jung expanded this epistemological insight by proposing that the unconscious is not merely repressed content but a source of symbolic knowledge. Dreams, myths, and archetypes communicate meanings that cannot be grasped through rational analysis alone. Consciousness, therefore, must adopt a hermeneutic attitude: it interprets rather than observes. In this respect, Jung anticipates the later developments of philosophical hermeneutics in the works of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur.²⁹

The epistemological model that emerges here is dialogical rather than monological. Knowledge of the self arises through a conversation between consciousness and the unconscious, mediated by symbols and interpretation. This framework dissolves the rigid boundary between knowing and being, making self-understanding an existential process rather than a cognitive act.

The legacy of Freud and Jung continues to resonate within contemporary debates on the philosophy of mind. Their insights prefigure non-reductive and emergentist models of consciousness that reject both Cartesian dualism and physicalist monism. The Freudian emphasis on conflict and repression anticipates cognitive theories of unconscious processing, while Jung's symbolic model aligns with phenomenological and narrative accounts of selfhood.³⁰

Moreover, both perspectives challenge the assumption that consciousness can be fully explained in third-person scientific terms. Instead, they foreground the first-person, interpretive dimension of experience—the meaning rather than merely the mechanism of awareness. This move reintegrates consciousness into the humanistic and existential dimensions of philosophy, where the question of who experiences becomes as important as how experience occurs.³¹

The contrast between Freud and Jung thus offers a dialectical framework for thinking about consciousness. Freud provides the analytic principle—clarifying the mechanisms of repression and conflict—while Jung provides the synthetic principle—articulating the integrative and teleological tendencies of the psyche. Together, they outline a dynamic model in which consciousness emerges as both product and process, shaped by the tension between fragmentation and unity.

Philosophically, this synthesis suggests that consciousness cannot be reduced either to causal determinism or to pure intentional meaning. It is instead a field of mediation, where the biological, symbolic, and existential dimensions of human life intersect. Such a view anticipates contemporary integrative

²⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. New York: Seabury Press, 1975: 112.

³⁰ Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005: 91.

³¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge, 1962: 87.

approaches in neurophenomenology and depth psychology, which seek to unite empirical and experiential accounts of mind.³²

Conclusion

The conceptualisations of consciousness proposed by Freud and Jung mark two of the most profound reorientations in modern thought about the human mind. Freud's theory initiated a radical decentering of the conscious subject, revealing that reason and self-awareness are not sovereign but derivative phenomena—fragile configurations within a psychic economy governed by repression, conflict, and desire. His dynamic and structural models introduced a conception of consciousness as functional rather than foundational: a surface manifestation of deeper, unconscious processes that shape thought and behaviour.

Jung, while rooted in the same psychoanalytic tradition, redirected this insight toward a more integrative and symbolic vision. For Jung, consciousness is not merely the by-product of repression but the locus of transformation through which the individual seeks psychic wholeness. His idea of individuation situates consciousness within a teleological process oriented toward the realisation of the Self, a higher-order principle of unity that transcends the ego. In this sense, Jung's psychology restores a metaphysical and spiritual dimension to consciousness that Freud's materialism deliberately excluded.

Comparatively, Freud's model privileges causality, while Jung's emphasises purpose; Freud conceives of consciousness as adaptive, Jung as creative; Freud's science is diagnostic, Jung's is hermeneutic. Yet despite these divergences, both thinkers converge on a shared philosophical revolution: the displacement of consciousness from the centre of the human subject and the affirmation of depth, conflict, and meaning as the fundamental categories of psychic life. They collectively establish that self-knowledge is not immediate but interpretive—that the mind becomes intelligible only through engagement with what lies beyond its conscious horizon.

In broader philosophical terms, the psychoanalytic reconfiguration of consciousness represents a critical departure from Cartesian rationalism and a prelude to phenomenological and existential conceptions of the self. By demonstrating that consciousness is simultaneously limited and revelatory, both Freud and Jung contribute to a modern understanding of subjectivity as dynamic, embodied, and meaning-oriented. Their theories invite continued dialogue between psychology, philosophy, and neuroscience in the quest to comprehend the layered complexity of human awareness. Thus, the study of consciousness in Freud and Jung remains not a historical curiosity but a living inquiry—an enduring effort to reconcile knowledge and mystery, reason and

³² Francisco Javier Varela, "Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy for the Hard Problem," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 3(4), 1996: 333.

imagination, the individual and the universal within the depths of the human psyche.

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