

Carl Müller-Braunschweig's Contributions to the Philosophical Reception of Psychoanalysis in Germany in the 1920s

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Abstract

This article explores Carl Müller-Braunschweig's contributions to the interface between psychoanalysis and philosophy in 1920s Germany. We focus on one of his works, presented in 1924 at the V International Congress of Philosophy. We aim to introduce the ideas of an author little frequented by the specialized literature, especially his epistemological contributions and his place in the history of the philosophical reception of psychoanalysis, hoping to foster new and more in-depth research on the topic. As a psychoanalyst and neo-Kantian philosopher, Müller-Braunschweig sought to frame psychoanalysis within the rigors of empirical science, proposing a dialogue between psychoanalysis and philosophy along the same lines as that which existed at the time between certain natural sciences, such as physics and chemistry, and philosophy. The article problematizes the reception of his ideas and how he would have influenced subsequent philosophical and psychoanalytic debates, establishing some markers from which psychoanalysis would interact with philosophy subsequently.

Keywords: Philosophical reception of psychoanalysis, Philosophy of psychoanalysis, Carl Müller-Braunschweig, Neo-Kantianism

1. Introduction

In this short article, we will discuss some aspects of the text *Ueber das Verhältnis der Psychoanalyse zur Philosophie* [On the Relationships of Psychoanalysis with Philosophy], published by the German philosopher and psychoanalyst Carl Müller-Braunschweig. This is a period that has been little explored in the history of the philosophical reception of psychoanalysis¹. According to the sources to which we had access, the text in question was initially presented in 1924, at the V International Congress of Philosophy and later published in the congress proceedings. In the following year, it was reprinted in *Imago* – a journal edited by members of the Viennese psychoanalytic movement and devoted to the applications of psychoanalysis to the human sciences. We know that this was neither the first nor the only publication by Müller-Braunschweig on the topic. Even so, considering its context of publication and its generalist content, we believe that it is a central text to understand the interface between philosophy and psychoanalysis within the German psychoanalytic movement of the 1920s.

Considering its introductory and programmatic vocation, this article will be divided into three parts. First, we will address certain editorial aspects of the text. Next, we will bring some elements of context, seeking to demonstrate the relevance of the material to a history of the philosophical reception of psychoanalysis. Finally, we will examine the main positions and contributions of Müller-Braunschweig in his publication.

¹ Concerning the secondary literature, we found only one relevant mention of Müller-Braunschweig's text in Gressot, M. (1956). A considerable part of the intellectual productions directed to Müller-Braunschweig's production is dedicated to the study of his controversial work at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society between the 1930s and 1940s. In this regard, see Lockot, R. (1985; 1994). Since then, much has been discussed on the topic, thus, it is not pertinent to be exhaustive here.

2. Editorial aspects of Müller-Braunschweig's article

As already indicated in the introduction, the text of the German philosopher and psychoanalyst was initially presented at the V International Congress of Philosophy, an event promoted by the Italian Society of Philosophy and held in the city of Naples between May 5 and 9, 1924. The occasion celebrated the seventh centenary of the local university, the bicentennial of Immanuel Kant's birth, and the centenary of Maine de Biran's birth. The event brought together a large number of researchers from different continents, aiming to discuss several philosophical topics of general interest. The works exhibited were divided into ten sections: Metaphysics, logic, and theory of knowledge; Aesthetics; Ethics; History of the philosophy of religion; Philosophy of law; History and philosophy of science; Psychology; Pedagogy; Sociology; History of philosophy (Valle 1925; Rabeau 1924; Sztern 1924).

Among the researchers present, we can mention some important French philosophers, such as Victor Delbos and Maurice Blondel (1925), who presented works on Maine de Biran in the *History of Philosophy* section. Also present was Étienne Gilson (1925), a future professor at the *Collège de France*, with an exhibition on Thomas Aquinas. In *Metaphysics, logic, and theory of knowledge*, we identified an original work by León Brunschvicg (1925), representative of French idealism in the first half of the twentieth century, entitled *Vie intérieure et vie spirituelle* [Interior Life and Spiritual Life].

Müller-Braunschweig presented his text in the seventh section of the congress, dedicated to psychology, a section in which the Italian psychiatrist Marco Levi Bianchini (1925) also participated, with a work on sexual symbolism in dreams, and the Swiss psychologist Edouard Claparède (1925) with an exposition on the definition of the concept of will. Both Levi Bianchini and Claparède were close to the psychoanalytic movement, bringing Freudian-inspired reflections to the public.

The congress may have brought some visibility to psychoanalysis within the international philosophical community. Müller-Braunschweig's text (1925) was published the following year, in the congress proceedings, and mentioned as early as 1924 in a long note about the congress written for an important German philosophical journal, the *Kant-Studien* (Sztern 1924). Even so, we are not aware of any more critical commentary dedicated to the author's work, neither his oral version nor his written version². Nor are we aware of any translation of this text into other languages.

As previously mentioned, a reprint of this text appeared in 1925 in the psychoanalytic journal *Imago*, but without great repercussion – apart from a bibliographical indication in a popularizing magazine, the *Almanach der Psychoanalyse* (1926). It should be noted that Müller-Braunschweig's contribution dialogues with other psychoanalytic productions of the time that questioned the theoretical and methodological status of the subject. We refer here to the works that followed the contest proposed by Freud in 1922, on the relations between theory and technique in psychoanalysis (Jeannet-Hasler 2002). Perhaps the most influential of these works was Sándor Ferenczi and Otto Rank's essay, *Entwicklungsziele der Psychoanalyse: zur Wechselbeziehung von Theorie und Praxis* [Goals of the Development of Psychoanalysis], originally published in 1924.

3. Text and context considered from a brief intellectual biography of the author

Carl Müller-Braunschweig (1881–1958) was a German psychoanalyst with a philosophical background. He defended a doctoral thesis in 1908

² Except for the work of Gressot, M. (1956), previously cited; a systematic search in the *Pep-Web* database revealed an allusive reference to the work of Müller-Braunschweig in an article of the Austrian-American philosopher Slochower, H. (1975).

with the title *Die Methode einer reinen Ethik, insbesondere der Kantischen, dargestellt an einer Analyse des Begriffes eines 'Praktischen Gesetzes'* [The Method of a Pure Ethics, in particular Kantian, presented from the analysis of the concept of a 'Practical Law']. The work was published in the same year in the *Kant-Studien* collection. In his dedication, we find the following passage, revealing the author's epistemological affiliation: 'I owe the present work to the study of Kant and to the writings of my venerated master Riehl, as well as to my own reflection'. Müller-Braunschweig refers here to the Austrian philosopher Alois Riehl (1844-1924), specifying his 'estimable *Beiträge zur Logik*', a work published by Riehl in 1892. In a book on the history of philosophy dating from the 1930s, Émile Bréhier (2012) situates the Austrian philosopher within a very particular neo-Kantian tradition, being among those who 'defended with greater vigor the reduction of philosophy to a theory of knowledge and the abandonment of all metaphysics'. This reductionist and anti-metaphysical principle would have been exposed by the author in the work *Der philosophische Kriticismus und seine Bedeutung für die positive Wissenschaft* [Philosophical Criticism and its Importance for Positive Science], published in two volumes between 1876 and 1887. Also according to Bréhier's indications, this same point of view was explored by Riehl in 1904, in the essay: *Helmholtz in seinem Verhältniss zu Kant* [Helmholtz's relations with Kant]. His *Beiträge zur Logik* [Contributions to Logic] (Riehl 1892), mentioned by Müller-Braunschweig in the dedication, can be regarded as an application of this radical principle to logic and its operators.

Now, like the Hegelian spiritualism of James J. Putnam, whose understanding has imposed itself in our research on the origins of the philosophical reception of psychoanalysis within the psychoanalytic movement (Freitas Pinto & Padovan 2020), the Müller-Braunschweig's neo-Kantianism would need to be investigated more closely, within this

same 'small' history of philosophy (Köhnke 1991; Beiser 2014; Heidelberger 2006). As the historian Regine Locket (2005) refers, Müller-Braunschweig carried out his philosophical studies in different institutions, starting in 1901 in Heidelberg, passing through Freiburg, Braunschweig, and Halle, having Jonas Cohn, Heinrich Rickert, Cay Baron von Brockdorff, Paul Menzer, Carl Stumpf, and Georg Lasson as teachers. In 1905, he finally settled in Berlin, next to Riehl.

According to his obituary (Scheunet 1959), Müller-Braunschweig turned down a position as a professor of philosophy soon after defending his thesis on Kant in order to devote himself entirely to psychoanalysis. To this end, he began his medical training in Germany, specializing in psychiatry between 1912 and 1914, under the supervision of Karl Bonhoeffer, at the Charité Hospital in Berlin. According to Gerhard Maetze (1977), Müller-Braunschweig went to Vienna in 1908 to seek an analysis with Freud but had to decline due to the high financial costs that the treatment would have. From the study of the letters exchanged between Freud and Karl Abraham, we learn that the German philosopher would have later, in 1910, sought analysis in Berlin, with Abraham (Falzeder & Hermanns 2009). According to the sources cited, Müller-Braunschweig would have a second analysis with the lay psychoanalyst Hanns Sachs, probably from 1920 onwards.

His engagement with the psychoanalytic movement formally began in 1919, with the lecture on 'Introduction to Freudian Psychoanalysis' at the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* in Berlin. In 1920, he enrolled as an external guest at the VI International Congress of Psychoanalysis, and the following year he began to attend the meetings of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society³. From 1922 onwards, he took up

³ As stated in the official bulletin of the International Psychoanalytic Association, Müller-Braunschweig was initially admitted as an 'extraordinary collaborator' (*Außerordentliche Mitglieder*) of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society (Berliner

some courses at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute – an establishment considered at the time to be the main school for the training of analysts – on the general theory of neuroses, as well as on dreams and faulty acts, based on Freudian texts (Berliner Psychoanalytische Vereinigung 1922). He also offered free courses on 'Introduction to Psychoanalysis' at the Lessing-Hochschule, with the program: 1) Unconscious; 2) Faulty acts; 3) Dream; 4) Drives; 5) Psychoneuroses, for about 120 auditors⁴. In 1924, he participated as a lecturer in the VIII International Congress of Psychoanalysis, giving a communication on *Critique of some fundamental tendencies of psychic events* (Bericht über den VIII. Internationalen psychoanalytischen Kongress 1924). In 1925, he joined a committee of professors responsible for organizing the first formal curriculum for the teaching of psychoanalysis at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute. Müller-Braunschweig dealt with most of the theoretical disciplines foreseen by the training, as well as courses focused on the interlocution between psychoanalysis and philosophy (the expression 'Philosophy of psychoanalysis' will be used to designate an investigation into the epistemological assumptions of psychoanalytic theory). A complete list of the subjects taught by the author can be found in the ten-year report of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, published in 1930 (Zehn Jahre Berliner Psychoanalytisches Institut - Poliklinik und Lehranstalt 1930).

As for his publications, we located a first article dated 1920 with the title *Psychoanalyse und Moral* [Psychoanalysis and morals] (Müller-Braunschweig 1920a; 1923c), where the author sought to establish a psychogenetic and, therefore, naturalistic origin for ethical and moral issues based on psychoanalytic concepts. This argument was taken up

Psychoanalytische Vereinigung 1921). The following year, he was admitted as an 'ordinary collaborator' (*Ordentliche Mitglieder*) in the same society (Berlin 1922).

⁴ Course started in December 1923 (Berliner Psychoanalytische Vereinigung 1924). This was not the only intervention carried out by Müller-Braunschweig in this institute.

again the following year in the publication of *Psychoanalytische Gesichtspunkte zur Psychogenese der Moral, insbesondere des moralischen Aktes* [The Psychoanalytic Point of View Regarding the Psychogenesis of Morals in Particular of the Moral Act] (Müller-Braunschweig 1921). Also in 1920, Müller-Braunschweig published a short paper entitled *Über die Schwierigkeiten in der Aneignung der Freudschen Psychoanalyse* [A Difficulty in the Assimilation of Psychoanalysis] (Müller-Braunschweig 1920) (Hoffmann 1921; Müller-Braunschweig 1923d), in which he explored epistemological issues linked to the so-called '*psychoanalytische Experiment*' [psychoanalytic experiment].

Between 1921 and 1923, we also located three articles published in the *Zeitschrift für Sexualwissenschaft* (Müller-Braunschweig 1922; 1923c), the first thematizing questions of a moral order, *Psychoanalysis and sexual reform*, the second of an epistemological order, *Der psychoanalytische Prozeß* [The psychoanalytic process] (Müller-Braunschweig 1923a), the third of a conceptual order, *Das Problem der Angst in seinem Verhältnis zur psychoanalytischen Libidotheorie* [The problem of anxiety and its relation to the psychoanalytic theory of libido] (Müller-Braunschweig 1923b). Two papers were published in 1926, the first of them presenting a discussion of psychoanalytic concepts with the title *Beiträge zur Metapsychologie* [Contributions to Metapsychology] (Müller-Braunschweig 1926a), the second exploring the *Zur Genese des weiblichen Über-Ichs* [Genesis of the Feminine Super-Ego] (Müller-Braunschweig 1926b). Due to their relevance to the psychoanalytic movement of the time, both were translated into English in the same year (Müller-Braunschweig 1926; 1926c).

This is the background of the article that we will discuss below, *Ueber das Verhältnis der Psychoanalyse zur Philosophie* [On the Relationships of Psychoanalysis with Philosophy]. A text written by a neo-Kantian philosopher, who engaged in medical training and who

began to be concerned, in the mid-1920s, not only with epistemological issues linked to psychoanalytic theory and practice but also – as we will see – with the psychological foundations of philosophical thought.

4. Müller-Braunschweig's article

The philosopher starts his text by defending the position that psychoanalysis is an 'empirical science' and stating that its object corresponds to '*psychische Vorgänge*' [psychic processes], considered by the author as '*Daten der Erfahrung*' [data of experience] (Müller-Braunschweig 1925). In this sense, Müller-Braunschweig claims that psychoanalysis, as an empirical science, would tend to establish a relationship with philosophy very close to that established by other sciences of the same type, such as physics and chemistry.

In making such considerations, the German philosopher and psychoanalyst does not seem to distance himself essentially from the epistemological positions defended by Ferenczi and Reik, between 1912 and 1913, and discussed generically at the time in terms of 'agnosticism' and 'pragmatism' – against Putnam's 'metaphysical' convictions (Freitas Pinto & Padovan 2020). The same could be said of Freud's position, in his famous entry 'Psychoanalysis', published in 1923, which affirmed psychoanalysis as an '*empirische Wissenschaft*' [empirical science] (Freud 1923), also comparing it to physics and chemistry. Unlike the latter, however, Müller-Braunschweig, because of his philosophical training, will be able to hold positions with greater rigor in this field. Among psychoanalysts, we believe that he was one of the first to directly address such questions, offering more solid and consistent answers to them. An important work to be done, considering the influence that the philosopher had on the formation of an entire generation of psychoanalysts at the Berlin Institute, would be to map precisely, within German neo-Kantianism, the epistemological references of Müller-Braunschweig. This topic will not be explored in

our article.

Resuming the 1925 text, after defining psychoanalysis as a science and psychic processes as its empirical object, the author claims that no scientific knowledge can be reduced to a simple collection of observations and experiences. It is also the task of the scientist to group and integrate observations and experiments into a cohesive set of concepts. By carrying out this work of a more theoretical nature, the psychoanalyst will be able to resort to philosophy, or at least – we would say – to a particular branch of philosophy, the theory of knowledge. To deal with problems of this nature, Müller-Braunschweig will suggest three research fronts.

The first will engage the '*Grundbegriffe*' [fundamental concepts] of the discipline, more general concepts that tend to move away from experience, thus becoming the object of philosophical meditation. This would be the case of notions such as '*psychische Energie*' [psychic energy] and drive '*Tendenz*' [tendencies], whose anchoring in experience ends up depending on a work of reflection that goes beyond the empirical limits of observation (Müller-Braunschweig 1925). We are facing an argument similar to the one presented by Freud in 1915, in the first paragraph of the article *Triebe und Triebchicksale* [Drives and Drive Destinies] (Freud 1915). In contrast to the fundamental concepts, Müller-Braunschweig draws attention to empirical concepts, such as those of 'libido' and 'unconscious', considered by the author to be much closer to observation and clinical experience. This hierarchy of concepts finds a parallel in the scale proposed by Robert Waelder, more than three decades later (Waelder 1962).

The second front will involve a critique of the psychoanalytic method, thematizing what the philosopher will call the 'psychoanalytic experiment' (Müller-Braunschweig 1925). The author will not go into detail in this regard, but, based on other of his texts, we can understand that Müller-Braunschweig questions the access to the

psychoanalytic object through a particular experience. We insist that this experience will not be thought of in a generic way, in terms of *Erfahrung*, but rather in a specialized way, in terms of *Experiment*. Later in his article, the author will give a very operative description of the psychoanalytic process, resorting to the notions of free association, the '*psychoanalytische Grundregel*' [fundamental rule of psychoanalysis], and of '*Widerstand*' [resistance], seeking to establish a formal framework for this 'experiment' (Müller-Braunschweig 1925). The topic had already been discussed at greater length in his 1923 article on the analytic process (Müller-Braunschweig 1923a). We note once again the author's pioneering spirit in the discussion of epistemological themes related to psychoanalysis.

The third front will focus on the relationship that psychoanalysis establishes with other sciences. This is a topic that was widely addressed by the psychoanalytic movement of the time, not only in terms of application – when psychoanalysis lends its concepts to other disciplines – but also, and above all, in terms of cooperation. Now, for logical reasons, this relationship of partnership could not involve philosophy, only other sciences, such as biology (Müller-Braunschweig 1925)⁵. We recall that this same argument had been mobilized by Ferenczi (1912) in his reply to Putnam. In this case, philosophical reflection would allow us to think about this interface with due rigor, respecting the limits and boundaries of each discipline. Although it is not explicitly stated by the author, we believe that Müller-Braunschweig maintains a unitary and not plural position of the sciences. A more conclusive answer to this question would depend, however, on a rigorous study of the author's epistemological references, an investigation that, as already mentioned, will not be done in this article.

⁵ The author also mentions '*Soziologie*' [Sociology] and '*Ethik*' [Ethics], but it is not clear to what extent these other disciplines were considered basic sciences. We understand that they are considered examples of applied sciences.

The last two fronts will thematize, respectively, the philosophical discussion of principles or presuppositions of psychoanalysis and the psychoanalytic explanation of philosophical practice. These two fronts will be privileged by the author in comparison to the previous three and will be addressed in the 1925 article in greater depth.

By entering the first, Müller-Braunschweig (1925) will choose a particular theme, the 'determinism of psychoanalysis', which will be thought of philosophically together with the problem of 'freedom', 'Kultur' [culture] and 'Moral' [morals]. A first reflection on this subject will start from the observation that, based on the 'psychoanalytic experiment', all our '*geistigen Akten*' [mental acts] seem to be determined by '*Trieb-und Affecktkonstellationen*' [constellations of drives and affects] – processes inaccessible to consciousness – and that, as a last resort, our whole existence seems to result from 'a certain infantile development'. By admitting this principle, even the higher acts of the '*Gewissen*' [moral consciousness] will be understood as natural phenomena, reducible to their history of development, both at the ontogenetic and phylogenetic levels.

Once again, we find here resonances with the debate between Putnam, Ferenczi, and Reik, in this case about naturalistic reductionism. Putnam (1911) had already denounced it in his articles, claiming that moral values in man could not be explained by the 'biogenic principle' (Freitas Pinto & Padovan 2020), precisely the one that will be implicitly evoked by Müller-Braunschweig when speaking of the ontogenesis and phylogenesis of moral consciousness. In 1925, however, resorting to the Kantian overcoming of the apparent contradiction between freedom and causality, the German philosopher and psychoanalyst proposed another solution to the problem, claiming that the scientific fact that moral consciousness finds its cause in the ontogenesis and phylogenesis of organisms does not in any way affect the value that morality can represent at the cultural level.

At this point, Müller-Braunschweig will deal with the modern opposition between 'fact' and 'value', which goes back within the great history of philosophy to the thought of David Hume. We know that, at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, it will be discussed by the neo-Kantian tradition and, in particular, by the logical empiricists, by authors such as Rudolf Carnap (Putnam 2002). We believe that Müller-Braunschweig sought to insert psychoanalysis into this debate, offering a scientific answer to the problem of values. This is a topic that would need to be investigated more carefully in future research on the philosophical reception of psychoanalysis.

According to the author, the feeling of freedom would be an attribute of consciousness and, by making the unconscious less separate from consciousness, psychoanalysis could even promote more freedom. In this sense, the adagio *Wissen ist Macht*, 'knowledge is power', would apply not only to the knowledge of the external world but also to the knowledge of the internal world (Müller-Braunschweig 1925). Such knowledge can be both intuitive and conceptual, and according to Müller-Braunschweig, psychoanalysis would be able to offer the individual under analysis an internal knowledge of the second type, that is, conceptual. We note that, in a way, the German philosopher and psychoanalyst anticipates elements that will later be discussed by several other authors, such as Habermas (1968), who will explore the self-reflexive and emancipatory vocation of psychoanalysis.

As for the second point, which corresponds to the fifth and last front of dialogue between philosophy and psychoanalysis discussed by Müller-Braunschweig, it will be a question of thinking about the psychogenesis of philosophy, of the philosopher, and of philosophizing. According to the author, philosophical practice is not natural, it is not expressed spontaneously in each and every individual. It is for this reason that the philosopher's superior intellectual capacity will be thought of as the product of a particular psychosexual development, a

development that may turn out to be normal or pathological depending on the unique compromise solutions found by each individual.

According to Müller-Braunschweig, the great interest in questions of a more general and universal nature would imply, in psychodynamic terms, a consequent lack of interest in the sensible world and in the particular objects that compose it. By deviating from the sexuality of the world, including the libidinal demands that are imposed throughout early childhood, the first objects of love of the future philosopher would be completely replaced by the parental imagos, phantasmatic formations capable of distancing the individual from all that is worldly. The philosopher, Müller-Braunschweig said, invests the world through the concept, without necessarily passing through the sensible. In finding such a solution to libido, we can – in Freudian terms – place ourselves within the realm of sublimation and paranoia.

5. Conclusion

In contemplating the works of the German philosopher and psychoanalyst Carl Müller-Braunschweig, our interest was not so much to draw attention to the author's contributions to the contemporary work of the philosophy of psychoanalysis. Instead, our aim was to think – in an introductory and programmatic way – about his work within a history of the philosophical reception of psychoanalysis.

We noticed that, on the one hand, Müller-Braunschweig continues some discussions present within the psychoanalytic movement, at least since the beginning of the 1910s, such as the debate between Putnam, Ferenczi, and Reik. The author will take up two themes of greater relevance in his 1925 article, namely, the question of causal determinism and that of moral freedom. The problem of naturalistic reductionism will also be revived, but now from a neo-Kantian perspective. On the other hand, Müller-Braunschweig will introduce a new discussion in psychoanalytic circles – we refer here to an

epistemological reflection on the concepts and methods of psychoanalysis.

We realize that, in discussing these themes, the German philosopher anticipates debates that will tend to animate the philosophy of the twentieth century. The fact that he addressed philosophers at the V International Congress of Philosophy and had his work published in the congress proceedings may have had an impact – not yet properly evaluated by the specialized literature – on the future of the philosophical reception of psychoanalysis. We will witness a great development of methodological reflection within the English tradition, finding important expression in the famous symposium of 1958, *Psychoanalysis, scientific method, and philosophy* (Hook 1959). The conceptual reflection will have a destiny in the French tradition, with several works, among which Paul Ricoeur's important work, *De l'interprétation: essai sur Freud* (1965). The German-speaking tradition, with the Frankfurt School – already mentioned – will discuss themes related to freedom and emancipation. Finally, we can also think about the Brazilian tradition, which will address each of these issues in a very original way, especially from the 1980s onwards.

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