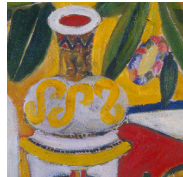


Intersections in economics and psychology: Eugen Böhler and C. G. Jung - From Logos to Myth

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Article



Abstract

Although macroeconomic processes are present in collective and individual life, with their significant socio-historical effects and consequences, they have not received due attention from analytical psychology, remaining dissociated and on the margins of analytical elaborations. This article is the result of research since 2018 on economic topics that resulted in the discovery of the Swiss economist prof. Eugen Böhler and his partnership with C.G.Jung as early as 1938 when Jung joined the ETH and especially from 1955 to 1961 when he produced essays and books involving the myths. Critical of the abstract and rational models that still permeate economic discussions today, Böhler was the one who introduced the presence of unconscious factors to understand the complexity of economic factors. Böhler sought tirelessly move out of from Logos towards Mito (Mythos). We understand, along with M. D. Ronca and Y.Demierre, that Eugen Böhler was the first Jungian Economist.

Keywords: Logos/Mythos. Eugen Böhler. Economic Science. C.G.Jung. Unconscious.

All economic moves are the product of mythical expectations, not in the sense of economic theory, but of psychology. [...] Psychologically, every economic recovery is a myth-making process that stretches beyond actual possibilities until the discrepancy becomes apparent. Rational methods and instruments are just compensations for mythical expectations and means of control. [...] Inflation is, therefore, the obvious symptom of the myth, which also manifests itself in the fact that all those involved live in projection and do not want to see the disadvantages and their own participation in inflation (BÖHLER, 1973, p. 211).

Happiness and unhappiness depend on much deeper things than the money in one's pocket (JUNG, 2015, p. 86).

God did not die. He has become money (AGAMBEN, 2012).

Introduction

Analytical psychology has contributed to the economic sciences, and Eugen Böhler (1893-1977) was responsible for introducing it to this field. In 1933, Böhler was among the professors who supported the candidacy of C.G. Jung (1875-1961) for the General Department of Free Affairs at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), to teach Modern Psychology, which, according to Ulrich Hoerni, aimed to seek a “culture of the psyche” (FALZEDER, 2020, p. 15). Jung remained at the ETH from October 20, 1933, until July 11, 1941.

The “crossings” between Jung and Böhler progressed most profoundly between 1955 and 1961. Jung sought to reflect on the complementarity of the unconscious to consciousness, while Böhler, in the field of economics, aimed to establish rationalist guidelines and social issues. Both formed a team to address the problems of the modern crisis of the human soul.

Intersections between Böhler and Jung

Böhler began teaching at the ETH in 1923. For him, economic systems did not address the main factor with which the economic sciences should be engaged: human needs. He considered that some factors were not significant for economic reasoning, such as the inaccuracy of statistical indices, the calculations and models proposed by the economic sciences, and, of course, their highly technical understanding.

Although linked to purchasing power, consumption, profitability, and working conditions in Switzerland at the resumption of economic activity after World War I (1941-1918), the 1929 Crisis, as well as post-World War II (1939-1945), these factors were essential but not sufficient for understanding economic phenomena.

Such an insight led Böhler to delve into Jung’s analytical psychology, especially from 1955 onwards, establishing a new personal “crossing” in his economic analyses, by striving for a connection between the various economic theories and the social conditions of the real world, more precisely, about human nature itself.

His “crossings” deepened after Jung’s farewell ceremony at the ETH in 1942, recognizing the “Bollingen master’s” contributions to the sciences in general. Between 1955 and 1961, Böhler sought to combine the concepts of analytical psychology with economics, as shown in the correspondence between them and in his writings, such as two works: *Der Mythos in Wirtschaft und Wissenschaft* (The Myth in Business and Science) (1965) and *Die Zukunft als Problem des modernen Menschen* (The Future as a Problem of Modern Man) (1966).

In 1931, already an influential and prominent professor at the ETH, Böhler published the article "Technology and economy in the intellectual decisions of the present" ("*Technik und Wirtschaft in den geistigen Entscheidungen der Gegenwart*"). The article is the first to refer to Jungian tools, such as collective unconsciousness, consciousness, and polarity, but without referencing analytical psychology or Jung (DEMIERRE, 2023). It is nevertheless difficult to explain the absence of references to Jung in Böhler's sources. Moreover, it is worth noting that, two years after publishing the article, in 1933, Böhler strongly recommended Jung for the position of professor at the ETH, which proves that the psychiatrist's work was relevant to his academic reflections on economics.

From 1944 onwards, Böhler questioned the relevance of economic laws, formulated in the realm of politics and among economists, using only mathematical and/or statistical data in their analysis. According to Marie-Louise von Franz, in that period, "Eugen Böhler showed that even economic thinking is strongly influenced by archetypal or mythological representations" (FRANZ, 1995, p. 109).

In 1950, Böhler became even more immersed in analytical psychology and began to use the term "myth" in his economic approaches, considering it to be a term that describes the irrational beliefs that are part of economic formulations and science in general. For Böhler (1967, p. 151): "Myth is the background through exaggerated fantasy, which makes life really worth living". And more: "Myth is the dialectical principle that oscillates in all domains between irrationality and rationality, between experience and concept, between desire and reality".

Böhler and Jung's "crossings" intensified from 1955 onwards, as seen in their letters, in which the former sought to deepen his scientific doubts about analytical psychology. Jung's first letter to Böhler was dated December 14, 1955, in which the economist asked: "Describe what you do with archetypes" (JUNG, 2002, p. 448). To which Jung replied:

The problem lies with the modern individual, because only they are in a position to give the answer that is contemporary, that is, modern. As always, the answer depends on contemporary concepts, which means it is psychological-scientific as far as "theory" is concerned (JUNG, 2002, p. 449).

Jung's response resulted in the formulation of the work *Die Zukunft als Problem des modernen Menschen* (The Future as a Problem of Modern Man), by Eugen Böhler, available in Spanish as *El Futuro, Problema del Hombre Moderno*, published by Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1967.

In 1957, Jung published *Conscious and Unconscious: Contributions from Psychology* (*Bewusstes und Unbewusstes: Beiträge zur Psychologie*).

This is a collection of Jung's essays, namely: "The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious", found in *The Self and the Unconscious* (vol. 7/2); "Introduction to the problem of the religious psychology of alchemy", found in *Psychology and Alchemy* (vol. 13); "On the phenomenology of the spirit in fairy tales", in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (vol. 9/1); and "On the psychology of Eastern meditation", in *Psychology and Religion: West and East* (vol. 11/5). Jung invited Prof. Böhler to preface the work, under the title: *Die Bedeutung der komplexen Psychologie C. G. Jungs für die Geisteswissenschaften und die Menschenbildung* (The importance of C. G. Jung's complex psychology for the humanities and human education).

His "crossings" sparked the first connections between economics and analytical psychology, which were later expanded by other Jungian authors such as James Hillman (1982, 1993); Andrew Samuels (1995); Robert Sardello (1998); Axel Capriles (2005); Waldemar Magaldi (2006); Karoline Maria da Silva Giló e Paulo Ferreira Bonfatti (2022); Gustavo Beck (2023). However, none of these works mention Eugen Böhler as the pioneer of this "crossing over", although he may have been considered intuitively by these authors,

given their understanding of Jung's perceptions.

Protestant theologian Gerhard Wehr (1996), a German author with around 80 publications, four of them on Jung, introduced the approaches between Böhler's economic presuppositions and Jung's analytical psychology in his book *C. G. Jung und Eugen Böhler: Eine Begegnung in Briefen* (C. G. Jung and Eugen Böhler: An encounter in letters), Zurich: *vdf Hochschulverlag AG, ETH*, published in 1996. This work contains 22 letters from Eugen Böhler to Jung and eight replies from Jung, which we can access in Portuguese; one of them can be found in *Letters: 1946-1955* (vol. 2) and the others in *Letters: 1956-1961* (vol. 3) - editions published by Editora Vozes.

Jung and Böhler met in person in Küsnacht, according to their correspondence. On three occasions, the economist reports his dreams and Jung analyzes them. As the relationship grew, the tone of the letters seemed to become increasingly intimate and friendly, as his last letter shows. Jung acknowledges: "Your friendship is so dear to me and my old age so welcome, for they bring me living proof that I have not fallen outside the realm of humanity" (JUNG, 2003, p. 237).

His scientific goals cover the following topics: "Rationalism does not understand that it only subtracts and destroys" our creativity and submits us to technologies that promise work activities without rights, controlled by bureaucracy and without individual freedoms, that is, without the possibility of a "direction towards the inner person and their vital needs" (JUNG, 2003, p. 10). In other words, the much-vaunted and prestigious technique and mathematical calculation, as

the driving forces behind economic desires, could be obstacles to the process of individuation.

The “crossings” between economics and psychology deepen even further, as Jung recognizes Böhler’s contribution to discovering and experiencing a new world that was taking shape after the Second World War. We are referring to the debates about the founding of the European Common Market and its economic and social complexities. Böhler helped Jung to take a stance on economic issues that considered affectivity, human relationships, and subjective values in the face of the socio-economic inequalities experienced by the world in the 1950s and 1960s. Jung admits that Böhler made him aware of his blind spots, distances, and disconnections about the economy and its implications for people’s lives. Jung (2003, p. 78) admits:

You have come up with several excellent formulations that have shone a light on things for me, such as the Common Market and what social ethics means in general. The latter in particular, which until now had been growing in my head as something hazy, has taken on a clear form thanks to your essay. You provide me with a highly beneficial form of psychotherapy of a peculiar kind: you give me the valuable experience of what I call “meaningful cooperation”, a collaboration in spirit and fact.

According to Demierre (2023, p. 65), Böhler preferred to “build intellectual bridges across the theories and concepts” of the founder of analytical psychology and his relevance to the economic sciences. This is why he declined Jung’s invitation to join the C. G. Jung Institute; he chose instead only to preserve the fraternal ties between them.

It was through his letters that Böhler became aware that “logical persuasion” prevailed in his studies, but he admitted that Jung, “thanks to his perceptive and comprehensive analysis and his originality, had become accustomed to considering things only (for himself)” (JUNG, 2003, p. 23). Böhler sought to bring the proposal of analytical psychology to the economic sciences in terms of the relevance of myths; he began to appreciate the need to make the “crossing from Logos to Myth”, as Jung saw it:

[...] the human being and their soul, the individual, the one and only true bearer of life, who not only works, eats, sleeps, reproduces, and dies, but who has a destiny that is full of meaning and that surpasses them. And for this we no longer have any “myths” (JUNG, 2003, p. 10).

Böhler’s “journey”, according to Ronca (2017), began when he realized that economic measures to encourage consumption might not influence the generation of new jobs and further investment, such as falling interest rates and production costs. In 1959, he began to criticize the isolation of the economy from economic factors, since, for him: “The real economy does not operate in a vacuum” (BÖHLER

apud RONCA, 2017, p. 12), but is a social factor present in human life. "Economic goods bear the fantasies and illusions that assign them their value, and so the economy must be understood in connection with psychic values" (BÖHLER apud RONCA, 2017, p. 152).

According to Böhler, economic theories cannot capture the real economic life of countries because they do not take account of the influence of the myths at work in political and economic mechanisms, instead preferring statistics in their formulations, which he calls "mathematized, accounting, econometric equations" of social and cultural reality. As for statistics, he claims:

Statistics show, on the opposite, that it is much more likely that both the causes and the length of economic cycles and the relationship between different factors vary greatly from one cycle to the next. This is why each cycle must be considered as a unique historical phenomenon (BÖHLER apud RONCA, 2017).

Böhler thus found a science that made sense from his earliest studies, contributing to interpreting the economy not just through reason, which prevents and distances man from being an individual, but pointing to the need to consider the personal and collective myths that constitute human society, as proposed by C.G. Jung's analytical psychology. His "crossing over" came about through intellectual transformations, leading him to abandon the economic models "prescribed" by his science.

According to Demierre (2023, p. 66):

For Böhler, the place of myth is central to understanding the problem facing man. The concept of myth arises once he evokes that science is a living myth, triggering the projection of our conception onto the outside world. In addition, science feeds the techniques, through innovations (perpetual growth) that build this artificial world. This explains very well why he thinks there is a problem of a mismatch between reality (the world that includes the rational and the irrational) and our models, in all periods of history (we are unable to assimilate both sides in our models). For Böhler, the solution to the problem of myth is self-criticism, by gaining awareness of this phenomenon. Realizing this is the first step towards change. In other words, man must evolve by becoming aware of his inner self. The development of the inner self undergoes a process of individuation, that is, an individual achieves self-realization by considering both the conscious and unconscious parts of their psyche. This event will allow us to reach a kind of fullness of our psychological being. It is worth noting that Böhler expresses the idea that certain individuals, through their preference for rational intuition, enable this myth to be presented through the development of increasingly important techniques. Science draws its essence from rationalism, which obviously suits people with their preferences. The latter, through previously envisioned rational ideas, will seek to project their ideas onto the world through techniques, creating an irrational world. He deals with this point in detail in his works.

In his “crossings”, Böhler is led to realize that all comes from within, so man needs to learn from his social history and integrate the inner and outer worlds so as not to become an artificial object of self. This is the condition of modern man, who projects all his libido into work, perhaps anticipating the current condition since the advent of economic neoliberalism in the 1990s, along with the collapse of workers’ rights. In addition to these factors, there is also the ability of the nation-states that have joined this movement to assert themselves on the world stage, arbitrating, through institutions, on issues related to working conditions in general, environmental costs, and interest rates. The famous slogan “minimum state” illustrates this by indicating that states should increasingly intervene less in social policies, so that their institutions could access financial funds from the states themselves, to defend their own interests, which are contrary to those of the workers. This scenario has led to economic neoliberalism being associated with the far right and authoritarian measures in terms of society’s own customs, shaping a collectivized individual with a regressive psychological aggravation, prone to positions that are closer and more disruptive to the contemporary world.

“Crossroads” from Logos to Myth

Böhler (1973) admits that it is very difficult to shed light on the mythical foundations of economics and its sciences, given the strong lack of self-criticism on the part of its proponents and their self-centered attitudes. In Böhler’s view, the basic assumption of rationality in economics, which is proclaimed by scholars, financial agents, and government officials, does not allow anyone to take responsibility for the functioning of systems as they have existed for many generations: “The struggle for the market economy or capitalism is therefore not about reality but about perceptions of reality, in other words, a struggle between mythical evaluations” (Böhler, 1973, p. 202-203).

Böhler’s contributions to economics point to the mythological presence and action in the perspectives of economics, considered by experts to lie in the realm of “logos”, of rationality. However, their methods take neither social reality nor the condition of individuals into account, as if they had no opinions or personal ideological convictions, leaving most of the population subject to emotional suffering for their decisions. According to Böhler (1973, p. 204):

The parties might consult experts, but their selection is already politically determined and the decision is made based on metaphysical assessments. At best, the press mobilizes the science that sheds light on the directions mentioned. Insofar as the editors have some expert knowledge, the opinion is based on models that have become stereotypes, since only a few major newspapers

or media outlets have skilled personnel who would be able to examine the particular conditions of the individual problem with sufficient thoroughness. Thus, when deciding on such an important problem, “rationality” in the usual sense plays a subordinate role.

For Böhler, the *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age, is at work in economic decisions around the world, dissolving one of the most important resources in the functioning of the world economy, for example, exchange rate flexibility, taxation, and the charging of interest between the differences in the currencies of countries. Thus, it shuts down all possibilities for the practice of international solidarity, as it is held hostage to the economic policies practiced by the world's economic systems in terms of their forecasts, evaluations, and re-evaluations, as well as demands for exchange rate flexibility, the devaluation of their currencies, and their export policies, limiting the individual decisions of each country. Such forecasts remain in force despite being inadequate, as experience has shown, precisely to the extent that they are based, according to Böhler (1973), on myths that cast them in an optimistic and mystical light.

The myth in the world economy is the *zeitgeist* with its technical-rationalist discourse, in other words, what the spirit of the age, as a psychological mechanism, considers to be the “logos” is the “myth” present and active, leaving the individual, as such, distant from the economic decisions being made. This psychological mechanism does not correspond to people's reality, as it functions as a model of thought with which to comprehend reality. Here we see the exploitation of people by technical-rationalist systems, without changing what they call the “market economy”, liberalism, and now “neoliberalism”, a movement that believes itself to be the complete solution to economic problems.

According to Böhler (1973, p. 205):

Accordingly, the *zeitgeist* brings both “value-free” science and “rational” economics under its control. Its utopian character manifests itself in the inclination to form abstract models of the future instead of solving the concrete problems underlying the monetary crisis, as well as in the dissolution of established rational orders as a result of the process of demythologization with which every mythical expectation ends. None of those involved are aware that the system they blame for the crisis is the product of the projection of their own complicity, which they do not wish to see. [...] The struggle for social systems is therefore a struggle for myths. [...] The rule of the myth is so strong that its followers do not even perceive how different reality is from ideologies as it is supposedly realized.

Both the ideology of liberalism and now neoliberalism - the market economy - and what is considered “progressive”, which seeks to reject or soften the exploitation of people, according to Böhler, are unconsciously charged with affection. Each proposes a

range of affections, real emotional complexes. The proposals of the market economy suggest a decentralization of decisions, generating associations with insecurity, power, private property, exploitation, selfishness, injustice, individualism, and chaos in economic relations in general. The “progressive” ideology, on the other hand, calls for a decentralization of economic decisions, promising to create associations with the idea of community, common property, peace, justice, altruism, security, collectivity, and planning. As Böhler sees it, both perceptions have nothing directly to do with these affections. However, as pairs of opposites, they have become absolute for both visions and economic hypotheses.

But myths are the only psychological “reality” worth living for, for which millions of people have had to lose their lives, for which millions, if not billions more, work, suffer, and give up their lives, for their whole lives because they are fascinated by the symbols of myth. Although everyone involved uses the heavy artillery of reason, the outcome has nothing to do with reason since, measured by rational standards, it must be seen as irrational if bare reality were the source of all reason, which rationalists persist in ignoring (BÖHLER, 1973, p. 206-207).

Böhler also sees the dominance of myths in economic processes. According to him:

So-called economic goods are not actually material objects, but projections of desires and expectations onto the outside world. The consumer’s imagination promises paradise and reaps the rewards of mundane everyday life because every achievement devalues the desired object. In reality, the individual does not know what they want: they are a victim of advertising, its status, conformism, and the zeitgeist. Otherwise, the company’s advertising, propaganda, and sales policy could not exist. This creates the relative stability of demand. The consumer is not the king, but the servant. The rationality of consumption is in a small place. Despite the need to balance income and expenditure, there is no rational link in the short term and even less in the long term (BÖHLER, 1973, p. 210).

In light of this, we see how much myth directs our personal and collective economic, business, and state projections, as financial investments seek to satisfy unfulfilled desires. However, although they can stimulate us to constructive activities, they trap us in a state of envy, irritation, and psychic torment, which we try to compensate for with further acquisitions, amoral and unethical decisions, and even criminal ones, especially between multinational companies, central banks, financial institutions, and banks, thus creating the condition of economic inequality. The mythological performance on us and the direction of our collectivity brings us into contact with the fantasy that the “other” does not have much value, particularly if they have less money. The poor do not count. In addition, there is the fantasy of hiding the crimes of theft against the most economically unjust, which

are being designed and enforced around the world in an iniquitous, corrupt, competitive, and insensitive way.

According to Samuels (1995, p. 116, 117):

Economic inequality gives rise to personal and national hopes established by the wealth of symbolic life. We believe all this emotionally, even though we know intellectually that such wealth cannot be bought by women, men, corporations, or governments. [...] Myth has illuminated our investing in such corruption. [...] In our time, both in the capitalist West and in the former communist East, it is quite tricky to overcome our divided emotional attitude towards the market economy.

Final Considerations

Analytical psychology made Böhler realize that once money becomes the center of social life, it accelerates time and causes the psychological suffering brought on by the contemporary integration of finance and electronic technologies. Or as Muniz Sodré said:

This motion and rearrangement, triggered by the speed of electromagnetic waves, points to the heart of the matter: the shockwave of electronic culture, a counterpart of the economic fiction foreshadowed by Goethe, in which Mephistopheles, out to help Faust, invents paper money. It was indeed alchemy, but the magic is only in the “quickening” of experience. The compression of space by the acceleration of time is also the ultimate magic and reason for our global displacement. This magic today is apparently more Mephistotelian than divine. However, it is also worth reflecting on Giorgio Agamben’s phrase: “God is not dead. He has become money” (AGAMBEN, 2012 *apud* WULF; BAITELLO, 2018, p. 99).

Böhler (1973) sees human satisfaction based on ethical life values, such as dedication to work, since, through them, we impose our individual condition to the diverse adaptations that life demands from us. It is not about accumulating goods, since it is a merely instinctive trend that does not consider other human values. It is about though coordinating individual purposes following the “wisdom of the heart” and not the “welfare theory”.

The “crossing from Logos to Myth” seems to be a) from the “logos” of the free market – neoliberalism – or the progressive vision of economic systems that both perspectives propose to the world, towards b) a perspective of a personal myth, since the accumulation of goods is at the expense of life and health, the family and the community in general, the environment, the social conditions of our cities, and development that compromises the future and contradicts the “wisdom of the heart”. The redistribution of income and wealth cannot stem from technical-rationalist arguments such as those proposed by economic postulates that only consider the so-called

“economic frameworks” based on full employment, stability of the currency, and price levels (controlling inflation), as well as the balance of payments (controlling spending without counting investments in priority areas where human values are most needed, such as health, housing, and education, for example) and balancing growth.

According to Böhler (1973, p. 216):

Why do we not take all human values into account to achieve a harmonious society? The reason is the complete lack of epistemological criticism of the economic postulates themselves, and this in turn is because the economic principle has been mythologized and raised to an ethical principle through the subsumption of concepts. This has reinforced the disastrous tendencies of the *zeitgeist* and, therefore, the imbalance in society.

Our profession is among the main reasons for us to make this crossing, which integrates economic activity and, therefore, we participated in the capitalist system and the economy, with all the emotional and relational implications of the psychotherapeutic process and not only in its symbolic aspects. “Money is always a phenomenon that takes place within the analytical relationship, and the economy has a therapeutic value”, according to Gustavo Beck (2023, p. 215). Thus, we are engaged and committed to our psychotherapeutic practice and its economic implications.

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