

## Freud's philosophical path

### From a science of mind to a philosophy of human being

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*Despite an early interest, Freud explicitly rejected philosophy, because of its "speculative" character. He struggled with balancing the intellectual appeal of philosophy with the certainty he hoped to find in positivist science. Putting aside the scientific status of Freud's work, the author re-examines Freud's attitude towards philosophy. Failing to recognize the assumptions of his investigations, Freud segregated psychoanalysis from philosophy on the charge that philosophers equated mind with consciousness, putatively propounded unfounded speculations, and assumed false conclusions about comprehensiveness. However, Freud never completely abandoned his initial philosophical proclivities. His own contributions to cultural history, social philosophy, notions of personal identity, and the humanistic thrust of psychoanalysis, demonstrate that he continued to address his earliest interests in philosophical questions. The author elucidates the philosophical complexity of psychoanalysis and concludes that a reconsideration of Freud's self-appraisal of his intellectual commitments is warranted.*

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At the University of Vienna, Freud divided his early studies between philosophy and preparation for a medical career. He knew the basic outline of the German philosophical tradition as taught in the 1870s, and we have some evidence that he continued to entertain the relation of his thought to Kant and to other philosophers; but he also took pains to convince himself and his readers that he was *not* doing philosophy. In pursuing his science, Freud regarded psychoanalysis as an alternative to then current philosophies of mind, and despite his later speculations about the ways that his findings might be applied to culture and history, his aloof position never altered.

We most clearly witness this tension between empirical science and a philosophy of human nature roughly from World War I onwards, when he felt confident that the foundations of psychoanalysis were secure. Freud's outlook combined two elements, a biological concep-

tion of human behavior (justifying the empiricism) and a novel humanistic understanding about social theory, cultural history, and personal identity. However, the explicit description of his philosophical ideas remains moot in Freud's published writings, for in the express rejection of formal philosophy, he eschewed significant self-reflection on his intellectual commitments. Yet on several occasions, Freud privately admitted that, in his retreat from philosophy, he never completely abandoned the musings of his youth.

Freud expended a fair amount of intellectual (and psychic) energy in defining himself as an empirical scientist at the expense of a competing, seemingly repressed intellectual passion, and that this subordinated desire to philosophize re-emerged upon writing *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and the meta-psychological papers of the same period, which were then further developed in the 1920s and 1930s with speculations

directed far beyond the individual on the couch to society-at-large. Why he extrapolated his clinical theory to cultural criticism has prompted much discussion (e.g., that it reflected a crisis centered on Jewish identity (Paul, 1996) or the conflict with Jung (Breger, 2000)), but suffice it to summarize my claim here: I broadly regard this development as representing the expression of a frustrated philosopher. On this view, the psychoanalytic approach to human behavior devised by Freud in many ways represented a backdoor entry into the speculative problems that originally intrigued him as a university student. In adopting this position, I employ a lesson from the master himself: “An important element in the theory of repression is the view that repression is not an event that occurs once but that it requires a permanent expenditure [of energy]” Freud (1926, p. 157).

### FREUD’S POSITIVIST ALLEGIANCE

At the University of Vienna during the mid-1870s, Freud was deeply interested in philosophy and considered fulfilling a dual doctorate in medicine and philosophy. He supplemented his physiology courses with an intense series of lectures delivered by Franz Brentano, whose commitments to empiricism, logic and natural scientific ideals influenced Freud’s later approach to psychology (Freud, 1990). Having entered the university in 1873 (finishing his medical studies 1881), Freud enrolled in six of Brentano’s lecture courses from the winter of 1874 through the summer of 1876. These were the only non-medical courses he took (Merlan, 1949). Of note, he visited Brentano outside of class and it seems that some intellectual intimacies were shared (Freud 1990).

Brentano, during the time of encounters with Freud in 1874, had just been appointed Professor and had published his major work *Psychology from an empirical point of view* (Brentano, 1973). Whether Freud actually discussed with Brentano the basis for accepting or rejecting the notion of “the unconscious” or “unconsciousness” as a property of the mind cannot be determined, but the impressionable student reports to his friend, Eduard Silberstein, that Brentano disparaged Johann Friedrich Herbart’s views on the unconscious as “untenable” (Freud, 1990, p. 102). Brentano’s *Psychology* makes a considerable effort of attacking the notion of an unconscious. As noted, some scholars (and I agree) have concluded that Freud’s formal studies with Brentano developed into a more personal relationship that made a significant impression on the student’s understanding of philosophy and influenced

the development of Freudian psychoanalysis (Barclay, 1959, 1964; Fancher, 1977; McGrath, 1986; Frampton, 1991; Cohen, 1998a; b; 2000). Accordingly, I surmise that Brentano’s mentorship offered both part of the original framework in which Freud organized his own empirical studies, and furthermore presented Freud with a set of criteria by which to justify a theory of unconsciousness. Furthermore, Brentano, as a pioneering phenomenologist, became an apostle of “inner perception,” which Freud later was to take in his own distinctive course. And most generally, Freud’s subsequent detour into neurology arose, at least in part, in the agreement with his philosophical mentor that philosophy was “in absolute chaos” (Freud, 1990, p. 102).

Ernst Brücke, a major proponent of materialism, more likely directly influenced Freud’s interests in models of the mind, which were based on a physiology grounded in physics and chemistry. Indeed, Freud chose to side with the more certain, objectivist approach Brücke offered (Glymour, 1991). This early competition between philosophy and physiology would be replayed in later years as Freud struggled between the demands of a reductive science and an introspection that taxed the limits of that science.

Although he disavowed affiliation to Kantianism, (Freud, 1990; Smith, 1999), Brentano actually distanced himself more specifically from Hegelianism. In his rejection of “Absolute idealism,” he created an introspective phenomenology in service to a scientific psychology, which was then prominently developed by Edmund Husserl. Historicism, neo-Kantianism, and analytical philosophy were also to become prominent alternatives to a rejected idealism. This latter movement, with an ascendant naturalism, would give birth to logical positivism, also referred to as the “Vienna Circle”. This complex history may be seen as a general re-alignment of philosophy and science, an adjustment that underpinned much that became evident in phenomenology, historicism, value theory, and logic. However, for our purposes, the most direct development for Freud’s philosophical undertaking was the evolution of natural philosophy into “science.”

Scientists, by the end of the 19th century, found themselves pursuing a course independent of their philosophy colleagues, one that increasingly accorded science the role of adjudicating truth claims and establishing knowledge (Schnädelbach, 1984; Tauber, 2009). Science thus attained a position that, when coupled with the drive of increasing technology and the growing institutional and social power of its professionalization, established an assertive, normative character to research and its products (Tauber, 2001). Originating

with August Comte in the 1820s, extended by Ernst Mach in the 1890s, and finally matured in the Vienna Circle in the 1920s, positivism dominated the philosophy of science during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and thus set the standards for truth claims during Freud's professional life.

Freud's embrace of scientism and positivism followed the fashion of his time. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the natural sciences, left to their own technical pursuits, ascended to great heights of technical mastery of nature. That success required an epistemology, which seemingly built from commonsensical notions of empirical knowledge, and by successfully responding, positivist philosophy assumed its hegemonic hold on the scientific community. When Freud entered the scientific community, investigators began to refer to themselves as "scientists" instead of to "natural philosophers" (following William Whewell's suggestion for a new designation in his *Philosophy of the inductive sciences* (1840)). Positivist triumphs led to romantic reactions (Tauber, 2001), which took many forms, but suffice it to note here that a disenchanted universe posed the question of human's existential standing in a new way: how to place humans in relation to the nature they experienced. While the objective component of that problem was soon adopted by a new discipline, psychology, the various expressions directed at the deeper metaphysical challenge soon dominated discussion of the signification of science's findings. In other words, with "objectivity" given, the unresolved problem became *subjectivity*.

Those scientists who embraced this newly evolved positivist philosophy were, by and large, pleased to leave the problematic philosophical (defined as "metaphysical") questions behind them as they pursued their investigative projects. Freud chose to align himself with them, not only because of the appeal to methodological authority, but perhaps more deeply as a personal response to the crisis of modernity generally experienced at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Megill, 1985). To seek new foundations and save rationality in the face of crushing obstacles comprised an intellectual mission dominant among the German intelligentsia (Bambach, 1995). Thus, positivism, which seeks radically neutral and objective knowledge (frequently omitting to account for its own values and self-refuting assumptions), organized Freud's ever-present desire to legitimize psychoanalysis by linking its theories and the clinical data upon which they were based with those sciences that he thought had achieved a kind of objectivity he admired.

Freud's "physics envy" belied his scientific aspirations. Scientific theories generally fall into two camps.

Some are simply descriptive with no judgments as to optimal or sub-optimal states. Such theories, which characterize the natural sciences, for example, Newtonian mechanics or general relativity, are value-neutral and thus non-normative. Of course, they are not value-free. They are judged and governed by their own hierarchy of values: objectivity, universality, coherence, parsimony, aesthetical elegance, simplicity, etc. Other kinds of theories embed different social or personal values in their descriptive structure, which are derived from human experience and accordingly account for conditions on a *normative* spectrum of values. Psychoanalysis as a therapeutic venture is guided by various notions of normativity. This orientation focused Freud's investigational model, namely, an extrapolation from functional coordinates that seemed to allow life to flourish. Accordingly, his positivist aspirations for psychoanalysis floundered, as his critics relentlessly opined. Freud could not ignore those attacks, but did he effectively repel them?

#### THE CHALLENGE OF NORMATIVE ACCOUNTS

Following an account of human action reaching back into Enlightenment and Romantic traditions (Kirschner, 1996; Steiner, 1995;), analytic stories frame individual life histories to achieve certain ends. Indeed, a teleological structure of psychoanalytic theory clearly oriented Freud's epistemology, directed his investigations, and defined his interpretation of the clinical data (Meissner, 2003). Arising from physiology, function follows parameters of success and failure for prescribed goals, and with these basic coordinates, Freud placed psychic life on a clinical spectrum defined by relatively normal and pathological states. This endeavor rested on clinical judgment and application of norms that organized an understanding of psychic function and the psychotherapy directed at correcting its aberrancies.

Freud's positivist project, built on the ideals of the physical sciences, breaks apart on these normative shoals (Tauber, 2005, 2009), for the neat division of objective facts and subjective values only admits the separation of certain kinds of facts from certain kinds of value. The interpretative nature of psychoanalysis disallowed such a simple prescription, although formally, Freud held to his earliest scientific ideal to separate objectivity from personal value. A positivist philosophy that had served a newly emerged scientific medicine so well was not only inappropriate for psychoanalysis, its aspirations were unattainable as well. Even allowing for the broadest tenets as holding some

universal value – the general nature of unconscious drives and the determinism of early experience – these basic assumptions can only frame (in a most general way) the interpretation of the particularities of human experience. The analysis must be heavily influenced by non-objective values, namely the goals established by analysand and analyst, the data admitted for interpretation, and of course, the interpretation itself. On this view, in psychoanalytic clinical practice, as in any clinical scenario (Tauber, 2005), the observer must adjust the brackets of objectivity to fit the peculiarities of the subject.

Yet, Freud never abandoned his scientific criteria and guiding ideals. In a late overview of psychoanalysis, he wrote, “The future will probably attribute far greater importance to psychoanalysis as the science of the unconscious than as a therapeutic procedure” (1927b, p. 265). Thus, for the late Freud, the therapeutic result was construed as a fortunate product of a successful analysis, but the scientific status of the analysis remained primary. Note, however, that the verisimilitude of the analytic process was predicated on Freud’s early therapeutic successes, so one might easily argue that the medical aspects were critical to assigning truth claims for his interpretations. Irrespective of these considerations, Freud in the end eschewed the therapeutic as subordinate to the scientific inquiry, or in other words, science trumped medicine, because in the final analysis, medicine offered an inferior theoretical application of his positivist ideals.

Positivism’s appeal explains Freud’s presentation of psychoanalysis and aspects of its methodologies. But Freud did not engage directly with the inherent philosophical tension (between normative and non-normative aspects) of his science. Indeed, he could not escape how an evaluative judgment – an interpretative analysis, a formulation of a standard of behavior – reflected a set of non-positivist values applied to create a psychoanalytic interpretation. Putting aside further comment on the positivist standing of Freud’s theory, I only note that instead of dealing with the philosophical commitments of psychoanalysis, Freud instead polemically took his argument against a weaker opponent, the “philosophers.” The general tenor of Freud’s remarks about philosophy attempted to rebut the criticism that psychoanalysis offered little clinical evidence or scientific rationale for its practice and thus fashioned itself, willy-nilly, as a contemplative discipline. Specifically, Freud complained that philosophers (whom he does not identify, but they must have included Brentano) equated the mental with consciousness and ignored the unconscious, which for the psychoanalyst represents the true seat of the mind (Freud, 1900).

Relevant to this point, in 1925, Freud penned “The resistances to psycho-analysis”, in which he forgives physicians (encumbered with their mechanical, materialist orientation) for misconstruing the authority of psychoanalysis. However, to the philosophers he offers no respite. He accuses them of narrowly perceiving “mind” only in its conscious functions and thus failing to recognize that “what is mental is in itself *unconscious* and that being conscious is only a *quality*, which may or may not accrue to a particular mental act ...” (Freud 1925b, p. 216, emphasis in the original). Further, Freud asserts that because philosophers have no experience with hypnosis or dream analysis, they are locked into self-observation and thus to consciousness. Freud then notes that psychoanalysis resides in some middle position between medicine and philosophy, deriving no benefits from any kinship with either discipline.

#### FREUD’S REJECTION OF PHILOSOPHY

Throughout Freud’s early and late writings, psychoanalysis seemingly had no *Weltanschauung* beyond that of empirical science itself (cf., e.g., Freud, 1933), which embraced positivist tenets. This philosophical structure largely defined the development and presentation of his “new science.” Complicating the objective pose assumed by the psychoanalyst are the various emotional demands encountered during an analysis; the aspiration to objectify the subjective proved to be a daunting challenge. Nevertheless, Freud hoped to distance himself from the analysand to the extent that allowed a scrupulous assessment, and in so doing, he wore the mantle of a clinical scientist seeking an objective description of psychic events and behavior. Consider Freud’s own description of the analyst’s objective attitude:

I cannot advise my colleagues too urgently to model themselves during psycho-analytic treatment on the surgeon, who puts aside all his feelings, even his human sympathy, and concentrates his mental forces on the single aim of performing the operation as skillfully as possible .... The justification for requiring this emotional coldness in the analyst is that it creates the most advantageous conditions for both parties: for the doctor the desirable protection for his own emotional life and for the patient the largest amount of help that we can give him today (Freud, 1912, p. 115).

Having adopted this orientation, Freud maintained that psychoanalysis offered a positivist basis for understanding complex human behaviors and institutions,

thereby distinguishing itself from previous speculative philosophies. He donned the scientific cloak even when proselytizing. Of several disavowals, this one, from his *Autobiography*, succinctly states his case:

I should not like to create an impression that during this last period of my work I have turned my back upon patient observation and have abandoned myself entirely to speculation. I have on the contrary always remained in the closest touch with the analytic material and have never ceased working at detailed points of clinical or technical importance. Even when I have moved away from observation, I have carefully avoided any contact with philosophy proper. This avoidance has been greatly facilitated by constitutional incapacity (Freud, 1925a, p. 59).

But more than some “incapacity” for philosophical thinking, Freud held decidedly negative views of philosophy. As late as in his *New Introductory Lectures* of 1933, Freud sounded his repeated refrain about the intellectual weaknesses of “philosophers” and the strength of his own empirical epistemology:

Philosophy is not opposed to science, it behaves like a science and works in part by the same methods; it departs from it, however, by clinging to the illusion of being able to present a picture of the universe which is without gaps and is coherent, though one which is bound to collapse with every fresh advance of our knowledge. It goes astray in its method of over-estimating the epistemological value of our logical operations and by accepting other sources of knowledge such as intuition (Freud, 1933, pp. 160-161).

Thus, Freud’s rejection of philosophy rested upon his diagnosis of three weaknesses: (1) philosophy represents an encompassing mode of knowledge (or perhaps a metaphysics) that cannot respond to new empirical findings; (2) beyond its blindness to empiricism, philosophy’s logic is closed and limited; and (3) philosophers elevate non-scientific forms of knowledge to an epistemological level that is rightly reserved for positivist findings. This indictment of “philosophy” originated in the rejection of a lingering influence of idealism, whose “speculative” and “totalizing” proclivities Freud replaced with the positivist promises of the research laboratory.

That Freud’s characterization distorted “philosophy” requires little comment here, other than to note the irony that he accepted his own positivism without the same critical appraisal that he applied to other philosophies. He caricatured philosophy by associating

it with religion and with what was already a widely rejected Hegelianism; he avoided exploring the logic of his own approach and its presumptive claim on true knowledge; and finally, he seemingly ignored the metaphysical foundations of his own efforts to devise an encompassing philosophy of human nature. Nevertheless, Freud employed specific philosophical positions for his own theoretical purposes, and these philosophical elements form the underpinnings of his thought, both scientific *and* humanistic (Tauber, 2010, in press).

Freud’s understanding of what constitutes knowledge is readily understood, given his research training and the context of his clinical investigations. Nevertheless, his intellectual journey reveals a duality of perspectives, which complicates his ambitions. This dual allegiance to science and a more speculative inclination directed towards culture criticism, religion, and history is clearly demonstrated in his correspondence with Fliess, where he reported to his friend the schema of the “Project for a scientific psychology” (“Draft K” of the correspondence). There, he revealed his commitment to neurophysiology as classically conceived. Although he called the project a “Christmas fairy tale” (Freud, 1985, p. 162), Freud postulated a physiological model of the mind and therein grounded psychopathological depiction of the neuroses. The tentative postulates of this attempt represent a schema that would be followed throughout Freud’s later development of psychoanalysis, a schema of energetics borrowed from physics (Glymour, 1991). According to this model, the mind was “to take its place among the inhabitants of the ‘billiard-ball’ universe of Newtonian mechanics” (McIntyre, 1958, p. 17). How various aspects of Freudian theory reflected the general scientific culture and attitudes of his intellectual milieu have been well described (Kitcher, 1992; Decker, 1977), and more specifically, this notion of psychic forces defining complex behavior conveys the general tenor of Freud’s scientific thinking: from the earliest speculations and throughout his mature period, he remained passionately committed to a scientific model that would mirror physics, the paragon of the natural sciences. But as he presents this physiological model to his confidant, he draws back and admits that despite the allure of this scientific hypothesis, it truly remains in service to another calling altogether, one I would call philosophy. So, while his original intent had been a philosophical characterization of the mind, Freud himself admitted, in order to achieve this goal he detoured first into neurophysiology and then into psychiatry. His affectionate reference to philosophy in his letter to Fliess (Freud, 1985, pp. 159, 180; quotations given below) belies the many instances in Freud’s published writings, where he firmly established a distance between himself

and philosophers and, more specifically, between psychoanalysis and prevailing philosophies of mind. How might we account for this division?

Throughout his writings Freud sprinkled remarks directed to those detractors, who claimed that psychoanalysis failed the scientific standards of the age. He thus had to establish that psychoanalysis was objective (i.e., *scientific* in following a most austere objectivist truth doctrine) and that it was not “philosophical.” Considering his background in neurophysiology and his commitments to the ascendant positivism of the age, Freud’s flirtation with a reductive model served an important orienting function for what was to become an altogether different approach to understanding psychopathology. In this view, Freud struggled throughout his career to bridge the gap between his aspiration to create a science of the mind, on the one hand, and to promote an interpretative method serving to reveal a broader philosophy of human being, on the other hand. He believed that adherence to positivist principles would not only bolster the truth claims of his psychoanalytic extrapolations, but would also align this “new science” with the hope that all knowledge might be unified under the single banner of science. And science for Freud, equated with truth:

It is not permissible to declare that science is one field of human mental activity and that religion and philosophy are others, at least equal in value, and that science has no business to interfere with the other two: that they all have equal claim to be true and that everyone is at liberty to choose from which he will draw his convictions and in which he will place his belief. A view of this kind is regarded as particularly superior, tolerant, broad-minded and free from liberal prejudices. Unfortunately it is not tenable .... It is simply a fact that the truth cannot be tolerant, that it admits no compromises or limitations, that research regards every sphere of human activity as belonging to it and that it must be relentlessly critical if any other power tries to take over any part of it (Freud, 1933, p. 160).

This statement summarizes Freud’s philosophical bedrock: truth is only scientific truth and thus intolerant of other truth claims. He rails against those he identifies as pluralistic in their pursuit of truths derived by different methods, and he condemns philosophy as arrogant in its systematic conceits: philosophy might “behave like a science, and works in part by the same methods,” but it is inferior because of “the illusion of being able to present a picture of the universe which is without gaps and is coherent, though one which is bound to collapse with every advance in knowledge”

(Freud, 1933, p. 160). Freud’s diagnosis of philosophy’s fatal weakness was “over-estimating the epistemological value of our logical operations and by accepting other sources of knowledge such as intuition.” (Freud, 1933, p.160). Let us call this position, Freud’s public scientific persona, and below we will trace the broader intellectual origins of his theory in greater detail and show how a larger philosophical challenge underlies his psychoanalytic project.

## FREUD’S RETURN TO PHILOSOPHY

Much of Freud’s defense of his theory draws a distinction between the “science” of psychoanalysis and the “speculation” of philosophers. This position, however, belies the complexity of the philosophical influences on psychoanalytic theory and largely ignores that psychoanalysis depends on the antecedents of previous characterizations of unconsciousness, for example, those by Schopenhauer, Eduard von Hartmann, and Nietzsche (Askay & Farquhar, 2006). Other philosophical antecedents are evident as well (Tauber, in press), but these are not our concern here. Instead, we seek to understand how to place Freud’s speculative writings in the context of his aversion to philosophy. Let us first consider the autobiographical “Postscript,” in which Freud amends his earlier self-appraisal to acknowledge that he had returned, “after making a lifelong detour through the natural sciences, medicine, and psychotherapy ... to the cultural problems which had fascinated me long before, when I was a youth scarcely old enough for thinking” (Freud, 1935, p. 72). Culture criticism is not philosophy, and Freud certainly was not a systematic philosopher, but that slippage does not release him from the appeals of philosophy, which continued to tug at him throughout his life.

Even before Freud published *Interpretation of dreams*, he noted his complex relationship to philosophy. In a letter written to Wilhelm Fliess on New Year’s Day, 1896, Freud admits to a powerful philosophical inclination:

I see how, via the detour of medical practice, you are reaching your first ideal of understanding human beings as a physiologist, just as I most secretly nourish the hope of arriving, via these same paths, at my initial goal of philosophy. For that is what I wanted originally, when it was not yet at all clear to me to what end I was in the world (Freud, 1985, p. 159).

He repeated this sentiment a few months later: “As a young man I knew no longing other than for philo-

sophical knowledge, and now I am about to fulfill it as I move from medicine to psychology. I became a therapist against my will” (Freud, 1985, p. 180 [April 2, 1896]). The extent Freud held to his earliest desires, of course, cannot be resolved; however, one might fairly conclude that he went through several stages of speculation, widening his horizon to broader cultural and historical interpretations. From this perspective, Freud’s dismissive “against my will” would be skeptically interpreted by a shrewd analyst.

Later, Freud became less defensive when he admitted that “in the works of my later years ... I have given free rein to the inclination, which I kept down so long, to speculation ...” (Freud, 1925a, p. 57). I wish to draw a distinction between Freud’s use of “speculation” in formal psychoanalytic works, such as *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923), and the kind of speculation he employed in more general cultural or historical writings such as *The future of an illusion* (1927b), *Civilization and its discontents* (1930), and *Moses and monotheism* (1939). In these latter works, Freud gave free rein to broad psycho-cultural critiques, each of which is highly speculative. Indeed, in his late career, he even more freely admitted to such proclivities, and called his theoretical revisions after his division of the mental personality into ego, super-ego, and id, a “regressive development” (1935, p. 72).

Despite his earlier disdain for such explorations and for the unorthodoxy of his scientific program, Freud’s indignation about the dismissal of his theory appears again and again as he sought to defend the critical, that is, scientific character of psychoanalysis (Freud, 1940). In 1901 he had already written that after all, “[we] venture ... to transform metaphysics into metapsychology” (p. 259; see Draenos, 1982). Given the conviction that he had so conclusively demonstrated the basic structure and dynamics that characterize human thought and action, his frustration at the resistance to his ideas is self-evident.

During the later self-contemplative phase of his life, Freud wrote a short essay, “Post-script to a discussion on lay analysis,” where he commented on the relationship between medicine and psychoanalysis as fundamentally divided by the separate concerns of “scientific analysis and its applications” (1927a, p. 213, emphasis in the original). He acknowledged how clinical challenges grounded the psychoanalytic encounter, but he regarded psychoanalysis as a branch of psychology, not medicine, and he was concerned that “the therapy, i.e., the medical dimension) not destroy the science” (*ibid.* p. 209). Among the various issues that brought this relationship to his attention, he commented that the medical school hardly offered a suitable training for

a psychoanalytic career, and instead he advised a very broad education in the humanities and social sciences. When commenting on his own career, Freud wrote:

After forty-one years of medical activity, my self-knowledge tells me that I have never really been a doctor in the proper sense. I became a doctor through being compelled to deviate from my original purpose. ... I have no knowledge of having had any craving in my childhood to succour suffering humanity. My innate sadistic disposition was not a very strong one, so that I had no need to develop this one of its derivatives. Nor did I ever play the “doctor game”; my infantile curiosity evidently chose other paths ... I scarcely think, however, that my lack of genuine medical temperament has done much damage to my patients. For it is not greatly to the advantage of patients if their physician’s therapeutic interest has too marked an emotional emphasis. They are best helped if he carries out his task coolly and, so far as possible, with precision (Freud, 1927a, pp. 208-209).

Putting aside the issue of the clinical character of Freud’s endeavor for now, consider the basic dichotomy he identified in the text just quoted: physician versus scientist. And for him scientist meant psychologist. “Physician,” on the other hand, held Freud to a therapeutic mission, one he obviously accepted, but that clinical context did not fully fit his aims.

As he writes further in this essay, the neurotic serves the science of psychoanalysis, because as in clinical medicine, the pathological more clearly defines the workings of the normal. Indeed, for Freud, psychopathology was a tool for deciphering the normal mind. Obviously his efforts also included a therapeutic outcome, and the audience he addressed was putatively committed to psychotherapy, but the point Freud made, an admission of a deeply personal nature is that his own self-image and, more to the point, the true character of psychoanalysis, did not fall within the clinical domain so much as within a scientific one. In some sense, his remark might be understood as an implicit admission that psychotherapy was not coincident with psychoanalysis. For him, the therapeutic result was construed as a byproduct of the analysis, and the analysis – its scientific status – was primary:

Psychoanalysis falls under the head of psychology; not of medical psychology in the old sense, nor of the psychology of morbid processes, but simply of psychology. It is certainly not the whole of psychology, but its substructure and perhaps even its entire foundation. The possibil-

ity of its application to medical purposes must not lead us astray (Freud, 1927a, p. 252).

So what did Freud mean by “psychology” and, more generally, “science?” I have already cited Freud’s own admissions about early interests, motivations, and persistent allegiances to philosophy; albeit, he remained reluctantly aligned with the latter. And now I am highlighting his self-proclaimed identification with psychology, a human science, but a science nevertheless. (Note, that identification was the last of several shifting identifications. For example, during the earlier *Project*-era of the mid-1890s, Freud dismissed psychology for what he hoped was a more promising physiology (Decker, 1977, pp. 67-68). How are these designations reconciled? Perhaps Freud understood science, particularly in relation to philosophy, in ways less apparent than the simple dichotomy he used in his writings. Science, after all, had only recently emerged from natural philosophy as a distinctive activity, and more saliently, even among those who continued to identify as philosophers, some did so as champions of science. I believe the key to unlocking what appears as a frozen opposition may be in Freud’s earliest training with Brentano, where philosophy – in its best sense – was taught as aspiring to a scientific ideal. However, that model failed him as he sought a broader characterization of human nature and its social dimensions reflected in human creativity. In his mature writings, Freud took the basic precepts of psychoanalytic theory, applied them to the problems of society and human development, and thus vetted his earliest interests. In this sense, Freud pursued “philosophy” – a philosophy forged as a clinician and employed as a cultural theorist. Accordingly, Freud applied his principal lesson to himself: the child is the father of the man.

## FREUD THE HUMANIST

Because the argument between Freud and “the philosophers” he attacked resulted from a challenge originating in the clinical setting (and thus requiring therapeutic options), the psychiatric parameters of Freudianism have dominated critical philosophical assessments. Indeed, much has been written on the efficacy of psychoanalysis, which refers to the clinical methods Freud devised. If the controversy moves to wider philosophical and more specific humanistic concerns, a different conceptual framework appears and Freud’s enduring contributions become clearer.

Two “tectonic” plates constantly shift positions in Freud’s theory: one, associated with science, commits to

naturalism – naturalistic explanations governed by naturalistic cause; the other massive foundation of Freud’s thought rests on freedom of the will, where reason’s autonomy allows the rational ego to examine and then master the unconscious drives. Freud (1923) held that psychoanalysis “does not set out to make pathological reactions impossible, but to give the patient’s ego *freedom* to decide one way or the other” (p. 50; emphasis in original). Thus, because psychoanalysis depends on reasoned analysis, which demands some version of self-governing reason, Freud consequently held on to two fundamentally opposed metaphysical positions – humans are determined, and humans are free – and because of their divergent vectors, Freud, like Kant, split the mind’s faculties into two contrasting domains (Tauber, in press).

Kant conceived of reason as “pure” and “practical” in order to save metaphysics and, more immediately, moral autonomy and its product, moral responsibility. Freud similarly allowed for divided psychic faculties to account for his interpretative method and to fulfill humane therapeutic goals. After all, his concerns were not philosophical in a first order way (which hardly diminishes his debts to philosophy or, conversely, his influences on contemporary thought). In seeking means to liberate the neurotic through reasoned inquiry, Freud was a champion of human freedom, which he directed towards fulfilling creative human potential. For this cause, he proceeded not as a philosopher, but as a humane clinician. Accordingly, his interests are better understood as directed by an overarching humanism. I am using *humanism* not only in the cultural sense within which we identify Freud’s political identity, urbane wit, and classical knowledge, but also in the sense of how humanism offers an ethical point of view in which humans, residing in a secular world, might determine their own meanings and judge their own actions in service to a self-determined life. In this view, psychoanalysis becomes a means for the achievement of a state of health that permits the pursuit of a life fulfilled.

To achieve these goals, Freud, despite acknowledging the power of unconscious drives, implicitly believed in human reason and the exercise of free will in the psychoanalytic process. Indeed, autonomy and self-reliance find their ethical expression in his moral commitment to an image of humans as legislators to themselves. He drew this theme from Kant’s philosophical project (Tauber, in press) and a rich endowment of German romanticism (Kirschner, 1996; Ferguson, 1999), a deep appreciation of poets and dramatists, from Goethe and Schiller to Sophocles and Euripides, and from a firm disavowal of religion.

Each tradition contributed to placing Freud squarely in the humanist tradition, perhaps best described by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in *The dignity of man* (1486):

Thou, like a judge appointed for being honorable, art the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower nature which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine (della Mirandola, 1965, p. 5).

For Freud, that achievement arrived through self-knowledge.

The humanist message, reiterated in various contexts and with differing meanings, is clearly stated in a remarkable essay published in 1917, where Freud sought to explain the challenge of psychoanalysis and the ordinary resistance he encountered in its acceptance. For Freud, the insights offered by his methods were the third of three critical assaults on humankind's narcissism: (1) displacement from the center of the universe (Copernicus) – a cosmological blow; (2) recognition of human descent from animals (Darwin) – a biological blow; and (3), most wounding, “*the ego is not master in its own house*” – a psychological blow (Freud, 1917, p. 143; emphasis in original). He summarized psychoanalytic findings as residing in two cardinal insights: “sexual instincts cannot be wholly tamed” and “mental functions are unconscious” (*ibid.*), and thus the conscious mind possesses only incomplete and untrustworthy perceptions. Accordingly, “you behave like an absolute ruler” with only partial or distorted information. After this succinct admonishment, Freud declares, like the philosophers of old, “*Turn your eyes inward, look into your own depths, learn first to know yourself!*” (*ibid.*, emphasis added). And that is the gist of the entire psychoanalytic enterprise: thus, while acknowledging the rule of the unconscious, Freud argued that the rational ego still might free itself from the clutches of damaging psychic forces, and at the very least, through self-awareness, achieve some degree of freedom.

From this perspective, Freud's credo follows Spinoza's judgment: “man's greatest happiness and peace of mind (*acquiescentia animi*) comes only from this full philosophical understanding of himself” (Hampshire, 1962, p. 121). Here, the philosophical, psychological, and humanistic streams of Freud's thinking converge. Note, truth cannot be final in any sense. Rather, truth is personal understanding, which is more than the empirical *science* of psychoanalysis can afford. The self-reflection, assessment, judgment, aspirations and

motivations that go into processing the desiderata of analytic mining defy reduction to scientific laws and principles. Freud's science took him part way, and he, above all, recognized the power of his systematic thinking and the ordering of mysterious psychic manifestations. But in the end, a synthesis, a processing, an education, a recounting, an *interpretation* brings the psychic “data” together into analytic truth. The emotional truths attained at this juncture serve as the fundamental goal of psychoanalysis, whose therapeutic success might not be certain, but whose centrality for human *being* – the inner inquiry itself – remains a legitimate claim for those so committed.

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Stepping back from the details of Freud's relationship to philosophy, how might we understand the overall structure of his project? While a short summary cannot do justice to the subject, certain broad conclusions may be made: Freud melded two apparent disparate forms of knowledge: a rigorous empiricism tempered by a hermeneutics of the human soul, so that psychoanalysis exercises a chimera of rationalities, in which two kinds of reason – empiricist and hermeneutic – complement one another to fulfill distinctive intellectual demands. Rather than regarding the synthesis of an objectifying empiricism with a unique hermeneutics as some kind of anomaly, I see Freud's science reaching back to its earliest philosophical roots, before natural philosophy became “science”. In that history, where philosophical questions guided early experimentalists, two motives drove their research: the mastery of nature *and* the metaphysical wonder of placing humans in their natural order (Tauber, 2009). Here, at the junction of these outlooks, a moral vision guided their beholders – a vision of divine order – that by the end of the secularized 19th century had generated another relationship: humans alienated from nature (Tauber, 2001). The key metaphysical problem of that era, one that deeply affected the young Freud (Trosman, 1976) and continued to haunt him, revolved around the imbroglio of re-enchanting the universe, which science had stripped of human value (Schiller 1801/1993). The deep influence of Feuerbach (Boehlich, 1990) and the struggle with religious identity Freud countered with a firm atheism, an appropriation of figures and themes from mythology, and a pre-occupation with the ancients (Scully, 1997; Armstrong, 2005). The disappointment with the speculative philosophies ready-at-hand and the search for truth in its most direct expression (positivism)

each reflect dual commitments of Freud's bisected *Weltanschauung*. Eventually, the division was bridged once Freud felt his scientific contributions had been completed and he felt confident to proceed with the greater project, the one antedating his scientific career.

When Freud applied his findings to problems of war, religion, social structure, and creativity, he sought to extend his science into the larger intellectual world that he had abandoned as a young university student. The extrapolated science is self-evident in his psycho-historical works (1913, 1939), the critique of religion (1927b), and various biographical studies. In applying his theory to biography, cultural history, and complex social dynamics, Freud clearly announced his greater ambitions, which originated at a time in his life when he thought philosophy might have afforded him ways to study those deeply perplexing existential and cultural questions. Although philosophy, at least as Freud first formally encountered the subject, proved inadequate to his quest, in turning to science, he began a long trek that did, indeed, return him to his original interests. After all, these cultural-historical works represent the expression of his earliest yearnings to comment on the history and culture in which he lived. This was not philosophy, in an orthodox sense; it was an expression of his humanism.

In his late writings, Freud attempted to create no less than a comprehensive framework in which to understand human history and culture. While he was roundly criticized for these speculative ventures and indicted of practicing a naïve scientism, Freud felt fully justified, because he held that psychoanalysis had captured certain universal truths about human nature. Simply, he used the science, which he himself recognized was still not fully developed (e.g., Freud 1920), to provide himself with a philosophical platform upon which to develop the theory well beyond its original intent. In defending this scientific enterprise, Freud famously admitted to Einstein, "does not every science come in the end to a kind of mythology like this? Cannot the same be said to-day of your Physics?" (Freud, 1932, p. 211). This "codicil" refers to a metaphysical boundary, a domain beyond human understanding, which he believed lies under all human knowledge. In this sense, Freud thought he had plumbed the depths of the psyche and seen – perhaps, intuited – the dynamics governing behavior, but only to a level that human reason permitted. The unique grammar and semantics he had devised were only "logical" inventions to describe that-which-had-no-logic. At this deepest level, Freud reached into *mythology* to express the inexplicable, one that was in kind no different from the limits of the metaphysics supporting contemporary physics.

Freud, like the ancient Greek tragedians, presented his drama of the human being on a mythic stage. The *métier* was "science," but the psychoanalytic "play" emerged from a creative amalgamation of fact and fancy, history and memory, and knowledge and imagination, which he hoped would capture the key features of human nature as a mythological expression. Analysts tell a tragic story: destined to know their past and having lived the fate of their experience, they come, like Oedipus, to understand the true character and deeper meanings of that experience. The analyst thus takes his place among several actors in his psychic drama, and while holding some sense of self-identity, he also must recognize that in the recesses of a distant childhood, others have impacted and molded him to behave defensively in a world where even those who love him have inflicted trauma and lasting wounds. Unable to change the course of one's life, the only recourse resides in *recognition* and *reconciliation* (Reeder, 2002). The dual message of psychoanalysis thus fulfills the tragic criteria of self-knowledge, acknowledgement, acceptance, and then transformation. This passage of the hero marks a rite, a stage of maturation, presented in the language of advanced Western societies and resonating with the classical origins of our civilization. While following a clinical scenario, analytic insight re-enacts a passage described by the ancients, and in this sense, Freud created a new dramatic form – the dominant myth of the 20th century. I am referring to the understanding afforded by placing the individual in the basic narrative of human development.

Freud struggled with fitting the scientific mode of knowing within the broader therapeutic agenda he set himself. For him, science did not function solely as some kind of separate intellectual or technical activity to study the natural world, but rather became an instrument to help define human realities in the humane quest of knowing the world in order to place ourselves within it. So, despite Freud's commitment to empiricism and the scientific objectivity he claimed for his method, he began and ended his career with responses to perplexing questions about the nature of man, the history of culture, and the place of religion in the face of humanity's search for meaning. Further, Freud, like many of his generation, sought to re-enchant human life, in terms responsive to Schiller's earlier indictment, namely how to meld hegemonic rationalism with human needs and human values. "Instead of helping to deprive the world of its magic, charm, and poetry, Freud made our psychic life more poetic – more poetic and more rational at the same time" (Kaufmann, 1980, p. 104). Freud could not escape the duality he assigned himself, and thus what Kaufmann calls the "poetic," and

what I refer to as “humanism,” directed Freud’s greater efforts. Supporting testament is offered by Binswanger, who wrote about a conversation with Freud in 1927:

I could scarcely believe my ears when I heard him say, ‘Yes, the spirit is everything,’ even though I was inclined to surmise that by ‘spirit’ he meant in this case something like intelligence. But then Freud continued: ‘Mankind has always known that it possesses spirit; I had to show it that there are also instincts.’ (Binswanger, 1957, p. 81)

While some have made similar observations about Freud’s humanism (e.g., Trosman, 1976; Loewald, 1978; Kaufmann, 1980; Bettelheim, 1982; Goldberg, 1988; Brown & Richards, 1999), most of Freud’s biographers, and certainly his critics, have subordinated, and more often ignored what appears to me the crucial component for understanding the overall structure of his thought.

The scope and breadth of Freud’s creation still appears dazzling, because he tapped into the deepest sources of Western identity and re-expressed its key tenets in terms that we might effectively apply to ourselves. His supreme accomplishment thus resides in his picture of humans as primitively willed *and* humane in possessing an acute self-consciousness that not only informed them of their “alien” (natural, animal) character, but also of the means of attaining self-knowledge and control of their destiny. Freud thus exemplified the “natural philosopher” in the broadest and most noble tradition: to know nature; to define ourselves within nature; to control nature in order to direct human destiny. To label Freud a scientist in this way is to recognize his genius in its most expansive expression.

We are heirs to how Freud saw and heard his patients with eyes pierced by skepticism and ears tuned by suspicion. He taught that for analysts to see themselves anew requires fracturing molded figurines and critically listening to what *they say* and observing what *they do*. That is all, but that is enough, because he then turned that way of seeing from a dispassionate description to a deeply personal account of human living. Guided by a perfectionist ideal, whereby insight might convert neurotic afflictions into productive and happier lives, Freud expanded the Romantic and Enlightenment hopes for human fulfillment. He did so with a formulation that resonated with much of Western twentieth-century culture and at the same time pushed those despairing elements aside to make room for a paradoxical hope in a most unhappy century: humans are determined, yet free. Philosophers have yet to exhaust that rich mine.

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