

## Introduction

---

### Psychoanalysis as Philosophy

Where are the new physicians of the soul?

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak* (1982, 33)

FREUD'S CONCEPT—WHEREBY “man lives with his unconscious, not by it” (Meissner 2003, 214)—has vexed critics since its inception. That humans possess a vast reservoir of memories, perceptions, and forms of judgment cannot be denied. Indeed, Freud has been credited with an important role in setting the research agenda for contemporary cognitive psychology (e.g., Pribram and Gill 1976; Erdelyi 1985; Modell 2006; Westen, Weinberger, and Bradley 2007) and many aspects of cognitive science (e.g., Bilder and Lefever 1998; Smith 1999a; Wilson 2002). But the scientific standing of psychoanalysis and of its therapeutic claims has been severely compromised both by a lack of empirical support and its dependence on an outdated biology. Critics, in recognizing the particular cultural influences of fin de siècle Vienna on Freud's construal of emotional life, have leveled powerful arguments. They have portrayed him as a late Victorian thinker whose clinical observations and interpretations reflect the particulars of his time and place and not the timeless properties of personality that he sought to describe. However, as James Strachey whimsically observed about his own analysis with Freud in 1920, “As for what it's all about, I'm vaguer than ever; but... I daresay there's SOMETHING to it” (quoted by Makari 2008, 342). I concur: Freud did get *something* right, something that remains an enduring contribution to the understanding of the human psyche, and I hope to clarify that *something* here, not by a scientific appraisal, but by a philosophical one. I will not argue that psychoanalysis constitutes a formal philosophy, but I will show that exploring Freud's project with the tools of philosophy offers important insights into psychoanalysis and from that vantage suggest its placement within its broadest intellectual and cultural contexts.<sup>1</sup>

Using the philosophical context in which Freud conceived his theory, this book reconstructs a “dialogue” with key philosophers. That exposition provides an important perspective on the foundations of psychoanalytic theory by analyzing key precepts—the basis of psychic cause; the philosophical standing of the unconscious; the role of rationality; the construction of the subject (i.e., an ego conceived without a “self”); and the ethical structure of self-awareness—as part of a larger philosophical debate. In this analysis, from its depiction of the unconscious to its formulation of mind, psychoanalysis is scrutinized as a philosophic topic. So, on my view, Abraham Kaplan’s ironic comment, “Whatever else psychoanalysis has been called, nobody, I think, has accused it of being a philosophy” (1977, 75), requires redress.

### Freud’s Personae

To begin, one might well ask, *which* Freud? Several images beckon: The first originates in the late 1870s, grows through the mid-1890s, matures by 1910, and flourishes into the early 1920s. This Freud occupies himself with establishing a *science* of the mind based upon positivist precepts. The Freudian unconscious resides in the biological domain, he insisted, and the empiricism of psychoanalysis sought to capture its character scientifically.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, *Professor* Freud claimed a place for his method and theory within the academy with the other biological sciences.

A complementary identity, the physician, emerges from the first. This second Freud reached beyond positivist biology to achieve his therapeutic goal, namely the rehabilitation of his patient. *Doctor* Freud, rather than assuming the stance of a disinterested observer, becomes an active participant in the process of healing. In this scenario, the radical positivist dichotomy of subject (analyst) and object (patient) collapses as a different dynamic develops between analyst and analysand. Both the emotional content of the “data” and the elements of subjective interpretation would raise theoretical and practical problems for Freud’s “science.”

A third persona emerges from these biomedical identities. Despite a steadfast commitment to certain scientific ideals, Freud melds into a more speculative theorist after 1913. Beginning with *Totem and Taboo* (1913b), he offered, over the next 25 years, frankly speculative accounts

of the primordial family, the character of religion, the psychodynamics of historical figures, the nature of society, and the fate of civilization. Although this shift from individual psychology to various forms of social philosophy did not alter his basic bio-clinical orientation, these later cultural-historical writings were inspired by ambitions to extend his science of the mind to a wide array of humanistic concerns about the existential status of humans, the metaphysics governing their belief systems, the psychology of nations and civilizations, and perhaps most tellingly, the justification for the *kind* of inquiry he had promoted throughout his career. In this last instance, I am referring to the inquiry per se as the means to human freedom and the full potential of human industry. This humanistic Freud remained hidden in the deeper recesses of his personality and appeared once he regarded his scientific work as fundamentally completed. That the *humanist* Freud remained silent for so long reflects the complex political identity he tirelessly promoted and the demands of defending his new “science of the mind.”

Yet he appreciated and, perhaps more telling, his readers responded to his wider concerns:

My interest, after making a lifelong detour through the natural sciences, medicine, and psychotherapy, returned to the cultural problems which had fascinated me long before, when I was a youth scarcely old enough for thinking... [T]he events of human history, the interactions between human nature, cultural development and the precipitates of primaeval experiences (the most prominent example of which is religion) ... [are] studies, which, though they originate in psychoanalysis, stretch far beyond it, [and] have perhaps awakened more public sympathy than psycho-analysis itself. (Freud 1935, 72)

Freud’s enduring interests in what might be termed social or anthropological philosophy, and beneath these disciplines a supportive humanism, offer important clues towards understanding Freud’s thinking and the intellectual framework in which to place his work.

In building his theory, Freud adopted, at least implicitly, a philosophy that supported both his science *and* his therapy. For his psychology, he employed a form of naturalism (oriented by evolutionary theories) constructed around a dynamic psychic will; for his therapy, he accepted a mind-body duality, which utilized a conception of reason independent

of psychic (biological) forces. The first position reflected his identity as a neuroscientist; the second served his humanism; the former he celebrated; the latter remained subordinate, if not moot, during much of his career. My study moves from the first domain to the second, and in so doing, emphasizes the ethical strengths of psychoanalysis. I thereby seek to replace the endless discussions of Freud's epistemology with a description of psychoanalysis as a moral philosophy. By means of this recontextualization, Freud's project assumes its just standing as an enduring achievement of redefining Western consciousness in its full deployment: Who am I? and What am I to be?

The analysand's internal dialogue addresses no object, but instead becomes a voice of his or her own introspective articulation. In the process, "the self" disappears and only a subject remains, a voice unto itself in dialogue with itself. So the narrator reduces to an unnamed author, in which the commonsensical pronoun (he, she, I) suffices. This pronominal subject represents a general (and implicit) reference to personal identity, namely, a human agent immersed in human activities and concerns. Since that inner voice of self-consciousness is only alluded to and never developed, "the self"—the philosophical category developed throughout the modern period to identify this voice of feeling, consciousness, and rationality—ironically, does not appear in Freud's writings. So we might well ask, "*Who* is the subject?" Is the conscious ego "the self?" If so, to what degree does self-consciousness qualify to establish personal identity in light of the partiality of self-knowledge? And if the conscious ego is *the self*, how are the other elements of the mind placed within the constellation of individual identity? (This confusion has led to many imbroglios, such as legal responsibility for deviant behaviors, not to speak of commonsensical identifications of personhood.)

Freud has reflexivity follow its own course in the modality of free association, and then in a second stage those reflections become the subject of analysis guided by an autonomous rationality. (Note, I am using "reflectivity" in reference to an active introspection, while "reflexivity" denotes a more passive mode of self-consciousness.) Accordingly, the ego's faculty of reason requires (and assumes) degrees of freedom in making its observations and assessments, albeit limited by various psychic obstacles (resistances and defense mechanisms). Through the help of the analyst

these barriers may be overcome. So despite an abiding skepticism, Freud nevertheless assumed the integrity and autonomy of ego's reason to conduct its own investigation. However, while the ego represents that faculty of reason, its power or authority is never established.

The nascent object-relations aspects of Freudian theory result from the unsure standing of the ego. Philosophically, that weakness is striking: *Philosophically* the "ego" does not equate with the "self."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the agent of Freudian psychoanalytic interest remains the self-conscious ego, and the philosophical project of defining the self was never attempted. Instead, Freud dealt with a circumscribed agent, one whose voice of reason engaged in introspective analysis. And that faculty hinged upon a critical turn, one taken with no apparent deliberation (nor clearly articulated), namely, the autonomy of reason, which confers the ability both to (1) scrutinize the natural world and draw judgments about it, and (2) determine moral choice and take ethical action in conjunction with the supervision of the superego. Again, Freud did not specifically define his use of "autonomy," and the word itself only appears once in his entire opus (Kobrin 1993), yet this basic tenet lies embedded within psychoanalytic theory.<sup>4</sup>

Reason's instrumental role promotes the self-interests of the individual and the social collective in which she or he lives. The demands of controlling unconscious desires and at the same time mediating the fulfillment of those desires within the cultural context requires that the ego establish, and enact, an individualized system of value in which desires are weighed and judged on a spectrum wider than immediate pleasure. In the analytic setting, the ego must weigh the strictures of the superego against the drive for instinctual pleasures, and in the interpretative stage of analysis, revise understanding and personal choice. That process mixes ingredients from diverse psychic sources, and, in the end, some rational insight must be coupled to emotional recognition and resolution. While the affective dominion assumes dominance in identifying sources of neurotic thought and behavior, it is reason that finally must adjudicate and ultimately govern through its insight and rationalization. From a philosophical perspective (as opposed to clinical), this latter aspect of psychoanalysis is emphasized here in order to understand reason's dual roles, namely, not only enforcing ethical conduct but also establishing moral coordinates of

behavior. Indeed, to recall the leading epigraph to this book, for Freud, reason is humankind's only hope.

By placing the unconscious in the *body*, and the knowing, deliberating ego in the *rational mind*, Freud understood Reason just as Kant had originally configured his own transcendental project: An autonomous rationality allows the mind to examine nature independent of natural cause; and the selfsame autonomy of reason confers on humans their sovereign free will, which in turn establishes their ethical standing, namely the ability to assume responsibility for their actions. This conception offered Freud's patients the option of exercising interpretative reason, coupled to affective recognition, to achieve control of their lives: Insight and catharsis (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 60–61) led (at least potentially) to freedom from the shackles of a despotic unreason. Exactly *how* (and whether) such clarity worked to achieve emotional liberation remains an unresolved claim, but putting aside the theoretical mechanisms and clinical data upon which most debate revolves, I endeavor to characterize the *philosophical* foundations of psychoanalysis and, in so doing, explain Freud's lasting contribution.

In broad outline, we begin with a description of Freud's struggle to establish psychic determinism and how that problem, formulated by his philosophical mentor, Brentano, haunted the development of psychoanalysis. After an extended examination of certain aspects of Freud's epistemology, we then probe the foundations of his moral inquiry as configured by Kantianism. That formulation establishes the basis for interpreting Freud's multifaceted characterization of human agency, again situated within the nineteenth-century philosophical tradition. This narrative exploits multiple perspectives, for no single, encompassing description suffices to capture the philosophical complexity of Freudianism. In some cases we have evidence that Freud was aware of the philosophical traditions in which he worked, and in other respects certain influences percolated down to him through secondary sources and influential mentors. From that composite, he took sides—rejecting certain philosophical positions and adopting others—in order to address various agendas. Accordingly, he drew from competing philosophies, mixed his science with a unique hermeneutics (Gill 1994; Brook 1995), and configured the human

simultaneously in the biological and the moral domains. Based on these multiple perspectives, this book describes the philosophical heterodoxy of the theory, and more specifically, how it catches various elements of different philosophical schools and refracts them with its peculiar lens. In short, to portray psychoanalysis philosophically, we must draw from many reservoirs.

Upon this framework a conceptual scaffolding becomes available for placing the various components of psychoanalytic theory: the positivists provided the basic epistemological schema; metaphysically, Freud followed Kant's approach to the determinism–free will paradox, which lies at the heart of psychoanalysis; and with Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, Freud joined a great debate about the nature of human identity.<sup>5</sup> From that discussion, the ethics of psychoanalysis emerge, for the manner in which the agent is construed determines the character of the ethics associated with the subject (Tauber 2001; 2005). So while Freud cannot formally be placed among the philosophers, he nevertheless may profitably be regarded from their vantage in order to better understand his own undertaking, and perhaps more importantly, by considering him in that tradition, we enrich our own philosophical understanding of the matters he considered so profoundly. From this perspective, matters pertinent to psychoanalytic practice and clinical interpretations fall well beyond the borders of my inquiry:

1. Although psychoanalysis as “science” first framed, and then dominated, the debate about the status of the discipline, its truth claims, its therapeutic efficacy, and finally, its role as an intellectual enterprise (Decker 1977; Hook 1959), I consider that discussion, at least in its formal terms, moribund. While scientific knowledge serves Westerners as the basis of truth, when the debate was posed in these terms, psychoanalysis failed the standards of Freud's day (Decker 1977) and even more so the gauntlet of later critics (e.g., Grünbaum 1984; Eysenck 1985; Crews 1986; Holt 1989; Webster 1995; Macmillan 1997; Cioffi 1998a). Indeed, the scientific status of Freud's theory could not fairly articulate the critical importance of psychoanalysis for defining notions of personal identity and reconstructing that identity

along normative lines. My interpretation thus eschews further appraisals of Freud's scientific thinking, and, instead, we will consider other modes of knowledge more appropriate to the task of characterizing psychoanalysis.

2. I resist the pull of debating the merits of Freud's enterprise as a *psychotherapy*. Although relief of suffering provides psychoanalysis with an essential orientation, the efficacy of psychoanalysis as a *clinical* endeavor is not examined. For my purposes, understanding that the clinical outcome of analysis assigns a telos to the investigation suffices. Freud himself, towards the end of his career, had subordinated the clinical program by forthrightly aligning psychoanalysis with *psychology*, leaving "medicine" (i.e., therapeutics) to lesser interest.<sup>6</sup> I see this shift as part of Freud's trajectory towards his original humanist concerns, and, aligned with this movement, I suggest he acknowledged misgivings that he had achieved the *scientific* results he had hoped to establish. Accepting the clinical limits of psychoanalysis, we are left with what I believe is Freud's abiding contribution—the *humanist* project he developed under the auspices of psychoanalysis. Accordingly, scant attention is paid to his descriptions of the various psychic complexes or to the standing of Freud's more narrow theoretical concerns. Instead, this study follows the broad outlines of Freud's own intellectual biography, namely, the shift from a postulated science of the mind to a humanist inquiry of the soul.

3. Because my discussion seeks to capture the cardinal philosophical elements of psychoanalysis, the vicissitudes Freud's theory suffered at the hands of his various followers (Brown 1964; Roazen 1975; Markari 2008) do not pertain to this study. Anna Freud had correctly concluded, even before her father died, that orthodox theory had been replaced by various psychoanalytic schools, which must be considered part of the ongoing process of creating a psychoanalytic psychology and psychiatry (A. Freud 1967). I would not claim she advocated ecumenical peace, but she did highlight what should have appeared obvious to the most impassioned champion of one group or another, namely that psychoanalysis by the 1920s, both theoretically and socially, had assumed diverse theoretical orientations, but nevertheless, principles of therapy *built upon* the original foundations.<sup>7</sup> These later

disputes simply highlight the strength of Freud's influence, which must reside in the deepest structures of his thought. Thus, while I acknowledge the heterodoxy of psychoanalysis, which in turn reflects the diversity of interpretations of Freudianism, again, I am not concerned with endorsing or rejecting the particularities of Freud's clinical theory.

## **Kantian Themes**

As summarized below, the first three chapters of this book deal with key aspects of Freud's epistemology and metaphysics, while the last three chapters explore the general outline of the ethics that underlie psychoanalysis. The middle chapter (chapter 4) then serves as the narrative's hinge to bridge the discussion of how Freud employed Kantian precepts to develop a philosophy of moral agency. Indeed, Kant, in striking ways, served as Freud's philosophical North Star. In elaborating psychoanalysis, Freud sought to establish a model built on psychic cause. He argued, on the one hand, that humans are subject to unconscious activities (framed within a biological conception), and, on the other hand, that the rational faculty of the ego permits, given proper support and articulation, the means of both understanding the deterministic forces of the unconscious and freeing the rational ego from their authority. The entire enterprise depends on an implicit notion of autonomy, whose exercise would free the analysand from the tyranny of unconsciousness in order to pursue the potential of human creativity and freedom.

Thus in the effort to liberate an ensnared psyche, psychoanalysis depends on an ego capable of separating itself from its own instinctual biology and thus radically distinguishing itself from the causation sequences described by objective analysis. This basic schema, of course, simplifies Freudian concepts of the ego and the unconscious as somehow radically dissociated, when in the later development of his theory, Freud posited a structure with considerable overlap. But in the analytic context, rational reconstruction of complex early experience generates understanding (and perhaps therapeutic results) only because of reason's autonomy. This conception of reason is lifted directly from Kant, and like Kant, Freud employed this rationality for both epistemological and moral ends. Epis-

temologically, the study of the (natural) unconscious domain of the mind followed a strategy indebted to Kant's conception of reason, namely a faculty independent of nature and thus able to study phenomena and generalize laws describing natural causes. And beyond this epistemological formulation, reason's autonomy represented the fundamental requirement for Kant's notion of moral responsibility. Accordingly, Freud relied on reason's autonomy to establish criteria of normative behaviors; more deeply, reason so configured offers the means for establishing psychological freedom from oppressive psychic drives.

I am not suggesting that Freud closely followed Kant to the extent of seeing the categorical imperative, the kingdom of ends, and the negation of self-interest as the content of some true moral system. Further, I am not arguing that Freud followed Kant in terms of the *content* of moral philosophy; for example, he did not subscribe to the renunciation of self-interest as the basis of morals at all. And perhaps most saliently, Freud did not derive "autonomy" from a conception of the self, the argument that because humans are rational and reason permits only one moral law, we are free because we dictate the one moral law to ourselves. However, while Freud did *not* follow key tenets of Kant's moral philosophy, he *did* adopt from Kant the broader framework in which the autonomy of reason is the basis for the personal struggle to establish a life deemed "free." In this sense, Freud radically reconfigured Kant's original formulation much along the lines Nietzsche pursued.

This interpretation fuses two distinct notions of autonomy. Nietzsche's moral scheme is typically taken to be almost perfectly opposed to that of Kant, inasmuch as they are presenting two opposing conceptions of morality. For Kant, the self-dictated law is one and universal; for Nietzsche, the transfiguration of values replaces the unitary with a radical pluralism, in which emerges a unique expression of one's own personal needs and requirements for "health" (Tauber and Podolsky 1999). On this axis, Freud closely aligns with Nietzsche in both the flexibility of the norms governing behavior and perhaps more importantly in the potential for self-determined choice on a spectrum of options. So for Freud and Nietzsche, autonomy has shifted from recognizing the rational and some universal moral order to a radical individualism, where autonomy enacts

the characterization of human potential, a potential that would move biologically driven humans to a new moral order (Tauber 1995). What separates Nietzsche and Freud is the role of reason: Nietzsche celebrates the instincts, while Freud champions the reason that would control them. In that triangulation, I place Freud between Kant and Nietzsche.

In this general scheme, a complex duet is played out between Kant and Nietzsche, where psychoanalysis offers a promissory note: Take one's history in hand to command the effect of emotional traumas to declare a liberation and the forthright assertion of personal autonomy for a life of meaningful love and work. Here we hear most clearly the call of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who demands that humans strive towards some as yet unrealized ideal. The notion that such a venture is feasible, that it is morally inspired, that it serves to actualize human potential, has carried forth the Romantic expression of individuality to become a credo of contemporary Western societies. Psychoanalysis, as a means of personal investigation, thereby becomes a tool for self-responsible choices directed towards that ideal. Outlining that effort and inspired by its possibilities, Freud legitimately becomes a vital author of contemporary ethics. Indeed, I will argue that dwelling on Freud's epistemological quandary displaces the more essential moral query he assigned himself.

From this vantage, I see Freud's science evolving into the humanist project mentioned above. Freud's thought thus coordinates two philosophical axes: The first concerns the establishment of a "scientific" phenomenology of the mind, which is basically reductive in character; the second "humanistic" vector, holistic and constructive, directs the interpretation towards certain humanistic ideals, whose values and purpose, while distinct from the scientific venture, directs psychoanalysis. In short, Freud transfigured his clinical insights into a mode of ethical inquiry guided by the hopes of human potential.

### **Freud the Ethicist**

Of course the definition of individual freedom and the boundaries inside which choice might be taken constitute key questions of lingering interest in assessing psychoanalysis. Indeed, to what degree does psycho-

analytic insight command the unconscious? Needless to remind readers, over this issue furious battles have been fought, but at the very least, for Freud, the ends of interpretation are emotional recognition and rational insight directed towards change. And this position decisively shifts the question from the epistemological domain to the moral. On this view, although psychoanalysis may fail to offer a Nietzschean liberation (cure) as Herbert Marcuse (1955) and Norman O. Brown (1959) prophesied, analysis promises at least to provide Spinozean insight, which in itself comprises an ethics. Beyond the analysis qua analysis, a revised understanding of one's personal history, behaviors, choices, maladjustments, conflicts, and neuroses allows some reconstructed understanding of one's personal identity, goals, and placement in the world. Here I am referring to certain commitments made towards some normative ideal. Indeed, Freud wrote quite explicitly on this normative structure: "*Analysis replaces repression by condemnation*" (Freud 1909b, 145), by which he meant that the ego asserts control on acting out desires or breaking constraints. That telos not only defines the trajectory of analysis, but establishes the *possibility* for a revised personhood. Through psychoanalysis, the burdens of early experience, namely the identification of the residua of lingering oppressive neuroses that distort personal potentials, are shed or reworked to allow a form of rebirth, an *autopoiesis*. The sheer audacity of the project divides unequivocally between those who declare "their heartfelt wish that Freud might never have been born" (Forrester 1997, 9) and others who believe that he deserves defense as "a great philosopher" (Cavell 2001) or "revolutionary" (Lear 1990, 3).

Freud's grandiose ambitions have been extensively listed and examined by his biographers, and suffice it to note a single famous anecdote:

Freud clearly fancied himself an Oedipus, defeating the dark riddling voices of the subconscious. When, on his fiftieth birthday (1906), a number of his intimates presented him with a medallion engraved with a portrait of himself on the obverse, and a replica of Oedipus answering the Sphinx on the reverse, he turned pale. Next to the nude Oedipus, the following words from Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* were inscribed (line 1525): "Who divined the famed riddle and was a man most mighty." (Scully 1997, 230)<sup>8</sup>

Ernest Jones explained the “pale and agitated” reaction as due to Freud’s belief that he had encountered

a *revenant*, and so he had.... Freud disclosed that as a young student at the University of Vienna he used to stroll around the great arcaded court inspecting the busts of former famous professors of the institution. He then had the phantasy, not merely of seeing his own bust there in the future, which would not have been anything remarkable in an ambitious student, but of it actually being inscribed with the *identical* words he now saw on the medallion. (Jones 1953–57, 2:14)

Indeed, Freud attempted to create no less than an entire philosophy of history and culture. While he was roundly criticized for these speculative ventures, he felt fully justified, because he held that psychoanalysis had captured certain universal truths about human nature. Thus the science, which he himself recognized was not fully developed (e.g., Freud 1920, 60), nevertheless offered him a platform upon which to develop the theory well beyond its original intent. And, of course, he would not be inhibited.<sup>9</sup>

In acknowledging the limits of his scientific enterprise, Freud himself referred to his theory of the instincts (*Die Trieblehre*) as “our mythology” (1933, 95) and 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, 211). This “codicil” refers not only to the provisional character of scientific theory (Fulgencio 2005), but also to a metaphysical boundary, a domain beyond human understanding, which he believed lies under all human knowledge. Again, Freud drew on a Romantic idea:

The ultimate basis on which all our knowledge and science rest is the inexplicable. Therefore every explanation leads back to this by means of more or less intermediate stages, just as in the sea the plummet finds the bottom sometimes at a greater and sometimes at a lesser depth, yet everywhere it must ultimately reach this. This inexplicable something devolves on metaphysics. (Schopenhauer 1974b, 2:3)

In this sense, Freud thought he had plumbed the depths of the psyche and discerned 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. So in admitting the limits of psychoanalytic *science*, Freud devised a *mythology* to express the inexplicable.

Psychoanalysis leads Freud to the mythic hero, who knows his fate and still struggles against it with the use of two tools: reason and the imperative to *know*. 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; of history and memory; of knowledge and imagination to reenact an ancient myth about human nature. Analysands tell a tragic story: Humans, destined to know their past and having lived the fate of their experience, come, like Oedipus, to understand the true character and deeper meanings of that experience, and thus finally come to answer the fundamental question, Who am I? The analysand must take her place among several actors in her psychic drama, and while holding some sense of self-identity, she also must recognize that in the recesses of a distant childhood, others have impacted and molded her to behave defensively in a world, where even those who love and secure her have inflicted trauma and lasting wounds. Unable to change the course of one’s life, the only recourse resides in *recognition* and *reconciliation*, and then ultimately, *responsibility* to take hold of one’s nature (Lear 1990, 170–72; Sherman 1995; Reeder 2002). The analysand, as Oedipus, then follows the tragic course of self-knowledge, and in the full encounter with the past, understands the impact of her unique heritage that has cast the injured into the world. 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 yet resonating with the classical origins of our civilization. While following a clinical scenario, analytic insight and the accompanying emotional recognition reenacts a passage described by the ancients and reenacted in various modern contexts (Campbell 1949; Rank 2004; Rudnytsky 1987; Bowlby 2007). The “myth of psychoanalysis” is not a *fiction*, but rather a complex description of the psyche using allusions and metaphors coupled to an analytic.

In this sense, Freud created a new dramatic form—the dominant myth of the twentieth century—where the Oedipal story becomes universal, not so much as a story of psychosexual development, but as an expression of the more general plight of human existence.<sup>10</sup>

Psychoanalytic tenets continue to exert a profound influence on how we have come to understand personal agency, because whatever is discarded from the particulars of Freudian theory, the contours of his basic investigation remain intact and continue to guide contemporary conceptions of personal identity and the hope for individual growth and self-fulfillment. Building on the psychoanalytic schema, Freudianism has defined the general parameters by which these various aspects of personhood might be understood. He demanded forthright exposure and discussion of that which creates a disjunction between what we strive for and what we in fact *do* and *experience*. In this sense, Freud created a moral investigation of great power and influence, not in the classical sense of presenting a systematic procedure for determining ethical choices, but rather in asserting the basis for human action—a self-awareness, driven by an appreciation of counterforces—that choice beckons. More, choice arises from recognizing new opportunities. So, in acknowledging the pervasive influence of unconscious forces, understanding devolves into freedom. Introspection results in rewriting the personal narrative, and from this critical vantage I maintain that reflexive interpretation not only defines what psychoanalysis *is* and *how* it does whatever it does, but that the *process* of analysis itself is fundamentally an ethical venture as defined above. As a theory of interpretation, psychoanalysis offered philosophy an application, or a mode of “practical philosophy,” that still awaits further development.

Given Freud’s commitments to a biological conception of the psyche, the promise offered by psychoanalysis represents a remarkable synthesis of an outstanding tension. In this regard, Freud must be considered philosophically inspired; perhaps a “naturalized” philosopher, certainly a reluctant practitioner, but one who nevertheless followed a quest to better understand the evolution of culture, the character of human history, and the existential standing of human beings. On this reading, the promised result of psychoanalytic investigations resides in the humanistic realization of human potential—enacted beyond the domain of scientism.

Following the ancient ethical precept of “Know thyself,” Freud held that insight *per se* is a moral achievement: self-reflection becomes a moral undertaking, because self-knowledge provides the perspective required for ethical deliberation. Freud’s stew of epistemological ideas obscures this deeper ethical character of his theory and practice, and whether he succeeded or failed as a clinician does not alter the basic moral thrust of psychoanalytic theory.

### **Narrative Outline**

The first three chapters consider key aspects of Freud’s epistemology, the larger context of his positivist aspirations, and the limits of that approach as applied to psychoanalysis. Thus we begin with Freud’s early years at the University of Vienna, where he studied philosophy under the tutelage of Brentano, the charismatic and highly influential forerunner of twentieth-century phenomenology and various schools of logic. Freud encountered Brentano at the exact moment his mentor sought to establish the philosophical basis of the new science of psychology as an empirical discipline. Brentano devoted considerable attention to various theories of the unconscious, only to reject each. In so doing, he presented the conceptual obstacles such theories faced, which Freud would later work to overcome.

Freud’s attempt to establish a science of the mind begins with the philosophical challenge posed by Brentano, reviewed in chapter 1. Throughout Freud’s long defense of his own work, Brentano’s adamant rejection of an “unconscious” persisted as a lingering shadow to interrogate Freudian tenets, and, indeed, Brentano had set the legitimizing criteria and the conceptual template for Freud’s own investigations and justifications (Brentano 1973, 107). I argue that Brentano’s original objections continued to haunt Freud, and from that tension, Freud’s later theory found its orientation, specifically, an argument built from cause. On this reading, Freud’s claims for the scientific basis of psychoanalysis were framed in answer to Brentano. Inasmuch as Freud destroyed his early correspondence (Freud 1960, 141), we have only remnants of biographical data to support this interpretation.

The empirical basis of psychoanalysis has been understood in myriad ways, and chapter 2 defines two logical challenges: The first concerns the

Freudian syllogism for establishing the causal inference of the unconscious, which I maintain demonstrates a circular argument; the second restates Wittgenstein's cogent observation that reasons are not causes, at least not in the sense in which psychoanalytic explanations assert, and that Freud's causal logic conflates reasons and causes. These arguments are supported by Freud's own doubts expressed late in his career, where the adamancy of his scientific posture is mitigated by an open-minded acknowledgment that the discipline required a more robust development. More, I maintain that Freud, at the end of his career, acknowledged that he ultimately built his theory on an assumption, and by rigorous Brentanean criteria, he had failed to establish its scientific basis. These considerations then lead to the logical positivists and Karl Popper, who together would reject the entry of psychoanalysis into the halls of science. Exploring their position highlights not only the weaknesses of Freud's *scientific* endeavor, but points to another direction in which we might salvage his efforts and recognize his accomplishments.

Chapter 3 places Freud firmly within the most pertinent philosophical debates of his own period by comparing and contrasting his positivist commitments to the critiques offered by historicists (represented by Wilhelm Dilthey) and neo-Kantians (Friedrich Lange and Wilhelm Windelband). Together their respective philosophies offer, on the one hand, a powerful rejoinder to the positivist view of unmediated empiricism and, on the other hand, a spirited defense of the human sciences that must rely on other modalities of understanding. Indeed, late-nineteenth-century neo-Kantians were principally concerned with the limits of knowledge and the purging of metaphysics from their epistemologies. In this regard they joined ranks with positivists, but unlike them, they were highly suspicious of positivism's embrace of an uncritical empiricism and therefore more skeptical about the presumed ability to capture "the real" in any final fashion. Of these, Lange and Windelband (from different origins) set the agenda for those who rejected the incipient scientism generated by the technical successes of the positivist program. In opposing the positivists, they held that the restraints of the mind's inner structure and basic organization left the world-in-itself ultimately unknowable. Experience of that world was thus limited by the mediation of various categories of understanding that Kant originally described in the transcendental deduc-

tion developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. From that epistemological position, these neo-Kantians believed that “philosophy can identify the limits of knowledge ... [but] beyond these limits ... philosophy itself can no longer establish any substantive conclusions” (Windelband quoted by Bambach 1995, 81).

Freud rejected such skepticism and instead accepted the immediacy of experience and the objectivity of scientific observation, inasmuch as he sought, and then prescribed, a positivist approach to his own clinical-based description of the mind. That mode of investigation denied its own reliance on a weak fact/value distinction (that would eventually collapse in post–World War II critiques of the positivist position [Tauber 2009]) and certain metaphysical assumptions, which in several respects further weakens psychoanalytic theory. Following consideration of the epistemological arguments offered by the neo-Kantians, we are ready to return to Kant and configure Freud’s theory from a Kantian perspective.

Of the various components of Kant’s system, the one most relevant to this discussion focuses upon the fundamental dilemma of reconciling the determinism of the natural world (in this case, the influences of the unconscious) and the autonomy of reason, which bestows moral responsibility and free choice. And in parallel, the unresolved tension in psychoanalytic thinking arises from these competing visions of human nature, namely a biologically conceived organism subject to primitive drives and a rational faculty independent of those deterministic forces. To delineate Freud’s own understanding of this problem, chapter 4 describes the conception of Kant’s formulation of reason’s autonomy and how Freud employed that schema for very different purposes.

On this Kantian view, psychoanalysis becomes an ethical inquiry, similarly based on reason’s emancipation and the potential of freeing humans from what Kant called their “immaturity” (1996d), and which Freud described in clinical terms of dysfunctional defenses, neuroses, and repressions. At this point, we are in a position to expose the fundamental tension in psychoanalytic theory, a beguiling paradox in which natural cause and moral reason—determinism and freedom—are conjoined despite their apparent logical exclusion. Notwithstanding reason’s standing, its authority remains disputed, even problematic, in the Freudian universe, because rationality is always in precarious balance with

its counterpoise—the pervasive power of the arational. Analysis raises self-consciousness to a new level of complexity. Self-consciousness itself becomes acutely self-conscious in the encounter with the unconscious, which appears as radically enigmatic, even a stranger, to the (rational) ego. More, that primordial element behaves dangerously, not only as a result of its unpredictability, but also because its control is always in question, and so the unresolved challenge to Freudianism circles around the ability of reason to accomplish its assigned tasks. Given Freud's respect for the power of the unconscious, he might well have aligned himself with Hume's prescription of ethics as rationalized emotion and thereby discounted the ability of rational thought to distinguish subjective self-interest from more complex choices. When discussing the superego, a Humean dynamic is operative, but in the context discussed here—moral inquiry as a deliberate and enlightened pursuit—Freud sided with Kant.

This tension is further explored in chapter 5, where Freud's understanding of the biological character of human nature resides in a powerful critique of Kantianism. At one level, Freud simply accepts the biological basis of human agency, which appropriately follows the logic of his clinical and scientific training. Committed to the naturalism of the laboratory and hospital, Freud comfortably affiliated with the biomedical models of his era, and in the context of the *philosophical* understanding of this dimension of human nature, he closely aligned himself with the Nietzschean-Schopenhauerian line of post-Kantian philosophy. Clearly, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche complement Freud's own conception of the ego as biologically derived from, and subject to, primordial organic drives and instincts.

Schopenhauer contested Kant's conception of the noumenal self, and replaced that formulation with the notion of the self as divided by demands of "representation" and "will." However, just as Kant failed to reconcile the intersection of two kinds of reason, Schopenhauer failed to resolve the conundrum of dividing agency into two domains, and only with Nietzsche does the will alone triumph, with "representation" assuming a subordinate position. Putting aside the influence Nietzsche might have had on Freud, we must appreciate how their respective notions of the organic basis of human nature help explicate the grounding of psychoanalytic theory. Nietzsche's Will to Power places humans firmly in

the domain of the biological, where vitality reduced to instinctual conflict resonates powerfully with Freud's own conception. For each of them, despite multiple layers of history, culture, and psychological denial of this instinctual realm, the psyche is best characterized from the perspective of animal origins, whose primitive markings Freud sought and interpreted.

The consequences of the instinctual orientation present a moral agent essentially individualized and independent, so when others appear in the psychic drama, they generally become contestants. However, while an atomistic ethos enacts much of Freud's and Nietzsche's respective conceptions of human striving, this aspect alone does not encompass Freud's moral project, which offered an ethical response to the dangers of unchecked human instincts. *Bona fide* self-awareness and reason coincides with the voice of analysis, whose strategic placement is a given as an "ego" constrained by rational self-awareness. Presumably, the ego's self-consciousness must be accounted for as the result of human evolutionary history (Wegner 2002), but Freud never interrogates its philosophical identity, and following the genealogy of his thought, he built upon an understanding of introspective self-reflection whose autonomous character is fraught with unresolved difficulties.

Chapter 6 explores Freud's complex use of reflexivity, whose history marks much of post-Kantian philosophy. Reflexivity, at least in the modern context, begins with Descartes and evolves into a particular dialogical mode with Hegel's dialectic. In the seventeenth century, "reflexivity" was coined as a new term for introspection and self-awareness. It thus served the instrumental function of combating skepticism by asserting a knowing self. In this Cartesian paradigm, introspection ends in self-identity. An alternate interpretation recognized that an infinite regress of reflexivity would render "the self" elusive, if not unknowable. Reflexivity in this latter mode was rediscovered by Hegel, who defined the self through the encounter with an Other: The introspective process ends when the self-contained individual confronts the Other and thereby articulates its own identity in that engagement. With this background, building on the complex interplay of the reflexivity theme, we will see the origins of Freud's own (undeveloped) object-relations psychology, and more deeply, the philosophical character of self-consciousness he employed.

As already mentioned, Freudian psychoanalytic explorations are organized with a “voice” pursuing its own subterranean workings, and in this sense, the ego (and only part of the ego) possesses a faculty seemingly independent of the mind’s biological substratum. Freud thus based his science on a biological conception of human nature, but he characterized the interpretative faculty as a humanist. This basic unresolved tension, truly the paradox of a free willed-reason coupled to deterministic unconscious forces, demands address. Exploring the moral implications of this schema frames chapter 7, where we examine how, through various modes of human identification and interpretation, psychoanalysis presents a method by which the analysand attempts to redefine herself in hope of more effectively pursuing satisfying love and work. In this context, “moral” refers to the values that orient individual needs and motivations. Defined by the existential and psychological challenges of the analysand, Freud’s criteria reflected underlying currents of Romantic and Enlightenment ideals, which in turn are based on a humanist vision of human potential. So beyond the character of human nature exposed by Freud’s inquiry, the humanistic configuration of psychoanalysis as a therapy for a sick soul tilts his endeavor towards a tempered optimism.

Totally committed to the process of self-exploration, Freud’s moral inquiry became his key philosophical expression. In this sense, we have come full circle: Freud’s project as read through a humanist lens fulfills a complementary aspect of the scientific project, one inspired by his earliest interests. Viewed in this manner, the philosophical conundrum of self-consciousness—residing at the core of the issue of the self—shifts from a *problem* to a *solution*, for with the ongoing, ceaseless process of self-examination, the inquirer adopts a method to achieve the insight at the core of philosophical inquiry. Of course, the inquiry is never completed (e.g., Wittgenstein 1968, sec. 133, p. 51e), but Freud, the physician, declares his therapeutic intent based on the ongoing inquiry itself: For him, self-awareness becomes a vehicle to carry insight, which in turn begets liberation through an affective transaction conducted through the unconscious communication of analysand and analyst (Freud 1912a, 111). Acute self-reflectivity thus becomes a value, *sui generis*.

Note, as already mentioned, Freud takes this position facing an unresolved metaphysical quandary: From the scientific milieu in which he

worked, psychoanalysis is based upon the causal chain of the unconscious, and from another domain he assigned freedom of choice through both emotional enactment and rational insight. So the analysand's conviction that she has free will and through understanding may achieve liberation from crippling unconscious forces opposes the fundamental commitment to a biological determinism from which Freud makes no attempt to escape. This determinism-free will paradox pits the two poles of psychoanalytic theory in fixed and irresolvable opposition. The concluding comments weigh these positions and find that in the calculus of Freud's thought, his humanism—the logic inherent in the hope of self-determination and heroic engagement—ultimately puts the entire psychoanalytic enterprise within the Enlightenment and Romantic ideals of human achievement and thus ultimately sides with freedom.

No doubt Freud was pessimistic, but I maintain that his pessimism was coupled to psychoanalytic cures and from those accomplishments he steadfastly proceeded to develop his theory, both practically and conceptually. The method rested on a complex configuration of rational insight and catharsis, which then leads to some degree of control of unconscious drives. This key presupposition of an emotional reenactment coupled to rationality's promise, presented as a given, I regard as a problem that reappears in different guises throughout Freud's opus. Chapter 4 presents the version of reason I see Freud lifting from Kant, and the following chapters refract that form of rationality: chapter 5 in juxtaposition to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche; chapter 6 in regards to the silent "self"; chapter 7 in the context of the moral interpretation I offer.

The *précis* of the story: Freud translated Kant's admonition that we strive for "maturity" (1996d) into a program that drew deeply from Western notions of personhood: autonomy coupled to emotional dependency; personal responsibility shackled to deterministic forces; self-consciousness aware of an elusive subterranean identity. Despite the inextricable linkage of these couplets, he remained committed (albeit cautiously, even skeptically) to the exercise of self-determination, perfectionism, and the power of reason, to seek (and perhaps achieve) self-fulfillment and some form of self-redemption. In formalizing our vague intuitions that we are not necessarily the identities we project (or even

know), he radically altered Western notions of personal identity. A new self-conscious awareness was thus born, and because the full development of identity politics created by his insights have yet to be exhausted, Freud's philosophy—unsystematic, deliberately undeclared, and often ill-formed—commands abiding interest.