

PSYCHOANALYSIS
AT THE LIMIT

*Epistemology, Mind, and
the Question of Science*

EDITED BY

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ONE

THE ROLE OF BEING AND EXPERIENCE IN FREUD'S UNCONSCIOUS ONTOLOGY

M. GUY THOMPSON

THERE IS LITTLE QUESTION in the minds of every psychoanalytic practitioner that Freud's conception of the unconscious is the pivot around which psychoanalysis orbits, even if the particulars as to what the unconscious comprises has been debated by every psychoanalytic school that has followed in his wake.¹ Yet despite the controversial nature of this concept, there is a pervasive agreement among analysts that whatever the unconscious is, it is certainly not a form of *consciousness*. That being said, this is precisely the dilemma that philosophers have found most troubling about the psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious and the reason why so many have questioned its efficacy. In a recent book, Grotstein² addressed a fundamental and as yet unresolved difficulty in prevailing conceptions of the unconscious, which follows when we attempt to assign the very core of our being to a hypothesized unconscious agent that we can never know directly, and whose existence we must infer and, hence, *believe* to be so, as an article of faith. Grotstein concluded that we are still, after one hundred years of trying, unable to account for this persistent yet obstinate contradiction: that the unconscious knows all, but is "known" by no one.

Like many, I have been haunted by this anomaly over the course of my analytic career. For the purposes of this chapter, however, my concern is not a theoretical one but one of approaching the problem phenomenologically—that is, from the perspective of the psychoanalyst's *lived experience*, what has

been depicted by the interpersonal school as an experience-near paradigm. Therefore, I do not intend to offer a new theory about the nature of the unconscious but rather to explore the relationship between the alleged existence of the unconscious and one's experience of it. In the course of my exploration of this problem I address a number of critical questions: Does it make sense, for example, to speak in terms of one's capacity to "experience" the unconscious if the very concept of the unconscious refers to that which is beyond experience? Moreover, does it make sense to talk in terms of suffering "unconscious experiences" if one is not *aware* of the experiences one is presumed to be suffering? And finally, allowing that experience is, at its margins, tentative and ambiguous, how does one account for those phenomena on the periphery of experience, whether such phenomena are characterized as unconscious (Freud), ambiguous (Merleau-Ponty), mysterious (Heidegger), unformulated (Sullivan), or simply hidden?

I do not claim to have found the answers to these questions or even to advance a preliminary step in that direction. Instead, I merely seek to explore some of the problematics that the psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious has obliged us to live with ever since Freud formulated it one century ago. First, I review Freud's depiction of the unconscious in relation to his conception of psychological reality, and then turn to some of the philosophical problems that derive from his characterization of the "two types" of mental functioning, primary and secondary thought processes. Finally, I review some of the implications that derive from the psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious by employing a phenomenological critique of its presuppositions, and exploring the role of Being and experience in Freud's conception of the psychoanalytic encounter. Though my concern is strictly theoretical, it is nonetheless philosophical because the questions raised are of a philosophical nature. While I am aware of the fact that numerous psychoanalysts since Freud have endeavored to situate his conception of the unconscious in the light of subsequent theoretical developments, my purpose is not to assess these developments with a view to contrasting them with Freud's. Instead, I review the problematics of Freud's thesis in the light of those philosophers whose perspective is at odds with the very notion of an "unconscious" portion of the mind and who endeavor to situate the phenomena that Freud deemed unconscious in the context of consciousness itself, or in the case of Heidegger one that dispenses with the conscious-unconscious controversy altogether. To this end I will propose that the Freudian unconscious is a form of sentient, nascent "consciousness" (implied in Freud's own depiction of it) but a form of consciousness that is unavailable to *experience*. Hence I characterize the purpose of the psychoanalytic endeavor as one of bringing those aspects of consciousness that lie on the periphery of experience to experience, to the degree that is feasible in each case.

FREUD'S CONCEPTION OF PSYCHIC REALITY

Freud's first topography for demarcating the distinction between conscious and unconscious aspects of the mind concerned the nature of fantasy and the role it plays in the life of the neurotic. As a consequence of his experiments with hypnotism Freud surmised that every individual is driven by two kinds of fantasies: one of which one is aware and the other of which one is unaware. Freud opted to term those of which one is unaware "unconscious" because we have no conscious experience of them, but are nonetheless capable of discerning their existence when hypnotized. Such so-called unconscious fantasies have been repressed, but because they reside "in" the unconscious they engender psychic conflict, the manifestation of which accounts for psychopathology, dream formation, and parapraxes.

Thus Freud's first, topographical model of the unconscious was relatively simple: one portion of the mind is conscious and the thoughts it contains are in the forefront of awareness (or *conscious experience*), whereas another portion of the mind is unconscious and is composed of fantasies that have suffered repression (or more primitive defense mechanisms). Freud also included a third element in this topography, the "preconscious," which contains thoughts and memories that, though not immediately conscious, are nonetheless available to consciousness in principle. Freud's earlier topography is essentially an outline of the vicissitudes of the individual's psychic life, what Freud termed psychic reality. Freud's depiction of psychic reality is not, however, predicated on the kind of factual reality that is investigated by the empirical sciences, because it is a kind of "reality" that one *experiences* in the form of fantasy, delusion, or hallucination. Quoting Freud: "What lie behind the sense of guilt of neurotics [for example] are always *psychical* realities and never *factual* ones. What characterizes neurotics is that they prefer psychical to factual reality and react just as seriously to thoughts as normal people do to realities."³ Yet in what sense can one treat such fantasies as "realities" when they are not *real*? Freud recognized that fantasies can be experienced as real in the same way that objective reality, which is to say, that which is not our invention, is typically experienced. In other words, fantasies, though not literal depictions of the past, nevertheless convey meaning, and such meanings are capable of telling us more about our patients than the so-called facts of their history. By interpreting both fantasies and symptoms as meaningful, Freud was able to obtain truths about his patients that were otherwise hidden. His opposition between "psychic" and "external" realities served to juxtapose an inherently personal reality with a more literal one. This isn't to say that literal, or objective, reality is necessarily false, but it was Freud's genius to see that the truth about one's history can be derived from the communication of otherwise innocuous musings, by interpreting a patient's fantasies as disguised messages. The recognition that fantasies could be

conceived as messages suggested there was something “hidden” in them that the patient neither recognized nor appreciated.

Hence, fantasies serve a purpose: they disclose the intentional structure of the individual’s deepest longings and aspirations. But Freud lacked a conception of intentionality that could explain how his patients were able to convey truths they didn’t “know” in a disguised and indirect manner. In other words, his patients *unconsciously intended* their symptoms and the attendant fantasies that explained them; they weren’t “caused” by their unconscious. Freud nevertheless suspected the existence of an unconscious form of subjectivity that was capable of intending symptoms when he coined the term *counter-will* in one of his earliest papers. Leavy brought attention to Freud’s difficulty in grappling with the notion of an “unconscious subject” in a study of the development of Freud’s psychoanalytic theories:

One of Freud’s earliest ways of presenting the idea of unconscious motivation was as “counter-will” (*Gegenwille*), a word that is worth keeping in mind whenever we say “the unconscious.” Will, so rich in philosophical overtones, has been played down by psychoanalysis. Being a verb as well as a noun, the word will always implies a subject. When I do something that I claim I didn’t want to do . . . it does no good to plead that blind, impersonal, unconscious forces “did” the act: *they are me.*⁴ (emphases added)

Leavy’s use of the term *will* is not, of course, limited to the conventional usage of *conscious* will, any more than Freud’s expression *counter-will* is. The term will refers to an intentional act that often alludes to *pre-reflective* (or “unconscious”) sources of motivation. Freud first used the term counter-will in a paper on hypnotism in which he referred to an idea that the patient is unaware of, but was brought to conscious awareness under hypnosis.⁵ Freud continued to use the term in a variety of contexts for some twenty years. The last time he apparently used it was in a paper on love and sexual impotence that was published in 1912. Leavy notes that the term seems to have disappeared thereafter. According to Leavy, “Probably the generalization fell apart into concepts like resistance, repression, unconscious conflict, and ultimately, drive. But the gain in specificity was accompanied by the loss of the implication of a personal ‘will.’”⁶

As Freud pursued his project of establishing the empirical “causes” of symptoms, his earlier notion of the unconscious as a subtle agent, or anonymous ego, or counter-will, receded into the background. Yet the tendency to depersonalize the unconscious into impersonal drives and forces has not met with universal acceptance, even in psychoanalytic circles. The term “drive” was scarcely used before 1905, though the concept was there under other guises. Yet expressions like “affective ideas” and “wishful impulses” clearly convey more subjective nuances than the terms *drive* or *excitations*, for

example. With all the current debate over Strachey's translation of Freud into English, especially the translation of *Trieb* into either "drive" or "instinct," neither the use of *Trieb* or drive alters Freud's understanding of the concept.

Whichever term one prefers, whether drive or instinct, psychoanalysts, with few exceptions, find it agreeable to use a term in which the impersonal aspect of the unconscious predominates. One of those exceptions, in addition to Leavy, was Hans Loewald, who took considerable care to explain how his use of the term *instinct* was intended to convey a human quality. According to Loewald: "When I speak of instinctual forces and of instincts or instinctual drives, I define them as motivational, i.e., both motivated and motivating. . . . [For me] instincts remain relational phenomena, rather than being considered energies within a closed system."⁷

Terms such as *motive* and *relational* lend a clearly personal nuance to the term *instinct*, and even the word *phenomena* sounds more personal than *forces*. If Freud's shift from counter-will to drive lent credence to his claim that psychoanalysis, at least in appearance, deserved the status of a science, it is nevertheless a science more similar to that of academic psychologists who "study" rats or physicists who "measure" energies. However much some analysts may strive to measure the psychoanalytic experience in specifically scientific terms, the legitimacy of one's fantasy life can only be grasped metaphorically and experientially, in terms that remain personal in nature.⁸

FREUD'S FORMULATION OF TWO TYPES OF MENTAL FUNCTIONING

After Freud formulated his theory of the structural model in 1923, his earlier allusions to the unconscious as a "second subject" that behaved as a "counter-will" gradually disappeared. The precedent for this revision was predetermined even earlier by Freud's distinction between primary and secondary thought processes. Indeed, the publication of Freud's "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning" in 1911⁹ roughly coincided with his final reference to the unconscious as "counter-will" in 1912.

In this formulation Freud conceived the primary thought processes as essentially "unconscious." Hence they were deemed to account for such psychic phenomena as displacement, condensation, the ability to symbolize and apprehend time and syntax, as well as dreaming. Since the primary thought processes are supposed to be governed by the pleasure principle they are responsible for that portion of the mind that "strives toward gaining pleasure" and withdraws from "any event that might arouse [pain]."¹⁰ More to the point, Freud held that unconscious processes were "the older, primary processes [and] the residues of a phase of development in which they were the only kind of mental process" that was available to the infant.¹¹ Thus, whatever the infant wished for, says Freud, "was simply presented in a hallucinatory manner, just as still happens today with our dream-thoughts each night."¹²

However primitive the primary thought processes may seem, they are nonetheless perfectly capable of sensing that when the infant's hallucinatory anticipation of pleasure fails to materialize, another means of obtaining gratification must be substituted in its place. Moreover, the primary thought processes are also presumed to be capable of "experiencing" disappointment, leading to the necessity for another means of engaging the world. Quoting Freud:

It was . . . the non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction, the disappointment *experienced*, that led to the abandonment of this attempt at satisfaction by means of hallucination. Instead of it, the psychological apparatus *had to decide* to form a conception of the real circumstances in the external world and to endeavor to make a real alteration in them. A new principle of mental functioning was thus introduced; what was presented in the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable, [thus paving the way for] setting up the reality principle.¹³ (emphases added)

Freud's conception of the unconscious is based more or less entirely on the distinction between these two principles of thinking. Now the secondary thought processes, governed by the reality principle, assume responsibility for the individual's relationship with the social world, including the capacity for rationality, logic, grammar, and verbalization. It doesn't take much reflection to see that there is something unwieldy, even contradictory, about the way Freud unceremoniously divides facets of the mind between these two principles of mental functioning. For example, if the primary thought processes are only capable of striving toward pleasure and avoiding unpleasure, and the secondary thought processes are in turn responsible for delaying gratification while formulating plans in pursuit of one's goals, to *what* or *whom* is Freud referring when he suggests that it is the "psychical apparatus" that "decides to form a conception of the real circumstances" encountered, and then "endeavors to make a real alteration in them"?¹⁴ Is the so-called "psychical apparatus" (*Seele* in German, or "soul") the primary, or the secondary, thought processes?

We can presumably eliminate the secondary thought processes from this logical conundrum since Freud just explained that the *psychical apparatus* (whatever that is) was obliged to bring these very processes *into being* in the first place. On the other hand, we can also eliminate the primary thought processes from contention since Freud proposes the need for a more realistic mode of thinking than already existed, precisely because the primary processes are, by definition, incapable of executing them.

Many of the questions that Grotstein raises in response to Freud's formulation of the two types of mental functioning are devoted to the need

to find a resolution to this problem, and there has been no shortage of subsequent analysts who have raised this point. For example, Charles Rycroft questioned Freud's conception of the "two types" of thinking in his 1962 paper, "Beyond the Reality Principle."¹⁵ There he questions whether it makes sense to insist that the primary thought processes necessarily precede the secondary ones. Rycroft notes that even Freud doubted it, since according to a footnote in his paper on the "Two Principles of Mental Functioning," Freud himself admitted that

It will rightly be objected that an organization which was a slave to the pleasure-principle and neglected the reality of the external world could not maintain itself alive for the shortest time, so that it could not come into existence at all. The employment of a fiction like this is, however, justified when one considers that the infant—provided that one includes with it the care it receives from its mother—does almost realize a psychical system of this kind.¹⁶

Freud might have added to this "fiction" the notion that the infant is as helpless as Freud suggests before it elicits the "protection" of its developing ego. Rycroft observes, "Freud's notion that the primary processes precede the secondary in individual development was dependent on . . . the helplessness of the infant and his having therefore assumed that the mother-infant relationship . . . was one in which the mother was in touch with reality while the infant only had wishes."¹⁷ Again, we cannot help being struck by the notion that the infant needs somebody else (in this case, the mother or, later, an ego) to grapple with the social world *on its behalf*. Rycroft concurs with the view of many child analysts that infants aren't as helpless as Freud supposed. According to Rycroft:

If one starts from the assumption that the mother is the infant's external reality and that the mother–infant relationship is from the very beginning a process of mental adaptation, to which the infant contributes by actions such as crying, clinging, and sucking, which evoke maternal responses in the mother, one is forced to conclude that the infant engages in realistic and adaptive behavior [from the very start].¹⁸

Rycroft concludes that the secondary thought processes probably operate earlier than Freud suspected and that they even coincide with primary process thinking. Even if Freud was right in proposing that infants are indeed ruled by primary thought processes, what if those processes happen to include those very qualities he attributed to the secondary, such as rationality, judgment, and decision making, even an acute grasp of reality? Wouldn't such a scenario, in turn, negate the utility of the ego's so-called synthetic

powers? If Freud's *original* formulation of the ego is retained—that it is essentially defensive in nature—then the so-called unconscious id that is governed by the primary thought processes could be conceived as *a form of consciousness*. Freud's wish to distinguish between two types of thinking could be retained, but only after remodeling their capacities and functions. Paradoxically, what I am proposing would in many ways reverse Freud's schema. The primary thought processes, which I propose are “conscious” but pre-reflective and, hence, not *experienced*, enjoy a spontaneous relationship with the social world, while the secondary thought processes—those employing the tasks of reflective consciousness—determine the individual's relationship with him- or herself.

The nature of subjectivity has always puzzled philosophers and psychologists alike. Freud's depiction of an “unconscious” agency whose designs need to be interpreted to be understood was his singular contribution to our age. But his theories could never explain what his intuition was capable of perceiving. Freud hypothesized some sort of self, or agency, prior to the formation of the ego. This was supported by his theory of primary thought processes and, in another context, by his conception of primary narcissism. We know that the id is capable of thought because, after all, it decided to form an extension of itself—the ego—to insulate itself against the anxiety of being in the world.

In practical terms, the division between the id and the ego is a false one. As Freud himself acknowledged, the ego is merely an “outer layer” of the id; it was never conceived as a separate entity. If we expect to be consistent with the ego's origins, then that ego—following even Freud's reasoning—is nothing more than a “reservoir” of anxiety; in fact, our experience of anxiety itself.

SARTRE'S CRITIQUE OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

Given all the attendant problems that Freud's conception of the unconscious has elicited, it is surprising that there is little, if any, attention paid to the prevailing conception of consciousness it presupposes. Whereas Freud depicted psychoanalysis as essentially a science of the unconscious, it is impossible to escape the observation that it is also a science, if we can call it that, that is preoccupied with consciousness itself, if only implicitly. Terms like truth, epistemology, knowledge, understanding, and comprehension pervade virtually every psychoanalytic paper that is devoted to the unconscious as a concept. But isn't our fascination about the unconscious and our failure to resolve questions about its nature a consequence of our obsession with “consciousness” and the epistemological bias it engenders?

These are among the questions that phenomenologists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger, and Paul Ricoeur devoted the bulk of their philosophical writings to: what is the importance

of knowledge and what role does it serve in our everyday lives? Of all the phenomenologists, it was perhaps Sartre who took psychoanalysis the most seriously, even conceiving his own brand of “existential psychoanalysis.”¹⁹ Fascinated with Freud the man as well as his project, Sartre was also a Frenchman and, like all French philosophers, was preoccupied with the nature of rationality, a legacy of Descartes. Yet Sartre’s fascination with Freud alerted him at a very early stage of his intellectual development to the problems I have summarized earlier.

Sartre^{20, 21} rejected Freud’s topographical model for reasons similar to Freud’s. In Freud’s earlier topographical model the only thing separating the system-conscious from the system-unconscious is the so-called censor that serves to regulate what is permitted into consciousness and, contrariwise, what is repressed into the unconscious. Hence the censor is aware of everything, what is conscious and unconscious alike. Yet because the ego is unaware of the censor, this model posits a “second consciousness” (the censor) that is both unknown and unknowable to the ego in principle. Sartre’s problem with this model is obvious: the so-called censor is the de facto “person” who is being analyzed and who disclaims knowledge of all the shannigans he employs to disguise what he is up to, “bad faith” in its essence. As we saw earlier, Freud also had problems with the implications of a “second thinking subject,” and decided to discard this model for a more ambiguous one that contained only one subject that *knows*, the conscious portion of the ego, and not one but *three* subjects (i.e., “agencies”) that do not know: the id, the superego, and that portion of the ego that is responsible for defense mechanisms (although, it must be added, the individual is arguably aware of some aspects of the superego, the id, and even defensive maneuvers).

Freud’s subsequent revision of his earlier model, however, fares little better in Sartre’s opinion. The topographical model is replaced with one that is less concerned with demarcating conscious and unconscious portions of the psyche than with determining the complex nature of psychic agency, or subjectivity. Although the two models are not completely complementary, it is easy to recognize those elements of the second model that were intended to remedy the problems engendered by the first. Now the id more or less assumes the role of the system-unconscious, whereas the ego more or less assumes the tasks of the system-conscious. Ironically, the system-preconscious does not enjoy a direct parallel with the third agency in Freud’s new apparatus, the superego; instead, the superego adopts some of the functions of the now-abandoned censor, due to its ability to prohibit those wishes and desires it deems unacceptable. Sartre’s principal complaint with the new model is that it still fails to resolve the problem of bad faith, the problem of a “lie without a liar.” If anything, the new model gets even further away from Sartre’s efforts to personalize the unconscious, by instituting three psychic agencies that protect the conscious ego from any responsibility for its actions. How would Sartre propose to remedy this situation, to account for

those actions that Freud claimed the “conscious” patient is “unconscious” of devising, while holding the conscious patient responsible for performing them?

Sartre accomplishes this by introducing two sets of critical distinctions into the prevailing psychoanalytic vocabulary. The first is a distinction between *pre-reflective* consciousness and *reflective* consciousness, and the second is between *consciousness* and *knowledge*. Sartre summarizes the basic dilemma in Freud’s conception of the unconscious, contained in both the topographical and structural models, with the following questions: How can the subject (a divided “subject” notwithstanding) not know that she is possessed of a feeling or sentiment that she is in possession of? And if, indeed, the unconscious is just another word for consciousness (Sartre’s position), how can the subject, even by Sartre’s reckoning, not know what she is “conscious” of? Sartre’s thesis of “pre-reflective” consciousness, probably derived from Brentano, is his effort to solve this riddle. Following Husserl’s thesis, Sartre saw consciousness as *intentional*, which means it is always conscious of *something*. Hence there is no such thing as “empty” consciousness; nor is there such a thing as a “container” or “receptacle” that houses consciousness, a formulation that rejects not only Freud’s thesis but Melanie Klein’s “part-objects” hypothesis as well. Rather, consciousness is always “outside” itself and “in” the things that constitute it as consciousness-of something. In Sartre’s words: “Intentionality is not the way in which a subject tries to make “contact” with an object that exists beside it. *Intentionality is what makes up the very subjectivity of subjects.*”²² In other words, the concept of intentionality renders subjectivity as already and in its essence a *theory of intersubjectivity*, since to be a subject is, by necessity, to be engaged with some thing “other” than one’s self, even if this other something is just an idea (including the act of self-awareness). Sartre elaborates how this thesis would be applied to the social world specifically:

When I run after a streetcar, when I look at the time, when I am absorbed in contemplating a portrait, there is no *I* (or “ego”). There is [only] consciousness of the *streetcar-having-to-be-overtaken*, etc. . . . In fact, I am then plunged into the world of objects; it is *they* which constitute the unity of my consciousness; it is *they* which present themselves with values, with attractive and repellent qualities—but *me*—I have disappeared; I have annihilated myself [in the moment of conscious apprehension].²³

Thus, when I experience a rock, a tree, a feeling of sadness, or the object of my desire in the bedroom, I experience them just where they are: beside a hill, in the meadow, in my heart, in relation to myself and my beloved. Consciousness and the object-of-consciousness are given at one stroke. These things constitute my consciousness of them just as I constitute their existence as things through the act in which I perceive them and give them a

name. And because naming things is a purely human activity, these things, says Sartre, do not exist as rocks, trees, or emotions in the absence of a human consciousness that is capable of apprehending them through the constitutive power of language.

However, such acts of apprehension do not necessarily imply “knowledge” of what I am conscious of. Sartre makes a distinction between the pre-reflective apprehension of an object and our reflective “witnessing” of the act. Ordinarily when I am pre-reflectively conscious of a feeling, for example, I intuit the feeling of sadness and, in turn, reflectively acknowledge this feeling *as* sadness: I feel sad and experience myself as a sad individual more or less simultaneously. But I am also capable of feeling sadness, or anger, or envy without *knowing* I am sad, or angry, or envious, as such. When such a state is pointed out to me by my analyst I am surprised to be alerted to this observation. Of course, I may resist the analyst’s intervention and reject it, but I may also admit it because, on being alerted to this possibility, I am also capable of recognizing this feeling *as mine*. Sartre argues that I would be incapable of recognizing thoughts or ideas that I claim no awareness of *unless I had been conscious of these feelings in the first place on a pre-reflective level*.

In other words, what Freud labels consciousness Sartre designates “reflective consciousness” (i.e., knowing *that* I am conscious of it) and what Freud labels the unconscious (or preconscious) Sartre designates as that moment of pre-reflective consciousness that, due to resistance, has not yielded to reflective awareness and, hence, to “knowledge” of it, after the fact. This is why I can be conscious of something that I have no immediate knowledge of, and why I can become knowledgeable about something that I am, so to speak, “unconscious” of, but am subsequently able to recognize as mine when a timely interpretation alerts me to it. Thus, I can only *experience* something I have knowledge of, not what I am merely “conscious” of. The power of analysis, according to Sartre, lies in its capacity to “arrest” time for the patient, by allowing the neurotic (or psychotic) the opportunity to slow the pace of his anxiety-ridden experience to ponder what his experience is, in its immediacy.

Of course, the decisive difference between Sartre’s and Freud’s respective formulations isn’t that it merely substitutes Freud’s terminology with Sartre’s; on a more radical level it eliminates a need for the notion of a “second thinking subject” *behind* or *beneath* consciousness, and ultimately offers a means for personalizing the unconscious in a manner that Freud was unable to. There are still problems, however, even with Sartre’s formulation. Because Sartre shared with Freud an obsession with the nature of consciousness, he went even further than Freud and eliminated the need for an “unconscious” altogether, replacing Freud’s formulation with a model that was rooted solely in a theory of consciousness, a solution that was even more rationalistic than Freud’s. Sartre even acknowledged late in life that his earlier project had been too indebted to Descartes and suffered from being infused with rationalism, as though “comprehension” is the final arbiter to psychic liberation.

Ironically, despite Freud's preoccupation with epistemology, he moved away from his earlier bent toward intellectualism and subsequently adopted the more skeptical position that knowledge, per se, plays a limited role in the psychoanalytic experience. The move away from interpretative schemes toward transference (and, more recently, relational) conceptualizations of psychoanalysis reflect the growing influence of phenomenology, skepticism, and hermeneutics on psychoanalytic practice. If we want to find a philosophical model that can integrate all these influences, however, we will not find it in Sartre but in someone who was a mentor to him in the earliest days of his intellectual development: Martin Heidegger. I will now review those elements of Heidegger's philosophy that appear to solve the problem of the unconscious that neither Freud or Sartre were able to.

HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPTION OF BEING AND EXPERIENCE

Although he was never all that interested in psychoanalysis and what little he knew of it dismayed him, there are many aspects of Heidegger's philosophy that are sympathetic with it. Unlike Sartre and Freud, Heidegger was not interested in the nature of consciousness, per se, because he thought it tended to psychologize our conception of human experience instead of getting to its roots. Heidegger's reasons for taking this position were complex, but at the heart of them was a conviction that epistemology is not a viable means for getting to the bottom of what our suffering is about. Of all the phenomenologists of his generation, Heidegger was alone in conceiving philosophy as a therapy whose purpose is to heal the human soul. This made Heidegger unpopular with academic philosophers but a valuable resource to a group of European psychiatrists and psychoanalysts who saw in his work a humanistic alternative to Freud's penchant for theory. Ironically, many of them, including Medard Boss, Ludwig Binswanger, Eugene Minkowski, and Viktor Frankl, threw out the baby with the bathwater in their haste to separate themselves from the psychoanalytic *Zeitgeist* by replacing it with Heidegger as the basis for their clinical theories. This culminated in the impoverishment of both traditions, and only a handful of psychoanalysts (e.g., Hans Loewald, Stanley Leavy, Paul Federn, and R. D. Laing) sought to integrate elements of Heidegger's philosophy into Freud's conception of psychoanalysis.

Heidegger is probably most famous for his decision to root his philosophy in ontology, the study of Being, instead of epistemology, the study of knowledge. This is irritating to philosophers and psychologists alike because it discards epistemological questions in favor of a fundamental critique of what human existence is about. This is a topic that most people would prefer to leave alone, for why question the "why" of our existence when it is patently obvious that we, in fact, exist? But Heidegger was not simply interested in why we exist but how, and to what end. For example,

when I pause to take stock of myself by asking, "Who am I?" I am asking the question about the *meaning of Being*. In fact, we submit to Being all the time, but without knowing it. Whenever we are engaged in writing a paper, painting a picture, driving a car, or riding a bicycle, we "let go" of our rational and conscious control of the world and in that letting-go we submit to Being, an experience that, by its nature, we cannot think our way through. Arguably the most radical critic of Descartes's rationalistic constitution of subjectivity, Heidegger countered that we live our lives in an everyday sort of way *without* thinking about what we are doing and, more important, without having to think our way through our activities as a matter of course. The place he assigned to reason is, in effect, an after-the-fact operation that is not primary to our engagement with the world, but secondary; it is only when our involvement with the world breaks down that we take the time to divorce ourselves from it for the purpose of pondering what has happened and why.

Contrary to both Husserl and Sartre who believed it is possible to employ the conscious portion of the mind to fathom the bedrock of who I am in tandem with the choices that determine my subjectivity, Heidegger countered that it is impossible to ever get "behind" our constitutive acts in such a way that we can determine the acts we intend to embark on *before* committing them. Whereas Sartre argued that I "choose" the person that I am and can always change who I am by choosing to be someone else, Heidegger observed that my ability to comprehend the choices I make necessarily occurs *after* the fact, so that I am always endeavoring to "discover" (or disclose) the acts I have already made in a world that is not my construction but always "other" to my intent or volition. This is because I am always embedded in a situation that is imbued with moods and feelings that conspire to influence my choices before I am ever conscious of having made them. Thus, my experience of myself is one of having been "thrown" into the situation I find myself in, and then collecting myself to fathom how I got here and what my motives have been, afterward.

Hence, more primary for Heidegger than the comprehension of the world (Descartes), the search for pleasure (Freud), or relief from anxiety (Melanie Klein) is the *need to orient* ourselves at every moment in time, by asking ourselves: Where are we, what are we doing here, to what do we belong? It is my sense of "who" I am to ask this question that constitutes me in my existence. Although the question of who-ness is the foundation of Heidegger's philosophy, it is important to understand that this is not a psychological question of identity, as per Erikson, but an ontological question of Being, because it is bigger than the psyche or the self. At bottom, this question is presupposed when we query the role of the unconscious, but it replaces Freud's psychologization of this question with an existential one. If one removes these questions from a strictly philosophical context and inserts them into one that is specifically clinical, one readily recognizes that Heidegger

is raising the same questions that our analytic patients are struggling with, only they lack the the means with which to consider them.

Because Heidegger rejected epistemology, his philosophy is inherently sceptical,²⁴ not in the sense of doubting that I can know anything but because knowledge doesn't get to the heart of what my life is about. Moreover, this attitude is easily adapted for the purposes of psychoanalytic inquiry, as any number of contemporary psychoanalysts have recognized. The novelty of this perspective has also insinuated its way into the thinking of many disparate (including "classical" as well as contemporary) psychoanalytic practitioners, some by virtue of their acquaintance with Heidegger's philosophy (Leavy,^{25, 26} Laing^{27, 28}), some by virtue of Sullivan's interpersonal theory (Levenson,^{29, 30, 31} Stern,³² Bromberg,³³ Langan³⁴), and others through the influence of classical psychoanalysts such as Hans Loewald,³⁵ a self-identified Freudian analyst who studied with Heidegger in his youth. What holds such disparate theoretical outlooks together is their respective conceptions of experience. Heidegger's movement from epistemology toward ontology led to his abandoning concepts like consciousness and even intentionality (as it was conceived by Husserl) in favor of a critique of our relationship with Being and the manner it is disclosed to us in the immediacy of everyday experience.

How, then, does Heidegger conceive of experience and why is this an ontological question instead of an epistemological or strictly psychological one? From a strictly Heideggerian perspective, psychoanalysis is already concerned with our manner of Being and has been from the start. People go into analysis because they are not satisfied with the manner of Being they are in and want to change it. But in order to determine what our manner of Being is about we have to give ourselves to it, through our experience of it. In its essence, psychoanalysis gives us the opportunity to give thought to our experience by taking the time that is needed to ponder it. Heidegger would have agreed with Freud that there are indeed "two types" of thinking that we typically employ, though he wouldn't formulate them in the way that either Freud or Sartre proposed. Heidegger not only rejected Freud's conception of the unconscious but also avoided employing the term consciousness in the convoluted manner that Sartre did, opting instead to focus his attention on two types of "thinking": calculative and meditative. Basically, Heidegger believed that the nature of consciousness is so inherently mysterious that it is misleading to equate it with synonyms like "awareness" or "knowledge." We have seen from the thicket of contradictions that both Freud and Sartre entertained about the distinction between a conscious and unconscious portion of the mind that such a distinction ultimately dissolves into a well of confusion.

Whereas analysts are abundantly familiar with the observation that their patients frequently resist thinking about certain topics because they are distressing and would prefer to think about those topics that are more pleas-

ing or interesting to them, Heidegger observed that one manner of thinking (whatever the topic may be) is inherently comforting while the other is more liable to elicit anxiety or dread (*angst*). We tend to avoid thinking the thoughts that make us anxious and abandon ourselves to thoughts, speculations, and fantasies that are soporific. The prospect of enduring the kind of anxiety that genuine thought entails is distressing and the tactics we employ to avoid it are universal. The task of analysis is to nudge our thinking into those areas we typically avoid so that we can access a region of our existence we loathe to explore, but which lies at the heart of our humanity. This is effected by *experiencing what our suffering is about*, and allowing such experiences to change us; not by virtue of knowing more than we already do about ourselves, but by helping us accommodate a dimension of our experience that we avoid at every turn. When we succumb to such experiences we are thrown into a different manner of experiencing ourselves and what we, as “selves,” are about.

For this to make any sense we must understand why Heidegger insists on depicting the manner of Being he is concerned with with a capital B, a distinction that Heidegger calls “the ontological difference.” The word “being” (with a little b) is an “entity” and, as such, is the object of scientific investigation as well as our everyday ordinary perceptions: trees, houses, tables, feelings, and so on. In other words, it refers to things as they seem at first blush. Heidegger, however, transforms these “things” (beings or entities) into Being by recognizing their temporal dimension, that “beings” necessarily exist *in time*, in a temporal flux of past-present-future: what we ordinarily call “now.” This temporalization of beings into Being, however, can only be achieved by a human being who is privy to a relationship with objects of reflection by virtue of the capacity to think about them and interpret what they mean. Hence, our relationship with time reveals what the Being of “beings” share in common: the world as it is disclosed or “illuminated” *to a person* by virtue of his or her capacity to experience the object in question. In other words, beings (things, objects, perceptions) are transformed into Being when they are experienced by virtue of my capacity to interpret their significance for *me*. This observation sheds light on what psychoanalysts have already been doing whenever they employ interpretations to help their patients realize that everything they experience is unique to them alone, because everything they are capable of experiencing contains an historical component. Where Heidegger parts company with most analysts however, is that such realizations are not intended to merely help patients “understand” themselves better but to *experience* who and what they are, fundamentally. Like Heidegger, the analyst “temporalizes” the patient’s experience by interpreting its historical antecedents, and in that act of temporalization helps the patient’s world come alive. This is what Heidegger calls doing “fundamental ontology.”

THOUGHT—AND THE *EXPERIENCE* OF THINKING

As noted earlier, in Heidegger's later thought he emphasized a form of thinking he characterized as meditative, a kind of thought that is usually dismissed as irrelevant by scientists and academics who employ a manner of thinking that Heidegger depicts as calculative. But what kind of thought does meditative thinking entail? J. Glenn Gray suggests it is helpful first to understand what Heidegger does not mean by meditative thinking.

Thinking is, in the first place, not what we call having an opinion or a notion. Second, it is not representing or having an idea (*Vorstellen*) about something or a state of affairs. . . . Third, thinking is not ratiocination, developing a chain of premises which lead to a valid conclusion. . . . [Meditative] thinking is not so much an act as a way of living or dwelling—as we in America would put it, a way of life.³⁶

Offering a different perspective on this enigmatic proposition, Macquarrie proposes that: “‘Meditation’ suggests a kind of thought in which the mind is docile and receptive to whatever it is thinking about. Such thought may be contrasted [for example] with the active investigative thought of the natural sciences.”³⁷ In comparison, Heidegger characterizes calculative thinking as the conventional norm and a by-product of the technological age in which we live. Though its roots go all the way back to Plato, its impact on culture was not fully formed until the scientific revolution that was inspired by Descartes in the seventeenth century. The tendency to perceive the world in the abstract and conceptual manner that calculative thinking entails took an even sharper turn in the twentieth century with the birth of the computer era and the amazing gains that technology has enjoyed over the past century, evidenced in the development of housing, transportation, medicine, and so on. The question of technology is a complicated one and remained the focus of Heidegger's attention throughout his lifetime. Though it would be extreme to say that Heidegger was opposed to science, there is little doubt that he believed science has overtaken our lives to such a degree that we have now forgotten how to think in a nonscientific manner. One of Heidegger's most infamous statements about the status of science is that “science does not *think*” and that the thinking science employs is an impoverished variation of it, epitomized by the credence given to scientific “research” and the like, which Heidegger dismisses as thought-less and thought-poor.

Indeed, one of the consequences of the technological age is what has recently been depicted as the “postmodern condition,” the ultimate expression of our contemporary obsession with technology and the technology culture it has spawned. This is a culture that, from Heidegger's perspective,

is fundamentally ill in the sense of being “ill at ease” with itself, a product of the pervasive emptiness that characterizes the twentieth-century neurosis. Heidegger saw psychoanalysis as the inevitable response to the malaise in which postmodern man is imprisoned, because once we created this dire situation it was necessary that we fashion a cure for it. What, in Heidegger’s opinion, is the cure for such malaise? To simply remember how to think in the manner that we have forgotten. In fact, this is the kind of thinking that Freud, despite his penchant for science, stumbled upon on his own, not by engaging in scientific research but by examining his own condition.³⁸ As we know, his efforts culminated in the radical treatment scheme that lies at the heart of the psychoanalytic endeavor, epitomized by the free association method and its complement, the mode of “free-floating attentiveness” (neutrality) that he counseled his followers to adopt.

Whereas in Heidegger’s earlier period he emphasized the region of our everyday activities that we perform as a matter of course without recourse to having to think our way through them, the period of his development in which he distinguished between calculative and meditative thinking entailed a “turn” in his thinking that focused on the kind of experience we are capable of obtaining once we are cured of our obsession for knowledge. Though Heidegger abandoned terms such as intentionality and consciousness in his later period, he emphasized to an even greater degree than before the importance of *attending to experience* and argued that the only means we have of “touching Being” is by pondering what our experience tells us from this novel perspective. Thus, for Heidegger experience, proper speaking, is ontological, that is, one does not experience with one’s feelings or one’s mind, but with one’s *Being*; hence one cannot feel or think one’s way to experience because, by its nature, one must *submit* to it.

To summarize, whereas Sartre distinguishes between pre-reflective and reflective modes of consciousness, Heidegger distinguishes between a region of our existence that is unavailable to experience and the capacity we have to access this region by giving ourselves to it. Whereas Freud’s conception of the unconscious conceives it as an “underworld” of hidden aims, intentions, and conspiracies that shadow the world we are conscious of (i.e., the world in which we live), Heidegger reverses this thesis in favor of one that dispenses with the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious altogether. Instead, Heidegger sees a cleavage between the acts we commit without thinking (i.e., that we have no knowledge of when we commit them) and the acts that become available to experience by giving them thought. Conversely, it is the world I inhabit *without* thinking where I reside, not the one (as per Freud) I am conscious of. Indeed, this is the world I bring to awareness in analysis, but a world that I will never, no matter how much I try, be fully conscious of—at least not in the obsessive way that the neurotic would have it.

R. D. LAING'S CRITIQUE OF 'UNCONSCIOUS EXPERIENCE'

Much of this, I imagine, is probably familiar to you, not because you have studied Heidegger but because, with enough experience of your own, you have already adopted a phenomenological perspective, but without "knowing" it. This is one of the virtues of phenomenology: since we are only capable of grasping it intuitively, many people stumble on it on their own, as Freud did, without formal instruction. In many respects, despite his protestations to the contrary, Freud was a closet phenomenologist, and many of his ideas about psychoanalysis, including the bulk of his technical recommendations, were faithful to the phenomenological perspective. In fact, Heidegger recognized that Freud's conception of free association and the analyst's endeavor to effect a state of free-floating attentiveness was compatible with the kind of meditative thinking Heidegger was advocating.³⁹

Given the parallels between Heidegger's and Freud's respective conceptions of meditative thinking and the analytic attitude (i.e., free association, neutrality),⁴⁰ it is all the more surprising that Heidegger's influence has not been more evident in psychoanalytic circles. Despite his influence on a generation of continental psychiatrists following the Second World War, there has been little effort among psychoanalysts to critique Freud's conception of the unconscious from a Heideggerian perspective. A singular exception is the work of R. D. Laing who studied Heidegger before he trained as a psychoanalyst and published his first, Heideggerian-inspired, book during his analytic training (1960). Laing's first two books, *The Divided Self*⁴¹ and *Self and Others*,⁴² were inspired attempts to apply some of Heidegger's insights to the psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious and the relation it bears on what is given to experience.⁴³

In Laing's *Self and Others*, he confronts some of the problems with Freud's conception of the unconscious (noted earlier) in a critique of a paper by Susan Isaacs, a follower of Melanie Klein. Though Isaacs's paper is mostly related to Klein's technical vocabulary, one of the themes in Isaacs's study that caught Laing's attention originated with Freud and has been adopted by virtually every psychoanalyst since: the notion of "unconscious experience," a contradiction in terms for the reasons we reviewed earlier. Indeed, Laing avers: "It is a contradiction in terms to speak of 'unconscious experience,' [because] a person's experience comprises anything that 'he' or 'any part of him' is aware of, whether 'he' or every part of him is aware of every level of his awareness or not."⁴⁴

Laing's thesis is that the psychoanalytic notion of unconscious experience alludes to a more fundamental contradiction that Freud's conception of the unconscious begins with: that there is such a thing as an unconscious portion of the mind that one is capable of experiencing. Indeed, Freud's decision to conceive a separate portion of the mind that the (conscious) mind has no awareness of sets up a series of false theoretical dualities between inner experience and outer reality that land one, in the words of Juliet Mitchell, "in

a welter of contradictions such as the notion that ‘mind’ is a reality outside experience—yet is the ‘place’ from which experience comes.”⁴⁵ Mitchell observes that “This problem is peculiar to psychoanalysis . . . because the ‘object’ of the science . . . *experiences* the investigation of the scientists.”⁴⁶

The heart of Laing’s argument revolves around the difficulty that every psychoanalyst faces if he or she believes that the psychoanalyst is in a position to know more about the patient’s experience (conscious or unconscious) than the patient does:

My impression is that most adult Europeans and North Americans would subscribe to the following: the other person’s experience is not directly experienced by self. For the present it does not matter whether this is necessarily so, is so elsewhere on the planet, or has always been the case. But if we agree that you do not experience my experience, [then] we agree that we rely on our communications to give us our clues as to how or what we are thinking, feeling, imagining, dreaming, and so forth. Things are going to be difficult if you tell me that I am *experiencing* something which I am not experiencing. If that is what I think you mean by unconscious experience.⁴⁷

Even when one allows that the psychoanalyst is investigating the experience of the analysand, the analyst must remember that he has no direct access to the patient’s experience other than what the patient tells him, whether the patient’s account of her experience is reliable and to what degree. Yet it seems that the analyst is not content with the limitations of the situation that is imposed on him and prefers to engage in wild speculations and inferences as to what he “supposes” is going on in the patient’s mind, of which the patient is presumed to be unaware:

Beyond the mere attribution of agency, motive, intention, experiences that the patient disclaims, there is an extraordinary exfoliation of forces, energies, dynamics, economics, processes, structures to explain the ‘unconscious.’ Psychoanalytic concepts of this doubly chimerical order include concepts of mental structures, economics, dynamisms, death and life instincts, internal objects, etc. They are postulated as principles of regularity, governing or underlying forces, governing or underlying experience that Jack thinks Jill has, but does not know she has, as inferred by Jack from Jack’s experience of Jill’s behavior. In the meantime, what is Jack’s experience of Jill, Jill’s experience of herself, or Jill’s experience of Jack?⁴⁸

Indeed, the subtle interplay of how one’s experience of other affects one and, in turn, how one’s reaction to this effect elicits behavior that affects other’s experience as well was a major theme in Laing’s writings throughout his

career. The book in which Laing's critique of Isaacs's paper appeared was a full-scale examination of the effect that human beings have on each other in the etiology of severe psychological disturbance, fueled by the acts of deception and self-deception that characterize our most seemingly innocent exchanges with one another. Heidegger's influence on Laing's clinical outlook was explicitly acknowledged by Laing when citing Heidegger's essay, "On the Essence of Truth"⁴⁹ in that work. Noting Heidegger's adoption of the pre-Socratic term for truth, *aletheia* (which conceives truth as that which emerges from concealment), Laing put his own twist on Heidegger's thesis by emphasizing the interdependency between candor and secrecy in the way that one's personal truth emerges and recedes in every conversation with others, an innovation that owes just as much to Sartre and Freud as to Heidegger's ontological preoccupations.

Many of the terms that Laing introduced in that book for the first time (e.g., collusion, mystification, attribution, injunction, untenable positions) were coined for the purpose of providing a conceptual vocabulary that could help explain how human beings, in their everyday interactions with each other, are able to distort the truth so effectively that they are able to affect each other's reality, and hence their sanity as well. It was just this vocabulary that Laing suggested was missing in Freud's psychoanalytic nomenclature. In the language of psychic conflict, Laing agreed with Freud that people who suffer conflicts are essentially of *two minds*: they struggle against the intrusion of a reality that is too painful to accept, on the one hand, and harbor a fantasy that is incapable of being acknowledged on the other. Consequently, their lives are held in abeyance until they are able to speak of their experience to someone who is willing to hear it with benign acceptance, without a vested interest in what one's experience ought to be.

Like Heidegger, Laing avoided employing terms such as consciousness and unconscious and situated his thinking instead in the language of experience and how experience determines our perception of the world and ourselves. Instead of characterizing what we do not know as that which has been repressed into one's "unconscious," Laing was more apt to depict such phenomena descriptively, as that which I am unconscious *of*; or better, as that which is not available, or given, to experience, even if in the depths of my Being I intuitively sense I am harboring a truth that is too painful or elusive to grasp. Laing also adhered to Heidegger's thesis that my experience of the world is dependent on what I interpret the world to be, so that if I want to change my experience of the world I have to reconsider my interpretation of it.⁵⁰

It should be remembered that these words were written forty years ago, long before the subsequent development of hermeneutic, relational, constructivist, and intersubjective schools of psychoanalysis, that have in turn noted some of the same problems that Laing presaged but rarely gets credit for. One possible explanation for this oversight is that Laing's com-

mentary is *still*, forty years hence, radical in comparison with contemporary treatments of this theme; indeed, virtually all the schools previously listed continue to embrace the notion of “unconscious experience”! Space does not permit me to compare and contrast Laing’s contribution to this discussion with more contemporary versions of it; my concern is limited to that of assessing Freud’s conception of the unconscious and some of the problems that inhere from its presuppositions. I include Laing in this discussion because of the emphasis that he, more than any other psychoanalyst, has reserved for the place of experience in the psychoanalytic encounter and the problems that derive from it. That being said, there are aspects of Freud’s conception of experience that are surprisingly consistent with Heidegger’s and are compatible with the ontological dimension of human experience.

FREUD’S AND HEIDEGGER’S RESPECTIVE CONCEPTIONS OF EXPERIENCE

I will now review those aspects of Freud’s conception of the unconscious that are compatible with Heidegger’s philosophy and the respective importance that each assigns to the role of experience in our lives. Over the past two centuries the German language has offered perhaps the richest and most subtle variations on the kinds of experience that English subsumes under one term. It should not be surprising, therefore, that German philosophers have dominated the nineteenth- and twentieth-century investigations into the nature of experience that subsequently spilled over to other European countries, including France, Great Britain, and Spain. I am thinking of Hegel, Schopenhauer, Dilthey, Nietzsche, Husserl, and Heidegger specifically, each of whom elaborated on the notion of experience in their respective philosophies, granting the concept a central role in both phenomenology and existential philosophy. Before exploring their impact on phenomenology, however, I will say a few words about the German conception of experience and the etymology from which the terms they employ are derived.

The first is the German *Erfahrung*, which contains the word *Fahrt*, meaning “journey.” Hence, *Erfahrung* suggests the notion of temporal duration, such as, for example, when one accumulates experience over time, including the accruing of wisdom that comes with old age. The other German term for experience is *Erlebnis*, which derives from the word *Leben*, meaning “life.” Hence, the use of the word *Erlebnis* connotes a vital immediacy in contrast to the more historical perspective of *Erfahrung*. When invoking *Erlebnis*, the speaker is emphasizing a primitive unity that precedes intellectual reflection.⁵¹ In the scientific community the notion of experience suggests the accumulation of empirical knowledge through the use of experimentation, a supposedly objective endeavor. On the other hand, experience may also suggest something that happens to us when in a passive state and vulnerable to stimuli, such as what occurs in a movie theater. It may also suggest the process whereby we

submit to education, entailing the accumulation and memorization of knowledge over a considerable period of time. Finally, the term may also be used to connote a journey I have taken while traveling to a foreign country, perhaps in wartime when I am faced with obstacles and danger, the experience of which may have expedited my journey into manhood.

You can see from these distinctions between the two types of experience we are capable of having that, even while offering tantalizing hints as to what the term means, there remains something ineffable about the concept itself. This presents us with a paradox, because the word is often employed, according to Martin Jay, "to gesture towards precisely that which exceeds concepts and even language itself."⁵² In fact, the word experience has frequently been used as a marker for what is ineffable and so private or personal that it cannot be rendered in words. One's experience of love, for example, is an experience that many insist is impossible to express or grasp in words alone, precisely because it is experienced long before it is understood, if then. As Laing observed earlier, even when I try to communicate what I experience to others, only I can know what my experience is. Hence, our efforts to convey our experience are imperfect because it cannot be reduced to words. This observation has enormous consequences for the experience of psychoanalysis for both patient and analyst who rely almost entirely on the passage of words between them.

So what does the essential nature of experience entail? Is experience antithetical to our capacity to reason, as some have claimed, or is our ability to reason dependent on our capacity to experience the very thoughts that our words endeavor to convey? As we know, many of the last century's philosophers and academics sought to reduce human activity to language, suggesting that one's capacity to experience is mediated through words and, hence, is secondary to the power that words possess. This view implies that pre-verbal experience is inconceivable, so that even the experience of pain relies on one's "knowledge" of what pain entails. Many of the features of structuralism, deconstructionism, poststructuralism, and the postmodernist perspective argue that the very notion of a conscious, sentient, self that is capable of determining its own truth is an antiquated idea that should be replaced with a schema that views the subject, not in terms of an experiencing agent, but as an effect, or "construct," of hidden forces.

To appreciate the contribution of phenomenology to our conception of experience it is important to note that, historically, empiricist philosophers such as Hume separated experience from rationality by consigning to experience sensual data alone. Hence, modern scientific methodology, which endeavors to combine the experience we derive from our senses with our capacity to think about and reflect on the nature of such experience, is unable to account for the experience of ideas, thoughts, and imagination. In other words, philosophers have traditionally "split" human Being in half, assigning one portion of the human project to rationality, the mind, and the other portion to sense experience, the body.

The singular contribution of Husserl at the turn of the century was to reconcile the split between sense experience and rationality by suggesting that experience is already inherently thoughtful, because the nature of consciousness, according to Husserl, is intentional, so that the act of consciousness and its object are given at one stroke. One isn't "related" (as per object relations theory) to the other because each is irrevocably dependent on the other, so that neither is capable of standing alone. As some Buddhists have argued, the presumed split to which Western thought has been devoted is illusory, because the two are actually One. Heidegger concluded that there are levels of experience—just as there are levels of awareness or consciousness—depending on my capacity to interpret *to the depths* what my experience discloses to me.

This thesis is especially relevant to the psychoanalyst who endeavors to direct the patient's attention to his or her experience by interpreting its meaning. Viewed from this angle, a good interpretation is never intended to explain one's experience, but to deepen it, in the phenomenological sense. Alternately, *what the patient experiences and how reveal to the analyst the person that the patient happens to be*. Thus, as Laing noted earlier, patient and analyst alike are interested not only in their own experience of the situation they share together, but in what each takes the other's experience to be, however imperfect the ability to understand the other's experience may be.

This is why Heidegger sees experience as the "revealing" of Being; because experience discloses who I am as well as the world I inhabit, the two are inextricably connected. I am neither strictly constituted by the world, nor is the world I inhabit my invention: the two are interdependent because each serves to constitute the other. Thus, the distinctive feature of experience from a Heideggerian perspective is its capacity to shock the world I inhabit at the roots, because experience does not only reveal things that are hidden, it is also capable of changing, by virtue of such revelations, *who* I am. Hence, "When we talk of 'undergoing' an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making, [so that *in order* to undergo experience] we [must] endure it, suffer it, [and] receive it as it strikes us, and [finally] submit to it."⁵³ By anticipating my experiences with a specific purpose in mind I can make use of them to gain insight into the person I am. Moreover, there are degrees to experience; it isn't all or nothing. This is why I am also capable of resisting experience, avoiding it, and even forgetting experiences that (due to repression) are too painful to bear. In turn, the degree to which I am able to experience anything—a piece of music, the paper you are now reading, even psychoanalysis—is determined by how willing I am to give myself to the experience in question.

What, then, does the ontological structure of experience have to do with the unconscious? Some would argue, nothing. After all, psychoanalysis is concerned with exploring the unconscious whereas Heidegger's conception of phenomenology is devoted to the revelation of Being through the critique of one's experience. Despite what Freud said about the ego "no longer being

the master of its own house," experience nevertheless plays a vital role in Freud's conception of analysis and the conflicts that patients typically suffer. Basically, Freud believed that our capacity to bear painful experience (*Erlebnis*) as children goes a long way in determining whether we will develop neurotic symptoms, or worse, when we grow up. This is actually a Heideggerian conception of experience, though Freud never knew this. According to Freud, if a child is faced with an experience that is too painful to bear, the child simply represses it from consciousness, making the child's experience of frustration disappear. As Freud realized, it isn't the actual experience of frustration that is repressed but the *knowledge* (or as Heidegger would say, the "interpretation" of what one takes the case to be) of the incident that elicited the experience in the first place; hence, after this piece of knowledge (i.e., interpretation) is suppressed, the individual continues to experience moments of sadness or anxiety, for example, but has forgotten why. The only problem with this solution is that the repressed memory finds an alternate means of expression that transforms it into a symptom, which the adult subsequently suffers and complains about, though the individual hasn't a clue what caused the symptom or what purpose it serves.

For Freud, the purpose of pathogenic symptoms is to shield the individual from experiencing a disappointment of traumatic proportions that the person who suffers the symptom (that replaced the original trauma) wants desperately to suppress. Since the disappointment in question was repressed (or disavowed, projected, etc.) but not entirely eradicated, the individual instinctively *avoids experiencing similar disappointments and anything that may serve to remind him of it in the future*. Analytic patients are loathe to risk disappointment because to really *be* disappointed is not only transformative, but necessarily painful. But such disappointments are transformative only and to the degree to which they are finally experienced at the heart of one's being, in the give-and-take of the treatment situation.

Just because one has a fleeting thought, idea, or intuition, for example, doesn't guarantee that one will have a full-throttle *experience* of it. The phenomenologist accounts for this phenomenon by suggesting that Freud's unconscious is nothing more than a *mode of thinking* (consciousness) that the patient is unaware of thinking. In other words, the patient has no experience of thinking the thoughts attributed to her because she failed to *hear* herself thinking the thoughts in question. At the moment such thoughts occurred, her mind was "somewhere else." The psychoanalyst says she was unconscious of what she was thinking, but the phenomenologist would say she simply failed to listen to, and hence experience, the thoughts in question, as they occurred to her.

Based on this hypothesis, psychoanalytic treatment is nothing more than an investigation into the patient's experience, suffered over the entirety of one's life. Hence, analysts seek to learn about the experiences (*Erfahrung*) that patients remember over the course of their history, just as they seek to understand the patient's experience of the analytic situation (*Erlebnis*) that

is, the patient's *experience of his or her relationship with the analyst*: the so-called transference phenomena. But analysts are also interested in eliciting what may be characterized as "lost" experience (what Heidegger would call potential experience) through the patient's free associations. Change comes about through the patient's ability to speak of his experience instead of concealing it, as he has in the past. In other words, giving voice to experience deepens it, but only if the experience elicited plunges the patient to the depths of his suffering.

CONCLUDING UNSCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT

What does Heidegger's emphasis on the ontological dimension of experience tell us about the psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious? Does it do away with it entirely or does it offer another way of conceiving it? How, in turn, does it relate to Sartre's distinction between reflective and pre-reflective consciousness? Are Heidegger's and Sartre's respective views compatible or are they hopelessly irreconcilable? And finally, is it possible to be "conscious" of something that one has no experience of, or is it necessary to experience something to know it, even "pre-reflectively"? Or contrariwise, is there a dimension to experience that one is not *aware* of experiencing, or is it essential to be conscious of experience to construe it as experience, as such, whether one is referring to *Erlebnis* or *Erfahrung*?

Recall that Sartre makes a distinction between *pre-reflective* consciousness and *reflective* consciousness (i.e., that which we ordinarily term *conscious awareness*). Even while Sartre is indecisive on this point, for Heidegger, Sartre's notion of pre-reflective consciousness only makes sense if it is conceived as a form of nascent awareness that is not immediately available to experience, properly speaking. Only when I *reflect on* my pre-reflective acts of consciousness am I capable of experiencing them and, hence, *be* with them. Thus, from a Heideggerian perspective, there is no such thing as "unconscious experience," despite the views of Melanie Klein, Wilfried Bion, Harry Stack Sullivan, and so on. If Sartre's conception of pre-reflective consciousness is simply another term for what Freud calls primary process thinking, then *the unconscious should be conceived as a form of consciousness that is not yet available to experience*; in other words, that which is un-available to experience is un-conscious.

As we saw earlier, Heidegger lost interest in exploring the distinctions between consciousness, awareness, and intentionality because he felt they were inadequate concepts for describing the nature of thought and why it is available to experience in some situations but not others. Thus, the capacity to experience is the final arbiter for what it means to inhabit the world and to be-in-the-world authentically, as the person I genuinely am, because experience, whatever form it assumes, is irrevocably *my own*. Heidegger finally rejected the primacy of consciousness because he was concerned with how

one comes to *be* who one is and the weight of guilt and anxiety that being oneself inevitably entails.

If Freud's conception of the unconscious is finally a scientific one, it is nevertheless imbued with ontological overtones that are evident, for example, when he characterizes the way we stumble on it in our dreams, parapraxes, and symptoms. From this perspective, the unconscious is nothing more than an algebraic "x" that serves to explain that which is not immediately given to experience. Moreover, one can discern parallels between Freud's and Sartre's (as well as Heidegger's) respective depictions of "two types of thinking" that, when treated phenomenologically, betray ontological connotations to Freud's intuitions, if not his theoretical conceptualizations. Thus, what Freud depicts as primary thought processes may be conceived as a version of Sartre's notion of pre-reflective consciousness, and what Freud depicts as secondary thought processes are editions of what Sartre terms reflective consciousness. Seen from this angle, the primary thought processes are a form of consciousness, but lack the *reflective* capacities that the ego is only capable of obtaining after the acquisition of language. Another way of understanding the distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erhfarung* is to conceive the former as a form of pre-verbal experience (i.e., the experience of the infant) whereas the latter pertains to the child's (and later, the adult's) capacity to reflect on his or her experience after having acquired the capacity for language. The child's ability to learn from experience will evolve and develop, just as the *capacity to experience* will also evolve, from the most primitive aspects of *Erlebnis* to the more sophisticated editions of *Erfahrung*. Thus, Freud's topographical and structural models are indeed scientific but only to the degree that psychoanalysis is a theoretical science that presumes to explain that which is inaccessible to experience. As a theoretical construct it may be accurate or not. We do not know, nor can we, whether and to what degree they are accurate, which probably explains why the history of psychoanalysis is littered with a seemingly endless array of alternative formulations to Freud's, each of which is just as feasible (or not) as the next. Whomever's theory one opts for (whether Klein's, Sullivan's, Bion's, or Lacan's, for example), however compelling or attractive or elegant it may be, it is still just as theoretical, abstract, and impossible to prove (or disprove) as Freud's.

From Heidegger's ontological perspective, the unconscious is not a theoretical construct, nor is it "in" my head, but "out" *there*, in the world, a dimension of Being. Hence it is my abode, my past, and my destiny converged, so that "I," the one for whom the unconscious comes into Being, am simply the experience of this tripartite intersection. We apprehend it as an enigma, a dimension of our existence that lies hidden one moment, then slips into view the next, only to disappear again, in perpetuity. If our only access to it is through the vehicle of interpretation, it is not the interpretation (i.e., "translation") of this or that psychoanalytic theory into a language of the consensus, but the kind of interpretation we render each moment of

our lives, by virtue of giving things a name and a significance. This is because everything we are capable of experiencing conveys meaning, and the only way to understand what something means is to determine what it means for *me*, when it is experienced and how.

Consequently, the unconscious is never unconscious for me, but a living presence in my world. This is why the purpose of analysis is not to simply “know” the unconscious, but to return the analytic patient to the ground of an experience that was lost, in order to finally claim it, as his or her own.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this chapter was presented as the Presidential Address at the Eleventh Annual Interdisciplinary Conference of the International Federation for Psychoanalytic Education, Chicago Illinois, November 4, 2000.

2. J. Grotstein. *Who Is the Dreamer Who Dreams the Dream?* (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 2000).

3. S. Freud. *Totem and Taboo. S.E.*, 13:1–161 (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 159.

4. S. Leavy. *In The Image of God: A Psychoanalyst's View* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 8.

5. S. Freud. Case of a Successful Treatment by Hypnosis. *S.E.*, 1:115–128 (London: Hogarth Press, 1966).

6. Leavy, *op. cit.*, 12n.

7. H. W. Hoewald. *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 152–153.

8. For a more thorough treatment of Freud's conception of psychic reality see Thompson, 1994, 1–50.

9. S. Freud. Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning. *S.E.*, 12:215–226 (London: Hogarth Press, 1958).

10. *Ibid.*, 219.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. C. Rycroft. *Imagination and Reality* (New York: International Universities Press, 1968), 102–113.

16. Quoted in Rycroft, *ibid.*, 102–103.

17. *Ibid.*, 103.

18. *Ibid.*

19. J.-P. Sartre. *Existential Psychoanalysis* Hazel Barnes, trans. (Washington, D. C.: Regnary Gateway 1981).

20. J.-P. Sartre. *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* Philip Mairet, trans. (London: Methuen and Co., 1962), 48–55.

21. J.-P. Sartre. *Existential Psychoanalysis*, *op. cit.*, 153–171.

22. J.-P. Sartre. *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Forest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick, trans. (New York: Noonday Press, 1957), 48–49.

23. *Ibid.*

24. See Thompson, 2000b, for a discussion on the skeptical dimension to Heidegger's and Freud's respective conceptions of the human condition.
25. S. Leavy. *The Psychoanalytic Dialogue* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).
26. S. Leavy, 1988, op. cit.
27. R. D. Laing. *The Divided Self* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960).
28. R. D. Laing. *Self and Others*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969).
29. E. Levenson. *The Fallacy of Understanding: An Inquiry into the Changing Structure of Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Basic Books, 1972).
30. E. Levenson. *The Ambiguity of Change: An Inquiry into the Nature of Psychoanalytic Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
31. E. Levenson. *The Purloined Self: Interpersonal Perspectives in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Contemporary Psychoanalysis Books, 1991).
32. D. B. Stern. *Unformulated Experience: From Dissociation to Imagination in Psychoanalysis* (Hillsdale, NJ and London: The Analytic Press, 1997).
33. P. Bromberg. *Standing in the Spaces: Essays on Clinical Process, Trauma, and Dissociation* (Hillsdale, NJ and London: The Analytic Press, 1998).
34. R. Langan. The Depth of the Field, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 29, No. 4 (October 1993).
35. H. W. Loewald. *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).
36. J. G. Gray. Introduction to *What Is Called Thinking?* by Martin Heidegger (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1968), x–xi.
37. J. Macquarrie. *Heidegger and Christianity* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1994), 77–78.
38. See Thompson, 1998 and 2000b, for a more detailed exploration of how Freud developed the principles of free association and neutrality.
39. See Medard Boss's account of Heidegger's take on Freud in Boss, 1988, 9–10.
40. See Thompson, 1996a, 1996b, and 2000b for a more detailed exploration of Freud's conception of free association and neutrality in light of the sceptic and phenomenological traditions.
41. R. D. Laing. (1960), op. cit.
42. R. D. Laing. (1969[1961]), op. cit.
43. The theme of experience preoccupied Laing throughout his lifetime. Two of his other books, *The Politics of Experience* (1967) and *The Voice of Experience* (1982), even contain the word experience in their titles. (See more on the history of experience in Western culture in Thompson, 2000a.)
44. R. D. Laing. (1969[1961]), op. cit., 8.
45. J. Mitchell. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 254.
46. Ibid.
47. R. D. Laing. (1969[1961]), op. cit., 12–13.
48. Ibid., 14–15.
49. M. Heidegger. (1977) On the Essence of Truth. In *Basic Writings*, David Farrell Krell, ed. (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1977), 113–142.

50. R. D. Laing, H. Phillipson, and A. R. Lee, A. R. *Interpersonal Perception: A Theory and a Method of Research* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966), 10–11.

51. Whereas Sartre would imply that pre-reflective consciousness is a form of experience (*Erlebnis*), Heidegger would argue that in order for knowledge to be available to experience it must be *thought*; hence, for Heidegger pre-reflective consciousness is not *experienced*, per se. For this reason Heidegger disputed the notion of *Erlebnis* as a feature of experience, properly speaking, although he would have no problem with employing this term so long as it connotes an act that is *reflectively* conscious to the person at the moment it is experienced. For more on this see Heidegger, 1970.

52. M. Jay. *The Crisis of Experience in a Post-Subjective Age*. Public Lecture, University of California, Berkeley, CA, November 14, 1998.

53. M. Heidegger. *On the Way to Language*, Peter D. Hertz, trans. (San Francisco: Harper and Row 1971), 57.

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