

Psychoanalysis in a New Light

GUNNAR KARLSSON



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Contents

	<i>Preface</i>	page ix
	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xviii
	<i>List of figures</i>	xix
1	Phenomenology and psychoanalysis	1
	On phenomenological philosophy	5
	The natural attitude and the phenomenological reductions	6
	The intentionality of consciousness	11
	Important points of connection between phenomenology and psychoanalysis	12
	Interest in the subjective	13
	The concepts of intentionality and meaning	14
	Interest in the latent	14
	The significance of reflection	15
	The value of openness	15
	The break with the 'common-sense attitude'	16
	Responsibility as an ethical principle	16
	The function of phenomenology in this work	18
	Summary	20
2	The life-world as the ground for sciences	21
	A critique of naturalism	23
	The grounding of natural science	26
	The origin of geometry	28
	From mathematical system to natural science	31
	The psychophysical paradigm	33
	The hierarchical organization of the sciences	35
	Summary	39
3	A critical examination of neuropsychanalysis	40
	Conceptualization of the body–mind problem	42

	A methodological comment concerning the correlation between body and mind	43
	An ontological comment concerning the correlation between body and mind	44
	The theory of dual-aspect monism	44
	The alleged epistemological function of neuroscience for psychoanalysis	50
	The description of subjective awareness	54
	Concluding remarks	61
	Summary	64
4	The conceptualization of the psychical in psychoanalysis	65
	About Freud's view on the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious	66
	The ego's conscious intending	70
	The distinguishing quality of the unconscious	76
	The pre-sexual conditions of the unconscious	80
	Self-consciousness and its significance for psychoanalysis	85
	Conclusion	90
	Summary	91
5	The libido as the core of the unconscious	93
	Sexuality in Freud's earliest works	94
	The development of the drive theory	100
	Freud's characterization of sexuality	106
	The structure of drives	109
	Life drives versus death drives	112
	The id and the unconscious	114
	Summary	116
6	The grounding of libido in the life-world experience	117
	Some characteristics of life-world experiences	119
	The lived body in ill health	126
	The sexual experience in the life-world and its relation to the concept of libido in psychoanalysis	128
	The bodily character of sexual experience	129

	The intrinsic character of sexual experience	132
	The now-character of sexual experience	134
	Sexual experience's gravitation towards the unbounded	136
	The libido – the construction of sexuality	139
	Summary	141
7	Beyond the pleasure principle: the affirmation of existence	143
	On Freud's <i>Beyond the pleasure principle</i>	144
	Discussion about death drives – binding of energy – temporalization	152
	Further reflections on the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious	158
	Summary	160
8	The question of truth claims in psychoanalysis	162
	Part 1: Historical background	163
	On Freud's view	163
	On the post-Freudian development	167
	On Bion's transformations	172
	Part 2: Sketching a solution	175
	On the constructed character of the unconscious	175
	The integration of construction, reconstruction, and historical and narrative truth	178
	Integration of construction and reconstruction: a constructed reconstruction	179
	The narrative logic of the constructed reconstruction	181
	The historical validity of the constructed reconstruction	181
	Consciousness/self-consciousness and the integration of reconstruction, construction, and historical and narrative truth	185
	Summary	189
	<i>Concluding remarks</i>	191
	<i>References</i>	194
	<i>Index</i>	205

Preface

Know thyself

Inscription at Delphi

Don't be ashamed that you are human, be proud!

Within you, vault opens up behind vault ad infinitum.

Never will you be finished, and that's as it ought to be.

Tomas Tranströmer

For the living and the dead

Psychoanalysis has been pronounced dead a number of times, despite its short history within the scientific field of study. Psychoanalysis has not only been dismissed due to its alleged lack of scientific character. Per Magnus Johansson (1997: 10) provides a sample of some of the other types of accusations that have been made against the psychoanalytic method:

Psychoanalysis has, during its hundred year old history ... among other things, been accused of: pansexualism, encouraging sexual frivolity, being a Jewish science, for possibly being more suitable to the people of Southern Europe, but hardly applicable to those living in Northern Europe. It has also been assumed to be suitable to the Nordic population but not the Latin. Psychoanalysis has been criticised for exclusively analysing and being applicable to upper-class women, and for being captive to an oppressive patriarchal system, for being a bourgeois science. It has also been criticised for being too time-consuming and expensive, for being unscientific and for not having any evident therapeutic effect, and even for being harmful and dangerous.

The scientific status of psychoanalysis deserves an in-depth discussion. It is indeed a complex science. I hope that this book can be

viewed as a contribution to the discussion of the scientific nature of psychoanalysis. What is its scientific domain? What constitutes this scientific domain? What truth claims does it maintain? These are some of the main topics I will discuss in my book. I have not based my discussion on an evaluation of the scientific and/or therapeutic effectiveness of psychoanalysis. Such research on psychoanalysis is valuable, but has its limits if one wishes to understand the nature of psychoanalysis. The basis of my work has been to examine instead the actual psychoanalytic process (what actually happens in the psychoanalytic interaction between the analysand and the analyst) as a scientific project – that is to say, research project – namely psychoanalytic research. Psychoanalytic research, roughly described, strives towards self-knowledge. I thus wish to discuss the scientific domain, conditions for and character of psychoanalysis/psychoanalytic research.

I have to some extent borrowed from phenomenological philosophy in order to carry out this task. Phenomenology as a philosophical movement is approximately as old as psychoanalysis, founded by the philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Psychoanalysis and phenomenology belong to the dominating traditions of thought that were developed during the twentieth century. There has been a certain amount of discussion between the two traditions, but these two exciting and sophisticated sciences have not had as much to do with each other as would have been expected. By taking some of the phenomenological ways of thinking into consideration, I believe that psychoanalysis could achieve a more profound self-understanding as a science.

In [chapter 1](#) I will discuss the relationship between phenomenology and psychoanalysis in general. A brief introduction to phenomenology and some of its main concepts will be provided. I will identify a number of points in common that allow for a fruitful interchange between them. In this book, phenomenological philosophy and its theory of knowledge will assist in the understanding of psychoanalysis, its scientific domain and its conditions.

Chapter 2 deals with the issue of how scientific descriptions of the world are preceded by as well as preconditioned by everyday experiences. Husserl has given this prescientific experience of the world the term 'life-world'. The life-world, in other words, is the world we are born into and in which we grow up. The life-world is of epistemological importance to the phenomenologist, as it constitutes the foundation from which sciences can be constructed. The life-world cannot be reduced to purely (natural) scientific descriptions, as the so-called 'naturalistic attitude' seeks to accomplish. The chapter contains a critique of naturalism, the idea that the natural scientific descriptions of the world are descriptions of an objective reality, independent of the subject/man. In the naturalistic attitude, the primordially of the life-world, both logically and chronologically, is neglected in relation to the natural scientific method of describing the world. Through the use of Husserl's phenomenological reflection, I will argue for the primordially of the life-world in relation to natural scientific descriptions of the world. The chapter is important for two reasons. Firstly, it clarifies the overarching function of phenomenology in this book. Secondly, the chapter provides background for the critical examination of a neuropsychanalytic project conducted in the following chapter.

The relationship between psychoanalysis and biology has been debated, and one can find various ideas among psychoanalysts regarding the question of the relevance of natural scientific biology for psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic practice. The question is complex and in chapter 3 I will limit myself to critically examining a neuropsychanalytic project that encompasses a discussion on the age-old philosophical problem of the relationship between body and mind, as well as the creation of a new discipline: neuropsychanalysis. Neuropsychanalysis claims to show a way out of the dead end that traditional (non-neurological) psychoanalysis has supposedly found itself in. My examination of *The brain and the inner world* (Solms and Turnbull 2002), in particular, demonstrates that neuropsychanalysis suffers from a variety of problems – among others,

serious self-contradictions. In accordance with the background of [chapter 2](#), in which I argue in favour of the epistemological priority of the life-world in relationship to the (natural) sciences, neuropsychanalysis as examined in [chapter 3](#) shows itself to be an example of a naturalistic attitude. According to the naturalistic attitude, one does not do justice to subjectivity or life-world experiences. These have a tendency to be reduced to natural scientific descriptions, in this case clothed as the unconscious.

After examining this (neuro)psychoanalysis, it is deemed urgent to find an appropriate starting point for the examination of the domain of psychoanalysis, not least the unconscious. [Chapter 4](#) contains a discussion on the psychoanalytic conceptualization of the psychical in psychoanalysis and attempts to discuss the conditions for and the character of the unconscious. In my view, it is important that an investigation of what the unconscious is starts where the unconscious reveals itself in clinical practice. This is where the issue of consciousness enters, since the psychoanalytic process begins with the conscious self-understanding of the analysand and moves forward through the use of conscious validations of interpretations made in relation to the unconscious.

In order to understand what the unconscious is, we must understand what essentially characterizes consciousness, and here we can make use of phenomenological analyses of consciousness. In phenomenology, the essence of consciousness is that it is intentional (meaning-bestowing). My thesis, discussed in the chapter, is that the unconscious, in its most radical form, breaks with the synthesizing function of consciousness. The unconscious has a dissolving character and shows itself as something contrary to and foreign in relation to the conscious intending of the ego. I concur with the French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche's (b.1924) ideas of the unconscious as untamed and wild, as it is expressed in Freud's id (*Das Es*) or Laplanche's own original version of the death drive.

Furthermore, my argument is that the unconscious can only emerge given certain pre-sexual prerequisites, in the form of a

self-contained bodily ego. The unconscious can be said to be positioned in between something I call ‘the ego’s conscious intending’ and a rudimentary body-ego experiencing. The thoughts introduced in [chapter 4](#) are developed in the following chapters. Concerning the unconscious and its basically libidinal character, these thoughts are further developed in [chapters 5](#) and [6](#), and in [chapter 7](#) I return to the ideas concerning the pre-sexual conditions of the unconscious.

In [chapter 5](#), Freud’s theory of drives is discussed.¹ Sexuality has played the central role in Freud’s theoretical work from the very beginning. The libido or sexual drives can be said to be the core of the unconscious according to Freud. However, sexuality is not everything, and therefore psychoanalytically it should be understood in relation to a counter-force of sexuality – for example, the ego or the ego-/self-preservative drives. In this chapter I attempt to show that Freud’s characterization of sexuality differs from the conventional notion of sexuality as a natural condition limited to an adult heterosexual genital relationship. According to Freud, sexuality must be considered in a broader context and infantile sexuality must be taken into account. Furthermore, I argue that the libido concept, or the sexual drives, should not be understood as experienced sexuality, or even as possible to experience. The concept of libido should rather be understood as a theoretical construction, and as such expresses itself most clearly in Freud’s economic, energy point of view.

The unconscious in its most radical, constructed character can be captured through the use of different descriptions. We can think of such important concepts as Freud’s pleasure principle and its striving towards the immediate discharge of energy; the Nirvana principle, where the energy of the drives aims at a discharge to point zero; or Freud’s death drives as Laplanche has interpreted them. Laplanche

¹ For Freud’s German concept *Trieb*, I have chosen throughout the book to use the word ‘drive’ rather than ‘instinct’ (as is often the case in English psychoanalytic texts). However, when quoting English texts – for example, Strachey’s translation of Freud’s Collected Works – I comply with the text in question, even though this has meant rendering *Trieb* as ‘instinct’.

argues that the death drive belongs to sexuality when it functions according to the principle of free energy. Such a description reminds us of Freud's wild and untamed id, which is part of Freud's structural theory. Laplanche means that Freud provides a deeper understanding of the unconscious with the help of the id. My point is that these different ways of seeking to grasp the unconscious are idealized, theoretical constructions.

An important idea presented in [chapter 5](#), which later provides the starting point of [chapter 6](#), is that Freud's view on sexuality is not based solely on his clinical practices. For Freud, the importance of sexuality in psychopathology – and in life in general – had the character of a vision (May 1999), which he attempted to verify in his scientific work during his lifetime. This is an idea that I will explore further and develop in [chapter 6](#), where I argue that Freud's constructed libido (or the sexual drives) is founded in prescientific sexual life-world experiences.

[Chapter 6](#) fulfils an epistemological function in the sense that the psychoanalytic concept of libido is founded in the sexual life-world experiences. The theoretical concept of libido becomes comprehensible by identifying its roots in the life-world experiences and by illuminating the measures/achievements that are required for moving from experienced sexuality to the theoretical construction of libido, which psychoanalysis uses in its project. In this chapter, certain characteristics of the life-world are described phenomenologically, such as how this experience of the life-world 'normally' appears to us, as well as a form of life-world experience that differs from the 'normal' experience of the life-world, namely experiences of injuries and illness. These different types of life-world experiences then function as the ground against which the conscious sexual experience of the life-world can be delineated. It is on the basis of this unique character of the sexual life-world experience that the psychoanalytic concept of libido can be constructed. The libido, or sexual drive, provides psychoanalysis with a perspective from which the subjective life can be understood and explained.

Chapter 7 returns to a theme discussed in chapter 4, namely the psychic achievements that are the conditions for the unconscious system governed by the pleasure principle. The vantage point of the discussion in chapter 7 is Freud's essay *Beyond the pleasure principle*, written in 1920, after he had come to the realization – on the basis of everyday as well as clinical experiences – that the pleasure principle is not universally prevailing in the psychical apparatus. Freud postulated in this essay something that is beyond the pleasure principle, which gradually came to be understood as the death drive. It is in this essay that Freud discussed the death drive for the first time and his last theory of the drive was presented. The essay is complicated and contradictory, but interesting, and it has given rise to various interpretations.

It seems to me that one can sense two conflicting meanings of the death drive in Freud's essay. It is the first meaning that Freud discusses initially, which has to do with the compulsion to repeat, which I give particular importance to in chapter 7. From an economic metapsychological point of view, the compulsion to repeat is about the binding of energy, which thus expresses something completely contrary to the death drive's discharge of energy, which is the other interpretation one can find in the essay. My idea is that what is beyond the pleasure principle – or, better expressed, that which is prior to the pleasure principle – is an affirmation of existence, which I discussed in chapter 4. This is a prerequisite for the activity of the pleasure principle. The discharge of energy is better qualified for the term 'death drive' and is, as mentioned above, the other meaning that can be found in Freud's essay. The essay is distinguished by the fact that Freud attempts to ground the death drive in biology, in a highly speculative manner. In my interpretation of the compulsion to repeat and death drives, I will instead make use of phenomenological insights regarding time.

Scientific activity seeks to obtain knowledge and find truths. I have made the assumption throughout this book that the concrete psychoanalytic process, consisting of the analyst and the analysand,

is a scientific project and not solely a psychological treatment. Concrete psychoanalysis is about gaining self-knowledge and finding truths about oneself. We are thereby confronted with the question of what kind of truth concept is applicable to the concrete psychoanalytic project. As I pointed out initially, there are different ideas regarding the scientific status of psychoanalysis. Given that one conceives of it as a science, there are many opinions about what kind of science it is. Bearing this in mind, it is hardly surprising that consensus is lacking as to what truth concept could be applicable to the psychoanalytic project.

In [chapter 8](#) I deal with the topic of the truth concept in psychoanalysis. The discussion evolves around the two conceptual pairs: construction – reconstruction and historical truth – narrative truth. In the first part of the chapter, these concepts are discussed from a historical context, focusing on Freud's point of view, the narrative tradition in psychoanalysis and a few of Wilfred Bion's (1897–1979) ideas. It is obvious that these three specific traditions encompass different views on the truth concept in psychoanalysis. The view of the narrative tradition differs significantly from Freud's idea that the task of psychoanalysis is to reconstruct historical truths. Within the narrative tradition, one rejects the possibility of saying something that is historically valid concerning the life of the analysand. The task of psychoanalysis, instead, is to construct convincing truth narratives. Bion's idea of invariant transformations can be interpreted as a third alternative regarding the relation between construction and reconstruction. Construction and reconstruction are not seen as incompatible concepts; rather, the reconstruction of psychoanalysis – or, in Bion's terminology, 'invariant transformation' – cannot be achieved without a psychoanalytically constructing perspective.

Bion's position is a challenging starting point for the second part of the chapter, in which I attempt to integrate the concepts of reconstruction and construction, as well as historical truth and truth narratives. I argue that the unconscious, captured through the use of a psychoanalytic construction, must be integrated with the

analysand's reconstruction of his/her life story. The psychoanalytic project enables the analysand to create a new story that claims historical validity. It is important in this context, however, not to perceive the term 'historical' in an objectivistic manner, as if it were a question of disclosing objective historical facts. It is instead suggested that the connection between 'the-past-as-it-was-experienced-in-the-past' and 'the-past-as-understood-from-the-present' can be understood in terms of 'fusion of horizons', an expression borrowed from the philosopher and hermeneutist Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002).

1 Phenomenology and psychoanalysis

At first sight it may appear as if phenomenology and psychoanalysis are opposites. The phenomenological project is concerned with studying consciousness, whereas the field of investigation for psychoanalysis is the unconscious. Freud (1900: 613) describes the unconscious as ‘the true psychological reality’, and in a well-known metaphor the role of consciousness is limited to the top of an iceberg. One can, in fact, ask: what do these sciences have to do with one another? This question can be answered in different ways. The aim of this book is to discuss the field of psychoanalysis and its basis as science, and for that purpose I believe that phenomenology has the greatest relevance. The impression that phenomenology and psychoanalysis are antithetical changes when one considers the dependence on consciousness for psychoanalytic practice. Psychoanalysis cannot liberate itself from consciousness, owing, among other things, to the fact that the psychoanalytic process both begins with the self-understanding of the analysand and is driven by means of conscious validations and verifications of interpretations of the unconscious. And clinical experience is an important basis when one attempts to characterize the field of psychoanalysis and its scientific ground.

In this chapter I will discuss briefly how I conceive of the relationship between phenomenology and psychoanalysis, and say something about how phenomenology will be used in this work. For the reader who is not familiar with phenomenology, this chapter can serve as an introduction to phenomenological philosophy.¹

¹ The literature about phenomenology is vast. The classical introductory work about the phenomenological movement is Spiegelberg’s (1982) *The phenomenological movement. A historical introduction*. Other examples of works of an introductory kind are Sokolowski’s (2000) *Introduction to phenomenology* and Zahavi’s (2003) *Husserl’s phenomenology*.

From a historical perspective there are some interesting similarities between those two movements. Their undisputed founders were contemporaries, born in the same region of Europe, in Moravia, which at that time belonged to the Habsburg empire. Sigmund Freud was born in 1856 and died in 1939. Edmund Husserl lived between 1859 and 1938. Both were Jews, even though Husserl converted to Protestantism. The first full-fledged psychoanalytic work and the first phenomenological work were published at about the same time; Freud's *The interpretation of dreams* was published in 1900 and Husserl's *Logical investigations* was published in two volumes in 1900–1 (Husserl 1970/1900–1). Both Freud and Husserl attended lectures given by the philosopher Franz Brentano (1838–1917), whose influence on Husserl is apparent and significant, while his influence on Freud is unclear but possibly subtle (cf. Cohen 2002). Both psychoanalysis and phenomenology have developed into movements with different branches, a fact that will be reflected in this work. Different representatives for these two scientific movements inspire my analyses, albeit Freud and Husserl hold central positions.

In spite of these historical similarities and their comprehensive production, Freud and Husserl had not much to say about each other. Freud never mentioned Husserl or his phenomenological philosophy in his works. Freud referred to Franz Brentano, who was an important influence for Husserl, in a note in his *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious* (1905a: 31–2, n. 6), and then as someone who had composed some kind of riddles from syllables. Husserl made a brief mention of Freud. On the whole, the interest in psychoanalysis for the first generation of phenomenologists was quite insignificant, which stands in sharp contrast to the later generation of French phenomenologists.

As already mentioned, there is little comment on Freudian ideas in Husserl's work. Among other things, there are a couple of references in Husserl's (1970/1936a) last and unfinished work. The meaning of these references is that the problem with 'the unconscious' also belonged to the problem of transcendental constitution

(p. 188), that is to say, that philosophical project which absorbed his interest at the time. Further on in this work there is a discussion (p. 237) about ‘unconscious’ intentionalities that had been revealed by ‘depth psychology’. Here, repressed emotions of love, of humiliation and of resentment are also mentioned as fields for phenomenological psychology. Besides, there is a somewhat developed and, in my eyes, more interesting point of view in the discussion about ‘the problem of the unconscious’, written by Husserl’s disciple Eugen Fink (1905–75), and placed as an appendix (Husserl 1970/1936b). In particular, Fink argues for the importance of a thorough analysis of consciousness before being able to determine adequately the character of the unconscious. Spiegelberg (1972: 136) points out that the German philosophical phenomenology only had a superficial and casual contact with psychoanalysis – not due to a hostile attitude but rather a difference of interest. With Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), however, in the posthumously published *Zollikon seminars* (2001), one can trace a hostile attitude to psychoanalysis, specifically in his critique of Freud’s metapsychology. Heidegger paid attention to the difference – which for him appears to be a contradiction – between Freud’s mechanistic and deterministic metapsychology and psychoanalytic treatment’s emphasis on liberating the analysand.

The French phenomenological philosophers, however, have shown much more interest in psychoanalysis than the older generation of German phenomenologists. Paul Ricoeur’s (1913–2005) comprehensive Freud essay is in a class by itself (Ricoeur 1970). Ricoeur, who conceives of psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic science, takes his vantage point from language philosophy containing several levels of meaning. The psychoanalytic level concerns the ‘semantics of desire’, whose manifest linguistic expressions are distorted. The relationship of psychoanalysis to language contrasts with a ‘phenomenology of religion’, which is naïve in relation to the unconscious and where the language is not considered to be distorted, but to manifest something holy that is in need of revelation. When it comes to the psychoanalytic project of interpretation, Ricoeur stresses that

psychoanalysis consists of a mixed discourse. Together with a hermeneutic language (meaning, interpretation, representation, and so on), there is quasi-physical energy language (cathexis, discharge, quantity, and so on). It is the distinctive feature of psychoanalysis to comprise this mixed discourse. Even if psychoanalysis incorporates a quasi-physical energy language in the interpretation of meaning, it does not make psychoanalysis into a natural science. It remains, according to Ricoeur, a hermeneutical science, where the quasi-physical language is subordinated to the dimension of meaning. In a later work, Ricoeur (1977) discusses the conditions for validation in psychoanalysis. In line with Ricoeur's *Freud and philosophy: an essay on interpretation* (1970), he argues that psychoanalysis is an interpretive science which, when it comes to the validating procedure, must differentiate itself from the validation in terms of observations that are used in the natural scientifically oriented social sciences. The truth claim of psychoanalysis and the possibility of verification/falsification are based on the narrative character of the psychoanalytic process.

A couple of other French philosophers and phenomenologists need to be mentioned. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61) was basically sympathetic towards psychoanalysis (for example, 1962/1945, 1963/1942), but was critical of it in two respects (Bullington 1998). In the first place, he objected to Freud's economic point of view concerning the drive energy, which to him entailed an objectification of the human being. In the second place, he considered the psychoanalytic idea about an unconscious as 'idealistic', in the sense that it postulated the unconscious as something transcendent, as something outside the world. For him there was nothing but the incarnated subject who is in the world. Merleau-Ponty took upon himself the task of reinterpreting several important psychoanalytic concepts (for example, libido, repression, discharge), in terms that are in line with his idea about incarnated subjectivity.

Finally, some words about Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905–80) logical critique of Freud's idea about the unconscious and its censorship

are appropriate here. Sartre (1956/1942) claimed that it is logically impossible to postulate a censorship whose character is such that it knows what to keep away from consciousness. He launched an 'existential psychoanalysis' whose task was to disclose a person's fundamental choice. In this version of the investigating mind there was no room for anything unconscious; instead he proposed something called 'bad faith' (*mauvaise foi*), which is a chosen, inauthentic strategy of action, which can be described roughly as a choice not to conceive of oneself as a free choosing subject. Whether this concept avoids the logic critique that Sartre directed at Freud's concept about a censorship of the unconscious, however, is debatable.

ON PHENOMENOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

Here I will mention, very briefly, some essential characteristics of phenomenology, whose influence on twentieth-century philosophy is significant and has also been of importance for the social sciences. Phenomenology thus originates from the works of the philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl. The task of phenomenology was to study the meaning/significance/essence of a phenomenon. But its relevance was not to be limited to the study of specific philosophical questions in the strict sense, but to work as an epistemological ground for other sciences. The concept 'phenomenology' contains two terms: 'phenomenon' (from the Greek *phainomenon*), which means that which appears/that which shows itself, and 'logy' from *logos*, which in this context can be translated as law/structure/essence. The field of study for phenomenology is thus 'that which appears'/'that which shows itself', and that which appears or shows itself can be anything – for example, perceptual experiences, cognitive processes, emotional experiences, aesthetic experiences or religious experiences. The task of phenomenology is to study the *logos* of phenomenon – in other words, those conditions that are presupposed in order for it to be the phenomenon that it is or is experienced to be. The aim of phenomenology to describe the essence of a phenomenon has to do with identifying and clarifying

the necessary conditions for it to be what it is. When we say the necessary conditions, we mean the conditions that are required for the subjective experience.

Phenomenology is a philosophy of subjectivity and consciousness. To give a simple example:² What is the essence of ‘the perception of a table’? Phenomenologically, this question is answered by studying this perceptual experience and those characteristics or constituents that must be there in this specific experience, in order for it to be a perceptual experience of a table. Each specific experience includes both a contingency – that is, a particularity – and a principal structure, its *eidōs* or essence. The perception of the table at which I sit and work consists of things that are contingent – for example, the brown colour of the table – which do not affect the principal structure (the essence) of the table. The table would remain a table even if it were to be painted red. Colour does not belong to a table’s essence. However, in the specific experience there is also a ‘grasping’ of a necessary, principal structure, that which makes me experience it as a table (‘the tableness’). It must have a certain consistency, a certain height; I must be able to put things on it, and so on. The necessary or principal structure is, in other words, the structure that is needed in order for it to be what it is.

The natural attitude and the phenomenological reductions

Within the framework for his project, Husserl developed different methodological options that are called ‘the phenomenological reductions’. The term reduction is not to be confused with reductionism – that is, the project to reduce a phenomenon by explaining it by means of a less complex structure, as is the case when psychology is reduced to biology, biology to chemistry, and so on. The credo of phenomenology is precisely the opposite, namely to be faithful

² The examples are chosen for pedagogical reasons, with the purpose of illustrating certain ideas. The phenomena that have been studied by phenomenologists are not experiences of banal objects, but important epistemological questions, which will be evident in the next chapter.

to the experience as it shows itself for the subject (human being). Husserl's three most salient reductions (and I do not make any more subtle distinction between reduction and the so-called "epoché") are *phenomenological psychological reduction*, *phenomenological transcendental reduction* and *eidetic reduction through imaginative variation*. These reductions must be understood against the background of our common, everyday experience of the world.

Husserl has called the attitude which characterizes this everyday experience the 'natural attitude' (Husserl 1962/1913). The natural attitude is the naïve, uncritical attitude to the world. The aspect which Husserl stresses most of all in the natural attitude is the *belief* in (taken for grantedness of) the existence of the world. The object that I see in front of me shows/presents itself as existing *independently* of my perception of it. In this attitude, the world presents itself as a world filled with objects totally independent of the perceiving human being. The natural attitude is a description of our spontaneous, unreflective way of being in the world; when transformed uncritically into a philosophical position it becomes a naïve realistic epistemology, in which the world is exactly the way one sees it, independently of one's perception.³

The first two reductions (phenomenological psychological reduction and phenomenological transcendental reduction) are reminiscent of each other in the sense that they try to bracket our everyday attitude (the so-called natural attitude), where we always implicitly

³ In the psychoanalytic literature there are plenty of expressions of a realistic epistemology. The realistic epistemology exists in different variants. Apart from naïve realism, we have an epistemological realism with respect to the descriptions of science – for example, in postulating that the theoretical concepts of physics (quarks, molecules, etc.) possess an existence independent of the (researcher) subject. The realism in its different variants is objectivistic, in the sense that the characteristics of the object allegedly belong to the object, independent of the subject. In [chapter 2](#) I will critically discuss this kind of realism from the vantage point of Husserl's phenomenology, and in [chapter 3](#) I will discuss an orientation within psychoanalysis, which embraces an epistemological realism. It is obvious that the concept of reality is too briefly and poorly treated in psychoanalytic literature (see Wallerstein 1983, 1985). The concept is rarely problematized and when statements are made they are often of a realistic character.

take the world as existing independently of consciousness. In the natural attitude the achievement or work that consciousness brings about in order for a world to be present is hidden. The world appears as if ready-made and determined, and our experience as if caused by external, independent stimuli. In order to discover the work of consciousness at all, a radical break with this natural attitude is necessary. We must break with our unreflected belief in the existence of the world, in order to reflect on how the phenomenon is given in and through consciousness. For phenomenology the world is nothing that exists independently of us, but the appearance of the world presupposes consciousness and the subject. In the natural attitude we neglect the conditions of consciousness and the subject for the possibility of a world. But in the phenomenological attitude, under the phenomenological reduction, we discover and clarify the link or correspondence between the subject and the world.

Apart from the suspension or bracketing of the belief in the world, the phenomenological reduction implies a bracketing of different systems that attempt to explain the phenomenon. In other words, we set aside theories, sciences, and so on, which try to explain the phenomenon. We are not supposed to explain the phenomenon with something external to the phenomenon in question. The point with the phenomenological reduction is to make us open and unprejudiced towards that which is given in experience. Here we can refrain from the difference between the phenomenological psychological reduction and the more far-reaching transcendental reduction, which brackets not only the world, but also that-in-the-world, including empirical ego.

The phenomenological reduction attempts to answer the following question: how is it *possible* that I experience, for example, the table in front of me as existing, independently of my perception of it? Such a question cannot be answered merely by stating: because the table exists. Suppose I ask the following: how is it *possible* that I experience the table in front of me as existing independently of my perception of it, whereas I do not experience the after-image

from a camera flash as existing independently of my looking at it? To answer such a question by stating that the table exists, whereas the after-image does not exist in reality, would not be to answer the question. That would be begging the question. The question about how something is *possible* forces us to reflect on how it is experienced for consciousness. The existence of the world cannot then be presupposed, but we must try to describe the conditions or the possibilities for that which actually exists. This question 'raises' us to an ontological level, which tries to clarify the necessary conditions for the (experience of) existence.

Here, I have attempted to point out the connection between the phenomenological reduction and the question of how something is possible – the ontological question. The phenomenological reduction tries to bracket our belief (judgement, or what is taken for granted) in the existence of the world, with the purpose of making possible an investigation of *how* the object is given in and through consciousness. The bracketing of the existential judgement – the reduction – is not to be understood as a kind of Cartesian doubt. It is not that I doubt the existence of the table; rather, the point is that the belief in its existence has to be clarified. As was shown above, as well as the suspension of the existential judgement, the phenomenological question entails a bracketing of all other theories, systems and sciences that try to explain the experience of the phenomenon. The phenomenological researcher strives to describe the phenomenon as free from preconceived ideas as possible.⁴

Let us now move on to 'the eidetic reduction through imaginative variation'. This can be described as the methodological option that aims to go from the particular to the essential (*eidōs* = essence). This is achieved by freely varying parameters (characteristics) of a real or fantasized example of the phenomenon. Thus, one searches for the essential traits that make a phenomenon what it

⁴ The emphasis on openness that is so important for phenomenology has great similarities with the open attitude of psychoanalysis as it is expressed in Freud's 'evenly suspended attention' and in Bion's 'without memory and desire'.

is. Let us take as an example the phenomenon of 'kindness'. As a point of departure, I take a situation when I am shopping in a store, I am short of time, and a man perceives my pressed predicament and offers to let me stand in front of him in the queue to pay. This experience of being treated in a kind way entails both accidental factors and the essential constituents that make it into an experience of kindness. In the phenomenological reflection, the accidental factors are not reckoned with – for example, that it was a man who showed the kindness or that it was in a grocery store that the kindness was manifested. The phenomenological reflection, on the other hand, aims at making explicit or thematic the (essential) constituents that make it into the experience that it is – in my example, an experience of kindness and nothing else. Without being able to carry out a real phenomenological analysis of this phenomenon here (that presumably is much more complex than one may think at first), we can have a feeling that the essential constituents involve, for example, that the person who exercises the kind act is a subject who carries out an intentional act (a robot cannot be kind) and that there are no ulterior motives behind this act (for example, that it is carried out in order to make me feel pressed to do a favour in return). Thus, the purpose of the eidetic reduction is to articulate those constituents that are essential for the experience of kindness, without which they would not be an act of kindness, and leave aside such accidental traits that happen to be part of this particular case of kindness.

The phenomenological attitude thus aims at making us open to that which is given in and through consciousness, which is achieved by means of the phenomenological reduction's (transcendental or phenomenological-psychological) break with our natural attitude. The eidetic reduction can thereafter be carried out with the purpose of articulating the essence of the phenomenon being studied.

Earlier, I said that the natural attitude conceals the work, the achievement that consciousness brings about in order for a world to be present to us. The phenomenological reductions that are to liberate us from the naïveté of the natural attitude in relationship to

the world (the naïve realism) thus open up a new field where the achievement of consciousness and 'part' in the creation (meaning bestowing) of the world is uncovered. The epistemological position of phenomenology can be described neither as traditional idealism (that the subject in its own majesty is the source of knowledge) nor as traditional realism (that the character of the object of knowledge is completely independent of the subject). Expressed in terms of the concept of intentionality, phenomenology maintains the indissoluble relationship between subject and object. And it is within the phenomenological reduction that we can discover intentionality – that is, the meaning bestowing of consciousness. Intentionality is the cornerstone of phenomenology and the analysis of it is complex and sophisticated. Here I will say a few words about it.

The intentionality of consciousness

For phenomenology, consciousness is, in its essence, intentional. Husserl inherited the concept of intentionality from his teacher Franz Brentano. Intentionality was the most characteristic trait of the mental in Brentano's characterization of mental and physical phenomena. Psychology was a science of mental life, while natural science studied physical phenomena. The 'directness' of the intentional acts of consciousness was the specific distinguishing mark for psychical phenomena, which means, for example, that in 'presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on' (Brentano 1973/1874: 88). Husserl took over and modified, deepened and developed Brentano's concept of intentionality.

Roughly speaking, the concept of intentionality is about the meaning bestowing of consciousness. Intentionality has to do with meaning. The meaning of something – the meant – is dependent on a subjective attitude, a subjective way of being. The experience always stands in a relationship to an experiencing. Consciousness (the psyche) is always consciousness of something. The acts of consciousness 'go beyond' themselves and constitute (meaning bestow)

the object or the world. The world for the human being is first and foremost meaningful. Merleau-Ponty expresses the fundamental significance of meaning when he claims that ‘we are *condemned to meaning*’ (1962/1945: xix; italics in the original). The concept of intentionality implies a rejection of the idea that there would be objective facts, *independent* of a subject/subjective understanding/consciousness. The objectively given fact is always presented in relationship to a subject/something subjective, to a specific subjective attitude, which is the condition to be able to speak about ‘something’ as an objective fact. Such a non-dualistic point of view implies that subject and object are not two entities independent of each other, but that they are interwoven through intentionality.

It should be acknowledged that the concept of intentionality or meaning is not a simple concept. Perhaps one difficulty is due to the fact that meaning, so to speak, is too close to us. We are too impregnated by it, like the air we breathe. Meaning bestowing, like understanding, is a concept that essentially characterizes human beings. Its ubiquitous presence contributes to the difficulty in making its significance explicit. The phenomenological exposition of the concept of intentionality is thus very complex and implies in the deepest sense an analysis of the subject’s temporality.

IMPORTANT POINTS OF CONNECTION BETWEEN PHENOMENOLOGY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

It is important to respect the essential differences that exist between psychoanalysis and phenomenology. Psychoanalysis is an empirical science that studies psychic reality, including the unconscious.⁵

⁵ It is unfortunately not uncommon that the terms ‘empiric(al)’ and ‘empiricism/empiricistic’ are confused when psychoanalysis as a science is discussed. Empirical science means that its field of study concerns real entities. In the case of psychoanalysis, it concerns actual existing people (analysands). Empiricism/empiricistic are terms that refer to an epistemological point of view in which it is claimed that all knowledge is based on experience, and ‘experience’ is often understood in a very limited way, tantamount to observable and measurable. My point of view is that psychoanalysis is an empirical science (and not only a psychological treatment), but that an empiricistic epistemological ideal is not

Phenomenology can be seen as a philosophical, epistemological-ontological project, which tries to describe conditions and presuppositions for different forms of existence. Later on in this chapter I will specify how phenomenology will be of help when discussing the foundation of psychoanalysis.

Even if phenomenology and psychoanalysis are two different types of scientific projects, they nevertheless have points of connection that are important as a point of departure for my work. Let me present seven points of connection between phenomenology and psychoanalysis and then include common traits as well as differences that can be found.

Interest in the subjective

Both psychoanalysis and phenomenology have the subjective as their field of study. Phenomenology attempts to describe the subject's experience of different phenomena – in other words, how the world shows itself in and through consciousness. In psychoanalysis also the interest is focused on the subjective experiencing of the analysand. Freud stressed many times that the field of psychoanalysis concerns psychical reality as opposed to material reality. But even if the subjective is a common interest, there are different levels of the subjective that are in focus for the respective science. The field of phenomenology is limited to the subject's conscious intending – that is, to be described as open and as presuppositionless as possible. When I say 'the subject's conscious intending', it should be understood in a broad sense and not be constrained to the explicit, thematic consciousness. Below (under the heading 'Interest in the latent'), I will pay attention to the fact that the concept of consciousness for phenomenology includes that which is given implicitly. Later on in the book it will become apparent that bodily awareness belongs to the concept of consciousness for phenomenology. The 'instance' in

germane to psychoanalysis. The phenomenological view is an alternative to an empiricistic (positivistic) epistemology.

the subject concept, which is the target for the unique interest of psychoanalysis, is the unconscious. Phenomenology in its reflection cannot, I maintain, reach this, but psychoanalysis does, by means of its method of free association.

The concepts of intentionality and meaning

Both phenomenology and psychoanalysis deal with meaning and intentionality. The concept of intentionality entails a subject's meaning bestowing of an object. The idea about the subject's intentionality is the cornerstone of phenomenology, even if it is conceptualized somewhat differently by phenomenologists. The concept of meaning is also central for psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is concerned with the distorted, illogical and pathological, that which appears meaningless, from the assumption that it has meaning, or rather, as I would like to express it, that it is possible to incorporate it into meaning. In the phenomenological project, the concept of meaning does not run into resistance. It is more complicated with psychoanalysis. In line with Ricoeur (1970), one can claim that psychoanalysis consists of a 'mixed discourse', where meaning may have to be transformed by explanation on the basis of a quasi-physical language. Here I will only conceptualize the tension that exists when one presupposes intentionality (interpreting meaning) at the same time as one assumes an unconscious whose character transcends or – to put it even more strongly – breaks with the subject's conscious intending (meaning bestowing). To try to clarify the unconscious is a mammoth task. Nevertheless, I will try to discuss its character and its relationship to consciousness, partly against the background of the concept of meaning (see [chapter 4](#)).

Interest in the latent

I mentioned above that phenomenology is focused on consciousness in a broad sense, including that which is given implicitly, even if it is not unconscious in the psychoanalytic sense of Freud's systematic unconscious. Thus, in a sense, both phenomenology and psychoanalysis are interested in the latent. They are not content with that which

is explicit, thematically conscious, but strive to uncover something 'beneath' the manifest. But the latency that phenomenology tries to uncover is carried out, roughly speaking, by means of reflections on the basis of the subject's intending. In order to approach the latency of psychoanalysis – the unconscious – a (theoretical or constructed) metapsychology is required. Ricoeur has discussed phenomenology from the vantage point of the terminology of psychoanalysis – a delicate task, but, nevertheless, one which may fulfil a certain function. He means that phenomenology studies consciousness and the pre-conscious, but not the unconscious.

The significance of reflection

The methodological procedure entails reflection on both psychoanalysis and phenomenology. The search for the essence of a phenomenon in phenomenology is carried out by means of a systematic reflection of something that is experienced. Also, in the psychoanalytic process, the reflection on the analysand's material by the analyst and the analysand constitutes a crucial moment in the psychoanalytic investigation/treatment. The Kleinian psychoanalyst R. Horacio Etchegoyen (b.1919) (1991: 549) has paid attention to certain similarities between the analysand's verbalization in the psychoanalytic process and Husserl's so-called eidetic reduction (even though I think it would be more appropriate to refer to Husserl's phenomenological reduction than to the eidetic reduction). Roughly speaking, one can describe the psychoanalytic process of acquiring knowledge as an oscillation between ordinary storytelling, free association and a higher degree of self-conscious reflection of one's experiences.

The value of openness

Both the phenomenological and the psychoanalytic processes of acquiring knowledge are based on openness. In phenomenology this value has been formulated in terms of 'back to the things themselves' (*Zu den Sachen selbst*) – that is, to try to be faithful to the phenomenon that we meet in as presuppositionless a way as possible.

Husserl developed the phenomenological reduction for the purpose of assuring oneself about this open attitude. In its investigation of the unconscious, psychoanalysis is dependent on theoretical constructions, but it does not hinder one from trying to be as open and un presupposing as possible in the psychoanalytic investigation. The importance of openness in psychoanalysis is emphasized more and more. That the psychoanalyst would have a kind of psychoanalytic screen through which the analysand's storytelling is filtered must certainly be considered as an outdated and scurrilous portrait of psychoanalysis. As I pointed out before, Bion's (1988) recommendation to the psychoanalyst to work 'without memory and desire' has gained great popularity (see n. 4 on p. 9).

The break with the 'common-sense attitude'

Both phenomenology and psychoanalysis represent, in a sense, a break with the everyday, instrumental, common-sense attitude. By 'common-sense attitude' is meant an everyday, uncritical, non-reflective way of being in the world. This attitude is captured in phenomenology by Husserl's expression 'the natural attitude' (see p. 7). It is the natural attitude that phenomenological reduction breaks with. The phenomenological attitude, under the reduction, opens up a field that was previously concealed. The basic rule of free association in psychoanalysis and the psychoanalytic frame also signifies a break with social everydayness, which makes it possible to get a grasp of the unconscious and to make it into a subject for investigation in a way that is not possible under ordinary daily circumstances. Thus, for both phenomenology and psychoanalysis, it is due to a break with the ingrained way of being in the world that it is possible to uncover previously hidden dimensions in our existence, even if these dimensions are not exactly the same for psychoanalysis and phenomenology.

Responsibility as an ethical principle

As a last and very important point of connection between phenomenology and psychoanalysis, one can mention that they both put

much faith in knowledge and self-knowledge as possessing a practical ethical value, and not only a theoretical value. Husserl talks about a striving for a responsible life that presupposes an insight into the subject's meaning-bestowing function. Knowledge acquires ethical implications, an idea that goes back to Socrates' view on the significance of philosophy as a way of living a rational and justified life. It may be surprising that Husserl (1956/1923–24, 1959/1923–24, 1970/1936a) put such an emphasis on this ethical dimension for phenomenology. Zahavi (2003: 67–8; italics in the original) writes that Husserl's motive for philosophizing:

is not primarily a theoretical motivation, but a practical, or more precisely an *ethical* one – the ethical striving for a life in absolute self-responsibility ... Husserl speaks of an evidence-based self-responsible life that the phenomenological search for a transcendental foundation makes possible. To live in the phenomenological attitude is not a neutral impersonal occupation, but a praxis of decisive personal and existential significance.

And further on (p. 68; italics in the original):

what is decisive for Husserl is not the *possession* of absolute truth, but the very *attempt* to live a life in absolute self-responsibility, that is, the very attempt to base one's thoughts and deeds on as much insight as possible. And, as Husserl states in one of his still unpublished manuscripts, the self-responsibility of the individual also entails a responsibility for the community. Self-responsibility is fully realizable only in relation to other subjects.

Husserl's philosophical motive for philosophizing would easily qualify as a motive for undergoing psychoanalysis. The ethos of psychoanalysis is also the idea that the analysand's gaining of self-knowledge will make her/him freer to choose and recognize a real responsibility for her/his acts and her/his experiences.

THE FUNCTION OF PHENOMENOLOGY IN THIS WORK

I would now like to say something about how I will use phenomenology in my aim to discuss the scientific foundation of psychoanalysis and its conceptualization of its field of study, the psychical. Phenomenology is a philosophy that presents an epistemological attitude and epistemological ideas, which I will take advantage of. Husserl had the idea that philosophy was to be a science and not, for example, a system of subjective life views. His idea was that phenomenology was to assume this scientific task in philosophy. And he also expressed the idea that phenomenology was even a rigorous science, in the sense that it was not to proceed on the basis of non-analysed conditions, which is the fate of all other sciences, empirical and ideal (Husserl 1965/1910–11). Psychoanalysis is an empirical science, whose field of study is the subject's psychical – not least unconscious – life. A psychoanalysis in search of an epistemological-ontological basis can in this sense take advantage of phenomenological philosophy.

In general, I would like to stress that the project is not about 'phenomenologizing', to make phenomenology out of psychoanalysis, in the form, for example, of 'Dasein-analysis' (Binswanger 1975; Boss 1979) or Sartre's (1956/1942) 'existential psychoanalysis'. I am sceptical of these forms of synthesizing between psychoanalysis and phenomenology, since they risk neglecting the unconscious of psychoanalysis. I am anxious to keep the boundary between phenomenology and psychoanalysis clear. Phenomenology can in no way replace psychoanalysis. Neither is my intention to carry out a dialogue between the two sciences, in which they would give and take from each other. The searchlight will be directed at psychoanalysis, and phenomenology will mainly have an assisting function in my discussion of psychoanalysis.

Even if I think that phenomenology is of great help in order to understand what psychoanalysis is, my analysis of the conditions of the unconscious will rather stress the principal difference that exists between psychoanalysis and phenomenology. Phenomenology

does not study the unconscious of psychoanalysis – such an aim is reserved for psychoanalysis. However, phenomenology can help in illuminating the conditions for the possibility of something like the unconscious (see [chapter 4](#)).

The overall function of phenomenology in this work is thus of an epistemological-ontological kind. There is an idea in Husserl's thinking that is more clearly spelt out in the next chapter, namely that all sciences are preceded by and, in a certain sense, conditioned by prescientific experiences – in other words, the sciences are grounded in prescientific experiences of the world which Husserl (in particular at the end of his life) came to talk about as the life-world (*Lebenswelt*). Scientific achievements must always be understood against the background of the prescientifically given life-world and by means of phenomenological investigations of life-world experiences. Phenomenology has a general epistemological function to serve for the sciences. The abstract, theoretical constructions in sciences should, in a true scientific spirit, be justified by pointing out their basis in the subjective life-world experience, which can thereby be subject to a critical and systematic investigation. Husserl (1980/1912: 69) could express this idea in the following way: 'Phenomenology in our sense is the science of "origins", of the "mothers" of all cognition; and it is the maternal-ground of all philosophical method: to this ground and to the work in it, everything leads back.'

Apart from this general phenomenological, epistemological point of departure, certain more specific themes in psychoanalytic theory will be elucidated by means of phenomenological thoughts and reflections. These concern themes that are of great clinical relevance, but which have not been satisfactorily investigated in psychoanalysis, nor acquired an adequate place within psychoanalytic theorization. Examples of such themes are the experiences of existence and self-consciousness. These concepts that have been subject to thorough investigations in phenomenology are neglected in the psychoanalytic theory. My hope is that phenomenology will make a contribution to building a firmer bridge between psychoanalytic

theory (including the metapsychology) and clinical practice, and thereby make psychoanalytic theory and practice more solid and scientifically cogent.

SUMMARY

This chapter concerns the relationship between phenomenology and psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis has, among phenomenologists, been received with various levels of interest; some have been enthusiastic, while others have been sceptical and perceived that psychoanalysis, for example, conceives of the human being in too mechanistic a way. Interest in phenomenology among psychoanalysts has usually been limited. My point of view is that there is sufficient common ground of values between them in order for psychoanalysis to benefit from taking part in phenomenological reflections. In this chapter, seven points of connection between phenomenology and psychoanalysis have been identified; these are common traits that nevertheless can entail differences. The points of connection are the following: interest in the subjective, the concepts of intentionality and meaning, interest in the latent, the significance of reflection, the value of openness, the break with the common-sense attitude, and responsibility as an ethical principle.

In this work it is the psychoanalytic conceptualization of the psychical and its scientific ground that are in focus. The task of phenomenology is to help psychoanalysis in its striving to be a cogent science – that is, to help psychoanalysis to be grounded in one adequate (for its purposes and conditions) epistemology. This can be said to be the overall function of phenomenology in this work. In addition, in the discussion concerning more specific themes in psychoanalytic theorization, phenomenological ideas and reflection will be of help.