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5 Existentialism, Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy

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Existentialism and psychoanalysis are often seen to be in opposition. However, although there are surely differences, existentialism, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy all share a common quest, problematic, and terrain. This shared domain addresses fundamental questions as to the nature of the human condition, including issues such as anxiety, choice, responsibility, alienation, freedom, agency, life, death, relationships, experience and subjectivity. They investigate ethics: the question of how best to live, given the nature of human subjectivity. The existential response to the past century's record of massive and rapid change and unsettling of verities, including religion in the West, meld clearly with the same problems that psychoanalysis and psychotherapy address.

As Rollo May suggested, the attitude that existential analysis was 'an encroachment of philosophy into psychiatry, and does not have much to do with science' was 'partly a hang-over of the culturally inherited scars from the battle of the last of the nineteenth century when psychological science won its freedom from metaphysics' (May, 1958, p. 8). The period around 1913 when Karl Jaspers published his classic *General Psychopathology* reflected a turning point in psychiatry, which had mainly been entrenched in biological paradigms. Now taking account of the 'whole person', psychiatry was becoming 'fundamentally historic and temporal, interpersonally orientated, and affirming of human freedom' (Wertz, 2006, p. 402). The idea that social or sexual maladjustment were no longer deemed sufficient to explain psychological illness was an important seed for the existential psychology movement. This movement arose spontaneously in different parts of Europe with diverse contributors sometimes unaware of each other's work.

R. D. Laing credited Eugène Minkowski (1885–1972) with being the first psychiatrist to have seriously attempted to 'reconstruct the other person's lived experience' (Laing, 1963, p. 207). Minkowski, drawing on Henri Bergson, created the expression 'lived time', which refers to being able to differentiate past, present and future, and of the priority of time over space. He also stressed the importance of meeting reality through 'vital contact', again reflecting Bergson's *élan vital* (see Spiegelberg, 1972, pp. 243–6).

Two main schools of psychotherapy were founded by existentialists: one by followers of Heidegger, and one by followers of Sartre. Swiss psychiatrists Ludwig Binswanger and Medard Boss were the two major Heideggerian figures, while Scottish psychiatrist and psychoanalyst R. D. Laing followed Sartre (although he also drew from other figures including Martin Buber, Rollo May and Heidegger). There was also Logotherapy, an existential therapy founded by Viktor Frankl, highlighted in the title of his well-known 1946 book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, which was an account of his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp where he found a 'will to meaning', which in life was the foremost human urge. According to him this concept went way beyond his Viennese compatriots Nietszche ('will to power') and Freud ('will to pleasure') (Frankl, 2006).

Ludwig Binswanger (1881–1966), the founder of the major approach in existential psychiatry, observed that the existential movement in psychiatry arose from rejecting the idea that psychiatry should deal just with 'mentally ill man' rather than with 'man as such'. It was based on Heidegger's idea that man was not to be explained by any theory, whether mechanistic, biological or psychological (May, 1958, p. 3). It dealt with human nature itself, which meant that illness needed to be understood at least partly in terms of human agency. Some of the main concepts Binswanger adopted from Heidegger were the *Umwelt*, *Mitwelt* and *Eigenwelt* (the physical, social and personal worlds).

Medard Boss (1903–1990) extended Heidegger's concepts of past, present and future as primary Heideggerian 'existential structures'. From this he elaborated his main existential concerns of human space and time (i.e. shared rather than individual existence), the body projecting itself forth, and the use of associations to describe a mood or 'attunement'. He understood dreams as reflective of one's state of being, the way that certain aspects of life are illuminated or not, rather than as representing specific unconscious wishes or archetypes. In general, for Boss, we do not so much interpret the world as have it reveal itself to the light of *Dasein*. Light and darkness are central metaphors: psychopathology is a choice to live in darkness, and therapy brings enlightenment of an aspect of life that has not previously been illuminated.

American psychologist and psychoanalyst Rollo May (1909–1994) made a substantial contribution to the dissemination of existential ideas in the Anglophone world. He introduced English-speaking readers to the ideas of continental thinkers beyond Sartre (who was already known via the route of his novels and plays). In 1958 May, together with Ernest Angel and Henri Ellenberger, edited a landmark book, *Existence*, that introduced the existential-phenomenological psychology of Binswanger, Minkowski and others to the United States. The book included translations of Binswanger's 1946 ground-breaking articles, 'The Existential Analysis School of Thought' (1946) and 'The Case of Ellen West' (1944) (May et al., 1958). May's influence was such that he is

often referred to as the father of existential psychotherapy. May's ideas often overlapped with Binswanger, but he wanted to reconcile existential psychology with humanism and Freudian psychoanalysis in the United States. He introduced new and reframed some existing existentialist concepts, as is revealed from the titles of his best-selling books, including *Love and Will*, *Power and Innocence*, *Freedom and Destiny*, *The Courage to Create*, and *The Discovery of Being*.

R. D. Laing (1927–1989) argued for greater social intelligibility of schizophrenia, not for a complete explanation in social terms. Laing preferred the dentist to use his or her scientific 'look' in examining his teeth, but emphasized the inappropriateness of the exclusive use of such a 'look' by a doctor at childbirth. The emphasis on the primacy of experience is as a redress to simply looking at outcomes or effects. As Laing argued in *The Divided Self*, science deals with what is appropriate to it. So the science-based art of dentistry, for example, studies teeth and their relation to the mouth. But the study of a mental illness deals with the attributes of mind, however 'mind' is defined. This does not imply Descartes's total separation of mind and body, which function on different principles. Laing was a psychiatrist who always assumed a role for biology, and was influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's more holistic position that we are 'embodied subjects'.

A science, as Laing pointed out, deals with the area appropriate to it. Understanding human actions properly begins from a standpoint of a 'science of persons', as first outlined in *The Divided Self*. This starting-point is the apprehension of the personal, as a self-acting agent who always chooses, whether he or she likes it or not. Laing's commandment: Always treat a person as an agent, a choosing being, not a thing. The point of view of Martin Buber's 'I–thou' division as opposed to 'I–it' is central in *The Divided Self*, and it continued to underpin Laing's further work. If we treat somebody as a 'thou', they are likely to behave very differently from if we treat them as an 'it'. This view was at the root of Laing's critique of psychiatry, which so often treated persons as processes instead of agents.

Nonetheless, in this, as in so much else, Laing essentially follows Sartre. Laing kept very careful and copious notes on his minutely detailed reading of *Being and Nothingness*. Laing, together with his anti-psychiatry colleague David Cooper, summarized three major later works of Sartre as *Reason and Violence*. Like Sartre, Laing's approach starts from the existential–phenomenological premise that consciousness is always consciousness of something, that it cannot be seen just as an 'in itself', but is always directed and in relation to something or someone. Laing's primary apprehension is that the person cannot be reduced to a thing as the person is always choosing and deciding, while a thing does not. A decision is not causally determined but is the action of an agent. That intuition is shared by both psychoanalysts and existentialists: for psychoanalysts our actions may have an unconscious motivation that might be investigated so

as to bring it into conscious control; for existentialists, we may be denying our role in what is happening and need to recognize it.

In *The Schizoid World of Jean-Paul Sartre and R. D. Laing* (Kirsner, 2003), I emphasized how very much both Sartre and Laing centred on context and on situating the problems of acting meaningfully within it. As inherently social beings, we are always in significant relationships with others. Social phenomenology is an application of phenomenology that provides more detailed understanding of social relationships.

Existentialism emphasizes the nature of humans as actively choosing beings born into a world they did not choose. For existentialists generally, we cannot choose not to choose and are responsible for the results of our actions. Generally, we are oriented towards future action; we are agents who cannot avoid choosing futures we often do not see. Existentialists tend to view human beings as operating in continuing crisis, who need to constantly question conventional or received notions of what constitutes the best life. But the best life is not a universally agreed one, nor is it restricted to particular reasonably stable cultures. Philosophies of existence attempt to understand our identity and how we can and how we should act in a social and physical context that is not of our choosing and most often is not benign. These philosophies viewed the human condition as a question that the individual needed to address themselves in their own being without recourse to covering generalizations from either theology or science. There was a new focus on individual experience as connected to the nature of the life-world. There was a particular emphasis on the ethic of the self, how and why we choose our world, what the parameters of choice are, and the nature of authentic and inauthentic action.

For many, including philosophers who had not properly separated philosophy from theology, the source of meaning could be viewed as deriving from God. Others considered God and meaning independent. But atheistic existentialism, of which Sartre was the leading proponent, put them together, holding that values derive from the consequences of there being no God:

> If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. (Sartre, 1975, p. 349)

Thus for the existentialists, there is no intrinsic human nature. Whatever our identities, they are formed by our interactions with the outside world. We are our choices, as Sartre wrote in *Being and Nothingness*. We are judged by actions and not intentions. So for Sartre biology is a foundation but not a determinant of action. Albert Camus held that life is absurd and that there is no transcendent reason for living, though we are condemned to the consciousness and the hopelessness of this situation. The one thing we can do is rebel, to be clear-sighted

and not succumb to our fate. Like Sartre, Camus at bottom promotes a Sisyphean freedom of not allowing the self to be dominated and controlled by outside forces. This is the setting or stage on which we act with our freedom, and that we cannot escape. But there is a human condition into which we are 'thrown', as Heidegger asserted, involving the parameters of life and death, of lack of control of a destiny that we nonetheless steer. We dwell in a 'clearing' which is a space that enables experience to be created and to become meaningful (Heidegger, 1962, p. 113).

The existentialist understanding of freedom is both optimistic and pessimistic. On the one hand, it is optimistic insofar as we can make the world or at least ourselves according to our designs. On the other hand, we cannot escape the freedom and thus we bear full responsibility for our actions. Rather than having a given make-up that determines our actions, we make our own essence. It is an active process that is not reducible to external or biological factors. Instead of being *given* meaning, we *create* meaning ourselves. No matter what the arguments or evidence for or against an action, it is ultimately the result of an ineffable decision that we make only on the basis of reasons; our decisions are not *caused* by them. The decision is our responsibility and involves our being-in-the-world: consciousness is always consciousness *of* something and is intentional. A decision implies an intuitive experience which involves phenomenology and not physical reality.

Along with Sartre's concept of *mauvaise foi*, self-deception (sometimes misleadingly translated as 'bad faith'), where people attempted to escape their freedom by treating themselves or others as objects instead of subjects, the nature of Sartre's 'for itself' or 'existence' is that this being is always in question, whether or not we want to admit it. The only restriction on individual freedom is that, as Sartre proposed in *Being and Nothingness*, we are 'condemned to be free', so we are not free not to be free. Deception restricts freedom by not revealing the true situation on which to freely decide upon action. For Sartre, it is essential to endeavour to be clear about what is going on, taking into account the many personal, social and environmental factors that make for this particular situation's occurrence. This involves the fine detail of the settings of the stage upon which actions are undertaken. Understanding particular actions demands that one analyse the biological and social settings within which actions are undertaken.

Sartre developed his own theory of psychotherapy, which he called 'existential psychoanalysis'. Sartre's existential psychoanalysis was based on finding the original choice that a person makes of his or her life, rather than an original trauma (as Sartre would have it that Freud sought). Instead of pursuing how a person was impacted upon by biology, relationships or circumstances, it sought individual meaning in a person's orientation of their actions towards the future as part of a project. Existential psychoanalysis tried to understand the

circumstances within which the individual actor then makes a decision in view of his or her own goals. It was an attempt to understand the context in which the ineffable decision-making process takes place by seeing how the individual experiences the situation and acts so as to go beyond it in terms of his or her own goals. For Sartre, we are not lumps of clay, and what is important is not what people have made of us 'but what we ourselves make of what they have made of us' (Sartre, 1964, p. 584).

In the case of the writer Jean Genet, Sartre sought to understand how Genet transcended his situation as an orphan who seemed destined to become a thief when he was discovered stealing something. Sartre surmised that Genet rejected the identity as a thief and decided to become a writer at that moment (Sartre, 1964, p. 2). For Sartre, our freedom was such that we could see it most clearly when we are in chains. During the Algerian War of independence from France in the 1950s, the French–Algerian journalist and political activist Henri Alleg turned the tables on his French Army torturers by refusing to accept that he had to give in at any given moment. For Sartre, who wrote a preface to Alleg's account of his torture, this was an exemplary case of an existential hero because he refused to be what he was defined to be as an essence and rather showed his irreducible existence (see Alleg, 2006).

Existentialism has been a response to, and rejection of, scientistic materialism and mechanistic approaches to the nature of human existence. Nonetheless, the philosophies of existence have acted as *correctives to* reductionist biological or mechanistic understanding of human action, and inevitably these models were based upon the presuppositions of individual freedom and responsibility. They stress the ineffable human element in creating action, particularly each individual's role. Sociological factors may lay the conditions for actions but do not determine them. For existentialists, there is always room for choice, however, little that may be. So they have a model of the human mind that begins with the individual who is not completely subsumed by biological or social factors. Or even where these are paramount, existentialists will follow the role played by individual choice in understanding the particularity of human actions within these contexts, including how human beings can treat themselves as being determined, as having no choices. They focus then on the nature of the human condition.

There was a space where existentialism fitted a need for the insertion of an active individual attitude that was not mechanistic and which recognized individual experience and responsibility. Dominant models for understanding action did not see humans as starting as active, creative beings but instead determined cogs in religious or mechanistic wheels. For all the vagueness of many existential philosophies, the fact that the language used is deliberately humanistic and not mechanistic is a step forward towards truly human psychology. Binswanger was convinced that traditional scientific methods hid rather than revealed what was going on in the patient (May, 1958, p. 8).

Laing argued that a rigorous 'science of persons' was necessary in contrast to natural science medical approaches. As Laing put it in *The Divided Self*:

It seems extraordinary that whereas the physical and biological sciences of it-processes have generally won the day . . . an authentic science of persons has hardly got started by reason of the inveterate tendency to depersonalize or reify persons. People who experience themselves as automata . . . are rightly regarded as crazy. Yet why do we not regard a theory that seeks to transmute persons into automata or animals as equally crazy? (Laing, 1960, p. 23)

Laing always stuck with this theme, and quoted the physicist and theologian C. F. von Weizsacker, who wrote in the last paragraph of his book, *The History of Nature*, that '[t]he scientific and technical world of modern man is the result of his daring enterprise, knowledge without love' (1949, p. 190). To which Laing added: 'Chilling. I cannot see how knowledge without love can yield a knowledge of love; how a heartless method, yielding heartless results can do anything but explain away the heart' (Laing, 1976, pp. 151–2).

In his excellent introduction to the pivotal volume *Existence*, titled, 'The Origins of the Existential Movement in Psychology', May described the issue in this way:

The existentialists are centrally concerned with rediscovering the living person amid the compartmentalization and dehumanization of modern culture, and in order to do this they engage in depth psychological analysis. Their concern is not with isolated psychological reactions in themselves but rather with the psychological being of the living man who is doing the explaining. That is to say, they use psychological terms with an ontological meaning. (May, 1958, pp. 14–15)

Some existential philosophers mistakenly included Freud and psychoanalysis within the mechanistic and scientistic approaches they criticized. Yet, as I shall now argue, psychoanalysis at base investigated the ineffable at least as much as the existentialists did.

An important response to the past century's upheavals and uncertainties came from Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the founder of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is the first form of psychodynamic psychotherapy and was inaugurated in the dialogue between Freud's colleague, Josef Breuer and the first psychoanalytic patient, 'Anna O', who dubbed the process the 'talking cure'. Psychoanalysis linked unconscious motivation with individual experience and neurosis, mass behaviour, and questions of life and death. Freud attempted to answer similar fundamental philosophical questions about the

character of human nature, also focusing on individual experience and identity.

Psychoanalysis was often regarded as scientific or medical on the model of the natural sciences and Freud's models of human beings were seen as reductionistic, mechanistic and medical. On one version of psychoanalysis that was dominant during the rise of existentialism, these involved scientistic models of energy and force, such as hydraulic or economic models of sexual and aggressive impulses vying for fulfilment of pleasure and destruction. The official English translation for the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* of Freud's term *trieb* as 'instinct' (instead of the more correct 'drive') indicated the scientistic bent of the translators, as did the mistranslation of ordinary German terms *Das Es, Das Ich* and *Das Über-Ich* as the quasi-technical terms 'id', 'ego' and 'superego' (instead of 'it', 'I' and 'over-I') (for more instances, see Kirsner, 2007). By contrast, Lacan rendered Freud's motto, '*wo es war, soll ich werden*' – often translated as 'Where id was ego shall be' – as instead 'Where it was I shall become' (Žižek, 2007). The Latinizations make Freud's intent seem more technical than philosophical. The scientistic bent is in line with the translator, James Strachey's direct comment in the 'General Preface' to the *Standard Edition*:

> The imaginary model which I have always kept before me is of the writings of some English man of science of wide education born in the middle of the nineteenth century. And I should like, in an explanatory and no patriotic spirit, to emphasize the word 'English'. (Strachey, 1966, p. xix)

Thus the translation ills add to the ambiguities that German philosopher Jürgen Habermas labelled as Freud's 'scientistic self-misunderstanding of metapsychology' (Habermas, 1971, p. 246). Metapsychology describes the general abstract theoretical framework of the operation of the psyche. At this level, as a child of his time, Freud did not fully understand his discovery of psychoanalysis as really a hermeneutic inquiry, seeking to understand the meaning of human actions.

Thus, perhaps the important philosophical dimension of Freud's thinking has been obscured by the way he couched his discoveries in the scientific terms of his time. However, many have argued that his discoveries were more in the realm of meanings than of causes (Rycroft, 1966), or that his language combined that of physical energy and that of subjective desires; what he called 'force' and 'meaning' (Ricouer, 1970). This hermeneutic view was in tandem with philosophical traditions, including existentialism. As Canadian psychoanalyst and philosopher Jon Mills asserted:

> in the end, existentialism remains a multitudinous set of precepts, some systematized, but mainly recalcitrant to systematic reduction. But one

irrefutable premise is that we as subjective agents are never static or inert creatures; rather we are a process of becoming, an observation made by the ancients from Heraclitus to Lao-tzu. One could argue that psychoanalysis has always been an existential enterprise, and nowhere do we see this more poignantly realized than in Freud. Freud's entire metapsychology could be said to be an existential treatise on the scope, breadth, and limits to human freedom. Freud was profoundly engaged with the questions of life and death, determinism and choice, self and other, alienation and causality, so much so that his mature model of the mind is none other than a return to the Greek concept of the soul. (2003, pp. 272–3)

From the perspective of 'force', of the quantitative or energetic side of psycho-analysis that gave it a scientific facade and acceptance, it is understandable why psychoanalysis appeared to existentialists as treating human beings as though they were mindless machines. Sartre rejected Freud in terms of his attack on consciousness as pre-eminent, which meant, Sartre thought, that freedom and self-determination were undermined. For their part, such rejection did not endear existentialists to psychoanalysts, especially in the United States (Mills, 2003, p. 272). Existentialism appeared more humanistic and less authoritarian and mechanistic than psychoanalysis, and truer to experience.

If there is no essential or intrinsic human nature that determines our actions, how can this relate to psychoanalysis, which stresses how embedded we are in our natures (e.g. the Oedipus Complex, the Pleasure Principle, sexuality)? Do our drives control us? Are we our drives? One problem here is the way the question is framed. Are we something 'beyond' our biology? Descartes's dual-istic division of consciousness and physical extension, the mind and the body, has bedevilled modern philosophy and extended to some twentieth-century existentialists, particularly Sartre. This approach assumes our wishes and drives are part of our physical biological make-up, whereas our thinking is mental. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who are influenced by a differ-ent existential thinker, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, this folk theory asserts that since our essence is to think, therefore, our minds are disembodied 'and there-fore what makes us human has nothing to do with our bodies' (1999, p. 401). However, this idea of essences is questionable as it does not see human beings or the world as systems. It can be seen to be part of a 'bewitchment of language' in which words which are used to name things appear to thereby confer some substance of their own. Thus, because we can say the word 'mind', we may assume it refers to real processes. Because we can distinguish 'it' from 'the body' in words, this may convey the appearance of necessarily quite separate entities. Freud did not take this separated view when he understood the way the unconscious mind functioned in relation to the conscious and outer world. Sex-uality was not just a bodily mechanism but was an essential part of being

human. The mind/body distinction takes a particular assumption that because we can distance ourselves from a concept, we are, therefore, not part of it – as Descartes did by doubting everything and arriving at the view that 'I think therefore I am'.

Sartre arguably made such an error in criticizing Freudian psychoanalysis as involving 'a lie without a liar': he thought that the idea of the agency of censorship of conscious ideas meant that the person had to know what was being censored in order to censor it. Sartre proposed the idea of *mauvaise foi* to understand why people denied aspects of their own freedom and treated themselves as things rather than as choosing beings. One main form of bad faith involved treating oneself as an object, as a thing that has no choice. Sartre described three main patterns of self-deception that meant that a person was treating himself or herself or others as objects, as though they had no choice. These were ways of trying to evade our inescapable freedom which we cannot escape. For Sartre, we are 'condemned to be free'. According to Sartre, we can be understood as having 'existence' or 'essence' – following Descartes's ideas about the non-mental. This distinction was made in *Being and Nothingness* as between 'being-for-itself' and 'being-in-itself'. Irving Yalom encapsulated Sartre's goals and approach to therapy as 'Sartre considered it his project to liberate individuals from bad faith and to help them assume responsibility' (Yalom, 1980, p. 222).

The norm in nineteenth-century psychiatry was containment in asylums. But psychoanalysis involved a new turn: listening to the patient for meaning instead of simply noting external symptoms. This was because for Freud the mind was not equivalent to consciousness and was the study of the unconscious and its relationships with the rest of the mind and the outer world. Although for Freud unconscious mental activity played a crucial role in human behaviour, this did not imply that choice was not involved.

Insofar as psychoanalysis is about unacknowledged agency and intention, it shares much with existentialism. Unless Freud's theory is viewed as materialistic, it can be seen as being about choice, albeit unconscious. The idea of 'unconscious choice' is a contradiction in terms only if 'choice' is defined from the outset as being necessarily conscious. Freud proposed two hypotheses that were 'an insult to the entire world'. The first was that the psychical is not equivalent to the conscious, and the conscious mind was only a portion of mental processes. The other was that sexual drives play a crucial part in the formation of mental illness (Freud, 1961, pp. 21–2). Psychoanalysis is a means of uncovering what we don't know we know (see Eisold, 2010). This implies a psychodynamic view of mind. Repression involved having blotted out the memory of the memory so that it is inaccessible and seemingly non-existent. Although Freud himself took his sexual aetiology to be the fundamental ground, other schools of psychoanalysis (e.g. Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, Melanie Klein, Donald Winnicott) adopted different views.

Existentialism, Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy

Psychoanalysts did not know the unconscious of their patients. It is not for the analyst to tell the patient what to think. Freud's approach was exploratory. He insisted on continuing to ask questions even when the path appeared to have ended. The meaning or meanings of the unconscious may not be found, especially where the wishes rest in the end on a decision. The term 'decision' comes from the Latin *decidere*, 'to cut off'. Difficulties are resolved 'at a stroke' so that it is a matter of agency, not determination. But that agency is itself individual, both in existentialism and in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis was the first systematic psychotherapy to focus upon unconscious action. Freud's German term *Unbewusst* had the sense of what is unbeknown to me; it implies unwitting behaviour. Insight is a desired quality shared by psychoanalysts and existentialists, as is the ultimately unknowable quality of subjective decision-making, as opposed to mechanistic calculation.

As outlined above, Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* worked towards what he labelled 'existential psychoanalysis', as applying the methods of psychoanalysis within the context of beings which are future orientated, because for Sartre psychoanalysis had no concept of the future. Psychoanalysis can be seen as a way of unblocking the influence of the past on the present and the future. It can be a way of liberating the individual from the control of unconscious wishes. The supposed antithesis between psychoanalysis and existentialism is erroneously conceived, as though psychoanalysis is somehow inimical to the idea of the importance of the future because of a focus on the past. But to the contrary, the revelation of the experienced history involves unlocking the patient from being stuck in the past. Freud discussed two patients who, he said,

> give us an impression of having been 'fixated' to a particular portion of their past, as though they could not manage to free themselves from it and were for that reason alienated from the present and the future. They then remained lodged in their illness in the sort of way in which in earlier days people retreated into a monastery in order to bear the burden there of their ill-fated lives. (Freud, 1963, p. 273)

The task of psychoanalysis is to understand the past so as to free the patient from it. The future then becomes possible to experience as a normal conflict between different wishes on the same psychological level instead of being a conflict where neurotic symptoms are expressions of the result of a psychic conflict between unconscious and conscious wishes.

Freud made an important point in defining neurosis:

> people usually overlook the one essential point – that the pathogenic conflict in neurotics is not to be confused with a normal struggle between mental

impulses both of which are on the same psychological footing. In the former case the dissention is between two powers, one of which has made its way to the stage of what is preconscious or conscious while the other has been held back at the stage of the unconscious. For that reason the conflict cannot be brought to an issue; the disputants can no more come to grips than, in the familiar simile, a polar bear and a whale. A true decision can only be reached when they both meet on the same ground. To make this possible is, I think, the sole task of our therapy. (Freud, 1963, p. 433)

In an earlier paper, Freud described the cure for neurosis as 'transforming your neurotic misery into common unhappiness. With a mental life that has been restored to health, you will be better armed against that unhappiness' (1955, p. 305). This marked a change of register from neurosis to normality, as in the normal struggle between two conscious wishes. Health for Freud did not mean happiness but rather the relative absence of neurosis in the sense that pathogenic unconscious wishes were not what were standing in the way of the fulfilment of important conscious goals.

If the unconscious is viewed as an entirely separate domain unlinked to the conscious aspects of the self except through physiological or mechanistic impulses, then there is a point to some existential critiques of Freud for having divided the self into two, wherein an energetic homunculus of the unconscious drives the conscious self. But while Freud emphasized the importance of the unconscious domain, he showed how it was connected with the conscious, how access could be gained via interpretation, free association, understanding of cultural, anthropological, literary and social phenomena, jokes, slips, and so on. Psychoanalysis provides other modes of access to unconscious desires, which are very much 'known unknown' parts of our dynamic selves. Conscious and unconscious are parts of a whole agent who can be more or less aware.

As University of Chicago philosopher and psychoanalyst Jonathan Lear has argued, the reality principle is not just an empirical read-out of reality. It is ethical. Freud is trying to explain 'psychological perturbations' on how neurotics live. Lear explains: 'that is, he sees people who are failing to flourish, and he sets out to give a psychological account of why that is. On his account, neurotics fail to live well because they themselves "turn away from reality"' (2005, p. 10). Lear asserted that for Freud neurotics are gripped by a 'psychologically organized orientation that actively distorts their ability to understand the world and their place in it'. Freud doesn't see pure cases of the pleasure principle or the reality principle at work but instead 'theoretical posits, whose joint and conflicted workings are supposed to explain what he does see: people living structured unhappy lives. The pleasure principle and the reality principle are there to explain why people are doing such a poor job answering the question of how to live' (Lear, 2005, p. 153). Lear asserts

that the master-complaint of his patients was 'in my own attempt to figure out how to live, something is going wrong' (p. 10). Lear argued further that:

> Freud was not well-placed to hear this master-complaint. He was a doctor and he conceived himself as engaged in scientific research. Just as a doctor probes for the hidden causes of physical diseases, so Freud took himself to be probing the unconscious for hidden meanings making the patient ill. With the benefit of hindsight, we can now see that a certain clinical brutality flows from this self-understanding . . . It also blinds him to the profound philosophical and ethical significance of his discoveries. (p. 10)

I have elsewhere suggested (Kirsner, 2006) that Freud was essentially ethical, that across the board from clinical to social theory as well as personally, he adopted a stoic approach.

I have been arguing that existential analysis and psychoanalysis are cut from the same cloth of attempting to define a fully personal ethical approach to studying human nature. Moreover, psychoanalysis was also very much part of the scene in the development of existential psychotherapy. Boss, for example, was a Freudian psychoanalyst, while Binswanger joined the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society at Freud's invitation, after Freud's split with Jung. Like psychoanalysis, existential psychiatry and psychology arose in response to a more general need in psychology and psychiatry (May, 1958, p. 4).

Binswanger combined psychotherapy with Heidegger's existentialism. Freud and Binswanger remained long-standing friends for the remainder of Freud's life. As Binswanger wrote to Freud's wife following Freud's death that underlying his admiration for Freud's outstanding scientific achievement,

> I was deeply receptive, over the decades, to the greatness and the indomitable spiritual and moral force of his personality. But underlying all that was my love for him, which from the day of our first meeting in Vienna in 1907 has remained unchanged to this day . . . nothing made me happier than his statement a few years ago that we had kept faith with each other for twenty-five years. (Reppen, 2003, p. 28)

Binswanger was one of two of Freud's most long-standing friends – the other was a fellow Swiss, Oskar Pfister who, like Binswanger, was also connected with Jung (Reppen, 2003, p. 281). Although Freud and Binswanger had their differences – Freud feuded with all but the most devout of his psychoanalytic colleagues – 80-year-old Freud wrote to Binswanger: 'I have always confined myself to the ground floor and of the edifice – you maintain that by changing one's point of view, one can also see an upper story, in which dwell such distinguished guests as religion, art, etc.' (Binswanger, 1957, p. 96).

A comparison of existentialism and psychoanalysis, far from amplifying their differences, shows them to be closer than is often thought as responses to

the same social crises and changes with the rise of mass communications, science, the 'death of God' and the focus on the human subject. As Jon Mills concluded:

> Da-sein is the subjective human being who lives in a world composed of multiple dynamic organizations that are psychologically, socially, and temporally realized in relation to the past, the present, and future possibilities. Just as Sartre emphasizes our subjectivity as radical freedom, and psychoanalysis as the pursuit of bringing to light that which lies hidden from our immediate conscious awareness, we exist in relation to what we can become. Ultimately in both the existential and psychoanalytic traditions, we can only become more free through knowledge. (Mills, 2003, p. 278)

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