



Freudian Psychoanalysis

Freudian Psychoanalysis: Truth, Self-knowledge and Psychological Development

Johan Eriksson, PhD

Eriksson, PhD

Abstract

The psychoanalytic clinical endeavour acquires its form and character toward the background conviction that truth is the food of the soul. But how are we to characterize the form of knowledge and truth that is sought for in the psychoanalytical process? And why would knowledge and truth pertaining to our own spiritual life automatically entail our growth and development as human beings? The author tries to answer these questions with help from, first of all, Heidegger's phenomenological investigations of the concept of truth. The imperative of truth in the psychoanalytical context, the author argues, is a fundamental demand that the interaction in the consulting room should as far as possible be of such a character that it promotes the possibility for the patient's psychological expressions to *speak the truth*, to *fulfil its own claims*. The truth we strive for in the psychoanalytic process is thus not primarily centred around knowledge in the classical, epistemological sense but is rather about a *way of being and living*. Truth, in this context, is an *ethical* concept. And since the genuine form of psychoanalytic self-knowledge is created only by a subjectivation-process that transfers the unconscious impulses and possibilities into the sphere of truth, the psyche must, in this process, start to *respond*, to become *responsible*, and to thereby enter into a movement of *re-organization*.

Keywords: Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger, truth, self-knowledge, psychic suffering, defence mechanism, the unconscious, first person authority

Introduction

In a frequently cited text, the British psychoanalyst Wilfred R. Bion states that "healthy mental growth seems to depend on truth as the living organism depends on food." Whenever truth is lacking or deficient, Bion continues, "the personality deteriorates" (1965, p. 38). I imagine this to be an intuitive truth to most people. And for us psychoanalysts it is more than that: our whole clinical endeavour acquires its form and character toward the background conviction that truth is the food of the soul.

In several of the foundational texts of psychoanalysis, Freud repeats this emphasis on truth, making it clear that we should see truth as a technical imperative to all psychoanalytical treatment. Here we may think of such statements as "the analytic relationship is based on a love of truth – that is, on a recognition of reality – and that it precludes any kind of sham or deceit" (1937, p. 248), or "psycho-analytic treatment is founded on truthfulness. In this fact lies a great part of its educative effect and its ethical value. It is dangerous to depart from this foundation" (1915, p. 164).



In the secondary literature, it has been common to refer the *pathos* for truth that permeates Freud's clinical texts to his epistemological positivism, to his conviction that psychoanalysis is a science and embrace "the scientific *Weltanschauung*" (Freud 1932, p. 158). Here, it often sounds as though Freud would have transferred a passion for scientific truth into the area of clinical treatment of the individual. I don't think this view stands to scrutiny. On the contrary, I imagine that Freud's own passion for scientific truth found nourishment in his conviction that psychological health and development presupposes that we leave behind the infantile omnipotence, and the direct and hallucinatory satisfaction of infantile wishes, to the benefit of the sublimation of the drives and the adjustment to a hard reality. For Freud, therefore, the scientific age represents the highest stage in the psychological and cultural development of mankind. The scientific man, so Freud thinks, is ideally characterized by his doubting all ideological authorities, by not being seduced into regarding himself in animistic or religious terms; in short: by letting his emotions, projects and his gaze upon the world and himself be governed by the actual state of things, not by his own or other people's wishful thinking.

The passion for truth is thus not, in Freud's case, a kind of love for science itself. It is even possible to stretch this thought to imagine that the quest for truth is not, in the first place, to be characterized as a fundamental facet of psychoanalytic treatment which strives to promote the development of a better life – as if the quest for truth were subjected, for example, to a kind of *emancipatory interest of knowledge* (Habermas, 1968). Rather, the quest for truth ought perhaps to be seen as a *central, constitutive aspect* of what psychoanalysis defines as a good life. In this way, psychoanalytical theory and praxis could be seen as an expanded articulation and development of the very general intuition which reveals itself most clearly in the fact that it is almost conceptually impossible to imagine a dynamic and flourishing life based on lies and deceitfulness.

The experience of truth—in philosophy, this is called "evidence". The situation of present day psychoanalysis has become somewhat ironical in this respect. Psychoanalysis has been marginalized due to an accusation for not being based on evidence, despite it being the singular form of treatment that makes out of the experience of evidence its central, therapeutic moment. Freudian psychoanalysis is the only form of psychotherapeutic treatment whose essential idea and ethos are built up by truth and evidence, and we can thus safely hold psychoanalysis to be the only genuinely evidence-based form of treatment on today's therapeutic market.

The ambition of the present article is, if not to give a full answer of the involved questions, so at least to open a path that could lead to an answer of how, on the basis of the founding works of psychoanalysis, we are to analyse the content of Freud's intuition that truth is the food of the soul. In what way is truth connected to psychological development? Or, to be more specific: why would insights into our own psychological life automatically entail the growth and development of this life?

But before I try to answer these questions, I must ponder a while over the fundamental and not easily answered question: what is truth?

Truth and Correspondence



Even the briefest examination of our everyday use of the concept of “truth”, and its related modifications, reveals it to be far from univocal. Sometimes we speak of a true friend, or a truthful person. Sometimes we speak of true art, true love, true fear, etc. We speak of true or genuine gold and we speak, of course, of theories, thoughts, convictions and statements as being true.

Despite these wide ranging applications of the concept of truth, however, the main tendency in philosophy has always been to start with theories and statements. When we enter into theoretical reflections, so it seems, theories and statements immediately present themselves as the natural and fundamental cases where “true” and “false” become relevant judgements. And this is closely related to another natural tendency, going all the way back to Aristotle, which is to think of truth in terms of correspondence, i.e. a statement, a thought or a theory is true if it corresponds to an actual state of affairs.

The so-called correspondence theory of truth—formulated in many more or less convincing versions—has of course been contested over the centuries. One of the most influential attempts at problematizing it was Martin Heidegger’s. In the famous § 44 of *Sein und Zeit* from 1927, Heidegger claims that although there is a kind of justification for the correspondence theory of truth, we must liberate ourselves from our crude ways of understanding the concept of correspondence. We must ask ourselves: in the correspondence between a thought or a statement and a state of affairs, what is it that corresponds, really?

This question, Heidegger continues, cannot be settled by arbitrary speculation. Rather, we must take as our starting point, in accordance with the phenomenological attitude that characterizes Heidegger’s investigation, a real experience in which the truth of a statement *reveals itself*. But where are we to find such an experience? The short answer: we find it when the statement gets confirmed as true. This is thus called “evidence”. Heidegger gives a very basic example (1927, p. 217f). Assume that somebody with his back turned against the wall made the correct statement that the painting on the wall does not hang straight. The truth of this statement is confirmed when the person turns around and observes that the painting actually doesn’t hang straight. But as *what* is the truth of the statement revealed in this confirmation? Is it really revealed as a correspondence between the statement and the state of affairs?

In order to reach an answer to this question, Heidegger in the next step asks what the utterer of the statement is related to when he, without seeing the painting, makes his statement. It would be a kind of falsification of the phenomenological content if anyone claimed that the utterer is related to an image or a representation of the real painting on the wall. According to Heidegger, the uttering of the statement is not related to anything else than the painting itself. The uttering of the statement *lets the painting be seen* as tilting to one side. The uttering, in Heidegger’s words, “discovers” that toward which it is directed.

And now we can understand that in the confirmation of the truth of a statement, in the experience of evidence, truth is not revealed as a correspondence between two separate phenomena—the statement and the state of affairs, the thought and the thing—but rather reveals itself as a correspondence between the state of affairs *as discovered through the uttering of the statement* and the state of affairs *as confirmed through the act of observation*. The truth of the

statement, what is confirmed, is that the statement reveals the painting *as it is in itself*.

If we use the terminology of Heidegger's teacher Edmund Husserl, who of course deeply inspired Heidegger himself, we could say that, in this case, the perceptive confirmation of the truth of the statement, its evidence, means that we have been able to give the statement a "intuitive fulfilment" (*Anschauung Erfüllung*). But now, the statement is a phenomenon of such a character that it can be true without us having any justification of its truth. We can conclude, then, that the true statement is characterized by the fact that it *can*, in principle, gain intuitive fulfilment. The true statement fulfils, so to speak, *its claims* (in this case the claim that the painting tilts to one side). The false sentence, on the contrary, lets the being get seen, but *not as it is*. It *ascribes* something to the being that the being itself lacks, and is thus principally unable to gain intuitive fulfilment. In contrast to the true statement, it does not fulfil its claims. It speaks in an *empty* fashion.

To Fulfil One's Claims

If we leave Heidegger's analysis of the truth of statements to one side, we can still conclude that the formal structure he conceives seems to be generally applicable, rather than being restricted to phenomenon such as statements, thoughts and concepts. That something qualifies as true or genuine gold, for example, at closer inspection means precisely that it "fulfils its claims". How are we to understand this?

The wedding ring on my finger is not primarily a dead, material thing characterized by its extension in space and its ability to resist pressure. In its capacity of being an artefact within a human and normative context where such things as love and sexuality are organized through the forming of families and through marriage (with its formidable arsenal of established rituals and symbols)—in other words, in its capacity of being inserted into a "world"—the ring has *meaning* and *significance*. The ring *speaks*, in a wide sense; it "tells us something". And what it says is, among many other things, "I am made of gold". The ring *makes a claim*, and *therefore* it can be made of genuine or false gold: it can fulfil its claims, or not. Any piece of metal cannot be genuine or false gold. A piece of metal must first speak, as it were, the language of gold. A piece of metal which did not speak the language of gold—for example a random piece of metal I found in the forest—can on closer inspection reveal itself as gold, but by the time I found it, it wasn't genuine or false gold: it just was—gold. Only when the piece of metal starts to show itself *as gold*—only when it has starts to make "gold claims"—will the logical space be open for questions such as "is this really genuine gold?".

The same formal structure will of course apply when we, let's say, call somebody "a true friend". To enter into that sphere where somebody can have the character of being a friend that can be true or false, the behaviour and attitude of my friend must first of all speak the language of friendship. Once this language is established, a certain action on his part, e.g. that he takes a day off work just to help me moving, may show him to be "a true friend". In this case, my friend shows himself *as he is*. His actions "fulfil" the claims that his general attitude towards me has established. Had he not helped me but instead made up a bad excuse for not doing it, I might have considered him *a false friend*, i.e. someone who makes the claim in his general attitude of being a friend, but who then fails to fulfil it through his actions. He then, in his general attitude,



shows himself, but *not as he is*. An arbitrary person in my social network may indeed lie to avoid helping me moving, without ever running the risk of being “a false friend”.

But now let’s move closer to our actual problem: when we go to emotional states such as love, fear or anger—what is it that makes it possible to call them true? Again, it is that they fulfil their claims of being true, that they show themselves *as they are*. In accordance with its inner character my fear of snakes, e.g., claims to be true or justified by the fact that it develops within a network of beliefs and expectations where it gains its character of being precisely a fear of snakes. The fear must harmonize with the belief that snakes in one way or another is dangerous, that they maybe are present in the environment where I am, that they may attack under certain conditions, etc. Were it not for this network of beliefs and expectations (which justifies the fear) the fear would cease be precisely fear, and we would stand before something else, e.g. an outburst of phobic anguish (and we are speaking of logic now rather than emotions). The fear’s claim of being fear—its language of fear— would be false, empty.

The same, again, with my love for philosophy: it is in the nature of love to claim to be true, or as we say—authentic. Had my fascination for philosophy not been guided by a warm joy and a genuine appreciation of philosophical challenges (i.e. things that indicate my love’s claim to be exactly love), had it instead been founded by vanity or a wish to live up to my parents’ expectations, then my engagement would show itself as something it is not. It would not fulfil its claims to be love. To expressions of love would then be false.

Questions of truth and falsity may engage people to a smaller or greater extent. It has something to do, of course, with what subjects they concern, what your vocation in life is, what your beliefs are, what your particular areas of invested interest might be, etc. For the goldsmith, it is crucial to know that his material is genuine, while another person may have inherited gold and pearls that he would never bother to examine any closer. A scientist is of course deeply engaged in the truth-value of his theories and hypotheses, while another person gladly reads a popular science magazine without being awake at night racking his brain over whether the discoveries he read about are true or false. However: when it comes to engagement in questions about our own spiritual life it seems not to be conditioned in the same way. Here, I agree with the philosopher Raimond Gaita (2002, p. 237-241) when he says that we are unable even to imagine a person who is totally indifferent to the truth and falsity of the deeper facets of his own soul—if his love, grief or ambition is real or fake, if they are just hollow echoes or if they fulfil their own claims and expressions. That such questions continue to trouble us seems to be *constitutive* for the very concept of a human being, a personality, a soul. Most of us would surely agree that if somebody displays a complete indifference to what is real and fake in his interior life, then that person has indeed “lost his soul”.

This stated, it has become time to approach our guiding question: why does psychoanalysis hold truth to be the food of the soul? Why would we, having gained psychoanalytic insights into the truths about ourselves, automatically grow and develop by virtue of such knowledge?

The Imperative of Truth

The classical, Freudian psychoanalysis is thus subjected to an imperative of truth. But what kind



of truth are we speaking of here? Is the main object of the imperative to demand of the psychoanalyst that he abandons all sentimentality and emotionally supportive interventions to the benefit of making correct interpretations of the analytical material, thereby really helping the patient to reach new knowledge about his own psyche? Maybe. Personally, I think the following way of putting it is more appropriate: the imperative of truth in the psychoanalytical context is a fundamental demand that the interaction in the consulting room should as far as possible be of such a character that it promotes the possibility for the patient's psychological expressions to *speak the truth, to fulfil its own claims*.

The truth we strive for here is thus not primarily centred around knowledge in the classical, epistemological sense—as if the success of the therapy could be measured in terms of the amount of knowledge about his own psyche the patient has managed to acquire—but is rather about a *way of being and living*. Truth, in this *ethical sense*, is in itself the reason for the analyst to abandon sentimental sympathy and conciliatory kindness. And this is also the condition for judging *all interventions from the analyst's side* in terms of their truth—not only interpretations in the classical sense. An intervention—an interpretation, a humming, a spontaneous association, a question, a confirmation of what the patient has just said, a tactfully placed silence, etc.—is true if and only if it promotes the development of truth as a way of being and living. This means, perhaps surprisingly, that an interpretation might be deemed false even if it happens to be correct in terms of the involved psychological and historical facts. Indeed, if an interpretation is put forth at the wrong time, or if it is given in a form that is insensitive to the patient's level of cognitive and emotional development, it does not promote the development of true expressions, but might instead run the risk of being used by the patient for defensive purposes—let's say for purpose of developing a kind of intellectualized and superficial “self-knowledge” which in the end becomes part of what Donald W. Winnicott has termed “a false self” (1965).

Naturally, I do not wish to discard the thought that self-knowledge is the basic therapeutic aim of psychoanalysis. On the contrary. But as soon as we start analysing the imperative of truth, we also find it necessary to ask the question of the nature of the involved self-knowledge in a more nuanced way. To get further in this task, however, it has become necessary to first say something about the psychological suffering which psychoanalysis, in Freud's original sense, is supposedly able to cure exactly by virtue of the genuine increase in self-knowledge that it ideally involves.

Psychic Suffering

It would lead too far to go through all of Freud's etiological analyses of ways for psychoneurotic suffering to arise. On a formal plane, it will be enough for us to conclude that Freud generally conceives of psychic suffering as closely related to the concepts of “defence” and “resistance”, and the list is well-known of what he calls “defence mechanisms”: repression, projection, introjection, reaction-formation, regression, isolation, negation, splitting of the ego, etc.

In Freud's theories, psychic development does not come forth as a regular and law-bound process that automatically continues along the same tracks as long as the inner and outer conditions remain relatively intact. Rather, he holds the psychic development to be determined by how well the psyche manages to handle the inner and outer challenges that the human

psyche must invariably encounter (the most famous of them being of course the Oedipal Conflict). Psychic development, it might be said, is in itself a psychological achievement. This means that the psyche must be thought of as an organization that essentially remains *vulnerable*. Aided by more or less primitive defence mechanisms, the psyche has tried to handle the inner and outer challenges it has faced. Some parts of the psyche may have developed prematurely, while others may have lagged behind on more primitive levels. By way of repressions and reaction-formations certain impulses may have been referred to the unconscious, while a punishing super-ego was formed to control these impulses. Painful experiences of being small and needy may have been projected on to an outer object, while an ideal of self-sufficiency may have been internalized to constitute

the kernel of the inner organization of the ego. To put it briefly: to perceive psychic development in terms of psychological achievement means to imagine the psyche and its expressions as something multifaceted and multilayered, something that is split into parts that are on different levels of development, forming their own agendas and seeking, idiosyncratically, to form their own kind of expressions. It is the lifelong assignment of the psyche to orchestrate all these disparate parts into a unity where there in the best case prevails at least some kind of cognitive, moral and emotional equilibrium.

All this makes it understandable why Freud reaches the firm conclusion that even if a person's suffering is closely related to certain actual circumstances, for example that of a painful divorce, the suffering would still not take on the specific form of psychological *symptoms*, or of being a *psychoneurotic* suffering, if it were not for the fact that the actual experience has an emotional relation to, and thereby awakens, infantile conflicts that were earlier dealt with in a deficient way. The defence mechanisms that the psyche activates under the actual circumstances, and that helps us explain the symptoms of suffering, does thus always have their prototypes in the infantile life.

Furthermore, we must reach beyond the thought that the defence mechanisms are focused solely on keeping ourselves not conscious of e.g. a forbidden aggressive impulse or an incestuous wish. Rather, the defence mechanisms should be seen as different attempts at refusing to *identify ourselves* with its content.

Take for example the defence mechanism that Freud calls "negation". According to Freud, this mechanism entails "a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed; indeed, it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed" (Freud, 1925, p. 235f). Or think of a projection where you are acutely aware of what you reject, but you remain completely unaware of it *belonging to you*.

The "de-subjectivation" accomplished by the defence mechanisms explains why the unconscious parts of the psyche have a tendency to remain on lower levels of development and why they fail to get integrated in the relatively reality-adapted structure of logically interrelated wishes, beliefs, desires, convictions, expectations, etc. that form the more mature parts of our personality. The unconscious aspects remain dissociated from the organization that would bestow them with meaning and direction. Unconscious thoughts, wishes and emotions, thus, differ from their conscious equivalents not only by the lacking the specific quality of "being

conscious” (in that case they would belong, in Freud’s terminology, to the category of “pre-conscious” rather than the category of “un-conscious”). The difference is more dramatic, since the unconscious stratum is composed of inchoate and primitive forms of what we normally call thoughts, wishes and emotions. Primarily they have, you could say, the character of “impulses” or unrealized potentials.

The ability of the defence mechanism to de-subjectify, viz. to stop thoughts, wishes and emotions *from forming*, also explains why the unconscious aspects of the psyche are so entangled in what Freud calls the primary process, which represents the most primitive and original way of psychic functioning. As the unconscious impulses and potentials remain unintegrated and dissociated they stand in a loose and *associative* rather than logical connection to content of the more reality-adapted parts of our psychic life. These impulses, therefore, are not expressing themselves in a rational way, but rather in a *symptomatically* and to a large extent disguised way. As the emotional cathexis of the impulses are displaced to elements in the actual world (I here refer to both the inner and the outer world),—a world that is thereby invested with unconscious and multifaceted layers of meaning—psychic and physical actions in and in relation to this world may take on a quality of satisfaction that the mature parts of the psyche have a hard time to identify and experience. To borrow a famous example from Freud (1917): the depressed person’s loud complaints about his own worthlessness is revealed to express, at closer inspection, an aggression toward a lost object that the person has been unable to mourn, internalizing it instead as a part of the ego. Or think of the example of an intelligent and sensitive man that seeks the analytical help with diffuse relational problems.

His clear and seemingly productive self-reflections during the analysis might later be revealed as a kind of disguised and obsessive urge to anticipate the analyst’s interventions, and to thereby make the analyst feel superfluous. The man’s seeming eagerness to cooperate might in time reveal, in a number of ways, an unconscious and hidden tendency to confirm an auto-erotic and anal-sadistically tinged feeling of superiority or self-sufficiency—a tendency that has turned his love life into a troublesome story.

The suffering psyche, in psychoneurotic sense, is thus fundamentally characterized by *confusion*, by always speaking ambiguously, by being, in Freud’s words, “out walking in a country one does not know” (1937, p. 237). The suffering psyche is unable to collect itself and to set a firm direction concerning the basic, emotional orientation of its life. In short, the suffering psyche, in psychoneurotic sense, does not speak *the truth*, does not fulfil its own claims. The suffering psyche *show* itself, but not *as it is*.

On the basis of these characteristics we may conclude not only that our psychic suffering manifests something untrue, rather it does something more than just that, viz. it manifests a discarded truth, an act of *avoiding the truth*. Due to our ignorance, we are often able to state, in earnest and with no intention of lying, false things about actual state of affairs. This, however, does not seem to apply to our distortion of the deeper aspects of our own psychic lives, even though this kind of distortion is mostly not conscious. The defence mechanisms are not so much *causes* of our psychic suffering—as e.g. me having slept bad might *cause* my inability to listen attentively to what you are saying—rather, they represent the *form* of suffering, as e.g. jealousy can be the form of my present inability to listen to what you are saying (cf. Gaita 2003, p. 99). At

closer inspection, the psychic suffering will always be revealed as *ethical suffering*, and thus the psychoanalytic treatment, with its attempt at recovering the truth, should finally be seen as an ethical cure where you are not, primarily, facing traditional epistemological tasks, but rather are facing assignments such as *opening up, admitting, confessing, becoming sincere, becoming truthful* (cf. Eriksson 2014).

All this being said, we have started to line out some answers to the question about how we are to understand the kind of self-knowledge that we are striving for in psychoanalysis, and we have also begun to understand how knowledge and truth concerning our own psychic life entails the development and growth of this psychic life.

First Person Authority and the Unconscious

A central, constitutive aspect of what it is to be a person, a subject or an “agent” is the fact that you have a first person-perspective when it comes to your own psychic life. In the philosophy of psychology one to talk about this in terms of the subject having “first person authority” in relation to its own inner states: if you want to find out what I want, what I believe, what I am thinking etc. I am simply the best person to ask. I can speak about my mental states with an authority that is lacking in other people’s description of me. Someone else may find out what I want and believe by observing my behaviour and listen to what I am saying, but I can know these things about myself, as it were, *directly*, without having to base this knowledge on external observations. You may ask me why I am angry, but it would be very strange for you to ask me how I can know that I am angry.

This, however, does not necessarily mean that our subjective knowledge about our own psychic life are automatically transparent or without flaws. There are of course many occasions in life when others may understand me better than I do myself (this is quite a common experience and not something that psychoanalysis invented), but if this was a *general* fact, if it happened *always*, I would lack the very core of what constitutes me as a person or a subject – a subject that can sometimes in error about himself, or maybe have built up a self-image that is to a large extent false.

But what does the first person authority actually *consists of*? One way, traditional but increasingly criticized, of answering this question is the following: I can speak of the states of my own psyche in virtue of having a privileged epistemological access to them. My mental states are in a specific region of reality that I am the only one to have direct access to. By means of my inner perception, my introspective gaze, I can directly perceive something to which others can only infer on the basis of external observations.

Two of the most ambitious and thorough attempts at questioning this so called “Cartesian” view of the first person authority have been presented by Richard Moran (2001) and David H. Finkelstein (2003). These authors hold, correctly, that the Cartesian view does not do justice to the fact that first person authority is based rather on the fact that my mental states are precisely *mine*, something that *I am*, that they are deeply embedded in my character, my history and my ways of understanding and relating to the world. This entails that I am not only able to speak *about* my mental states, but I am also able to express them, and to express them as I speak



about them. When I say “Charles is jealous”, I do not express Charles’ jealousy, but when I say “I am jealous”, this is more than a mere statement, it is an *expression* of my jealousy. Thus, first person authority in relation to my jealousy does not mean that in virtue of having an inner perception I can be in a privileged way *conscious of* my jealousy, but rather that I can be *consciously jealous*.

On the basis of this discussion, we may now widen our former characterization of the Unconscious as Freud understands it. The unconscious aspects of our psychic life—that we formerly defined, not as not conscious, but as de-subjectivized and undeveloped—are primarily characterized by the fact that we cannot *express* them, in a direct fashion, by admitting them and ascribing them to ourselves (cf. Finkelstein, p. 119). When it comes to my unconscious jealousy, for example, it is fully possible that I can be aware of it (my analyst has maybe convinced me of feeling it), but that I am still unable to *jealously* say “I am jealous”, and, in that way, express my jealousy and let it fulfil my statement.

However, even as *I* remain unable to express the unconscious, it will still find *its* expression. The unconscious always finds its expression (were it not so, there would be no justification for talking about something unconscious), but when it comes to the *form* of its expression, it diverges sharply from the conscious aspects of our psychic life. One of Freud’s most important terms for the particular forms of manifestation of the unconscious is “acting out”, a term that is intimately related to what Freud has called “compulsory repetition” (1914). As we have seen earlier: the unconscious impulses cathect in a disguised manner our psychic and material environment (e.g. the therapy-room and the analytical relation), transforming it to an infantile tinged scene where the impulses may be *acted out* in the form of psychic symptoms and as symptomatic behaviour.

Psychoanalytic Self-knowledge

A psychoneurotic suffering soul is thus, to a large extent, “acting out” rather than “expressing itself”. It is confused in the sense that it cannot back up its own manifestations; it is so to speak ruled by “its psyche”, viz. it is ruled by something that the subject “has”, something that has not been integrated and developed enough to take the form of being something that the subject in a full sense of the word “is”.

All this makes us able to say that Freudian psychoanalytical treatment—which formal aim is to “make the unconscious conscious”—is all about extending and encouraging the patient’s first person authority, extending the patient’s possibility of speaking *from himself*, expressing himself, of speaking and living *truthfully*. Thus, the genuine form of self-knowledge to which the psychoanalytical treatment aims must have the character of a “subjectification process”. This Freud realized at an early stage. The analyst’s attempt at increasing the patient’s knowledge of himself will remain useless until the patient has come to take it on as an *assignment*, a delineation of a subjectification process he must go through *himself*. Or, as stated in Freud’s more spatially oriented metaphor: the patient must use the analyst’s message “to help himself in discovering the unconscious complex *where it is anchored* in his unconscious” (1909, p. 121). A few years later Freud speaks about “[t]he strange behaviour of patients, in being able to combine a conscious knowing with not knowing” (1913, p.142). And in his introductory lectures,



we read such statements as: “there are different sorts of knowledge, which are far from equivalent psychologically”; and: “there is more than one kind of ignorance” (1915-17, p. 281).

What Freud is after here, I think, is the experience that, to be able to assume its transformatory ability, self-knowledge must really become genuine *self-knowledge* rather than mere knowledge *about oneself*. And it must be achieved through a process where *I* participate by *opening up, acknowledging, admitting*, etc. Self-knowledge, as Freud understands the term, “must rest on an internal change in the patient such as can only be brought about by a piece of psychological work” (ibid. p. 281).

But finally, why would this kind of knowledge concerning our psychic life automatically mean that this psychic life grows and develops? Why do we grow by confronting ourselves and our own unconscious? We have already lined out an answer: self-knowledge means that we expand our first person authority and our ability to express ourselves *from ourselves*, to express ourselves *truthfully*.

Regression and Re-organization

The ideal psychoanalytical treatment is often defined, in a somewhat programmatic fashion, as a two-part process of “regression” and “re-organization”. I consider this general characterization to be quite true. The therapeutic framework of psychoanalytical treatment—the frequent therapy sessions, the asymmetrical relation between analyst and patient, the armchair/couch-setting, etc.—are all there to help the patient regress, to provoke his unconscious impulses to seek associative derivations and satisfactions in the therapy room, i.e. in the transference-relation to the analyst. Here, the specific competence of a talented analyst will be defined in terms of a sensitivity for the distorted and secretive expressions of the patient’s unconscious in the transference, and in the same time an increased sensitivity for the ways in which the patient’s conscious claims have become hollow or false. Secondly, the competence of the analyst will consist in his ability to convey his impressions to the patient, carefully and with the right timing, thereby facilitating a process where the unconscious impulses gradually start showing themselves *as they are*. All in all, we are here speaking of a kind of regression, a form of re-vitalization of the infantile layers of the patient’s psychic life.

We may say, somewhat schematically, that what we encounter in this process of regression is a kind of total turning point or shattering. According to Freud’s theory, the unconscious layers of our psychic lives become de-subjectivized and un-developed not because they are *too painful*, but because they threaten the unity of the psychic organization that forms the conscious part of our personality. When I, through the psychoanalytic process, start to get contact with my unconscious, when the unconscious gradually reveals itself as *belonging to me*, an uncanny form of disorganisation will take hold. When e.g. my need of love and care comes to the fore, the *emptiness* of my conscious claims to be self-sufficient is revealed, together with the emptiness of all the thoughts and fantasies that are supposed to support and justify these claims. The organization of my personality, in the defensive and rigid form that I have developed, has begun to fall apart.

At this point of the treatment, at this point in the regression—it is of course not an isolated



instance but a segment of a process that is often of the “one step forward, two steps backward” kind—it becomes possible for the psyche to reactivate what Freud calls “the irresistible advance towards a unification of mental life” (1921, p. 105), i.e. the *re-organisation*. As the unconscious impulses and possibilities begin to assume the form of thoughts, emotions and wishes, that are then admitted to be *my own*, as they thus start showing themselves as *being something*, as they start to *make claims* rather than just acting in secret, they also enter into the sphere of truth. We may recall what we said of gold earlier: the question “is this genuine gold?” enters into the logical sphere of truth and falsity only when a certain piece of metal has begun to *behave and show itself as gold*. At an earlier stage, on the level of undeveloped impulses, the unconscious has been acting solely in regard to pleasure and un-pleasure, satisfaction and the lack of satisfaction. Now however, as the unconscious enters into a relation with the other strata of our psychic life—now when I can start to say e.g. “I am jealous” in a jealous way, now when I start to express myself—my whole psychic life will be forced to respond to questions that is placed outside the sphere of mere pleasure, but inside the sphere of the good life. Here, we encounter questions about such things as justifications, values, beliefs, doubts and obligations: is it right for me to feel like this? Is it justified? Can I stand for this? Who am I? Is this what I want. Why am I thinking like this? Is this really me?

These formulations convey a perhaps overly intellectual version of a process that is often not so much that, but as a way of indicating the content of the emotional facets of the psychic re-organization I imagine them to be sufficient. In the ideal case of re-organization, Freud thinks, some impulses and aims will be abandoned as anachronisms, and their cathexis will be retrieved, integrated and re-directed towards more reality-oriented goals. Other impulses might develop further and force me to modify my understanding of my own identity, to leave behind the rigid beliefs and fantasies I had built up as defences at an earlier stage. Put briefly: since the genuine form of psychoanalytic self-knowledge is created only by a subjectivation-process that transfers the unconscious impulses and possibilities into the sphere of truth, the psyche in its entirety must start to *respond*, to become *responsible*, and to thereby enter into the process of development where my spiritual forces are gathered in an emotional organization through which the expressions of the *psyche* can take the form of being the expressions of the *person*, and thereby can start to *fulfil their claims*. Without truth, as Bion has rightly claimed, “the personality deteriorates “. And this is finally not an empirical but rather a conceptual truth, an insight into the essence of being a person.

References

- Bion, W.R. (1965) *Transformations*. London: Karnac Books.
- Eriksson, J. (2014) “Freud’s psychoanalysis: a moral cure.” *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, nr 4, vol 95: 663-675.
- Finkelstein, D.H. (2003) *Expression and the Inner*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Freud, S. (1909) *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy*. S.E., 10



- (1913) "On the Beginning of the Treatment. (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis I)". S.E., 12.
 - (1914) "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through. (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho- Analysis II)". S.E., 12.
 - (1915) "Observations of Transference-Love. (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis III)". S.E., 12.
 - (1915-1917) *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. S.E., 15.
 - (1917) "Mourning and Melancholia". S.E., 14.
 - (1921) *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. S.E., 28.
 - (1925) "Negation." S.E., 14.
 - (1932) *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. S.E., 22.
 - (1937) "Analysis terminable and Interminable". S.E., 23.
- Gaita, R. (2002) *A Common Humanity*. London, New York: Routledge.
- (2003) *Philosopher's Dog*. New York: Routledge.
- Habermas, J. (1968) *Erkenntnis und Interesse*. Frankfurt a. Main: SuhrkampVerlag.
- Heidegger, M. (1927) *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: max Niemeyer Verlag 1993.
- Moran, R. (2001) *Authority and Estrangement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Winnicott, D.W. (1965) "Ego distortion in terms of the true and false self". *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development*. New York: International University Press: 140-152.