

The Thick Bog
of Metaphor
and the New-wave
Hermeneutic Defense
of Psychoanalysis

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A Critique

By

M. Andrew Holowchak

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Preface

PSYCHOANALYSTS TODAY ARE OFTEN CONTENT to acknowledge that Freud had his share of moral blemishes. One says, “I do not need Freud to be lily white—he made many mistakes—but I prefer the grand mistakes of a genius to the trite truisms of a mediocrity” (Lothane, 2007, 493). They also readily acknowledge numerous defects with canonical Freudian psychoanalysis—its metapsychology especially. Says another: “The relationship between metapsychology and the clinical theory has not been clarified. Thus, the limits of each and the borderlines between them are matters of dispute, and there is no consensus on what is the total body of clinical theory and of metapsychology” (Holt, 325).

Yet almost all argue that, notwithstanding the defects of the man and his theory, psychoanalytic therapy is salvageable. Why is that? Psychoanalytic therapy, they counter, works.

Yet the question persists: *Does* psychoanalytic therapy work?

Even Freud, the man who started everything, had his doubts (Holowchak, 2012₁, 2012₂, and 2012₃). He became aware of the inefficacy of psychoanalysis as clinical therapy—*viz.*, that psychoanalysis qua clinical therapy was more fatuous than curative. That is why, in part, he spent the lion’s share of his mature years in the study of issues related to group psychology and in tweaking his metapsychology, even though he claimed metapsychology was dispensable. His interest in his later years was more in getting right the theory than in clinical work, which he increasingly found tiresome. In sum, he hoped to get right the metapsychology behind therapy, or at least offer a heuristically invaluable metapsychology that would pave a path for the correct biological explanation of human behavior in the future. It was scientific discovery—knowing the “laws” of the human mind, even if such laws, cast in language more psychological than physical, were only provisional—that moved him, not scientific application.

To the pragmatic question, there can be added a theoretical question: Is psychoanalysis scientific?

Plucky apologists address the question straightforwardly by claiming that psychoanalysis *is* scientific. Some defenses are spirited; others, less so.

Bertram Karon (2002, 567) gives a spirited defense. He appeals to a 2000 study in Stockholm that shows psychoanalysis to be more helpful than alternative treatments. Karon also adds a *Consumer Reports* study, “the most impressive evidence”, in which subscribers, who “had received

psychotherapy”—one must assume here that that implies sustained therapy—were asked about its efficacy. Ninety percent of nearly 4000 respondents in treatment replied that it helped. Yet is that evidence so impressive? The comparisons, it seems, were not aided by controls. Would not a similar appeal to persons who frequented psychics reveal that they found psychic readings very accurate?

Other attempts are not so grounded. Zvi Lothane (2002, 574–79) claims that Freud’s “fundamental methodological discoveries ... [constitute] the most significant advance in psychology since Aristotle”—a gallant claim, since Aristotelian psychology, like Aristotelian biology and physics, has been taken seriously for some two millennia. He adds that psychoanalysis is scientific, but has “its own scientific method”. That method includes use of free association and “a set of ethical prescriptions for handling the relationship” of doctor-patient. Nothing else is said of what comprises the method, though Lothane adds concerning the efficacy of psychoanalytic praxis, while “theories of hypotheses, of causation of disorder come and go; the method endures”. Thus, “it should not be judged by the methods that apply to other sciences”. Yet too little is said of the unique scientific method—free association has been much called into question as being a matter merely of suggestion—to inspire confidence in its existence.

Still other attempts seem desperate, if not sapless. Elizabeth Waieiss (2002, 559–63) argues, “There is no division between psychoanalysis and any society, science, or psychology based on humanistic-democratic values”. She adds that “the most basic reason” for hostility to psychoanalysis is likely failure of it to “prevent the eventual death of the individual”. Conventional medical doctors, whose role it is to maintain physical health, have a greater role in forestalling death, as it were, but they are not faulted for not being able to prevent death.

Freud was aware of the resistance to his theory—many times, he even used resistance to psychoanalysis as confirmation of it—and he made numerous published attempts to defend the scientificity of psychoanalysis. Though some were empty, most generally show he had a good grasp both of how scientific terms were formed and refined and of testing hypotheses.¹ He was also aware—because the axial concepts of psychoanalysis (e.g., unconscious, repression, resistance, and drive) were not physical and

¹ In practice, he often behaves quite unscientifically. He adhered to notions that were scientifically discredited or of dubious status—e.g., Lamarckian biology, the primal father, the Oedipus complex, and sexual etiology of neurosis—and refused to consider contributions of others in his coterie of analysts, when they challenged his psychoanalytic scaffolding.

had perhaps only a provisional status—that application of scientific method to his theory would prove awkward and it would be difficult to entrench scientifically such axial concepts. Hence, his attitude was that of an apologist.

Psychoanalysis had its heyday, but overall, since the death of Freud, things have gotten worse. There is today traditional Freudian psychoanalysis practiced by those who think any deviation from the gospel of Freud is sacrilegious. There are also Lacanian psychologists, Kleinian psychologists, Winnicottian psychologists, ego psychologists, self psychologists, *Dasein* psychologists, and object relations psychologists among the main psychoanalytic offshoots, and numerous offshoots from these offshoots—each with a unique theoretical orientation—hence, the Brobdingnagian theoretical confusion. What is worse, every school tends to base its therapy on its own “observations”, none of which are validated statistically by others outside a school. What is the result? Insularity—each offshoot has a language of its own—and, perhaps eventually, obsolescence of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis, in Freud’s day and our own, has met with and continues to meet with staunch opposition from critics—the most ruinous, from philosophers of science, like Adolf Grünbaum, and psychoanalysts, like Robert Holt, who see empirical confirmation as a problem of scientific practice. It is common today to direct such criticisms to all metempirical forms of psychotherapy—i.e., psychotherapies that nowise concern themselves with grounding their claims with empirical research and replicable experiments.

Freud acknowledged the problem of statistical validation of psychoanalysis in “Analytic Therapy”, and parried it as follows:

Friends of analysis have advised us to meet the threatened publication of our failures with statistics of our successes drawn up by ourselves. I did not agree to this. I pointed out that statistics are worthless if the items assembled in them are too heterogeneous; and the cases of neurotic illness which we had taken into treatment were in fact incomparable in a great variety of respects. Moreover, the period of time that could be covered was too short to make it possible to judge the durability of the cures. And it was altogether impossible to report on many of the cases: they concerned people who had kept both their illness and its treatment secret, and their recovery had equally to be kept secret. But the strongest reason for holding back lay in the realization that in matters of therapy people behave highly irrationally,² so that one has no prospect of accomplishing anything with them by rational means (1917, *S.E.*, XVI: 461).

² Does Freud here mean to include his irrational critics?

Freud's arguments, several, are far from bullet proof. In the first instance, the argument from heterogeneity maintains that the data of psychoanalysis are too unkempt for statistical assessment. Again neurotic illnesses are too unlike—i.e., not as uniform as—physical illnesses. Moreover, the length of successful treatment makes difficult assessment of cure. Furthermore, there is the crippling issue of repression, which is a matter of patients keeping crucial information from therapists. The last reason is perhaps the most troubling. Irrational defensive postures by patients require irrational (unconventional?) means of treatment.

Still, we know now that Freud was in large measure part of the problem. He often fudged his data, he sometimes slept through sessions when a patient was successfully hypnotized,³ and that his record of curative success, even by his own admission, was exiguous (Holowchak, 2012, 71–93).

Yet such criticisms apply more to the man than to the methods, and so the question of curative success of psychoanalysis is still today an open question. Meta-analyses give some evidence that psychoanalytic approaches might be effective (De Maat et al., 2013, and Gerber et al., 2011),⁴ yet that evidence is not uncontaminated. For instance, the researchers in one study conclude guardedly, “further controlled studies are urgently needed”, because “the lack of comparisons with control treatments is a serious limitation in interpreting the results”. In short, it is one thing to say, for example, that aspirin mitigates pain for persons with mild to severe arthritis, but that claim amounts to little unless there is a control group, given placebos, that reports a statistically significant difference in lack of mitigation of pain.

There is byzantine theoretical perplexity. If therapists cannot ground therapy in a theory that is scientifically verifiable and that has some degree of confirmation, what is the merit of psychoanalysis, or more generally, of any form of psychotherapy?

A common answer today amounts to warding off the theoretical question by claiming that psychotherapy is best understood as a hermeneutic discipline and not a science. This, Antal Bókay states, is the recognition

³ Hypnosis he found to be difficult and unreliable.

⁴ See e.g., S. de Maat, F. de Johghe, R. de Kraker, F. Leichsenring, A. Abass, P. Luyten, J.P. Barber, R. Van, and J. Dekker, “The Current State of the Empirical Evidence for Psychoanalysis: A Meta-Analytic Approach”, *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 2013, 107–37, and A.J. Gerber, J.H. Kocsis, B.L. Milrod, S.P. Roose, J.P. Barber, M.E. Thase, P. Perkins, and A.C. Leon, “A Quality-Based Review of Randomized Controlled Trials of Psychodynamic Psychotherapy”, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 168, No. 1, 2011, 19–28.

that Sandor Ferenczi in Freud's day came to have. Ferenczi and Otto Rank, states Bókay, were increasingly marginalized by Freud not only on account of theoretical differences, but especially because of realization that psychoanalysis was not a medical therapy, but an ontological or hermeneutic therapy. Writes Bókay: "Ferenczi ... advocated a kind of psychoanalysis that had therapy as not only its practical task, but its very essence. In philosophical terms, therapy had for him an *ontological* function, and everything else—including theory—was secondary" (1998, 195). There was also an equalitarian, pedagogical function to therapy. "Ferenczi, moreover, conceived of psychoanalysis as pedagogical rather than medical—pedagogical in the radical sense that it involves free and mutual self-creation in which the participants are magicians, lovers, and true friends" (195). Canonical Freudian psychoanalysis, in contrast, was anything but mutual, in spite of the existence of transference and counter-transference. The relationship between analysans and analysand was always paternalistic.

That is much the same with Ludwig Binswanger, who founded *Daseinanalyse*. Attracted to the work of Freud, he was unsettled by its biological reductionism. The result was *Einführung in die allgemeine Probleme der Psychologie (Introduction to the General Problems of Psychology)*; 1922). In the book, he opted for an alternative to treating psychological problems by reference to a mental apparatus of some sort, as did Freud. He wished instead to begin with basal phenomena in the manner of Husserl's phenomenology. The aim was to see all persons from the perspective of all their experiences, insofar as that was possible. Hence, he also appropriated Heideggerian hermeneutics—the notion of *Dasein*, or being-there (see chapter 1). In 1942, he published *Grundformen und Erkenntnis menschlichen Daseins und Erkenntnis menschlichen Daseins (Basic Forms and the Realization of Human Being-in-the-World)*. *Daseinanalyse* also allowed him to accommodate both philosophy and religiosity in his form of therapy, each of which Freud thought were vestiges of a more primitive way of looking at the world, but each of which were vital for Binswanger.

The hermeneutic tack was taken also by Medard Boss, a youthful medical student, analyzed by Freud in Vienna. Over time, Boss took psychoanalysis in a new, Heideggerian direction, formalized in his book *Psychoanalysis and Daseinanalysis*. For Boss, psychoanalytic therapy, following the lead of Heidegger's hermeneuticism, was a matter of aiding patients to consider ways of existing in the world—*Dasein* or being-there, a form of situated being. As David L. Smith notes, the method is anything but analytical. "Diametrically opposed to Freud's method of analysis,

Daseinanalysis does not impose a priori categories on the material, but interrogates the phenomena as they show themselves” (2010, 218). *Daseinanalysis*, he says, concerns “freeing individuals to fulfill their ownmost possibilities for being with things and with other human beings” (1988, 62). It is essentially philosophical, not scientific. “Only *Daseinanalysis* sees human beings as the very freedom and openness, which may be used to call forth the freedom and openness of fellow human beings”. Without *Daseinanalysis*, he concludes, one cannot grasp “how psychotherapy is possible at all” (1988, 62). As he states in his groundbreaking book 25 years earlier, “No other psychotherapeutic procedure but that of psychoanalytic *practice* is capable of helping man to break through to, and to carry out, his authentic and wholesome being-wholly-himself” (1963, 285).

One can be sympathetic with the hermeneutic apologia of Ferenczi, Binswanger, and Boss, for their disagreement with the founder of psychoanalysis was genuine, and philosophical. It is not so much that they disagreed with Freud’s methods, but more so with Freud’s theory—*viz.*, that psychoanalysis was science, when it was to them essentially praxis. One could, of course, object that their approach could do little to handle severe cases of psychopathology—that such an ontological account could be aidful only for persons of mild-to-moderate psychical disorientation—but the same objection readily applies to psychotherapy.

The debate between Freud and mavericks like Ferenczi and Boss was genuine, because it was philosophical. What was to be decided was whether there could be a science of the human mind—in effect, whether such a science was possible. For instance, if being is merely being-in-the-world—that is, situated being as an unanalyzable ontic posit—then there is no possibility of a subject having real knowledge of any sort of an external world. The notion of a subject/object divide is unintelligible, and the question of the possibility of there being a science of the human mind is itself fatuous. On such an account, Freudian methods of therapy cannot be etiological.

Yet hermeneutic psychotherapy today is most often championed not because of genuine recognition that the essence of psychotherapy comprises such things as discourse and intersubjective understanding between situated beings, but because it offers disgruntled therapists, who have traditionally followed Freud’s lead in maintaining that psychotherapy is scientific, a philosophical out from the charge of non-scientificity. One way to eschew the problem of scientific validation of psychoanalysis is to claim that human communication is hermeneutic, or more narrowly, that psychoanalysis is a hermeneutic discipline and not an etiological method

of therapy. In that regard, its measure of success is not symptom-removal or redirection of drive-energy in socially condoned or acceptable ways, as Freud would say, but for instance broadened understanding through a commonly created myth, effected by therapist and patient, for the patient's wellbeing, as is commonly stated in today's hermetic literature on therapies.

In this undertaking, *The Thick Bog of Metaphor and the New-wave Hermeneutic Defense of Psychoanalysis: A Critique*, I argue that today's hermeneutical apologia of psychotherapy is more of a dodge than of a defense. It offers therapists—chiefly through the thick bog of metaphor (e.g., therapy as expanding or shifting horizons, unmasking, and creating a work of art, *inter alia*), often incomprehensible use of language (e.g., incorrect prejudices, truth conversation, hermeneutic truth, different kinds of knowledge, and leaving things to their otherhood), and *ad hoc* appropriation of hermeneutics—a refuge to buffer themselves from the possibility of criticism of the scientificity of their discipline.

How did psychotherapy get into this mess?

To answer that question, I must wax historical (part 1) as well as critical (part 2).

The structure of the book is as follows. Part one, Hermeneutics and Freud, comprises a chapter that offers a brief history of hermeneutics as well as a chapter that offers a critical look at the argument that Freud was a hermeneut. Part two, The Scientificity of Psychotherapy, looks at the assault on psychotherapy from without—from the perspectives of philosophers of science—and from within—from the perspective of clinical therapists, squarely facing the lack of empirical evidence on behalf of psychoanalysis. Part three, The Hermeneutic Asylum, limns attempts by therapists to defend psychotherapies from such criticisms by asserting that psychoanalysis is essentially hermeneutic, not scientific, treatment. In its three chapters, I critically examine, first, attempts to bolster the claim that psychotherapy is hermeneutic by therapists decrying science; second, the notion that hermeneutic therapy is open and moral discourse; and third, the extent to which such open, moral discourse can be of aid to patients with legitimate pathological issues.

At day's end, one must ask whether the hermeneutic apology, based on appropriation of hermeneutic metaphors that are vigorously debated by philosophers today, is aidful for psychotherapy and psychotherapists. I answer that it is not, because hermeneutic therapy, whose meaning lies in its metaphors, is placebo-driven, not genuinely therapeutic. One questions the benefits of a therapy that is so tightly wrapped in metaphors whose meanings are up for grabs.

I close with an ontological problem for the Heideggerian situated-being thesis, employed by numerous therapists today: Would a true hermeneut defend psychoanalytic practice as hermeneutic or merely engage in its praxis? In other words, if *Dasein* is merely, and essentially, about situated being—i.e., being in the world—and if that is the most obvious, substratal fact of human existence, then would a true hermeneut *argue* that to be is to be in the world? One need never to argue for the obvious—an unanalyzable ontic posit—otherwise the thesis is not so obvious, and the posit is certainly not unanalyzable.⁵

Moreover, engagement with hermeneutic therapy of the Heideggerian sort implies, consonant with Heidegger's thinking (sketched out in chapter 1), better and worse ways of existing in the world. A therapist's role is to assist a client in discovering an optimal fit. Yet even Heidegger was skeptical that such a fit—i.e., true human "authenticity"—could be had, for recognition of the need of such perfect situation in time was itself recognition of "ecstatic temporality"—*viz.*, recognition by a being in some sense out of or transcending time. In short, one would have to step out of time to situate fully oneself in time.

The literature on the hermeneutic defence of psychotherapy is vast—too vast for anything but a sample of it in this critique. And so, I focus merely on as representative sample of some of the most recent literature. The term "new wave" I employ to mean the literature after Adolf Grunbaum's 1984 bombshell, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*.

⁵ All beings that argue that being is situated being are in some sense unsituated, and can never begin to be situated until they cease to argue that being is situated being.

Part I

Hermeneutics and Freud

Chapter 1

A Brief History of Hermeneutics

PHILIP RIEFF WRITES, “IN THIS TACTIC of [dream] interpretation, the psychoanalytic procedure is not unique but rather branches off from ancient precedent. The text has changed, but the procedure and moralizing intent of psychoanalytic interpretation are better understood when compared with the tradition of religious hermeneutics, which psychoanalysis parodies”. Yet this *exegetical* hermeneuticism of sacred texts, which seeks to stay true to the sacral essence of such texts, does not quite fit oneiric interpretation, which is more protean. Instead, for Rieff, a *reconciliatory* hermeneuticism, in which the interpreter must alter the literal emphases of that text “to conform with some new challenge of document or dogma”, is apposite for interpreting psychoanalytically dreams (118–19). For Rieff, Freud’s method of interpreting dreams is essentially reconciliatory hermeneuticism.

Here we encounter to our first problem: the problem of definition. If we are to grasp psychotherapy as essentially hermeneutic, we must settle on a definition of hermeneuticism.

There is perhaps a conventional apprehension of the term. Following Rieff, “hermeneuticism” is often understood as method of interpretation of written, especially sacred, texts that allows for meaning beyond what seems apparent.

Yet such an understanding is too narrow and obviously too vague, and only goes so far to further our grasp of psychotherapy as essentially hermeneutic practice. Questions such as these go unanswered. Why is literal interpretation of texts wrongheaded or impossible? What constitutes correct method of interpretation beyond the literal?

Appeal to the psychotherapeutic literature, as we shall see—and here is one of the largest problems with the defense in a nutshell—is unavailing, for there is no one set-in-stone definition of hermeneuticism, and each psychotherapist *qua* hermeneut seems to draw from a conception to suit perceived needs.

This chapter is essentially prefatory. My intention here is to give a history, necessarily sketchy, of what might be dubbed the hermeneutic movement, from its roots in Greek antiquity to its efflorescence in German philosophy. The account, brief and selective, is by no means an effort to offer a representative summary of the movement, for only a thin thread connects the hermeneuts described below. That thread is the notion that

texts, and interpretation in general, are context-sensitive (historical). My summary is given merely to shed light on the recent arguments of psychoanalysts and psychotherapists that analysis is or ought to be seen as essentially hermeneutical—and here we focus on the Germans Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer—hence our selectivity.

This chapter comprises two parts. I begin with some account of a hermeneutic trend in antiquity and then jump to selected German hermeneutical philosophers. First, I begin with Hesiod, turn to Plato, move to the Greek and Roman Stoics, and end with Augustine of Hippo, who offers a splendid illustration of the sorts of linguistic and epistemic problems with which later German hermeneutists would concern themselves. Second, I cover three of the primary German philosophers: Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer. The criterion of selection for those German philosophers is determined by numerous references to them, to the exclusion of others, in the contemporary psychotherapeutic literature in an attempt to bolster arguments for psychotherapy being hermeneutic.

“You turn out to be interpreters of interpreters” An Early History of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics comes from the Greek *hermeneuō*, which means “I expound”, “I interpret”, or “I translate”. The link is to the Greek messenger god, Hermes—the messenger of and mediator between the gods; the mediator between gods and men; a god of boundaries, transitions, orators, and poets; the conductor of souls to Hades; and often merely a playful trickster.

In *Works and Days*, Hesiod (b. ca. 750 B.C.) tells of the smith god Hephaestus’ creation of Pandora (All-gifts) to humiliate humans. As every god was enjoined to give Pandora a gift, Hermes gave her the gifts of mendacity and seductive words, and thereafter was bid to take her to be the wife of his brother, Epimetheus (Afterthought) (II.60–68). In “Hymn to Hermes” (Hymn IV), Hesiod describes Hermes as a many-ways (*polytrophon*) and blandly cunning god—a robber, cattle driver, bringer of dreams, night watchman, and thief at the gates. As illustration of his thievery and playfulness, on the night he was birthed by Maia, he stole the cattle of Apollo.

In early Greek thinking, there was a tendency to interpret literary texts—e.g., the works of Homer, an older contemporary of Hesiod, and Hesiod—in a manner “other” (*allos*) than conventional meaning might allow. The Greek word *huponoia* (suspicion or contrivance; lit., what lies beneath perception; cf. hypnosis) best captures that notion.

Huponoia was standard practice at religious gatherings and sanctuaries, where the link to divinity and irrationality was secured through *ekstasis* (a sort of being outside of oneself; cf. “ecstasy”) or *enthusiasmos* (having a god within oneself; cf. “enthusiasm”). For instance, the Oracle at Delphi—honoring Apollo, half-brother of Hermes and god of prophecy—was the wealthiest and most prestigious sanctuary for prophecy in Greek antiquity. In existence as early as the eighth century B.C., it came into prominence by the sixth century B.C.

There were both priests and a priestess at the oracle. The priestess, called *Pythia*, was the mouthpiece of Apollo. She was past middle age and of upstanding virtue. At dawn, when the priest would sacrifice a goat to test for whether or not the day would be auspicious, she would purify herself in the water of the Castalian spring. She would then enter the sanctuary of the inner temple and ascended upon a sacred tripod, situated over a chasm, in order to receive any message from Apollo.

When suppliants arrived, they too purified themselves in the Castalian spring, offered a cake outside of the temple, and then sacrificed a goat inside of the temple. Conducted to the inner sanctuary, they were told to think holy thoughts and speak words favorable to a good omen. The priest would then give the suppliant’s question to the “enthusiastic” (god-inspired) *Pythia*, and she would return a response, given to the suppliant in verse, often mired in ambiguity. Herodotus (b. ca. 485 B.C.), for illustration, cites King Croesus of Lydia, asking of the *Pythia* whether he would be successful, if he should begin war with Persia. Croesus was told that if he should begin war with Persia, a great empire would be lost. He subsequently went to war with Persia, and to his astonishment, lost. He had not recognized that *his* loss would be the loss of a great empire, prophesied by the priestess (I.53 ff.).

Plato (427–347 B.C.) railed against *huponoia* in several dialogues. For instance, in *Ion*, a dialectical discussion on rhapsody, Plato’s mentor Socrates (469–399 B.C.) engages with Ion, who claims to be second to none as a rhapsode, who gives magniloquent recitals of Homeric poems, though presumably without grasp of their meaning.⁶ Rhapsodes, we are told, work their craft through a sort of divine dispensation—*viz.*, enthusiasm. Ion replies to a prod from Socrates, who essays to tease out just what it is that Ion does, “You spark my soul with your words, Socrates, and they seem to show me that the good poets, through divine dispensation, help us to inter-

⁶ My translations from the Greek (here) and Latin throughout. Socrates says to Ion, “It is plain to all that you are incapable of speaking with mastery and knowledge (*episteme*) on Homer, for if you were able to speak with mastery, you would be able to speak about all the other poets with mastery” (532c).

pret (*hermeneuein*) the utterances of the gods” (535a). Socrates says, “And so you rhapsodes interpret (*hermeneuete*) the works of the poets?” Ion replies, “Once again, you speak the truth”. Socrates adds, “And so you turn out to be interpreters of interpreters (*hermeneōn hermenēs*)” (535a). Socrates’ point, missed by Ion, is metaphysical. The allusion is to Plato’s theory of imitation (*memēsis*) in *Republic*. There Plato speaks of the form of bed, a man-made bed, and a painting of a bed—the second, an imitation of the eternal and immaculate Platonic form, being maculate and inferior to the form; the third, an imitation of an imitation, twice removed from what has greatest claim to reality, and thus being greatly maculate and virtually worthless (596b–598b).⁷ Consequently, to be an interpreter is not to know, and to be an interpreter of an interpreter is to be even further removed from knowing. Thus, Ion speaks glibly, and his craft is epistemically worthless.

One of the most conspicuous illustrations of the craft of interpretation—here interpretation, though in keeping with *huponoiā*, is extralinguistic—comes to us from the ancient Stoics. For Stoics, the cosmos was a harmonious system, every event causally linked with all others. The early Stoics, and the Stoic Aurelius (121–180 A.D.) some centuries later, were cosmological determinists. According to chronicler Diogenes Laertius (third century A.D.), the Stoic cosmos itself was deemed to be deity, and deity was thought to unfold eternally through *Logos* (Order, Reason, or Cause) in series after series of cosmic cycles, each identical. In any one cycle, Divine *Nous* (Mind or Thought), as a tenuous and craftsman-like fire or merely a craftsman, unfolds itself and ultimately self-creates the material world of things as we know it (II.57). All things, interrelated, are held together by a certain cosmic tension. At the end of a cosmic cycle, the cosmos deflagrates, and eventuates in a colossal conflagration, until such time as *Nous* again can unfold. Each cycle and the amaranthine succession of cycles, each identical, are deterministic.

The causal framework of the cosmos gave rise to the science of divination (Gr. *mantikē*, L., *divinatio*)—defined in Marcus Cicero’s *On Divination* by his brother Quintus Cicero as “the presentiment and science of future events” (I.1). In Book II, Marcus (106–43 B.C.) offers a definition of divination from the great early Stoic Chrysippus (280–207 B.C.): “It is a capacity to interpret (*cognoscentem*), to see, and to explain signs that are given as portents by the gods to men. It is the function of diviners to foreknow the disposition of the gods toward men, the manner in which that disposition is shown, and by what means the gods may be propitiated and

⁷ Aristotle, Plato’s pupil, wrote a work on semantics and logic titled *On Interpretation* (*Peri hermeneias*).

their threatened ills averted” (II.130). Diviners, then, are able to see through the cosmic veneer to the cosmic edifice.

Quintus gives proofs of the existence of the gods through arguments that are based on the legitimacy of the science of divination. First, those craftsmen, proficient at predicting the divine, exist in profusion in various places, and it would be strange for such technicians to thrive, were the cosmos not well ordered by deity. Second, the science of divination is efficacious. Evidence for the efficacy of such bodements exists in abundance (II.7). Next, there is an argument from authority. The Stoic Cleanthes (331–232 B.C.) writes of the arrangement (*rationem*), regularity (*modum*), and systematicity (*discipulum*) of the cosmos as proof of design (II.15). The cosmos is a perfect fit for things created, is complete, and has beauty and ornament (II.58). Thus, those proficient at analysis and interpretation of certain parts of the cosmos—the flight patterns of birds, the surface of animal livers, or even the visions in dreams—offer confirmatory evidence of its divine authorship (II.162–67). “This power or art or nature, thus, has been given beforehand by the immortal gods to man, and to no other creature, for the knowledge of future events” (*scientiam rerum futurarum*). It not only belongs to humans generically grasped, but to specific individuals, and especially to great persons. Thus, being able to foreknow by seeing the edifice of the cosmos behind what is apparent—that is, through correct interpretation—is a dispensation, given by deity to a few, privileged interpreters.

Centuries later, Augustine of Hippo (354–430 A.D.) in *The Teacher* offers a theory of language that is essentially hermeneutic. As a method of conveyancy, he says, language is sterile. It enables speakers to acquire beliefs through other speakers’ testimonies, but not knowledge. Language conveys through signs, significations (how signs function), and significates (things signified by signs). Augustine then offers a Meno-like paradox, “When a sign is given to me, it can teach me nothing if it finds me ignorant of the thing of which it is the sign; but if I am ignorant, what do I learn through the sign?” (X.33) To illustrate, no one can be taught what “oyster” is through verbal instruction. It is only through prior acquaintance with oysters that the verbal instruction, vis-à-vis oysters, has any merit. Augustine sums in Platonic fashion, “Words have force only to the extent that they remind us to look for things; they do not display them for us to know” (XI.36).

How, then, is one to acquire knowledge of things if verbal instruction is effete? Augustine falls back on his theory of divine illumination—a tack employed by Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* and Lord Kames in *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*.

There are things we believe, without knowing, and things we believe and know. On the one hand, of such things we believe without knowing, we grasp that many are of utmost use. Utility however does not give us knowledge. On the other hand, all things we know are believed. What we know we do not know through sounds, but through “the Truth that presides within the mind itself”. It is through recourse to Christ, “who is said to dwell in the inner man”, says Augustine, that learning is possible. Christ gives persons divine illumination (XI.37–38).

Illumination is a form of perception, which occurs through the senses or the mind. The former is carnal; the latter, spiritual. Sensual understanding, say of the moon, occurs not through a knower conveying words to one who is ignorant, but through the one ignorant looking at the moon (XII.39). Truths of the mind, in contrast, are cognizable divinely—through “the inner light of Truth”. Augustine elaborates: “Under these conditions our listener, if he likewise sees these things with his inward and undivided eye, knows what I am saying from his own contemplation, not from my words. Therefore, when I am stating truths, I do not even teach the person who is looking upon these truths. He is taught not by my words but by the things themselves made manifest within when God discloses them” (XII.40). Augustine has us consider two assertions: “I have seen a flying man” and “Wise men are better than fools”. One could claim to believe the former, but would never claim to know it. Yet one could claim to know the latter. In both cases, one would claim no understanding is gotten from words.

What is the upshot? “Nothing can be taught by words” (XII.40) The path is paved for justification of a god-guided understanding of Scripture.

“Ecstatic temporality” German Hermeneuts

Augustine’s awareness of the problem of conveyancy through language was echoed millennia later by Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834) in *Hermeneutics* (published posthumously, 1838). Behind the venter of rationality and coherency of language in any discussion between two persons, there is much that fails to get transmitted. That is clearest when someone from one culture tries to understand someone from a radically different culture. Yet even in such circumstances, there is some meaning, capable of conveyancy. The former as it were grasps what the latter says through the filter of the latter’s cultural norms. Yet the same applies to a lesser extent to any two persons within the same culture. Imagine two Argentinians females, engaged in discussion of American poet

Theodore Roethke's "Cuttings" and two other Argentinian females discussing what went wrong in Argentina's 1–0 loss to Germany in the 2014 World Cup soccer game. The discussants, speaking Spanish, would use the same language to get at the meaning of the American poem and to understand why Argentina's team lost the game, but each would have a distinctive vocabulary, unique employment of grammar, singular life experiences that shape her understanding of words, and a limited grasp of the English language. The possibility of a precise conveyancy of meaning and understanding is impossible in the case of the poem and highly improbable in the case of the match. Nonetheless, language is adequately suited to conveyancy of some amount of meaning. Humans get by.

For Schleiermacher, there too are inherent difficulties with understanding written texts. Relational analysis is critical. One must interpret each word as a word embedded in a sentence, each sentence as a sentence embedded in a paragraph, and each paragraph as a paragraph embedded in the text as a whole. To understand the whole, one must interpret its parts; to understand the parts, one must see them as belonging to a whole.

Reading Sigmund Freud's "Three Essays on Sexuality" in German, for instance, is comparable to a dialogical conversation in which one person plays the part of both discussants—here, the author and reader of the text—in some effort to glean authorial intentment. A reader comes at the work from a certain grammatical and syntactical base—the German of Freud's day—common to all of the same language, but employed with uniqueness by Freud as well as by the reader. Concerning the latter, Schleiermacher writes, "The vocabulary and the history of an author's age together form a whole from which his writings must be understood as a part" (1977, 113).

Moreover, there is the task of grasping precisely what Freud meant, though one cannot, so to speak, have privileged access to his mind. Appeal to late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century German grammar and syntax is indispensable. Still, every work of Freud is non-trivially unique. One must compare, say, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920) to other Freudian works roughly of the same period—"Lines of Advance in Psycho-Analytic Therapy" (1919), "A Child Is Being Beaten" (1919), "The Uncanny" (1919), "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921), "Psycho-Analysis and Telepathy" (1922), and "Dream and Telepathy" (1922); and those writings, in relation to other works of the Freudian corpus; and the Freudian corpus, in relation to other German writings of the time; and so on. Thus, interpretation is fluid and dynamic, not solid and static. There is no perch from which meaning is absolute. There is no definitive answer to the question: What did Freud mean by *Todestrieb*?

Readers are guided by a grasp of the chaotic incoherency of extreme individualism—e.g., trying to grasp the meaning of the word *Todestrieb* without considering its context in a sentence or in a work—and the perfect coherency of extreme universalism—e.g., grasping that “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” aims at disclosure of the possibility of a death drive. The shift from what is particular to what is universal, thus, occurs according to no fixed rules of language or logic. As with Augustine, there is “divination” of a sort involved, and divination involves hypothesis framing and comparative analysis, when reading a text to gauge authorial intendment. “By leading the interpreter to transform himself, so to speak, into the author, the divinatory method seeks to gain an immediate comprehension of the author as an individual” (1977, 150). The notion of perfect apprehension of something written or spoken is bunkum, yet in general there is adequate conveyancy to ensure some measure of apprehension in everyday speech and writing. Understanding authorial intendment through interpretation can be had in degrees. In that regard, though understanding can never be perfect, it can in some sense converge asymptotically toward perfection.

Because of the fluidity and relativity of interpretation, there exists for a hermeneut a circle. A text must be understood as a whole in relation to its parts; the parts must be seen as parts of a whole. When such understanding has been had—and here perfect authorial grasp is merely an ideal to be approximated—one (at least theoretically) leaves the hermeneutic circle.

The next significant hermeneutic philosopher is Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), who goes beyond hermeneuticism as a method of interpreting language. As his most significant work, the unfinished *Being and Time* (1927), suggests, hermeneuticism is an ontology—a way of being in the world.

Heidegger’s target is the French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650), for whom being is a matter of a person, as both mind and body, occupying a certain physical space for a certain period of time. For Descartes, to understand fully is to have knowledge, which is guaranteed ultimately by clear and certain apprehension that deity exists and is no deceiver, so that, say, the certitude one feels in asserting “Twice two equals four” can be epistemically grounded (see chapter 2). For Heidegger, in contrast to Descartes, understanding transcends epistemology—it is pre-linguistic and prescientific (1927, 8)—and relates to each person’s “Being” (*Sein*)—here not mere existence, but a way of existing in the world.

Pace Descartes, Being, says Heidegger, is not reducible to something occupying space in time. Rather, Being determines beings as beings—it is

that by which beings are already understood (1927, 6). Moreover, Being is not a matter of a subject gathering information or testing hypotheses about an external reality, thought objectively accessible, in the manner of science, which Heidegger's epistemology rules out. Instead, Being occurs when one immerses oneself in the world through the process of interpretation. One interprets the world and the various things in it, and through doing so, the world and the things in it appear as "something". In Heidegger's words, through interpretation, "something becomes intelligible as something" (151). Thus, the sort of being Heidegger has in mind is not mere existence in space and time, but conscious and reflective existence of the right sort in space and time—that is, *Dasein* (12). Thus, one opens oneself to a myriad of intersubjective experiences. Through interpretive immersion, there is the possibility of a sort of harmony between interpretation of the world and the world. In short, understanding allows for being at home in the world, which is where all meaning occurs.

The process of harmonizing interpretation and the world through understanding occurs through assertion, which functions to see a thing or event "as something"—e.g., to see a double axe as a chopping thing, which allows for meaning and linguistic identification. Understanding through assertion occurs prior to any epistemic certainty claimed through philosophical analysis—for instance, the certainty of self-existence one ultimately might get by means of systematic Cartesian doubting.

Heidegger's hermeneutics of being leads to a hermeneutic circle different from that of Schleiermacher. Given each is a being immersed in the world as a temporal being, self-apprehension cannot be had unless one apprehends oneself as a cosmos-immersed entity. In fine, one cannot apprehend oneself without seeing oneself as something existing in and as part of the cosmos, and one cannot apprehend the cosmos other than through the filter of an entity that is essentially extant in and part of the cosmos. There is no leaving the circle. The key is hermeneutical apprehension, in such a manner that one grasps fully the perpetual existential task of *Dasein*—apprehending self and the world through being in the world. Such apprehension, Heidegger states, has implications for the sort of life one then must lead. It must be "authentic"—i.e., it must be fully situated in time, as it were, and cognizant of full-situatedness in time—but that implies "ecstatic temporality", or being outside of time (1927, 437). Yet Heidegger's discussions of angst and human mortality offer little hope for ecstatic temporality—*viz.*, genuine *Dasein*.

Overall, the shift from textual interpretation to existential interpretation is a shift from grasping the meaning of words to the meaning of life.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, a pupil of Heidegger, takes up his teacher's ontology of hermeneutics, but aims to return to a Schleiermachiian frame—how language relates to the meaning of life—for human understanding of the world is understanding through language. He does so in *Wahrheit und Methode* (*Truth and Method*, 1960). The thesis propounded—and here the title misleads—is that truth does not have a method. The target is the empiricism of positivists of his day. Truth is achieved through *Bildung*—education within a cultural context.

Humans are born into a horizon (*Horizont*)—a cultural context that shapes each person's perspective of the way things are. When one reads, say, Darwin's *Origin of Species* or studies Michelangelo's *Moses*, one cannot approach either work from a disinterested, scientific perspective and converge asymptotically toward authorial intendment, as Schleiermacher suggests one can do. Gadamer criticizes Schleiermacher for essaying “to understand the author better than the author understood himself” (1985, 150). Schleiermacher fails to acknowledge that each person has a “historically shaped consciousness”. Prior to study of Darwin's or Michelangelo's work, one is previously molded in a manner that determines a certain interpretation of that work. One works with certain prejudices (*Vorurteile*; lit., “prejudgments”⁸) that shape interpretation and allow for meaning. In effect, one is already shaped by the *Moses* before one first sees it. Thus, the *Moses* has in some sense an axiological presence that we cannot have. It has existed for many years prior to us, and it has had a profound influence on the horizons, prior to ours, which have determined ours.

Being born into a horizon, no person can ever know the *Moses* of Michelangelo—at least, not as Michelangelo or even others of his day knew it. The cultural context, ever fluid and alive, has changed, and the past can only be apprehended through the lens of the present, which Gadamer thinks tends toward richer, more complex interpretations of the past. Thus, on the one hand, we cannot today know the *Moses*; on the other hand, the *Moses* is ever alive insofar as there continues to be interest in understanding it, and that interest creates an ampler, more nuanced understanding of the past.

When we interface with the *Moses* with hermeneutic apprehension, we immerse ourselves in a dialogical relationship with the work and the horizon in which it was constructed. Seeing first the *Moses* as something alien—i.e., belonging to a different horizon—we interpret the work from the very different context of our own horizon, less rich and less complex,

⁸ Perhaps better captured in English by “prepossessions”, which does not necessarily carry with it the notion of harmfulness.

because our is not the product of successive past horizons. Doing so, we achieve a “fusion of horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*).

Interfacing or relating to the *Moses* to achieve a fusion of horizons is not an intellectual process, for which there are rules to follow. There is no method, such as hypothetico-deductivism, that allows us to apprehend the *Moses*. One does not become a great sculptor by reading and rereading manuals of instruction on sculpting. Rather one takes up apprenticeship with a masterly cynosure like Michelangelo and over time acquires a knack. Consequently, achieving a fusion of horizons is comparable to becoming masterly in sculpting: It is something that just happens over time through repeated practice and immersion.

Fusion of horizons is Gadamer’s hermeneutic circle. The *Moses* as it was created is forever lost. So too is *The Origin of Species*. There can be no gleaning of authorial intendment; that task is abortive. Those horizons have passed, and as it were, have fluidly birthed new horizons. Any attempt to know the works is vain. Yet the meaning of those works does not reside in perfect understanding of authorial intendment. One can, however, aim at recapturing “the perspective in which [the author] has formed his views”, and that is comparable to being an audience member during creation of the work (1985, 259–60). Yet that is not a matter of leaving one’s horizon. Horizons are ever being birthed or shaped, and the meaning of the *Moses* is a product of the interfacing of present with past in a manner that is ever richer and increasingly multifaceted, thereby creating a fusion of horizons to allow for future fusions.

What is said of works of art or of literature is applicable for self-apprehension. There can never be a point of knowing oneself. Being is, over time, a shifting horizon. In that regard, the best one can do is effect what is comparable to a fusion of horizons by connecting a present self with a past self through meaningful interpretation. That requires abundant interpretation through self-reflection.

Upshot

This précis of hermeneuticism as a movement of some sort throughout time is admittedly sketchy and certainly incomplete. There are, for instance, important contemporary players—e.g., Habermas, Ricœur, Derrida, and Lacan—whom I have overpassed. However, brief and incomplete it might be, it is a sufficient historical introduction to hermeneutic thinking for the task ahead: critical analysis of psychotherapists’ use of hermeneutical philosophy to ground and justify psychotherapeutic practices.

Chapter 2

Was Freud a Hermeneut?

IN *FREUD: THE RELUCTANT PHILOSOPHER*, Alfred Tauber states that Freud, in seeking to establish psychoanalysis as a science, wound up, perhaps unwittingly, offering a hermeneutic. He writes:

In an attempt to establish psychic cause, Freud has offered an *interpretation*. An interpretation, while failing to establish causality, *does* offer an explanation, albeit one constructed within its own definitions and guided by its own inner logic. The overall structure of that interpretation is framed by ‘meanings’, and these interpretative elements ... then are assembled to compose larger meanings through a more comprehensive interpretation, and so on. Simply, the psychological narrative becomes a product of a hermeneutical strategy, where cause is embedded in the constructed schema as a product of a larger interpretative enterprise (66).

The point was made earlier and with greater robustness by Paul Ricœur in *Freud and Philosophy*. Ricœur, drawing much from Freud’s use of dreams to generate psychoanalytic theory and his method of free association, “By making dreams not only the first object of his investigation but a model of all the disguised, substitutive, and fictive expressions of human wishing or desire, Freud invites us to look to dreams themselves for the various relations between desire and language” (1970, 5). He continues: “It is not the dream as dreamed that can be interpreted but rather the text of the dream account; analysis attempts to substitute for this text another text that could be called the primitive speech of desire. Thus analysis moves from one meaning to another meaning; it is not desires as such that are placed at the center of the analysis, but rather their language” (1970, 5).

Adolf Grünbaum, however, vigorously challenged Ricœur’s misappropriation of dreams. “What, besides an imported ideological objective, prompted Ricœur to shrink the subject matter of Freud’s wish-fulfillment theory, which offers repressed infantile motives for dreams as dreamed during sleep, into mere verbal dream-reports during waking life?” (1984, 45) The theory of dreams might have been the royal road to the unconscious, for Freud, but it was not the sole road.

The gloves were off, as it were. Psychoanalysts, daunted by Grünbaum’s criticisms concerning lack of scientificity of their discipline, began to find in hermeneuticism a response to Grünbaum. Moreover, what

applies to Freudian psychoanalysis, in the mind of many therapists today, applies also in general to psychotherapy.

This book is an investigation of the current (post-Grünbaum) wave of literature that argues for psychotherapy as a hermeneutic discipline. The question I pose is whether the modern hermeneutic defense is evidentially grounded or merely a rationalization. Do psychotherapists argue on behalf of hermeneuticism to parry criticisms that psychotherapy is not scientific or are there good reasons to see psychotherapy as essentially hermeneutic?

Preliminary to an answer to that question, it is profitable to examine thoroughly, as does Tauber, Freudian psychoanalysis—the aim of this chapter. Was Freud in any sense expressly a hermeneut, as it is today often claimed? If so—if Freud avowedly recognized that psychoanalysis was in some sense hermeneutic—then there is some reason to take seriously any appeal to authority by psychotherapists. As we shall come to see in later chapters, some of the apologists for the hermeneutic status of psychotherapy do just that.

“These men inspired Freud” Hermeneuticism or Positivism?

Since Paul Ricœur published *Freud and Philosophy* (1970) and Jurgen Habermas published *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971), it is not uncommon today to paint Freud a hermeneut. Some hermeneuts among psychoanalysts argue for therapy being hermeneutic by appealing to the interpretive aspects of Freud’s writings. Freud, they maintain, is expressly hermeneutic. Psychoanalysis is essentially an investigation of the human unconscious, the human unconscious is only indirectly accessible and disobeys the logic of the conscious (i.e., it is primary process, exempt from mutual contradiction, and timeless), and thus the methods of psychoanalytic investigation are essentially hermeneutically interpretive. Other therapists maintain that even if Freud was expressly scientific, he should have recognized that psychoanalytic investigation was essentially hermeneutic interpretation.

Prior to the work of Ricœur and Habermas, I think it is safe to say that the received view, generated by Freud’s own views on the status of psychoanalysis, was that Freud was a Positivist and that he aimed for psychoanalysis to be an empirical, but unique, science, since its objects of investigation were not things external to the mind, but the mind itself.

Positivism was, in addition to the hermeneutic tradition in Germany, another, later movement that was antithetical to hermeneuticism. The So-