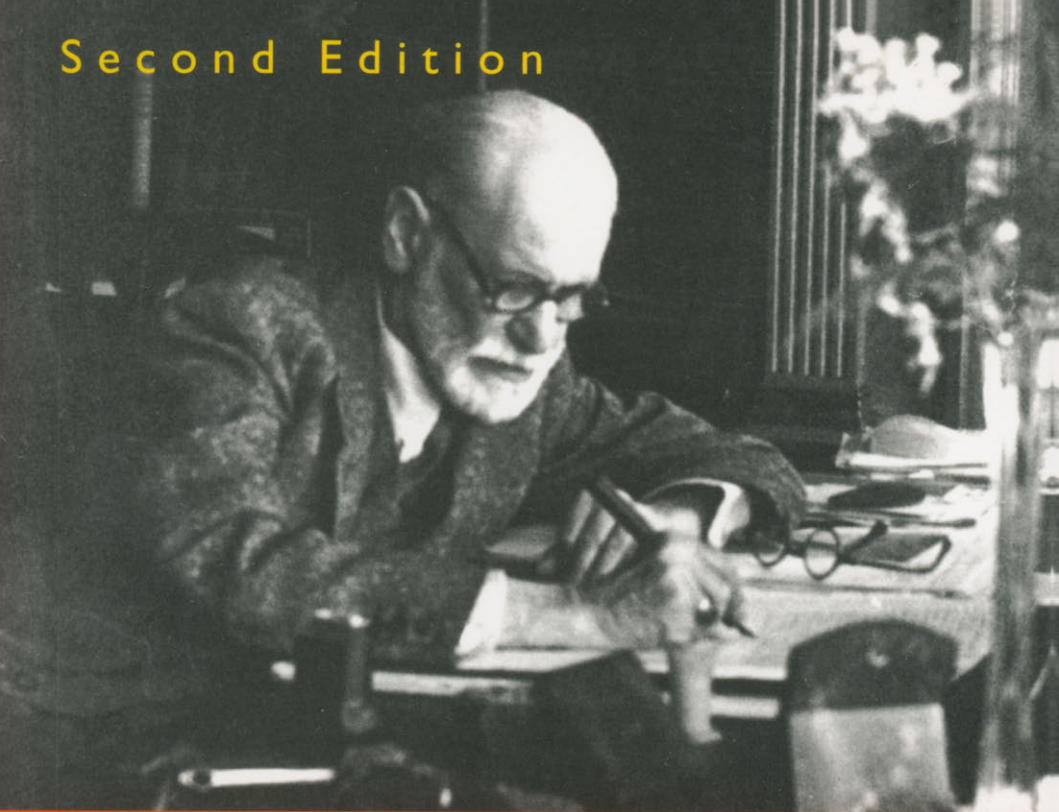


Second Edition



THE POLITICS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

stephen frosh



The Politics of Psychoanalysis

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The Politics of Psychoanalysis

An Introduction to Freudian
and Post-Freudian Theory

Second Edition

Stephen Frosh





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To Judith

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STEPHEN FROSH

Preface to the Second Edition

Returning to *The Politics of Psychoanalysis* thirteen years after I first wrote it has been, for me, a surprisingly affirming experience. Although it was the first book I wrote on my own, and I hope that I have tidied up my style and tempered my wilder speculations since that time, I have been pleased to find how much of it still seems to hold true and how enjoyable it is to read. The basic descriptions of major psychoanalytic theories remain robust and accurate and the attempt to derive social and political consequences from them still seems to me worthwhile and interesting.

That said, there have been many developments in critical psychoanalysis in the last decade or so and my own thinking has changed as a result. I have also produced a number of other books on related topics and have learnt a great deal from the research involved in that work. Still, trying to stay true to the original conceptualisation of this book as a critical *introduction* to psychoanalytic theory, I have tried not to burden the text with too many novelties, but instead to clarify and correct where necessary and to add in material related to what I regard as major new developments. This has meant, in particular, something of a revision of the assessment of object relations theory, my criticisms of which I think were over-stated in the first edition, and the inclusion of the feminist intersubjectivity theory associated with the work of Jessica Benjamin. I have also tried to clarify and develop the account of Lacanian and post-Lacanian psychoanalysis and included material on the engagement of psychoanalytic thinking with postmodernism. Some issues which I have dealt with at length elsewhere have only been lightly treated here (for example, questions of the scien-

tific status of psychoanalysis, its approach to homosexuality, its contribution to understanding racism and its therapeutic efficacy), but I have referenced these where appropriate so the work can be easily traced.

I hope that this new edition will please readers who appreciated my earlier efforts and will also be attractive to those coming fresh to the question of what psychoanalysis can offer social theory. Despite all the ambivalence which I regard as fitting for this topic, I remain convinced that psychoanalysis is a profound source of insights and challenges for those wishing to build social forms conducive to positive human development and enriching personal relationships.

STEPHEN FROSH

Introduction

Psychoanalysis, a product of the culture of late nineteenth-century Europe, has been one of the strongest influences on twentieth-century thought, its impact comparable only to that of Darwinism and Marxism. Much that was new in psychoanalysis has become accepted wisdom in our culture and has been absorbed even by people who have not read Freud's works: several decades of technical writing, popular literature and therapy have made the concepts of repression, sexual desire and the unconscious familiar, often implicit in ordinary 'common-sense' understandings of ourselves and each other. As many commentators have observed, influential theories of human nature have their own way of becoming true; thus, our awareness of psychoanalysis creates us partly in its image, so that our dreams, neuroses and resistances are comprehended in a Freudian frame. By the same token, Freud's writings continue to be a source of challenge and controversy, as much now as when they first appeared sixty and more years ago. There is nothing in psychoanalysis, from its most general principles to its most specific observations, that can be said to be universally accepted. Analysts themselves, belonging to the various schools and institutions that have grown up in the wake of Freud, diverge markedly on crucial issues; the non-analytic world has been as scornful as it has been intrigued. The stunning virtuosity of psychoanalysis lies in walking on water: a tremendous speculative energy and certainty of theorising balanced on a foundation that half the world denies. Denies, but cannot ignore; for psychoanalysis, whether right or wrong, challenges all traditional modes of thought on human nature and with that challenge poses questions for psychological, social and political theory.

Fundamentals of psychoanalysis

What is psychoanalysis? Originating with Freud, still awed by his work and nominally obedient to his principles, the psychoanalytic movement has expanded and diverged significantly since his time. It has been institutionalised nationally and internationally, it has developed formal and elaborate training programmes, it has infiltrated social and literary thought as well as psychotherapy, its main area of activity. It has produced, along the way, a number of different schools of thought with their own theories which in many cases depart in crucial respects from Freud's own ideas. All psychoanalytic theories do, however, have their origins in Freud's work and all share some common assumptions and affiliations. The most important of these concerns the existence of the dynamic unconscious – the idea that in each of us there is a realm of psychological functioning which is not accessible to ordinary introspection, but which nevertheless has a determining or at least a motivating influence on the activities, thoughts and emotions of everyday life. The exact structure and content of this unconscious arena is a much debated topic; for most analysts, however, it is made up of the residues of infantile experiences, possibly alongside certain kinds of instinctual impulses, particularly sexual ones. In addition, all psychoanalysts agree that children develop by passing through certain stages, leading to increased complexity of psychic structure; in all theories, the experiences of early life (up to four or five years of age), primarily with parents, are of crucial significance for the whole of later life. There is, however, considerable disagreement on the details of the developmental process, which is in some cases at the heart of differences between various psychoanalytic schools. Psychoanalysts also fairly universally agree on the significance of Freud's basic approach: that through the intense examination of psychological and cultural phenomena of virtually any kind (dreams, slips of the tongue, works of art, neuroses) the underlying 'dynamics' of mental life can be unearthed. For most analysts, the therapeutic situation is the place where this all happens most clearly, as well as being the appropriate setting for operation of the 'talking cure'.

There are shared bases to all approaches, then, but there is also a wide variety of theories that may be termed 'psychoana-

lytic', often differing greatly in their basic concepts and implications. Sometimes, indeed, different theories are directly opposed to one another on particular issues, making general references to psychoanalysis spurious. Despite this, analytic concepts are frequently employed out of the context of the specific theory from which they arise, a procedure which obscures their significance or makes them lose their sense altogether. An alternative, but equally common, failing is to take only one psychoanalytic theory and to treat it either as the whole or as the only correct approach. It is still the case that Freud's own ideas are sometimes used in this way, as if there had been no developments since he founded psychoanalysis, and also as if there were no contradictions within his own work. More recently, Lacanian ideas have been employed in a wide variety of cultural discussions as if they hold all the progressive prospects for psychoanalysis. In addition to neglecting the complexity of analytic thought, which stretches across a wider area than is encompassed by any one theory, this procedure misleadingly presents the discipline as coherent when in fact it contains numerous contradictions, some of them potentially highly productive.

In this book, the focus is on those major traditions that most clearly bring out differing aspects of psychoanalytic theory, especially as it relates to social thought. Each of these approaches is introduced in Part II in the context of what it has to say about the role of instincts in psychology (something that bears on notions of 'human nature') and about the influence of social experience in the development of the finished human 'subject'. In addition to the work of Freud himself, described in Part I, the approaches selected for consideration are 'classical' ego analysis, object relations, Kleinian and Lacanian theory, and – in Part III – the variants of these approaches that have developed when psychoanalysis has been applied in political contexts. This list is not fully comprehensive: not only are there other positions within psychoanalysis, but there are important related schools outside the psychoanalytic movement itself, for example those of Jung and Adler. However, the selected approaches are the most important in the current analytic pantheon and they present the full range of serious theorising on most topics that are germane to the central debates within psychoanalysis. Ego analysis grew out of Freud's later work,

was strongly influenced by Anna Freud's ideas and codified particularly by Heinz Hartmann and his colleagues in the United States. The focus of this school, as its name implies, is on the functioning of the ego, the core of intelligent activity which modifies and controls unconscious impulses and ensures that they are expressed only in ways which are compatible with the requirements of functioning in the ordinary social world. This approach attempts to combine a biological view of the individual with an understanding of social processes by exploring the enculturation of the child during the socialisation period; that is, its concern is with the way the individual's needs and desires become adapted to particular social demands. Consequently, ego analysis is similar in its general position to Freud's own views, for example his belief that instinctual renunciation is necessary for the maintenance of society.

Object relations theory has mainly British origins, deriving from writers such as Fairbairn, Winnicott and Guntrip, but it has in recent years become increasingly important in the United States through its links with a number of related schools, for example 'self-psychology' and 'intersubjective' psychoanalysis as well as the influential work of Otto Kernberg. Whereas Freud places sexual and aggressive instincts at the centre of mental life, object relations theorists emphasise the relational context of development. For them, the crucial point in considering individual psychology is not the biological 'drives' that underlie behaviour, but the quality of relationships that are available to a person, and were available during the formative period of very early life. These early relationships are understood to lay down basic psychic structures and internalisations which provide the template for later relationships; the quality of the early environment is thus crucial for the future conduct of a person's life. Object relations theory, with its emphasis on the importance of the interpersonal environment, presents a more 'open' view of individuality than do the classical theorists: that is, it is more accessible to the idea that the individual is best understood as part of an interpersonal 'field'. Because of this apparently social emphasis, object relations theory is at the centre of most of the debates outlined in this book.

Kleinian theory is closely related to object relations views, even being included under that heading by many writers. It is distinguished from the object relations approach here because

of significant differences on some points which are crucial when considering the politics of psychoanalysis, both in basic theory and in attitudes towards therapy. The most important of these differences revolve around the Kleinian insistence on the existence of instincts that 'drive' the individual, and also on the way 'phantasy'¹ is seen as central to psychological functioning. The result is an approach that, while stressing the importance of the 'object world' of other people for development, focuses away from the real world concerns of object relations theory and towards an internal world marked by phantasy, splitting and various complications of process and structure. Interestingly, the Kleinian emphasis on the complexities of internal life and their links with the equally complex and contradictory external world raises many important questions and provides some intriguing possibilities for attempts to construct a 'dialectical' theory of development. It also supplies some instructive concepts for use when considering therapy. To some extent, Klein's work is a bridge between classical and object relations views; but it is also distinct from both positions, and has forged a unique and powerful vision that undermines any neat categorisation of psychoanalysis' social theory.

Finally, Lacanian theory is linked to a different tradition from that of the others, that of structuralism as it has been worked out in philosophy, linguistics and cultural studies, particularly in France. Lacan's own claim was that his work represented a 'return to Freud' armed with the new tools provided by structural linguistics; others have suggested that his main achievement was to polarise analytic practice and obscure analytic theory. One thing Lacanianism does provide is a radical opposition to any adaptationist politics, a celebration of the power of psychoanalysis to produce disconcerting ideas and, more concretely, an account of the way the individual becomes formed in the structures of language and culture. Despite some lines of agreement with Klein's work, Lacanianism is basically distinct from, and at odds with, all other forms of psychoanalysis in its relentless insistence on the impossibility of any human

1. The spelling 'phantasy' is a common one in psychoanalysis, but is problematic in that it is used to signify different things in different theories. In this book, its use is restricted to occasions when Kleinian theory is being discussed, as 'phantasy' has a specific sense there (see Chapter 5). In all other instances, the more conventional spelling of 'fantasy' is employed.

structure that is not bound up in, and constructed as part of, culture. This insistence has led to some of the most interesting new developments in the social application of psychoanalysis, particularly by feminists, even if they sometimes end up opposed to Lacan.

Evaluating psychoanalysis

All the issues mentioned so far will be explored more fully in the discussions that follow. However, the description of the various analytic theories raises a point that must be addressed here. This concerns the evaluative criteria that can be employed to differentiate between theories and to assess the importance and validity of the psychoanalytic enterprise itself. The first aspect of this relates closely to the notion of politics employed in this book, and will be discussed later. There have, however, been numerous critiques of the whole project of psychoanalysis, the main lines of which are worth mentioning briefly (see Frosh, 1997, for an extended examination of these issues). First, there is the empirical question: that psychoanalysis is 'unscientific', its theories based on no legitimate base of observation or experiment and having the status only of speculation. The behaviourist Hans Eysenck was a prime propagandist for this view, in numerous articles and books over three decades. His argument rests on two straightforward principles: that the veracity of psychoanalysis is testable through traditional empirical means and that in all areas where such tests have been carried out, psychoanalysis has failed:

We are left with nothing but imaginary interpretation of pseudo-events, therapeutic failures, illogical and inconsistent theories, unacknowledged borrowings from predecessors, enormous 'insights' of no proven value, and a dictatorial and intolerant group of followers insistent not on truth but on propaganda. (Eysenck, 1985, pp. 201–2)

Eysenck's evaluation of Freud's intellectual status is no less sweeping:

He was, without doubt, a genius, not of science, but of propaganda, not of rigorous proof, but of persuasion, not of the design of exper-

iments, but of literary art. His place is not, as he claimed, with Copernicus and Darwin, but with Hans Christian Anderson and the Brothers Grimm, tellers of fairy tales. (ibid., p. 208)

That psychoanalysis has been attacked so frequently by positivists such as Eysenck and by philosophers of science for its neglect of what are claimed to be fundamental scientific principles (falsifiability, the provision of quantitative evidence, use of adequate controls over the contamination of data – see Grünbaum, 1984, and Gellner, 1985, for sophisticated accounts of this kind) is a fairly substantial irony, as is the defence of psychoanalysis offered by some of its defenders in terms of its messages or general concepts or moral stature. Freud's aim certainly was to construct a new 'science', fusing biology and psychology, the body and the word; in the terms of the unpublished 1895 manuscript which influenced all his later psychoanalytic work, it was to develop a 'Project for a Scientific Psychology'. 'Science' signified for Freud the distinction between the insights of philosophers and mystics on the one hand and, on the other, the careful, uncompromising and impartial attempt to uncover the governing rules of the mind which was his image of psychoanalysis. For Freud, the basic elements of psychoanalysis were its observations, upon which 'facts', collected under the controlled conditions of the analytic situation, irresistible theorems could be posited. When he speculated, he was clear about it: in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he warns:

What follows is speculation, often far-fetched speculation, which the reader will consider or dismiss according to his individual predilection. It is further an attempt to follow out an idea consistently, out of curiosity to see where it will lead. (Freud, 1920, p. 295)

But even when his ideas were at their most uncertain, Freud still felt them to be scientific in essence, unclear and available to reorganisation as they might be. Freud was particularly impatient, in this connection, with those who complained that he kept altering his ideas:

Only believers, who demand that science shall be a substitute for the catechism they have given up, will blame an investigator for developing or even transforming his views. (ibid., p. 338)

Whatever Freud was doing, it was not, to his mind, to be confused with poetry, religion or philosophy.

It is not just behaviourists and conservative philosophers who have criticised psychoanalysis for its lack of an empirical base. Farrell (1981), in an exposition that is basically sympathetic to psychoanalysis, nevertheless notes that, 'The impact of psychoanalysis on the West cannot be justified on the grounds that it contains a body of reasonably secure or established knowledge about human nature' (p. 190). On the contrary, he finds relatively little evidence that supports the validity of psychoanalytic theory and bases much of his defence of it on the lack of support for alternative approaches, psychoanalysis being a 'premature' theory rather than necessarily a totally wrong one. Wittgenstein, too, while exhibiting considerable interest in the project of psychoanalysis, denigrates its empirical standing: 'Freud is constantly claiming to be scientific. But what he gives is *speculation* – something prior even to the formation of an hypothesis' (Wittgenstein, in Cioffi, 1973, p. 79). Sebastiano Timpanaro, in one of the most extensive and honourable critiques of psychoanalysis to have originated from within Marxism, makes a sustained attack on 'the captious and sophistical method, resistant to any verification, quick to force interpretations to secure pre-ordained proofs' that he sees as characteristic of the Freudian approach (1976, p. 14). Whereas Wittgenstein suggests that much of the problem lies in Freud's desire to find laws of thought and behaviour when in fact there is none, Timpanaro accuses him of overlooking those obvious explanations which reside in material circumstances and class divisions, relying instead on finding something 'unknowable' and mysterious behind every phenomenon. Timpanaro (1976, p. 178) comments that:

While the accusation of pansexuality often levelled at psychoanalysis is largely wide of the mark, the charge of psychologism is... much more accurate. The preferred explanation is always the most tortuous and complicated, and thus the most 'misanthropic'.

These criticisms are not always easy to answer. Although the excesses of positivism are fairly obvious (too rigid a view of science, too limited a notion of human behaviour and experience, cavalier treatment of experimental data to suit their own

theories, and so on), the empirical arguments that derive from progressive critics are more robust. Timpanaro (1976, p. 207) himself supplies part of the answer in a quotation from Trotsky that compares the apparently 'materialist' work of Pavlov with that of Freud:

Pavlov's method is that of experiment, Freud's that of conjecture... in Freudianism we have an instance of a working hypothesis which can, and indubitably does, allow for the development of deductions and conjectures along the lines of a materialist psychology.

This is in line with Farrell's (1981) idea that psychoanalysis is a 'premature science', pronouncing on issues of significance for human experience but without the technology that makes verification of these pronouncements possible. Psychoanalysis under this view provides a direction for research and practice, always available to alteration or liable to be surpassed – an idea not dissimilar to that held by Freud himself. But another line of defence which has been taken up by many psychoanalytic apologists is that presented most forcefully by Habermas (1972), who suggests that psychoanalysis is an instance of a particular kind of science, a 'hermeneutic' approach which is 'the only tangible example of a science incorporating methodological self-reflection' (p. 214). The focus of the psychoanalytic enterprise in this view is on the unravelling of distorted 'texts'; that is, it is a form of interpretative activity, a kind of literary criticism of everyday life. As such, its project is to make sense, to find meaning in material and hence to allow for a more complete self-reflection than might otherwise be possible.

Whatever the merits of Habermas' specific theory, the general argument that psychoanalytic knowledge is knowledge of a different order from that accessible by means of the experimental sciences is a strong one, however unpalatable it might have been to Freud. The object of psychoanalytic knowledge is subjectivity, the flowing, changing, productive and disjointed experience that each of us has of ourselves and the world, and the pattern of linkages that this subjectivity has with unconscious and with external events. The criteria for evaluation of the correctness of theories in this area cannot be solely empirical or observational, because such approaches operate on the wrong level to conceptualise or measure subjective experience.

Other criteria that deal with personal *meanings* are also required, for instance investigating the persuasive and conceptual power of psychoanalysis, its 'hermeneutic' energy. This does not mean that all psychoanalytic theorising is acceptable: as both Gellner and Timpanaro demonstrate, there are many examples even in Freud's work of distorted or tendentious thinking in which the material is made to fit pre-existing ideas and in which alternative positions are equally, or more, persuasive. As I have argued extensively elsewhere (Frosh, 1997), psychoanalytic thinking has to be *accountable* as well as daring. But there is a need for a broader view of what constitutes knowledge than that available from within positivist psychology – something which can speak to our experience and ideas as well as to our eyes. Limiting our concepts of ourselves and others to those that are based on simple observational measurements or laboratory experiments is a path towards complete ignorance of all internal states – of the core of psychology itself.

The politics of psychoanalysis

The final issue to be raised here is central to the concerns of this book. It begins with another common criticism of psychoanalysis, that it is by nature a bourgeois discipline, opposed to radical activity. In part, this argument derives from practice: from the dismissiveness with which analysts have sometimes greeted political action, from the moralism implicit or explicit in psychoanalytic therapy, or from the use made of some analytic theories apparently to explain away oppressive practices, for instance father–daughter rape (see Ward, 1984). Pilgrim (1997) comments that psychoanalysis 'is a mechanistic, individualistic and psychologistic theory and is tied to its medical roots', making it an unlikely source of radical political insights. Brooks (1973) supplies a shriller and more extensive critique by arguing that 'Freudianism is not a basis for a Marxist Psychology' because it systematically obscures the social base of human life, and also because it depersonalises the individual, depicting 'human behaviour as the manifestation of the play of forces of the unconscious and id, ego, super-ego, rather than as a meaningful act revealing the world' (p. 334). It will be argued later in this book that this is, in fact, the precise opposite of what

psychoanalysis at its best does: psychoanalysis offers a means of understanding how the world can be 'revealed' and expressed in the experiences of every individual. But the Marxist critique cannot be dismissed so lightly when it is more carefully formulated. Once again, Timpanaro (1976, p. 12) is a helpful guide here. He articulates the 'Marxist objection that psychoanalysis is a bourgeois doctrine, and to that extent incapable of seeing beyond an "ideological" horizon delimited precisely by the class interests of the bourgeoisie', a critique which stresses the tendency of Freud to regard his society as the only possible one and to view repression as its necessary consequence. Timpanaro goes on to point out the idealist tendencies in Freud and his complete neglect of Marxist theories of the family (something 'really scandalous'), and to conclude that:

With the exception of some inspired but fairly restricted conquests, psychoanalysis is neither a natural nor a human science, but a self-confession by the bourgeoisie of its own misery and perfidy, which blends the bitter insight and ideological blindness of a class in decline. (p. 224)

Timpanaro does recognise some virtues in Freudianism, particularly in the early concentration on hedonism (for example, in the *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud, 1905a), but in the main he sees it as a portrayal of bourgeois decadence. Once again, this is not wrong but it is also not the whole story. The details of the riposte to this argument are implicit in the whole of the rest of this book, but the general point is as follows. Psychoanalysis does often reveal individualistic and retrograde tendencies, and some psychoanalytic theories are wholly in this mode. But it also contains the possibilities for an approach that analyses the mechanisms by which the social world enters into the experience of each individual, constructing the human 'subject' and reproducing itself through the perpetuation of particular patterns of ideology. This is analysis of the bourgeois condition, but potentially of other conditions as well – of all conditions under which selfhood is formed. As such, psychoanalysis can be more than a portrayal of 'a class in decline'; it can also provide insights into how we may be constituted under changed circumstances, and possibly into how those changes may be brought about.

It is arguments such as that given earlier that make the juxtaposition of the terms 'psychoanalysis' and 'politics' meaningful. Workers in a number of social science disciplines now recognise the importance of people's subjectivity – their ideas, beliefs and emotions – in directing or influencing their social behaviour and perceptions of themselves and others. This recognition has led to a renewed interest in the origins and nature of subjective experience, something which has in turn led to psychoanalysis, as a body of psychological theory and practice that focuses insistently on subjectivity, dealing specifically with the workings of unconscious perception, emotion and desire. In addition, in its formulations on development and on the significance of particular interpersonal encounters, psychoanalysis offers insights into the mechanisms by which individuality becomes constructed within a social context – something that needs to be understood if the politics of subjectivity are to be accurately portrayed. Thus, in sociology, literature, film studies and philosophy, as well as in political and feminist theory, there has been an enormous burgeoning of interest in psychoanalysis in recent years. In mental health practice, too (though less so within the confines of traditional psychology and psychiatry), renewed attention is being paid to variants of psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic psychotherapy, following a decade or so of humanistic or 'growth' psychology and a slowly growing recognition of the limits of cognitive behaviour therapy and of drugs.

It is against the backdrop of these trends in contemporary thought that the politics of psychoanalysis becomes a matter for serious consideration. 'Politics' here is being used in a broad but reasonably precise sense, to refer to the positions taken up with respect to the power relations that exist between people and that are embedded in the major structures of society. These positions can be of various kinds, ranging from legitimisation of existing power relations by appeal to their biological 'naturalness', to the oppositional stance that attempts to subvert these relations by revealing the vested interests and social construction processes which lie behind them. In this context, there are two distinct strands to the 'politics of psychoanalysis' that will be dealt with in this book.² The first of these concerns the

2. A third possible strand, dealing with the manoeuvrings of groups and individuals for power *within* the psychoanalytic movement, is more properly the province of sociology or journalism – see Turkle (1978) and Malcolm (1982) for examples.

politics inherent in psychoanalytic theories, the implications of psychoanalytic ideas and assumptions for notions of selfhood and society, and for programmes of personal and social change. A pertinent question here, for instance, is whether the Freudian emphasis on the existence of biological instincts (or 'drives') at the root of psychic life dooms psychoanalysis to being a reactionary approach arguing for the unchangeability of 'human nature' and the inevitability of social inequalities. Again, there are questions to be raised about the recognition given in psychoanalysis to the place of social influences in development – are these influences basic to the construction of the psyche, or are they seen as having simply a meliorative role, marginally affecting an already determined organism? Freud's own views on instincts and psychic structure are described in Chapter 1, while Part II takes up the political issues that arise and considers them in the light of post-Freudian theories. Particular attention is paid to the different theories' accounts of the importance of instincts or drives and of the links between experience and psychic structure; the debates that surround these issues go to the core of the problem of how that which is social and that which is individual combine to form the experiencing human 'subject'. Because of this, the discussions of Part II are basic for all the later explorations of the book, which in some ways represent a working out of the implications of the various positions there encountered.

The second strand of the 'politics of psychoanalysis' concerns the application of psychoanalysis to wider political questions. Although there are innumerable ways in which this might take place, and psychoanalysts and fellow travellers have not been particularly wary of pronouncing upon anything and everything, there are two fundamental issues which have dogged psychoanalytic social theory from its earliest days and which reveal most clearly its limits and its productivity. The first of these relates most closely to the concerns of traditional socialism: the relationship between social (or state) structures and individuality. At issue here is Freud's belief, described in Chapter 2, that the repression of individual desires is *necessary* for the well-being of society, that society and the individual are unavoidably in conflict. This offers a deeply pessimistic view of the possibilities for radical social change, a point which has not escaped Freud's critics. The second issue is that of femininity, a

'social' concern because it holds within it some of the crucial arguments concerning the impact of ideology and social structure (in this case, that pertaining to patriarchy) on the personality and experience of individuals. Freud's views on femininity are also described in Chapter 2, while Part III provides an account of some major post-Freudian attempts to use psychoanalysis to enrich socialist and feminist debate, from the efforts of so-called 'Freudo-Marxists' to the recent spate of feminist psychoanalytic criticism.

The final test of any theory is, of course, the practice to which it gives rise. The internal politics of psychoanalysis and its application to wider political questions in many ways come together in its consideration of the purposes and techniques of therapy, the area of psychoanalysis' specific practice. Here, in considering the possibilities for personal change and the means by which it might be brought about, psychoanalysis reveals its own ideological underpinnings and its views on how to produce transformations of experience and consciousness, a quintessentially 'political' task. Measures of psychoanalysis' politics can be found here in the extent to which the importance of social conditions is recognised in its pronouncements on possibilities for individual change, and in the aims that it espouses – for instance, whether they are couched in terms of adaptation to social mores, or subversion of them. The views of analysts on their own position as agents of change is relevant to this: the difference, for example, between those who obscure the power relations that operate in therapy and those who examine it is an important one in considering the expression of analysis as a political activity. Freud's views on these matters, specifically the possibilities for 'cure' and the mechanisms through which therapy operates, are presented in Chapter 3, while Part IV describes and analyses a range of post-Freudian positions that demonstrate both the underlying assumptions and the political possibilities of psychoanalytic therapy.

It is now possible to return to the question of the evaluative criteria employed here to discriminate between different psychoanalytic theories. The notion of politics used in this book takes for granted the existence of power relations that are linked with basic social structures and that are involved in the construction of each individual. Hence, the criteria employed for assessing theories are neither empirical in a traditional

scientific sense, nor neutral in a political sense. The potential value of psychoanalysis for people concerned with politics lies in its ability to provide an account of subjectivity which links the 'external' structures of the social world with the 'internal' world of each individual. In the search for a socially oriented psychoanalysis, the coherence of each theory's account of how social relations become inscribed inside each person – and of how each human subject becomes 'positioned' socially – during development is an important guide to how the theory should be evaluated. More generally, theories differ in their view of how basic the social is to our understanding of 'human nature', with more progressive approaches deconstructing the latter notion to reveal how the two terms of the traditional individual–social divide actually interpenetrate one another in an indissoluble way. Again, the various theories hold different implications for practice, both in the area of therapeutic and of political change. A progressive psychoanalysis requires an approach that locates change in an appropriate social context, thus avoiding the temptation to see salvation in therapy while also spelling out the contribution that analytic help can make to wider social developments.

In summary, this book has a dual purpose: to introduce a complex range of psychoanalytic thought, and to do so in a manner that reveals and assesses its political significance. It will be argued that only some elements of psychoanalysis are politically progressive and that even in their case the limitations of analysis have to be recognised: that it describes and acts upon the individual 'subject' without tackling the wider social structures which must also be the target for activity if change is to come about. That this is a genuine limitation, however, does not reduce the value of what psychoanalysis does have to offer. Without a theory of subjectivity, of how the individual's experience becomes organised, there can be no complete approach to politics. Psychoanalysis, with all its retrogressive tendencies and complex contradictions, offers the most provocative and persuasive prospects for the development of such a theory that are currently available.

PART 1

The Freudian Base

There is no other place to start in psychoanalysis than with the work of Sigmund Freud. This is by no means an onerous duty, because the quality and provocativeness of that work still remains breathtakingly high. It is also, of course, enormous in quantity, and no brief introduction can cover all its aspects. In Part I, some of Freud's basic notions are described thematically, selected for their relevance to the central concerns of this book – to uncover the internal politics of psychoanalysis and the potential for its application to external political questions. Chapter 1 deals with Freud's ideas on the nature of the unconscious, the role of instinctual drives in mental life and the structure of the mind. In Chapter 2, Freud's attitude to society and its impact on each individual is described, as is his version of feminine psychology. Finally, Chapter 3 presents Freud's views on the potential impact, and mode of action, of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. The tone of Part I is less critical and more expository than that of later sections of this book; its purpose is to introduce the base upon which all contemporary psychoanalytic debates are built.

Chapter 1

The Discovery of the Unconscious

If psychoanalysis can be thought of as characterised by any particular 'project', it is to produce a certain kind of knowledge, providing explanations of human conduct and experience by revealing the mental forces that underlie them and that are not dealt with by any other intellectual discipline. It is decidedly *not* to bring about a therapeutic transformation in the lives of individuals: in Freud's words, 'We do analysis for two reasons: to understand the unconscious and to make a living' (Jacoby, 1975, p. 124). Increasing the complexity of psychological understanding by providing explanations for otherwise inexplicable or only partially comprehensible phenomena, especially by revealing meaningful motivations and conflicts at the base of apparently irrational and meaningless material, was at the heart of Freud's particular enterprise. Despite the increase in 'therapeutic zeal' shown by many post-Freudians, and the institutionalisation of psychoanalysis as a form of treatment for psychological distress, the central element in psychoanalysis – its ability to interpret human experience in a way that makes it coherent – remains theory rather than therapy. This is where psychoanalysis poses a major challenge to other forms of psychology: whereas academic psychology specialises in the description of microscopic elements of behaviour – part functions, one might call them – psychoanalysis attempts to supply explanations for the entire gamut of personal and interpersonal activity. These explanations are of a particular kind, both causal and interpretative, and entailing a particularly thorough approach to the uncovering of personal meanings. Norman Brown catches the excitement and the paradoxical nature of the

Freudian enterprise here when he describes how psychoanalysis demands a revision of some of our most cherished ideas:

Meaningfulness means expression of a purpose or an intention. The crux of Freud's discovery is that neurotic symptoms, as well as the dreams and errors of everyday life, do have meaning, and that the meaning of 'meaning' has to be radically revised because they have meaning. (Brown, 1959, pp. 3–4)

Detailing the precise nature of Freudian 'meaning' is an important task and is the main subject of this chapter, but, as noted in the Introduction, psychoanalysis was never intended solely as a philosophical or hermeneutic system. Rather, Freud makes clear in several passages his admiration for biology and his determination to root psychoanalysis in biological science. The immediate origins of psychoanalysis reside, at least in part, in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* that Freud wrote in 1895, in which he tried to account for the whole of mental functioning in terms of the transmission and inhibition of various forms of energy. Twenty-five years later, his adherence to the possibilities available from biology was no less pronounced. In the defence of science at the end of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he states:

The deficiencies in our description would probably vanish if we were already in a position to replace the psychological terms by physiological or chemical ones... Biology is truly a land of unlimited possibilities. (Freud, 1920, p. 334)

The notion of Freud as biologist is a central component of Sulloway's (1979) book, in which he claims that Freud's theories 'became *more* biological, not less so, after the crucial years of discovery' (p. 391). But it is also important to realise that Freud's claim to scientific status does not rest on his allusions to biology or his propensity towards the language of physics and physiology. His scientific status resides in his method and in his discovery: the method is observation, speculation and formulation of what has been observed in terms of general theories; his discovery was of the origins, motives and processes of mental life. In this respect, as Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) suggest, there is no clear distinction to be made between psychoanalysis as a natural science and as an inter-

pretative discipline. In presenting an account of the mechanisms of psychological functioning, Freud was also explaining the meaning of psychological events. Above all, his concern was with conflict, between the individual and the world and, perhaps more powerfully and more poignantly, within the various strata of the individual's mind. Freud's creation was a dynamic psychology, of 'source, aim and object', of motivation and intention – a fully human science. And his major building-block, 'the foundation stone on which the whole structure of psychoanalysis rests', was the doctrine of repression.

Repression and the unconscious

Two of the most uninhibited and influential writers on Freud and culture begin their major books on Freud with the assertion that the crux of Freudian theory is repression. For Brown (1959, p. 3), in *Life against Death*:

The Freudian revolution is that radical revision of traditional theories of human nature and human society which becomes necessary if repression is recognised as a fact. In the new Freudian perspective, the essence of society is repression of the individual and the essence of the individual is repression of himself.

Marcuse (1955), in *Eros and Civilization*, is more succinct: 'According to Freud, the history of man is the history of his repression' (p. 11). In these quotations, Freud's frequent failure to distinguish between the generality of defence mechanisms and the specifics of repression is being followed. Whereas in his more careful moments (particularly in later works such as *Inhibitions, Symptoms, Anxiety*), Freud was clear that repression was just one of the defences used to protect the psyche against unpalatable material, he frequently applied the notion of repression to any psychological process which prevents unconscious material becoming conscious. In the metapsychological paper *Repression* (1915a), he states that 'the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the unconscious' (p. 147). For radical Freudians, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, 'repression' generalises still further to connote social as well as endopsychic processes. By a

sleight of hand, the internal splitting introduced into the psyche by the exigencies of ordinary life are converted into a parable of the whole of social existence. The extent to which this is a justifiable process is a matter of serious dispute.

In the reference to the prevention of unconscious material becoming conscious lies the reason why the view of Brown and Marcuse concerning the centrality of repression does not really contradict the more general remembrance of Freud as the 'Discoverer of the Unconscious'. Freud himself emphasised the intimate links between repression and the unconscious. In part, this is a statement of practical observation, in the sense that it is the analysis of the various resistances displayed by clients when facing disturbing material that reveals the presence of the unconscious. From observations of resistances in analysis, plus the evidence derived from hypnotic suggestion and hysterical symptoms, Freud concluded that there had to be in existence mental phenomena which were not available to awareness, but which nevertheless had a powerful influence on psychological life:

We have found – that is, we have been obliged to assume – that very powerful mental processes or ideas exist... which can produce all the effects in mental life that ordinary ideas do... though they themselves do not become conscious. (Freud, 1923, p. 352)

Conceptually, too, Freud stresses the necessary connection between repression and the unconscious: it is precisely the mark of the Freudian revision of theories of the mind that there cannot be one without the other. 'The repressed is the prototype of the unconscious for us', he states (Freud, 1923, p. 353), highlighting in this remark the radically new perception that is brought to bear by the theory of the dynamic unconscious. It is not so much that he recognised the existence of an area of mental functioning lying outside consciousness; for many workers, before and after Freud, have done this, and there can be very little debate over the position that our mental contents are broader than that which is immediately accessible to consciousness. Freud's new contributions lie in his recognition of the relationship between repression and the unconscious, in his description of the functions of unconscious material, and in his detailing of the contents and form of unconscious life.

Freud (1915a) distinguishes between two types of repression. The first is 'primal repression', in which the mental representation of instinctual impulses is denied access to consciousness; this representation therefore remains unconscious. Second, there is 'repression proper', which Freud refers to as an 'after-pressure', in which material which is available to consciousness *becomes* repressed because of its association with the already repressed mental representative of the instinct. In this way, material is denied access to consciousness not only because it is too threatening to awareness, but also because of the attraction of material that has already been repressed:

It is a mistake to emphasize only the repulsion which operates from the direction of the conscious upon what is to be repressed; quite as important is the attraction exercised by what was primarily repressed upon everything with which it can establish a connection. (Freud, 1915a, p. 148)

The importance of this notion is that it suggests that repressed material does not remain static in its unconscious state (the more everyday use of the term 'unconscious', as in 'he is unconscious'), but has a life of its own, 'vicissitudes' to use a term favoured by Freud's translators. Freud notes that, if anything, unconscious material develops apace, more vigorously than material which is governed by the constraints and reality testing of conscious experience. However, this is not to say that what he calls the 'proliferation in the dark' demonstrated by unconscious material cannot be charted. The maps are obtained primarily through the analysis of dreams, but also from parapraxes and the symptomatology of neuroses; they give rise to a vision of the unconscious as an entity (the 'Ucs') in which all is wish, impulse and drive, where reality has no place and there are no constraints upon desire.

The nucleus of the Ucs. consists of instinctual representatives which seek to discharge their cathexis; that is to say, it consists of wishful impulses... There are in this system no negation, no doubt, no degrees of certainty. (Freud, 1915a, p. 190)

That the unconscious is mostly describable in terms of what it does not have – a sense of time, of contradiction, or of reality –

is no fault of Freud's, for the unconscious is the primary negation, the opposition to the world of order and common sense, the great subverter of everyday life. As Freud notes earlier in the paper on *The Unconscious*, if we look hard and long at ourselves, the recognition is forced upon us that we are aliens, that our actions are only explicable when we refer them to 'another site' than consciousness, when we abjure the claim that we have some special private knowledge available to us about our secret process, when we treat our 'acts and manifestations' as if they belonged to someone else.

What, then, is the difference between conscious and unconscious material? Dynamically unconscious ideas have (i) been repressed, and are (ii) kept from consciousness by continuing pressure (Wollheim, 1971, p. 161). This distinguishes them from 'preconscious' ideas which can be admitted to consciousness with ease and which are more akin to the common-sense tradition of the unconscious as a library or storehouse of ideas or memories. Because repressed ideas lie outside consciousness they cannot easily be controlled, but instead are the source of many behaviours and experiences which do not have the character of being willed by the self. In this way, repressed ideas are dynamic not simply in the sense of having to be held back by an opposing force, but also in the sense of being causal, of having a motivating effect on human psychology. Freud's notion is that the emotional energy of repressed desire becomes split off from the conceptual part of that desire (the idea) and invested in something else – dreams or symptoms, for example. It is only through the recovery of the concept that the driving energy of the desire can be identified and, if necessary, rechannelled. In all this, words are crucial: not only is psychoanalysis, as will be seen, fairly dubbed 'the talking cure', but language is introduced right into the heart of the deep mystery of the unconscious. Thus, from an insightful discussion of schizophrenia, Freud generalises that:

We now seem to know all at once what the difference is between a conscious and an unconscious presentation... (T)he conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone... A presentation which is not put into words... remains thereafter in the Ucs. in a state of repression. (Freud, 1915a, p. 207)

Words make consciousness of impulses possible; when the correct connections are made, they bring unconscious material through into the half-light of preconscious activity, and thence to the full glare of recognition. In this statement there can be found a provocative argument for the role of language in governing consciousness, and a major rationale for the therapeutic activity of psychoanalysis.

Freud's account of the unconscious is an explanatory one. The activities of desire, condensed or displaced by the machinations of repression, make sense of the seemingly inexplicable, tell us more about ourselves than we might wish to know. Behaviour is motivated, but the motivations are in some way dangerous and unacceptable, and therefore become hidden. Implicit in this formulation is the notion that the state of reason, of informed and conscious control over one's psychological 'self', is not a state of nature, but of culture – that is, it has to be striven for and constructed. This is one of the sources of the subversive impact of psychoanalysis: it overturns the western view that the distinguishing mark of humanity is reason and rationality. In the Freudian version, the true sources of being lie not in the 'cogito', but in the unacceptable and hence repressed impulses towards sexuality and aggression which hold unrecognised sway over what we usually perceive as the central elements in our personality. The illusion of individual integrity and a unified self hides an awareness that pervades our dreams, of instinctual energy held back by repression. This is one focus of dissent among post-Freudian writers: the possibilities for full human autonomy and integration so central to humanistic psychology are undermined by the Freudian unconscious, according to which we are, in Deleuze and Guattari's (1977) phrase, 'Desiring Machines'.

Instincts and their vicissitudes

When considering the requirements for a complete theory of psychoanalysis, a 'metapsychology', Freud distinguished between topographical, economic and dynamic points of view, all of them necessary. The topographic view is that outlined earlier, the distinction between conscious, preconscious and unconscious material. The economic viewpoint was basic to