

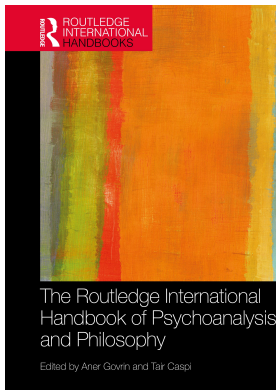
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5

BRIDGING PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

A Hermeneutic Pathway Between the Disciplines

Roger Frie

If the question “Why consider philosophy?” is ever raised among a group of psychoanalysts, consternation usually results. Why even ask? Is the practice of psychoanalysis not light years away from what philosophers do? Many philosophers, conversely, have little time for the theoretical, let alone practical pursuits of psychoanalysis. The notion that the mind is opaque and that transparency of thought and action are mere illusion is anathema to many who practice philosophy, those who strive to achieve clarity and cohesion in carefully constructed arguments about the nature of knowledge, language, and truth.

The simple fact is that philosophy and psychoanalysis often make for strange bedfellows. On the one hand, philosophy might be described as an academic pursuit that cherishes the process of isolated self-reflection. On the other hand, psychoanalysis is an inherently social endeavor, dependent upon the insights achieved through the interaction between patient and analyst. Yet despite their differences, the intersection of philosophy and psychoanalysis can be traced back to the very beginning of Freud’s project. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of the unconscious without acknowledging the enigmatic perspectives of Friedrich Nietzsche. But the inclusion of Nietzsche in the pantheon of philosophers inevitably raises the question of “What constitutes philosophy?” Confusion and ambivalence abound, in large measure because philosophy and psychoanalysis are both rife with intradisciplinary tension. Competing schools offer their own definitions. Philosophy and psychoanalysis are also linked in another way. Both are under enormous pressure to demonstrate their relevance in an academic and professional environment that privileges STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects, embraces the promise of evidence-based practice and increasingly neglects the role of the humanities for human understanding.

The objective of this chapter is to develop a pathway between philosophy and psychoanalysis, to overcome common misconceptions about their interaction, and above all, to challenge the skepticism towards philosophy that exists among mental health professionals in general, and psychoanalysts in particular. Having spent my career at the intersection of philosophy and psychoanalysis, I will reflect on some of my own experiences as a trained philosopher and a practicing psychoanalyst. Using a personal narrative in this way may strike some readers as usual, but as I hope to show, philosophy and psychoanalysis both grow out of our lived experience.

The chapter will proceed in stages. I will begin by drawing on my own path in order to consider the challenges posed by common disciplinary boundaries. I will trace the early cross-fertilization between philosophy and psychoanalysis to the development of a hermeneutic perspective that encompasses both fields. The notion that our lives are circumscribed by society, culture, and history has its roots in the ideas of Wilhelm Dilthey; its early psychoanalytic application in the work of Ludwig Binswanger; and its contemporary expression in Hans-Georg Gadamer and psychoanalytic approaches that emphasize the contexts of human understanding.

Journeying Across Disciplines

When asked by a psychoanalytic audience to explain the pertinence of philosophy, I reply that the answer is both simple and complex. I suggest that the psychoanalyst enters into a form of dialogue with the patient in an attempt to better understand the possibilities and constraints of what it means to be human in a world shaped by social interactions. I then suggest that the psychoanalyst is also inherently a philosopher, a statement that is usually met with a puzzled response. I go on to point out that in the broadest sense, psychoanalysis relies on a set of assumptions about how we relate to others and ourselves. These assumptions are shaped by implicit beliefs and values about the nature of human relating and what constitutes a life well lived. The assumptions we make are at once personal, professional, and cultural in scope. They guide the way psychoanalysts work, the questions they ask, and the answers they find in the interaction with their patients. In a similar sense, I suggest that philosophy is a discipline that seeks to understand and articulate the foundations of our personal and societal assumptions about the nature of experience. It is this process of “laying bare” or “disclosing” the assumptions that shape human understanding which, in my view, inherently connects psychoanalysis and philosophy.

My attempt to explain the pertinence of philosophy for psychoanalysis reveals my own beliefs about how each discipline functions, as well as my specific background and training. If the question were asked of someone else, they might offer a different answer based on the distinct disciplinary definitions in which they trained and which they hold dear. This is an important point because there is a host of competing disciplinary definitions about what constitutes “psychoanalysis” and “philosophy,” none of which is wrong, and which, taken together, provide a measure of the sheer breadth of these fields.

The complexity I am describing also relates to professional practice and identities. Depending on the context in which I am asked to talk or write about philosophy, I might worry that what I have to say will be deemed insufficiently “philosophical.” A similar argument could be made about psychoanalysis. If I am asked to speak with psychoanalysts whose approach is different from my own, I know in advance that their understanding of the clinical material I present may not only differ, but even clash with what I have to say. Given the variety of schools and perspectives that have historically sought to dominate each field, how do we even begin to define what constitutes psychoanalysis or philosophy?

To illustrate the challenges of defining psychoanalysis or philosophy within narrow disciplinary boundaries, I will draw on my own experience as a trained philosopher and practicing psychoanalyst. On the one hand, I have a doctorate in philosophy and have published numerous articles and books that are of a philosophical nature. On the other hand, I have always been attracted to thinkers who are at the periphery of the academic discipline, at least as it tends to be defined in the Anglo-American academic milieu. I recognized early on that my interest in questions of human experience did not fit neatly into the philosophical field known as “analytical philosophy.” But I have also learned that any answer to the problem of “What is philosophy?” depends upon who is asked and who seeks to define it.

Philosophical thinking, like psychoanalytic practice, enables us to reflect on, understand, and potentially articulate the nature of our lived experience. By lived experience I include such topics as our emotional being, our intersubjective existence, our social interactions, and our development within culture. My university education, which I completed in England, provides an illustration of many branches of philosophy that attend to these areas of study. All of my degrees were completed in interdisciplinary departments. As an undergraduate student at the University of London, I read modern history and political theory. I then went up to Cambridge, where I completed two postgraduate degrees, the first in social and political theory and the second in the history and philosophy of science. While none of my degrees stems from a philosophy department as such, I was taught, supervised, and completed my postgraduate training as a philosopher. From England I moved to the United States and then eventually back to Canada, where I grew up. Over the past twenty-five years I have taught in a number of university faculties, but never, strictly speaking, in a department of philosophy. I began my academic career by teaching psychoanalytic theory in a history of science department in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and then taught in a number of interdisciplinary programs over the following decade. Following the completion of a second doctoral degree in clinical psychology and training in psychoanalysis, I spent a decade in a psychiatry department in New York City, where I was responsible for teaching courses grounded in the humanities: history, ethics, and above all, theories of mind. Today I live in Vancouver, where I teach in a faculty of education and a department of psychiatry, and all the while my work continues to be shaped by my philosophical interests.

After sharing this academic path, you might better understand why I sometimes feel like an “interloper,” someone who practices philosophy but does not easily fit into the discipline as it is commonly understood. Similarly, while psychoanalysis was once represented in a broad array of university departments, it is increasingly unusual for university professors to be practicing psychoanalysts. My colleagues respect my work as a psychoanalyst, but most have little understanding of what I do, in large measure because there are so few psychoanalysts in the academic world today. When I reflect on my career path, I recognize that regardless of my academic affiliations, my scholarship has always existed at the intersection of philosophy and the psychoanalysis. I use my philosophical training to disclose the underlying ideas and values that guide the clinical disciplines in which I practice. This involves a kind of critical thinking, a willingness to ask questions that often go unasked.

When we engage in critical thinking, we may find that the models and techniques that guide our clinical discipline are based on a host of underlying assumptions: above all, on personal and cultural ideas and values that go unacknowledged. These ideas and values may be culturally specific, gendered, racialized, and historically specific. The role of a philosopher, or critical thinker, I believe, is to shed light on such ideas and values and, in the process, make them explicit. Once they become explicit, we can articulate their meaning and understand their impact. We can also begin to ask why we use particular models and techniques, and consider possibilities of change that attend to the broader moral good. The process of disclosure I am describing has many similarities to the psychoanalytic method. Psychoanalysts may work with their patients to formulate the emotional and interpersonal patterns that have hitherto remained implicit and unformulated.

Intellectual Tribalism

If philosophical and psychoanalytic pursuits intersect in the manner I have described, then we may wonder why these fields are so often seen as distant, if not opposed. This relates, I believe, to the challenges posed by a kind of “intellectual tribalism.” I want to provide an example of what I mean by drawing on my own experience of postgraduate training in philosophy, which

was in essence an apprenticeship in the philosophical profession. It is perhaps at this crucial, early career stage that the definition of what constitutes philosophy matters most because it shapes the boundaries within which intellectual research is pursued.

Today, if someone asks me what philosophy means, I usually respond with a question (I am, after all, a psychoanalyst!): “Whose philosophy?” My point is to raise awareness that there is no single agreed-upon definition of the field and that there is a host of different schools. Philosophy, as it is generally taught and practiced in Great Britain, pertains to the “analytical” tradition. In light of what I have said about my interdisciplinary interests, you might wonder why I chose to pursue postgraduate research at Cambridge. After all, the university has been known as the birthplace of the analytical philosophy. To make matters even more complicated, I became a member of Trinity College, which is a historical bastion of analytical philosophers. Among its former members, Trinity College counts a famous trio: Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), G. E. Moore (1873–1958) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951).¹ And indeed, when I was a student there, I learned, like other budding philosophers, to acknowledge Wittgenstein’s rooms whenever I passed by.

I wish I could say that I went up to Trinity solely because I wanted to study in the shadow of these great minds. My reasons were rather more mundane: as a wealthy college, Trinity was known to offer generous fellowships. There is also another, more important reason for choosing to study at Cambridge. It allowed someone like myself, with diverse interests, to pursue interdisciplinary scholarship. The only difficulty was that the kind of scholarship I had in mind could not be undertaken in the Department of Philosophy because there was little interest in, or representation of, continental European philosophy.

The tension around what constitutes “philosophy” was present in a host of ways, but I remember it most when it came to how the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein was discussed and taught at the time. Today, we know Wittgenstein as a renowned philosopher whose writings cover a range of philosophical perspectives, from his early *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* to his posthumously published *Philosophical Investigations*, in which he revisited and questioned some of his earlier ideas. Wittgenstein may have hailed from Austria, but I came to know that at Cambridge he became the quintessential analytical philosopher. This Wittgenstein seemed to have little interest in the “woolly” concerns of continental philosophy. Wittgenstein’s (1921/2007) famous statement at the end of the *Tractatus*, “That which we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence,” was not understood as an invitation to explore the realm of unspoken or unspeakable but as a directive to focus our philosophical investigations on the visible, on logic and language. Some topics merited philosophical study. Others did not.

The Wittgenstein I was introduced to was wedded to clear analytical thinking. Yet there were whispers of another Wittgenstein: the private side of a man who lived an anguished emotional life and filled a diary with reflections of a quasi-religious nature – of experience that is often beyond words. This was Wittgenstein the human being, who struggled with existential questions about life’s meaning, human mortality, and spirituality. Wittgenstein recorded his thoughts in a series of diaries that have since been published. For my Cambridge philosophy colleagues, Wittgenstein, the man of emotional turmoil, was not considered to be an object of study. If you were interested in that kind of experience, you might read literature or theology, or if all else failed, continental philosophy. Or you could go further afield to the strangest of all disciplines, psychoanalysis. And of psychoanalysis, as some of analytical philosophers might remark, “we must pass over in silence.”

Lest you think I am drawing a one-sided picture, let me provide another illustration. In 1992, as I was finishing my doctorate, a fierce debate broke out in Cambridge after it was proposed that the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, be awarded a honorary doctorate. Many in Cambridge

scoffed at Derrida because they felt his work did not meet the standards of rigorous scholarship and thus did constitute academic philosophy. Some went so far as to describe Derrida's writings as absurd. Because of the protests, the university was forced to put the matter to a faculty ballot. It was the first time this had occurred in over three decades. Despite the charges against him, Derrida's was ultimately awarded a honorary degree by a vote of 336 to 204. I fully admit to finding Derrida's work challenging, and at times I am not at all sure what he is trying to say. But Derrida is hardly the only philosopher whose work can be difficult to decipher! Above all, it is hard to question Derrida's status as a serious thinker given his centrality to theory of deconstructionism and critical theory more generally.

If you think that this kind of sectarian thinking should have no place in the academic pursuit of knowledge, you would be right. But institutions of learning, be they philosophical or psychoanalytical, are rife with these kinds of divisions. Years later, when I began to train as a psychoanalyst I was struck by the extent to which similar divisions colored the psychoanalytic profession. The history of psychoanalysis is full of intradisciplinary tension: political infighting and long-lasting feuds are legion. Different traditions of psychoanalytic theory and practice, often allied with specific institutes or umbrella organizations, have sought to maintain the belief that they embody the true version of profession (see Govrin, 2016). Fortunately, these tensions have begun to wane, even if the underlying differences have not. Psychoanalysts, especially in North America, have learned that they cannot afford to spend time fighting amongst themselves while the broader profession of mental health is increasingly critical of any kind of long-term or open-ended psychotherapy.

In similar fashion, we might observe that there is now an increasing number of philosophers who are bridging the gap between analytical and continental philosophy. Wittgenstein's diaries, for example, have become a source of fascination (cf. Nordmann, 2001; Sass, 2001). I am not suggesting that the divisions between analytical and continental philosophy have disappeared. Many university departments continue to define themselves along disciplinary lines. But there is nevertheless a greater willingness to explore the spaces between them. An example of this kind of scholarly exploration was a seminar that I had the good fortune of participating in. Led by the analytical philosopher Stanley Cavell, it considered the parallels between the work of Wittgenstein and Lacan. The discussions that followed bridged disciplines and multiple points of view. Yet within universities today, the distinctions between analytical and continental philosophy, and the comparative absence of psychoanalysis, continue to shape what kinds of questions are asked, what kind of scholarship is carried out, and ultimately, who is chosen to practice and represent the discipline at the academic level.

During my postgraduate studies, I struggled to align my interdisciplinary interests with the need to achieve the kind of university degree that might enable me to have an academic career. At Cambridge it was clear that anyone with a serious interest in European thinkers had to look beyond the philosophy department. Fortunately, I found my way to interdisciplinary programs where I was taught that philosophy is multifaceted and that critical thinking can provide the means to cross disciplinary boundaries. I was supervised in turn by the social theorist Anthony Giddens, the historian of psychoanalysis John Forrester, and the specialist in German Romantic philosophy and aesthetics Andrew Bowie. They all encouraged me to read widely and to pursue my fascination with the interaction of philosophy and psychoanalysis.

From Psychoanalysis to Hermeneutics

Like anyone who expresses an interest in psychoanalysis, I began by reading Freud's key works. Trained as a neurologist, Freud was a stalwart believer in late 19th-century naturalism, even as he engaged in increasingly speculative theorizing (Sulloway, 1979). The early Freud posited an

unconscious realm of the mind as a repository of hidden truths, a distinct entity in the mind that consists of repressed sexual and aggressive impulses and is governed by dynamic forces. Within a short space of time, the unconscious became the focal point of the psychoanalytic method. In its early iterations, Freudian psychoanalysis was deceptively simple and straightforward: the psychoanalyst was like an archaeologist who would excavate and interpret the contents of the unconscious, giving rise to a process of working through that would enable the patient to master the intrusion of unconscious impulses into conscious life.

Given Freud's embrace of science, it is not altogether surprising that he had a tenuous relationship with philosophy. On the one hand, Freud recognized the relevance of the humanities, and especially the classics, for psychoanalysis. Indeed, it is quite impossible to imagine Freud's work without the classical Greek mythology in which it is steeped. On the other hand, Freud sought to maintain a safe distance from the field of philosophy. Yet closer inspection of his writings suggests that Freud returned time and again to philosophy's thematic concerns.

Freud recognized early on the way in which the philosophies of the 19th-century German thinkers Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche coincided with psychoanalysis. In fact, Nietzsche developed a concise formulation of the notion of repression well before Freud reached a similar conclusion. Freud acknowledged the philosopher's insights, writing that,

But not one amongst all of us has succeeded in describing this phenomenon and its psychological reasons as exhaustively and at the same time as impressively as Nietzsche did in one of his aphorisms: "I have done that," says my memory. "I could not have done that," says my pride, and remains inexorable. Finally, my memory yields.

(Freud, 1901, p. 158)

Freud is even quoted by his biographer, Ernest Jones (1967), as stating that Nietzsche "had a more penetrating knowledge of himself than any other man who ever lived or was ever likely to live" (p. 385). Coming from Freud, this was impressive praise indeed! Yet Freud the scientist held fast to the promise of a scientific psychology and was reluctant to share the limelight with a philosopher. He went on to make the dubious claim that he had not actually read Nietzsche while developing his own ideas on the unconscious.

Freud's ambivalent relationship to philosophy had a lasting impact, especially in North America. To this day, very few psychoanalytic training institutes assign any readings, let alone courses, in philosophy. Over time, the profession of psychoanalysis became more aligned with medicine, and the humanities were increasingly neglected, despite their essential place in Freud's work. Today, some of Freud's essential texts, above all *Civilization and Its Discontents*, are far more likely to be read in university humanities departments than in psychoanalytic institutes. Why? Because Freud's accounts of human nature, religion, and societal interaction are deemed too distant from the concerns of the practicing psychoanalyst. Yet the fact that psychoanalysts make assumptions about human nature and are shaped by their culture's values and societal norms is thereby neglected.

As a postgraduate student in philosophy, and later as a psychoanalytic trainee, I was fascinated by Freud's forays into theory-building. The parallels with contemporaneous continental philosophers seemed noteworthy. I was particularly struck by the work of hermeneutic philosophers who developed an alternative to the scientific naturalism so popular in Freud's day. I delved into the work of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), a German philosopher and psychologist, and one of the founders of modern hermeneutics. Dilthey is probably best known for distinguishing between the human sciences and the natural sciences. Whereas the primary task of the human sciences is the understanding of human and historical life, the main task of the natural sciences is

to arrive at causal explanations. Dilthey (1894/1977) sought to formulate a descriptive psychology of understanding (*verstehen*) in response to the emerging positivistic paradigm in psychology. Dilthey proposed that psychologists use their everyday experience as a basis for interpreting and understanding psychological meaning. He argued that psychological phenomena not only require interpretation, but they are also constituted by human interpretive practices, thus giving rise to the field of modern hermeneutics – broadly speaking, the study of human understanding and interpretation.

Using Dilthey as a starting point, I want to briefly elaborate some of the main ideas of philosophical hermeneutics before returning to my aim of mapping out a pathway between philosophy and psychoanalysis. Dilthey's "descriptive psychology" began with the examination of the totality of life experience: the lived reality that precedes the distinctly Western, Cartesian separation between mind and body, self and world. Dilthey argued that it is only against this ever-present, mostly unarticulated background of their experience that humans are able to perceive and comprehend things, including themselves.

We live in this atmosphere, it surrounds us constantly. We are immersed in it. We are at home everywhere in this historical and understood world; we understand the meaning and significance of it all; we ourselves are woven into the common sphere.

(Dilthey, 1976, p. 191)

In other words, we can only understand the human being in the life-world in which he or she exists. From the viewpoint of hermeneutics, this means that understanding is itself generated by our social interactions and cultural contexts. If our aim is to make sense of the world as it is experienced by human beings, not by natural objects or internal drives, then any philosophy or psychology that does not account for our interactions and contexts is necessarily incomplete. The problem with reductive strategies of the kind also found in Freud was that they tended to distinguish psychological phenomena from their social and cultural surround.

Dilthey's hermeneutics was revised and expanded by Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). His philosophical project is complex, and I will only briefly sketch some of his early ideas. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1927/1962) engaged in an investigative method – what he called a "fundamental ontology" – into the nature of Being. Heidegger refers to the entity, or human being, that questions the meaning of Being as "Dasein." The term Dasein translates literally as "There-being," but the German term is usually retained because there is no equivalent translation that adequately conveys the notion that Dasein exists only by virtue of its "thereness," of always being located in a specific place and time. To put it very simply, I exist as Roger Frie by virtue of the interactions with my environment and the relationships I have with other people in the specific time and place in which I live. All of these things make me who I am.

Whereas much philosophy, particularly after René Descartes (1596–1650), perceived the mind and world as separate entities, Heidegger argues that being involved in the world is definitive; Dasein is neither autonomous nor self-contained, but must always be understood to exist as "being-in-the-world."² This implies that the person is not simply *of* a particular context, and this context does not *only* form the background for activity. Rather, the embeddedness of the person in his or her contexts is so profound as to render any absolute distinction of action from context nonsensical. We are "always and already in the world." In essence, we find ourselves "thrown" into a world we neither create nor control.

The state of "thrownness" is described by Hans-Georg Gadamer as our "situated" existence. Gadamer (1900–2002) was a student of Heidegger and sought to work out the conditions that

make human understanding possible. It is Gadamer who is most closely associated with hermeneutics today. Drawing on Heidegger, Gadamer (1960/1991, p. 301) states:

The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it. We always find ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a task that is never entirely finished.

(p. 301)

For Gadamer, it is necessary that we see beyond our immediate concerns to enter into a dialogue with voices from the past that form our current interpretations of life. This requires us to develop an awareness of the situation in which we find ourselves and be cognizant of our “horizon of understanding.” Being thrown into the world implies that we exist in specific horizons of understanding that shape what we experience and the interpretations we make. A person who looks to the horizon is not limited by what is immediately in front of her. By responding to the contexts into which we are thrown, we can begin shaping our possibilities of understanding into knowledgeable lives.

From Hermeneutics Back to Psychoanalysis

Despite my fascination with these hermeneutic philosophers, it was the attempt to apply their insights to psychoanalysis that really caught my attention. I refer in particular to the interdisciplinary work of the Swiss psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and philosopher, Ludwig Binswanger (1881–1966). Today, the pairing of hermeneutic philosophy and psychoanalysis has become more accepted, thanks in no small part to Paul Ricoeur’s pathbreaking book on the art of interpretation, titled *Freud and Philosophy* (1970). But Binswanger’s attempt to traverse the distance between hermeneutic philosophy and psychoanalytic practice in the early 20th century was truly novel (Frie, 1997). Not only did he introduce a range of philosophical ideas to psychoanalysis, but he also developed a clinical perspective on intersubjectivity and empathy well before these terms entered into the general psychoanalytic vocabulary.

So why do we know so little about him? There are a number of reasons. Binswanger’s early foray into philosophy was met with bewilderment by his fellow psychoanalysts, not least by Freud himself. And many English-speaking psychoanalysts remain unaware of the breadth of Binswanger’s work because only select pieces have been translated, in large measure due to their philosophical nature. Binswanger developed a small but devoted following that was made up of a diverse group of clinicians and philosophers. He eventually became known to many English speakers not as a psychoanalyst *per se* but as the founder of existential analysis. Binswanger was humbled by this interest, but never fully identified with the existential approach popularized by Rollo May in *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology* (May, Angel & Ellenberger, 1958). It is worth noting that when May edited this well-known book with his colleagues, Ernest Angel and Henri F. Ellenberger, he was still a training and supervising psychoanalyst at the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and Psychology in New York City. May’s attraction to Binswanger’s work can be read as an outgrowth of his psychoanalytic training in the ideas of Harry Stack Sullivan, Erich Fromm, Frieda Fromm-Reichman, and Clara Thompson, all founders of the W. A. White Institute. May was himself analyzed by Erich Fromm and therefore well attuned to the contextual perspective by the time he discovered Binswanger’s work.

In order to understand Binswanger’s appeal to May and other philosophically inclined neo-Freudian psychoanalysts, it is important to provide some further background. Binswanger

first met Freud in 1907, when Binswanger accompanied Jung to visit Freud and his family at their home in Vienna. In contrast to the short-lived relationship between Freud and Jung, Freud and Binswanger maintained a lifelong friendship, despite their growing and significant differences (Fichtner, 1992). Binswanger was a generation younger than Freud and came from a family of prominent psychiatrists who ran the Bellevue Sanatorium in Switzerland. Binswanger took over the directorship from his father in 1910 and devoted much of his career to the integration of philosophy and psychoanalysis. Binswanger's interests in philosophy were reflected in his personal associations with major German philosophers of the period and Bellevue became a center for interdisciplinary learning. Prominent thinkers who visited included Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Martin Buber, Karl Löwith, Ernst Cassirer, Alexander Pfänder, and Max Scheler.

Early on Binswanger was attracted to Freud because of insights that psychoanalysis could provide into human behavior. But he was also critical of Freud's reductive theorizing and embrace of scientific naturalism. In contrast to Freud, Binswanger sought to understand and explain human beings in the totality of their existence, not as natural objects constructed from various parts. In his first book, *Introduction to the Problems of General Psychology* (1922), Binswanger points to Dilthey as "the first to demonstrate the way to a psychology of the person" (p. 247). Building on this hermeneutic impulse, Binswanger suggests that understanding is made possible to by the structural continuum of lived experience prior to any division between subject and object, mind and world.

In the preface to *Introduction to Problems of General Psychology*, Binswanger articulates the objective of his work: "to achieve clarity about the conceptual foundation of what the psychiatrist perceives, reflects on and does with respect to psychology and psychotherapy, at the bedside" (1922, p. v). For Binswanger, it is precisely the question of *how* we understand the other person that is of central importance to clinical practice. His search for direct, intersubjective understanding led him to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological method – a descriptive approach that seeks to allow phenomena to "express themselves." This is achieved through a process of bracketing our preformed judgements. Binswanger suggests that the psychoanalyst explore the patient's lived experience without imposing his or her theoretical model onto that experience, akin to what is commonly understood today when psychoanalysts speak of "holding their theories lightly."

In addition to drawing on the phenomenological method, Binswanger turned to the notion of empathy, which was developed by Robert Vischer in 1873 as a means for understanding art. In 1903, the German philosopher Theodor Lipps argued that empathy could also be used to achieve psychological understanding of another person. While the term appears in Freud's writing, beginning in 1905 with his work on *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud never developed empathy as a substantive clinical concept. Binswanger read Lipps's work on empathy in 1913 and saw the interpersonal potential of empathy for the clinical situation.³

Like his American contemporary, Harry Stack Sullivan, Binswanger also felt that Freud's psychoanalytic techniques were of limited use to patients who suffered from psychotic disturbances. Moreover, he had difficulty accepting Freud's tenet of emotional neutrality and anonymity. Binswanger believed that the use of phenomenological intuition and empathy might enable the clinician to achieve a holistic understanding of the patient. Following Heidegger, Binswanger maintained that it was essential that the person be understood in his or her totality, without reducing experience to causal explanations or theoretical constructs. Heidegger's conception of world – the matrix of relations in which we exist and discovers meaning – provided Binswanger with a conceptual tool for understanding and describing human experiences "in their full phenomenal content and context" (Binswanger, 1955, p. 264).⁴

As a clinician, Binswanger sought to understand his patients in terms of their world-designs: their experiential horizon of meaning and understanding. Binswanger's concept of "world-design" has much in common with Gadamer's more familiar concept of "horizon of understanding." Both refer to the possibilities and limitations of understanding that are tied to our particular situatedness, to how we exist in the world. For Binswanger, our existence in the world is captured by Heidegger's concept of "thrownness." Binswanger suggests that we are thrown into situations, and it is this state of "thrownness" that we are forced to come to terms with. Any attempt to understand ourselves as human beings must therefore begin by understanding the nature of our existence as "thrown."

There is one other aspect of Binswanger's theory that needs to be included. Binswanger suggests that our experiential worlds are fundamentally social in nature. He was critical of both Freud and Heidegger because he believed they neglected the role of other people in the achievement of understanding. Binswanger suggested that it is through our interaction with others that we are able to grasp meaning in our lives, and in this sense his clinical practice is indebted to Martin Buber (1878–1965) and his philosophy of dialogue. According to Binswanger, the therapeutic process is dependent upon the psychoanalyst's attitude of loving openness to the patient – what Buber referred to as the I-Thou (Buber, 1923/1970) – which allows an analysis to evolve in an atmosphere of uninterrupted, direct communication. As Binswanger puts it,

This communication may in no way, as the orthodox psychoanalysts believe, be conceived as mere repetition, in the positive case as transference and countertransference, or in the negative case as resistance and counterresistance; much rather, the relationship of patient and doctor represents always also an independent communicative novelty, a new linking of fate, and namely not only regarding the patient–doctor relationship, but also and above all regarding the pure relationship of being-with in the meaning of a genuine "with-one-another."

(Binswanger, 1935/1994, p. 215)

In this sense, we might say that Binswanger's account of the therapeutic process, and his emphasis on the "genuine 'with-one-another'" between doctor and patient, places him alongside such early critics of Freud's technique as Sándor Ferenczi and Sullivan, though there is no indication that they knew of one another or had prior contact.

A Hermeneutic Pathway

In the hermeneutic–psychoanalytic perspective I have outlined, our situatedness gives shape to our "horizon of understanding," a largely invisible backdrop of "preunderstanding" that enables us to navigate our way in the world. From a clinical perspective, the goal is to discover the nature of our situatedness, so that we can begin opening up a space for new and different ways of being and relating. Yet this is far from easy. Our world-horizons are limited, meaning that there is a boundary to what we know or understand at any point in time. As a result, there will always be experience that escapes our awareness. This points back to the nature of the unconscious. As the hermeneutic psychologist Philip Cushman suggests,

The unconscious is not an interior thing, but part of the patient's social landscape that contains potential feelings, thoughts, and experiences that are not able to show up because they lie on the other side of the patient's horizon of understanding.

(Cushman, 1995, p. 307)

After his philosophical turn, Binswanger began to conceptualize the unconscious differently than Freud. When *Introduction to the Problems of General Psychology* was published, it was met with consternation by Freud, who wrote to Binswanger: “What are you going to do about the unconscious, or rather, how will you manage without the unconscious? *Has the philosophical devil got you in its claws after all? Reassure me*” (Binswanger, 1957, p. 64; emphasis added). There was, in fact, little Binswanger (1957, p. 64) could do to “reassure” his old friend and colleague. Yet as Binswanger points out, he never actually did away with the unconscious, as Freud assumed. Instead, he began to conceptualize the unconscious process in a different way. As Binswanger says,

I have never managed without the unconscious, either in psychotherapeutic practice, which is indeed impossible without using Freud’s concept of the unconscious, or in theory. But after I turned to phenomenology and [Heidegger’s] existential analysis, I conceived the unconscious in a different way. The problems it related became broader and deeper, as it became less and less defined as merely the opposite of the conscious.
(Binswanger, 1957, p. 64)

In order to appreciate Binswanger’s position on the unconscious, it will be helpful to return to Dilthey, who acknowledged that we can never fully know our own minds and that understanding is always limited. However, rather than posit a separate unconscious to explain this limitation, Dilthey proposes different levels of awareness. In a remarkably contemporary sounding statement, Dilthey (1989, p. 311) declares: “Psychic acts are conscious, but not attended to, noticed, or possessed in reflexive awareness.” In other words, we may have conscious states that are not attentively or reflexively observed, just as we may be lost in consciousness without being necessarily unconscious. Dilthey is describing a process of “not knowing” that is commonly referred to today as “dissociation.” Perhaps most significantly, Dilthey insists that all psychological experience be understood on a continuum, where no experience can be understood in isolation from the larger social context in which we exist. According to the Dilthey scholars, Makkreel and Rodi,

By making reflexive awareness the background for the focusing efforts of attentiveness (*Aufmerksamkeit*) and introspection (*Selbstbeobachtung*), Dilthey accounts for the so-called dark regions within consciousness without positing a separate realm of the unconscious. Instead of appealing to an unconscious depth, which is a grand explanative hypothesis, Dilthey conceives the mysteries of consciousness in terms of an ever-widening context whose basic contours can be described. Consciousness is conceived as a continuum where no content can be understood in isolation from its larger context.

(Makkreel & Rodi, 1989, pp. 35–36)

As human beings, our situatedness always makes us opaque to ourselves. We are always limited by where we are and what we know, so that it is never possible to have a “God’s-eye” view of the world. For this reason, a suitably trained and sympathetic interpreter may discern what we mean better than we do ourselves. The approach I am describing here is not like the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” practiced by Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals*, or advanced by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Nietzsche’s and Freud’s interpretive strategies were predicated on the idea of an unconscious censorship and a clear distinction between manifest and latent content. Increased understanding is not about overcoming censorship to reveal hidden truths. The

metaphors that have been traditionally used to define the nature of psychological experience – deep, internal, private, inaccessible – though highly descriptive, neglect the social and cultural contexts of experience in which understanding is generated.

When viewed from a developmental lens, we might say that the patterns of social practice and emotional interaction between a child and its caregivers always unfold in specific cultural contexts and historical trajectories and give rise to horizons of understanding that shape subsequent emotional experiences. These meanings are communicated through social interaction and form “organizing principles.” By organizing principles, I refer to implicit patterns of relating that are, in effect, unconscious – not in the sense of being repressed, but in the sense of being prereflective. Thus, for hermeneutic philosophers and psychoanalysts, “unconscious experience” refers to the prereflective dimension of experience that is generated and maintained in our interactions with other people.

The psychoanalytic method that I am describing is akin to the process of hermeneutic disclosure. It is not a linear movement from inner to outer, from a lack of awareness to articulated knowledge. Hermeneutic disclosure is not an archaeological excavation of ever-deeper layers of an unconscious mind. It is an exploration of our relational and experiential worlds. What is known or not known, what is sayable or unsayable, is product of the ongoing interpersonal fields in which we participate. The aim, in this sense, is to formulate patterns of relating that have hitherto remained unformulated, a point of view that is present in work of many relational psychoanalysts (cf. Stern, 1997).

What It Means to Converse

I want to conclude by returning to the problem I introduced at the start of this chapter. How do we navigate the divide across disciplines and between different modes of thinking and practice? (see Burston & Frie, 2006) I have suggested that there is much to be learned from hermeneutic philosophers and psychoanalysts. They tell us that understanding is a fundamentally social process that always runs up against uncertainty. This is particularly the case when engaging another person in dialogue. Knowledge gained through dialogue always involves “not knowing.” To truly converse with another person is to enter into a conversation without knowing in advance where it will take us. In a particularly important passage, Gadamer states:

A genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will “come out” of a conversation. Understanding, or its failure, is like an event that happens to us.

(Gadamer, 1960/1991, p. 383)

Following Gadamer, we might say that it is precisely “not knowing,” the recognition that experience consists of more than we can ever put into words or actions, which enables us to appreciate what it means to be human. Even if we think we already know, our engagement with the other person opens up new possibilities, new avenues of thinking, seeing, and feeling that may not have been available to us before. This process of understanding cannot happen if we shut down dialogue, insist on the correctness of our position, or engage the other person in order only to demonstrate the veracity of our point of view. It requires us to listen to what others have to teach

us. This perspective is as relevant to the practice of psychoanalysis as it is to the interaction of different disciplines that are willing to speak with one another.

What might it mean to apply the Gadamerian conversation to the interaction between philosophy and psychoanalysis? Perhaps, philosophers and psychoanalysts can learn to move forward together, allowing themselves to be less the leaders than the led, trusting in the belief that an openness to what the other discipline has to offer will provide an opportunity to expand their horizons. By outlining a pathway between philosophy and psychoanalysis, this chapter has sought to contribute to an interdisciplinary conversation that looks to future possibilities.

Notes

- 1 Another Trinity philosopher was Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), though during his time at Trinity he was primarily known as a mathematician and collaborated with his former student, Bertrand Russell, on *Principia Mathematica*. Whitehead became famous for his philosophical work after he joined the philosophy department at Harvard in 1924, where he wrote his well-known book *Process and Reality*.
- 2 According to Heidegger, “It is not the case that the human being ‘is’ and then has, by way of an extra, a relationship-of-Being toward the ‘world’ – a world with which he provides himself occasionally. Dasein is never ‘proximally’ an entity that is, so to speak, free of Being-in, but which sometimes has the inclination to take up a ‘relationship’ toward the world. Taking up relationships toward the world is possible only because Dasein as Being-in-the-world, is as it is” (1927/1962, p. 84).
- 3 It is worth noting that Binswanger’s embrace of empathy took place some fifty years before Heinz Kohut first began to write about the importance of empathy in psychoanalysis. This is an example of the way in which divisions between different schools of thought often stand in the way of a free-flowing exchange of ideas. See also Susan Lanzoni’s (2003) discussion of empathy in Binswanger’s work.
- 4 Binswanger’s (1942/1993) chief and still untranslated work, *Grundformen und Erkenntnis menschlichen Daseins*, published in 1942, can be read as a critique of the lack of an adequate social theory in *Being and Time*, and as a response to the unfolding horrors of the time. Binswanger’s critical stance, in addition to his own Jewish heritage, places him outside of the Heidegger controversy. See Frie (1999, 2010) and Frie and Hoffmann (2002).

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