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Stud. Hist. Phil. Biol. & Biomed. Sci. 37 (2006) 394–413

Studies in History
and Philosophy of
Biological and
Biomedical Sciences

www.elsevier.com/locate/shpsc

Psychoanalysis as functionalist social science: the legacy of Freud's 'Project for a scientific psychology'

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Received 16 August 2005; received in revised form 17 January 2006

Abstract

The paper links Freud's early work in the 'Project for a scientific psychology' with the psychoanalytic psychology of Kleinian object relations theory now current. Freud is often accused of introducing mechanism into his psychology and installing at its core an irreconcilable dichotomy of two disparate ways of explaining human behaviour. I suggest that Freud's early mechanistic thinking is an attempt at what he only partly achieves, a functional account of the 'mental apparatus'. I consider whether this way of conceptualising the mind in functional terms is methodologically relevant to psychoanalytic investigation or whether it is at best heuristically useful. From a brief consideration of Kleinian object relations theory, illustrated by case material, I conclude that there are grounds for accepting the first of these alternatives.

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Keywords: Sigmund Freud; 'Project for a scientific psychology'; Psychoanalytic psychology; Functional analysis; Social science; Kleinian object relations theory

1. Introduction

The paper falls into two parts: a discussion of the role of Freud's early mechanistic theorising, and an argument for its relevance in contemporary psychoanalytic psychology. My principal concern is with the latter and with making a case for its being, as a psychol-

ogy, a theory which can help advance both our understanding and our knowledge of human behaviour. To do this means focusing on psychoanalysis as a science and on the question, as debated between the scientific and 'interpretive' or hermeneutic views of psychoanalysis, of the sort of knowledge it provides. I take 'science' broadly to mean human enquiry about the world yielding knowledge. With respect to psychoanalysis this is then to claim that the sort of observation it enables and the sort of phenomena it reveals, contribute to our knowledge of human beings, their behaviour and their mental life. To the extent that psychoanalytic psychology is concerned with meaning and interpretation it faces questions about the sort of knowledge we acquire from psychology that arise within the social sciences, and about the conceptual and methodological connexions of psychology with the behavioural sciences and biology.

To discuss the importance of psychoanalysis as a science, and of Freud's part in it as a scientist, is not to dismiss either the undoubted significance of psychoanalysis as a cultural movement or Freud's importance as a cultural figure. However in the social sciences' investigations of the place of psychoanalysis in culture and of Freud's role as its instigator, we shall need an informed evaluation of the contribution of psychoanalysis to knowledge and of its own status with respect to the social sciences. It is also important to have an understanding of its relation to the social sciences so as to assess the theoretical uptake and usage of psychoanalytic ideas and theories by writers in these disciplines, in particular by anthropologists and by social theorists of the Frankfurt School.¹

In the natural sciences the prevailing attitudes have been of rejection or indifference, partly fuelled by the trenchant criticisms of postivist philosophers of science.² This generation of critics belonged to the empiricist tradition in philosophy and the positivist tradition of science, and having failed Freud according to the canons of these traditions concluded dismissively that the only alternative must be to classify psychoanalysis as a myth or religion. This conclusion found endorsement within analytic philosophy on the different grounds that psychology (other than the experimental study of cognitive and perceptual processes) was concerned with meaning and interpretation and hence was unsuited to scientific investigation. This view owes much to Wittgenstein and his followers.³ Within the hermeneutic tradition in Continental philosophy there was also articulation of the view that psychoanalysis is properly concerned with the interpretation of human behaviour in terms of the reasons for action, and not with its causation.⁴

However these negative verdicts on the scientific claims of psychoanalysis are far from definitive: the old critiques tended myopically to restrict psychoanalysis to the canon of Freud's work alone, largely ignoring advances and changes in psychoanalytic theory which, while based in Freud's original work, have refined and extended it. Articulation and defence of the hermeneutic approach in the social sciences by writers such as Charles Taylor (1971) have brought into question the nature of knowledge for the social sciences as a whole. Such shifts in intellectual climate (themselves affecting the evolution of psychoanalytic theory) allow the question of psychoanalytic knowledge to be raised within the

¹ In anthropology see for example Malinowski (1951) and Spiro (1982); in social theory see notably Marcuse (1956), more recently Honneth (1995).

² See Popper (1963), pp. 33–39; Grunbaum (1984).

³ For Wittgenstein's views on psychology see Glock (1996), pp. 188–189; Budd (1989), pp. 17–18; for his views on psychoanalysis itself see Wittgenstein (1982); for discussion see Bouveresse (1995).

⁴ See the revisionary account of Ricoeur (1970).

much wider debate about the sort of knowledge that is provided by the interpretive or 'human' sciences.⁵ Within this my focus is on one question only, the extent to which we can still see psychoanalytic psychology as having affinities with the biological and behavioural natural sciences—the 'life sciences'. Even though Freud's 'science' has not persisted in just the form and with the content he thought it had, I shall suggest that part of the methodology of psychoanalysis remains scientific, making it scientifically valuable as a bridge discipline between the science of life and the sciences of man.

2. Freud's early work

Freud began his neuroscientific career as a medical student, continuing after qualifying as a doctor to work first in the laboratory and then when practising neurology, to research and publish in the clinical field.⁶ The 'Project for a scientific psychology' was written in 1895; it was abandoned by Freud, being discovered and eventually published in 1950.⁷ At first sight it seems to be transitional between Freud's earlier neuroscientific and later psychoanalytic phases, being written following the time he was engaged, with his colleague Breuer, in the work that eventuated in 1893 in the publication of their 'Preliminary communication' on the trauma theory of hysteria.⁸ It was however, as James Strachey (Freud's translator and editor of the Standard Edition of his works) remarks, written 'with more than half an eye to psychological events', and it figures in Freud's thought as a vehicle for psychological conjecture. Indeed on one view of the matter Freud's view of himself as a scientist and the scientific idiom of his theorising were intellectually quite otiose in that the conjectures of the 'Project' were not scientific at all but an exercise of pure imagination. Ritchie Robertson (2005) has argued that the contribution of the scientific 'model' to psychology was no more than its psychological effect on Freud. By seeing himself as an intellectual innovator (in company with Newton and Darwin) he could pursue a quite different intellectual project, that of a mystical romanticism, in the idiom though neither the spirit nor the methodology of science.

On a less ruthless view of the matter we can allow that Freud's psychological theorising was indeed stimulated by the scientific ideas in the 'Project', though leaving it open whether this was ultimately to be of scientific importance. It is widely agreed that while the 'Project' was never more than a 'blueprint', an exercise in a priori psychological theorising, it has heuristic value for psychoanalysis. As a model with features structurally suggestive for the psychological theory it supplies key concepts such as wish-fulfilment, the primary process of thought, and the Pleasure Principle, whose deployment allowed Freud to make advances in the psychoanalytic psychology itself. Endorsing this as the consensus view, Sulloway (1979, p. 123) summarises the achievement of the 'Project' as combining 'clinical insights and data, Freud's most fundamental psychophysicalist assumptions, certain undeniable mechanical and neuroanatomical constructs, and a number of organismic, evolutionary and biological ideas—all into one remarkably well integrated psychobiological system'.

⁵ Rustin (2001), Ch. 5.

⁶ See Fancher (1973), Ch. 1; Sulloway (1979), Ch. 1; McGrath (1986), Ch. 3.

⁷ Freud (1953a).

⁸ Freud & Breuer (1955).

But the question still remains, whether this 'psychobiology' provides anything more than a suggestive though indeed productive framework of metaphor for an ultimately interpretive psychology. It would be too swift to conclude that the acknowledged heuristic role of the 'Project' demotes it to mere metaphor; heuristic or conjectural reasoning forms part of the logic or process of discovery in science. Equally, however, a psychology which purports to supply a causal mechanistic explanation of the processes at work in the mind is not on that account a science. It may instead be mere scientism, and Freud is frequently accused of 'biologising the mental' by re-clothing what is already understood and known in psychology in an otiose scientific idiom. To rebut this what needs to be shown is that at least some of the ideas and concepts deriving from the 'Project' do real explanatory work in the psychoanalytic psychology in advancing our knowledge of human mental life.

It is the aim of this paper to provide a degree of support for this defence of psychoanalysis. For there are in the 'Project for a scientific psychology' the outlines of a teleological theory of the mind of a sort that I will call 'systemic'. The significance of this lies not in the presence of a teleological theory by itself, since teleological thinking, originating in the language of intention, is inevitably a form of explanation appropriate to the mental. Rather, the interest lies in the attempt we find Freud making to combine teleology with causal mechanical explanation. For this attempt reflects a line of thought being explored in nineteenth-century science, in the background of the new 'science' of psychology that Freud saw himself as pioneering.

The 'Project' itself begins with a ringing statement of Freud's allegiance to the mechanistic tenets of the group of German scientists to which Brucke, Freud's teacher at the University of Vienna, belonged and whose other members were Hermann von Helmholtz, Carl Ludwig and Emil du Bois Reymond. The avowed aim of this group was the reductive explanation of all biological processes to those in physics and chemistry.⁹ It is firmly in this spirit that Freud announces the 'Project' with the words 'The intention is to furnish a psychology that shall be a natural science: that is, to represent psychical processes as quantitative determinate states of specifiable material particles, thus making those processes perspicuous and free from contradiction' (Freud, 1953a, p. 295). Freud goes on to say 'the neurones are to be taken as the material particles' and also that 'what distinguishes activity from rest is to be regarded as Q, subject to the general laws of motion'. Uncharitably we might dismiss this as scientism since Newton's laws of motion turn out to have no role at all nor is 'Q' interpreted as a form of energy susceptible of quantitative empirical study on the lines of Helmholtz's prior work in electrophysiology. Whatever science Freud envisages here, it is not the laboratory science of his earlier career; 'Q' is a placeholder term, not a term for some measurable feature of a real laboratory nerve preparation.

However there is as so often with Freud a significant rhetorical element at work: Freud is declaring allegiance to the Helmholtz party line. There is a marked similarity between Freud's Newtonian declaration and the pronouncement by Fick, a pupil of Carl Ludwig, that 'all forces are in the final analysis nothing other than motive forces determined by the interaction of material atoms and insofar as the general science of motion and its causal forces is called mechanics, we must designate the direction of physiological research as truly mechanical'.¹⁰ Fick too is rehearsing the Helmholtzian doctrine that no new

⁹ Fancher (1973), pp. 14 ff.

¹⁰ Quoted in Coleman (1977), p. 157. See also Fancher (1973), pp. 15–16, for a similar pronouncement by Brucke.

generation of force outside of the motion of matter was possible so that no vital forces could arise *de novo* in living systems, and it was this metaphysical conviction which lay behind the mechanistic school's declared opposition to vitalism (Lenoir, 1982, pp. 231–232). Vitalism, the doctrine that living things were animated by a special life force, took several forms in nineteenth-century German thought. The most extreme was the metaphysics of the German nature philosophers (who had briefly though indirectly influenced Freud). Helmholtz's main target however was the form of vitalism within biology which postulated the existence or emergence within organised matter of non-mechanical forces, and his working out of the principle of the conservation of force was intended to show this to be impossible. But his rejection of vitalism extended to all forms of teleological explanation, and thus ignored the work of another contemporary school of biology whose members were precisely engaged in trying to formulate a causal mechanistic explanation for teleological organisation and for whom 'biological organisation is . . . nothing other than a particular direction and combination of purely mechanical processes corresponding to a natural purpose'.¹¹

3. Systemic thinking in nineteenth-century biology and psychology

At this time, in France, Claude Bernard was defining his approach to physiology as the study of the processes through which the biological unity maintained a constant internal state or milieu against the variations and impingements of the external environment. This biological conception of a system regulated to an equilibrium state was also in use among those of Freud's contemporaries and colleagues whose ideas were to feed into the 'Project' and so to influence psychoanalytic psychology. Theodor Fechner, whose (largely arm-chair) psychophysiological theorising influenced the 'Project' had earlier characterised physiological processes as exhibiting 'approximate stability'—a regular or periodic return to the same state, over time.¹² Breuer, Freud's first clinical collaborator and co-author was an active researcher in physiology, and Sulloway concludes that Freud and Breuer's (1893) theory of hysteria, the psychological precursor theory to psychoanalysis, was 'a transposition to mind of a paradigm of self-regulatory behaviour previously entertained by Breuer in all his physiological researches' (Sulloway, 1979, p. 68).

Despite Freud's Helmholtzian declaration with respect to mechanistic explanation therefore, his thinking was linked to a systemic line of thought widespread in the scientific community. His interest in mechanism led him to explore the way in which these systems worked in causal terms. We shall see that part of what is going on in the 'Project' is the delineation, at least in outline, of a biological unity as a self-regulating system whose causal mechanisms are directly organised to maintaining a stable internal milieu. Although nineteenth-century science had a concept of regulation it lacked a clear way of explaining it causally, since the interaction of causal mechanisms was imperfectly separated conceptually from what brought them together to make their interaction possible. Explaining how causal regulation comes about threatened to re-introduce the idea of a higher order purpose, and Freud himself, as Frank Kermode (1985, p. 5) remarks, had an 'inveterate suspicion of system which he associated with magic and the pre-scientific'.

¹¹ Lotze, quoted in Coleman (1977), p. 170.

¹² See Sulloway (1979), p. 405.

Nevertheless there are in the 'Project' the outlines of an attempt to analyse regulation as the interaction of causal processes. A central concept here is what comes to be called (though not in the 'Project' itself) the 'Principle of Constancy', whose original (as Freud later acknowledged) was Fechner's principle of stability.¹³ Fechner had enunciated this in three forms: 'absolute', describing the null state; 'full' stability, of physical systems; and 'approximate' stability of physiological processes. Most useful to Freud is the third of these, but we also see 'absolute stability' appearing in the 'Project' as the principle of neuronal inertia describing the tendency of neurones, and also of the 'apparatus', to discharge energy and return to a resting state (Freud, 1950a, pp. 296–297).

However, no sooner is the principle of neuronal inertia introduced in the 'Project' than it is immediately modified, being overlaid or replaced by (what is in effect) 'approximate stability', cited as the regulative principle keeping the levels of excitation in the system to a constant minimum through the processes of uptake and storage: 'the nervous system is obliged to abandon its original trend to inertia (that is, to bringing the level of $Q\eta$ to zero). It must put up with [maintaining] a store of $Q\eta$ sufficient to meet the demand for a specific action. Nevertheless, the manner in which it does this shows that the same trend persists, modified into an endeavour at least to keep the $Q\eta$ as low as possible and to guard against any increase of it—that is to keep it constant'.¹⁴ Thus the aim of the neuronal organisation, conveyed here in the language of intention, is to keep a constant low level of 'energy' or 'tension', and the way this occurs is by the combination of the tendency to discharge of some neurones and the tendency to take up and store energy of others. In making the 'apparatus' more complex and endowing its neurones with contrasting capacities for discharge or for storage Freud thus slides from the stability principle in one version as the inertia principle to another version, the 'approximate' stability of biological systems, which will become the Principle of Constancy, where the goal has changed from zero energy to 'as low as possible' compatible with (some unspecified form of) energy storage against the demands on the organism (or apparatus) for action (to secure supplies and avoid threat).

So far the contribution of this regulatory principle is merely descriptive; specifying the goal of the system as maintenance of a constant state adds nothing to show what regulatory processes are at work to achieve it, beyond what accumulation of the 'Project' discharge/uptake model of energy-management has already provided. On the one hand the impact of the environment and the organism's biological need states lead to increased levels of tension or energy; on the other the mechanisms of discharge and uptake both act to lower them; the causal processes leading to increase and decrease in energy levels are theorised as interacting to produce a constant state or energy level. What is being adumbrated here, though eludes Freud's recognition in his explorations of the properties of the mental apparatus, is a general model of a regulated system of interacting but independent causal processes.

In utilising the scientific models and understanding of his time as explanatory resources for the 'Project' Freud produced more than one model for a psychology. Sulloway (1979, pp. 122, 131) draws attention to the presence of both the mechanistic model of energy-flow between neurones and 'an evolutionary, organismic, or "biological" one' in which Freud

¹³ Freud (1953a), p. 296 n. 1. ('Principle of Constancy' is not always capitalised.)

¹⁴ Freud (1953a), p. 297; ' $Q\eta$ ' and ' Q ' are interchangeable here.

draws on Darwinian evolutionary theory to provide an explanation of how the 'apparatus' came to have the properties which enable it to maintain itself in its environment. Like the systemic approach I have been attributing to Freud, this explicitly Darwinian model is also teleological, taking the mental apparatus as having evolved as a result of selection pressure so that properties of the component elements (the 'neurones') are causally explained, analogously to the way a species trait is explained by its effect—promoting fitness to survive in its environment—through the causal mechanism of differential survival and reproduction of individuals possessing the trait.¹⁵ But while evolutionary theory provided Freud with a way of explaining how the 'apparatus' came to have the properties which enabled it to maintain itself in its environment, the regulatory process cited is that of preferential reproductive success of individuals possessing a heritable characteristic. There is however no analogue to processes of reproduction and selection in the explanation of a self-regulating system whose goal is its own continued stability, and so the paradigmatic causal explanation of teleology provided neither resource nor impetus for the exploration of systemic regulation. Although the evolutionary approach could readily be extended to account for the presence in the 'apparatus' of the equilibrium-maintaining interaction of causal processes as the result of selection, Freud did not pursue this link with the concept of systemic regulation. Indeed this line of thought becomes displaced by the evolutionary one which provides the 'biogenetic seed of Freud's later and far more enthusiastic endorsement of the developmental point of view in psychoanalysis'.¹⁶

4. Freud's two models

However, the influence of the systemic approach persists in Freud's theorising and the notion of self-regulation with the goal of psychic equilibrium lies not just at the origins but at the core of psychoanalytic psychology.¹⁷ Despite its unfinished theoretical exploration of systemic regulation, the 'Project' provided the mechanics for a psychological regulatory process; the mechanism of hallucinatory wish-fulfilment was conceptualised as an adjunctive regulatory mechanism whereby, if the apparatus's mechanical 'primary process' of discharging energy was prevented, for instance in infants as yet unable to act so as to satisfy their own needs, the energy was diverted into a pathway which previous experience of need satisfaction had facilitated, with reactivation of the memory trace of the earlier episode. This mechanism for replacing the energy discharge of real satisfaction by that associated with hallucination, with its temporary effect of reducing levels of tension or unpleasure, suggested to Freud a mechanism of wish-fulfilment by hallucination, which he also theorised as being at work in the production of dreams.¹⁸ Indeed, the systemic model of the 'Project' is imported virtually unchanged into *The interpretation of dreams* (Freud, 1953b), where the level of energy or 'tension' in the 'apparatus' is now said to be experienced as 'unpleasure' and the principle of constancy becomes the 'pleasure-unpleasure' principle, regulating the system so as to keep unpleasure to a minimum, and dreams

¹⁵ Freud refers to 'a Darwinian line of thought . . . to appeal to the fact of impermeable neurones being indispensable and to their surviving in consequence' (1953a, p. 303).

¹⁶ Sulloway (1979), p. 131.

¹⁷ The systemic component of Freud's thought has long been recognised; see for example Solomon (1974) for a different view of its significance.

¹⁸ Freud (1953a), pp. 317–319, 338–341.

are explained by the mechanism of hallucinatory wish-fulfilment worked out in the 'Project'.¹⁹

It is in the 'Formulations on the two principles of mental functioning' (Freud, 1958) that the concept of the mind as a self-regulating system appears in the form which has remained definitional for psychoanalytic psychology. Here Freud proposes that the mind is governed by two regulatory principles; mental life is the outcome of organisation in two separate systems, each with its distinct mental process subserving the two separate goals of pleasure-seeking and reality-orientation. The latter system is outwardly directed to keeping an equilibrium with the environment, and is governed by the Reality Principle under which the mind operates so as to take account of and master the real world, with the goal of survival in an external environment or milieu whose characteristics must therefore be apprehended. The first system, operating under the Pleasure Principle, regulates the internal state of the mind with the (by now familiar) goal of pain or 'unpleasure' avoidance. Under this constraint the working of the mind is directed to maintaining a constant internal milieu or psychic equilibrium and we here re-encounter the Principle of Constancy, together with other elements of the biological model of the 'Project' transferred to the psychology proper.²⁰

It is here that the charge of a fundamental incompatibility between two forms of explanation gets some of its purchase. It is argued that by importing a mechanistic theory more or less wholesale into his psychology and asserting its equivalence with psychological explanation Freud has simply passed over radical incompatibilities in epistemology and methodology, as well as in ontology.²¹ Since Freud in his writing both creates and exploits ambiguities between the physical and the psychological there are some grounds for these objections, but the background philosophical position dichotomising the natural and the human sciences is not itself unassailable. The modest aim of this paper is to show that with respect to methodology there is at least an element—the systemic model—which does carry over from Freud's early thinking into psychoanalytic psychology. So far I have argued that the biological model of the 'Project', as a vehicle for the abstract characterisation of a biological system without any empirically specifiable content, supplied a way to think systemically about the mind and to support a conception of the mind as a self-regulating system. I now argue that this approach is methodologically common to psychoanalytic psychology, and the biological and behavioural sciences. I also suggest that the systemic approach helps supply psychoanalytic psychology with a form of explanation appropriate to its object as evidenced by its ability to advance investigation. I do not claim that the mechanistic energy-management model of the 'Project' makes a substantive contribution to psychoanalytic psychology. What carries over and continues to be conceptually central in psychoanalytic theory, is the abstract notion of a self-regulating system later brought under the general causal analysis of teleology by Hempel under the title of 'functional analysis' (Hempel, 1965, pp. 308–314).

¹⁹ The 'mechanism' of hallucinatory wish-fulfilment in dreaming is elaborated in *The interpretation of dreams* (1953b), Ch. 7, Sect. C.

²⁰ It was not Freud's early theoretical explorations that led him to 'discover' an equivalence with the Pleasure Principle. Fechner had in his own speculative writings connected the seeking of pleasure with his principle of stability, and Freud borrowed both of them together.

²¹ See for example Archard (1984), pp. 31–32.

5. Functional explanation in the natural and social sciences

I shall suggest that explanation in psychoanalytic psychology is functional in the same way as functional explanation in the life sciences such as biology and behavioural science, and that to the extent that there is this common ground in point of methodology psychoanalytic psychology may provide a bridge between the social and the life sciences. What is meant by 'same' here is that functional analysis provides an explanation in terms of causal processes in both cases; this requires me to say a little about functional analysis and explanation in the biological and behavioural, and in the social sciences.

In the nineteenth century biologists were exercised by the question of how matter could be organised into systems which subserved a goal, without citing explanation by final causes or calling on vital forces or divine purpose to explain the self-regulation of living systems. By the mid-twentieth century advances in the experimental investigation of biological processes and the development of systems theory in cybernetics had contributed to a resolution of the problem, at least from a scientific perspective. Teleological explanation was re-presented as 'functional analysis' setting out the contributions made by causal processes in interaction, so as to bring about the end-state or goal for the system. The simple example of the thermostatic control of temperature—in which there are two independent causal processes at work, one which heats up the room and one which is activated by an increase in temperature and causes the heat production to stop—is mirrored by the equally simple systemic account of the control of blood sugar level in humans. The blood glucose level rises from dietary intake; a high blood glucose level causes insulin secretion which in turn causes uptake of glucose by the cells of the body, with a fall in blood glucose level. These cases show how functional analysis lays out for inspection the 'directive organisation' of these systems, involving (at the simplest) two independent causal processes, brought together by man or by Nature, with a negative feedback mechanism linking them.

Functional analysis thus explicates teleology as it applies to the directive organisation of systems and provides explanations of the sort I suggest Freud was moving towards, of how a goal-directed entity works in terms of its component causal processes.²² It has a further, extended, use in explaining the presence, or the characteristics, of elements in the system in terms of their effects on reproduction (so-called aetiological functional explanation), or on fitness for some other biologically advantageous goal. Functional explanations in biology standardly have both these elements, citing natural selection as the causal process which has brought about the presence of, say, the heart in mammals; functional explanations of human artefacts cite not evolutionary processes but the intentions of their human designers to explain the composition of the system.

Functional explanation in the social sciences also had its origins in the nineteenth century, in the work of Emile Durkheim. While the extent of its applicability and its importance are debated, functionalist thinking has continued to have a place in the social sciences, in particular in explaining puzzling behaviour for which the agent's reasons are insufficient. Indeed, this is one way that psychoanalytic theories, for instance Freud's theory of anxiety reduction by the formation of neurotic symptoms, come to receive mention alongside the social sciences as providing a functional account of rationally inexplicable behaviours.

²² Nagel (1961).

It can however be argued that functional 'explanations' in social science, while heuristically useful in directing attention to hidden or disguised human motivations in accounting for puzzling behaviour, are nevertheless parasitic on ordinary intentional explanation since the behaviour occurs within human social institutions and practices which are the product of human intention.²³ Since human behaviour is goal-directed functional analyses merely re-describe in systemic language the purposive structure of human behaviour, without thereby explaining anything. This sort of objection does not by itself gainsay the possibility of a more restricted application of functional explanation in social science, but it does draw attention to the need to distinguish description and explanation in functional accounts.

To focus on the sorts of requirement a functional analysis should meet if it is to provide an explanation we may turn to a critique of the applicability of functional explanation in the social sciences which focuses on methodology. It is argued that the social sciences cannot share in the methodology of the biological sciences in respect of the latter's employment of functional explanation since they cannot give empirical content to the basic concepts of functional analysis.²⁴ The concepts taken as central here are the system itself, its goal or endpoint, and the causal processes operating in the system so as to bring about the end-point. In the life sciences all three can be specified: the system is the unit of interest to the biologist—cell, subcellular organelle, organ system, organism, species, and so on; or to the behavioural scientist—brain, animal, group, mother-infant dyad. Here the system's boundaries and interface with the environment are set by the investigator and can be held constant experimentally while the contribution of processes in the system to the maintenance of some parameter identified as being important, can be investigated. Experimental manipulation also allows the causal processes to be isolated and studied, and causal hypotheses to be confirmed.

The first obstacle to functional explanation in the social sciences arises with the unit of investigation, with what the identity criteria of the social unit in question are. If a 'society' is a geographically isolated one (of the sort originally studied by anthropologists) then its identity conditions may perhaps be given in terms of physical boundaries but this is exceptionally the case. For most social groupings, societies and segments of society are only artificially or conventionally demarcated, according to some theoretically relevant frame of reference. The population of interest with respect to the ritual concerned might be that of a village imperfectly demarcated from its neighbours, or might be dispersed in society as a socio-economic class. The second problem for functional explanation in social science comes from the vagueness of the social conditions to be achieved as endpoint. Social stability, or social solidarity are often cited as the overall end-points, but these constructs do not have any investigatable empirical content until considerable theoretical background is in place. Social stability, for instance, is relative to a wide range of factors reflected in assumptions about the economic and social relations of the individuals in the society. Indeed both what is to count as a social unit and what is to count as a goal for it are subject to the pervasive methodological difficulty in the social sciences that among the criteria must be included some reference to how the individuals concerned—the 'social

²³ The conformity of the natural world to this form of explanation has been debated, some writers arguing that teleology is always an intentional form of explanation, or a natural cognitive orientation to the world which is instrumentally useful in science; see Wright (1973), Ratcliffe (2000).

²⁴ See Nagel (1961), pp. 520–535.

actors'—themselves understand their society and its conditions, so that the data are neither interpretation-free nor stable, being subject to continual re-interpretation by individuals within society.²⁵

Whether or not these objections can be satisfactorily answered must be set aside here; I shall be concerned to show that psychoanalysis itself is able to give empirical content to functional concepts. I have said that if a functional analysis is to amount to an explanation then we want to know not just that a certain practice, institution, or belief contributes to some overall goal or end-state but how it does so. My claim is that through its techniques, and the resulting observation-driven theory, psychoanalysis can not only specify the mechanisms in operation theoretically but can pick out their operation in the clinical setting.

6. Psychoanalytic psychology as science

I have suggested that there is a systemic line of thought in psychoanalysis, with its starting point in the 'Project', amounting to what is now called functional analysis. My claim is that this methodological element of Freud's systemic model directly enables psychoanalytic psychology to provide a functional explanation of the working of the mind in some of its aspects. But as already noted, a description in functional terms does not automatically yield an explanation of how the system of interest actually works; there are at least three points to answer before concluding that psychoanalytic psychology's conception of the mind as a self-regulating system provides a functional explanation. First, the system and second, the end-state or achieved condition, need to be given empirical content, and third, we require a way of picking out the operation of the mental processes which are held to regulate the level of mental 'unpleasure'.

The empirical content of the first two are briefly given here. The 'system' here is the mind of the person: we ordinarily individuate or pick out minds as belonging to individual human beings or persons, though with the rider, to which I return below, that mental properties are predicated of persons and from which it follows that talk of 'minds' is not therefore talk of things, but shorthand for talk of states of persons.²⁶ The end-point towards which systemic regulation is directed, which we encountered in Freud's early systemic theory as pleasure and the avoidance of unpleasure, becomes in psychoanalytic psychology the avoidance of mental or psychic pain for the subject. Again, there is no great difficulty in identifying such person-level states: painful mental states are phenomenologically describable by the subject, and are behaviourally attributable, as distress, depression, anxiety, and so on, by others.

The prominence given to the concept of mental pain is one of psychoanalytic psychology's distinctive and important contributions to our understanding of the mind. For it is a pivotal insight of psychoanalysis that much more readily than physical pain, mental pain can be got out of consciousness, by the operation of psychological 'defence mechanisms'. In ordinary psychology post-Freud we are familiar with (at least) the following defences: denial as a way of evading painful realities; projection involving the disavowal of unwanted aspects of the self, with their attribution to others; identification as a defence, for instance as a way of disarming a perceived threat by identification with the aggressor.

²⁵ See Taylor (1971) for elaboration of this position.

²⁶ See for example Strawson (1974) for this position.

These and other 'ego-mechanisms' were originally described in Freudian theory as ways of repressing unwanted material, thereby presenting as resistance in analysis. What then the psychological 'defence mechanisms' do is defend, against disturbances of what we quite ordinarily refer to as mental equilibrium or psychological well-being. Anything more than mild anxiety in normal persons will bring these mechanisms into play, while their inadequacy can be observed with the massive anxiety seen in post-traumatic or psychotic states. A major part of psychoanalytic psychology is concerned with the ways in which these and other defensive mechanisms achieve regulation or fail to, so as mitigate the consequences for the mental life of the individual in terms of impaired interpersonal and social relating imposed by psychosomatic, neurotic or psychotic symptoms. Both the motivation to understand the operation of the defences and the opportunity to do so are owed directly to the fact that psychoanalysis is a clinical discipline.

It is psychoanalysis' clinically derived conception of mental regulation that suggests a solution to the third methodological requirement for considering psychoanalysis as a functionalist theory within the social sciences, that of specifying what the causal processes are and how they work to regulate the system. Biology and behavioural science have the resource not available to social science (except in a restricted way) of being able to control experimental conditions.²⁷ However, Rustin (2001) argues that a comparable resource is also available to psychoanalysis; the consulting room can be seen as the 'laboratory' or controlled environment in which these psychological regulatory processes can be isolated and investigated. Clinical psychoanalysis may thus be held to provide the setting for the work of description needed to supply empirical content to the postulated causal processes. What is observed and described is the communicative behaviour of the patient as it elicits response and consequent understanding in the analyst. This, as I shall argue, is what gives observational content to the concept of defence mechanism, detected as the transformation of mental content so as to preserve mental equilibrium.

Before undertaking this next step however, an objection needs to be considered. My argument for psychoanalysis as a functional explanation of mental regulation is also an argument against psychoanalysis as a mere functional description of human purposiveness. Functional description is prevalent in the social sciences but as I noted in the last section, lacks explanatory power since no causal processes are specified. I have just suggested that in psychoanalysis the clinical setting provides the 'laboratory' conditions for identifying causal processes explaining systemic regulation. But it might be objected that identifying such causal processes in the clinical setting is a matter of observing sub-personal processes, analogously with controlled laboratory observations of cognitive and perceptual processes. Mechanisms of affect regulation might indeed become more salient 'on the couch', but would be mechanisms belonging to a discrete sub-personal affect-regulation system (controlling levels of, say, arousal). This would leave my argument in a worse position than before, since psychoanalysis as a psychology of persons would still provide no more than a functional description, but one now modelled scientistically or pseudo-scientifically on a (supposed or real) scientific explanation of a psychological sub-system. And, if functional thinking did contribute to psychoanalytic psychology's methodology as I have claimed, it would still do so only heuristically by directing the analyst's attention to the unconscious strategies used by patients to reduce anxiety. In sum, the attempt being

²⁷ There are of course significant ethical limitations on experimental manipulation of human subjects.

made here to show how one can pick out the psychological processes effecting mental regulation could be vitiated by the fact that functional explanation in psychology is typically of the sub-personal systems studied by experimental psychology. There is therefore an onus on the defender of psychoanalytic functional explanation to show that the processes involved in affect regulation are not sub-personal processes of this sort.

To show this I draw on a suggestion made by Sebastian Gardner in the course of a broader argument for taking psychoanalysis as a 'warranted extension' of ordinary psychology. Since ordinary psychology is quite straightforwardly a whole-person psychology, acceptance of the arguments for taking psychoanalysis in this way would allow us to take the states with which it deals as whole-person psychological states.²⁸ However, more substance is given to this claim by specifying some criterion which psychoanalysis can be seen to meet, which will keep person-level states conceptually separate from sub-personal states, and a plausible criterion here is the subject's ownership of their states of mind. In order to accommodate ownership of unconscious mental states Gardner suggests that the states with which a person-level psychology deals are such that first, they 'allow themselves to be thought of' as owned by the person and second they 'allow the subject to think of' themselves as a person (Gardner, 1993, p. 57); in this way unconscious states which the subject only knows indirectly through psychoanalytic interpretation, can be included. This result can then be used to set a condition on what will count as a psychoanalytic regulatory process, namely that it is one which deals with whole-person mental states having the properties Gardner specifies. Since this condition will be met in my account of regulation, it can be maintained that I am not here considering sub-personal processes of the kind postulated by cognitive psychology.

7. Interpretation in the human sciences and in psychoanalysis

Arguing that the systemic approach could be seen to provide psychoanalytic investigation with a methodology appropriate to its object, I expanded this as the claim that its object is the mind conceived as a system whose regulatory activity is directed at the mitigation of psychic pain. However, I also aligned myself with a view that takes psychoanalysis and the regulatory activity it theorises as dealing with mental states of persons, states having intentionality or content. An objection arises at this point which, as part of the hermeneutic case against the scientificity of psychoanalysis that I earlier set aside for reasons of expository simplicity, cannot in itself be ignored. For it may be objected that no matter what degree of observational resolution is afforded by the analytic situation, this cannot make the phenomena it reports 'brute-data-identifiable'. That the essence of psychoanalysis is interpretation is something only an unreconstructed behaviourist would dispute and psychoanalytic 'data', as the content of the patient's communications articulated by interpretation, are inescapably within the hermeneutic circle.²⁹

However ineluctable the hermeneutic circle is made out to be, the interpretivist stance rejecting all causal explanation in the social sciences can be seen as too dismissive of the explanatory gap it leaves. Human communication must ultimately be a natural phenom-

²⁸ Gardner is rebutting the charge that psychoanalysis is no more than a 'sub-personal' psychology dealing with the ego, id, and super-ego as sub-systems of the mind (Gardner, 1993, pp. 54–55). Wollheim (1984) contains an extended argument for the 'warranted extension' view of psychoanalysis.

²⁹ Taylor (1971).

enon—it does not, after all, occur by magic—and an interpretivist account which takes for granted the inter-personal processes through which meanings are conveyed, negotiated, and apprehended fails to engage with the methodological point at issue, of how such transactions of meaning take place. The task therefore becomes that of showing how psychoanalytic observation can be such as to give empirical content to the idea of regulation given that the essence of psychoanalysis is interpretation. For an analysis of interpretation I shall draw on a paper by Charles Taylor, *Interpretation and the sciences of man* (1971). Since this paper contains the uncompromising view that there is no final end-point to interpretation, because no point of reference outside the hermeneutic circle, it might seem uncongenial to my claim that empirical content can be given to data derived from interpretation. However, I shall be providing a consideration to suggest that, in psychoanalytic interpretation at least, an external reference point can be found, and meanwhile Taylor's is a robust statement of the position I shall aim to modify in this way.

The conceptual underpinning for Taylor's account belongs in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, from the notorious intricacies of which we need only extract the view that language is not an abstract symbolic system but is something humans do.³⁰ Just as humans learn to use tools in order to perform operations on material nature, so they learn to use words, linked together as a language, in order to communicate with each other. However, human communicating involves more than the causal emitting of and responding to signals since it is normative or conventional: humans convey content to one another, by conforming their linguistic communicative behaviour to rules. What then distinguishes language uniquely as a form of behaviour is that it is a rule-governed activity: speakers are also practitioners who must be able to aim for, and thus to understand, the standards of correct word use which give the meaning of what is communicated.³¹ Language as a form of behaviour is linked with a wider group of behaviours which may, through the uses to which they too are put, also be termed communicative. So non-verbal noises, gestures, bodily stance and posture, facial expression, manipulation of objects, may all be employed by speakers in the normative practice of communicating content. In this way understanding communicative behaviour and linguistic competence can be said to be interdependent.

I return to Taylor's account of interpretation in the social sciences to see how it might illuminate the claim that psychoanalytic interpretation can provide observational content to a functional analysis of mental regulation.³² Taylor justifies extending interpretation beyond the textual domain of traditional hermeneutics, to the social institutions and practices studied by the social sciences, by pointing to essential features common to both forms of interpretation. Thus, interpretation is always of an object; it differs from, for instance, the work of the imagination, in being brought to bear on an entity which provides its subject-matter.³³ Further, the entity being interpreted must be a meaning-bearer both generically and in the particular case. It must, that is, be the sort of thing that is apt for being a meaning-bearer supporting ascriptions of sense or coherence (so as to rule out divination

³⁰ Hacker (2001) summarises and discusses Wittgenstein's philosophy of language in its relation to the hermeneutic tradition.

³¹ Rule-governed activities such as games are linguistically dependent, on this view.

³² Taylor's account, while persuasive, lacks complete analytic clarity; I have put my own gloss on some of his claims.

³³ In what follows I replace Taylor's term 'object' by 'entity' to avoid confusion with the psychoanalytic use of 'object' shortly to appear in my account.

carried out on natural phenomena) and as well as this the ascription of sense must be justified in any given instance of interpretation. Further, any instance of interpretation is 'for a subject'; just as speaking is an activity shared between speakers and interlocutors, so interpreting is an activity of linguistic retrieval which presupposes both a creating and an interpreting individual. Lastly, interpretation results a text or 'text-analogue'; the output has a linguistic form (not finally definitive of the content it is brought to bear on nor, therefore, exhaustive).

The entities providing the subject-matter of interpretation in the social sciences can be taken to include social institutions and practices understood in terms of collective and individual behaviour; human behaviour is a meaning-bearer for the activity of interpretation. More precisely, defining behaviour in general as movement displaying sensori-motor integration (and excluding behaviours appropriately designated by naturalistic terms like 'appetitive' or 'automatic' categorisable as forms of animal behaviour) human behaviour is admissible as a subject-matter for interpretation, as susceptible of having sense or coherence assigned to it, when it falls under a description, given in terms of intentions, appropriate to action and activity.³⁴

It is in this sense that the communicative behaviour of the patient, as utterances, actions, and activities, provides the subject-matter of psychoanalytic interpretation, initially for the analyst but in time for the patient as his own interpreter. Since Freud's famous discovery that what underlay much of the patient's behaviour in the clinical setting were unconscious attitudes, wishes and feelings towards parental figures in childhood, transferred onto the person of the analyst, the focus of interpretation in psychoanalysis has been this transference. We may then say that the patient's behaviour in the clinical setting is the meaning-bearer of the transference, in both the ways required by Taylor. First, as we have seen, in the general sense communicative behaviour is the sort of thing apt for the ascription of sense. Second, it is the individual patient's behaviour in the transference, in which the analyst becomes the recipient or target of feelings and attitudes held unconsciously in relation to other figures, that is the subject-matter of interpretation. Finally, psychoanalytic interpretation takes a linguistic form: its essence is to 'put things into words'.

8. Kleinian object relations theory

At this juncture some psychoanalytic theory is needed to take my argument forward. I have claimed that it is the focusing down on the detail of the way that unconscious mental states of the patient are revealed in the clinical setting which provides the empirical content to the concept of mental regulation. What is discerned in the interpretation of the individual patient's transference is the manifesting of what contemporary psychoanalysis theorises as the patient's 'object relations'.

Psychoanalytic object relations theory originates in certain of Freud's formulations about the internalising of external persons, as figures or 'objects' within the mind. However, it is from major developments since Freud, in both theoretical and technical understanding in this area, that the group of theories known as the British School of Object Relations, has emerged. The approach which is the most systematic and theoretically

³⁴ See Wollheim (1993), also Marshall (2000), on activity as intentional in this sense.

far-reaching, though is unfortunately far from perspicuous, is that of Melanie Klein and the analysts who worked with and have followed her.³⁵ The element of Kleinian theory we need here is the notion of a form of unconscious imagining or 'phantasy' which has as its content a representation of the subject's affective relations with internalised versions of significant external real figures. An everyday example of such a state, one accessible to observation, is that of a child's fearful attitude towards a benign but loud-voiced adult as a 'bogeyman'. Such 'internalised' versions of external figures can readily be understood as worked upon by the imagination, conditioned by anxiety, to render their character more extreme and exaggerated than that of their real-life counterparts.

According to Kleinian theory unconscious phantasy-states not only represent the subject's affective relation with the internal figure; they also have a subjective qualitative aspect, a 'phenomenology'. In this too they are no different from conscious states with a distinctive phenomenology, such as frightening memories or pleasant daydreams. In phantasy therefore the affective nature of the object relation is not just represented but is also experienced, although unconsciously.³⁶ It follows that when there is a transformation of content towards a less affect-laden object relation it is accompanied by a reduction of anxiety. Equally, the representation of an object relation may be 'held in place' by its role in keeping anxiety at bay or by contributing to an overall psychic equilibrium.³⁷ These features of phantasy provide a theoretical basis for the thesis that empirical content can be given to the functional concept of a regulative mechanism: regulation occurs when the represented object-relation is observed to alter so as to render the experience of psychic pain more bearable.

We can now see, returning to the objection considered earlier, that regulation is not a process governing sub-personal states. For as the phantasy represents the subject's object relations, it includes the representation of the subject and so, allows the subject to think of themselves as a person; and, as a state having phenomenology, a subjective experiential aspect, it allows the subject to think of it as their own.³⁸ In this way Gardner's conditions for a person-level psychology, specified earlier, are met.

Lastly, it can be contended that the interpretive activity of the analyst has a reference-point external to the hermeneutic circle. For the experience of pain, its presence or absence, can be said to be a brute experience: with pain, whether physical or psychic, there comes an end to interpretation.³⁹ What guides and confirms the analyst's interpretations is not at this point a further interpretation but the direct observation, in the patient's behavioural display of feeling, mood and emotion, and in the analyst's own reflective experience, of the quality and level of psychic pain.⁴⁰

With the contribution from Kleinian theory in place I can now state in full the claim to which the second part of this paper has been leading. The clinical nature of psychoanalysis provides two conditions, not found elsewhere in the social sciences, permitting detailed

³⁵ For an introduction to the theory see Mitchell & Black (1995), Ch. 4. Representative papers by Klein are in Klein (1975).

³⁶ For a philosophical exposition of unconscious phantasy see Gardner (1993), Ch. 6; see *ibid.*, pp. 214–220, for a defence of unconscious phenomenology.

³⁷ Wollheim (1984) pp. 42–45, sketches a teleological functional account of mental regulation.

³⁸ The force of 'allows' here is that it is when the state becomes conscious that it presents itself to the subject in this way; see Section 6.

³⁹ This is not to deny a significant constructed element to the experience of both mental and physical pain.

⁴⁰ The ability to observe in this way results from training: Rustin (2005).

psychological observation. First, it provides the motivation and opportunity to study the processes underlying psychological dysfunction and distress. Second, it provides an environment which permits the observation of behaviour at a level of resolution disclosing both the effect of anxiety and the restitutive action of the defence mechanisms. The patient's communicative behaviour is the meaning-bearer for the object-relational content of unconscious mental states. The analyst continually observes both the patient and himself, and not only interprets the object-relational content of the patient's behaviour accordingly, but checks his interpretations against the regulatory role of those object-relational representations as these are seen to alter under conditions of felt anxiety or psychic pain. The changes that are discerned constitute the occurrence of causal regulatory processes.

9. A clinical example

The following clinical example is given as an illustration of my claim. However, we may note certain caveats. It is not intended as stand-alone evidence for my argument; the appreciation of psychoanalytic work, as any specialist field of enquiry, requires considerable exposure to the techniques and the theories behind them. Nor is the material described intended by the analyst as sufficient on its own for his interpretation of it; psychoanalytic interpretation takes account of the patient's history, the current state of the analyst's knowledge of the patient, and the progression of the analysis. Lastly, I have taken the clinical material from the treatment of a child for a specific reason. The technique of child analysis developed by Melanie Klein, which involves the interpretation of play to a greater extent than of verbal material, is based on Klein's appreciation of children's play as revealing their psychological world.⁴¹ In work with adults and older children their command of language places more emphasis on interpretation of linguistic communication, displacing from the centre of attention non-verbal factors (though these are still taken account of by the analyst). In young children the communicative behaviour evinced in play is largely non-verbal; in the following example minimising the element of language-interpretation helps bring out how shifts of mood and emotion are detected in behaviour and how they accompany and shape the content of what the child is communicating through his play.

The Kleinian psychoanalyst Richard Rusbridger is describing a session with an intelligent three-and-a-half-year-old boy, referred to as 'A', who presented with significant delay in social and language development. 'A came into the session and immediately began to clean a toy horse that had been attacked by him in a previous session, where it had seemed to represent a rival baby inside a mother. He washed it vigorously in the basin, trying to clean its tail, and saying, "Clean that one—caterpillar". This washing broadly seemed to have a repairing quality, as if he was now a mother or a father cleaning up a baby that had done a pooh.' The analyst goes on to describe the boy's game with some sticks, which involved pushing them up the tap nozzle. He continues: 'Up to this point there was quite a settled and happy feeling in the session . . . then things changed. One of the sticks would not stay in the tap and fell out. "Little one won't go", he said. Then a long one stayed in. He got another longer stick and this time really shoved it in—but then found it wouldn't

⁴¹ Segal (1986), Ch. 2.

come out. He became very anxious, ordering me to get it out: “Get it out that one. Get it out, Rusbridder”. He pulled my hair. “I need a screwdriver, Rusbridder, to get it out”. He then added, sounding very like his mother, who could be quite fierce, “I might be a bit annoyed!”.

The boy’s behaviour now shifts from the relatively focused play with the taps and he moves around the room, eventually coming to sit on the analyst’s lap saying ‘*Squash Rusbridder! Pick your nose . . . pick your eyes . . . pick your eye-lashes!*’. The analyst reflects that the boy ‘is meant to be safe, now he is the gleefully attacking father . . . and I am now meant to be the helpless and anxious little boy . . . “Put Rusbridder in a rubbish-lorry and empty him into a pooh-pooh!” he said, making appropriate rubbish lorry noises. He picked at a crack in the plaster wall by the chair that he had enlarged in a previous session, saying “Me made that”, before saying, “Put all the policemen in the rubbish-lorry too”. Here I and all crime-watching father figures are violently, anally, disposed of, and his anxiety correspondingly escalates’.

The analyst remarks, ‘In the course of this material one can see A at first tolerating and wanting to explore with interest the tap that has been helping him. This did indeed have its correspondence with a quality about his personality of bright interestedness. On the other hand, one can also see that there is something rather fragile about this. When his little stick won’t stay in the tap he quickly becomes anxious and then turns to sadism towards the oedipal tap-object. Most damagingly for his mind, and therefore for his language development, he turns away from reality and asserts that he is not a little boy but is an idealised object in an ideal place. He has split the oedipal object, saying that he is in possession of the mother, and by implication . . . has disposed of the father’ (Rusbridger, 2004, pp. 737–739).

This material illustrates my claim in the following way: it shows the interpretive activity of the analyst as he attempts to understand the boy’s behaviour: his actions, the affective quality or mood of his play activity, and his speech. It also indicates how as part of his interpretive function the analyst is reflectively experiencing process: when the patient gets up close and says ‘*Squash Rusbridder! Pick your nose . . . pick your eyes . . . pick your eye-lashes!*’, the analyst’s interpretation to himself that he is the one meant to be the ‘helpless and anxious little boy’ is not an intellectual conclusion but reflects his sensitivity to the revelation, in the shifts and changes in content and mood, of the operation of regulatory mental ‘mechanisms’. The boy’s anxiety configures an object relation in which it is now the analyst who is anxious and helpless, and over whom the boy triumphs. It is these alterations in object relations between patient and analyst which allow the analyst, by consulting his own experience, to detect the psychological mechanisms which are operating. The proper object of psychoanalytic study, the patient’s ‘inner world’ of unconscious object relations, is thus accessed through the analyst’s reflective experience, which constitutes part of his observation, of these transformative changes of content.

10. Conclusion

I have made a case here for the claim that psychoanalytic psychology provides an empirical functional explanation of affective regulation in the mind. Both psychoanalysis and the philosophical understanding of it are complex subjects, however. In arguing that regulation occurs through the transformation of mental representations, I am relying upon

results from psychoanalytic theory for which space does not permit an adequate exposition and for which the philosophical clarification and defence are still in progress.

What I have argued here is intended as a contribution to the long-term debate in the philosophy of the social sciences exemplified by the opposition, sketched at the beginning, between the scientific and the interpretive or hermeneutic views of psychoanalysis. I do not take myself to have adjudicated in favour of either here. Furthermore it is not part of my claim that psychoanalysis, through sharing elements of its methodology with the life sciences, should thereupon be classified among these. This would fail to do justice to its undoubted affinities with the interpretive social sciences as well as with the humanities.

To take psychoanalysis in this broad way is to refuse to concur with the ground of old objections to the scientific status of psychoanalysis in the fixed opposition about ways to explain human mental life and behaviour. One consequence of recruiting psychoanalysis into the academic disciplines of psychology and philosophy is a degree of critical pressure on the supposed incompatibility of conceptions of the mental underlying such entrenched positions. In particular, the view argued for here, that a functional explanation of mental regulation derives its evidence from communicative behaviour, is one that resists foreclosure on the idea that the life sciences might be germane to explaining the psychological transactions which the social sciences presuppose. Through its grounding in the observation of behaviour psychoanalytic psychology keeps open the possibility of showing that the mechanisms by which humans regulate their mental lives are capacities with a natural basis.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Mr Richard Rusbridger for allowing me to quote material from his paper.

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