1 Phenomenology and psychoanalysis

At first sight it may appear as if phenomenology and psychoanalysis are opposites. The phenomenological project is concerned with studying consciousness, whereas the field of investigation for psychoanalysis is the unconscious. Freud (1900: 613) describes the unconscious as 'the true psychical reality', and in a well-known metaphor the role of consciousness is limited to the top of an iceberg. One can, in fact, ask: what do these sciences have to do with one another? This question can be answered in different ways. The aim of this book is to discuss the field of psychoanalysis and its basis as science, and for that purpose I believe that phenomenology has the greatest relevance. The impression that phenomenology and psychoanalysis are antithetical changes when one considers the dependence on consciousness for psychoanalytic practice. Psychoanalysis cannot liberate itself from consciousness, owing, among other things, to the fact that the psychoanalytic process both begins with the self-understanding of the analysand and is driven by means of conscious validations and verifications of interpretations of the unconscious. And clinical experience is an important basis when one attempts to characterize the field of psychoanalysis and its scientific ground.

In this chapter I will discuss briefly how I conceive of the relationship between phenomenology and psychoanalysis, and say something about how phenomenology will be used in this work. For the reader who is not familiar with phenomenology, this chapter can serve as an introduction to phenomenological philosophy.[1]

[1] The literature about phenomenology is vast. The classical introductory work about the phenomenological movement is Spiegelberg's (1982) *The phenomenological movement. A historical introduction.* Other examples of works of an introductory kind are Sokolowski's (2000) *Introduction to phenomenology* and Zahavi's (2003) *Husserl's phenomenology.*

From a historical perspective there are some interesting similarities between those two movements. Their undisputed founders were contemporaries, born in the same region of Europe, in Moravia, which at that time belonged to the Habsburg empire. Sigmund Freud was born in 1856 and died in 1939. Edmund Husserl lived between 1859 and 1938. Both were Jews, even though Husserl converted to Protestantism. The first full-fledged psychoanalytic work and the first phenomenological work were published at about the same time; Freud's *The interpretation of dreams* was published in 1900 and Husserl's *Logical investigations* was published in two volumes in 1900–1 (Husserl 1970/1900–1). Both Freud and Husserl attended lectures given by the philosopher Franz Brentano (1838–1917), whose influence on Husserl is apparent and significant, while his influence on Freud is unclear but possibly subtle (cf. Cohen 2002). Both psychoanalysis and phenomenology have developed into movements with different branches, a fact that will be reflected in this work. Different representatives for these two scientific movements inspire my analyses, albeit Freud and Husserl hold central positions.

In spite of these historical similarities and their comprehensive production, Freud and Husserl had not much to say about each other. Freud never mentioned Husserl or his phenomenological philosophy in his works. Freud referred to Franz Brentano, who was an important influence for Husserl, in a note in his *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious* (1905a: 31–2, n. 6), and then as someone who had composed some kind of riddles from syllables. Husserl made a brief mention of Freud. On the whole, the interest in psychoanalysis for the first generation of phenomenologists was quite insignificant, which stands in sharp contrast to the later generation of French phenomenologists.

As already mentioned, there is little comment on Freudian ideas in Husserl's work. Among other things, there are a couple of references in Husserl's (1970/1936a) last and unfinished work. The meaning of these references is that the problem with 'the unconscious' also belonged to the problem of transcendental constitution

(p. 188), that is to say, that philosophical project which absorbed his interest at the time. Further on in this work there is a discussion (p. 237) about 'unconscious' intentionalities that had been revealed by 'depth psychology'. Here, repressed emotions of love, of humiliation and of resentment are also mentioned as fields for phenomenological psychology. Besides, there is a somewhat developed and, in my eyes, more interesting point of view in the discussion about 'the problem of the unconscious', written by Husserl's disciple Eugen Fink (1905–75), and placed as an appendix (Husserl 1970/1936b). In particular, Fink argues for the importance of a thorough analysis of consciousness before being able to determine adequately the character of the unconscious. Spiegelberg (1972: 136) points out that the German philosophical phenomenology only had a superficial and casual contact with psychoanalysis – not due to a hostile attitude but rather a difference of interest. With Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), however, in the posthumously published *Zollikon seminars* (2001), one can trace a hostile attitude to psychoanalysis, specifically in his critique of Freud's metapsychology. Heidegger paid attention to the difference – which for him appears to be a contradiction – between Freud's mechanistic and deterministic metapsychology and psychoanalytic treatment's emphasis on liberating the analysand.

The French phenomenological philosophers, however, have shown much more interest in psychoanalysis than the older generation of German phenomenologists. Paul Ricoeur's (1913–2005) comprehensive Freud essay is in a class by itself (Ricoeur 1970). Ricoeur, who conceives of psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic science, takes his vantage point from language philosophy containing several levels of meaning. The psychoanalytic level concerns the 'semantics of desire', whose manifest linguistic expressions are distorted. The relationship of psychoanalysis to language contrasts with a 'phenomenology of religion', which is naïve in relation to the unconscious and where the language is not considered to be distorted, but to manifest something holy that is in need of revelation. When it comes to the psychoanalytic project of interpretation, Ricoeur stresses that

psychoanalysis consists of a mixed discourse. Together with a hermeneutic language (meaning, interpretation, representation, and so on), there is quasi-physical energy language (cathexis, discharge, quantity, and so on). It is the distinctive feature of psychoanalysis to comprise this mixed discourse. Even if psychoanalysis incorporates a quasi-physical energy language in the interpretation of meaning, it does not make psychoanalysis into a natural science. It remains, according to Ricoeur, a hermeneutical science, where the quasi-physical language is subordinated to the dimension of meaning. In a later work, Ricoeur (1977) discusses the conditions for validation in psychoanalysis. In line with Ricoeur's *Freud and philosophy: an essay on interpretation* (1970), he argues that psychoanalysis is an interpretive science which, when it comes to the validating procedure, must differentiate itself from the validation in terms of observations that are used in the natural scientifically oriented social sciences. The truth claim of psychoanalysis and the possibility of verification/falsification are based on the narrative character of the psychoanalytic process.

A couple of other French philosophers and phenomenologists need to be mentioned. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61) was basically sympathetic towards psychoanalysis (for example, 1962/1945, 1963/1942), but was critical of it in two respects (Bullington 1998). In the first place, he objected to Freud's economic point of view concerning the drive energy, which to him entailed an objectification of the human being. In the second place, he considered the psychoanalytic idea about an unconscious as 'idealistic', in the sense that it postulated the unconscious as something transcendent, as something outside the world. For him there was nothing but the incarnated subject who is in the world. Merleau-Ponty took upon himself the task of reinterpreting several important psychoanalytic concepts (for example, libido, repression, discharge), in terms that are in line with his idea about incarnated subjectivity.

Finally, some words about Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905–80) logical critique of Freud's idea about the unconscious and its censorship

are appropriate here. Sartre (1956/1942) claimed that it is logically impossible to postulate a censorship whose character is such that it knows what to keep away from consciousness. He launched an 'existential psychoanalysis' whose task was to disclose a person's fundamental choice. In this version of the investigating mind there was no room for anything unconscious; instead he proposed something called 'bad faith' (*mauvaise foi*), which is a chosen, inauthentic strategy of action, which can be described roughly as a choice not to conceive of oneself as a free choosing subject. Whether this concept avoids the logic critique that Sartre directed at Freud's concept about a censorship of the unconscious, however, is debatable.

ON PHENOMENOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

Here I will mention, very briefly, some essential characteristics of phenomenology, whose influence on twentieth-century philosophy is significant and has also been of importance for the social sciences. Phenomenology thus originates from the works of the philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl. The task of phenomenology was to study the meaning/significance/essence of a phenomenon. But its relevance was not to be limited to the study of specific philosophical questions in the strict sense, but to work as an epistemological ground for other sciences. The concept 'phenomenology' contains two terms: 'phenomenon' (from the Greek *phainomenon*), which means that which appears/that which shows itself, and 'logy' from *logos*, which in this context can be translated as law/structure/essence. The field of study for phenomenology is thus 'that which appears'/'that which shows itself', and that which appears or shows itself can be anything – for example, perceptual experiences, cognitive processes, emotional experiences, aesthetic experiences or religious experiences. The task of phenomenology is to study the *logos* of phenomenon – in other words, those conditions that are presupposed in order for it to be the phenomenon that it is or is experienced to be. The aim of phenomenology to describe the essence of a phenomenon has to do with identifying and clarifying

the necessary conditions for it to be what it is. When we say the necessary conditions, we mean the conditions that are required for the subjective experience.

Phenomenology is a philosophy of subjectivity and consciousness. To give a simple example:[2] What is the essence of 'the perception of a table'? Phenomenologically, this question is answered by studying this perceptual experience and those characteristics or constituents that must be there in this specific experience, in order for it to be a perceptual experience of a table. Each specific experience includes both a contingency – that is, a particularity – and a principal structure, its *eidos* or essence. The perception of the table at which I sit and work consists of things that are contingent – for example, the brown colour of the table – which do not affect the principal structure (the essence) of the table. The table would remain a table even if it were to be painted red. Colour does not belong to a table's essence. However, in the specific experience there is also a 'grasping' of a necessary, principal structure, that which makes me experience it as a table ('the tableness'). It must have a certain consistency, a certain height; I must be able to put things on it, and so on. The necessary or principal structure is, in other words, the structure that is needed in order for it to be what it is.

The natural attitude and the phenomenological reductions

Within the framework for his project, Husserl developed different methodological options that are called 'the phenomenological reductions'. The term reduction is not to be confused with reductionism – that is, the project to reduce a phenomenon by explaining it by means of a less complex structure, as is the case when psychology is reduced to biology, biology to chemistry, and so on. The credo of phenomenology is precisely the opposite, namely to be faithful

[2] The examples are chosen for pedagogical reasons, with the purpose of illustrating certain ideas. The phenomena that have been studied by phenomenologists are not experiences of banal objects, but important epistemological questions, which will be evident in the next chapter.

to the experience as it shows itself for the subject (human being). Husserl's three most salient reductions (and I do not make any more subtle distinction between reduction and the so-called "epoché") are *phenomenological psychological reduction*, *phenomenological transcendental reduction* and *eidetic reduction through imaginative variation*. These reductions must be understood against the background of our common, everyday experience of the world.

Husserl has called the attitude which characterizes this everyday experience the 'natural attitude' (Husserl 1962/1913). The natural attitude is the naïve, uncritical attitude to the world. The aspect which Husserl stresses most of all in the natural attitude is the *belief* in (taken for grantedness of) the existence of the world. The object that I see in front of me shows/presents itself as existing *independently* of my perception of it. In this attitude, the world presents itself as a world filled with objects totally independent of the perceiving human being. The natural attitude is a description of our spontaneous, unreflective way of being in the world; when transformed uncritically into a philosophical position it becomes a naïve realistic epistemology, in which the world is exactly the way one sees it, independently of one's perception.[3]

The first two reductions (phenomenological psychological reduction and phenomenological transcendental reduction) are reminiscent of each other in the sense that they try to bracket our everyday attitude (the so-called natural attitude), where we always implicitly

[3] In the psychoanalytic literature there are plenty of expressions of a realistic epistemology. The realistic epistemology exists in different variants. Apart from naïve realism, we have an epistemological realism with respect to the descriptions of science – for example, in postulating that the theoretical concepts of physics (quarks, molecules, etc.) possess an existence independent of the (researcher) subject. The realism in its different variants is objectivistic, in the sense that the characteristics of the object allegedly belong to the object, independent of the subject. In chapter 2 I will critically discuss this kind of realism from the vantage point of Husserl's phenomenology, and in chapter 3 I will discuss an orientation within psychoanalysis, which embraces an epistemological realism. It is obvious that the concept of reality is too briefly and poorly treated in psychoanalytic literature (see Wallerstein 1983, 1985). The concept is rarely problematized and when statements are made they are often of a realistic character.

take the world as existing independently of consciousness. In the natural attitude the achievement or work that consciousness brings about in order for a world to be present is hidden. The world appears as if ready-made and determined, and our experience as if caused by external, independent stimuli. In order to discover the work of consciousness at all, a radical break with this natural attitude is necessary. We must break with our unreflected belief in the existence of the world, in order to reflect on how the phenomenon is given in and through consciousness. For phenomenology the world is nothing that exists independently of us, but the appearance of the world presupposes consciousness and the subject. In the natural attitude we neglect the conditions of consciousness and the subject for the possibility of a world. But in the phenomenological attitude, under the phenomenological reduction, we discover and clarify the link or correspondence between the subject and the world.

Apart from the suspension or bracketing of the belief in the world, the phenomenological reduction implies a bracketing of different systems that attempt to explain the phenomenon. In other words, we set aside theories, sciences, and so on, which try to explain the phenomenon. We are not supposed to explain the phenomenon with something external to the phenomenon in question. The point with the phenomenological reduction is to make us open and unprejudiced towards that which is given in experience. Here we can refrain from the difference between the phenomenological psychological reduction and the more far-reaching transcendental reduction, which brackets not only the world, but also that-in-the-world, including empirical ego.

The phenomenological reduction attempts to answer the following question: how is it *possible* that I experience, for example, the table in front of me as existing, independently of my perception of it? Such a question cannot be answered merely by stating: because the table exists. Suppose I ask the following: how is it *possible* that I experience the table in front of me as existing independently of my perception of it, whereas I do not experience the after-image

from a camera flash as existing independently of my looking at it? To answer such a question by stating that the table exists, whereas the after-image does not exist in reality, would not be to answer the question. That would be begging the question. The question about how something is *possible* forces us to reflect on how it is experienced for consciousness. The existence of the world cannot then be presupposed, but we must try to describe the conditions or the possibilities for that which actually exists. This question 'raises' us to an ontological level, which tries to clarify the necessary conditions for the (experience of) existence.

Here, I have attempted to point out the connection between the phenomenological reduction and the question of how something is possible – the ontological question. The phenomenological reduction tries to bracket our belief (judgement, or what is taken for granted) in the existence of the world, with the purpose of making possible an investigation of *how* the object is given in and through consciousness. The bracketing of the existential judgement – the reduction – is not to be understood as a kind of Cartesian doubt. It is not that I doubt the existence of the table; rather, the point is that the belief in its existence has to be clarified. As was shown above, as well as the suspension of the existential judgement, the phenomenological question entails a bracketing of all other theories, systems and sciences that try to explain the experience of the phenomenon. The phenomenological researcher strives to describe the phenomenon as free from preconceived ideas as possible.[4]

Let us now move on to 'the eidetic reduction through imaginative variation'. This can be described as the methodological option that aims to go from the particular to the essential (*eidos* = essence). This is achieved by freely varying parameters (characteristics) of a real or fantasized example of the phenomenon. Thus, one searches for the essential traits that make a phenomenon what it

[4] The emphasis on openness that is so important for phenomenology has great similarities with the open attitude of psychoanalysis as it is expressed in Freud's 'evenly suspended attention' and in Bion's 'without memory and desire'.

is. Let us take as an example the phenomenon of 'kindness'. As a point of departure, I take a situation when I am shopping in a store, I am short of time, and a man perceives my pressed predicament and offers to let me stand in front of him in the queue to pay. This experience of being treated in a kind way entails both accidental factors and the essential constituents that make it into an experience of kindness. In the phenomenological reflection, the accidental factors are not reckoned with – for example, that it was a man who showed the kindness or that it was in a grocery store that the kindness was manifested. The phenomenological reflection, on the other hand, aims at making explicit or thematic the (essential) constituents that make it into the experience that it is – in my example, an experience of kindness and nothing else. Without being able to carry out a real phenomenological analysis of this phenomenon here (that presumably is much more complex than one may think at first), we can have a feeling that the essential constituents involve, for example, that the person who exercises the kind act is a subject who carries out an intentional act (a robot cannot be kind) and that there are no ulterior motives behind this act (for example, that it is carried out in order to make me feel pressed to do a favour in return). Thus, the purpose of the eidetic reduction is to articulate those constituents that are essential for the experience of kindness, without which they would not be an act of kindness, and leave aside such accidental traits that happen to be part of this particular case of kindness.

The phenomenological attitude thus aims at making us open to that which is given in and through consciousness, which is achieved by means of the phenomenological reduction's (transcendental or phenomenological-psychological) break with our natural attitude. The eidetic reduction can thereafter be carried out with the purpose of articulating the essence of the phenomenon being studied.

Earlier, I said that the natural attitude conceals the work, the achievement that consciousness brings about in order for a world to be present to us. The phenomenological reductions that are to liberate us from the naïveté of the natural attitude in relationship to