For Rupert and Bruno
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The abbreviations used in the notes throughout the book are as follows:

- *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*  
  Kris

- *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*  
  Jones

- *The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Arnold Zweig*  
  Zweig

- Standard Edition of *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*  
  Volume and page number only, e.g., II, 231
P R E F A C E

Operating from a private medical practice in Vienna, which he maintained from Easter 1886 until he was forced into exile in 1938, Sigmund Freud, by the power of his writings and by the breadth and audacity of his speculations, revolutionized the thought, the lives, and the imagination of an age. He contradicted, and in some cases he reversed, the prevailing opinions, of the learned as well as of common people, on many of the issues of human existence and culture. He led people to think about their appetites and their intellectual powers, about self-knowledge and self-deceit, about the ends of life and about man’s profoundest passions and about his most intimate or trivial failings, in ways that would have seemed to earlier generations at once scandalous and silly. It would be hard to find in the history of ideas, even in the history of religion, someone
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whose influence was so immediate, so broad, and so deep.

A heavy price has been paid for this achievement. In many of the consequences of the Freudian revolution, little trace can be found of Freud's own complex thought. His ideas were among the first victims of their success, and a generation brought up on them would be unable to say with any precision what they actually are. Furthermore, the fact has been lost sight of that, in revolutionizing the world, Freud revolutionized himself. Freud would probably have been a lesser thinker, most certainly he would have been a lesser man, if his ideas had come to him more easily.

That Freud's views have become largely obscured for us, and that his evolution as a thinker has received little recognition, are not unrelated. For, if ideas and hypotheses coming from very different periods in Freud's work are simply put together, the result in many cases is nonsense; in order to understand the individual ideas and hypotheses, it is often necessary to identify the situations to which they are a response or the problems they were devised to solve. With this in mind, I have set myself two aims in the writing of this study: first, to bring out what Freud actually said; and, secondly, to show the relevance of the chronological order in which he said it. To these ends I have, wherever possible, allowed Freud to speak for himself, and, insofar as the tasks are separable, I have preferred exposition to interpretation or evaluation. My first concern has been to set out Freud's account of the mind as this developed over the first half-century of psychoanalysis.

Freud's scientific career began in pathological medicine and in neurology, and it was attended with some success. But for an unlucky accident, he would have made himself famous as the discoverer of cocaine
in its clinical use. However, the Freud that we know
dates from the visit to Paris in the winter of 1885–1886,
when he had the opportunity of working under the
famous French physician Charcot with patients suffering
from hysteria.

Charcot’s great discovery, from Freud’s point of view,
was that certain types of hysterical patient could be
cured of their symptoms by the use of hypnosis; con-
versely, that hypnosis could be used to induce in normal
people the symptoms of hysteria. With these findings,
clearer perhaps to pupil than to master, Charcot fired
Freud’s imagination. He started him off on a new career,
and he endowed him with two gifts, which, transformed
over the years by experience and by the ingenuity of
Freud’s mind, became the foundations of psychoanalysis.
One was a form of therapy, which set out to remove the
symptoms of a mental disorder through the use of words,
and the other was a diagnosis, according to which the
symptoms of the disorder were traceable to the influence
of ideas.

The two parts of Freud’s legacy from Charcot—the
therapy and the diagnosis—are interrelated. It is because
ideas help to form hysterical symptoms that hypnotic
suggestion is effective against them: and the efficacy of
hypnosis confirms the “ideogenic,” or idea-made, charac-
ter of hysteria. During the first decade of psychoanalysis,
both therapy and diagnosis underwent a series of modi-
fications—this will be the theme of Chapter I. But it is
important to see how the two processes are connected,
and how any change in the one leads to, or is the product
of, a change in the other.

As far as the therapy is concerned, the first shift was
from hypnotic suggestion, in which the patient is hypno-
tized and the physician then talks, giving the patient
instructions which will rid him of a symptom, to the "cathartic method," in which the patient is hypnotized and then he talks, at once giving the physician information and ridding himself of the symptom: then the cathartic method gave way to free association, in which hypnosis is altogether abandoned and the patient no longer confines himself to the history of a particular symptom but says whatever comes into his head, thereby ranging over the various factors that have brought about his disorder. Parallel to these changes in therapy, inspiring and inspired by them, there were changes in the diagnostic account. For Freud was led to look further and further back in the patient's history for the ideas that made themselves felt in the symptoms of his mental disorder. The "traumatic event," as the moment is called from which the ideas derive, was eventually located in infancy, and—a more disturbing note—if the patient's associations were to be trusted, it was found invariably to have a sexual character.

In the light of Freud's later theory, perhaps the most striking aspect of his views at this date is an omission. There was emphasis upon the infantile, there was (some-what reluctantly) emphasis upon the sexual, but one thing of which there was no mention in Freud's writings—nor, for that matter, any suspicion in his mind—was infantile sexuality. In the so-called "seduction theory," we can see the lengths to which Freud was prepared to go in accounting for the facts of mental disorder as he saw them without compromising the innocence of childhood. According to this theory, hysteria has its origins in an event that is both infantile and sexual but that happens to or is endured by the child. In other words, the middle-class Viennese who came to Freud's consult-
ing room for relief from their nervous disorders had all been sexually assaulted by their fathers between the ages of six and eight.

Then, in 1897, in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, his friend and mentor, Freud announced his disbelief in the theory. It was a confession of failure, and yet Freud could also recognize that it was a great moment of decision, that it marked a new beginning. “I have,” he wrote “a feeling more of triumph than of defeat.” It was not simply that Freud saw the implausibility of the seduction theory—that must always have stared him in the face—but he now felt that it was less implausible to credit the infant with wishes and impulses from which tradition and orthodoxy had tried so hard to protect it. The long painstaking researches into the sexual life of the child, as well as into the scope of sexuality, the findings of which form the subject of Chapter IV, begin.

However, with the admission of infantile sexuality, Freud was also led to a more general truth about the mind: to an awareness of the role of impulse and desire in so much human activity. The ideas that Freud, following Charcot, had held to be formative in mental disorder, he originally identified with memories. “Hysteric suffers mainly from reminiscences” is a famous phrase dating from the period when the cathartic method was firmly believed in. Gradually, however, Freud came to think of the ideas that account for disease as the representations of wish and impulse. From then onward, he saw the neurotic as suffering not from buried recollections, but from repressed desires. And in many aspects of normal life—in dreams, in errors, in jokes—as well as in the symptoms of the neurosis, Freud detected the agency of the appetitive side of the mind. The discovery of desire
in so many areas of behavior, where previously every-
thing had been attributed to chance or to physical forces,
is considered in Chapter III.

Of course, even in the period when Freud thought that
it was ideas in the sense of memories that were effective
in mental disorder, he had recognized, indeed insisted,
that the ideas were not accessible to consciousness—at
any rate, as things stood. They were “unconscious.” And,
when Freud came to think that it was ideas in the sense
not of memories but of desires that were the true agents
in the formation of a neurosis and its symptoms, he
thought of them in the same way: they too were uncon-
scious. Indeed, the growing emphasis upon desire in
Freud’s thought only helped him to clarify his concept
of the unconscious, as against earlier concepts. For,
though in earlier views of the mind, unconscious
mental phenomena had often been admitted alongside
conscious ones, the difference between the two types
had been thought to lie solely in their degrees of strength
or efficacy. Freud, however, from the beginning, was
dealing with ideas that were both unconscious and very
strong. The older distinction between conscious and un-
conscious ideas was accordingly recast by Freud as one
between conscious and preconscious; and to account for
his kind of unconscious idea, which was not only un-
admitted but inadmissible to consciousness, he postu-
lated a prior act of repression, to which the idea had
fallen victim. In later life, and particularly in the psy-
choanalytic session, repression manifested itself in the
form of resistance. The conviction that the ideas that
made themselves felt in the neuroses had not merely
lapsed into a state of unconsciousness, but had been
forced there by repression, could only be strengthened
when these ideas were equated with desires. For desires,
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unlike memories, have an urgency to them, they seek satisfaction, and some powerful explanation is needed why they are unavailable to consciousness.

From the beginning, then, the notions of the unconscious and repression (or resistance) were closely linked. It was through repression that ideas found their way into the unconscious: just as, through the lowering of resistance, in dreams or in therapy, they found their way out. However, the question had to be asked, If everything that is repressed is unconscious, is everything that is unconscious the consequence of repression? In the course of grappling with this question Freud came to formulate his conception of “the system Ucs.,” or of the unconscious area of the mind as a system with its own rules and principles.

Freud's thinking on the topic of the unconscious, which culminated in the paper of 1915, one of the great “metapsychological” papers (originally twelve in number, of which only five survive) written in an astonishing bout of creativity over a period of five months in mid-1915, forms the subject of Chapter VI. And that chapter ends with the reflection that at the moment at which it seemed that Freud had worked out to his satisfaction the distinguishing criteria of conscious and unconscious, the distinction itself began to lose its interest for him: the central place that it had occupied for so long in psychoanalytic theory was now taken over by another distinction. During the last phase of Freud's thinking, which coincides with the last fifteen or twenty years of his life, it was the opposition of ego and id that was in the forefront of his attention.

Freud described the change as a shift in interest from the repressed to the repressing forces in the mind, and as a general characterization this gives an adequate
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account of his later work. The questions why and how repression comes about had always been with him, but a systematic investigation of the agency responsible for repression had to be postponed until the consequences of repression, as these manifest themselves in the neurosis, had been thoroughly studied. And, when Freud did embark on this new investigation, he found that he was not—as his earlier work might have led him to believe—simply turning away from the unconscious to the conscious. For, though the ego, as the repressing agency was called, was in large part conscious, insofar as it was responsible for repression it operated unconsciously. For this reason, as Freud moved over to a functional study of the mind or to the study of the interactions between various parts of the mind that inaugurate mental conflict, the distinction of conscious versus unconscious seemed to him less and less relevant.

In examining the ego as the repressing agency, Freud was led to ask how the ego came by the standards it enforced in repression. The question itself was not new, but what was peculiar to Freud’s late phase was the determination to provide a genetic or developmental account—a history, as it were, within the history of the individual—for these standards. Identified originally as a “differentiating grade” in, or a “modification” of, the ego, the superego is treated as a deposit left behind in the infant’s mind from its passionate but catastrophic relations with a loved parent.

In one respect Freud’s characterization of the change that came over his work as it entered its last phase does not do justice to its range. For, alongside the study of the ego, the other great theme of this period certainly was concerned with the repressed forces of the mind. And that was Freud’s discovery, and analysis, of the
death instinct. Contrary to certain popular conceptions, Freud had never believed that the whole of man's instinctual endowment was sexual. His theory of the psychoneuroses rests on a duality of instinct. In his early period he said little about the nonsexual instincts, except to refer, quite conventionally, to hunger and thirst. In his middle period—at any rate, after 1910—he contrasted sexuality and the ego instincts, but he left the ego instincts curiously unspecified. Then, in 1920, in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, he announced the discovery of the death instinct, and, from then onward, the human psyche and, by extension, human society and human history are seen as the arenas for the warring instincts of Eros and Thanatos, of love and death. Freud's late work was, however, not without its unity, for the two themes of the ego and its development and of the reclassification of the instincts bear upon each other, and in Chapter VII I set out to trace how they connect.

Freud is generally thought of primarily as one who explored the workings of the abnormal mind. That is certainly a fair estimate of his life's work. The study of the neurosis—its nature, its cause and its cure, the subject of Chapter V—lies at the center of his achievement. However, for various reasons, Freud held that the study of the abnormal mind could be advanced solely within some more general theory of the mind; and, in order to have a thorough understanding of his theory of the neurosis, one should really see it in this larger setting. I have endeavored to do this in Chapter II. For all the importance that a general psychological theory had for Freud, there are only two works in which he tried to set one out. They stand at the two ends of his life's work, and both are unfinished. One is the Outline of Psychoanalysis, written at the age of eighty-two, and the other.
which is the more elaborated account, is the brilliant and abstruse manuscript, composed during a few weeks in late 1895, and generally known as the “Scientific Project.” I have concentrated on the earlier work because, though Freud never published it and never referred to it again, it casts a lengthy shadow over much of his work. The manuscript is, however, difficult, and as a result the chapter in which I deal with it requires a closer and more exacting attention than I would have wished to ask of the reader. However, so much of the interest in Freud’s development currently centers in the “Project” that I felt that it would have been quite wrong to treat the subject in a more glancing fashion. Those whose interest in the history of psychoanalytic theory is less fundamental could quite legitimately omit the chapter or read it later.

In the last chapter I deal with Freud’s views about society and human culture. This, I have felt, is perhaps the area where there is the greatest need to retrieve what Freud actually said from the many interpretations and partial readings to which his words have been subjected. Freud speculated both about the past and about the future of society. Two very big questions clearly intrigued him: How did human society originate? and, Is it ultimately worthwhile? Much of what Freud said on these issues is stimulating and original, but it does not add up to a social theory or a social ethic. Nor did he think so.

In his reflections on society Freud was influenced by two very general principles, which pulled him in somewhat different directions. They were a belief in the ultimate power of reason and rational argument, and a profoundly low opinion of human nature. He was not intimidated from referring, on several occasions, to the
majority of human beings—as they were, or as society had formed them—as “worthless.” In addition, Freud's thinking about politics was colored by two deeply held sentiments, which were characteristic of the man: a bitter antagonism to religion and all forms of religious authority, and a hatred of America.

To point out that Freud himself did not have a “political theory” is not to deny that his writings are and will remain one of the most fruitful sources upon which speculation about society can draw. In the writings of Erik Erikson and Alexander Mitscherlich, Freud's general theories have been put to interesting use.

On one subject I have said nothing in this study: Freud's views about art. What Freud actually says on the subject—as opposed, once again, to what can be legitimately derived from his thinking—is very fragmentary, and the task of separating off what is there from various accretions is not simple. I have dealt with the subject in “Freud and the Understanding of Art,” in my On Art and the Mind (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).

I have discussed the themes and topics of this book with many friends, colleagues, and pupils, and I would find it hard to thank them individually. I am grateful to Dr. Frederic Weiss for letting me see how well the "Rat Man" case lends itself to exposition of Freud's view of the neurosis, and for various suggestions. My wife, Mary Day, and Katherine Backhouse have given me invaluable help with the preparation of the text. And I owe a debt to Dr. Leslie Sohn but for whom I would not have the necessary qualification for writing either about Freud or about psychoanalysis.
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Since the writing of this book, which was completed in the summer of 1970, there has been an undeniable shift in the public visibility of psychoanalysis and its founder. Exactly what this amounts to is not easy to say. In 1970 Freud was incredibly famous, his ideas had in some way molded the thought and sensibility of the age, but few people outside the specialized world of psychoanalysis could have said what those ideas were or entered into a discussion of their merits. We do not live today in a world of Freudian erudites, but there seem to be more people who are able to say with some accuracy what Freud thought, and, both in the general and in the intellectual community, there is far less willingness to reject psychoanalysis out of hand. In the last twenty years Freud has been edged out of the wings, to which he had been relegated, and he has come to occupy a significant
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place on the stage of ideas. In saying that, it is necessary to add the following qualification: that sometimes it is Freud’s name rather than Freud’s thought that enjoys this new prominence. What makes this qualification necessary is something I shall return to at the end of this preface.

Along with the revived interest in Freud, and serving as an index of it, there has been a rapid growth in the literature on Freud. Far and away the best guide to this literature, and a work that could stand on its own, not merely for its breadth of scholarship but also for the amiable judiciousness of tone it maintains throughout, is the 38-page bibliographical essay attached to Peter Gay’s biography of Freud, which I discuss below. The recent literature may be classified under four main categories, between which there is some overlap.

Let me make clear at the outset that I exclude from the literature I have in mind that which aims at making a real contribution to psychoanalytic theory thought of as a living science. Doing so leads me to exclude among other things a number of works which have specifically criticized Freud’s speculatively conceived account of female psychology. Initially this omission may seem odd, but the value of such works seems to me to lie in whatever substantive emendations they propose to the psychoanalysis of the sexes.

The first category of the literature I consider consists of additions to the Freudian corpus itself. The most significant item here is one of the 1915 metapsychological papers, which had been presumed lost forever, and a copy of which was rediscovered among documents belonging to Sandor Ferenczi. This had been published as Sigmund Freud, A Phylogenetic Fantasy: Overview of the Transference Neuroses, ed. I. Grubrich-Simitis, trans. A. and P. Hoffer (Cambridge, Mass., 1987): the first part of the title is not Freud’s.
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A continuing source of Freudiana is Freud’s own very considerable correspondence. The most recent contribution is The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fließ, ed. and trans. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), which makes obsolete, except for Ernst Kris’s wide-ranging introduction, the earlier selection published as The Origins of Psycho-analysis in 1954. The new volume is invaluable, and it is only to be anticipated that, over the years, new, comprehensive editions, with uncut texts, will appear of Freud’s correspondence with Karl Abraham, Lou Andreas-Salomé, Oskar Pfister, and Arnold Zweig, replacing those we presently have. Freud’s correspondence with Ferenczi and with Jones is being prepared for publication.

The first category may be stretched to include contributions to the continuing debate over the translation that James Strachey provided for the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. The debate has not been totally straightforward. Genuine if sometimes misplaced concern over the accuracy and the status of the English text has been entangled with the more practical desire to retain copyright, which a substantial retranslation would ensure. The most trenchant contribution to the debate has undoubtedly been Bruno Bettelheim, Freud and Man’s Soul (London, 1983), a work whose argument is vitiated by the untenable antithesis established between a “scientific” and a “humanist” conception of psychoanalysis. Few contrasts could be more opposed to Freud’s fundamental way of thinking.

The second category into which the literature falls is the historical and the biographical. This is where the major growth has taken place, and, apart from concerns specific to psychoanalysis, there are two principal reasons for this: one is the inevitable forward march of historical inquiry as the present recedes into the past, and the other is a kind of
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nostalgic curiosity that has fixed on the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the fin-de-siècle, and on Vienna in particular, as a hothouse of art and ideas. Recently two works of a historical character of exceptional interest have appeared: Peter Gay, Freud: A Life for Our Time (New York, 1988), and Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, Anna Freud (New York, 1988).

Gay’s biography is a magisterial work. It invites comparison to, though it is ultimately incommensurable with, Ernest Jones’s great three-volume biography. Jones had the inestimable advantage of having lived within Freud’s intimate circle for several decades. He also had the inestimable disadvantage of having to write under constant surveillance. He could write only what Anna Freud thought it appropriate that the world should know about her father, and her excessive protectiveness is well documented and kindly treated in Young-Bruehl’s biography. In the short run, at any rate, this protectiveness has proved counterproductive, and it is in part responsible for the denigratory literature on Freud which is largely a reaction to it. (This literature is the third category of writing about Freud.) Even Gay, who, unlike Jones, did not have to suffer from direct injunctions, nevertheless had his freedom as a scholar cramped by the prevailing obstructionist policies of the Freud Archives. A second major difference between Jones and Gay lies in their general biographical strategies. Jones was even-handed between life and thought, and the result is a huge sandwich in which the two alternate. By contrast Gay adopted the plan of integrating life and thought, and he included just as much of Freud’s thought as he judged to be necessary to understand the course of the life: it is no surprise that, with a subject such as Freud, this should turn out to be quite a lot. Furthermore, in tracing Freud’s formation, Gay is able to balance internal, or psychological, factors with external factors, or the events of the time, into
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which, as an accomplished historian, he has excellent insight.

Young-Bruehl’s life of Anna Freud is of particular interest on the relations between father and daughter. With great tact and skill she treats of the seemingly “scandalous” event at the heart of the Freud family, which few writers have been in a position to broach: Freud’s analysis of Anna. It transpires that some of Freud’s most intricate and delicate interpretations of incestuous and masochistic phantasies derive from material unearthed in the course of his daughter’s analysis.

Another historical work of considerable interest is William J. McGrath, Freud’s Discovery of Psychoanalysis: The Politics of Hysteria (New York, 1986). McGrath is particularly rewarding on a topic which I was able only to raise speculatively in my book (pp. 20–21 below), that is, Freud’s theoretical indebtedness to the philosopher Franz Brentano. However, McGrath certainly goes too far in proposing the contemporary political and social situation in Vienna as the prime explanatory environment for Freud’s theoretical development.

The third category of literature is that produced by the denigratory, or “debunking,” school. A gray area lies between the second and third categories, and there will be comprehensible disagreement about what falls where. What is distinctive of the denigratory school is a peculiar amalgam of fulsome praise of Freud and a battery of miscellaneous and uncoordinated criticism, some of it unsupported, some anachronistic, some undoubtedly well grounded, but much of it aimed at a target that conflates the thought and the man. A prime example is Paul Roazen, Freud and His Followers (New York, 1975), a work which I criticized in some detail in the Times Literary Supplement, March 26, 1976, p. 341.
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Another work that calls itself in doubt through its vehemence of tone, though it has the merit of maintaining an identifiable position, is Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, The Assault on Truth: Freud’s Suppression of the Seduction Theory (New York and London, 1984). Masson wishes to reinstate Freud’s 1895–97 explanation of hysteria in terms of infantile seduction (see pp. 24–27 below). However, much of his book argues not for the seduction theory itself but against the significance of one constituent in the theory with which Freud replaced it: phantasy. Freud, according to Masson, came to regard phantasy as a pathogenic element through generalization from a single instance, and that instance was itself described in bad faith. Attempting to protect his great friend Wilhelm Fliess from a malpractice charge that might legitimately have been brought against him by one of his surgical patients, Emma Eckstein, Freud (Masson argues) first tried to discredit Eckstein as a hostile witness by ascribing her complaints to phantasy, and then endeavored to substantiate this diagnosis by proposing the universality of phantasy. Chronology alone throws doubt on Masson’s reconstruction of Freud’s change of mind. Masson’s resuscitation of the seduction theory turned out to have an opportune character to it, in that it fitted in with a renewed public preoccupation in several Western countries with parental abuse—something which, incidentally, Freud never tried to deny or diminish. However, as recent legal history has shown, children’s phantasies about seduction are able to outstrip fact: a child can phantasize scenes that it has not experienced. Once this is recognized, two questions arise, Why is this so? or What does this reveal about infantile sexuality?, and What are its consequences? or Is fact or is phantasy the fundamental pathogenic factor?

Another work in the same vein, though also full of histor-
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...lic interest, and deserving a permanent place in the biographical literature, is Marianne Krüll, *Freud and His Father* (New York, 1986). Krüll ascribes the rejection of the seduction theory, which she too regards as an error, to the fact that Freud, in the wake of his father’s death, wished to exonerate him from assaults upon his children. It has, however, long been recognized that some such wish certainly entered into Freud’s motivation, and the question is whether it occupied the dominant role that Krüll assigned it and whether it blinded him to evidence on the other side.

The fourth category into which the new literature falls is the methodological. Initially it might seem that there would be no borderline cases between the third and fourth categories, but there is one work, full of erudition, which occupies this zone. This is Frank Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (New York, 1977). Like its title, Sulloway’s book falls into two parts that seem to have little to do with one another. The first part, which is strictly methodological, offers a broadly acceptable if somewhat underdefined characterization of Freudian theory as essentially biological. Starting with the broad contrast between psychology and biology, Sulloway emends it to one between pure psychology and psychobiology, and claims Freud for the second. But it remains unclear just what Sulloway is claiming over and above the thesis, which any responsible commentator on Freud would concede, that Freud’s theory was conceived by him as a materialist theory, plus the further fact that there is nothing in the theory itself that stands in the way of such a conception. The second part of Sulloway’s book is a critique of what he calls the “Freud legend.” Made up of a variety of beliefs, held in some cases by different people who otherwise were totally opposed to one another, the Freud legend is nevertheless presented by Sulloway as though it were a
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simple construct with a single function: the function being to present a picture of Freud as a lonely, embattled hero who endured calumny and opposition because of the originality of his ideas. This portrait, we are told by Sulloway, is false in every detail. I have criticized Sulloway’s book at greater length in The New York Review of Books, November 8, 1979, pp. 25–28.

Serious methodological writing on Freud has largely taken the form of articles. For excellent examples of such writing, admittedly all broadly favorable to Freud, I have to recommend to the reader Philosophical Essays on Freud, ed. Richard Wollheim and J. Hopkins (Cambridge, England, 1983).

Of recent years there is one book in this category which has attracted a great deal of attention and controversy. It has been widely praised—even by psychoanalysts, who ought to have abandoned their practice if they believed what they said—and it has come in for criticism. This is Adolf Grünbaum, The Foundations of Psychoanalysis: A Philosophical Critique (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984). Easier access to Grünbaum’s arguments, bypassing the book’s verbose mode of presentation, can be obtained through Grünbaum’s own précis in the special number of Behavioral and Brain Sciences, Vol. 9, no. 2, June 1986, pp. 217–28.

The great virtue of The Foundations of Psychoanalysis is that it clearly separates the atemporal question of the scientific content of Freud’s theory, or what, if anything, the theory says, to which the book in fact does not address itself, from two other questions, upon which it concentrates, and both of which can be answered only relative to the state of inquiry at the time of asking: one is that of the testability of Freud’s theory, or whether ways of questioning the truth of what the theory says have been designed, the other is
that of the credibility of the theory, or what tests so far conducted reveal.

Grünbaum’s book can be criticized on several counts. First, in considering the testability of Freud’s theory, it spends an unexplained amount of time reconstructing how Freud himself thought his theory could be tested. Secondly, it ascribes to Freud a view of this issue—the so-called Tally Argument—which Freud’s text does not support. Thirdly, Grünbaum, in confining himself to *clinical* testability, thus leaving extraclinical testability to another occasion, reveals himself to have a very impoverished idea of what goes on in the analytic session, hence of what can be tested there, and how: specifically, he displays no grasp of the nature, hence of the epistemic value, of the transference. Fourthly, Grünbaum, following Freud, runs as a rival candidate to psychoanalysis the hypothesis of suggestion. He entertains the possibility that every therapeutic change claimed for psychoanalysis may really be ascribable to the workings of suggestion, and he thinks that no one seriously interested in the scientific value of psychoanalysis can ignore this possibility. But, as Grünbaum’s argument progresses, suggestion escalates. Starting off as a place holder for any non-Freudian procedure, it becomes the name of a genuine (if underdescribed) empirical theory with its own laws and ontological commitments.

Finally, and most importantly, Grünbaum fails to give due weight to the fact that anything appropriately called “clinical testing” is not hermetic: it will inevitably presuppose a considerable body of extraclinical propositions. What is definitive of clinical testing is presumably that it assigns a crucial role to material revealed by the patient in the analytic session, but, in order for this material to assume such a role, it will have to be understood in the light of what the analyst has independent or at least additional
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reason to think true of the patient: the beliefs and desires the patient has, the phantasies he entertains, the associations he makes, the mechanisms of defense to which he typically resorts. And this background information will in turn be epistemically secured in the analyst’s thinking only through the more general or theoretical hypotheses to which he subscribes. Grünbaum’s failure to recognize this aspect of clinical testing is part of a larger failure which cramps much of his argument, that is, the failure to grasp the interaction between, on the one hand, the theory of the mind that Freud produced and, on the other hand, the preferences he showed within, and the additions he made to, the forms or schemata of psychological explanation.

The interdependence of theory and explanation in Freud’s work is an important theme, for much of the time implicit, but sometimes explicit, in my book, and the neglect of this theme in some of the recent discussion suggests to me that this would be a good place for me to set out in an overall way how I now see the situation. Doing so will enable me to introduce some revisions of what I wrote twenty years ago.

I shall approach the interdependence of theory and explanation from the side of explanation, and my aim will be to show how Freud was able to extend his explanatory reach as his theory uncovered more and more aspects of the mind that could be appealed to in explanation. And, as this happened, or as the scope of explanation enlarged, so there developed the need for, and the possibility of, new forms of explanation.

Let us start, as Freud himself did, as we all have to, with commonsense psychological explanation, or the schema that we have no alternative to using when we try to make
sense of the actions of our fellow human beings or, for that matter, of ourselves. Let us start, in other words, with what is called “desire/belief psychology.” Desire/belief psychology is not so much a psychological theory as a pro forma for psychological explanations, and the name derives from the fact that the explanations it promotes explain an action by appealing to a desire and a belief on the part of the agent that are appropriately related to one another and also to the action itself. The desire and the belief are appropriately related to one another just in case the belief specifies the best way that is, in the circumstances, open to the agent of satisfying the desire; in other words, the belief is instrumental vis-à-vis the desire. And the desire and belief are appropriately related to the action just in case (one) the belief indicates that very action as the best way of satisfying the desire, in which case the action is said to be “rationalized” for that agent, and (two) the desire and belief jointly caused the action.

An example of suitable banality—the example should be banal, just because this kind of explanation is so widespread—would be this: A man picks up a glass of water, which is on the table in front of him, puts it to his lips, and drains it. We explain this action by citing his desire to quench his thirst and his belief that, as of then, the best way of doing so is to drink the water which is before him. For the explanation to work, he must actually have the desire and the belief; they must (as in this case they evidently do) make the action rational for him to do; and, finally, it must be they that caused him to do the action. It is important to see that rationalization by itself does not explain the action: additionally, causation is required. If the agent had a desire and a belief that rationalized some action of his, then he had a reason for doing what he did. But it does not follow that, when he did it, this is the reason why he did
it: he might have done it for some other reason, or perhaps he did it without a reason. To close this gap, or for a reason that the agent had for doing an action to become the reason why he did it, this reason must be causally efficacious. It is only in the light of its causal history that we can explain an action. It is further to be noted that not only does the citation of a desire and a belief tied in this way to an action explain that action, it also establishes it as an action. An action, it has been said, is something that we do about which it is possible to ask in the appropriate sense why we did it. The desire/belief schema glosses this appropriate “why”: it is the why that the practical syllogism interprets.

Inheriting this explanatory schema—and Freud himself made ample use of commonsense explanation in, for instance, telling the narratives of his case histories or making a good story out of the manifest content of a dream—he also did three things to it. He deepened the schema; he elaborated, or produced variations upon, it; and he contextualized it.

In deepening the desire/belief schema, Freud preserved the form of explanation that common sense employs. What he did was to introduce into the form, as explanatory factors, unconscious desires and beliefs: factors which common sense either ignores or invokes with little conviction. So we have the following pattern:

1. Someone does something, and this is explained by reference to unconscious desire and belief on the agent’s part, which, in much the same way as their conscious counterparts would have done, rationalize the action and also caused it. An example, which Freud gave out of his own experience: On his way to visit his elder brother, who was staying in England, Freud failed to make the right connection in Cologne, though the train was standing in the station with its destination clearly marked, and in consequence he had to stay the night in Holland. This lapse is
explained by Freud’s unconscious (or perhaps preconscious) desire to see the great Rembrandts in The Hague and in Amsterdam and his belief that, if he missed his train, he would have to spend extra time in Holland and so his desire could be satisfied (VI, 1901b, 227–28). Notoriously Freud greatly enlarged the number of things we do that must be regarded as actions by showing that, contrary to appearances, they could be explained in this way: the why of the practical syllogism is appropriate to them. A large number of the so-called parapraxes discussed in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* fall into this category.

A natural extension of this deepened kind of desire/belief explanation is to cases where the place occupied by belief in the ordinary schema is taken by phantasy. However, as Freud came to appreciate, phantasies tend not to operate in the same orderly way as instrumental beliefs. Often enough they cannot be recruited as minor premises within some practical syllogism that the agent can be presumed to run through unconsciously. The upshot is that, when phantasies are causally operative, their operation often calls for one of the forms of explanation to which I now turn.

For Freud’s real explanatory innovations lay not just in substituting unconscious for conscious factors in the ordinary schema, though this is how philosophers have often treated the issue. On the contrary, as psychoanalytic theory uncovered further aspects of the mind and then pressed them into explanatory service, Freud found himself creating new forms of psychological explanation in which these factors could be accommodated. In other words, Freud elaborated the desire/belief schema, and I shall consider briefly three variations that he produced upon it. Each of these new forms has in fact its prototype in ordinary, or nonpsychoanalytic, explanation, but in each case it has been the discovery by psychoanalysis of a new aspect of the mind, a new psychological factor along with its special