

The Debate Between Grünbaum and Ricœur The Hermeneutic Conception of Psychoanalysis and the Drive for Scientific Legitimacy

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Abstract:

Paul Ricœur's hermeneutic approach to psychoanalysis stresses the interpretation of meanings revealed via the narratives woven through the discursive exchanges between analyst and analysand. Despite the tremendous influence Ricœur's interpretation enjoyed both in philosophy and in psychoanalysis, his approach has been subject to severe criticism by Adolf Grünbaum who argues that Freud modeled psychoanalysis on the natural sciences, and therefore it should be judged according to natural scientific standards. I argue that Grünbaum incorrectly downplays the importance of speech and language in psychoanalytic theory and practice, and moreover, that Ricœur's approach offers important insights that deserve to be redeployed today.

Keywords: Ricœur, Grünbaum, Psychoanalysis, Hermeneutics, Explanation.

Résumé:

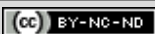
L'approche herméneutique de la psychanalyse de Paul Ricœur met l'accent sur l'interprétation des significations révélées par les récits qui se tissent à travers les échanges discursifs de l'analyste et de la personne en analyse. Malgré l'énorme influence dont jouit l'interprétation de Ricœur, en philosophie comme en psychanalyse, son approche a fait l'objet de critiques sévères de la part d'Adolf Grünbaum qui soutient que, dans la mesure où Freud a conçu la psychanalyse sur le modèle des sciences de la nature, celle-ci doit être jugée selon les normes des sciences naturelles. Dans cette contribution, je soutiens que Grünbaum minimise à tort l'importance de la parole et du langage dans la théorie et la pratique psychanalytiques et que l'approche de Ricœur propose en outre des idées importantes qui méritent d'être redéployées aujourd'hui.

Mots-clés: Ricœur, Grünbaum, psychanalyse, hermeneutique, explication.

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and the Drive for Scientific Legitimacy

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Introduction

The legacy of psychoanalysis is a complex one. Since its inception in the work of Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis has enjoyed widespread approval as a therapeutic practice, been deployed with fruitful results in philosophical discourse and literary theory, has been taken up in important ways by the sciences, and, in addition, has infiltrated and permeated popular discourse. It has also been heavily criticized by philosophers such as Karl Popper and Ludwig Wittgenstein, not to mention by many psychologists and psychiatrists. Freud's, and correlatively, psychoanalysis' current standing in both the academy and cultural discourse is no doubt colored heavily by the so-called "Freud Wars" of the late 1980s and 1990s, a war during which Freud lost more than a few battles. Recently, however, psychoanalysis has undergone something of a resurgence at the hands of philosophers as diverse as Slavoj Žižek, Adrian Johnston, and Jonathan Lear and, quite interestingly, has been taken up by neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio, Jaak Panksepp, Mark Solms, and Joseph LeDoux, among others.

Given the recent renewed theoretical and experimental interest in psychoanalysis, it is worth going back into the field's history to trace certain aspects of its trajectory. One of the most important debates regarding psychoanalysis concerns how it should be approached: Is psychoanalysis a natural science or is it primarily an interpretive, humanistic discipline? Two important figures within this debate – indeed, the figures who can be said to form the debate's opposing poles – are Adolf Grünbaum, a proponent of the view that psychoanalysis can and should be tested on natural scientific grounds, and Paul Ricœur, who, following his hermeneutically minded colleagues Karl Jaspers and Jürgen Habermas, argues that psychoanalysis provides individuals with a certain kind of self-understanding. On the hermeneutic conception of psychoanalysis, the process of analysis allows patients, or, in psychoanalytic parlance, analysands to integrate the traumas which generate neurotic or hysterical symptoms into their conscious understanding of themselves. With its emphasis on engendering a kind of self-understanding through the development of a narrative woven through the discursive exchanges between analysts and analysands, advocates of the hermeneutic view tend to argue that psychoanalysis cannot be subjected to the standards of the "observational sciences." Grünbaum, for his part, sees this as an attempt to "buy absolution" for psychoanalysis, to weasel out of the serious criticisms that are leveled against psychoanalysis on scientific grounds.

My agenda in what follows will be modest. My aim is to trace the contours of the debate between Grünbaum and Ricœur. I intend, first, to assess the force of Grünbaum's criticisms of the hermeneutic rendering of Freudian psychoanalysis. Secondly, I will draw some conclusions about the contemporary import of Ricœur's ideas about psychoanalysis. In the first section, I offer an account of Ricœur's hermeneutic conception of psychoanalysis. I emphasize the importance of narrative in psychoanalytic explanation and the unique perspective that Ricœur's narrative theory provides vis-à-vis the psychoanalytic method of therapy. In the second section, I set up Grünbaum's polemical critique of Ricœur's philosophy of psychoanalysis. Grünbaum's scientifically minded approach does not tolerate any interpretation of psychoanalysis which does not leave it open to scientific critique. But beyond this basic disagreement, Grünbaum's reading of Ricœur on psychoanalysis often paints a picture of a philosopher who did not understand his own views, let alone Freud's. I argue that Grünbaum's approach incorrectly downplays the importance of speech and language in psychoanalysis and misunderstands Ricœur's position on several key issues. I conclude that Ricœur's reading thus offers some real insights into the theory and practice of psychoanalysis, insights which perhaps deserve to be redeployed today. I am not able to trace the full extent of the encounter between Grünbaum and Ricœur, but I hope to motivate a reconsideration of Ricœur's interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis and to lay the foundation for future research.

Ricœur's Hermeneutic Conception of Psychoanalysis

Paul Ricœur devoted much attention to psychoanalysis throughout his corpus. The large tome *Freud and Philosophy*, first delivered in 1961 at Yale University as part of the Terry Lecture series, was published in French in 1965 and subsequently translated into English in 1970. A recent volume collecting some ten hard-to-find essays and published lectures on the subject that Ricœur wrote and delivered during his lifetime was published in 2012. And these two substantial volumes do not account for the numerous references to psychoanalysis which appear in many of Ricœur's other works, including *The Symbolism of Evil*, *Time and Narrative*, and *Memory, History, Forgetting*, among several others. Why did psychoanalysis, a psychological theory and method of treatment, occupy Ricœur's hermeneutic gaze for so long?

Ricœur's own answer would likely be that psychoanalysis deploys numerous interpretive strategies in order to excavate certain hidden aspects of the human psyche. These strategies, according to Ricœur, are put to work first and foremost in the analysis of a patient's speech. Remarking upon the "linguistic turn" which occurred in philosophy in the early-to-mid twentieth century – both in the Anglo-American analytic tradition and, though in a decidedly different form, on the European continent – Ricœur decisively situates psychoanalysis as a chief interlocutor in the philosophical discussion surrounding the nature of language. As he writes, "I contend that the psychoanalyst is a leading participant in any general discussion about language."¹ What, then, is the function of speech and language in psychoanalysis?

The basic method of psychoanalytic treatment is simple. Patients enter their analyst's consulting room, lie on the couch, and speak, saying whatever comes to mind no matter how nonsensical or irrelevant it may seem. By speaking without a censor – "free associating" – in this way, it is thought that the patient's unconscious fantasies and desires will be revealed. It is the

analyst's job to decipher the oftentimes disjointed utterances that issue from their patient's mouths in an effort to uncover these unconscious ideas. It is through language, then, that the patient's unconscious desires are brought to the surface. Ricœur's views on this matter receive definite support from the history of psychoanalysis. The pseudonymously named Anna O., widely recognized as the inaugural patient of psychoanalysis, famously described her method of treatment as "a talking cure," a moniker which remains attached to psychoanalysis to this day.² And as the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan notes in his famous "Rome Discourse" of 1953, "Whether it wishes to be an agent of healing, training, or sounding the depths, psychoanalysis has but one medium: the patient's speech."³

It is to this domain of psychoanalytic treatment that Ricœur restricts the bulk of his interpretation of the Freudian corpus. It is important to point out, however, that this reflects only one dimension of psychoanalysis. For there is a robust theoretical edifice which surrounds psychoanalytic practice, namely, the metapsychology which incorporates such notions as the unconscious, repression, the id, ego, and superego, and so on. As Adrian Johnston explains:

In both his case studies and technical papers, Freud proceeds by focusing on the empirical evidence available through psychoanalysis as a therapeutic practice. By contrast, Freud conceives of metapsychology as psychoanalysis's answer to metaphysics [...] The metapsychological portrait of the unconscious sketches the necessary conditions for the possibility of psychical experience as postulated by analytic interpretation and its underlying model of the mind.⁴

Ricœur, however, privileges the encounters between analysts and their patients, that is, the free associations of analysands and the interpretation of those associations that analysts undertake. There are several questions that can and should be asked of Ricœur's decision to restrict psychoanalysis to its clinical implementation, and, as we shall see, this is a point on which Grünbaum takes issue with Ricœur. But for now, let us consider the mileage that Ricœur is able to get out of what he often refers to as "analytic experience."

Ricœur's decision to restrict his inquiry to psychoanalytic practice has far reaching consequences for his conception of the epistemological status of psychoanalysis. Much of the criticism that has been heaped upon psychoanalysis concerns how facts are established, what objective measures are used to establish those facts, and so on. By focusing on the interpretive work undertaken by analysts, Ricœur decisively situates psychoanalysis among the more exegetical human sciences. Ricœur states his position quite explicitly: "No, psychoanalysis is not a science of observation; it is an interpretation, more comparable to history than to psychology."⁵

Ricœur enumerates the difficulties psychoanalysis faces apropos the validity of its theoretical edifice:

its data are enmeshed in the individual relationship of the analyst to the analysand; one cannot dispel the suspicion that interpretations are forced upon the data by the interpreter, for want of a comparative procedure and statistical investigation. Finally, the allegations of psychoanalysts concerning the effectiveness of therapy do not satisfy the minimum rule of verification.⁶

Ricœur is prepared to concede these defeats but only if psychoanalysis continues to be conceived as an observational or natural science. “As long as one tries to place psychoanalysis among the observational sciences, the preceding attack against psychoanalysis seems unanswerable.”⁷ Ricœur thus seeks to demonstrate that psychoanalysis cannot be counted among the observational sciences and that it is recalcitrant to attempts to assimilate it into more “scientific” forms of psychology.

Regarding metapsychological concepts such as the id, ego, superego, death drive, and so on, Ricœur writes that

none of [these concepts] are “observed,” even indirectly, as responses to stimuli; prior to the possibility of being “reformulated,” they were all “interpreted” in the analytic situation – that is, in a situation of language.⁸

According to Ricœur, it is only through the patient’s speech that the analyst comes to know the former’s unconscious. The interpretation of the speech of analysands is much too varied and flexible to integrate within the rigid frameworks of natural scientific models.

Of course, we might question the strength of Ricœur’s claim here. After all, the concepts that Ricœur enumerates as examples of psychoanalytic phenomena which are unobservable are precisely the metapsychological concepts that Ricœur wants to set aside for the moment. Indeed, these concepts are the theoretical postulates derived from psychoanalytic treatments and thereby issue from phenomena which are, in fact, observable. For example, conversion disorders in which certain psychical conflicts are manifested as somatic symptoms are certainly observable. And do not the patient’s verbal reports constitute a kind of indirect observation? Nevertheless, we can go along with Ricœur insofar as we never really leave the plane of language. The method of treatment the psychoanalyst would prescribe to cure such disorders would remain the tried and true method of the so called talking cure.

If, for Ricœur, the methods of psychoanalysis diverge from those of psychology, if they are closer to history than to psychology, how, then, does he conceive of psychoanalytic data, the facts about the human psyche revealed by psychoanalytic theory and practice? Ricœur’s views on this matter change throughout the course of his intellectual itinerary. In *Freud and Philosophy*, he writes, again contrasting psychoanalysis with psychology:

The difference comes at the beginning or never: psychology is an observational science dealing with the facts of behavior; psychoanalysis is an exegetical science dealing with the relationships of meaning between substitute objects and the primordial (and lost) instinctual objects. The two disciplines diverge from the very beginning, at the level of the initial notion of fact and of inference from facts.⁹

He reiterates this point a bit later when he remarks that “strictly speaking, there are no ‘facts’ in psychoanalysis, for the analyst does not observe, he interprets.”¹⁰ However, in an article published just twelve years after the appearance of *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricœur devotes a substantial amount of space to delineating the criteria for establishing psychoanalytic facts. Indeed, the question which guides Ricœur in “The Question of Proof in Freud’s Psychoanalytic Writings” is “what in psychoanalysis merits being considered as a verifiable fact?”¹¹

Ricœur posits four criteria for the establishment of psychoanalytic facts. The first criterion develops Ricœur's notion of the "semantics of desire" – a concept of which, as we will see in the next section, Grünbaum is quite critical. Ricœur points out that the concern of psychoanalysis "is only that part of experience which is capable of being said."¹² As we have noted, the discourse between analyst and analysand is crucial to psychoanalytic treatment. Ricœur continues:

This screening through discourse in the analytic situation also functions as a criterion for what will be held to be the object of this science; not instinct as a physiological phenomenon, not even desire as energy, but desire as a meaning capable of being deciphered, translated, and interpreted. Hence the theory necessarily has to account for what from here on we can call the semantic dimension of desire.¹³

Ricœur here explicitly introduces the notion of meaning within psychoanalysis. The repressed desires, wishes, memories, fantasies and so on that it is the analyst's task to uncover must be discerned and interpreted through the patient's speech. The analyst must pay close attention to both what the patient says and what he/she does not say. For desires reveal themselves through gaps or cuts in speech, which often indicate the patient's resistance to treatment, just as much as through what he/she actually articulates. Ricœur points out that the facts discerned in analysis are not observable in, for instance, the way that a chemical reaction is. As he notes, "facts in psychoanalysis are in no way facts of observable behavior. They are 'reports'."¹⁴ And with this, Ricœur hints at the importance of narrative in psychoanalytic practice, the role of which will become more explicit in his fourth criterion.

The second criterion Ricœur identifies continues his emphasis on language, but in this case, Ricœur remarks upon the intersubjective dimension of analysis. This consists most notably of the phenomenon of transference – the projection of the analysand's fantasies onto the person of his/her analyst, the playing out of past relationships and traumas within the analyst's consulting room. Ricœur remarks that

[t]hrough transference, psychoanalysis controls and examines these alternative possibilities by transposing the drama that generated the neurotic situation onto a sort of miniature artificial stage. Thus it is the analytic experience itself that forces the theory to include intersubjectivity within the very constitution of libido and to conceive of it less as a need than as an other-directed wish.¹⁵

Ricœur's third criterion is the most important for establishing the unique character of psychoanalysis, namely, its preoccupation with what Ricœur calls, following Freud, "psychical reality." This is contrasted with so-called "material reality," the domain of the natural and physical sciences. One distinctive feature of psychical reality is that the events which constitute it need not actually have occurred. The psychoanalytic preoccupation with fantasy ought to be a first clue here. Ricœur cites Freud's infamous seduction theory – according to which many symptoms that manifest in later life are the result of actual sexual assaults upon children by adults but which Freud eventually abandoned as a viable theory – as a prime example of the peculiarity of psychical reality. As he points out, "What is so disturbing is precisely that it was not clinically relevant whether the infantile scenes are true or false. This is what is expressed by the phrase 'psychical reality'."¹⁶

What matters to the analyst is not whether the events his/her patients describe really happened but whether the patient experienced the events *as if* they really happened.

With the fourth criterion, Ricœur explicitly introduces the role of narrative in psychoanalytic practice. It is precisely through narrative configurations and reconfigurations of the free associations of the analysand and the reintegration of material that the analyst helps him/her work through that psychoanalytic treatment is carried out. And it is through narratives that the results of analysis are presented to other clinicians in the form of case histories. Ricœur expertly remarks on the importance of narrative in psychoanalysis:

It is in the process of working through just mentioned that Freud discovers that the subject's history does not conform to a linear determinism that would place the present in the firm grasp of the past in a univocal fashion. On the contrary, recovering traumatic events through the work of analysis reveals that, at the time they were experienced, they could not be fully integrated in a meaningful context. It is only the arrival of new events and new situations that precipitates the subsequent reworking of these earlier events.¹⁷

In the above quoted passage, Ricœur points out what I think is a distinct advantage of the hermeneutic conception of psychoanalysis. The analyst helps the analysand to integrate the traumatic events that he/she may have experienced into a meaningful narrative. The analyst must help the patient to interpret these traumatic events, to help the patient understand what happened to them. In this way, the patient's psyche is analogous to a dense text that must be deciphered. Once the analyst and patient have worked through the "text" of the patient's free associations, the cause of the symptoms will hopefully have been raised to the level of consciousness so that the patient can understand why he/she is experiencing those symptoms in the first place.

Ricœur is careful not to make too much of the metaphor of the text, however. He writes:

But if we were only to follow the suggestion of the concepts of the text and interpretation, we would arrive at an entirely erroneous notion of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis could be purely and simply subsumed under the aegis of the historical-hermeneutical sciences, alongside philology and exegesis. We would then overlook the very features of interpretation that are grasped only when the investigatory procedure is joined to a method of treatment.¹⁸

Here, Ricœur's reticence to endorse a full-blown reformulation of psychoanalysis in terms of an exegetical discipline reflects another important shift in his thinking about psychoanalysis. In *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricœur writes that

[t]he validity of the interpretations made in psychoanalysis is subject to the same kind of questions as the validity of a historical or exegetical interpretation. The same questions must be put to Freud that are put to Dilthey, Weber, and Bultmann, not those posed to a physicist or a biologist.¹⁹

In *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricœur seems wholly committed to construing psychoanalysis as nothing but an exegetical human science. Indeed, he pushes this view to the point of endorsing the

distinction drawn by Dilthey between natural scientific explanation and humanistic understanding. Accepting this distinction clearly influences the way in which Ricœur conceives of psychoanalytic explanation. For Ricœur, psychoanalysis offers explanations by appealing to motives or reasons, and motives, he thinks, are not causes. He claims that “an explanation through motives is irreducible to an explanation through cause, that a motive and a cause are completely different.”²⁰ Ricœur’s unwillingness to conceive of motives as causes is seized upon by Grünbaum who thinks that Freud always strives to provide etiologies via causal explanations which take the form of motives, reasons, desires, and so on.

However, Ricœur seems to have taken notice of the philosophical criticisms of the once commonly held view that motives and reasons cannot be causes by the time he publishes “The Question of Proof.” In what amounts to an about-face, Ricœur notes that psychoanalysis must “incorporate into the exegetical procedures applicable to the process of self-understanding explanatory segments akin to those at work in the natural sciences.”²¹ Indeed, he explicitly repudiates the sharp distinction between motive and cause that he draws in *Freud and Philosophy*. “What characterizes psychoanalytic explanation is that it brings into view motives that are causes and that require an explanation of their autonomous functioning.”²² He continues, stating that “the hermeneutics of self-understanding [must] take the detour of causal explanation.”²³

The shift in Ricœur’s thinking apropos psychoanalytic explanation seems to have much to do with a corresponding shift in his thinking about the function of narrative explanation. He emphasizes that it is precisely through narrative that psychoanalysis explains. “[T]o explain [in psychoanalysis] is to reorganize the facts into a meaningful whole which constitutes a single and continuous history (even if it does not cover an entire life span).”²⁴ To the question “What makes a narration an explanation?” Ricœur responds, “It is the possibility of inserting several stages of causal explanation into the process of self-understanding formulated in narrative terms.”²⁵

For Ricœur, it is through the construction of a narrative that patients are able to understand themselves in a more meaningful way. It is through narrative that psychoanalysis is able to cure. And it is through narrative that psychoanalysis is able to explain. By bridging the gap between explanation and understanding, Ricœur makes a good case for conceiving of psychoanalysis as a multifaceted, hybrid discipline which operates on a multitude of different levels. However, it is precisely Ricœur’s conception of psychoanalytic explanation that we’ll see Grünbaum take up in an effort to discredit the hermeneutic conception of psychoanalysis. For Grünbaum, psychoanalysis models itself upon natural science, and therefore it should be judged as such. According to Grünbaum, Ricœur’s approach to psychoanalysis amounts to a pathetic attempt to shield it from various lines of criticism. It is to a consideration of Grünbaum’s critique of Ricœur, and the rejoinders that can be supplied from Ricœur’s perspective, to which we now turn.

Grünbaum’s Critique of Ricœur

It is uncontroversial to say that Adolf Grünbaum is totally opposed to the hermeneutic rendering of Freudian psychoanalysis. His polemic against the hermeneutic view began with his 1984 publication, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, was augmented with his 1993 publication, *Validation in the Clinical Theory of Psychoanalysis*, and has extended all the way to the fairly recent

past with an essay published in the 2004 edited volume, *Psychoanalysis at the Limit*. If Grünbaum is a vocal critic of psychoanalysis, he is even more critical of the hermeneutic conception of psychoanalysis advanced by the likes of Habermas and Ricœur. Many would argue that Grünbaum's critique signals the demise of the hermeneutic conception of psychoanalysis. As Sebastian Gardner tells us,

the limitations of [...] the hermeneutic defense of psychoanalysis as exemplifying a special, nonscientific form of human understanding have been established pretty definitely.²⁶

And Jonathan Lear explains that

[t]here remain within the psychoanalytic community analysts who believe that reasons cannot be causes. This is due to a (mistaken) philosophical tradition which held that the domain of reasons must be distinct from the domain of causes – a tradition which worked its way into psychoanalytic thinking via, e.g., Ricœur's *Freud and Philosophy* [...]²⁷

The complaints that are typically lodged against the hermeneutic interpretation of psychoanalysis surround precisely this distinction between reasons/motives and causes. However, as we saw above, very shortly after the publication of *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricœur repudiates the sharp distinction which nevertheless leaves the bulk of his hermeneutic conception of psychoanalysis intact. There is thus reason to believe that Grünbaum's attack upon Ricœur and the hermeneutic conception of psychoanalysis more generally has unjustly provoked hostile readings of Ricœur's approach to psychoanalysis beyond Grünbaum's own unduly aggressive interventions. Let us look more closely at Grünbaum's arguments to determine the extent of his misreading.

Grünbaum wastes no time announcing his disdain for the hermeneutic conception of psychoanalysis. On the very first page of *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, he writes that before delving into the domain of psychoanalysis itself, he must "expose a widespread exegetical myth."²⁸ This myth is, of course, none other than the hermeneutic conception of psychoanalysis. He continues, claiming that the hermeneutic rendering of psychoanalysis is composed of "multiple ontological and epistemic blunders."²⁹

One of the biggest gripes Grünbaum has with the hermeneutic conception is the latter's claim that Freud misunderstood what he was doing. Grünbaum points out that the hermeneutic interpreters of Freud "elaborated the patronizing claim that Freud basically misunderstood his own theory and therapy."³⁰ Grünbaum is referring most explicitly to a claim that Habermas makes in his 1971 book *Knowledge and Human Interests* in which he accuses Freud of being "trapped in a far-reaching 'scientific self-misunderstanding'."³¹ This is a claim that Ricœur indeed endorses. He writes that

in the extended discussion he devotes to psychoanalysis in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Jürgen Habermas is correct in speaking of the "self-misunderstanding of psychoanalysis as a natural science."³²

The quarrel here revolves around whether Freud's scientific ambitions failed to correspond to the actual theoretical and clinical edifice he developed. Adrian Johnston provides an apt

characterization of the dispute between Grünbaum and the likes of Habermas and Ricœur on this point. He writes that

many authors enamored of the mathematized natural sciences point to Freud's "shortcomings" as a scientist (and, in so doing, they fail to distinguish between, on the one hand, Freud's ardent desire for scientific prestige, and, on the other, the actual substance of analytic theory and practice) [...]³³

Grünbaum fits squarely within the ranks of those "enamored" of the sciences and highly critical of Freud on those grounds. However, the content of psychoanalytic theory and the enactment of its clinical procedures fail from the start to measure up to the standards of natural scientific rigor. Nevertheless, as Ricœur was at pains to show, this does not make it any less a powerful tool for investigating into what kinds of strange creatures we are.

Grünbaum extends his criticisms of Ricœur apropos the latter's concerns about the scientificity of psychoanalysis into a discussion of Ricœur's refusal to accept the fact that motives and reasons can be causes. Indeed, he argues that "the key to [the hermeneutic] failure is the misconstrual of so-called meaning connections between mental states in their bearing on causal connections between such states."³⁴ Ricœur's emphasis on meanings over causes is tightly connected to the way in which he circumscribes much of his reading of psychoanalysis to the discursive encounter between analyst and analysand, an encounter that he claims generates the theoretical structure of the metapsychology. Passing through this aspect of Ricœur's thought will help make clearer the reasons Ricœur emphasizes the tracing of meaning connections.

Grünbaum does not think highly of Ricœur's decision to focus on analytic experience. He writes that "Ricœur's circumscription of the domain of 'facts' – or objects of knowledge – that the psychoanalytic corpus is declared to codify is a mutilation of its range of relevance."³⁵ Grünbaum takes Ricœur to task on several fronts regarding his emphasis on speech and language. Grünbaum cites cases, for example, that of Judge Daniel Paul Schreber, in which individuals never underwent analysis but were nevertheless subject to Freud's theoretical proclamations and diagnoses as evidence that psychoanalytic claims can be extended outside of the analyst's consulting room. He notes that Freud's "etiologic hypotheses purportedly explained generically why people at large acquire neuroses, *regardless of whether they are ever treated psychoanalytically or not.*"³⁶

Grünbaum also intensely dislikes Ricœur's hermeneutic maneuvering regarding Freud's dream theory. When he is initially situating psychoanalysis within the contemporary discussion regarding language at the outset of *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricœur affirms that

[b]y making dreams not only the first object of his investigation but a model of all the disguised, substitutive, and fictive expressions of human wishing or desire, Freud invites us to look to dreams themselves for the various relations between desire and language.³⁷

He continues, remarking that

it is not the dream as dreamed that can be interpreted, but rather the text of the dream account; analysis attempts to substitute for this text another text that could be called the

primitive speech of desire. Thus analysis moves from one meaning to another meaning; it is not desires as such that are placed at the center of the analysis, but rather their language.³⁸

This is precisely what Ricœur christens the “semantics of desire.”

Grünbaum, however, does not buy Ricœur’s analysis. He asks,

What, besides an imported ideological objective, prompted Ricœur to shrink the subject matter of Freud’s wish-fulfillment theory, which offers repressed infantile motives for dreams as dreamed during sleep, into mere verbal dream-reports during waking life?³⁹

Grünbaum offers this analogy in support of his position that Ricœur’s restriction of psychoanalysis to speech is totally ridiculous:

It is salutary in this context to appreciate that what astronomers endeavor to explain, in the first instance, is not the visual impressions they have of celestial occurrences, but the celestial events *retrodicted* from these impressions, or the events whose earlier occurrence their impressions are taken to betoken. And just as dream reporting may well be inaccurate, so also the accuracy of astronomical observations has been lessened by the earth’s atmosphere, for example. Small wonder, therefore, that what Freudian theory tries to explain, in the first instance, is not the verbal *dream-reports* made by dreamers to analysts or others, but rather the manifest dream-contents inferred from the dreamers’ subsequent mnemonic impressions.⁴⁰

However, does not Grünbaum’s analogy correspond, at least roughly, to Ricœur’s position that the analysand’s reports are to be deciphered, interpreted in the manner of a text? There is something “underneath” the analysand’s speech that the analyst must excavate, namely, repressed desires, wishes, and fantasies which bubble to the surface through speech. Of course the analyst does not want to explain the report itself. Rather, the analyst strives to interpret what the specific dream content might *mean* in relation to other aspects of the patient’s psyche, dimensions of his/her mental life that have been revealed to the analyst by means of speech throughout the course of his/her analysis. Furthermore, what other point of access does the analyst have to the patient’s unconscious than the patient’s speech? The verbalizations of analysands are the analyst’s version of a telescope.

More importantly, Grünbaum’s analogy ignores the fact that the psychoanalyst and the astronomer are after two very different things. The latter is after an objective piece of nature, something which can be quantitatively measured and reproduced. In other words, the astronomer deals with what we saw Ricœur refer to earlier as material reality. The psychoanalyst, by contrast, deals with psychical reality. This is a crucial and peculiar feature of psychoanalysis, and Ricœur draws the full extent of its implications. Recall that in Ricœur’s elaboration of the criteria for psychoanalytic facts, the dimension of psychical reality constitutes precisely the domain of psychoanalysis’s explanatory purview. As he points out,

what is relevant for the analyst are not observable facts or observable reactions to environmental variables, but the meaning that the same events which the behavioral

psychologist considers as an observer assume for a subject. I will venture to say, in summation, that what is psychoanalytically relevant is what a subject makes of his fantasies.⁴¹

Adrian Johnston provides another line of support for this view. He writes:

One could say that analysis concerns itself more with a coherence theory of truth, with the consistencies and inconsistencies of the networks of associative connections internal to the webs of analysands' monologues. Whether the nodes in these verbal networks are realistic renditions or fictitious fantasies is both unknowable within the framework of an analysis and ultimately unimportant to its long-term progress. For example, an analysand who consistently lies to his/her analyst, fabricating all of his/her reported dreams, fantasies, and so on, still discloses to the analyst the truths of his/her unconscious, telling 'true lies' despite him-/herself insofar as the very selection of the fabricated verbal material cannot help but be itself revealing.⁴²

Ricœur and Johnston both make the crucial point that it is precisely on the plane of language that analysis must take place. It is through the patient's speech that his/her repressed desires and fantasies are revealed, and it is therefore through the patient's speech that the causes of his/her symptoms can be determined. It does not matter whether what the patient articulates *actually* happened. Rather, it only matters what the patient does (or does not) articulate. This is precisely why Ricœur emphasizes the tracing of meaning connections in psychoanalysis. What truly matters is the *meaning* the analysand is able to derive for him-/herself, the connections he/she is able to make between traumatic events and the rest of his/her mental life.

Grünbaum, of course, denies that psychical reality is sufficiently different from material reality as to warrant different epistemic standards. But to do so, I think, is either to radically reduce the explanatory scope of psychoanalysis or to completely ignore large swaths of Freud's texts, something which it is Grünbaum's stated aim not to do. One of the peculiarities of psychoanalysis which is the reason for both its fame and its shame is that it investigates a domain which cannot be quantified. It remains an open question, a question to which psychoanalysis continues to look for an answer, what the "stuff" of the mental is.

What are we to make of Grünbaum's claim that Ricœur's interpretation of psychoanalysis mistakenly ignores the application of psychoanalytic theory to individuals and events which are extraneous to the analytic relationship? It seems to me that Grünbaum's charge is based on a misunderstanding of Ricœur's methodological procedure. Ricœur insists that he is engaged in a kind of triangular reading of psychoanalysis. Ricœur argues that there is a "triangular relation" in psychoanalysis between the procedure for investigating certain mental processes, the method of treatment, and the accumulation and codification of psychological information, i.e., psychoanalytic theory or metapsychology.⁴³ According to Ricœur, the investigational and clinical aspects of psychoanalysis are tied together and codified by analytic metapsychology. In this triangular relation, the subtleties of Ricœur's reading of psychoanalysis and the balance that he strikes between meanings and causes become clear. He points out that "the investigatory procedure has, in effect, a strong affinity with the disciplines of textual interpretation."⁴⁴ For Ricœur, the way in which the psychoanalyst investigates into the nature of

neurotic and hysterical symptoms is precisely by way of interpretation, by tracing networks of meaning between the various aspects of the patient's mental life that have been revealed to the analyst through the patient's speech and actions.

This, however, does not constitute the whole of psychoanalysis. Recall, as indicated in "The Question of Proof," that Ricœur does not want to assimilate psychoanalysis entirely within the realm of the hermeneutical disciplines, even if much of its work takes place at this level. This is because psychoanalysis must offer a cure. To do this, the analyst must struggle with his/her patient's resistances, those psychical maneuverings which attempt to render the underlying causes of symptoms recalcitrant to analytic interpretation. As Ricœur writes,

It is the notion of resistance that prevents us from identifying the investigatory procedure with a simple interpretation, with a purely intellectual understanding of the meaning of symptoms.⁴⁵

In other words, it is not enough in psychoanalysis to merely interpret. Rather, the process of psychoanalysis involves working through resistances in order to provide a cure. Psychoanalysis must effect some kind of change within the patient's psyche. The task of psychoanalytic treatment is to allow the analysand to understand what he/she experiences as a "foreign body"⁴⁶ (the pathogenic trauma that generates neurotic and hysterical symptoms) as part of his/her own psyche.

The relation between these two aspects of psychoanalytic practice is what the metapsychology establishes. Thus, for Ricœur, psychoanalysis proceeds upwards from the empirical encounters with patients to the abstract theory:

[B]y coordinating interpretation and the handling of resistances, analytic praxis calls for a theory in which the psyche will be represented both as a text to be interpreted *and* as a system of forces to be manipulated. In other words, it is the complex character of actual practice that requires the theory to overcome the apparent contradiction between the metaphor of the text to be interpreted and that of the forces to be regulated; in short, practice forces us to think meaning and force together in a comprehensive theory. It is through the practical coordination of interpretation and the handling of resistances that theory is given the task of forming a model capable of articulating the facts acknowledged as relevant in the analytic experience.⁴⁷

Ricœur's focus on analytic experience is, I think, an attempt to do justice to the way in which Freud came to develop his overarching theory. Freud's intimate encounters with individual patients are what provided the material out of which the generalized metapsychology could be constructed. Ricœur emphasizes the clinical aspect in order to show the way in which it feeds into the theoretical aspect.⁴⁸ Once we reach the theoretical level, psychoanalytic insights are able to be deployed in numerous other domains. It is clear that Ricœur does not restrict the entirety of his interpretation of psychoanalysis to the analytic encounter from the amount of space he devotes to the application of psychoanalytic insights to a more general "hermeneutics of culture" in *Freud and Philosophy*. In addition, his essays on the relation between psychoanalysis and the

domains of art and religion indicate that Ricœur thinks that psychoanalysis is a useful interpretive tool beyond the clinical setting.

Ricœur's triangular reading of psychoanalysis by which he establishes the relation between psychoanalysis's procedure of investigation, method of treatment, and codifying theory also gives us insight into the way in which Ricœur conceives of psychoanalytic explanation. Ricœur points out that psychoanalysis

calls for an *explanation* by means of causes in order to reach an *understanding* in terms of motives. This is what I try to express by saying that the facts in psychoanalysis arise both from the category of the text, and hence of meaning, and from the categories of energy and resistance, and hence force.⁴⁹

Both hermeneutic and causal considerations, conceived in terms of the investigatory procedure and method of treatment, are integral to the psychoanalytic cure. And, as we noted above, they find their articulation by means of narrative. Once the patient's resistances have been worked through, he/she should then be capable of constructing a narrative according to which the causes of his/her symptoms can be *understood* and reintegrated in a *meaningful* way into his/her life.

The force of Grünbaum's charge that Ricœur continues to maintain the tenuous distinction between motives and causes is thus blunted. Grünbaum is aware of Ricœur's shift in thinking apropos the importance of establishing causal relations in psychoanalytic explanation. However, Grünbaum argues, citing Ricœur's refusal to subject psychoanalysis to standards of natural scientific verification, that "the conscientious reader will be forgiven [...] for wondering whether Ricœur himself has decided just what he wants to maintain."⁵⁰ I think, however, that much of Grünbaum's confusion here can likewise be attributed to his misunderstanding of Ricœur's triangular approach to psychoanalysis.

Conclusion: Ricœur and the Scientific Standing of Psychoanalysis

I have tried to present the case that Ricœur's interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis survives much of Grünbaum's polemical attack. Grünbaum's aggressive critiques of Ricœur's hermeneutic conception unfortunately did much to discredit the hermeneutic reading of psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, as I've argued, Ricœur's approach to psychoanalysis offers many rich insights regarding the theory and practice of psychoanalysis that ought to be mined.

Beyond simply trying to defend Ricœur's interpretation of psychoanalysis, there is an important point to be made here which is instructive vis-à-vis contemporary views about psychoanalysis and its philosophical and clinical import. In an age in which neuroscientific findings (seriously though they should be taken) are being hailed as a potential savior of psychoanalytic theory and practice – with its reputation damaged from a continuous barrage of critiques along the lines of those presented by Grünbaum – it is worth looking again at what insight was rendered when Freud listened to what his patients had to say, when he helped his patients listen to what they had to say to themselves. As Elizabeth Rottenberg writes, the contemporary fervor surrounding the interfacing of psychoanalysis and neuroscience is one according to which

neuroscience suddenly appears as a knight in shining armor capable of restoring a delicate and vulnerable psychoanalysis to its former glory by reaching out his helping hand [...]⁵¹

In other words, the idea seems to be that if psychoanalysis fails as a science, then psychoanalysis fails. Neuroscience is now purportedly corroborating certain of Freud's theoretical and clinical postulates. Psychoanalysis can now, at long last, receive the empirical support for which it has so desperately been seeking. Perhaps once again, so the story goes, psychoanalysis will be taken seriously as it has achieved a certain scientific legitimacy.

The advances made in neuroscience are fascinating and important for thinking about the nature of the human mind. And the discoveries of neuroscientific research may well bear out some of Freud's hypotheses, as he himself had hoped. It seems to me, however, that to buy wholesale into the idea that neuroscience is the "saving grace" of psychoanalysis, the latter being unable to sustain itself in its own right, is to play Grünbaum's game, the rules of which stipulate that natural scientific claims are the only legitimate ones to be made. Ricœur's emphasis on speech, on what is said in the analytic relationship, and the work that gets done in this peculiar form of discourse highlights the extent to which we can learn about ourselves by engaging in sustained interpretation of ourselves. The process of interpretation, of attempting to discern a meaning, whether the interpretation of an historical text, a novel, a film, a facial expression, or the free associations of a patient on an analyst's couch is a messy, sloppy, oftentimes inconsistent endeavor, qualities which are simply not tolerated in scientific observation. That is okay. Nevertheless, circumscribing psychoanalysis to the domain of the natural sciences and then dismantling it on that basis, as Ricœur tries to show, misrecognizes the locus of psychoanalysis's distinctive contribution. Psychoanalysis offers a method for interpreting the strangeness of mental phenomena. But it is an interpretive method that "is so new that we do not have any fixed model to which it should conform."⁵² Freud thus puts us on a path toward discovering what such a model would look like. Ricœur helps us to see the implications of this method more clearly.

- ¹ Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 4.
- ² Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. 24 Vols. Edited and translated by James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-74. SE 2: 30.
- ³ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), 206.
- ⁴ Adrian Johnston, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 11.
- ⁵ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 345.
- ⁶ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 346.
- ⁷ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 347.
- ⁸ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 355.
- ⁹ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 359.
- ¹⁰ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 365.
- ¹¹ Paul Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jean-Louis Schlegel, trans. David Pellauer, (Malden: Polity Press, 2012), 13.
- ¹² Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 13.
- ¹³ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 13.
- ¹⁴ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 13.
- ¹⁵ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 16.
- ¹⁶ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 17.
- ¹⁷ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 21.
- ¹⁸ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 25.
- ¹⁹ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 374.
- ²⁰ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 360.
- ²¹ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 32.
- ²² Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 34.
- ²³ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 35.
- ²⁴ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 40.
- ²⁵ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 43.

- ²⁶ Sebastian Gardner, "Psychoanalysis, Science, and Commonsense," in *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* Vol.2, No.2 (June 1995), 93.
- ²⁷ Jonathan Lear, *Love and its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux: 1990), p. 49 n.36; It should be noted, however, that Lear goes on to affirm that "the more general possibility of a causal hermeneutic account of human motivation" is not undermined, and he is much more of an ally in the present criticism of Grünbaum than an enemy. Nevertheless, he explicitly attributes a "non-causal hermeneutic" account to Ricœur, an attribution that we are calling into question here.
- ²⁸ Adolf Grünbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis: A Philosophical Critique*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 140.
- ²⁹ Grünbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, 140.
- ³⁰ Adolf Grünbaum, "The Hermeneutic Versus the Scientific Conception of Psychoanalysis," in *Psychoanalysis at the Limit: Epistemology, Mind, and the Question of Science*, ed. Jon Mills, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 140.
- ³¹ Grünbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, 8.
- ³² Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 29.
- ³³ Johnston, *Time Driven*, 61.
- ³⁴ Grünbaum, "The Hermeneutic Versus the Scientific Conception of Psychoanalysis," 139.
- ³⁵ Grünbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, 43.
- ³⁶ Grünbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, 44.
- ³⁷ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 5.
- ³⁸ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 5.
- ³⁹ Grünbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, 45.
- ⁴⁰ Grünbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, 46.
- ⁴¹ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 20.
- ⁴² Adrian Johnston and Catherine Malabou, *Self and Emotional Life: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Neuroscience*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 207.
- ⁴³ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 22.
- ⁴⁴ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 23.
- ⁴⁵ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 27.
- ⁴⁶ Freud, *SE* 2: 6.

⁴⁷ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 28.

⁴⁸ Ricœur has his doubts about the adequacy of the metapsychology in relation to analytic experience. But giving an account of the reasons for his doubts is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴⁹ Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, 35.

⁵⁰ Grünbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, 48.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Rottenberg, "Foreign Bodies: Psychoanalysis and Neuroscience," in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2014), 347.

⁵² Lear, *Love and its Place in Nature*, 6.