

## CHAPTER ONE



### *The Context: Conceptual Clarification and Previous Research*

“When I use a word” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything.

—Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

A major role of any theory is to describe and/or explain a certain range of phenomena. Although theories also have other uses—for example, clinical applications and other practical usages—these logically rely on the way the theory understands and explains the phenomena in question. The psychoanalytic theory, for example, has been generally thought of as a theory that attempts to understand the psychic processes in the individual’s mind, their interrelationships, their genetic sources, how they affect and experience behavior, and so on.

Because theories attempt to describe and explain, it follows that not any theory is just as good as any other. Although we humans may never be able to know the ultimate truth, we can nevertheless examine different theories and see

which one accounts better for the data, explains better, yields better practical applications, or, in short, which theory is acceptable from the perspective of our current knowledge; or, to use the philosophical jargon, which theory is *justified*. The fact that a given theory is justified does not necessarily imply that it is true in some ultimate sense, for it may turn out upon future discoveries that it is not so. It means, however, that it is the best approximation (or is one among several equally best approximations) that is available to us at present, so that as far as we can see now there are good reasons for maintaining the theory rather than rejecting it or replacing it by another. In order for us to know that a given theory is not an arbitrary invention but a serious contender, it needs to be justified; it has to be shown to be acceptable on the basis of available data and considerations. The issue of how theories are to be justified—that is, how we know which theory is more acceptable—falls within the domain of epistemology (the study of knowledge).

These remarks on theory and justification apply, Of course, to the psychoanalytic theory in general, and in particular to its dream theory, which is the subject matter of this study. If the psychoanalytic theory of dreams is to be more than an arbitrary invention that is just as good as any other, it has to be shown to be acceptable or, in other words, justified. The basic epistemological issue that underlies the psychoanalytic dream theory is, therefore: How can we justify the theory that dreams can be analyzed for their meanings in the way described by the psychoanalytic theory? And, more generally: How can we justify the claim made in psychoanalytic theory that dreams have meanings at all (rather than being mere meaningless scribbles), and that these meanings may be discovered through analysis?

These questions will be the subject matter of the present study.

## PART I: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

To explore the epistemological foundation of the psychoanalytic theory of dreams requires that we first clarify some concepts that are basic to this issue. Especially important for the present discussion are the concepts of *justification* and that of *meaning*, as well as the concept of *truth*. In addition, various alternative approaches that are based on different understandings of these concepts—such as positivism, hermeneuticism, Foundationalism, Coherence theory, and the like—are also pertinent to the issue. This first chapter will focus on these topics with a twofold aim: first, to sharpen and enrich relevant concepts and ideas that are often left vague and tend to obscure important issues and distinctions; and, second, to form common ground with the reader who may be familiar with another range of concepts or with different senses of the terminology I will be using.

First, concerning the concept of *justification*, we must understand precisely what constitutes an adequate form of justification—specifically of the psychoanalytic theory—and what forms of justification have in fact been applied in the course of the development of psychoanalysis. These have been disputed topics within psychoanalysis and have suffered much from conceptual confusion. I will not attempt to conclusively resolve these very broad issues. I will rather present my formulation of them and the definitions I will be using in the course of the study, and will attempt to clarify common and potential confusions relevant to this work.

Just like the concept of justification, the concept of meaning—another highly problematic concept, both within and outside of psychoanalysis—must also be demarcated. The way in which I will be using the term and my formulations of the ways in which it has been used in the course of the development of psychoanalysis must be distinguished from numerous other formulations and usages. Here too my aim will be to provide the framework necessary for the current study. We must know what we mean by “meaning” and what Freud meant by “meaning” if we are to inquire into the possibility of obtaining these in the course of Freudian dream analysis.

There are a variety of forms of justification and many meanings to meaning. Within psychoanalysis, however, in the past twenty years the range of diversity has been truncated by a tendency to view the alternatives in terms of a spurious debate between what are portrayed as two warring camps on the field of the conceptualization of psychoanalysis—between what has been referred to as the “positivists” and the “hermeneuticists.” This false debate is the product of members of the latter camp.

The psychoanalytic hermeneuticists primarily present themselves as an approach sensitive to experience and concerned with the explanation of behavior, experience, thought, and so on, in terms of meanings rather than in terms of causes, the latter relegated to the “positivistic” approach. According to the hermeneuticists, one cannot apply methods of investigation and justification that are acceptable in scientific disciplines to their experience-near meaningful explanations of the individual. The “positivistic” approach with which they contrast themselves includes all the simplistic formulations of the scientific approach to the conceptualization of psychoanalysis and consequently to its justification, and is considered to be neglectful of delicate issues of experience and meaning. This debate is spurious because matters are far from being so simple. Science has much more to offer in terms of justification and meaning (and in other respects) than is presented (or misrepresented) by the hermeneuticists. Conversely, the foundations and implications of the hermeneuticist position are problematic. The real dispute is between the broad range of conceptions that science has to offer and psychoanalytic hermeneuticism.

As I will argue, this spurious debate between “positivism” and hermeneuticism creates a false dilemma concerning the issue of justification. Justification is reduced to one of two very much simplified alternatives. The so-called “positivists” are attributed the simplistic application of natural science methods, with these methods being limited to those of an atomistic kind of Foundationalism. In contrast, the hermeneuticists tend to maintain that what testifies to the validity of the psychoanalytic endeavor are various aspects of the coherence of the patient’s narrative that emerges in the clinical setting.

I will also argue that in this spurious debate the concept of meaning is similarly reduced to a very limited brand—a noncausal one. Other possible understandings of the concept are excluded and the choice facing the analyst is supposedly between the neglect of the issue of meaning or concern with this specific noncausal type.

This debate, explicitly and, more important perhaps, implicitly, pervades the psychoanalytic literature, loading many concepts with a variety of confusing connotations. Thus, in order to appreciate the definitions and formulations of “justification” and “meaning” that I will be putting forth, it will be necessary to begin with a clarification of some of this confusion. Once the false dilemma between “positivism” and hermeneuticism is clarified, the falseness of the dilemmas between meaning and cause and between atomism and coherence will also become apparent, and the place of the variety of forms of meaning and justification in psychoanalysis will be appreciated.

Here too my aim is not comprehensive exposition and resolution. Entire books have been written to this aim (e.g., Barrat, 1984; Edelson, 1988; Grünbaum, 1984, 1993; Strenger, 1991). What I hope, rather, is to create an opening in the conceptual field of psychoanalysis that would allow for the introduction of various available forms of justification into the field and for a deeper understanding of the choice between them.

### **“Positivism” Versus Psychoanalytic Hermeneuticism: Clarification of Their Debate and Concepts of Meaning**

Since the beginning of Freud’s earliest psychoanalytic writings until the present day, the question of the possibility and the status of psychoanalysis as a science has been a controversial issue. Throughout his life, Freud fought the evaluation of his theory as a “scientific fairy tale,” as Krafft-Ebing already had put it way back in 1896 (Freud, 1985, p. 184; see Blass & Simon, 1992, 1994). He maintained until the end both that psychoanalysis adopts and should adopt no stance other than that of science, and that despite difficulties it was indeed successfully living up to the standards of science. More specifically, regarding the adoption of the scientific stance, and in some ways parallel to contemporary debates, Freud (1933c, p. 159) insisted that the objection that his scientific stance “over-

looks the claims of the human intellect and the needs of the human mind . . . cannot be too energetically refuted." "It is," he argued, "quite without a basis, since the intellect and the mind are objects for scientific research in exactly the same way as any non-human things."

Over the years, the adversaries of Freud's scientific stance took a variety of forms. After Freud's early discussion of the scientific status of psychoanalysis, the main claim that psychoanalysis worked vigorously to refute (e.g., Hartmann, 1959; Waelder, 1960; Wallerstein, 1964) was the claim put forth by philosophers such as Hook (1959), Nagel, (1959) and Popper (1963) that Freudian psychoanalysis fails to live up to the legitimate scientific standards it set itself. But in the past thirty to forty years, the very question of whether these standards are legitimate, whether the scientific stance should be adopted, has returned to center stage—this time from within psychoanalysis itself. Gradually emerging within the metapsychology versus clinical theory debate of the 1960s and 1970s (Gill, 1976; Klein, 1976; Wallerstein, 1976), in the last two decades it has evolved into the debate over psychoanalytic hermeneuticism. While in the course of its development psychoanalytic hermeneuticism has to some degree been inspired by the discipline of philosophical hermeneutics that came into its own in the second half of this century, the present study is concerned only, and will refer only, to hermeneuticism as it has uniquely emerged within psychoanalysis.<sup>1</sup>

As noted earlier, the hermeneuticists focus on meaning and coherence. The way in which they focus on these issues and their stance in general has some confusing implications. This confusion is best understood through their opposition to what they consider the scientific approach to psychoanalysis. The hermeneuticists contrast their stance with that of science, but the scope of science with which they are holding a debate is, as we will soon see, very constricted and strangely defined. It is what they often coin "positivism" with which they are arguing. Accordingly, I will maintain the distinction between science on the one hand, and their term "positivism" on the other, the latter referring to the specific conception of science with which the hermeneuticists feel they are carrying on their debate.

Among the psychoanalytic hermeneuticists one may find leading psychoanalytic writers, such as Goldberg (1984), G. Klein (1976), Renik (1993, 1998), Schafer (1976, 1983), Spence (1982) in the United States, and Home (1966), Klauber (1967), Ricouer (1970, 1981), and Rycroft (1966) in Europe.<sup>2</sup> More impressive, however, is the infiltration of these views into everyday psychoanalytic thinking and parlance. Although I doubt that many analysts would espouse the hermeneuticist conception if its full implications were recognized and made explicit, it seems that many voice major tenets of this view when the occasion arises. It is not unusual to hear it suggested in respectable psychoanalytically oriented case presentations or lectures, by senior practitioners and

beginners alike, that there is no fact of the matter regarding the patient's motives and meanings since we are not dealing with empirical reality, the domain of natural science (e.g., Haesler, 1994) or that meanings (in a psychological sense) are not really *discovered* through the psychoanalytic process but in some mysterious way come into being within the psychoanalytic session and therefore are non-causal, unlike in science (e.g., Kulka, 1994). The bottom line is that we have now recognized that psychoanalysis deals with interpretation, not with science. These are all basic tenets of the psychoanalytic hermeneuticism.

It should be noted that when such sentiments are expressed they do not always seem to be part of a comprehensive and well-formulated stance on these matters, but rather appear to be responses to local doubts and difficult questions. Questions such as how it is possible to explain the fact that analysts from different schools arrive at different understandings of the patient or how we can know for sure that the nature of the connection between certain associated ideas is indeed a causal one, may lead to a quick skepticism regarding psychoanalysis as a science and to a recourse to such hermeneuticist solutions, rather than to a more in-depth exploration of the issues. The adoption of the hermeneuticist solution is relatively easy and most practitioners do not feel compelled to devote themselves to the search for a comprehensive resolution of such philosophically oriented meta-questions. This may be because most practitioners do not encounter such questions in their ongoing clinical work. Also, it is my impression that it is believed that the answers to these questions would not have any fundamental impact on clinical work. Dealing with these philosophical issues could at best enrich the understanding of the work we are already doing. In the course of this book I hope to show otherwise; that indeed such issues do have important implications for clinical work, that for this reason the practitioner should indeed be very interested in pursuing these questions and coming to a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

### ***The Term "Positivism"***

The use of the term "positivism" to refer to a natural science conception of psychoanalysis is somewhat confusing. Auguste Comte (1798–1857) had introduced the use of "positivism" to denote the view that there are general rules of methodology that apply to all fields of investigation, to the human and the natural sciences alike. However, the term does ring strange in the context of the twentieth century. Since the time of Comte, the term "positivism" has accrued new meaning, and now is usually taken as shorthand for "logical positivism." Logical positivism is a philosophical theory, introduced by what was known as the Vienna circle in the early 1920s. Influential in the first half of the twentieth century, logical positivism in its original form died in the middle of the century, with its demise becoming renowned for being the one philosophical theory to

have actually been conclusively demonstrated to be false. While propounding views on all major philosophical issues from ethics to metaphysics, one of the most central theses of logical positivism is that the meaning of a proposition is its method of verification; we cannot meaningfully talk of entities other than observables (Schlick, 1959). Unobservable entities such as electrons, the unconscious, causes, and so on, are not independently existing things hidden from our view, but rather ways of describing observable data in condensed form, some even say fictions. For example, to speak about electrons is simply a short way of talking about certain observed patterns of measurements on scientific instruments. Similarly, to say that stress *causes* headache is merely to say that headache often follows stress (after all, we do not observe the causation itself, over and above the sequence of events that we observe to be following each other). In this sense, logical positivists are anti-realist with respect to unobservable, theoretical posits. (By “realism with respect to *X*” I mean, roughly speaking, as the expression is commonly used in philosophy: the belief that *X* is “not merely in our minds” so to speak; that it has a reality that is independent of people’s thoughts about it.)

There are certain aspects of logical positivism that Freud may seem to have espoused. However, many aspects of logical positivism are plainly irrelevant to Freud’s work; regarding many others the relationship is unclear, and their anti-realist perspective clearly runs counter to the blatant realism that (for the most part) pervades Freud’s writings. Freud was convinced that his work led him to discover realities that lay beyond the directly observed data. Strangely, those who label Freud a positivist do not regard his realism to be contradictory to his alleged positivism, but rather as further evidence of it (Hoffmann, 1991; Schafer, 1983, p. 184). Conversely, those eschewing metapsychology, and even the reality of causation on the ground that these are not observable, consider themselves to be moving away from this positivistic trend (Home, 1966; Klein, 1976; Schafer, 1976). This unfortunate choice of terminology is not only one of the sources of the confusion that arises in the application of the term “positivism” within psychoanalysis. This choice also encourages the dismissal of the scientific approach to psychoanalysis on the grounds that the time has finally come to lay it to rest: “positivism” has died. Now to some other sources of confusion.

### ***The Hermeneuticist Critique of Positivism***

The scientific view, according to the hermeneuticist formulation, is concerned with objective facts and with causes. While those holding a scientific view may agree with this, it is the hermeneuticist definitions of the terms *fact* and *cause* that make matters highly problematic. Two major problems lie at the heart of the matter: First, they define cause and psychic facts in such a way that the two

cannot belong to the same domain; and, second, they define meaning in such a way that the search for it, by the mere force of definition, cannot have anything to do with the observation of facts and the determining of causal connections. Let us turn to the details of their critique.

*The First Critique of Positivism: Psychic States Cannot be Discussed in Terms of Causation.* This position has several (partially overlapping) versions including the following.

a. *Accessibility of psychic states.* Psychic states are either not accessible to the observer or are contaminated by the subjectivity of the observer, his or her theories and methods, so that we can never really know the fact of the matter regarding these states. As Roy Schafer explains (1976, p. 205): “We psychoanalysts cannot rightly claim to establish causality through our investigations in any rigorous and untrivial sense of the term. Control, production, mathematical precision are beyond our reach, for we are not engaged in the kind of investigation that can yield these results.” Also in psychoanalytic investigations, according to Schafer, in contrast to “all other fields of inquiry, there can be no theory-free and method-free facts” (Schafer, 1983, p. 188). Consequently we do not have access to the psychic states themselves. Rather “all perception is interpretation in context” (Schafer, 1983, p. 184). Or as Renik (1993, 1998) explains, in the analytic situation “subjectivity is irreducible,” meaning that the analyst’s clinical observations of the patient’s psychical states are no more than constructions determined by the analyst’s personal subjective experiences and interests. What follows is that there is no point in talking of the causation of such states.

b. *Non-factuality of psychic states.* Psychic states have a unique status such that there is no real fact of the matter regarding them. Those who maintain this position often make much use of Freud’s ill-chosen term “material reality,” which he contrasts with “psychical reality.” While Freud used the term to distinguish between reality and fantasy, hermeneuticists have portrayed the distinction as being between events that have real existence and psychical events, which do not (Ricouer, 1981, p. 254). In line with this view Ricouer (1974, p. 186) contends, for example, that “there are no ‘facts’ in psychoanalysis, but rather the interpretation of a narrated history.” Others have associated this nonfactual view with the notion that subjective states spontaneously come into being, especially in the course of analytic treatment (Home, 1966, p. 45; Schafer, 1978, pp. 48–49). Or as Hanly (1990) in a sharp critique has referred to it: the notion that there is an “intrinsic indefiniteness of the human mind which allows it to slip away from any description that would seek to correspond with some fixed and determinate nature” (p. 376). In any case, since according to this view there is no fact of the matter regarding these psychic states, here too the consequence is that they are beyond causation.



c. *Causation does not apply to psychic events.* Causation belongs only to the domain of material events; hence, psychic events are not causal. Here there are two versions, one that we can talk of human causation only on a neurological level (e.g., Basch, 1976, pp. 72–73); the other and more common version is that we can talk of causation only in terms of the effects of real external events on the person (e.g., Rycroft, 1966, p. 16; Schafer, 1976). The neurological processes underlying our psychic states are part of a causal network as are our nonpsychic observable behaviors. In other words, real observable past events causally effect present ones; thus, for example, our present character traits may be causally determined by events that actually occurred in childhood. But psychic reality, our fantasies, wishes, intentions, and so on, lack the physical substance necessary for causation. Once we reject the reduction of the psychic to the biological, and put aside knowledge regarding external reality and its influence of past events, there is no longer any room to talk of causation. “The ideas of causes has a place only in the behavioristic approach to people” (Schafer, 1976, p. 370). An auxiliary component of this view is that intentions, reasons, wishes, and dispositions are not considered to be causes. These are personal constructs of noncausal status (Klein, 1976, p. 43; Schafer, 1976, pp. 204–205. This position has been discussed at length by Grünbaum, 1984, and Strenger, 1991).

*The Second Critique of Positivism: Observation and Causation are Divorced from the Search for Meaning.* This is a most central point and, as will later be seen, is of great significance to the issue of psychoanalytic dream interpretation. The “positivists” are said to be involved in some kind of scientific endeavor *rather than* devoting themselves to the study of meaning. This in part follows from the unusual definition of causation and the hermeneuticist view of the epistemic difficulties regarding the knowledge of psychic states (see the previous section on accessibility). More specifically, since causation is allegedly a category that applies only to biology and external nonpersonal events, the “positivists,” who are concerned with causation, cannot be concerned with meaning per se. Also, since the recognition of psychic states is essential to elaboration of meaning, “positivists,” who apply objective methods, which cannot perceive these states, cannot really elaborate meaning. As Home (1966) affirms: “Because meaning is an aspect of the living subject known to us through identification it cannot be investigated by the methods and logic of science for these are applicable only to the dead object, or to the object perceived as dead” (p. 47).

But the disjunction of meaning and causation extends beyond this. There appears to be an argument to the effect that even if we assume that causation is applicable to psychic states, and even if we assume that these states may be observed, the search for meaning is simply inherently unrelated to the search for causes. Meaning, in any sense relevant to psychoanalysis, is noncausal. In this

context Freud's concern with meaning is often contrasted with his desire to arrive at a causal understanding. For example, Basch (1976, p. 73) writes that "Freud was to assert many times . . . that psychoanalysts are concerned with meaning alone, only to then immediately try to hypothesize causal explanations for the events termed meaningful." In a similar but more extreme vein Home (1966, p. 43) writes that "In discovering that the symptom had meaning and that basing his treatment on this hypothesis, Freud took the psychoanalytic study of neurosis out of the world of science into the world of the humanities, because a meaning is not the product of causes but the creation of a subject."

Taking into account these definitions of mental states, causes, and meaning, "positivism" emerges as an irrelevant and misguided endeavor within the psychoanalytic setting. It tries to establish facts to the neglect of the epistemic impossibility resulting from the contamination of the data by theory; it seeks causation where there is none or where it cannot be determined; and it is involved with the effects of external reality and biology, rather than with the intrapsychic world of the individual. The positivistic concern with psychic reality is not a concern with subjectivity or with meaning.

***A Response to the Hermeneuticist Critique of Positivism:  
Psychic States Can be Discussed in Terms of Causation***

The confusion that underlies the hermeneuticist conclusions and their premises regarding subjectivity, causation, meaning, and so on, that are at its base is quite extensive and a comprehensive study of it would take us way too far afield. In this section I will briefly respond to their first critique—that psychic states cannot be discussed in terms of causation. A response to their second critique, which focuses on their claim that observation and causation are not related to a search for meaning, requires a broader statement on meaning and its relationship to causation. I will discuss this broader point in the following section, and in that context I will address the hermeneuticist critique.

a. *Response to the argument against accessibility of psychic states.* First, it should be noted that anyone working within the field of psychoanalysis must presuppose that the psychoanalyst has some access to the patient's psychic states, particularly to the suffering for which he or she seeks help. To the extent that we take psychic states to be the subject matter of our interest in the psychoanalytic setting, we are thereby assuming that they are accessible to the observer. To what are we responding in the patient if we have no idea about his or her subjective mental states? What is it we are understanding, if psychic states are not accessible?

Furthermore, the fact that a given psychic state is "subjective" in the sense of being inside the person and hidden from *direct* view does in no way imply

that it is impossible to assess its existence in some indirect way. Indeed, this is precisely what science does: It studies phenomena that are not directly observable—and with a tremendous degree of success. Electrons, black holes, electric currents, the evolution and disappearance of ancient species, the birth of stars, are no more observable than unconscious desires or hidden traumas. Scientists can directly observe only remote by-products of these phenomena, and even those usually only through the mediation of readings on their instruments. But this hardly shows that they have no access to such phenomena. In a similar way, there is every reason to believe that through the person's behavior, gestures, self-description, and so on, we can in principle learn about his or her psychic world.

In fact, this is what we commonly do in everyday interactions with others. By attending to other people's behavior and words, we commonly learn about their headaches, thoughts, anxieties, or worries—though, like all facts, not with complete certainty. In this respect we are like scientists who attend to the language and behavior of earthquakes, tissues in test tubes, or light from distant stars, and uncover the hidden geological, biological, or astronomical reality that they express. Thus, the direct unobservability of psychic states in no way implies their inaccessibility. To deny a priori our accessibility to them just because they are subjective and thus hidden from view is to reject the whole of science with a prescientific naiveté.

The claim that the involvement of the observer, with his or her theories and methods, bars access to psychic states is equally untenable. Admittedly, it is possible to maintain that our theoretical precommitments and our methods influence the way we perceive the facts. Whatever we observe in our patients and whatever our patients tell us are already “colored” by the observer's conceptual scheme or way of looking at the world. That something must be wrong with this argument is clear, however, from the fact that it can be applied not just to psychic facts but also to every single aspect of our world. Our theoretical precommitments and conceptual scheme should “color” not only psychic data but chemical, biological, meteorological, and everyday facts just as well. Hence, if the argument were sound, we would not have access to facts in any scientific field. It would seem, however, that the hermeneuticists do not wish to maintain that there are no facts accessible to science at all, but rather only that psychoanalytic facts are inaccessible, but the basis for this distinction remains obscure.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it is important to recognize that even if the world can be seen only through our theories, this does not mean that we do not have access to it. The possible theory-ladenness of the facts that we encounter merely implies that we can know only of the world as it made known to us through our human conceptual schemes. This is true in the realm of physics and psychoanalysis alike.

b. *Response to the argument against factuality of psychic states.* The idea that the domain of the “psychic” is not factual, that there is no fact of the matter concerning “psychic” states, sounds rather incredible already at first glance. Do the

hermeneuticists seriously wish to maintain that there is no fact of the matter as to whether or not I am experiencing distress? Do they wish to claim that it is neither true nor false that my patient has, say, a longing for a father figure? That, more specifically, whether or not she has such longing is not just unknowable but in fact neither true nor false; not in the sense that the situation is a borderline case between yes and no (as dusk is neither really day nor really night), but in the sense that it is purely and completely a matter of interpretation? It is hard to imagine what this can possibly mean. We may assume that hermeneuticists would agree that there is a fact of the matter regarding whether I am now sitting and writing this book. Were they to claim otherwise it would be very strange. Why then should there be no fact of the matter regarding subjective states?

Hermeneuticists are likely to object that writing a book is objective while psychic states are subjective. But here one should wonder whether they have not been misled by some mystical halo of the term “subjective.” In its original use, “subjective” simply means to exist within the subject. It is a geographical term, so to speak, that assigns to anxieties and pains a location inside the person, in contrast to books and chairs that are located outside the subject, in the domain of objects, the “objective” realm. Obviously, the fact that something happens to reside within the subject does not imply, at least not by itself, that there is no matter of fact about it. But here “subjective” has become synonymous with “ephemeral” or “hazy,” denoting the twilight zone between reality and fiction, and contrasted with facts.

One common argument designed to show that there are no psychic matters of fact is once again based on the fact that we have no data about the psychic life that is theory-free. Here the earlier argument is taken one step further. It is now claimed that if all that we observe is “colored” by our theoretical precommitments and our methods, then it is not that facts are inaccessible (as claimed in that earlier argument) but rather that there are no facts, only interpretations. But here too the weakness of this argument becomes immediately apparent when it is recognized that it can be applied not only to psychic facts but to all facts. If the argument is sound, it should take away the factual basis not only from psychoanalysis but from all of science.

We must, therefore, conclude that if psychic states are in some ultimate sense not hard facts, they are still in the same domain as scientific facts, and hence are sufficiently hard for scientific investigation of the type commonly carried out in standard science. The point is that even if the world in which we find ourselves is a human interpretation, it still contains elements—such as the chemical structure of water or the etiology of anxiety—that we cannot reinterpret and modify at will, so that there is a definite fact of the matter about them (as they are within the human world). Similarly, there are facts about the nature of the fantasies and feelings passing through a patient’s mind. Even if our world is a human interpretation, even if it is God’s dream, it contains elements that

are one way rather than another, which is to say, facts, or if you wish: facts-within-our-human-world.

The claim that psychic states are nonfactual ultimately emerges as strange, and the arguments in its favor obscure. Careful study of the way this claim is put forth and discussed suggests that a possible explanation of the obscurity may lie in the neglect of the distinction between a content—an idea in itself (e.g., the number 7, the concept of motherhood, or specifically of one's mother) and the state of *having the content*, possessing the idea; for example, between the idea of mother and a fantasy whose content is mother. Contents—of thoughts, desires, fantasies, and so on—may be abstract. They may refer to nonmaterial objects (e.g., as in a thought about the number 7) or to material objects that are either real (e.g., as in a desire to have a horse) or unreal (e.g., as in a fantasy about a unicorn), to objects clearly defined or to indeterminate objects. In contrast to the abstract contents, the *having* of the content is a real psychic event.

If one neglects this distinction, one may treat psychic events as unreal just because their contents are unreal. From the realization that unicorns are not factual, one may conclude that fantasies about unicorns are not factual. But this move is obviously fallacious. There are perhaps no facts about unicorns, but there are facts about the patient's *fantasy about* unicorns: It is a recurring event that started at a certain point in time and exerts various influences on the patient's behavior and thoughts. Although contents of psychic states need not be real, the psychic states themselves are real; they are in a person's mind, and as such there is a fact of the matter regarding them. I may have a fantasy that my mother had always hit me as a child. This may be completely untrue. The fantasy, however, as the presence of the idea in my head, exists. There is a fact of the matter regarding it. It is a real state. It is real even if the content to which it refers may not yet be clearly formed or clear, or if it refers only to some kind of vague potential. This would simply mean that my psychic event, or fantasy—which is as real as any real event in our world—has distorted, unformed, unclear, fuzzy, or vague contents.

One may perhaps object that in cases of fuzzy or vague psychic states it is not the content that is fuzzy but rather the psychic state itself. But even if this were true, it still would not make the having of the content any less real. The fact that a painting or a cloud is fuzzy does not mean that its reality is in question. Even vague psychic states are real and factual.

c. *Response to the argument that causation does not apply to psychic states.* Causation does indeed apply to psychic events. In some limited sense, the question of causation in the psychic domain may be considered as a matter of definition. Someone could arbitrarily decide to define causation in a way that delimits it to biological entities, or in a way that makes it applicable only to the effects of real external events. One could also define it such that it would relate only to interstellar influences. To do this, however, would be strange and would

miss the point. Why should the concept of causation be limited in this way? Causation means, very simply, “bringing about.” To say that an anxiety caused a fantasy is simply to say that the anxiety brought about, or gave birth to, the fantasy. It is hard to see what is wrong with such a formulation. Consider, for instance, the idea, held by some, that causation should be applied only to the effects of external reality. Why, for example, should the term causation be considered applicable only in the study of how the *real* mother affected the psychic state of her son and not how an *idea* the son has about his mother (regardless of its relationship to reality) affects his psychic state? If we adopt a common analysis from the field of philosophy, we may say, roughly speaking, that to say that *A* caused *B* is to say that *A* was followed by *B*, and were *A* not to occur, *B* would not have occurred either. Clearly, according to this common and commonsensical conception of causation, one psychic event may be the cause of another psychic event, in the sense that the former was necessary for the second to happen.

Is it because psychic events are considered less real than other events that they are excluded from having a causal status? As we have seen, the fact that we do not see our psychic events, the fact that the contents of the psychic events are abstract, does not make the psychic state of *having* the contents any less real. And yet in the literature it appears as if the deepening of Freud’s early recognition that we are not dealing with historical truth, but rather with psychic reality, removes causation from the picture. That is, it is as if once we acknowledge that in the clinical setting we cannot assuredly reconstruct the childhood events that determine the patient’s current predicament, our interpretations no longer deal with real entities, regarding which there are indeed questions of what determined what. It would seem that this position has recently become so deeply ingrained in psychoanalysis that some version of it even infiltrates into the writings and case studies of analytic thinkers who acknowledge that the role of causation has been too readily dismissed by the hermeneuticists (see Strenger, 1991, pp. 58, 73).

The arguments in favor of psychic events being causal are quite plain. Psychic events (e.g., thinking, believing, fantasizing, feeling, etc.) are real events that occur at a particular time. As such, they are, like all other real events that take place in real time, subject to causation: They influence, are influenced, bring about, and are brought about by other events. This is especially obvious if one is a materialist and does not believe in a nonmaterial soul, for then one should agree that psychic events take place in our brain and as such are subject to causation.

Furthermore, whether one believes that psychic events are in the brain or in the soul, there are simple cases in which it is obvious that these events cause and are caused. Think what it would mean to deny this. For example, the state of distress causes (brings about, gives birth to) the expression of pain. Insult causes distress. Clearly, it is not just a coincidence that one event tends to follow the other. Were we to assume otherwise, a patient could cry in pain but we

would have no reason to believe that the cry is a result of (i.e., was caused by) her actually being in a state of distress, for this would involve the attribution of causation to that state. We could not assume that the insult, or any other distress-correlated event, such as falling on one's face, actually brought on the distress. So whether distress (or any other mental event) is a material brain-event or a nonmaterial soul-event, either way the correlation clearly shows that it is subject to causal relations.

Do the hermeneuticists wish to deny these obvious cases of causation? I would gather that many of those who reject the "positivistic" position do not opt for this alternative. Rather, they refer to the relationships that I call (in accordance with common use) "causes" in different terms such as, motives, wishes, intentions, and dispositions, which are said to "bring about," "be responsible for," "give birth to," or similar expressions, which are merely different ways of speaking of causation. The only advantage of not referring to these as "causes" is that in this way they are supposedly no longer subject to the scientific standards to which causation is subject. It is as if a new and wholly other standard must be applied when we come to the domain of persons and psychic reality.

In sum, the arguments put forth here show that the hermeneuticists' claim that mental states cannot be discussed in terms of causal processes is untenable. Their first main critique is found to be misguided. In the next section, in which we examine the concept of meaning, their second critique of science as irrelevant to the psychoanalytic interest with meaning emerges as equally untenable.

### *Meaning and Causation*

The concept of meaning has many different meanings and applications in different fields. What it refers to is not something to be discovered or assumed, but is rather a matter of definition. The lack of recognition of this transforms matter of definition into matters of self-evident givens and results in spurious dispute. Examples of this may be found in the accusation that Freud put aside his concern with meaning to address questions of causation (e.g., Basch, 1976), or that he mistakenly assumed that meaning was tied to causation (e.g., Stolorow & Atwood, 1982). In Freud's terms, however, it is not possible to put aside meaning for causation, nor for him could meaning be mistakenly assumed to be tied to causation. For Freud meaning was *defined* by its tie to causation. Those who accuse him of neglect or mistake define meaning differently. As a rule, it would seem that in the psychoanalytic literature the referent of the term "meaning" is taken for granted, although different analysts are in fact referring to different things by the term. The result of this is not only misguided claims of neglect and mistake, but also a large degree of obscurity. To clarify matters, let us make two basic distinctions.

*Two Distinctions Regarding Meaning.*

a. *Meaning within the subject versus meaning to an observer:* An expressed content can be attended to in two basic ways. One can wonder what the subject expressing the content is expressing. What does he mean? This is the “meaning within the subject.” On the other hand, one can wonder what the content being expressed by the subject means to me the observer. This is the meaning to the observer. In the one, the content is determined in terms of the subject’s psychic context, and in the other in terms of the psychic context of the observer. For example, when the subject says he feels hungry, we may be concerned with what he is expressing in this statement; what he means by it. Alternately we may be concerned with what this expression means to me. In terms of *my* psychic context it may be that an expression of hunger means an egocentric focus on bodily needs. This is what it means to me. But, of course, it may have nothing whatsoever to do with the meaning within the subject. In fact, he may be hungry because he is fasting out of identification with the starving people of India. There may, at times, be much more confluence between what things mean to the subject and what they mean to the observer. Empathic understanding is based on such confluence. The observer may know what the subject is meaning because given such confluence there will be some similarity between what an expression means both to the observer and within the subject. At other times, there may be meaning to the observer while there is none in terms of the subject or even when there is no subject. This is the case when one reacts to a Rorschach card (although the observer may transform the task to what the alleged subject who created the Rorschach card wished to express).

Of course, there is also the option that a person take an observer stance in relation to oneself. In this case she would wonder, from the third-person perspective, what she had said means to herself.

This distinction between meaning within the subject of a certain individual and meaning to the observer of that same individual usually goes unnoted (Peterfreund [1971] is an exception). The impact of this becomes most apparent when it comes to dream interpretation. To understand the meaning of a dream may mean either to understand its meaning within the subject who expressed it at the time of the dream, or to understand what it means to the dreamer, as observer, when awake. As we will see, it is not self-evident that the two are one and the same, and which of the two is being referred to is not always clear.

In what follows I continue with the elaboration of the meaning within the subject.

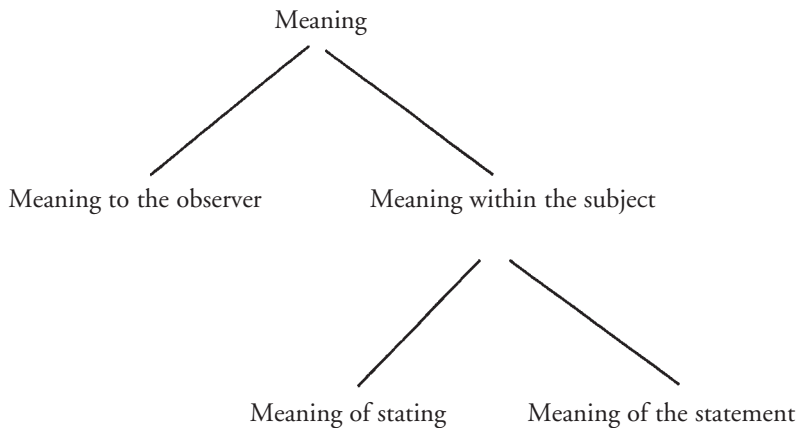
b. *The meaning of a statement versus the meaning of stating.* This distinction is between the meaning of the content being expressed and the meaning of the act of stating or expressing the content. For example, if a person suddenly



says, “I *really* love my mother,” I can wonder what is the meaning (within the subject) of the statement. Depending on the person, the context, as well as on one’s theory of meaning, this statement can have various meanings. One possible meaning is that the person has a feeling of love for her mother. Another possible meaning is that she actually hates her mother and this statement is a concealed expression of this. There are, of course, many other possible ways that this statement could be understood. Alternatively, however, the question may be not what she means, but what is the meaning of the fact that she is making this statement. Perhaps she had heard or thought something that made her feel guilty toward her mother and this caused her to state what she did. Or it may have been that someone she admired just said these words and she wished to emulate her, and so on. Here the act of stating means, “I feel guilty,” or “I wish to be just like my admired friend.” As we will later see, according to some formulations the meaning of stating is considered to be part of the meaning of the statement. In this case, the meaning of the statement would include, for example, both the feeling of love and the feeling of guilt.

The distinctions that we have discussed thus far may be charted as follows (Figure 1.1):

Figure 1.1. Meaning Distinctions Chart



*Meaning of the Statement: “Described,” “Created,” and “Discovered” Meanings.* When we speak of meaning we are speaking of a relationship between two entities. We say that *X* means *Y*. To understand the meaning of meaning in psychoanalysis we must define what these entities are and the nature of the relationship between them. Within psychoanalysis we may distinguish between three broad categories of “meaning” that differ on this latter dimension.

To clarify matters, let us return to the distinction just made between a *content*, which is abstract, and the *having of the content*, which is a real and concrete psychic event or state. It is possible to speak of meaning in terms of relationships between contents. Relationships between entities of this kind are found, for example, in semantics. When we speak of the meaning of the concept of “happiness” we are speaking of the relationship between this content and another content, for example: “Happiness” means joy or pleasure. The relationship in this instance is one of convention. There are other forms of relationship between contents, which refer to other senses of the term meaning. For example, we may inquire into the meaning of “happiness” in a philosophical sense. Here too we would be relating to contents, abstract ideas, but the relationship would be conceptual, as when Aristotle defines the meaning of happiness as an activity of the soul in accordance with excellence (Aristotle, 1963).

In contrast, we can also talk of meaning in terms of the relationship between one psychic event or state and another psychic event or state (each one of which may have various contents).<sup>4</sup> For example, when we want to know the meaning of happiness in psychoanalysis we want to know the meaning, not of the abstract concept of happiness, but of the actual psychic event of happiness or, in other words, the meaning of being in the state of happiness. A satisfactory account of such meaning would refer to other psychic states. For example, we may say that happiness means to the individual the feeling of being admired by a significant person, or the idea of having fulfilled an Oedipal wish. Here we identified meaning as the connection between two psychic states: e.g., the state of happiness and the feeling of being admired.

Note that in this example meaning is portrayed as a *general* connection between one *type* of psychic states (states of happiness) to another type (feelings of being admired). Meaning as a general connection between types of states can be found in general theories, as in the case of Freud’s theories regarding the meaning of anxiety, the meaning of jealousy, and, as we will see, the meaning of the dream. Against the background of such general theories, we may also speak of meaning as a *specific* connection in a *particular* individual between one specific psychic event or state to another. Thus, we may inquire into the meaning of happiness in a general and theoretical way, or alternatively we may be concerned with the meaning of happiness in one specific person, that is, in terms of an individual’s personal context of meaning. It is the latter that is of interest to us here.

So far we have isolated the general sense in which we speak of meaning in psychoanalysis, and identified it with connections between psychic entities, either general types of entities or particular ones. However, the issue now is: What kind of connections are such meaning-connections? The answer is that embedded in the psychoanalytic literature are three different psychoanalytic approaches to the nature of these connections. We may, therefore, speak of

three different categories of meaning within psychoanalysis. I will refer to these three categories as “*meaning described*,” “*meaning created*,” and “*meaning discovered*.” Each of these is based on a different conception of the nature of meaning-connections between psychic events. “Meaning described” refers to an experiential relationship, “meaning created” to a thematic (i.e., semantic, or content-based) relationship, and “meaning discovered” to a causal relationship.

More specifically, when we speak of *X* meaning *Y* for a certain subject, we may be referring to three alternative connections between *X* and *Y*. First, we may be referring to the fact that the subject has *an experience* of *X* being tied to *Y*. For example, a person may feel that his happiness is tied to his feeling of being admired by a significant person.<sup>5</sup> This feeling may be mistaken in the sense that it does not reflect his inner reality. He may be completely happy independently of any admiration, but his experience creates the tie between these psychic events. If we are interested in meaning in this sense, what we need to do is to carefully read the descriptions offered by the subject. Our question here would be how the individual experiences or describes the connections between his various psychic entities, not how they really are connected. Hence I refer to this form of meaning as “*meaning described*.” It should be stressed that what characterizes this approach is not the claim that attunement to experience is important for determining meaning. All psychoanalytic approaches would agree on that. Rather what characterizes this approach is the claim that meanings are *determined* by the description of the experience. Meaning *is* the immediate experience of connections between psychic entities, the way a certain psychic entity “is embedded in the ongoing course of . . . experiencing” (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984, p. 99).

Analysts who maintain this descriptive view of meaning often do not do so exclusively. They usually do not make do with the meanings that the individual describes, but rather consider there to be additional meanings that in due course should become experientially available. To relate to these additional meaning it is necessary to rely on one of the other two psychoanalytic views of meaning to which I now turn.

One alternate sense in which we may speak of *X* meaning *Y* would refer to a *thematic* tie between these psychic events, that is, the connection between their themes, or contents. Thus, when we speak of *X* meaning *Y* for a certain subject we may be saying that there is a common theme between what one psychic event (*X*) is about and what another psychic event (*Y*) is about, regardless of whether the two are related in any other sense. For example, within a specific individual there may exist a thematic tie between happiness and admiration based on the common theme of worthwhileness. This individual feels happiness to be a worthwhile state, and he also feels being admired to be a worthwhile state. To sharpen the point, let us assume that in fact there is no psychological connection between the two states of worthwhileness; the two

have developed in him independently of each other. Nevertheless, there is within this individual a meaning-connection between happiness and admiration—that is, a common theme between the content “happiness is worthwhile” and “being admired is worthwhile”—even though there is no psychological connection between the two. Here the meaning is not necessarily immediately felt or experienced, nor does it reflect some internal connection in the psyche of the subject. Rather, it reflects a semantic connection between two ideas, one that may be formulated (either by the subject or by another observer) through a literary analysis of the contents. Of course, the subject may happen to experience that thematic connection, but the point is that it is not the experience that constitutes the connection.

Meaning as thematic connections is not read off the subject’s experience, nor is it discovered to exist inside the subject’s psyche or experiences in any way. It is rather woven, so to speak, between the subject’s statements regarding his psychic entities, and added on to what is already found within him. In a sense, speaking of thematic connections between a person’s statements is similar to writing a story, which connects the different statements into a coherent script. Meaning based on this kind of connections can therefore be seen as a literary creation of the observer—whether the subject observing himself or another person. I will therefore call it “*meaning created*.” This view of meaning is central to all psychoanalytic hermeneuticists, but perhaps has been most forcefully presented by Schafer (1983) in his focus on the analyst’s function of creating stories and by Spence (1982a, 1982b), who speaks of the analyst’s function as a “pattern-maker” rather than a “pattern finder.”

The third sense in which we may speak of  $X$  meaning  $Y$  refers to a *causal* connection between the two psychic events. Thus, when we say that  $X$  means  $Y$  we mean that in some way  $Y$  brought about  $X$  or influenced the way in which it appeared. This connection does not have to be experienced in order to exist, nor does there necessarily have to be a thematic tie between the two (although in psychoanalysis there usually is). In our example of “happiness” this would mean that the feeling of happiness and the feeling of being admired would be *causally* attached to each other, they would be part of the same causal network, rather than attached merely by after-the-fact experience or thematic interpretation. Since this category of meaning is based on a relationship that does indeed reflect a reality—that is, an inner reality, or actual causal ties between psychic events—meaning in this sense is something to discover, not to postulate or create. We may, therefore, refer to this category as “*meaning discovered*.” This approach to meaning is the classical one and has dominated psychoanalysis since the time of Freud until the emergence of psychoanalytical hermeneuticism in recent years (see Friedman, 1996, p. 261).

It may be noted that in all three categories we are talking about the meaning of contents that exist in the mind, not about abstract contents, but only in