CHAPTER 3

"Unconscious" as "Mental and Not Conscious": Why Repression, the Dynamic Unconscious, and Psychopathology Are Irrelevant to Freud's Philosophical Argument

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In this chapter, I challenge the prevailing view that Freud was interested only in the argument for the psychoanalytic postulate of a dynamic unconscious and was not a philosopher who undertook to address the philosophical problem of the existence of unconscious mental states. I document Freud's continuing awareness that there are two problems of the unconscious that confronted him and the need for separate

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arguments to address these two quite different problems if his theoretical project was to succeed. I argue that, contrary to the standard view, there is a crucial strand of Freud's argument for unconscious mental states that does not make essential reference to repression, the dynamic unconscious, psychopathological states, or issues of psychoanalytic treatment such as resistance. The extrication of Freud's philosophy-of-mind argument from his clinical-theoretic contributions will set the stage for single-mindedly focusing on the philosophy-of-mind strand of Freud's thought starting in the next chapter. I also provide an account of Freud's distinction among four types of unconscious states that may help in understanding later analyses.

Freud on the Descriptive Versus Dynamic Unconscious

Freud's writing, I claim, contains a strand of argument that constitutes an important philosophy-of-mind argument for the existence of unconscious mental states that has not been adequately appreciated or properly reconstructed. This philosophical argument is more general than and entirely independent of his better-known argument for the existence of repressed unconscious mental states underlying psychopathology. Identifying this argument requires focusing on specific aspects of Freud's argument that address the philosophical issue of unconscious mental states. This in turn requires approaching Freud in a nonstandard way, as a philosopher of mind addressing enduring philosophical questions about the nature of mental states in general rather than as a psychological theoretician proposing specific theoretical and etiological hypotheses about psychopathological conditions. Such theories of the etiology of mental disorder comprise the larger part of Freud's theorizing but do not include the part that engages with the larger philosophical tradition from Descartes through Brentano about the nature of the mind.

This way of approaching Freud's work, as philosophical argument rather than psychological theorizing, poses a serious obstacle for some readers. Some will see it as an anomaly that my reconstruction of Freud's philosophy-of-mind argument does not focus on his account of repression or other aspects of his clinical theorizing. Psychoanalytically oriented writers tend to see repression as the most fundamental part of Freud's clinical theory because it is the source of psychological symptoms, and philosophers of mind tend to see repression as a salient target of analysis

because of its links to topics such as irrationality and self-deception. Freud was above all a clinician whose theories are motivated by his work with patients, they will say, and approaching him as a philosopher concerned with generic examples of unconscious mentation such as memory, skilled performance, problem-solving, and hypnosis divorced from clinical topics such as repression, the dynamic unconscious, and the meaning and etiology of psychopathological symptoms distorts his contribution and ignores his most profound insights.

The fact is that Freud was both a clinical theorist and an important philosopher of mind. One does not preclude the other. In many areas of science, exceptional thinkers who push the limits of their disciplines—from David Hilbert and Ernst Mach to Albert Einstein and Robert Spitzer—become part-time philosophers as well in order to reconsider the conceptual foundations of their disciplines, opening the way for new forms of progress. Freud needed to do some philosophy to be able to move ahead with his daring clinical theories confidently and on solid intellectual ground. I believe this philosophical contribution is of enduring importance in its own right and deserves to be recognized, even if it does not speak to Freud's clinical contribution.

The basic distinction between Freud's arguments as a philosopher versus Freud's arguments as a clinical theorist is easy to draw in a rough way. It is based on the common distinction, drawn by Freud himself as we shall shortly see, between the "descriptive" unconscious, which simply refers to any mental state that is not in conscious awareness at a given moment, and the "dynamic" unconscious, referring to any mental state that is repressed (these terms are further defined below). Repression requires the exertion of defensive forces that act against the natural tendency of mental states to become conscious and to influence consciousness (which they will sometimes do even when repressed, possibly in the form of symptoms), hence the "dynamic" element. All dynamically unconscious mental states are by definition descriptively unconscious, so the descriptive unconscious is the larger and all-encompassing domain that raises the issue of unconscious mental states in general, independent of the more specific issues concerning repression and dynamics that pertain to the subset of dynamically unconscious states:

> [T]he essence of the process of repression lies, not in putting an end to, in annihilating, the idea which represents an instinct, but in preventing it

> from becoming conscious. When this happens we say of the idea that it is in a state of being 'unconscious', and we can produce good evidence to show that even when it is unconscious it can produce effects, even including some which finally reach consciousness. Everything that is repressed must remain unconscious; but let us state at the very outset that the repressed does not cover everything that is unconscious. The unconscious has a wider compass: the repressed is a part of the unconscious. (Freud, 1915/1957, p. 166)

To examine Freud as a philosopher of mind, one must simply isolate those few of his arguments that address the question of whether and why there is a "wider" descriptive unconscious independently of whether there is a dynamic unconscious. All the rest of his work, concerned to one degree or another with the dynamic unconscious, may be considered clinical theorizing and is the stuff of standard accounts of Freud's contribution.

Did Freud really take the distinction between the descriptive and the dynamic unconscious seriously enough to form the basis for distinguishing two domains of argument? For those who remain skeptical, in the remainder of this chapter. I clear the ground for my approach to understanding Freud's philosophical argument by documenting that Freud took this distinction very seriously. Freud's own statements should dispel the perennial confusion that Freud's argument for the existence of unconscious mental states is inextricably linked to his theory of repression and account of psychopathology.

The Standard View That Freud's Philosophy-of-Mind Argument Cannot Be Separated from His Repression Theory

Although there are exceptions, most commentators on the development of Freud's view of unconscious mental states maintain that they must be considered in the context of his signature theories of repression and the dynamic (i.e., repressed) unconscious. The argument for unconscious mental states, these commentators suggest, goes hand in glove with his application of these ideas to the explanation of psychopathological conditions such as conversion hysteria. Indeed, students of psychoanalysis are routinely told that Freud became persuaded of the necessity of postulating unconscious meanings by his clinical experiences, especially during his treatment of conversion hysteria when he realized, for example, that

"glove anesthesia" in hysterical patients took place not in accordance with any anatomical feature of the nervous system but in accordance with commonsense ideas about the boundaries of bodily features—ideas that were not, however, being consciously applied by the patient. Thus, within psychoanalysis and often within philosophy and history of science as well, Freud's argument for the existence of unconscious mental states is commonly approached via his discoveries about repression and psychopathology.

Consistent with the view that repression is at the heart of Freud's argument for unconscious mental states, scholars of the history of psychoanalysis often observe that Freud's and others' arguments for the unconscious in the late nineteenth century were frequently based on the puzzling features of psychopathological conditions, as well as dreams, hypnosis, and other "normal" puzzling phenomena. For example, Sonu Shamdasani (2010) states:

> A critical mutation occurred in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, during which conceptions of the unconscious became the basis for dynamic psychologies. Psychologists and philosophers were concerned with the questions that were posed by hypnosis, dreams, glossolalia, fugues, automatic writing, maladies of memory, hallucinations, telepathy and other alterations of the personality that seemed to pose formidable problems for the philosophy and psychology of consciousness. (pp. 288–289)

In support of his emphasis on psychopathological phenomena as the trigger for the defense of unconscious mental states, Shamdasani quotes a striking statement made in 1890 by the French philosopher Ernst Renan:

> In studying the psychology of the individual, sleep, madness, delirium, somnambulism, hallucination offer a far more favourable field of experience than the normal state. Phenomena, which in the normal state are almost effaced because of their tenuousness, appear more palpable in extraordinary crises because they are exaggerated … human psychology will have to be constructed by studying the madness of mankind. (Renan, 1923, p. 184; as cited and translated in Shamdasani, 2010, p. 289)

Maria Gyemant (2017), in the course of some interesting observations of how Freud might have agreed with some of Brentano's criticisms of traditional arguments for the unconscious, entirely divorces Freud's

argument from the traditional philosophical discussion, asserting that "Freud was not a philosopher and Brentano's historical influence does not suffice to transform the Freudian unconscious in a philosophical concept" (p. 491). She goes on to argue that:

> Freud would have agreed with some of Brentano's objections to the unconscious because the unconscious that Freud is talking about is not the "unconscious of the philosophers" that Brentano criticizes. On the contrary, Freud adopts another perspective in psychology, the dynamic perspective, which complements the Brentanian descriptive perspective. (p. 492)

Gunter Godde (2010) notes that "it was predominantly his clinical practice of the 1890s that led Freud to posit the existence of a psychical unconscious" (p. 268). Similarly, Geert Panhuysen (1998) identifies hysterical symptomatology as the central psychological phenomenon (along with hypnosis) that "made such an impression on Freud that he abandoned the Cartesian identification of the psychic with the conscious":

> In the first place Charcot had demonstrated to him, during his stay in Paris, that the way in which hysterical paralysis and numbness spread across the body could not be reconciled with the neuroanatomic facts. Rather, they reflect the kind of neuroanatomic representations that the uninitiated have—a sort of "layman's anatomy."
>
> Second, he drew a great deal of his knowledge of hysteria from the case of Anna O., a hysteric who had been treated by Breuer in the early 1880s….Hysterical symptoms, which at first sight appear to be wholly incomprehensible and without purpose, become understandable and purposive in the light of the traumatizing circumstances in which they arise. The content of these traumatic experiences is repressed, but the now unconscious contents find expression in symptoms…. (Panhuysen, 1998, p. 27)

Some philosophers analyzing Freud's contribution go even further in anchoring Freud's argument for unconscious mental states in his clinical work. They assert that not only the dynamic unconscious and repression but also the interpersonal manifestations of repression as "resistance" in clinical psychoanalytic interviewing are at the core of Freud's arguments regarding the existence of unconscious mental states. For example, Donald Levy (1996) asserts that "an understanding of the unconscious is not possible apart from the view of resistance (and transference)

phenomena peculiar to it, according to Freud.…[R]esistance…was central to Freud's conception of unconscious mental activity" (Levy, 1996, pp. 56–57). In sum, it is pretty much the standard view that Freud's argument for the existence of unconscious mental states is somehow logically dependent on, or at least cannot be disentangled from, his insights into psychopathology, his postulation of the dynamically repressed unconscious, and his experiences as a clinician.

Is the Theory of Repression Basic to Freud's Philosophy-of-Mind Argument?

There is of course no question that Freud's clinical experiences convinced him of the reality of unconscious mental states and provided the motivation for formulating an account of unconscious mental states in order to theorize successfully about psychopathological processes. Examples from the domain of the dynamic unconscious provided Freud with vivid and impressive examples of unconscious processes at work and are central targets for the application of his theories. Moreover, a general cultural concern at Freud's time about the unconscious was stoked by prominent examples of psychopathology and the occult, providing a degree of receptiveness to Freud's theories. Freud did indeed arrive at his anti-Cartesian view in part as a result of his early explorations of hysterical conversion symptoms. Beyond hysteria, Freud's initial prototypical example of the repressed unconscious occurs in connection with dreams, which, although a normal experience, Freud considers to be analogous to neuroses with regard to the distinction between latent and manifest content and so in a theoretical sense straddle the normal–pathological border. It is incontrovertible that repression and psychopathology and related phenomena were enormously important in all these ways for Freud's theoretical development.

However, psychopathological examples can play many roles in Freud's thinking other than playing an essential role in the logic of Freud's anti-Cartesian philosophical argument itself. Such examples might serve to motivate an argument for unconscious mental states or might be the primary target for applying such a concept once it is secured. If the standard view were correct, one would expect that Freud's discussion of unconscious mental states, especially when he is most reflective and careful in presenting his reasoning, would be exclusively or mostly about

repression, psychopathological symptoms, and dynamically unconscious mental states. This is not at all what a careful reading reveals, as we shall shortly see. Instead, one finds reference to nonclinical phenomena such as memory, problem-solving, slips of the tongue, and hypnosis precisely at the points at which Freud is trying to elaborate the nature of his argument for unconscious mental states. This suggests that something rather different from the standard view's portrayal is going on.

One obvious problem with claiming that clinical examples are at the core of Freud's philosophical argument for the existence of unconscious mental states is that the very notion of repression, which is at the heart of Freud's theoretical explanation of such examples, already assumes that mental states can be unconscious. To postulate dynamically unconscious mental states involves both the claim that there are unconscious mental states and an explanatory hypothesis that they are unconscious due to repression. Thus, dynamic hypotheses are inherently more complex and risky than hypotheses regarding unconscious mentality by itself. If one already believes that mental states can be unconscious, instances of repression provide some vivid and persuasive examples. However, Freud understood that to theorize about the dynamic unconscious, he first had to establish the conceptual and theoretical possibility that mental states can be unconscious as against the standard Cartesian view of his time that mental states must be conscious. Only when the existence of unconscious mental states is secured can one then hypothesize about the causal process, such as repression, by which they become unconscious.

Moreover, repression aside, relying on psychopathological examples to attack the general Cartesian thesis rejecting unconscious mental states is a problematic strategy. Freud was no doubt cognizant of his teacher Brentano's (1874/1995) caution that when arguing for unconscious mental states, to be persuasive the empirical grounds offered must themselves be well established and not in dispute:

> In order to be able to draw any conclusion concerning an unconscious mental phenomenon as a cause, from a fact which is supposed to be its effect, it is necessary, first of all, that the fact itself be sufficiently established….For this reason the attempted proofs which are based on the phenomena of so-called clairvoyance, presentiment, premonition, etc., can *only* be of dubious value….But in addition, the things that Maudsley tells us about the accomplishments of geniuses, which are not the product of

> conscious thinking, are not facts that are sufficiently certain to be used as the basis for a conclusive argument. Geniuses are even rarer than somnambulists….[I]s it more presumptuous to assume that they have forgotten the conscious steps of their discoveries, than to assume that unconscious thought processes bridged the gap? (Brentano, 1874/1995, pp. 81–82)

Brentano here observes that one cannot argue against a well-established doctrine like the Cartesian consciousness criterion by citing evidence that is itself open to more doubt than the claim one is contesting, for one's opponents can simply question the legitimacy of the evidence. The nature of psychopathological phenomena was a highly contested area in Freud's day. To most observers, any firm opinion about, say, hysteria put forward by Freud to support an anti-Cartesian philosophical thesis would have seemed more questionable than the Cartesian thesis itself. In light of Brentano's point, not only the repression theory but examples from psychopathology in general are a questionable basis for an argument for the existence of unconscious mental states. If one must establish the possibility of descriptively unconscious mental states before building a theory of dynamically unconscious states, then many nonpathological states are equally good candidates for being descriptively unconscious without involving additional auxiliary assumptions about the nature and etiology of pathological conditions that might be disputed.

Additionally, if his argument should succeed, the last thing Freud wanted was to be dismissed by his opponents as identifying a phenomenon that is inherently pathological and not relevant to general psychological theory. A similar concern drove Freud (1909/1955a) to argue that the phobia patient Little Hans was a normal boy, to avoid the objection that his claimed Oedipus complex was a pathological deviation rather than a normal developmental phase. If unconscious mental states are the common phenomenon that Freud claims, one ought to be able to demonstrate that fact persuasively by appeal to less esoteric examples. Brentano, in commenting on Maudsley's "genius" example mentioned in the passage quoted above, had made this very point that an argument for unconscious mental states should be based on common examples:

> Goethe, who undoubtedly can claim a place among men of genius, says… that extraordinary talent is "only a slight deviation from the ordinary." If there are unconscious mental processes, therefore, it will be possible to discover them in less unusual cases too. (Brentano, 1874/1995, pp. 81–82)

As Freud was aware, even the existence of repression as an observed phenomenon in psychopathological phenomena does not decisively resolve the issue of unconscious mental states because the phenomenon of repression itself—that is, the ejection of a content from consciousness—does not logically imply unconscious mentation. The activity of repression could simply annihilate a mental state or render a state nonconscious consistent with many other accounts of the status of the nonconscious state that results. For example, once repressed, the content might transform into a nonmental physical disposition to have further conscious states or become a split-off conscious state rather than an unconscious mental state. The fact that the content becomes nonconscious via an act of repression does not by itself imply an answer to the questions of the existence of unconscious mental states.

For example, the English philosopher James Mill, interested in explaining why, for example, we are not aware of our muscular tensions throughout the day, suggested that, in a process analogous to repression, people systematically avoid certain thoughts through selective inattention and eventually build up a habit of inattention so ingrained that it is no longer possible for them to bring those thoughts to consciousness. (Indeed, "selective inattention" remains to this day one of the standard alternative accounts of the phenomenon Freud labeled "repression.") It appears that Mill did believe that the unattended states are unconscious mental states. However, his even more eminent philosopher son, John Stuart Mill, agreed with his father about the phenomenon but explicitly rejected an explanation in terms of unconscious mentality and insisted on a physiological disposition explanation of the states outside of awareness. The theory of repression in itself does not imply a solution to the problem of unconscious mental states in the philosopher's sense. Thus, the supposed epistemological value of repression in arguing for unconscious mental states is mostly a mirage.

Freud clearly portrays himself as refuting the generic Cartesian equation of "mental" and "conscious." Thus, as he well understood, he had to engage the arguments of the philosophers on their own grounds and needed his argument to connect with the mainstream tradition in philosophy of mind. Freud knew that none of the philosophers from Leibniz to Brentano had addressed the question of unconscious mental states primarily through the lens of psychopathology. Undoubtedly, most of them (like most clinicians and cognitive scientists today) did not believe in anything like a theory of repression. For Cartesian philosophers and psychologists, the "descriptive" unconscious and the

"dynamic" unconscious are equivalently problematic because they equivalently challenge the Cartesian consciousness criterion. It is the descriptive unconscious—often in the form of Freud's "preconscious" (e.g., memories that are out of awareness but can easily be brought to mind)—that had been the subject of dispute among philosophers preceding Freud. Freud's additional postulation of the dynamic unconscious and his researches into psychopathology do not alter the basic logic of this traditional discussion.

Freud on the Distinction Between Descriptive and Dynamic Unconscious Mental States

Freud made the distinction between the general philosophical claim that there are unconscious mental states and the specific theoretical claim that there are dynamic (repressed) unconscious mental states quite clear in two primary ways. First, in a great many passages, he underscored the distinction between descriptive and dynamic unconscious states and sometimes alluded to the differing arguments necessary for establishing them. Second, the examples he used to establish his thesis that mental states can be unconscious generally were selected so as not to rest on any assumptions about repression.

First, then, from the beginning of his psychoanalytic writings, Freud explicitly states that the philosophical argument is different from and depends on more commonsense examples than the repression hypothesis. Recall Freud's statement quoted in Chapter 2 from his early theoretical work, *Interpretation of Dreams*, that "The problem of the unconscious in psychology is, in the forcible words of Lipps, less *a* psychological problem than *the* problem of psychology" (1900/1953, p. 611). This striking statement offers a clue to Freud's intent. Consider the nature of the problem to which Freud refers. Lipps was a philosopher who worked on psychological topics such as empathy and humor, but had no involvement in psychodynamic psychology. Freud thus refers to the fact that Lipps (1883) addressed the general philosophical question of the nature of the mental and whether mental states, as the dominant Cartesian view held, must be conscious. Freud's statement identifying the central problem of psychology thus clearly refers to the general "philosopher's problem" of whether mental states can ever be unconscious, not to the psychoanalytic hypothesis of the dynamic unconscious and repression. In a footnote added later to the passage,

Freud quotes German philosopher Carl du Prel as coming to "the same conclusions as I have on the relation between conscious and unconscious activity," the conclusions being that "the concept of the mind is a wider one than that of consciousness" and "consciousness is not co-extensive with mind" (p. 612, n. 1, footnote added 1914). Again, these are conclusions to the philosopher's argument, not to Freud's argument for a dynamic unconscious.

Having identified *the* problem of psychology as the philosopher's question about the existence of unconscious mental states and indicated that he has reached a conclusion about how to resolve it, one expects that Freud, the systematic and consummate theoretician that he was, must have an argument for his conclusion. Later in the same passage, in the course of distinguishing his psychoanalytic hypothesis that there is a dynamic unconscious with primitive "uncontrolled" and "daemonic" contents from the philosopher's thesis that there are unconscious mental states, Freud indicates that he does have such an argument and that the evidence used in the arguments for the two domains is quite different:

> It is not without intention that I speak of 'our' unconscious. For what I thus describe is not the same as the unconscious of the philosophers.… By them the term is used merely to indicate a contrast with the conscious: the thesis which they dispute with so much heat and defend with so much energy is the thesis that apart from conscious there are also unconscious psychical processes.…But it is not in order to establish *this* thesis that we have summoned up the phenomena of dreams and of the formation of hysterical symptoms; the observation of normal waking life would by itself suffice to prove it beyond any doubt. The new discovery that we have been taught by the analysis of psycho-pathological structures and of the first member of that class—the dream—lies in the fact that the unconscious (that is, the psychical) is found as a function of two separate systems and that this is the case in normal as well as in pathological life. Thus there are two kinds of unconscious, which have not yet been distinguished by psychologists. Both of them are unconscious in the sense used by psychology; but in our sense one of them…is also *inadmissible to consciousness*.… (Freud, 1900/1953, pp. 614–615)

Freud explicitly distinguishes the dynamic unconscious, which he pointedly refers to as "our" (i.e., distinctively psychoanalytic) unconscious, from the broader domain debated by philosophers. Freud thus identifies two classes of unconscious mental states, one contained within the other;

the descriptive "unconscious of the philosophers" that consists of mental states that are not conscious at a given moment and the theoretically postulated subset of repressed dynamically unconscious states. These are, he says, "two kinds of unconscious, which have not yet been distinguished by psychologists" but "both of them are unconscious in the sense used by psychology," which is the descriptive sense used by the philosophers as well. Freud further asserts that without using examples of dreams and psychopathology (the domain of repression) and instead by using only examples from normal waking life, one can demonstrate the existence of the traditional unconscious of the philosophers "beyond any doubt."

Freud is saying—in direct contradiction to the interpretations of commentators such as those cited above—that he has an argument that he believes can prove the existence of unconscious mental states without any reference to the kinds of psychopathological examples that are essential to proving the existence of a dynamic unconscious. This implies that there are two different arguments based on different evidence. The need for this second argument is clear because it is obvious that the dynamic hypothesis is dependent on the prior proof of the existence of the philosopher's unconscious; without the philosopher's general unconscious, there can be no specific repressed unconscious. As I will show, Freud maintained this early understanding of his project's dual logic regarding unconscious mental states throughout his life.

We saw earlier that Gyemant (2017) argued that Freud's defense of the existence of unconscious mental states has nothing to do with the traditional philosophical argument but rather is concerned solely with the domain of the dynamic unconscious. Certainly, Freud does not want us to confuse the two. He sees his most distinctive and momentous scientific contribution as concerned with the dynamic unconscious. So, he often emphasizes the dynamic unconscious as the center of gravity of his argument, and this might well have misled commentators such as Gyemant.

However, in the above passage, Freud clearly refers to two arguments. He claims that the study of dreams and psychopathology is unnecessary for addressing the philosophers' question of the existence of descriptively unconscious states ("the observation of normal waking life would by itself suffice to prove it beyond any doubt"). Freud is quite aware that winning that argument is a necessary step prior to being able to claim that there is a dynamic unconscious in which some descriptively unconscious states are not merely preconscious but inadmissible

to consciousness. Despite Freud's focus on what he deems to be novel in his theory, he is committed to a position on the philosophers' question and claims to have an argument to resolve that question. As philosopher Michael Moore (1984) notes, "in analyzing the descriptive use of unconscious Freud was plainly attempting to analyze the ordinary usage of the term. He was seeking to elucidate what we ordinarily mean by unconscious" (p. 131). Freud is indeed quite clear about the fact that he is in part addressing the ordinary notions of conscious and unconscious: "There is no need to characterize what we call 'conscious': it is the same as the consciousness of philosophers and of everyday opinion. Everything else psychical is in our view 'the unconscious'" (1940/1964c, p. 159). Contra Gyemant, Freud is staking out positions in both domains of argument, not just one.

Freud's less recognized and less emphasized conceptual aspirations are implicit in passages like the following, in which he insists on or implies the conceptual priority of the descriptive unconscious:

> Unconsciousness is a regular and inevitable phase in the processes constituting our psychical activity; every psychical act begins as an unconscious one, and it may either remain so or go on developing into consciousness, according as it meets with resistance or not. The distinction between foreconscious and unconscious activity is not a primary one, but comes to be established after repulsion has sprung up. Only then the difference between foreconscious ideas, which can appear in consciousness and reappear at any moment, and unconscious ideas which cannot do so gains a theoretical as well as a practical value. (Freud, 1912/1958, p. 264)

> The division of the psychical into what is conscious and what is unconscious is the fundamental premise of psycho-analysis; and it alone makes it possible for psycho-analysis to understand the pathological processes in mental life, which are as common as they are important, and to find a place for them in the framework of science. (Freud, 1923/1961, p. 13)

> [I]n the descriptive sense there are two kinds of unconscious, but in the dynamic sense only one. For purposes of exposition this distinction can in some cases be ignored…[W]e have become more or less accustomed to the ambiguity of the unconscious and have managed pretty well with it. As far as I can see, it is impossible to avoid this ambiguity; the distinction between conscious and unconscious is in the last resort a question of perception, which must be answered 'yes' or 'no', and the act of perception itself tells us nothing of the reason why a thing is or is not perceived.

> No one has a right to complain because the actual phenomenon expresses the dynamic factor ambiguously. (Freud, 1923/1961, pp. 15–16)

The first passage specifies that every mental state starts as a descriptively unconscious state (which Freud here terms "foreconscious"), and Freud asserts that the distinction between dynamically repressed unconscious (or in this passage simply "unconscious") states and other unconscious mental states is "not a primary one" but is secondary, logically and temporally, to the primary distinction between conscious and descriptively unconscious states. Freud's hypothesis that there are dynamically repulsed unconscious ideas thus presupposes that he has established that ideas can be unconscious and is layered on top of the more fundamental claim. The second passage again indicates Freud's recognition of the logical priority of the general distinction between conscious and descriptively unconscious mental processes as "the fundamental premise of psycho-analysis" on which Freud's entire theoretical construction rests. The demonstration of this basic premise provides the framework that makes it possible to formulate Freud's theory that pathological states are due to repression. The third passage indicates Freud's awareness that there are two different concepts specified by the term "unconscious," an enduring ambiguity that has confused the literature on Freud's argument for the unconscious, allowing the argument for the dynamic unconscious to be incorrectly seen as the sole target of Freud's arguments. Freud makes the point that all unconscious states are equally descriptively unconscious in that they are not experienced consciously, but that tells you nothing about the reason they are not conscious and so does not reveal whether a state is dynamically unconscious, an explanatory hypothesis added on to the basic phenomenological distinction.

Late in his life, in one of his most mature statements, Freud spells out the distinction between the descriptive and dynamic unconscious, points to the importance of active unconscious mental states, and distinguishes the preconscious as the part of the descriptive unconscious that is easily accessible to consciousness:

> There is no need to discuss what is to be called conscious: it is removed from all doubt. The oldest and best meaning of the word 'unconscious' is the descriptive one; we call a psychical process unconscious whose existence we are obliged to assume —for some such reason as that we infer it from its effects—, but of which we know nothing. In that case we have

> the same relation to it as we have to a psychical process in another person, except that it is in fact one of our own. If we want to be still more correct, we shall modify our assertion by saying that we call a process unconscious if we are obliged to assume that it is being activated *at the moment*, though *at the moment* we know nothing about it. This qualification makes us reflect that the majority of conscious processes are conscious only for a short time; very soon they become *latent*, but can easily become conscious again. We might also say that they had become unconscious, if it were at all certain that in the condition of latency they are still something psychical.…[Here Freud considers an example in which an individual fails to be able to call into consciousness a motive he had—JW]. A consideration of these dynamic relations permits us now to distinguish two kinds of unconscious—one which is easily, under frequently occurring circumstances, transformed into something conscious, and another with which this transformation is difficult and takes place only subject to a considerable expenditure of effort or possibly never at all. In order to escape the ambiguity as to whether we mean the one or the other unconscious, whether we are using the word in the descriptive or in the dynamic sense, we make use of a permissible and simple way out. We call the unconscious which is only latent, and thus easily becomes conscious, the 'preconscious' and retain the term 'unconscious' for the other. We now have three terms, 'conscious', 'preconscious' and 'unconscious', with which we can get along in our description of mental phenomena. Once again: the preconscious is also unconscious in the purely descriptive sense, but we do not give it that name, except in talking loosely or when we have to make a defence of the existence in mental life of unconscious processes in general. (1933/1964a, pp. 70–71)

Note especially Freud's point that we are not justified in concluding that nonconscious states are unconscious mental states until we are "certain that in the condition of latency they are still something psychical," which is a point that requires evidence and argument. Moreover, it is the descriptive unconscious—not the dynamic unconscious—to which we must address our argument "when we have to make a defence of the existence in mental life of unconscious processes in general," with Freud implicitly indicating that this is an argument that of necessity he himself must and does make as an integral part of the development of his position. It is precisely this "general" argument aimed at showing that nonconscious states can sometimes still be psychical and thus descriptively unconscious that is Freud's philosophy-of-mind argument. Freud is quite explicit elsewhere as well that this general argument for the existence

of unconscious mental states can be made quite independently of issues concerning psychopathology:

> To most people who have been educated in philosophy the idea of anything psychical which is not also conscious is so inconceivable that it seems to them absurd and refutable simply by logic. I believe this is only because they have never studied the relevant phenomena of hypnosis and dreams, which—*quite apart from pathological manifestations*—necessitate this view. Their psychology of consciousness is incapable of solving the problems of dreams and hypnosis. (Freud, 1923/1961, p. 14; emphasis added)

Second, the nonpathological nature of Freud's examples when he is arguing most carefully for the existence of unconscious mental states reveals his understanding of the distinct nature of his philosophical argument from his clinical theory. For example, in Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1916/1963), in which Freud endeavors to offer a systematic presentation of his theories to an audience of students not already convinced of psychoanalytic theory, Freud offers the example of everyday slips of the tongue—in cases in which the motives underlying the slip may or may not be repressed—as his clearest evidence for unconscious mental states, eschewing examples of psychopathological conditions and deeply repressed material. When he later presents an updated account in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1933/1964a), he again uses the same signature example of the Speaker of the House's slip in declaring a prospectively tumultuous session of the legislature closed when he meant to say it was open, which provides a good example of an active unconscious state that is not necessarily repressed (for further comments on the importance of active unconscious states, see below). There is no reason to think that the Speaker would not immediately bring to consciousness his motive upon reflection, nor does Freud argue that the motive was repressed as opposed to simply being out of focal attention. Indeed, Freud offers the option that the Speaker may be able to call the content immediately to mind from the preconscious: "If, when we subsequently put it before the speaker, he recognizes it as one familiar to him, then it was only temporarily unconscious to him; but if he repudiates it as something foreign to him, then it was permanently unconscious" (1933/1964a, pp. 70–71).

At the end of his life, in the unfinished draft manuscript "Some Elementary Lessons in Psycho-Analysis" (1938/1964b) in which Freud started to summarize the evidence for psychoanaltic theory, Freud

presents three examples to support the existence of unconscious mental states that appear over and over in his work: unconscious problem-solving, slips of the tongue, and posthypnotic suggestion (these examples are revisited in detail in a later volume of this work). None of these examples involve psychopathology, and arguably, they need not involve repression, nor does Freud suggest that they do. If repression and pathology played a crucial role in Freud's philosophical argument, one would expect to find such examples at this and other pivotal points in his explanation of why unconscious mental states exist. That is not what one finds.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Freud often presents the continuity argument for unconscious mental states—that is, the argument that unlawful associative or rational gaps or discontinuities in the sequence of conscious states suggest that the conscious states are linked by unconscious mentation—as his primary argument for the need to postulate unconscious mental states (although I will argue later that something deeper is necessary and is implicit in Freud). In terms of distinguishing Freud's case for unconscious mentation from his case for repression, it is revealing that the continuity argument is generally mounted in a way that is wholly independent of any issue concerning pathology or repression, although these are sometimes mentioned as secondary instances of the gaps that violate the continuity of consciousness.

Consider a passage in which Freud presents the continuity argument for the necessity of postulating unconscious mental states in "The Unconscious":

> It is necessary because the data of consciousness have a very large number of gaps in them; both in healthy and in sick people psychical acts often occur which can be explained only by presupposing other acts, of which, nevertheless, consciousness affords no evidence….our most personal daily experience acquaints us with ideas that come into our head we do not know from where, and with intellectual conclusions arrived at we do not know how. All these conscious acts remain disconnected and unintelligible if we insist upon claiming that every mental act that occurs in us must also necessarily be experienced by us through consciousness; on the other hand, they fall into a demonstrable connection if we interpolate between them the unconscious acts which we have inferred….We can go further and argue, in support of there being an unconscious psychical state, that at any given moment consciousness includes only a small content, so that the greater part of what we call conscious knowledge must in any case be for very considerable periods of time in a state of latency, that is to say, of

> being psychically unconscious. When all our latent memories are taken into consideration it becomes totally incomprehensible how the existence of the unconscious can be denied. (1915/1957, pp. 166–167)

Every consideration in this portion of Freud's argument for unconscious mental states is applicable to all unconscious mental states, descriptive and repressed. Moreover, some of the arguments—for example, regarding latent knowledge and memory—are specific to preconscious states and do not apply to repressed states. It is clear that Freud is arguing for the reality of descriptive unconscious mental states quite aside from any argument for repressed states. The nature of his argument indicates that we must take seriously Freud's concern to argue the philosopher's issue of whether mental states can, in general, be unconscious, quite aside from his specific concern about the dynamic unconscious.

The argument over the existence of unconscious mental states endured from the time of Leibniz to the time of Freud. Freud's presentation locates his argument within that philosophical domain and not within the narrower domain of repressed mental states that, according to Freud, underlie psychopathology. By Freud's own word as well as the arguments he uses, there is clearly a strand of Freud's argument that does not depend on psychopathology and is independent of any explicit mention of repression or resistance.

I conclude that Freud plainly understood the distinction between the argument for his theory of repression and a more basic underlying strand of philosophical argument directed at the demonstration that there are unconscious mental states, and that both arguments were needed for his position to be maintained. It is to the latter philosophical dispute within its traditional rules of engagement that I claim Freud made a major contribution.

Why the Perceptual Metaphor for Consciousness Makes the Descriptive Unconscious a Useful Focus of Freud's Argument

A further, more conceptual reason that makes sense of Freud's independent focus on the existence of descriptively unconscious mental states has to do with the relative difficulty of establishing the existence of descriptive versus dynamic states and the rhetorical strategy necessary to make Freud's argument effective to his audience. Given the widespread

acceptance of Cartesianism about the mental, for many of Freud's readers, accepting the existence of any descriptively unconscious mental state involved crossing a veritable philosophical abyss. Consequently, considerable attention had to be given to this step in the argument. In contrast, although it might not seem so at first glance, the conceptual gap between the descriptive and the dynamic unconscious is much smaller and can be dealt with much more casually once one has secured the existence of unconscious mental states.

Freud's opponents believed that consciousness is the essence of the mental, so it was an extremely challenging task to formulate arguments that might move them to accept the possibility that a mental state can be unconscious even for a moment. But, once the Cartesian position is abandoned in principle and it is admitted that a mental state can be unconscious, it is not so difficult to imagine that conditions might arise that would make such a state incapable of becoming conscious again, despite the general inclination at the time to believe that mental states naturally sought consciousness. Once it is granted that unconscious mental states exist, Freud need only fill in some additional empirical facts to make a convincing case for inaccessible and repressed states in which their quest for consciousness is blocked. The transition from "unconscious at a given moment" to "unconscious at a given moment and (for various reasons) stuck in a state of unconsciousness and blocked from consciousness" is not so conceptually difficult, although it is theoretically disputable.

Consider again Freud's remarks concerning the explanation of slips of the tongue by unconscious intentions:

> In order to explain a slip of the tongue, for instance, we find ourselves obliged to assume that the intention to make a particular remark was present in the subject. We infer it with certainty from the interference with his remark which has occurred; but the intention did not put itself through and was thus unconscious. If, when we subsequently put it before the speaker, he recognizes it as one familiar to him, then it was only temporarily unconscious to him; but if he repudiates it as something foreign to him, then it was permanently unconscious. (1933/1964a, pp. 70–71)

Prior to this passage, Freud argues at length that there are unconscious intentions behind certain slips of the tongue, with no reference to repression or other features. Once he feels he has established this point at the beginning of the passage ("we find ourselves obliged"), he then describes the case in which the unconscious intention quickly and

easily comes to consciousness without resistance ("he recognizes it") and is thus considered, when it was unconscious, to have been preconscious. Freud then takes only one line to leap from the case in which the unconscious intention easily comes to mind to the case in which the unconscious intention will not come to mind ("he repudiates it"), and in which it is therefore repressed. Leaving aside the "heads I win, tails you lose" nature of Freud's inference to a repressed intention despite denial in the last sentence of the passage, the passage illustrates that once it is accepted that there are unconscious mental states that are accessible to consciousness, then in principle it is relatively easy to extend the argument to mental states that are enduringly unconscious (i.e., unconscious and inaccessible to consciousness). The philosophically most demanding problem is in establishing that there might be some kind of mental state outside of awareness in the first place.

The move from the existence of accessible unconscious states to inaccessible unconscious states is greatly eased by the perceptual understanding of consciousness, on which Freud relied. We saw that Freud observes that "[T]he distinction between conscious and unconscious is in the last resort a question of perception, which must be answered 'yes' or 'no'" (Freud, 1923/1961, pp. 15–16), a line of thought underscoring the rhetorical primacy of arguing for the descriptive unconscious. This connection is nicely laid out by D. M. Armstrong:

> A thing or phenomenon may not be seen, and yet be there to be seen in the field of vision. In these circumstances, all that is necessary for the thing or phenomenon to be seen is that it become the object of some visual attention. Alternatively, a thing or phenomenon may not be seen, either because it is not in the field of vision at all or because, although it is in the right place, it is not the sort of thing that can be seen by the perceiver. If introspective awareness is real, and can be thought of as the operation of an inner sense, then it should be possible to show similar distinctions. There should be some current mental phenomena which we are not aware of, but of which we can make ourselves aware by suitably directing introspective attention. And there should be other current mental phenomena of which we are not aware, and of which we cannot make ourselves aware merely by the redirection of attention. I believe that plausible instances of both sorts of case can be found. (Armstrong & Malcolm, 1984, p. 123)

As Armstrong's comments make clear, once the "inner perception" model of consciousness, which Freud and many other philosophers

have embraced, is accepted—and along with it the potential existence of unconscious (i.e., unperceived) mental states—it is a less demanding step to the distinction between unconscious mental states that are accessible (i.e., unperceived merely due to the directedness of attention) and unconscious mental states that are inaccessible (i.e., out of the perceptual field or undetectable by the inner perceptual organ for other reasons). This situation is implicit in Freud's comment, in the same passage quoted above in which he describes the distinction between conscious and unconscious states as a "yes" or "no" matter of perception, that: "As far as I can see, it is impossible to avoid this ambiguity [between the descriptive and dynamic unconscious];...the act of perception itself tells us nothing of the reason why a thing is or is not perceived" (1923/1961, pp. 15–16).

In the cited passage, Freud describes the terminological awkwardness of the ambiguity of often referring specifically to dynamically unconscious states—those of most interest to psychoanalytic theory—as "unconscious" when in fact the latter term covers a much broader scope. But he also offers an implicit argument for the priority of arguing for the descriptive unconscious: the basic and most controversial doctrine implicit in all claims that there are unconscious mental states is that there is an inner mental state that is unexperienced by conscious awareness. That is the deep philosophical claim. The rest—and specifically the distinction between preconscious and dynamically unconscious contents—is a matter of the various possible causes of a mental state's not being perceived within conscious inner awareness at a given time. Such causal issues can be considered only after the phenomenon claimed to be the effect that is to be explained has been established.

The Freudian theoretical link between perception and consciousness helps to explain why repression can be set aside in an analysis of Freud's philosophical argument. The nature of the visual field allows for the possibility that a physical object may be available within the usual scope of the field and yet remain unperceived, while leaving open the question of why the available object remained unperceived and how difficult it would be for it to become perceived. Analogously, Freud can mount an argument that mental states are such that they can remain outside of conscious awareness, without in that argument committing himself on how they get that way or how easily, if at all, they can be brought into consciousness. The analogy shows how easy it is to move from "unconscious and accessible" to "unconscious but inaccessible" (i.e., the content is

hidden from one's inner gaze) or even "unconscious and repressed" (i.e., one actively directs one's inner gaze away from the content) once the existence of "unperceived" (or descriptively unconscious) mental states has been established.

The construal of consciousness as a form of inner perception of mental states is not merely an analogy but, as Armstrong's passage indicates, an appealing theory meant to be taken literally. Freud himself, like many of his contemporaries, firmly embraced the perceptual theory of consciousness:

> But what part is there left to be played in our scheme by consciousness, which was once so omnipotent and hid all else from view? *Only that of a sense-organ for the perception of psychical qualities.* (1900/1953, p. 615)
>
> In psycho-analysis there is no choice for us but to assert that mental processes are in themselves unconscious, and to liken the perception of them by means of consciousness to the perception of the external world by means of the sense-organs.…Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psycho-analysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes which are their object. Like the physical, the psychical is not necessarily in reality what it appears to us to be. (1915/1957, p. 171)

In sum, the perceptual model lends itself to the kinds of analogical extension noted in Armstrong's passage that would ease the way to the notion of repressed contents. Moreover, we shall see in a later chapter that the perceptual theory plays an important role in Freud's argument for unconscious mental states.

Freud's Typology of Unconscious Mental States

To distinguish various strands of Freud's argument, it is useful to clarify several types of unconscious mental states that Freud is postulating to exist, especially given confusing ambiguities in Freud's terminology.

Thesis 1: There exist unconscious mental states; more precisely, there exists a state M and a time t such that M is both mental and not conscious at t. This "descriptive" (or "qualitative") unconscious, which includes the preconscious, is what Manson (2000) refers to as simply the

"non-occurrently conscious" sense of "unconscious," in which a mental state is not conscious at a given moment if it is not at that moment in consciousness, even if one can make it come into consciousness at will:

> 'Being conscious' is in the first place a purely descriptive term, resting on perception of the most immediate and certain character. Experience goes on to show that a psychical element (for instance, an idea) is not as a rule conscious for a protracted length of time. On the contrary, a state of consciousness is characteristically very transitory; an idea that is conscious now is no longer so a moment later, although it can become so again under certain conditions that are easily brought about. In the interval the idea was—we do not know what. We can say that it was latent, and by this we mean that it was capable of becoming conscious at any time. Or, if we say that is was unconscious, we shall also be giving a correct description of it. Here 'unconscious' coincides with 'latent and capable of becoming conscious'. (Freud, 1923/1961, pp. 14–15)

Just as "conscious" is in the first place a descriptive concept, so is "unconscious," and the considerations Freud puts forward in this passage concern only the descriptive unconscious. Only in a later passage does Freud take up his separate arguments for his distinctive dynamic unconscious ("But we have arrived at the term or concept of the unconscious along another path, by considering certain experiences in which mental dynamics play a part" [see below]), which already presuppose the existence of a descriptive unconscious.

Thesis 1, regarding the descriptive or qualitative unconscious, is the thesis that ultimately will occupy me in this book. (I will also to some extent be concerned with Thesis 4 below that focuses on "active" unconscious states.) It states simply that some genuine mental states do not have the quality of being conscious. This category includes all unconscious states, whatever their other properties and whatever the reason for their being out of awareness, ranging from a belief, desire, or memory that one happens not to be thinking about at a given moment but can be recalled at will to a deeply repressed sexual fantasy that is inaccessible to consciousness. States temporarily out of awareness but accessible to consciousness at will are called by Freud "preconscious." So, the descriptive unconscious encompasses both preconscious and dynamically unconscious states. (Indeed, to anticipate, we will eventually see that Freud claims that all mental states are descriptively unconscious, but that emerges at a later point in the analysis.)

As explained in a later chapter, Freud accepts the Cartesian notion that we necessarily are aware of and know about each of our conscious states ("Now let us call 'conscious' the conception which is present to our consciousness and of which we are aware, and let this be the only meaning of the term 'conscious'" [1912/1958, p. 261]). He takes consciousness as an obvious property of which we are directly aware ("There is no need to discuss what is to be called conscious: it is removed from all doubt" [Freud, 1933/1964a, p. 70]) and as the basis for inferences to unconscious mental states ("Without the illumination thrown by the quality of consciousness, we should be lost in the obscurity of depth-psychology" [Freud, 1933/1964a, p. 70]). The descriptive unconscious is therefore conceptually easy to identify because it encompasses any state that is simultaneously genuinely mental and out of our direct awareness. For Freud, we saw, "The oldest and best meaning of the word 'unconscious' is the descriptive one;…we have the same relation to it as we have to a psychical process in another person, except that it is in fact one of our own" (Freud, 1933/1964a, p. 70). Freud was explicit that inaccessible meanings (see below) are a species of nonoccurrently conscious meanings, and that the latter is a descriptive category acceptable to everyone and neutral with regard to Freud's more specific theoretical claims:

> I now propose that we should introduce a change into our nomenclature which will give us more freedom of movement. Instead of speaking of 'concealed', 'inaccessible', or 'ungenuine', let us adopt the correct description and say 'inaccessible to the dreamer's consciousness' or 'unconscious'. I mean nothing else by this than what may be suggested to you when you think of a word that has escaped you or the disturbing purpose in a parapraxis—that is to say, I mean nothing else than 'unconscious at the moment'. In contrast to this, we can of course speak of the dream-elements themselves, and the substitutive ideas that have been newly arrived at from them by association, as 'conscious'. This nomenclature so far involves no theoretical construction. No objection can be made to using the word 'unconscious' as an apt and easily understandable description. (Freud, 1916/1963, pp. 113–114)

This "easily understandable description" is the pre-psychoanalytic notion of "unconscious" that Freud is addressing in his argument with the Cartesians. Note that in this passage, Freud gives very wide scope to the notion of "inaccessibility," in a way that goes well beyond what it will

mean when defining dynamically repressed material (see below). He says that by "inaccessible," "I mean nothing else by this than what may be suggested to you when you think of a word that has escaped you or the disturbing purpose in a parapraxis—that is to say, I mean nothing else than 'unconscious at the moment'." There is no hint here of the presence of repression. When a word momentarily escapes your memory, that does not necessarily mean that the word has been repressed. Nor need it be the case that a disturbing purpose that intrudes into speech in the form of a slip of the tongue is inaccessible upon reflection, as, we saw, Freud makes clear in his example of the Speaker of the House declaring the session "closed."

Freud was aware that, although one might argue that all of one's latent (descriptively unconscious, preconscious) memories and knowledge must constitute unconscious mental states, as an epistemological matter it was only when their contents were active that one could glean indirect evidence that they exist. Moreover, there was a classic and difficult-to-defeat Cartesian objection to labeling them as truly mental, namely, that they are simply nonmental physiological brain states that have a disposition under appropriate circumstances to cause a conscious mental state to come into existence. Although ordinary language might refer to such nonconscious states using mental terms because of their disposition to bring about conscious states, such preconscious states are not literally mental to the thoroughgoing Cartesian but rather are physiological "brain tracts" that are capable of causing certain conscious states under appropriate circumstances. (For some illustrations of the classic brain-tract dispositional theory, see Chapter 4.)

This is why Freud relies heavily on *active* unconscious states as his primary evidence (see below). Active unconscious states may indirectly manifest their semantic content in the conscious derivatives to which they give rise, suggesting genuine mentation. Because he knows he needs such evidence of genuine unconscious semantic content to evade the Cartesian brain-tract objection, Freud realizes that unless unconscious states are active and yielding semantically driven derivatives at the very moment that they are unconscious, they can be easily countered by the brain-tract argument. This is the source of Freud's repeated and somewhat puzzling acknowledgment that accessible preconscious memories, although they are in fact technically unconscious mental states, in and of themselves are not smoking-gun examples that demonstrate the existence of unconscious mental states in a sense that overthrows Cartesianism:

> As for latent conceptions, if we have any reason to suppose that they exist in the mind—as we had in the case of memory—let them be denoted by the term 'unconscious'. Thus an unconscious conception is one of which we are not aware, but the existence of which we are nevertheless ready to admit on account of other proofs or signs. This might be considered an uninteresting piece of descriptive or classificatory work if no experience appealed to our judgement other than the facts of memory, or the cases of association by unconscious links. (Freud, 1912/1958, pp. 260–261)

> [T]he majority of conscious processes are conscious only for a short time; very soon they become latent, but can easily become conscious again. We might also say that they had become unconscious, if it were at all certain that in the condition of latency they are still something psychical. So far we should have learnt nothing new; nor should we have acquired the right to introduce the concept of an unconscious into psychology. (Freud, 1933/1964a, p. 70)

That is, Freud is acknowledging that to overcome the brain-tract objection, he needs something more than just the fact that memories go in and out of consciousness or other such preconscious phenomena.

Freud's use of the term "descriptive" (or the equivalent "qualitative") is confusing because it is in principle redundant. A state's being descriptively unconscious is just the state's being unconscious. The usefulness of the term "descriptive" for Freud stems from the fact that, as he progressed in his psychological theorizing, he increasingly focused on the dynamic unconscious and ignored the broader descriptive unconscious and its easily accessible preconscious contents. Given his theoretical and clinical focus on the dynamic unconscious, Freud used the term "unconscious" without qualifiers to refer exclusively to the narrower class of repressed mental states. He thus needed a modifier to let the reader know when he was using the term in its more general sense.

However, my analysis concerns the property of "not being conscious." So, contrary to Freud's usage, I will always use the unadorned term "unconscious" in the general sense of Thesis 1, to refer to all unconscious mental states irrespective of their further properties regarding accessibility, activity, repression, and so on. If I want to refer specifically to some narrower class such as the class of repressed states, I will say so. I thus reclaim the phrase "unconscious mental state" for the descriptive unconscious, meaning "mental but not conscious."

Thesis 2: There exist inaccessible mental states; more precisely, there exists a state M and a time t such that M is both mental and not conscious at t,

and M is not accessible to consciousness at t, that is, the individual cannot easily bring M into consciousness at t even with modest effort. Note that all mental states that are inaccessible in the sense of Thesis 2 are, by definition, unconscious mental states in the sense of Thesis 1. Clearly, "inaccessible" is a vague and graded notion that can range from transient forgetfulness to deeply buried desires to the sorts of in-principle inaccessible-to-consciousness rules and representations proposed for basic cognitive functions such as perception and language by theoreticians such as David Marr (1982) and Noam Chomsky (1965). One might attempt to draw philosophically significant lines between these various sorts of inaccessibility; for example, John Searle (1992) has argued that there are indeed unconscious beliefs and desires that are genuinely mental but that the cognitive scientist's in-principle inaccessible processing rules make no sense as mental states. Although inaccessibility is a complex and interesting concept in its own right, the concept of inaccessibility will not be relevant to this book's inquiry.

Thesis 3: There exist active unconscious mental states; more precisely, there exists a state M and a time t such that M is mental and is not conscious at time t, and M is active at time t. What exactly it is for a mental state to be "active" is a complex issue in its own right. Without aspiring to a comprehensive analysis, one may assume that for Freud's purposes to judge a state "active" at a given moment requires that the state's semantic content is interacting with other semantic contents in the mental system in a way that is at least partly manifested in consciousness. The activity of some of the states that Freud claims to be unconscious mental states is epistemologically essential to Freud's argument. This is because only active states provide the kind of indirect evidence of occurrent semantic content while unconscious that potentially can be used to counter standard Cartesian alternatives such as the physiological disposition account.

"Dynamics" of course refers generally to the exertion or clash of forces. Confusingly, Freud sometimes introduced the notion "dynamic" in connection with any causal impact exerted by an unconscious state independent of the presence of repression. "Dynamic" in this sense is more or less equivalent to "active":

> But we have arrived at the term or concept of the unconscious along another path, by considering certain experiences in which mental dynamics

> play a part. We have found—that is, we have been obliged to assume—that very powerful mental processes or ideas exist (and here a quantitative or economic factor comes into question for the first time) which can produce all the effects in mental life that ordinary ideas do (including effects that can in their turn become conscious as ideas), though they themselves do not become conscious. (Freud, 1923/1961, p. 14)

Repression as an additional dynamic exertion of force that keeps the active content out of consciousness was then subsequently invoked to explain how some active mental state could be both unconscious and active despite background theoretical assumptions that made this puzzling, such as the belief that active states naturally tend to become conscious. In an epistemological vein, Freud even occasionaly introduced the notion of active states as equivalent to unconscious states: "[W]e call a process unconscious if we are obliged to assume that it is being activated at the moment, though at the moment we know nothing about it" (Freud, 1933/1964a, p. 70).

Freud of course theorizes that active unconscious states are generally kept out of consciousness by repression. However, as Freud's own passages indicate, that additional hypothesis about why the active state remains unconscious can be conceptually disentangled from the fact that the state is active and unconscious. Indeed, even when Freud famously describes the moment during a demonstration of hypnosis at which he became persuaded of the existence of unconscious mental states in virtue of their active nature, the crucial elements of the event are described with no mention of repression:

> The well-known experiment, however, of the 'post-hypnotic suggestion' teaches us to insist upon the importance of the distinction between *conscious* and *unconscious* and seems to increase its value….It seems impossible to give any other description of the phenomenon than to say that the order had been present in the mind of the person in a condition of latency, or had been present unconsciously, until the given moment came, and then had become conscious. But not the whole of it emerged into consciousness: only the conception of the act to be executed. All the other ideas associated with this conception—the order, the influence of the physician, the recollection of the hypnotic state, remained unconscious even then.
>
> But we have more to learn from such an experiment. We are led from the purely descriptive to a *dynamic* view of the phenomenon. The idea of

> the action ordered in hypnosis not only became an object of consciousness at a certain moment, but the more striking aspect of the fact is that this idea grew active: it was translated into action as soon as consciousness became aware of its presence. The real stimulus to the action being the order of the physician, it is hard not to concede that the idea of the physician's order became active too. Yet this last idea did not reveal itself to consciousness, as did its outcome, the idea of the action; it remained unconscious, and so it was *active and unconscious* at the same time. (Freud, 1912/1958, p. 261)

The importance of active but unconscious contents to Freud's overall argument leads him to point to the centrality of this notion for the extension of his argument to repressed ideas that yield psychopathology, although these instances, for reasons cited earlier, cannot form the initial basis for his argument regarding unconscious mental states and can be dealt with only after establishing that descriptively unconscious mental states exist:

> The same preponderance of active unconscious ideas is revealed by analysis as the essential fact in the psychology of all other forms of neurosis. We learn therefore by the analysis of neurotic phenomena that a latent or unconscious idea is not necessarily a weak one, and that the presence of such an idea in the mind admits of indirect proofs of the most cogent kind, which are equivalent to the direct proof furnished by consciousness. We feel justified in making our classification agree with this addition to our knowledge by introducing a fundamental distinction between different kinds of latent or unconscious ideas. We were accustomed to think that every latent idea was so because it was weak and that it grew conscious as soon as it became strong. We have now gained the conviction that there are some latent ideas which do not penetrate into consciousness, however strong they may have become. Therefore we may call the latent ideas of the first type foreconscious, while we reserve the term unconscious (proper) for the latter type which we came to study in the neuroses. The term unconscious, which was used in the purely descriptive sense before, now comes to imply something more. It designates not only latent ideas in general, but especially ideas with a certain dynamic character, ideas keeping apart from consciousness in spite of their intensity and activity. (Freud, 1912/1958, p. 262)

It is the existence of inaccessible yet active contents that forms the basis for Freud's initial conception of a dynamic unconscious:

> By the differentiation of foreconscious and unconscious ideas, we are led on to leave the field of classification and to form an opinion about functional and dynamical relations in psychical action. We have found a foreconscious activity passing into consciousness with no difficulty, and an unconscious activity which remains so and seems to be cut off from consciousness. (Freud, 1912/1958, p. 263)

Note that both preconscious and unconscious states are described as active. The difference is that when the preconscious state becomes active it comes into consciousness and exerts its activity via that route, whereas other unconscious states become active and yet do not come into consciousness. Thus far, these claims can be considered atheoretical regarding why an active state would not come into consciousness.

Thesis 4: There exist repressed unconscious mental states; more precisely, there exists a state M and a time t such that M is mental and not conscious at time t, and M is not accessible to consciousness at time t, and the reason M is inaccessible is because M is repressed (or otherwise defended against) at time t, that is, M is inaccessible because M is actively kept out of consciousness by psychological defenses at time t. Because of the postulated involvement of active repressing forces, Freud referred to repressed unconscious states as "dynamically unconscious" states. As we saw, he also sometimes explained his use of "dynamic" as referring to the fact that such states are actively exerting an influence on conscious mental life even as they themselves remain unconscious. Note that all mental states that are repressed in the sense of Thesis 4 are, by definition, unconscious mental states in the general sense of Thesis 1 and inaccessible mental states in the sense of Thesis 2.

The following passage illustrates how Freud proceeds from the sense of dynamic as "active"—which he has judged certain states to be in the preceding passage—to the sense of dynamic as "repressed":

> [A]t this point psycho-analytic theory steps in and asserts that the reason why such ideas cannot become conscious is that a certain force opposes them, that otherwise they could become conscious, and that it would then be apparent how little they differ from other elements which are admittedly psychical. The fact that in the technique of psycho-analysis a means has been found by which the opposing force can be removed and the ideas in question made conscious renders this theory irrefutable. The state in which the ideas existed before being made conscious is called by us repression, and we

> assert that the force which instituted the repression and maintains it is perceived as resistance during the work of analysis. (Freud, 1923/1961, p.14)

The theory of repression was so central to Freud's clinical psychological theorizing that he reorganized his conceptual vocabulary around it so that when used without qualifiers, "unconscious" became synonymous with "repressed":

> This piece of insight into psychical dynamics cannot fail to affect terminology and description. The latent, which is unconscious only descriptively, not in the dynamic sense, we call preconscious; we restrict the term unconscious to the dynamically unconscious repressed; so that now we have three terms, conscious (Cs.), preconscious (Pcs.), and unconscious (Ucs.), whose sense is no longer purely descriptive. (Freud, 1923/1961, pp. 14–15)

Although Freud asserts the *theoretical* priority of the dynamic unconscious in formulating his explanation of psychopathological conditions, as we have seen he nonetheless acknowledges the *conceptual* priority of the descriptive unconscious.

An Anomaly: Unconscious Defenses as Inaccessible and Active but Not Repressed

I will be saying almost nothing further about Theses 2 and 4—inaccessible and repressed mental contents—in the remainder of this book, so I will offer here a brief account of the fate of their relationship within Freud's theory. These theses are distinct in principle, because mental contents might be inaccessible for reasons other than repression, as many cognitive scientists postulate. Freud did not theoretically distinguish inaccessibility from repression until late in his career because, along with many of his predecessors, he believed that the natural situation is for mental contents to be accessible to consciousness and to exert force to spontaneously rise into awareness. Consequently, he thought, a mental content can be inaccessible only if repressing forces are actively holding the content outside of consciousness, thereby counteracting its natural tendency to enter consciousness. Thus, for early and middle Freud, inaccessibility and repression come to the same thing.

Freud had several arguments by which he supported the repression theory of inaccessible contents, including the painful nature of the

unconscious ideas which come back into consciousness after the lifting of repression, which suggests that the forgetting was motivated; the phenomenal awareness of attempting to avoid or repel the idea during the therapeutic process of regaining awareness of the idea; resistance to therapy as an interpersonal manifestation of repression; and the ability of psychoanalysis to lift the repression and thereby liberate the idea into consciousness:

> It is by no means impossible for the product of unconscious activity to pierce into consciousness, but a certain amount of exertion is needed for this task. When we try to do it in ourselves, we become aware of a distinct feeling of repulsion which must be overcome, and when we produce it in a patient we get the most unquestionable signs of what we call his resistance to it. So we learn that the unconscious idea is excluded from consciousness by living forces which oppose themselves to its reception, while they do not object to other ideas, the foreconscious ones. Psycho-analysis leaves no room for doubt that the repulsion from unconscious ideas is only provoked by the tendencies embodied in their contents. (1912/1958, p. 264)

However, Freud eventually realized that not all mental processes that are inaccessible to consciousness are repressed. This revision was forced upon Freud in attempting to resolve various paradoxes that beset his early theory. The most basic problem was that the patient's repressing activity—for example, his or her defenses and resistance to therapy—usually remains inaccessible to the patient's awareness. But according to Freud's early account, it is consciousness itself that is attempting to defend itself by pushing away the painful content, so the repressing activity is an activity of consciousness and should be conscious. But that, of course, would defeat the point of the act of repression. (The philosophical version of this problem is the "paradox of self-deception"; if I am deceiving myself, how can I not be aware of what I myself am doing, and thereby undo the deceit?) One obvious move is to suggest that the act of repressing is itself repressed, but then, it seems, that act (i.e., the act of repressing the original act of repression) should be conscious, but it is not. Adding yet another act of repression that makes the earlier act of repression unconscious leads to an infinite regress. Freud's solution was to create a new "structural" account of the mind in terms of ego and id to replace his earlier "topographic" account in terms of consciousness and the unconscious.

Thus, in *The Ego and the Id* (Freud, 1923/1961), Freud abandoned the thesis that inaccessibility implies repression and extended the

inaccessible unconscious—exclusive of the preconscious—to a new category of states that are not repressed, including the ego's defenses by which other states are repressed. Thus, the unconscious turns out to include some nondynamically unconscious states that cannot be brought into consciousness by lifting of repression but must be inferred some other way. This development of the theory reveals that Freud himself did not see repression as definitional or fundamental to unconscious status, even leaving aside preconscious states.

Here is Freud's vivid description of this paradoxical situation and what it meant for his theory:

> In the further course of psycho-analytic work, however, even these distinctions have proved to be inadequate and, for practical purposes, insufficient. This has become clear in more ways than one; but the decisive instance is as follows. We have formed the idea that in each individual there is a coherent organization of mental processes; and we call this his ego. It is to this ego that consciousness is attached; the ego controls the approaches to motility—that is, to the discharge of excitations into the external world; it is the mental agency which supervises all its own constituent processes, and which goes to sleep at night, though even then it exercises the censorship on dreams. From this ego proceed the repressions, too, by means of which it is sought to exclude certain trends in the mind not merely from consciousness but also from other forms of effectiveness and activity. In analysis these trends which have been shut out stand in opposition to the ego, and the analysis is faced with the task of removing the resistances which the ego displays against concerning itself with the repressed. Now we find during analysis that, when we put certain tasks before the patient, he gets into difficulties; his associations fail when they should be coming near the repressed. We then tell him that he is dominated by a resistance; but he is quite unaware of the fact, and, even if he guesses from his unpleasurable feelings that a resistance is now at work in him, he does not know what it is or how to describe it. Since, however, there can be no question but that this resistance emanates from his ego and belongs to it, we find ourselves in an unforeseen situation. We have come upon something in the ego itself which is also unconscious, which behaves exactly like the repressed—that is, which produces powerful effects without itself being conscious and which requires special work before it can be made conscious. From the point of view of analytic practice, the consequence of this discovery is that we land in endless obscurities and difficulties if we keep to our habitual forms of expression and try, for instance, to derive neuroses from a conflict between the conscious and the unconscious. We shall have to substitute

> for this antithesis another, taken from our insight into the structural conditions of the mind—the antithesis between the coherent ego and the repressed which is split off from it. (1923/1961, p. 17)

Freud's resolution of the paradox of repression was simply to accept that some mental states are capable of being inaccessible to consciousness without their being repressed by consciousness, and that the ego's defensive activities are among these. Once Freud was forced to distinguish between repressed and nonrepressed inaccessible contents, he could have gone on to carefully reformulate his entire theory of unconscious processes with this distinction in mind. Instead, he seems to have thrown up his hands at the seeming inelegance of this development. He replaced his "topographical" conscious–preconscious–unconscious model of the mind with a new "structural" ego–id–super-ego conceptualization in which the distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness is not as central and cuts across mental agencies. In fact, Freud never even coined a term to refer to the class of inaccessible but not repressed ego processes—a domain now loosely known as the "cognitive unconscious," and one in which issues of regulation of representations' accessibility and inaccessibility to consciousness have indeed proved to be central. Here is Freud's exasperated statement regarding the addition of this class of unconscious states to the already postulated preconscious and repressed unconscious in response to the paradox of repression:

> For our conception of the unconscious, however, the consequences of our discovery are even more important….We recognize that the unconscious does not coincide with the repressed; it is still true that all that is repressed is unconscious, but not all that is unconscious is repressed. A part of the ego, too--and Heaven knows how important a part--may be unconscious, undoubtedly is unconscious. And this unconscious belonging to the ego is not latent like the preconscious; for if it were, it could not be activated without becoming conscious and the process of making it conscious would not encounter such great difficulties. When we find ourselves thus confronted by the necessity of postulating a third unconscious, which is not repressed, we must admit that the characteristic of being unconscious begins to lose significance for us. It becomes a quality which can have many meanings, a quality which we are unable to make, as we should have hoped to do, the basis of far-reaching and inevitable conclusions. (1923/1961, pp. 17–18)

This last sentence could not be more incorrect. In failing to systematically develop the nonrepressed but inaccessible unconscious, Freud created a divide between the psychoanalytic unconscious and the later cognitive science unconscious (Eagle, 1986; Kihlstrom, 1987). Indeed, one might muse that Freud's reaction here could represent a scientific misjudgment of historic dimensions, analogous to the Greeks failing to develop calculus because they could not make sense of calculating the limit of an infinite progression. In discovering that defenses occurred automatically outside of awareness and without the defenses themselves being repressed, Freud was in effect close to conceptualizing the unconscious process of inhibition of the spreading activation of alternative semantic meanings within the associative web, a major discovery of contemporary cognitive science (e.g., Anderson & Spellman, 1995; Collins & Loftus, 1975). It is exactly by focusing on such inaccessible but not repressed ego processes that contemporary cognitive psychologists have made the concept of unconscious mental states the basis of extremely "far-reaching and inevitable conclusions."

Although Freud failed to develop his theory in this direction, his comments in the above passage do make clear that the states that are the target of his argument that unconscious mental states exist encompass the nonrepressed cognitive unconscious that is the subject matter of cognitive science. His argument is aimed at the entire spectrum of unconscious mentality, not one type. Nor did his frustration with the theoretical complexities occasioned by the several varieties of unconscious mental states mislead him into downplaying the significance of the general distinction, for he concludes the above passage as follows: "Nevertheless we must beware of ignoring this characteristic, for the property of being conscious or not is in the last resort our one beacon-light in the darkness of depth-psychology" (1923/1961, p. 18).

One is tempted to ask: Why was Freud so seemingly disturbed by the conclusion that he drew from the paradox of repression that there must be unrepressed yet inaccessible unconscious mental states? This may seem a peculiar reaction to the discovery of further evidence that mental states are often unconscious, thus making the domain of the unconscious mental literally more "far-reaching." Having challenged the consciousness criterion by arguing for the existence of both preconscious and dynamically unconscious mental states, why should the fact that there is yet another type of unconscious state—inaccessible but not repressed—pose a problem? I believe there is an answer to this question, and that

the theoretical issues his conclusion raised for Freud went beyond the logical puzzles it posed for the concept of repression itself to the heart of his broader clinical theory.

From David Hume's (1739/1978) notion of the "vivacity" and consequent mental force of an idea through to Brentano's "proof" that the degree of consciousness and the degree of intensity of a representation coincide (see Chapter 8), the dominant tradition in philosophy of mind at Freud's time tended to hold that the intensity of a representation is identical to or systematically related to the consciousness of the state. Moreover, the intensity or degree of consciousness of a state was thought to be directly related to its causal potency in influencing the succession of states in the mind. For example, states to which we attend or which are otherwise vivid have more impact on our mental processes than those that we perceive only peripherally or faintly.

Very roughly speaking, preconscious states are temporarily inactive mentally and thus can be latent mental states with little causal potency when unconscious—or, Freud acknowledges, may even be construed as sheerly physiological dispositions. They get their mentational powers from their potential to enter consciousness when they become active. But the focus of Freud's theory was on the claim that there are unconscious mental states that have enormous active power to influence conscious processing even while unconscious. This was incompatible with the dominant view's doctrines that faintly conscious (let alone unconscious) states have little causal potency, and mental states naturally are or seek consciousness depending on their intensity. Against this tradition, Freud wanted to insist above all that unconscious mental states can be "*active and unconscious* at the same time" (1912/1958, p. 261).

Freud's way around this obstacle to his theory was to borrow and elaborate on Johann Herbart's (1816, 1824) idea that mental states interact dynamically. The basic idea is simple: the way that one can have an intense idea remain unconscious despite its natural tendency to seek consciousness and despite the fact that intensity and consciousness tend to go together is to have some other ideas actively and forcefully counteract the natural tendencies of the idea and form a counterweight to the idea's entry into consciousness. According to Herbart, some states actively inhibit the expression of others and even keep them from entering consciousness despite their vivacity. With a sufficient counterforce from repressing ideas, even an intense idea could be kept unconscious.

Freud's incorporation of the idea of repression into his theory was thus a solution specifically tailored to the problem of why intense ideas might remain unconscious even while they retain their intensity and thus—if their causal powers could somehow at least partly evade the repressing forces—their causal potency in influencing consciousness.

Defenses seem to be naturally unconscious and thus not to seek consciousness. Moreover, they seem often to be fully unconscious even while active. These conclusions posed a challenge to Freud's strategy for accounting for active unconscious states via mental dynamics, because they cast doubt on the pivotal background assumption that natural vivacity equals dynamic power. The recognition of inaccessible yet unrepressed ego defenses thus raised, however subtly and indirectly, the question of whether the theory of repression really needed to play the central role assigned to it by Freud. Freud was certainly sophisticated enough to recognize this potential threat. This is perhaps why, rather than welcoming yet one more form of unconscious mental state, Freud seems perplexed. His concern can be read between the lines of his discussion.

Freud's concern was a prescient one. The existence of inaccessible but not repressed mental contents opens up questions about the entire notion of repression as a significant determinant of mental functioning. The discoveries of modern cognitive science support a central role for automatic inhibitory cognitive processes in mental functioning rather than repression in the form described by Freud. The validity of even the central hypothesized examples of repression, such as forgetting memories of traumatic experiences, has been scientifically questioned. And so, a final reason for focusing on Freud's argument for unconscious mental states independent of any assumptions from Freud's theory of repression and the dynamic unconscious is simply that the repression theory, although finding echoes in current theories of schema activation and inhibition and self-manipulation of cognition, has been largely set aside in contemporary psychology (Eagle, 1986; Kihlstrom, 1987).

Freud Against the Philosophers on the "Vivacity" Argument

Freud is a consummate theoretician, and he fully understands that there is no way to establish the dynamic unconscious without first conquering the challenge of the descriptive unconscious. The only route to a theory

of repression is via a path through an initial argument that mental states can be unconscious in the descriptive sense.

Leaving aside issues of argument reconstruction and subtle matters of interpretation, if one wants to be quickly convinced that Freud does clearly take on the philosophers and to witness the degree of ridicule he accords their views, one need only examine Freud's various remarks about the common philosopher's argument (and many psychologists' argument as well) that the sorts of cases that Freud calls unconscious mental states are in fact no more than weak or unattended to or barely noticed conscious states. This defense of the consciousness criterion uses Hume's "vivacity" dimension and a similar "degree of intensity of consciousness" notion in Herbart and similar notions in many other philosophers of mind to challenge Freud's claims that the experiences of normal life reveal that mental states can be unconscious. Here are two passages in which Freud takes on this objection.

The first passage comes from relatively early in Freud's psychoanalytic career in his 1909 case study of a little boy, "little Hans," who has a horse phobia. Freud attempts to demonstrate the existence in Hans of an Oedipus complex that will explain his phobia (I explore in a separate work [Wakefield, in pressa] the degree to which Freud succeeds in doing so). In the course of the case analysis, Freud considers little Hans's statement, after seeing his baby sister Hanna in the bath, that she has a penis ("widdler" in Hans's vernacular) but that it is still very small. Freud reports that he is aware of other boys who have had a similar reaction to seeing their sister's bodies, and he argues that this denial of the reality that there is no penis there is an expression of castration anxiety. He adds the following footnote, managing to parlay his discussion of widdlers into fodder for his attack on Cartesians:

> Why was it that these young enquirers did not report what they really saw—namely, that there was no widdler there? In little Hans's case,…he had arrived at the general proposition that every animate object, in contradistinction to inanimate ones, possesses a widdler….He was now utterly incapable of surrendering what he had achieved merely on the strength of this single observation made upon his little sister. He therefore made a judgement that in that instance also there was a widdler present, only that it was still very small….
>
> We can go a step further in vindicating little Hans's honour. As a matter of fact, he was behaving no worse than a philosopher of the school of

> Wundt. In the view of that school, consciousness is the invariable characteristic of what is mental, just as in the view of little Hans a widdler is the indispensable criterion of what is animate. If now the philosopher comes across mental processes whose existence cannot but be inferred, but about which there is not a trace of consciousness to be detected—for the subject, in fact, knows nothing of them, although it is impossible to avoid inferring their existence—then, instead of saying that they are unconscious mental processes, he calls them semi-conscious. The widdler's still very small! (Freud, 1909/1955a, n. 3, p. 11)

Freud argues that it is an absurd denial of reality for little Hans to insist that his sister has a widdler. He explains this irrational denial as driven by the attempt to protect from falsification a general theory the boy has formulated about widdlers, by denying the observed facts. Freud then argues that by analogy, the Cartesian who is confronted by a case of a plainly and completely unconscious content and who argues that the content must have some slight degree of consciousness associated with it and so is really conscious, is equally denying the facts in order to protect the Cartesian theory of the mental. The argument Freud offers here has nothing to do with repression or the dynamic unconscious. It is an argument directed purely at countering the Cartesian denial of descriptively unconscious mental states.

The second passage, from *The Ego and the Id*, was written during a later period of Freud's mature theorizing:

> Some investigators, who do not refuse to recognize the facts of psycho-analysis but who are unwilling to accept the unconscious, find a way out of the difficulty in the fact, which no one contests, that in consciousness (regarded as a phenomenon) it is possible to distinguish a great variety of gradations in intensity or clarity. Just as there are processes which are very vividly, glaringly, and tangibly conscious, so we also experience others which are only faintly, hardly even noticeably conscious; those that are most faintly conscious are, it is argued, the ones to which psycho-analysis wishes to apply the unsuitable name 'unconscious'. These too, however (the argument proceeds), are conscious or 'in consciousness', and can be made fully and intensely conscious if sufficient attention is paid to them.
>
> …The reference to gradations of clarity in consciousness is in no way conclusive and has no more evidential value than such analogous statements as: 'There are so very many gradations in illumination—from the most glaring and dazzling light to the dimmest glimmer—therefore there

> is no such thing as darkness at all'; or, 'There are varying degrees of vitality, therefore there is no such thing as death.' Such statements may in a certain way have a meaning, but for practical purposes they are worthless. This will be seen if one tries to draw particular conclusions from them, such as, 'there is therefore no need to strike a light', or, 'therefore all organisms are immortal'. Further, to include 'what is unnoticeable' under the concept of 'what is conscious' is simply to play havoc with the one and only piece of direct and certain knowledge that we have about the mind. And after all, a consciousness of which one knows nothing seems to me a good deal more absurd than something mental that is unconscious. (Freud, 1923/1961, n. 1, p. 16)

This argument, too, has nothing to do thus far with repression or the dynamic unconscious. Freud has confronted the "vivacity" objection exclusively on the battlefield of the descriptive unconscious, with arguments that are not in any way about repression or the dynamic unconscious. If Freud was not arguing separately with the Cartesian philosophers and psychologists about the general question of the existence of unconscious mental states quite independently of issues over the existence of repression and a dynamic unconscious, there would be no need for such passages. If it was not a serious theoretical preoccupation, there would be no need to revisit the issue over decades.

After Freud has finished in the passage above attacking those who deny the descriptive unconscious on purely descriptive grounds, he then brings in some additional phenomena from the dynamic-unconscious domain as further evidence:

> Finally, this attempt to equate what is unnoticed with what is unconscious is obviously made without taking into account the dynamic conditions involved, which were the decisive factors in forming the psychoanalytic view. For it ignores two facts: first, that it is exceedingly difficult and requires very great effort to concentrate enough attention on something unnoticed of this kind; and secondly, that when this has been achieved the thought which was previously unnoticed is not recognized by consciousness, but often seems entirely alien and opposed to it and is promptly disavowed by it. Thus, seeking refuge from the unconscious in what is scarcely noticed or unnoticed is after all only a derivative of the preconceived belief which regards the identity of the psychical and the conscious as settled once and for all. (Freud, 1923/1961, n. 1, p. 16)

Freud argues that if simply failing to attend to unnoticed conscious states was being mistaken for unconscious mental states, then, first, that would be easy to rectify simply by attending to those states, whereas sometimes it is not easy. And, second, there would be no inherent problem in recognizing one's own conscious content when one did succeed in attending to it, but sometimes there is such a problem. Even here, Freud does not mention repression or rely on the theory of repression. Rather, he relies on empirical phenomena regarding the difficulty of bringing some inferred mental contents into consciousness as considerations against the vivacity objection to the descriptive unconscious. No doubt Freud leaves these considerations for last because they are the factual claims that a Cartesian might be most likely to dispute. In any event, Freud uses these facts to defend the existence of the descriptive unconscious as much as to point beyond it to the dynamic unconscious and ultimately to the postulation of repression. But here he is directing his argument at those "investigators, who do not refuse to recognize the facts of psychoanalysis but who are unwilling to accept the unconscious," by which, the text that follows indicates, he primarily means that they refuse to accept the descriptive unconscious (e.g., by accepting dispositionalist or split-off consciousness accounts of purportedly unconscious mentation).

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud also takes a moment to muse about the possibility of submitting to the Cartesians and relinquishing his premise that there exist descriptively unconscious mental states and instead allowing the states in question to be considered "psychoid" nonmental brain tracts instead:

> [W]hy do we not rather, instead of this, remain in agreement with the philosophers and, in a consistent way, distinguish the Pcs. as well as the Ucs. from the conscious psychical? The philosophers would then propose that the Pcs. and the Ucs. should be described as two species or stages of the 'psychoid', and harmony would be established. But endless difficulties in exposition would follow; and the one important fact, that these two kinds of 'psychoid' coincide in almost every other respect with what is admittedly psychical, would be forced into the background. (1923/1961, p. 15)

There thus can be no doubt that Freud was concerned with making an argument for the descriptive unconscious over the course of his psychoanalytic career. He plainly portrays himself as offering two different sorts of arguments, one set of arguments for the descriptive unconscious and,

building on the presupposition of a descriptive unconscious, another set of arguments for the dynamic unconscious. What I hope to show is that the relatively superficial arguments for the descriptive unconscious in the above kinds of passages are accompanied by a deeper and more systematic philosophical argument that mental states can be unconscious.

Freud as Philosopher of Cognitive Science

A further, more pragmatic, problem with focusing on repression in understanding Freud's argument for unconscious mental states is that this divorces Freud's account from its potential relevance to contemporary cognitive science. The cognitive science view is that much psychological processing routinely goes on outside of awareness without the influence of repression. Indeed, the most common objection to construing Freud as a philosopher of cognitive science is that Freud is primarily concerned with mental states that are unconscious due to repression, whereas modern views of the "cognitive unconscious" rarely consider repression. Moreover, Freud's name is inextricably linked to the theory that when mental states are repressed to keep painful mental contents out of consciousness, the resultant unconscious ideas are often primitive in nature, interact according to nonrational "primary process" laws, are often sexual in content, and are at the root of neuroses as emotional energies tied to repressed contents find their way back into consciousness as symptoms. Because these Freudian doctrines have no necessary place in contemporary cognitive science, Freudian and cognitive science theories are often considered opposed.

However, these differences over issues of psychological theory linked to repression do not imply a difference over the broader conceptualization of the mental that forms the shared framework for both theories. In my view, my construal of Freud's argument for unconscious mental states locates him as an early philosopher of cognitive science. Freud's contributions to the foundations of cognitive science can be excavated without getting hopelessly bogged down in the extraneous theoretical issues posed by Freud's psychological theorizing because Freud addresses the issue of whether mental states—by which in this context he specifically means cognitions—can be unconscious in a way congenial to cognitive science and independent of his answers to other theoretical questions such as what causes a mental state to remain unconscious, how a mental state operates when it is unconscious, what sorts of mental contents are

likely to be unconscious, and the neurosogenic effects of some unconscious mental states. Freud's argument for the existence of unconscious mental states can be reconstructed in a way that would not have to be changed even if repression did not exist, and even if, as some recent cognitive scientists have suggested, we were entirely to dispense with the dynamic unconscious (O'Brien, 2002). The type of analysis provided here thus clarifies the link between Freud and cognitive science.

Conclusion

Freud's argument for unconscious mental states is often claimed to depend on his arguments for a dynamic, repressed unconscious. In this chapter, I have disputed that idea. I have attempted to open a space for an analysis of a strand of Freud's argument for unconscious mental states that is independent of the dynamic unconscious and engages philosophers on their own turf of the descriptive unconscious.

In an encyclopedia article Freud wrote to explain the basics of psychoanalysis to a larger public at a time when he was in his theoretical prime, in a section titled "The Corner-Stones of Psychoanalytic Theory," Freud says: "The assumption that there are unconscious mental processes, the recognition of the theory of resistance and repression, the appreciation of the importance of sexuality and of the Oedipus complex–these constitute the principal subject-matter of psycho-analysis and the foundations of its theory" (1923/1955b, p. 247). Contrary to the usual notion that there are two cornerstones, the sexual and repression theories, Freud carefully distinguishes the claim that there are unconscious mental states from the theory of repression and resistance, therefore listing three rather than two cornerstones. Each of the cornerstones rests on the prior ones; repression and resistance make sense only after one has established that there can exist unconscious mental states, and the Oedipal theory of neurosogenesis only makes sense once one has a theory of repression. I follow Freud here in separating his foundational philosophical argument for unconscious mental states from the bulk of his theorizing about repression and sexuality. This book is concerned only with Freud's defense of the first cornerstone and not the other two. (For an analysis of Freud's argument for the third cornerstone, the Oedipal theory, see my *The Day the Horse Fell Down* and *Bed Time* [Wakefield, in pressa, in pressb).

As noted in the Introduction, my attempt to provide an understanding of Freud's importance in the history of the philosophy of mind should not be mistaken for a general "defense" of Freud at a time when his overall reputation is suffering greatly. As should now be apparent, this work is not an apologia for Freud in any generic sense. The unconscious in the descriptive sense in which Freud defends it and in which I shall examine it can exist without there being any dynamic unconscious, so this book's entire discussion is neutral on Freudian clinical theory. As far as the present analysis goes, Freud could turn out to be an important philosopher of mind but a failed clinical theoretician. However, this analysis will hopefully locate Freud's clinical theorizing within a broader intellectual and philosophical framework and provide insight into the depth and subtlety of Freud's thinking in the philosophical domain, providing perspective that is lacking in some recent attacks on Freud.

I conclude that the target of the present analysis can be the descriptive unconscious—the "not occurrently conscious"—consistent with Freud's intentions. Thus, *I use the term "unconscious" in what follows to refer simply to the property of a mental state not being conscious.* The term as I use it has no further theoretical implications and presupposes nothing specifically Freudian. I am concerned only with Freud's thinking about unconscious mental states in the same generic sense that philosophers of his time thought about them and philosophers today still think about them, without any additional theoretical baggage presupposed.

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