

# The Interpretive Turn

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## *Interpretation as Explanation*

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By turning the Platonic parts of the soul into conversational partners for one another, Freud did for the variety of interpretations of each person's past what the Baconian approach to science and philosophy did for the variety of descriptions of the universe as a whole. He let us see alternative narratives and alternative vocabularies as instruments for change, rather than as candidates for a correct depiction of how things are in themselves.

—Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection"

A concern to distinguish between explanation and understanding harks back to a time when, some thought, humanistic inquiry needed to be made safe from positivism. The distinction is one between analyses conforming to the terms and laws of a causal-mechanistic idiom and analyses couched in the language of intentions and human significance. Explanations explain by subsuming specific cases under laws; understanding proceeds by making plain the rules and relations in which activities are embedded, and which give them their significance qua human actions.

An explanation of a particular car radiator's cracking might consist of citing the water in the radiator, a drop in ambient temperature, how water so confined reacts in such conditions, and so forth. An understanding of the cracked radiator might plausibly involve, *inter alia*, an appreciation of inconveniences caused, acceptance of an excuse for lateness, or tolerance of a bad mood.

This way of framing the distinction between explanation and understanding has, as an important consequence, that reasons *cannot* count as explanations of action. They cannot because reasons do not constitute the appropriate sort of causal antecedents. Reasons seem

too tied to specific contextual concerns and to the intentional idiom; they lack the law-like relations to actions demanded by explanation. Yet, to acquiesce to an exclusion of reasons from the realm of explanations leaves mysterious our practice of citing reasons as causes.<sup>1</sup>

Psychoanalysis provides, I argue, an important test case against which to evaluate the viability of the explanation-understanding distinction. For, if the *Naturwissenschaften* are to provide explanations and the *Geisteswissenschaften* are to generate understanding, then psychoanalytic practice, for one, belongs to both while fitting neither.<sup>2</sup> The distinction between explanation and understanding—between causal-nomological analyses and those that promote comprehension—is challenged by any discipline, such as psychoanalysis, that promises both understanding and change.

There is a further important respect in which psychoanalysis resists classification within the traditional dichotomy. On the one hand, psychoanalysis is charged with being unscientific by virtue of failing to satisfy criteria for scientific explanations. On the other hand, although some theorists emphasize psychoanalysis as an interpretative strategy, this characterization is seriously incomplete. For a chief goal of this practice is the change, and not just (or even primarily) the understanding of behavior.

What is important is that psychoanalytic practice traffics primarily in interpretations. Conventional wisdom links interpretation with the understanding of behavior—the reasons and rules, articulated or not, that provide behavior with its meaning for ourselves and others.<sup>3</sup> As a result, I maintain, any linking of interpretations of behavior to

changes of behavior undercuts the either-or of explanation-understanding.

In opposition not only to the explanation-understanding distinction but also to many standard explications of explanation, I term psychoanalytic explanations “narrative explanations.”<sup>4</sup> My suggestion, building on the work of Roy Schafer, Donald Spence, and others, construes psychoanalytic explanations as a type of historical narrative. Specifically, they are *reconstructions* by reemplotment of an analysand’s narrative, tellings and retellings of a particular tale.<sup>5</sup>

By identifying three components of the psychoanalytic process—the self-understanding of an analysand, the reemplotment offered by a psychotherapist, and the implications of an analysand’s acceptance of such a reemplotment—I suggest how psychoanalytic explanations enable change. What is novel about explanation so conceived is that it involves no relation of specific cases to general rules; it is not explanation by subsumption. The therapeutic process melds explanation, interpretation, and change, on the account I outline, in fundamentally the same way that Thomas Kuhn’s well-known account of theory-change in science involves a rejection of law-governed explanations of such changes.<sup>6</sup>

In the first part of this essay I develop a conception of psychoanalytic explanation as a type of historical narrative. The second part examines how this model links interpretation with behavioral change.

<sup>4</sup>In a series of papers I have attempted to defend this notion as appropriate in, at least, history, anthropology, and psychoanalysis. See Paul A. Roth, “Narrative Explanation: The Case of History,” *History and Theory* 27 (1988):1-13, “How Narratives Explain,” *Social Research* 56 (1989):449-78, and “Truth in Interpretation: The Case of Psychoanalysis,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 21 (1991):175-95. I am extremely sympathetic to the views on causality, and much of his account of theory in psychoanalysis, expressed in Richard Miller’s *Fact and Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). There is much I find congenial in Ronald Giere’s *Explaining Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), as well, though I share neither Miller’s nor Giere’s realist proclivities.

<sup>5</sup>See Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), and his *Content of the Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Donald Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth* (New York: Norton, 1982); Michael Roth, *Psycho-Analysis as History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); P. A. Roth, “Truth in Interpretation.”

<sup>6</sup>I want to emphasize that what follows represents only a partial explication of the psychoanalytic process. A fuller account would need to examine factors relating to the interaction between analysand and analyst. In addition, I ignore throughout the vexed issues of the therapeutic efficacy of psychoanalysis and its status vis-à-vis other forms of therapy.

<sup>1</sup>Unlike the way in which debate has developed in, e.g., action theory in analytic philosophy, philosophical debate in the philosophy of history and the philosophy of social science characteristically contrasts the giving of reasons and the giving of causes. For reviews of recent debates in this area, see David Braybrooke, *Philosophy of Social Science* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1987) and Alexander Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1988). Rosenberg has a particularly good discussion of why “folk psychology” fails to satisfy demands for explanation. Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), and K.-O. Apel, *Understanding and Explanation: A Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984) offer good overviews of this debate.

<sup>2</sup>Similar points apply, I would argue, to the practice of most social sciences. However, it is particularly acute in the case of psychoanalysis, and that is my focus here.

<sup>3</sup>The assimilation of interpretation to understanding, and so as a notion that contrasts with that of explanation, animates Charles Taylor’s well-known essay “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” in *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Indeed, that anthology celebrates the contrast I wish to call into question.

## I

Psychoanalysis, though conceived by Freud as an incipient science, faces at least two challenges to this self-conception. One challenge is to the scientific aspirations of the discipline. The specifics of this challenge vary, but common to the otherwise divergent critics, for example, Karl Popper and Adolf Grünbaum, is the complaint that psychoanalytic procedure fails to satisfy an acceptable model of scientific explanation. That is, these critics accede to Freud's assimilation of psychoanalysis to a natural science model. The problem here, the complaint runs, is that those employing psychoanalytic methods either do not formulate explanations that actually are scientific (Popper), or do form explanations, but ones that the available data invariably do not sustain (Grünbaum). In either case, all claims of psychoanalysis to scientific legitimacy are held to be without warrant.

A second, seemingly sympathetic, attempt to examine the practice of psychoanalysis poses a different challenge. On this account, psychoanalysis constitutes a "depth hermeneutics," a method for interpreting human action. The aim of psychoanalysis qua hermeneutics is to uncover unacknowledged but intentional contents of actions of an agent. Psychoanalytic explanations so construed reveal the meaning of action—its intentional content—and so contributes to an understanding of action, not to its explanation.

But this account, as Paul Ricoeur and Habermas acknowledge, ill accounts for the presumed therapeutic efficacy of psychoanalysis. Habermas, for example, although he argues that psychoanalysis is misunderstood if given a mechanistic model, can do no more than ascribe the therapeutic efficacy of such explanations to the powers of self-reflection. "Depth hermeneutic understanding takes over the function of explanation. It proves its explanatory powers in self-reflection, in which an objectivation that is both understood and explained is also overcome."<sup>7</sup> But left undeveloped are why the Habermasian conditions of "self-reflection" manage to function as conditions of change.

Ricoeur insists that any satisfactory account of psychoanalytic explanation must include an account of the mechanism of change; however, he has no such account to offer.<sup>8</sup> The hermeneutic stress on

the narrative features of psychoanalytic explanation aggravates rather than resolves the question of how such narrations influence behavior (on the assumption that they sometimes do).

Some theorists respond to the charge that psychoanalytic explanations are not scientific by suggesting a different, and specifically historical, model for such inquiry. The comparison between psychoanalytic practice and history has been suggested by a number of writers.<sup>9</sup> What distinguishes Roy Schafer's work, in this regard, is his systematic reworking of Freud's mechanistic terminology into an idiom better suited for other, more history-like, explanations.

Indeed, his "translations" from conventional psychological accounts into his "action language" terminology emphasizes the parallels between psychoanalytic practice and humanistic inquiry.

The discipline of psychoanalysis faces problems that are much more like those of the humanities than those of the natural sciences. These are the problems of perspective, subjective evidence and inference, and the reliability and validity of interpretation. Specifically, the discipline must develop an ordered account of the doings of human beings in a special kind of relationship into which only language-using, historically oriented human beings can enter—the psychoanalytic.<sup>10</sup>

The project . . . is one by means of which psychoanalysts may hope to speak simply, systematically, and nonmechanistically of human activities in general and of the psychoanalytic relationship and its therapeutic effects in particular. (p. 7)

For Schafer, psychoanalytic explanations offer reasons for the analysand's behavior which reveal the analysand as agent, that is, a purposive actor. The problem is learning why analysands typically disown responsibility for their desires and behavior.

But the suggested assimilation of psychoanalysis to history is odd in at least one major respect. On the one hand, Schafer claims that

<sup>9</sup>See, e.g., discussions in Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*; Samuel Novey, *The Second Look: The Reconstruction of Personal History in Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968); Ricoeur, "The Question of Proof"; Michael Sherwood, *The Logic of Explanation in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Academic Press, 1969); and Spence, *Narrative Truth*. Roy Schafer also belongs in this group; I discuss his work in detail below. Miller, in *Fact and Method*, sketches a suggestive account of how theory functions to guide research in history and in psychoanalysis.

<sup>10</sup>Roy Schafer, *Language and Insight* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 7. Further references to this work are given by page citations in text.

<sup>7</sup>Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon, 1968), p. 272.

<sup>8</sup>Paul Ricoeur, "The Question of Proof in Freud's Psychoanalytic Writings," in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Charles Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon, 1978), p. 201.

the psychoanalytic case history is a more comprehensive, a better integrated account of biographical data than the account that an analysand offers (p. 57). Yet, on the other hand, Schafer insists that psychoanalytic inquiry is fundamentally a particular type of *retelling*. "Every psychological theory is a narrative development. It is a narrative development, not of theory-free or prenarrational events, but of events that have already and necessarily been rendered in the terms of one or another theory or narrative strategy, even if only incompletely and inconsistently."<sup>11</sup> But if the key to a psychoanalytic retelling is not in the acquisition of new or additional facts, or even a checking of alleged events, in what respect is it a more consistent and complete history?

The contribution is thematic. A psychoanalytic retelling interprets analysands as responsible for their lives in ways in which they have not previously acknowledged. Scattered happenings in life are united by their interpretation as choices on the part of the patient. Gain is achieved by *reemplotting* a life story.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, in the course of personal transformation, analysands discover, acknowledge, and transcend their infantile categories and their defects as life-historians and world-makers. They see that they have been not the vehicles of a blind repetition compulsion, but the perpetrators of repetition at all costs. They reclaim their disclaimed actions, including their so-called mechanisms of defense, and in so doing, they revise them and are in a position to limit their use of them or in some instances to discontinue using them altogether. (p. 23)

The emphasis in Schafer's account falls not on the facts cited in a narration, but on the categories by which the narrative is formed. What counts is how significance is assigned and how connections are depicted; the documenting of events is not (characteristically, anyway) at issue.

Schafer contends that an analytic encounter is "second-order history" that has as its events, its data, the initial analytic dialogue.<sup>13</sup> The psychoanalytic enterprise seeks integration of the first-order his-

<sup>11</sup>Roy Schafer, *Narrative Actions in Psychoanalysis* (Worcester, Mass.: Clark University Press, 1981), p. 24.

<sup>12</sup>Although I do not discuss the point in this essay, I do not assume that all aspects of one's life are *equally* open to reemplotment or interpretation. How evidence and other factors function to constrain interpretations is an issue I hope to address in later work.

<sup>13</sup>Roy Schafer, "Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue," in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 49.

tory—the story told by the analysand—by second-order reflection, that is, considering the categories by which that history is initially told.

In this regard, Schafer distinguishes between the primary and the "second" reality constituted in the analytic situations. The first or primary reality is the life history as an analysand tells it. In the second reality, however, "events or phenomena are viewed from the standpoint of repetitive recreation of infantile, family-centered situations bearing on sex, aggression, and other such matters."<sup>14</sup> This is a narrative that invokes the distinctively psychoanalytic categories for retelling the analysand's reports. Schafer also refers to this as the patient's "psychic reality." "Psychic reality" refers to subjective meaning, especially unconscious meaning. Its usefulness resides in its reminding us that psychoanalytic explanation depends on our knowing what an event, action or object means to the subject; it is the specifically psychoanalytic alternative to descriptive classification by a behavioristic observer.<sup>15</sup> It claims to be "more coherent and inclusive" and by its use "one achieves a narrative redescription of reality."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Schafer, insists, "each narrative establishes a reality of its own."<sup>17</sup>

Speaking of a narrative establishing "a reality of its own" involves no *recherché* sense of "reality." As I argue below, a person instantiates his or her own sense of their history in everyday actions. For example, possessing particular anxieties or fears might cause a person to flee or avoid certain situations or involvements. Relief from these anxieties, in turn, opens new possibilities for action. One cannot undertake to reach the Indies by sailing west from Spain until one has certain beliefs about the shape of the earth, and so forth. Similar considerations apply, I suggest, to much more mundane actions and beliefs.

Since events are emplotted relative to developmental and affective states, their genuineness is not a function of some-simple correspondence to fact, but of faithfulness to the second reality, to the experience of the patient. As Novey emphasizes, genuineness is determined by what may be called "affective correspondence."<sup>18</sup> What

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup>Roy Schafer, *A New Language for Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 89.

<sup>16</sup>Schafer, "Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue," p. 46.

<sup>17</sup>Schafer, *Narrative Actions*, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup>Novey, *The Second Look*, p. 148.

makes an interpretation compelling and convincing is critically dependent on how events are emplotted in the analysand's emotional life.

Psychoanalytic explanations, construed as historical narratives, are characterized not by fact finding but by a deliberate choice of narrative strategy. The point is not that interpretations are indifferent to the events of one's life, but that interpretations are not determined by them. Indeed, Schafer contends that "from the analytic point of view, there is, strictly speaking, no independent biographical material that counts."<sup>19</sup> Biographical material counts not "independently," but dependently, that is, in the context of answering some question, some problem confronted in analysis.

Interpretations are retellings fashioned by altering the categories for organizing and relating events. If one imagines the moments of a life arranged chronicle-like, there is no assignment of significance to these events apart from first learning how some of them are bound into the story one tells of this life. A missed appointment may be a lost opportunity, or it may be a successful avoidance of unwanted scrutiny. In addition, each characterization has its own attendant reasons, and so leads to yet other stories.

The "data" for the reconstruction of a history of one's emotional life is just the tale told by analysand. "To the extent that the debate over therapeutic action is carried on in terms of 'evidence', to that extent is it meaningless. The debate should be conducted in terms of the advantages of one narrative strategy over another."<sup>20</sup> In this sense, the history of an analysis is a record of successive retellings of events.

This emphasis on the way the story is told, and not the verification of statements, underlines elements common to historical, psychoanalytic, and fictional narratives. Schafer's views here follow Hayden White's discussion of the "emplotment" of historical narratives. White argues that how a historical happening is to be depicted—emplotted—is not itself a question of fact. What happened to Napoleon at Waterloo has no intrinsic valence as, for example, tragic. White maintains that it is in the writing of a narrative that the facts become part of a particular scheme of development that is, for example, tragic or comic. The choice of narrative form is the historian's

<sup>19</sup>Roy Schafer, "The Appreciative Analytic Attitude and the Construction of Multiple Histories," *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* 2 (1979): 3–24, quoted from p. 23.

<sup>20</sup>Schafer, *Narrative Actions*, p. 40.

doing. This choice of emplotment is the fictive element in an historical narrative.

But historical situations do not have built into them intrinsic meanings in the way that literary texts do. Historical situations are not *inherently* tragic, comic, or romantic. . . . How a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation.<sup>21</sup>

White's thesis more generally is that it is by use of culturally familiar modes of emplotment that historical narratives explain changes. The different literary forms are just matrices for ordering and structuring events.<sup>22</sup>

Emplotment involves a point of view. Each point of view defines a set of relevant events and their relation. "But transference and resistance themselves may be viewed as narrative structures. Like all other narrative structures, they prescribe a point of view from which to tell about the events of analysis in a regulated and therefore coherent fashion. The events themselves are constituted only through one or another systematic account of them."<sup>23</sup> The analysis of transference is thus conceived not as "a window on the past"<sup>24</sup> but as a story jointly made.

White characterizes the challenge to psychoanalytic practice, conceived in this way, as one of convincing "the patient to 'reemplot' his whole life history in such a way as to change the *meaning* of those events for him and their *significance* for the economy of the whole set of events that make up his life."<sup>25</sup> Both Schafer and White maintain that the vision of reality that results from a choice of plot type is neither factual nor fictional.<sup>26</sup> It is not factual because there is no essential nature that events have. It is tragic or not on some telling of it. But the telling of it as tragedy is not a mere fiction; there is nothing false about events so represented.<sup>27</sup>

A chronicle of events is not a history of them, and it surely is no

<sup>21</sup>White, *Tropics*, p. 85.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 95–99.

<sup>23</sup>Schafer, "Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue," p. 32.

<sup>24</sup>Novey, *The Second Look*, p. 144.

<sup>25</sup>White, *Tropics*, p. 87.

<sup>26</sup>Schafer, *A New Language*, p. 56.

<sup>27</sup>See, esp., the first two essays in White, *Content of the Form*.

explanation. If all histories are emplotments of events, then, as odd as it may sound, the chief basis for accepting explanations is not their truth. There is no life of someone to be told *wie es eigentlich gewesen*; hence, histories of that life may be better or worse, relative to some purposes, but no history is *the true one*.<sup>28</sup>

Those who have studied the logic of psychoanalytic explanation reluctantly concede that interpretations need not be *true* in order to have beneficial effects.<sup>29</sup>

What is crucial, it appears, is the reconceptualization of the analysand's experience that the interpretation permits. Sherwood offers an interesting characterization of this point.

There seems to be a definite and very basic "rationalizing drive" in human experience, a need to see one's own behavior as forming a reasonable and coherent pattern. The adequate psychoanalytic narrative, by providing such a pattern, by giving reason for 'unreasonable' behavior, satisfies this need and thereby allays anxiety—a therapeutically valuable consequence. . . . The psychoanalytic explanation provides that patient with a handle, a lever by which behavioral change may be effected. Both these obvious therapeutic benefits—diminished anxiety and more realistic behavior—will result from a patient's acceptance of a psychoanalytic narrative, whether or not that narrative does in fact outline the true cause of the patient's neurotic behavior. Therapeutic efficacy, then, may be entirely unrelated to the truth of such narratives. It will depend solely upon the ability of the analyst to persuade the patient . . . to accept his narrative as being true; if this occurs, then the therapeutic benefits outlined above will be achieved.<sup>30</sup>

Sherwood puzzles why there need be no fundamental correspondence between events in a patient's life and the interpretation that has therapeutic effects. One part of this puzzle is how *any* interpretation leads to change; that I address below. A second part, the one most troubling to Sherwood, is how therapeutic efficacy of interpretations is disassociated from truth. One answer here is that no history offers the correspondence he seeks. Modes of emplotment are fictive in the sense that the significance given events, and the way of relating

<sup>28</sup>I argue this view in detail regarding historical and psychoanalytic interpretations in P. A. Roth, "Narrative Explanation," and "Truth in Interpretation."

<sup>29</sup>See, e.g., Sherwood, *The Logic of Explanation*, pp. 250–51; Novey, *The Second Look*, pp. 148–49.

<sup>30</sup>Sherwood, *The Logic of Explanation*, pp. 250–51.

them, is a consequence of the mode of telling. *All* histories are, to this extent, fictive.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, if verisimilitude is not to be had for historical narratives, then a response is available as well to some critics of the scientific status of psychoanalytic explanations. In particular, one of Grünbaum's most devastating criticisms of psychoanalytic explanation is based on Freud's claim that only veridical interpretations will have therapeutic efficacy. Freud held, as well, that a mark of veridicality is an analysand's acknowledgment of the verisimilitude of an interpretation. Grünbaum points out that this claim for veridicality as a necessary condition for therapeutic efficacy is simply unsubstantiated by any argument. There is no distinguishing between the claim that an interpretation has therapeutic effect because veridical and, for instance, the suggestion that a therapeutically beneficial intervention is merely an instance of the placebo effect.<sup>32</sup>

However, if the notion of "truth as correspondence" is not, for the reasons rehearsed above, germane to the therapeutic point, then criticisms such as Grünbaum's become irrelevant. That is, if psychoanalytic explanations constitute a type of history, a history providing, *inter alia*, an etiology of why one feels and does what one feels and does, then the bases for assessing such a history are going to have to be other than those on which Grünbaum, and Freud, insist. For the evaluating of a history is not like the evaluation of hypotheses in the natural sciences, and questions of verisimilitude do not always apply.

An analyst's judgment regarding the reality basis of an analysand's narration will doubtless influence the retelling that the analyst offers. "The history of psychic reality amounts to a special kind of narrative—what may be called *the psychoanalytic life history* . . . I emphasize that for psychoanalysis, one *tells* a history; one does not *have* a history. It is a history of something, however, a fabrication won't do" (pp. 181–82). But significance remains defined by what a person took to happen. (pp. 14–15)

What is of concern is how actions (including, for example, fantasies

<sup>31</sup>Given the sort of antirealism that is now commonplace in the philosophy of science, and given that interpretation is no less theory driven than explanation in science, there is nothing especially radical about my claims. I defend this type of antirealism regarding the interpretation of behavior in *Meaning and Method in the Social Sciences* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

<sup>32</sup>For a concise summary of Grünbaum's criticisms in his characteristically vigorous style, see his "Epistemological Liabilities of the Clinical Appraisal of Psychoanalytic Theory," *Notas* 14 (1980): 307–85, esp. 352–54.

and dreams) that at first seem puzzling, dissociated, or just happenings become part of a more complete and integrated history that reveals the analysand as agent, and so a locus of control and change.

The function of the therapeutic process is to resolve this tension between the past and the present and future. . . . The intent of the historian is not simply to assign cause and responsibility for events in the past but also to place them in a perspective which invites action in the present and the future. The intent is fully to accept responsibility and freedom to choose.<sup>33</sup>

The analyst qua historian is committed, from the outset, to creating a "revisionist" history of the analysand's life.

Psychoanalytic interpretation, on the account I am advocating, is a "reading" of the tale one tells about one's own life. This historicized view of the process of constructing one's biography is in keeping with the pragmatist maxim that anything real in its effects is to be counted as real.

Yet, Schafer misses the force of his own insight by concluding just that psychoanalysis, as a second-order history, is compatible with a number of different retellings of an analysand's first-order account. For, given that indefinitely many reconstructions may be possible, he sidesteps the issue of which account to favor. He does claim a special comprehensiveness for the psychoanalytic account. But why should comprehensiveness be persuasive to someone, indeed, so persuasive that an analysand makes the story his or her own? But by sketching what might constitute a reason for accepting a psychoanalytic explanation, I suggest as well how reemplotment causes change.

## II

Motivation to construe psychoanalysis as a physics of the unconscious arises from the desire to depict the process ultimately in mechanistic terms. Schafer, among others, understandably rails against the sort of hypostatization of the mental that this approach countenances. But if there is no physics of the mental such as Freud (and many of the heirs to his theory) imagined, then how is it possible for

some redescription of a life to effect change? In sketching a theory below that answers this question, I suggest that such an account makes a general or principled distinction between explanation and understanding irrelevant. For, if my account is plausible, it indicates how a change in the story one tells of oneself enables changes in actions—makes different behavior possible.

Schafer, in this regard, stresses the redescription as a reconceptualization of an analysand as agent rather than victim, as a doer and not as bystander. The life story so recast depicts the individual as responsible for what previously appeared to be happenings beyond the individual's control.

In another form, this question asks how any of this is changed, or changed for the better, by the construction of a Freudian life history and present subjective world.

. . . Under the influence of the psychoanalytic perspective, the analysand not only begins to live in another world but learns how to go on constructing it. It is a transformed world, a world with systematically interrelated vantage points or rules of understanding. It is a world of greater personal authority and acknowledged responsibility. (pp. 24-25)

Change is possible, Schafer asserts, because the analysand learns to "live in another world" and to "go on constructing" such a world. But, as noted before, Schafer gives no explanation for why a narrative offering "interrelated vantage points" or a tale of a world where one must acknowledge one's own responsibility should be attractive or persuasive. What requires identification is those advantages that might accrue to someone from a self-understanding of the sort Schafer proposes.

One way of specifying what advantages this approach offers is to attend to Schafer's remarks regarding "living in another world." These statements echo Thomas Kuhn's description of a paradigm shift. I propose to exploit this parallel in the following way. It is as an account of paradigms that I read Freud's famous discussion of psychoanalytic types, for instance, the "exception" and "criminality from a sense of guilt."<sup>34</sup> The "exception" is someone who suffers from some problem, for example, a congenital deformity, for which they are blameless, but by which they rationalize claims for special privileges, as if owed compensation for an injury.

<sup>34</sup>These are discussed in Freud's "Some Character-Types Met with in Psychoanalytic Work." Citations are from Philip Rieff, ed., *Character and Culture* (New York: Collier, 1963).

<sup>33</sup>Novey, *The Second Look*, p. 13.



The young man who believed himself watched over by a special providence had been in infancy the victim of an accidental infection from his wet-nurse, and had lived his whole later life on the "insurance-dole," as it were, of his claims to compensation, without having any idea on what he based those claims.<sup>35</sup>

Likewise, there is the person who commits criminal acts and so creates an actual criminal history in order to accommodate a prior sense of guilt.<sup>36</sup> It is in terms of a particular event or basic relation, for instance, unresolved feelings about an early injury or guilt related to the Oedipus complex (in classical Freudian theory, anyway), that subsequent understanding of oneself and one's relations to others are constructed or emplotted.

These are paradigms in the most straightforward sense of that ambiguous term, that is, models that serve as a problem-solving basis, as a model for normal interactions, in an individual's life. Psychoanalysis qua therapy seeks to identify what the details of an individual's paradigm happen to be, details that the individual is assumed to have repressed. "The practice of psychoanalysis is to replace etiolated derivatives by the original and fundamental."<sup>37</sup> This part of therapy constitutes a type of phenomenology.

But phenomenology is only descriptive. How does one move beyond "mere description" to change? My suggestion is that therapy, if successful, induces a paradigm shift, a shift to a different model for self-understanding. Schafer et al. prefer talk of reemplotting the significance of events in one's life. What this misses is the functional, the pragmatic role self-understanding has in guiding ongoing actions, one's ongoing interpretation of events. Difficulties arise not primarily in recollection, but when guiding assumptions engender too many anomalies, that is, experiences that cannot be reconciled with or accommodated to the story one lives by.

Novey remarks that "reconceptualizing his world, including his self percept, will eventuate in different modes of experiencing and feeling on the patient's part."<sup>38</sup> Schafer, in a related vein, views an interpretation of transference as an attempt to convince an analysand to abandon an unconsciously held paradigm.

The transference interpretation is an attempt to correct certain beliefs about self and others that the analysand has been holding fast against all evidence. The analysand has been holding these beliefs so fast that he or she gives every appearance of using them as methodological principles or principles of knowing. This is to say that, for the analysand, these beliefs must be taken as true if he or she is to be able to make judgments of claims about anything else, for nothing is more certain than they are. They serve as tests of what is true.<sup>39</sup>

In steadfastly and perspicaciously making transference interpretations, the analyst helps constitute new modes of experience and new experiences. This newness characterizes the experience of analytic transferences themselves. Unlike extraanalytic transferences, they can no longer be sheerly repetitive or merely new editions. Instead, they become repetitive new editions understood as such because defined as such by the simplifying and steadfast transference interpretations.<sup>40</sup>

Schafer imagines the cognitive change as effected by a metaphor, that is, by changed associations. But the key is that the Schaferian metaphors function by taking previous experiences and "organizing and implicitly rendering these constituents" in a new, less emotionally debilitating way.<sup>41</sup> "Thus, when one says, 'That's it exactly!' one is implicitly recognizing and announcing that one has found and accepted a new mode of experiencing one's self and one's world, which is to say, asserting a transformation of one's own subjectivity."<sup>42</sup> The transformation, I would like to say, is of the terms in which problems are posed. By reorganizing experiences, one discerns new patterns, and so different solutions become available.

Personal development recapitulates, on this scheme, Kuhn's account of revolutionary developments in natural science, and to much the same effect. For just as adopting a new scientific paradigm creates new options for engaging with the world, so too, I hypothesize, with a change of personal paradigm. Actions one could not previously undertake, or would not have thought to do, now appear as possibilities. One "lives in another world" if that world is free of, say, fears that dictated, in the world previously inhabited, how one needed to live.

<sup>35</sup>Rieff, *Character and Culture*, pp. 159-60.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 179-81.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>38</sup>Novey, *The Second Look*, p. 149.

<sup>39</sup>Roy Schafer, "The Interpretation of Transference and the Conditions for Loving," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 25 (1977): 335-62, quoted from p. 350.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 353.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 354.

It is Kuhn who taught us how to link *redescription* and change. By developing the analogy between a gestalt-switch and a change of paradigm, Kuhn insists that "though the world does not change with a change of paradigm, the scientist afterward works in a different world."<sup>43</sup> The world has changed because, in the case of Kuhnian revolutionary science, what is introduced is a new set of problems, new criteria for what counts as a solution to a problem, and new categories with which to describe and perceive the world.

Through the theories they embody, paradigms prove to be constitutive of the research activity. They are also, however, constitutive of science in other respects, and that is now the point. In particular, our most recent examples show that paradigms provide scientists not only with a map but also with some of the directions essential for map-making. In learning a paradigm the scientist acquires theory, methods, and standards together, usually in an inextricable mixture. Therefore, when paradigms change, there are usually significant shifts in the criteria determining the legitimacy both of problems and of proposed solutions.<sup>44</sup>

The changed categories are not, and this is the revolutionary point of Kuhn's own analysis, mere extensions of or developments from what came before. Scientific change is coming up with a different story to tell about things already known.

Scientific revolutions are precipitated, on Kuhn's analysis, when an accepted theory becomes overburdened by anomalous events, that is, occurrences that it cannot explain. There is no algorithm of theory change, however, no set formula that announces when the time has come to abandon a theory. Moreover, history suggests that a necessary condition for a scientific revolution is the existence of an alternative problem-solving model. Paradigms, on this view, are satisfactory insofar as they promote and guide the usual business of puzzle solving. It is their practical utility that leads to conceptual reorganization.

Of the two paradigms of personality mentioned above, Freud provides a relatively clear and straightforward account of how to replot the "exception." Such people must renounce the sort of gratification obtainable by constantly demanding compensation for their injury. Instead, as Freud remarks, they "must make that ad-

<sup>43</sup>Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed., enlarged (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 121.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109.

vance from the pleasure-principle to the reality principle by which the mature human being is distinguished from the child."<sup>45</sup> The man who imagined himself watched over by a special providence because of his childhood injury was letting a wish substitute for the practical need to take care of himself. Freud's discussion here is of particular interest, I suggest, for Freud makes clear that the replotment is not a matter of finding new facts about the patient's background, but of factors present in the analytic relationship. "By the side of the necessities of existence, love is the great teacher; and it is by his love for those nearest him that the incomplete human being is induced to respect the decrees of necessity and to spare himself the punishment attendant on any infringement of it."<sup>46</sup>

Retellings become a patient's own, for the reemplotted life history solves at least some of the anomalies, the failures an analyst recognizes in his or her own current configuration of the world. An analyst must come to see the value of the new paradigm, but the same process is true of changes of allegiance in the case of natural scientific theories. Kuhn stresses that science education is a matter of indoctrination; students are taught to see the world in a certain way. If paradigms are acquired through education, this might explain the length of time and some other processes characteristic of psychotherapy.

What is required of a paradigm qua problem-solving model is that it be a guide to understanding past experience and to successfully integrating new experiences on the basis of this prior understanding. In this respect the paradigm commands interest for its pragmatic functions, and not because it satisfies some logical schema.

My goal has been to unify, using a conceptually familiar model, seemingly disparate methods, and their respective idioms, for accounting for human behavior. Much more needs to be said regarding what makes one paradigm more satisfactory than another. However, the conceptual problem of how any therapy might alter behavior is not obviously different from understanding the logical, psychological, and sociological factors that prompt major scientific change.

Psychotherapy is based on a certain paradigm, Freud's "talking cure." Psychoanalytic technique, and the process of constructing psychoanalytic explanations of an individual's actions, is tantamount to attempting to reeducate a person to a certain way of thinking about

<sup>45</sup>Rieff, *Character and Culture*, p. 158.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

his or her relation to others. The model outlined here is nonmechanistic. In the context of psychoanalytic practice, explanation and understanding occur without reducing one to the other. It was the belief that they could not so coexist that led to forced attempts to establish each as *sui generis*. However, attention to the case of psychoanalysis suggests that the explanation-understanding distinction is a fabrication that goes when positivism does; it is a distinction that marks no necessary difference.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup>John Connolly, Larry Davis, Bob Gordon, Charles Guignon, and Roy Schafer provided valuable critical readings of earlier drafts of this essay.

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CHAPTER 10

*True Figures: Metaphor, Social Relations, and the Sorites*

SAMUEL C. WHEELER III

"What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins."<sup>1</sup>

What is the criticism in this passage? Truth, the set of true sentences of a human language, is or uses a mobile (changing, shifting, inconstant) array of figures of speech. These figures, metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms are defective on many counts: they are enhanced, transposed, and embellished to produce an *appearance*. They seem to be something they are not really. A figure is thus a kind of lie. A metaphor transfers a meaning from one thing to which it properly belongs to another to which that meaning does not properly apply. A metonym names an associated item in place of the proper item itself. Anthropomorphism humanizes objects by giving clocks faces, tables legs, and hurricanes eyes. More generally, anthropomorphism conceives things in human terms, relative to human interests and considerations.

So, how are words, the foot soldiers of the mobile armies, lies? The words of a human language are pretenses of being something

<sup>1</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), p. 42.