**Introduction: Know Thyself**

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**1. A Delphic Command**

The words inscribed at the Temple of Delphi – ‘know thyself’ – have been a guiding light for both philosophy and psychoanalysis.

Thus it is often said that an important aim of psychoanalysis is self-knowledge.[[1]](#footnote-1) An explicit connection to Delphi, however, was made by Freud himself just once, in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, where he says ‘The road whose goal it is to observe the precept γνω̃θι σεαυτόν[*gnothi seauton*: know thyself] runs *via* the study of one’s own apparently accidental actions and omissions’. (1901: 210) The claim that this was not only an aim of psychoanalysis, but the guiding principle of Freud’s life and work, was left to Ernest Jones to make in his obituary of Freud (in the kind of hagiographic language which could only be justified, if at all, in such a context): ‘Future generations of psychologists will assuredly wish to know what manner of man it was who, after two thousand years of vain endeavour had gone by, succeeded in fulfilling the Delphic injunction: know thyself.’ (1940: 4) Jones rehearsed the claim again in his influential biography of Freud (1955: 470), and the connection between psychoanalysis and the inscription at Delphi became widespread, endorsed by such luminaries as Sterba (1969: 439), Eissler (1963: 461), Menninger (1956: 623), Kohut (1973: 25), and Bettelheim (1982: Ch. 4), who elaborates the aim by connecting it with practical effects: ‘The guiding principle of psychoanalysis is that knowing oneself requires knowing also one’s unconscious and dealing with it, so that its unrecognized pressures will not lead one to act in a way detrimental to oneself and others.’ (1982: 24)

While the Delphic command is mentioned in several of Plato’s dialogues, Socrates, like Freud, takes it up in discussion just once, in the *Phaedrus*, where he claims that it is ‘ridiculous’ to pursue knowledge of other things before one knows oneself, a claim which places self-knowledge at the heart of the human epistemological endeavour. What Socrates himself meant by inviting us to pursue self-knowledge is something about which scholars disagree (Hadot 1995: 90), yet there are at least four senses in which the endeavour has been considered central to philosophy.

First we have the practical endeavour of the individual philosopher, through her philosophical reflection on her predicaments in their particularity, better to come to know *herself*. This goal, clearly apparent in the approach of Socrates, the Stoics and Epicureans, has been suggested as the intelligibility-conferring setting against which various ancient philosophical texts must be read (Hadot 2002). An explicit personal, therapeutic, existential engagement in doing philosophy is also occasionally to be found in more recent philosophers (e.g. Nehamas 1998), yet may play an implicit motivating role for philosophers more widely.

Next we have that project which could be called ‘knowing *ourselves*’ – namely the philosophical project of clearly articulating the human condition in its generality. This is the Socratic task taken up in theoretical mode. This project of philosophical anthropology may appear merely descriptive yet, to the extent that humanity is to be understood by reference to ideals, aspirations and excellences (such as truth and truthfulness, love and goodness, reason and rationality), it is not intelligibly separable from fundamental evaluative questions of how to live (i.e. from what we here call ‘ethics’, which we understand more broadly than questions of ‘morality’ traditionally conceived).

Thirdly we meet with the philosophical valuation of knowing ourselves as an intrinsically valuable way of life. This was most famously encapsulated in Socrates’ famous retort when invited at his trial to abandon reflection on the Delphic oracle’s pronouncements (i.e. to abandon his search for wisdom): ‘the unexamined life is not worth living’. Here philosophical reflection becomes not merely a reflective means to a non-reflective end but an end in itself, one which constitutes a significant form of the good life.

Finally we may bring these together, as when my philosophical reflection on how *I* am to live is informed by my best understanding of how *one* may live best *given what it is to be human*, or when my understanding of how *one* may live best is informed by deep reflection on *my* own (or others’) personal experience. While different philosophers have understood the connection between self-knowledge and the ethical life in various ways, it is notable that living an examined life, one enabled by philosophical enquiry, has been seen as the crowning purpose and achievement of philosophy by many, from Plato and Aristotle, through Descartes, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and Dewey to Martha Nussbaum and Bernard Williams. And here we meet with values that find expression not only in philosophy but also in the goals and methods of psychoanalysis. In what follows we explore the character and congruence of such endeavours at self-knowledge.

As Bernard Williams expresses our second, theoretical, version of the Delphic command, philosophy can be understood as ‘part of a more general attempt to make the best sense of our life, and so of our intellectual activities, in the situation in which we find ourselves.’ (2000: 479). As such, he argues, philosophy is a ‘humanistic discipline’. It is humanistic not only in the sense that the central object of study is ourselves, but also that its understanding develops within and expresses a ‘human perspective’. Definitive of such a perspective is that it is irreducible to that of the natural sciences in its style, method and aims. The scientific ambition that particularly concerns Williams is that of working toward a description of the world ‘as it is in itself, independent of perspective’ (2000: 481). The contrastive aim of philosophy, as he understands it, is to do proper justice to matters of meaning, intelligibility and significance – matters which, he argues, involve reason reflecting on itself from within, drawing inescapably on such perspectival modes of understanding as are inevitably historically and culturally situated and conditioned.

Williams’ thought may here helpfully be brought into relation with that of Charles Taylor (1985) who takes us closer to matters psychoanalytic with his focus on that project of self-understanding which involves our articulating – both in the sense of ‘giving voice to’ and in the sense of ‘developing and refining’ – our *emotional* experience. Thus according to Taylor we are essentially ‘self-interpreting animals’ whose ‘interpretation of ourselves and our experience is constitutive of what we are, and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on reality, separable from reality, nor as an epiphenomenon, which can be by-passed’ (1985: 47). What Taylor here means by ‘self-interpretation’ is not an essentially intellectual or reflective act, but rather pertains to a kind of self-understanding not met with in animal life. We highlight two aspects of Taylor’s discussion.

First, Taylor argues that ‘experiencing a given emotion involves experiencing our situation as bearing a certain import’ (49). An import is a way in which a situation or object can be relevant and important to us, given our desires and purposes. Taylor’s claim is now very widely accepted in the philosophy and psychology of emotion as the claim that emotions constitutively involve our making appraisals of situations, which appraisals form ‘the grounds or basis for the feeling’ (49). Thus, we can define emotions ‘by the imports they relate to: fear is the affective response to the menacing, anger to the provoking, indignation to the flagrantly wrongful, and so on.’ (49) As a consequence, our emotions are not intelligible for what they are merely in objective – i.e. experience-independent, physiological or physical-causal – terms since they essentially ‘characterize things in their relevance to our desires and purposes.’ (51)

Second, Taylor highlights the relationship between our self-understanding, our social and moral emotions, and what it is to lead a human life. Shame, for example, is only intelligibly experienced by those who understand, experience, and value their lives as having a certain kind of import – i.e. only intelligibly experienced by subjects with an aspiration to dignity (53). The subject who feels shame cares about how she handles herself and how she is seen by others. She is someone who understands herself, in her shame, to be failing to meet standards that matter to her. In such ways are self-conscious social subjects partly constituted, in their emotional lives, by their self-interpretations.

None of this is to say that there is no space for our self-interpretations to go awry, nor to suggest that we may not fail to interpret ourselves in apt ways (see Moran 2001: Ch. 2; Carmen 2003). What it suggests, however, is that: from the point of view of philosophical anthropology, aspirations to grasp what it is to lead a human life in merely objective terms (i.e. in terms not referring to a subject’s self-understanding) will be doomed to failure; from the point of view of psychopathology, that the relationship between self-interpretation and selfhood must be taken into account in understanding the distinctive sufferings of human selves; and from the point of view of therapy, that we can begin to understand how a merely talking cure could be thought curative of such disturbances as reach down into our selfhood – since reinterpreting the meaning of one’s behaviour will be at the same time a refashioning of oneself.

**2. Recovering the Inner Life**

Williams and Taylor pursue philosophy as, in part, a project of retrieving, sustaining and exploring a conception of what it is to live a human life. The living of a distinctly human life involves, at its paradigmatic best, the experience of a rich inner subjectivity which informs our relationships, work and creative projects. Aspects of this inner life may, and frequently do, remain stunted or atrophy through lack of nurture, become covered over by emotional defences against the pains of living, be inhibited by ideological narrowness, or be degraded through corrupt forms of relationship. Against such natural tendencies, many of the arts and humanities, including literature, poetry, history and philosophy, engage in a continuing project of developing and retrieving our subjectivity. The project may be valuable for individuals yet also, more broadly, for cultures.

What makes this ongoing endeavour intelligible to its participants is the possible disjunction of our *implicit, lived* understanding of what it is to live a distinctly human life and those more *explicit* self-understandings which may do better or worse justice to what is implicitly grasped and lived. What makes it necessary is both the way in which our implicit, lived understandings may have been muted or thwarted by various factors including our explicit self-conception which may tacitly or explicitly trash much of what makes for our humanity. (Imagine how impoverishing it would be to actually live as if that philosophy or psychology of mind which you consider most implausibly reductive, or which simply leaves out of account or sees as merely epiphenomenal that which in your inner and existential life most matters to you, were true.) And what makes it valuable is the recovery of that within us which has become muted, our emancipation from such falsifying self-understandings as impoverish our self-becoming, and the intrinsic dignity of the examined life.

Nothing in such a humanistic approach is opposed to the natural scientific study of human life, but it challenges the scientistic thought that such a life may itself be adequately articulated in the terms offered by the natural sciences. The humanity that Williams and Taylor retrieve for us is one run through with a constitutive normativity, subjectivity, affectivity, rationality and agency, and the methods they retrieve for us are ineliminably hermeneutic and aspire to no interpretation-transcending objectivity. What matters for them is not that the humanities and social sciences demonstrate the validity and reliability of their methods by adopting natural scientific methods ill-fitted to self-interpreting animals, but rather that they self-critically deploy such meaning-apprehending methods as are apt to the study of human life.

Such a focus is also central to the vision of psychoanalysis which pursues its own exploration and development of our humanity on two fronts.

First, at the level of theory, and by contrast with behaviourist, cognitivist and physiological psychology, it emphasises the inner subjective life. This is the life of our preoccupations - with erotic desire and social recognition, with our shame, guilt and contrition, power and humiliation, with our hopes and our histories, lovableness and loneliness, lovesickness and consuming hatreds, shyness and courage, envy, resentment and gratitude, intense secret passions, idealising delights, the peculiarly vaunted or denigrated status for us of our significant attachment figures, our sexual adequacy and inadequacy, fateful repetitions, with our expressions and deeds which threaten to betray us, and all of our inner conflicts, moodiness, anxieties, excitements, self-punishments, self-defeating behaviours, irrational impulses, and bodge-job forms of self-management. This caboodle is what we may call our ‘subjective life’ or ‘internal world’, and many a student of psychology has been disappointed to find that what they naturally hoped would be centre stage on their syllabus – namely why our emotional life is so often baffling and tumultuous – barely gets a look-in besides the studies of cognition, behaviour, perception, and neuropsychology. It is, of course, the life of the neurotic subject – but also of *all* of us, since “psychoanalytic research finds no fundamental, but only quantitative, distinctions between normal and neurotic life” and “the psychical mechanism employed by neuroses is not created by the impact of a pathological disturbance upon the mind but is already present in the normal structure of the mental apparatus” (Freud 1900: 373, 607).

Second, at the level of practice, psychoanalysis aims to attain or recover for us the very subjective sense of what otherwise appears not as meaningful, humanly intelligible, moments of emotionally charged behaviour, but instead merely as behavioural signs and symptoms of an unknown condition. It aims, that is, to restore or develop in us our subjectivity, to help us recover or grow our agency or self-possession, to retrieve or awaken our inner lives, to ‘make the unconscious conscious’ and thereby to ‘know ourselves’.

It is safe to say that, compared to any other psychological school, psychoanalysis has in both its theory and practice most keenly kept its pulse on the distinctive qualities of the inner life. That philosophy may borrow from it to considerably enrich its own sense of what it really means to live a distinctly human life should not be surprising (e.g. Wollheim 1984; 1993). One of the most valuable contributions made by psychoanalysis to the project of making sense of ourselves is its drawing our attention to both the clinical data and the everyday observations upon which it constructs its theories. It offers up, if not an entirely new, then a considerably under-examined, set of human experiences. Such experiences are relevant not only for psychoanalysis’ own explanatory and therapeutic projects; they also deserve a place in the understanding of what it is to be human at play in many other disciplines – including, of course, philosophy. Many chapters in this Handbook consider the significance of psychoanalysis as a contribution to the meaning and meaningfulness of human activity, to the nature of human experience, to a philosophical anthropology and the phenomenology of human consciousness and relating, and thus to questions in ethics, religion, aesthetics and, of course, self-knowledge.

Thus, psychoanalysis draws our attention to the reality of central aspects of the inner life which we know implicitly to be essential to human life as lived yet which for various reasons often escape our reflective grasp. As Nietzsche remarked, philosophy is littered with claims and ideas, e.g. about human psychology and ethics, that are insufficiently tied to human reality. For example the important Aristotelian conception of man as a ‘rational animal’ might, if we’re not careful, illegitimately displace from our self-understanding the essential contribution made by our emotional sensibilities, sensibilities which make possible not only irrationality and human impoverishment but which put us in contact with reality and enable our flourishing. Or an equation of mentality with consciousness may squeeze out of view the essential contribution to our psychological lives of dynamically and descriptively unconscious mental processes. At the time of writing, many areas of philosophy are undergoing transformation in response to developments in the social, cognitive and neuro-psychological understanding of unconscious processes and the possible challenges these provide to the autonomy and integrity of conscious rational deliberation. The issue is at the heart of philosophy’s project, as the place and nature of reason and conscious deliberation have been of central concern to philosophy since its inception.

A second reason why philosophy should attend to the understandings of human life offered by psychoanalysis, and may be enhanced by psychoanalytic reflection, is that the unconscious may be understood to consist of optional and idiosyncratic aspects of our lives which go unexamined and constrain our sense of what is possible (see Fuchs, this volume, and Lear, this volume). This point can be better understood in light of a more familiar argument concerning why philosophy should attend to history, deriving from the self-interpreting nature of human life. If what it is to live a human life or have a human mind were immutable facts, they could be interrogated by means of a familiarity with any human culture at any point in history (one’s own culture and times, for example). Since, however, what it is to be a human being itself changes (within limits) over time and place, philosophers attempting to grasp what it is to live a human life or to be minded in human ways will do well to attend to more than their present time. This will be important not only for the understanding of other modes of human life but, perhaps even more importantly, for the understanding of our own. For it is only when set against the backdrop of other ways of being human that we can understand the distinctive shape, and acknowledge the contingency, of our own life. This lesson from history, we say, has a psychoanalytic analogue given above. Thus, a historical, sociological, *and* psychoanalytic method may help philosophy come to know itself, to make its unconscious conscious, by unearthing the contingent character of the forms of life which it takes for granted, including the form of its own enquiries.

**3. Psychoanalysis: Know Thyself**

But in what ways may philosophy return the favour? Various chapters of this handbook provide their own diverse answers. But, following here the theme of ‘know thyself’, we propose that one of philosophy’s distinctive contributions is to assist psychoanalysis in knowing *itself*. Psychoanalysis as a discipline involves an ongoing dialectic of psychological theory and therapeutic practice informing each other, over time generating diverse self-understandings that are in tension with one another. Perhaps the debate over natural science and hermeneutics provides the most striking example of this. Philosophy can make more explicit conceptual implications, uncover misunderstandings, unearth problematic structuring assumptions, and enable new and productive self-understandings.

As an illustration: It is today fairly well understood that the kind of self-knowledge sought both by psychoanalysis and by anyone hoping to do genuine emotional work on herself, is not simply reflective. It may be interesting for us to develop beliefs about our minds’ functioning, and such beliefs may even be true, but, from a therapeutic point of view, the risk is significant that such an intellectual self-acquaintance may defensively stand in the way of, and disguise the ongoing need for, an emotionally deeper and mutative form of self-knowledge. Relatedly, Jonathan Lear (2005, section 4) notes that even ‘raising “the question of how to live” can be a way of avoiding the question of how to live.’ Getting clear on what is and isn’t involved in that deeper and intrinsically transformative project of knowing thyself is something with which philosophy has been concerned for centuries before psychoanalysis, and without philosophical aid it is inevitable that psychoanalysis will sometimes embed those self-misunderstandings about what it is to know thyself which philosophy has had to grapple with.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Consider for example Hadot’s (1995: 90) explication of that first sense of ‘know thyself’ offered in Section 1, that in

the Socratic dialogue … the interlocutors are invited to participate in such inner spiritual exercises as examination of conscience and attention to oneself; in other words, they are urged to comply with the famous dictum, “Know thyself.” Although it is difficult to be sure of the original meaning of this formula, this much is clear: it invites us to establish a relationship of the self to the self, which constitutes the foundation of every spiritual exercise.

But is ‘this much’ clear? Sometimes this is the relationship taken in knowing oneself, but others have taken the Delphic command otherwise. Augustine, for example, (c.417/2002: 10.8.11) urged that when the mind ‘is ordered to know itself, let it not seek itself as though withdrawn from itself, but let it withdraw what it has added to itself.’ That is to say that some central forms of knowing oneself involve not the gleaning of new information about oneself – not an addition but a subtraction, not so much the establishment of a helpful self-relation but the undoing of an unhelpful self-relation. In addition we also meet with those other forms which take us closer to self-becoming, i.e. to growing into one’s own character, to articulating and making more determinate what is as yet undeveloped, than to any increased store of knowledge about oneself.

Philosophical reflection on the way that the term ‘self’ works in a variety of locutions – including ‘know thyself’ – bears this out and helps us guard against assuming that it inevitably signifies the object of a reflexive relationship, and instead helps us see how it functions to signal the absence of relationship. Consider, for example, ‘self-respect’, ‘self-possession’, ‘self-motivation’, ‘self-consciousness’, ‘to thine own self be true’, ‘selfishness’. Someone who ‘selfishly’ ‘keeps something for himself’ is not well understood as keeping something for someone who happens to be himself, but rather as simply keeping something *without thought of later giving it to* anyone. The same may be said of someone who ‘keeps something *to* himself’: he just *doesn’t share it with* others. Someone who is ‘self-possessed’ doesn’t stand in a positive relation of possession to himself (whatever that would mean), but is rather *free from the psychological influence of* others past and present. He now acts in a straightforward and decisive manner that is free from responsibility-avoiding dither. Someone who becomes ‘self-conscious’ is, to be sure, thrown into an anxious state of wondering how *she* is coming across to others, and in this sense it is she and they, these flesh and blood people (but not some additional ‘self’ that she has), who are the objects of her attention. Yet what is also essential to our self-conscious subject is that she has been thrown out of relationship with these others, at least in any trusting connected form. Someone who is ‘true to herself’ is not so much simply representing herself accurately or simply happening to act on the basis of whatever she desires. Rather, she is *not in the business of dissimulation* but now *chooses and acts* according to her own values. The ‘self-motivated’ person is simply a person whose motivation to achieve her goals is *not dependent on external influences*. And, we suggest, one important understanding of the person who follows the Delphic command focuses not on the subject enjoying a reflexive relationship with his own mind but on his *enjoying the absence of unhelpful defence mechanisms*. For just as ‘being true to oneself’ is not perspicuously taken to cover, say, unremarkable cases of wanting to go for a walk and then, by gosh, going for a walk, so too ‘knowing thyself’ is not perspicuously taken to cover, say, ordinary cases of being able to verbally express one’s thoughts and feelings about, say, going for that walk. Instead ‘knowing thyself’ is, in such cases, not a matter of having, but rather of *emancipating oneself from*, a certain relation with oneself – a relation of self-deception or the inability to tolerate and own one’s thoughts and feelings. In such contexts, at least, the injunction to ‘know thyself’ refers not to the cultivation of a truthful reflexive presentation of the mind to itself but to a non-dissimulative, non-reflexive engagement with one’s life.[[3]](#footnote-3),[[4]](#footnote-4)

Or – by way of understanding the value of philosophical reflection on ‘knowing thyself’ to psychoanalysis – consider the idea that such self-knowledge is by itself but a morally neutral affair. Here we are offered the notion of a psychopathic patient who, despite her depravity, and perhaps even because of a successful psychoanalysis, knows herself perfectly well – not just in the sense of having a factually correct understanding of her own psychology, but also in the sense of having dismantled her defences. Without philosophical reflection such an idea can seem rather too clearly intelligible, as if there were no meaningful alternative. Yet, while the claim remains controversial, it certainly has been doubted whether what we understand by the Delphic command, or for that matter by the work of psychoanalysis, can quite so readily meet with an amoral interpretation. For, the suggestion goes, just as it is only in and through our joy, anger and sadness that we really understand what it is to know reward, be wronged, and lose what matters to us, so too it is only really in and through relationships conditioned by love that we can comprehend others’ true reality, and only in and through our honest commitment, integrity and humility that we can know what it is to lead a truly human life. On this view we do not grasp what it is to be a human living a distinctly human life by becoming knowledgeable about the behavioural habits of homo sapiens. Rather we grasp it by engaging in forms of relationship with others which are essentially characterised in moral terms – in terms of what is humane, in terms of what is revealing of our and their humanity.[[5]](#footnote-5) Truly understanding what it is to wrong someone, for example, may be thought to consist not simply in being able to track a range of abstract propositional entailments, but instead in feeling guilt and wanting to put it right. There are certainly senses in which a clever and uninhibited psychopath may ‘know herself’, but if she can’t feel the guilt she has nevertheless accrued by her evil acts then, the suggestion goes, there is yet an important form of self-knowledge which she lacks.

This excursus into two important, psychoanalytically pertinent meanings of ‘knowing thyself’ is of course but one of the ways in which philosophy may repay psychoanalysis for its enriched reflective conception of our inner life. Stepping back to survey the interdisciplinary field we may distinguish advocative, critical, and synoptic applications of philosophy to psychoanalytic theory.

On the advocative side we find philosophy helping to defend and clarify psychoanalytic theory from misunderstandings. Here we might think, for example, of how best to understand the physicalistic and energetic metaphors within psychoanalysis, how best to understand the notions of psychological ‘structures’ and defence ‘mechanisms’, and which methods of investigation, epistemic standards, and forms of understanding and explanation are best suited to knowledge of inner life.

On the critical side we find philosophy helping to sort out the wheat from the chaff within psychoanalytic theory. What has mattered here is not so much the scientific evidence for the truth or falsity of psychoanalytic theories which is not a direct matter for philosophy. Instead what matters here is the cogency of the forms of reasoning used within psychoanalysis to support its claims, and the critical unearthing of optional, perhaps even worrisome, moral and political values tacitly embedded in the theory and practice. Here, connecting the critical with the advocative application, the question of whether psychoanalysis can qualify as a science, and if so, what kind of science, has been of considerable importance. In such ways psychoanalysis comes to better know itself – to know and work through its habitual irrationalities in the service of achieving a more honest, perhaps a more modest, less hubristic, and more integrated psychoanalytic enterprise.

The synoptic contribution of philosophical reason to psychoanalysis takes us into a broader discussion of interdisciplinarity in psychoanalytic thought.

**4. Psychoanalysis Situated**

The above discussion of the Delphic command stressed the importance of not misunderstanding ‘knowing thyself’ as always and inevitably involving the cultivation of a positively informative relation of the self to itself. Instead it urged the significance of a form of ‘knowing’ marked principally, not by the presence of a particular epistemic attitude but rather, by the *absence* of self-deception. Another way to misunderstand ‘knowing thyself’ merely as a self-relation would be to assume that it did not essentially implicate others – i.e. to overlook the essentially *interpersonal* nature of self-knowledge. This idea that we come to know ourselves in and through one another forms the heart of Hegel’s (1807/1977) conception of identity as ‘negation’: we become who we are in so far as we distinguish ourselves from others and in so far as we achieve mutual recognition with them.[[6]](#footnote-6) Such negation determines not only our sensori-motor selfhood – as we differentiate from, whilst at the same moment we perceptually and motorically relate to, our proximate environments – but also our personalities – as we come to relinquish our childhood egocentricity. In that process we come to appreciate both that we and others have genuinely different tastes, desires and values and that, all being well, for all that we may still offer one another humane recognition. Or, at least, that we may – if we so wish – work to achieve that mutual recognition and mutual accountability, work to manage our relationships and overcome our and others’ misrecognitions, such unending work being – in the ‘tragic vision’ of psychoanalysis – an aspect of any worthwhile relating at all.

That self-knowledge may be won through essentially relational means marks a significant theme of recent psychoanalysis which has come to place our object-relations and our intersubjectivity at the heart of both its clinical theory and its clinical practice. Yet negation and relation also provide another means for philosophy to repay its debt for the richer picture of the inner world offered to it by psychoanalysis: by helping psychoanalysis ‘know itself’ through grasping its relations to, identities with, distinctions from, debts to and dependencies on other disciplines. Here philosophy plays its long-established role of coordinating, synthesising synoptician.

Psychoanalysis itself originated in interdisciplinary reflection. It is both well-known and frequently forgotten within psychoanalysis that Freud drew upon extensive non-clinical sources in constructing psychoanalytic theory. Patricia Kitcher (1992) lays out the full extent of Freud’s borrowings from theories and discoveries of his time in neurophysiology (neurons, psychic energy, the reflex model of the mind), psychology (associationism, functional analysis), psychiatry (unconscious ideas, the sexual origin of neurosis, the separation of ideas and language), sexology (infantile sexuality, stages of sexual development, component instincts), anthropology and evolutionary biology (recapitulationism), with further ideas taken from philology and sociology. To the extent to which psychoanalysis draws on non-clinical findings and models directly it will need to revisit such ideas as have been superseded within their source disciplines. The same may be said of the use by more recent incarnations of psychoanalysis of theories and concepts from structural linguistics, attachment theory, existential phenomenology, Marxism and critical theory, anthropology, postmodernism, developmental psychology and neurobiology. Philosophy in synoptic, grand-theoretic, mode may take up the task of urging and facilitating such updatings, and of drawing critical attention to failures to do so.

Philosophy’s job here, however, is not only the uncomfortable one of interdisciplinary policeman, but also that of diplomat. For sometimes, when psychoanalysis borrows from other disciplines, it does not so much directly import their concepts, as tacitly reappropriate or metaphorically extrapolate them for its own ends. While this may, in many cases, relieve psychoanalysis of the obligation to keep track of changes in scientific knowledge and understanding within the source domains, it may result in unclarity about the imported concepts, e.g. whether they are best understood as carrying literal or metaphorical senses (an example here may be Freud’s use of energetic and biological concepts). Here the task of philosophy is to clarify this indeterminacy and to assess whether inferences are being made within the psychoanalytic theory which illegitimately switch the senses of terms mid-argument.

Perhaps the most significant diplomatic role for philosophy concerns the questions of whether and how the findings and the methods of non-psychoanalytic disciplines are to be brought to bear on psychoanalytic theory and vice versa. Looking back a few decades one thinks especially of attempts to use the quantitative methods of experimental psychology to test hypotheses derived from psychoanalytic theory, or to test the adequacy of psychoanalytic therapy. The distinctly philosophical questions here were whether and when and how such hypotheses are pertinent to the theory, whether the theory is genuinely testable, whether it’s too bad for the theory or too bad for the experimental methods if it isn’t, and whether and when such methods truly are apt to investigation of the internal world.[[7]](#footnote-7) In the background of such debates lies the central question of whether psychoanalysis is a science. If so, of what sort, and are our existing conceptions of science adequate when it comes to the idea of a ‘science of subjectivity’? If not, is this because psychoanalysis is unscientific (i.e. a failed science) or non-scientific (e.g. a Weltanschauung)? More recently one thinks of the theory and findings of experimental psychology concerning the non-dynamic unconscious and their significance for psychoanalytic theory. In defending the claim that apparently meaningless human phenomena may have a sense, Freud (1916: 251) argued that merely physical (e.g. genetic or neurological) explanations frequently fail to tell us all we want to know, and that psychological explanation remains called for – but he failed to adequately consider the different psychological ways (e.g. via such heuristics and biases in information processing as form part of an ‘adaptive’ unconscious) we may make sense of such phenomena. Recent work on both sides explores the complementarity of such explanations, and offers us the understanding that cognitive processing is motivated in psychodynamic ways and that the psychodynamic unconscious may be comprised of structures first delineated outside psychoanalytic theory (Eagle 2013; Chen & Chaiken 1999). Here the philosopher’s role is both synoptic (surveying the points of overlap and contact in the objects and the theories) and diplomatic (working to ensure that different schools, with their different approaches to the life of the mind, do not talk past one another).

A certain kind of good psychoanalysis might go something like this (but without the linear form): build enough trust between a vulnerable patient and a respectful analyst; examine and carefully deconstruct the patient’s defensive character formations; try to tolerate, truthfully acknowledge and integrate such latent unintegrated and undeveloped feelings and expectations that induce shame and distrust in the patient; facilitate thereby the development of these feelings and the patient’s increased realistic self-confidence. Along the way such grandiose ambitions and self-deceiving illusions as serve defensive ends may be dismantled in the pursuit of: a more workable inner life, an increased ability to remain inwardly and outwardly truthful, and the forming of deeper relationships. A good philosophical analysis of psychoanalysis may proceed along parallel lines. Having one’s precious psychoanalytic understandings subjected to philosophical critique may be galling, parts of what was cherished may have to be foregone, ambitions may sometimes need to be scaled back, collaborations more willingly entered into – with the rewards being greater clarity and the opportunity for what is truly valuable within the theory to shine and grow. The result is a discipline with its finger even more keenly on the pulse of our baffling inner lives and yet more serviceable to those seeking to follow the Delphic command.

**5. Truth and Truthfulness**

We close with an illustration of the closeness of matters philosophical and psychoanalytic in relation to the Delphic command by an examination of their mutual concern with truth and truthfulness.

Freud commented that ‘Psychoanalytic treatment is founded on truthfulness’ (1915: 164) and – perhaps less truthfully! – that, regarding his own development of psychoanalysis, ‘My single motive was the love of truth’ (quoted in Sterba 1982: 115). It is a motivation he urges on the patient too, in the ‘fundamental rule’ of psychoanalysis (Thompson 2004). ‘The only exception’ to the rule that the patient be encouraged to speak of whatever he or she wants is ‘in regard to the fundamental rule of psycho-analytic technique which the patient has to observe’. What is the rule? Freud (1913: 134-5) tells his patient that:

You will notice that as you relate things various thoughts will occur to you which you would like to put aside on the ground of certain criticisms and objections. You will be tempted to say to yourself that this or that is irrelevant here or that it's quite unimportant or nonsensical so that there's no need to say it. You must never give in to these criticisms, but must say it in spite of them—indeed, you must say it precisely because you feel an aversion to doing so. Later on you will find out and learn to understand the reason for this injunction, which is really the only one you have to follow. So say whatever goes through your mind.… [N]ever forget that you have promised to be absolutely honest and never leave anything out because for some reason or other it is unpleasant to tell it.

This valuation of truth-telling is also central to that most psychoanalytical of pre-Freudian philosophers, Friederich Nietzsche, who, in his last work, wrote: ‘Truth has had to be fought for every step of the way, almost everything else dear to our hearts… has had to be sacrificed for it. Greatness of soul is needed for it, the service of truth is the hardest service.’ (1895/1968: 50) In *The Gay Science*, he explains that the ‘“will to truth” does *not* mean “I do not want to let myself be deceived” but – there is no alternative – “I will not deceive, not even myself”; *and with that we stand on moral ground*.’ (1882/2001: 344).

Above we considered the notion of knowing thyself, and tried to do more justice to the idea of such a gain in knowledge than could be done by reading it in terms of increasing one’s stock of information about oneself. In particular we stressed self-knowledge as overcoming self-deception and self-alienation and as relating realistically with others. Below we also go on to discuss ‘knowing one’s own mind’ in the sense of arriving at non-vacillating resolve and determinacy of thought and will. So too, in considering truth, we do well to attend to uses of the concept which take us beyond notions of mere correctness. Thus not only a judgement expressed in a proposition, but also plumb lines, hearts, desires and lovers, may all be true. And if we are true *to* someone (including ourselves – recall ‘to thine own self be true’), then correct judgement also does not seem to come into it. We may here recall Martin Heidegger’s (1927/1962: §44) recovery of truth as *alethia* from otherwise hegemonic conceptions of truth as *adequatio* – the former to do with something’s self-revelation or unimpeded unconcealment, the latter to do with one thing’s correct representation of something else (see Gipps, this volume). We may think too of Ryle’s (1949: 183-4) discussion of what he called ‘avowals’ – utterances like

‘I want’, ‘I hope’, ‘I intend’, ‘I dislike’, ‘I am depressed’, ‘I wonder’’ etc – and of how we may be tempted by their form to misconstrue all the sentences in which they occur as self-descriptions. But in its primary employment ‘I want…’ is not used to convey information, but to make a request or demand. It is no more meant as a contribution to general knowledge than ‘please’. … Nor, in their primary employment, are ‘I hate…’ and ‘I intend…’ used for the purpose of telling the hearer facts about the speaker. … They are things said in detestation and resolution and not things said to advance biographical knowledge about detestations and resolutions.

The truth of such avowals is not a function of their expressing correct judgements that one hates or intends, but rather of their being expressions of the hate and intention in question. When we express ourselves truly, or again truthfully, we typically speak ‘from’, not ‘about’, our thoughts and feelings, and do so without perverting their articulation.

What none of the above-mentioned philosophers considers, in their talk of truth as the auto-revelation of Being to us (Heidegger) or as the auto-revelation of the human heart and mind to itself and others (Nietzsche, Ryle), is the significance, including the ethical significance, of an interpersonal commitment to truthfulness for the very constitution of what is there to be revealed. To put it otherwise: we do well to avoid considering the value of truthfulness only in relation to the expression of *what already has determinate psychological shape*, and instead to acknowledge its even more fundamental role in our minds *becoming made up,* in various senses of that idiom. Such a focus is provided by Williams’ (2002) discussion of the virtues of truth and truthfulness, the psychoanalytic resonances of which should shortly become clear.

Williams begins with the observation that many of our thoughts do not already clearly take the form of a belief as opposed to a desire or, say, a wish (2002: 82). For sure, sometimes we do have

very determinate dispositions to assert certain things. But in many other cases, it is not merely the case that we do not know what we believe (though this is of course often true), but that a given content has not come to be a belief at all. What makes it into a belief may be that we are asked about the matter or about the belief and then have to decide whether we are prepared to assert it or not. How can that be, if assertions are expressions of belief? The answer is that assertions … often give others a reason to rely on what we say, either as a statement of how things are, or as an expression of how they seem to us. So … I have to consider what I am prepared, sincerely and responsibly, to assert. I ask myself what I believe, and that is, in such a context, the same question. The question should not be understood, however, as simply one of what I already believe; in trying to answer it I do not simply review my dispositions but consider my reasons for taking a given content to be true, and this is a question of what *I am* to believe.

A subject may be sincere in that he may come out with what is on his mind at any moment, but unless there is some consistency between what he says from occasion to occasion it will be hard to treat what he says as expressive of anything that dignifies the description of ‘belief’ (Williams suggests the phrase ‘propositional mood’ as a more fitting alternative). He may at first be ‘awash with many images, many excitements, merging fears and fantasies that dissolve into one another’ (2002: 195).

What will help a subject firm up his thoughts into distinct beliefs, desires and wishes that no longer bleed into one another, will be in part the conversations he has with others. In conversation you may ask me what I think or feel about something, and if I am to respect the relationship we have, to be of use to you, and to be someone whose word counts for something, it will be important that I give thought to the matter at hand and actually form determinate thoughts or feelings. At a level more basic than the enjoyment of any transparent self-understanding of determinate beliefs and desires ‘we are all together in our social activity of mutually stabilising our declarations and moods and impulses into becoming such things as beliefs and relatively steady attitudes.’ (2002: 193)

Williams identifies a second way in which conversations clarify what we believe. Some of our thoughts are wishes, and through wishful thinking, turn into beliefs. Or again, some of our indeterminate thoughts may become either wishes or beliefs, and which they become may depend on other wishes and desires we have. Wishful thinking, says Williams ‘is very basic and not a great mystery: the steps from its being pleasant to think of P, to its being pleasant to think that P, to thinking that P, cover no great psychological distance.’ (2002: 83). As a result, ‘there is no mystery about the fact that… an agent may easily find himself committed to [the] content [of his wishes and beliefs] in the wrong mode’ (2002: 198). However, this does not happen transparently. When beliefs arise in these ways, when they ‘become hostage to desires and wishes, they do so only as the result of hidden and indirect processes, against which the disciplines of the virtues of truth are directed’ (2002: 83). And this is something that conversations with others can help prevent. This applies not only to questions of what to believe, but also when thinking about what to do. Since

individual deliberation… is inherently open to wishful thinking … it needs the virtues of truth as much as purely factual inquiries need them. [So] thinking about what one individual should do can usefully involve more than one person: we can think about what I should do. This is not just because you may have experience and knowledge which I lack, but because your wishes are not mine – possibly not in their content, certainly not in their effects. [We] help to sustain each other’s sense of reality, both in stopping wishes’ becoming beliefs when they should not, and also in helping some wishes rather than others to become desires. (2002: 198)[[8]](#footnote-8)

The same may also be said of a third question, self-interpretation: we may equally helpfully think together about who I am.

The implications of Williams’ philosophical argument for both psychoanalytic theory and practice are clear. Yet, arguably, they are equally relevant to philosophical practice itself. Nietzsche and Wittgenstein both identify a similar role for the will and its influence on philosophical thought as Williams identifies for the wish above, and with it the significance of an ethic of truthfulness in philosophy. Wittgenstein’s remarks return us to the very first sense of ‘know thyself’ we identified in relation to philosophy, the practical endeavour of the philosopher to come to know herself:

What makes a subject difficult to understand - if it is significant, important - is not that some special instruction about abstruse things is necessary to understand it. Rather it is the contrast between the understanding of the subject and what most people want to see. ... What has to be overcome is not a difficulty of the intellect, but of the will. ... Work on philosophy is ... actually more of a kind of work on oneself. (2005: 86).

The edifice of your pride has to be dismantled. And that means frightful work. … One cannot speak the truth, if one has not yet conquered oneself. One cannot speak it – but not because one is still not clever enough. (1980: 30/35)

**6. A Handbook of Philosophy *and* Psychoanalysis**

Wittgenstein’s reflections on philosophical practice carry both explicit and implicit psychoanalytic overtones (Baker 2003), but he famously had an ambivalent relationship to psychoanalysis itself (Levy, this volume), whilst Freud in turn famously had an ambivalent relationship with philosophy. In 1886 Freud avowed to Fliess that he secretly nourished ‘the hope of arriving … at my initial goal of philosophy’ after ‘the detour of medical practice’ (Freud 1985: 159). Furthermore he supplemented his medical lectures by enrolling in six of the philosopher Brentano’s lecture courses, and also met with him outside of the class (Tauber 2010: 29). He conceived of psychoanalysis as standing in a ‘middle position between medicine and philosophy’; he also added that he had ‘never really been a doctor in the proper sense’ (cited by Rieff 1959: 301). Later though he confessed to a ‘constitutional incapacity’ for philosophy (Freud 1925: 60) and became famously dismissive of ‘the philosophers’ – who he equated with those who dogmatically insisted that ‘“consciousness” and “mental” were identical’ and so would not accept what he variously described as the ‘postulate’ or ‘hypothesis’ of unconscious mental life (1925: 31).

By happy contrast with Freud’s ‘philosophers’, those contributing to this handbook show a sympathetic interest in psychoanalysis’ most central concept, the unconscious, in relation to its closest conceptual allies: defences, transference, conflict, free association, wish-fulfilment, and symbolism. Several of their chapters work to help psychoanalysis know itself by elucidating, re-theorising, and rescuing ‘the unconscious’ from objections and misrepresentations – including its self-misrepresentations. Other contributions explore psychoanalysis in relation to: its philosophical pre-history, the recognition and misrecognition afforded it within twentieth century philosophers, its scientific strengths and weaknesses, its applications in aesthetics and politics, and its value and limitations when brought to bear on ethics, religion and social life.

Further introduction we save for the openings of each of the sections which follow. Within each section, we have endeavoured to provide an evaluative overview of current thinking at the interface between philosophy and psychoanalysis through original contributions that will shape the future of the debate. Some chapters lean more towards the overview, others towards developing a line of argument that defends a particular position, but taken as a whole, each section forms the ground for future research.

We close by acknowledging three points. First, we have not sought to provide an introduction to psychoanalytic theory, for which we refer the reader to Bateman & Holmes (1995), Rusbridger & Budd (2005), Eagle (2011), Lear (2011), or Milton, Polmear & Fabricius (2011). Second, there are some limitations in coverage. The reader will notice, for example, that Jungian, Lacanian, and feminist traditions feature far less prominently than Freudian and object-relations approaches. Sometimes this wasn’t for lack of trying to solicit contributions but, especially in relation to the paucity of coverage of post-Lacanian developments, we must also own a lack of editorial expertise in assessing their cogency. The third relates to this being a handbook of philosophy *and*, not philosophy *of*, psychoanalysis. It may be remarked that we have included some, but not extensive, coverage of the ‘Freud Wars’ which constituted a once prominent strand within the philosophy of psychoanalysis of the last 40 years. Some of the important issues that arose in those debates, in particular the scientific evidence for and conceptual validity of psychoanalytic theory, have naturally found their place in this handbook, but on the whole, we have encouraged different modes of engagement of the kind discussed and illustrated in this introductory chapter.[[9]](#footnote-9)

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1. Other important aims include self-becoming (i.e. developing what is as yet but latent within) and improved self-other relating. As will be evident from our discussion we take these to be interdependent with self-knowing. For elaborations see Eagle 2011 and Lacewing 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The fantasy that one could avoid such philosophical troubles through avoiding philosophising – and the correlative defensive equation of intellectual activity with intellectualising defence – is akin to the fantasy that one may better go through life by simply avoiding troublesome emotional experience. The psychoanalyst, one might say, no more has the option of opting out of intellectual self-understanding than the philosopher has the option of opting out of the self-(mis)understandings that constitute our emotional lives. For self-(mis)understanding, in both emotional and intellectual registers, is an inexorable part of the human condition. One might say that one cannot not philosophise – only do so worse or better, i.e. only be less or more aware of the assumptions embedded in one’s thinking. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In this way we can grasp why, say, a Woody Allen character who is preoccupied by psychoanalytically understanding himself is still neurotic: he is caught up in endless self-relationship rather than being emancipated from self-preoccupation. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It is important to note that more comes under the general concept of knowing thyself than the absence of unhelpful self-relations. Thus another important aspect of the concept refers to the cultivation of a straightforward determinacy of action. Such an agent takes responsibility for himself (he ‘owns’ his thought and his actions) and does not vacillate; he ‘knows his own mind’. We return to this in the final section. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A perspective most forcefully developed by Raimond Gaita (2004), and iterated by Backström (this volume). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This is but one of several ways in which Hegel prefigures psychoanalytic theory (McDonald 2014). We may think here too of Wittgenstein’s plan to use either the Earl of Kent’s ‘I will teach you differences’, or Joseph Butler’s ‘everything is what it is and not another thing’, as the motto for his *Philosophical Investigations.* The thought is also familiar to us through Saussure’s (1915/, p.120) consideration that ‘in language there are only differences without positive terms’: our concepts enjoy their determinacy in virtue of their exclusionary relations with other concepts, and we reflectively grasp what phenomena are by appreciating how they differ from other phenomena. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For summaries see Smith (2003) and Gomez (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. As Williams (2002: 198) notes, however, there can yet ‘be a negative side to this same process: in helping you to decide, I may reinforce your fantasy, and we may conspire in projecting wishes into a deceptive social hologram.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. We are very grateful to Katy Abramson and Adam Leite for their comments on an earlier draft of this introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)