THE UNCONSCIOUS
(1915)
EDITOR'S NOTE
DAS UNBEWUSSTE

(a) German Editions:
1924 G.S., 5, 480–519.
1924 Technik und Metapsychol., 202–41.
1931 Theoretische Schriften, 98–140.
1946 G.W., 10, 264–303.

(b) English Translation:
‘The Unconscious’
1925 C.P., 4, 98–136. (Tr. C. M. Baines.)

The present translation, though based on that of 1925, has been very largely rewritten.

This paper seems to have taken less than three weeks to write—from April 4 to April 23, 1915. It was published in the Internationale Zeitschrift later in the same year in two instalments, the first containing Sections I–IV, and the second Sections V–VII. In the editions before 1924 the paper was not divided into sections, but what are now the section-headings were printed as side-headings in the margin. The only exception to this is that the words ‘The Topographical Point of View’, which are now part of the heading to Section II, were originally in the margin at the beginning of the second paragraph of the section at the words ‘Proceeding now . . .’ (p. 172). A few minor changes were also made in the text in the 1924 edition.

If the series of ‘Papers on Metapsychology’ may perhaps be regarded as the most important of all Freud’s theoretical writings, there can be no doubt that the present essay on ‘The Unconscious’ is the culmination of that series.

The concept of there being unconscious mental processes is of

EDITORISCHE VORBEMERKUNG

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Wenn man die Gruppe der fünf 1915 verfaßten metapsychologischen Schriften Freuds als seine wichtigsten theoretischen Arbeiten ansehen darf, so bildet die vorliegende Arbeit über »Das Unbewußte« gewiß deren Gipfelpunkt.

Die Annahme unbewußter seelischer Vorgänge ist für die psychoanalytische
course one that is fundamental to psycho-analytic theory. Freud was never tired of insisting upon the arguments in support of it and combating the objections to it. Indeed, the very last unfinished scrap of his theoretical writing, the fragment written by him in 1938 to which he gave the English title 'Some Elementary Lessons in Psycho-Analysis' (1940), is a fresh vindication of that concept.

It should be made clear at once, however, that Freud's interest in the assumption was never a philosophical one—though, no doubt, philosophical problems inevitably lay just round the corner. His interest was a practical one. He found that without making that assumption he was unable to explain or even to describe a large variety of phenomena which he came across. By making it, on the other hand, he found the way open to an immensely fertile region of fresh knowledge.

In his early days and in his nearest environment there can have been no great resistance to the idea. His immediate teachers—Meynert, for instance—in so far as they were interested in psychology, were governed chiefly by the views of J. F. Herbart (1776–1841), and it seems that a text-book embodying the Herbartian principles was in use at Freud's secondary school (Jones, 1953, 409 f.). A recognition of the existence of unconscious mental processes played an essential part in Herbart's system. In spite of this, however, Freud did not immediately adopt the hypothesis in the earliest stages of his psychopathological researches. He seems from the first, it is true, to have felt the force of the argument on which stress is laid in the opening pages of the present paper—the argument, that is, that to restrict mental events to those that are conscious and to intersperse them with purely physical, neural events 'disrupts psychical continuities' and introduces unintelligible gaps into the chain of observed phenomena. But there were two ways in which this difficulty could be met. We might disregard the physical events and adopt the hypothesis that the gaps are filled with unconscious mental ones; but, on the other hand, we might disregard the conscious mental events and construct a purely physical chain, without any breaks in it, which would cover all the facts of observation. To Freud, whose early scientific career had been entirely concerned with physiology,

\[1\] The possible influence on Freud in this respect of the physiologist Hering is discussed below in Appendix A (p. 205).

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\[1\] Der Einfluß, den möglicherweise der Physiologe Ewald Hering in dieser Hinsicht auf Freud hatte, wird weiter unten in Anhang A (S. 163 f.) erörtert.
this second possibility was at first irresistibly attractive. The attraction was no doubt strengthened by the views of Hughlings-Jackson, of whose work he showed his admiration in his monograph on aphasia (1891b), a relevant passage from which will be found below in Appendix B (p. 206). The neurological method of describing psychopathological phenomena was accordingly the one which Freud began by adopting, and all his writings of the Breuer period are professedly based on that method. He became intellectually fascinated by the possibility of constructing a 'psychology' out of purely neurological ingredients, and devoted many months in the year 1895 to accomplishing the feat. Thus on April 27 of that year (Freud, 1950a, Letter 23) he wrote to Fliess: 'I am so deep in the "Psychology for Neurologists" that it quite consumes me, till I have to break off really overworked. I have never been so intensely preoccupied by anything. And will anything come of it? I hope so, but the going is hard and slow.' Something did come of it many months later—the torso which we know as the 'Project for a Scientific Psychology', despatched to Fliess in September and October, 1895. This astonishing production purports to describe and explain the whole range of human behaviour, normal and pathological, by means of a complicated manipulation of two material entities—the neurone and 'quantity in a condition of flow', an unspecified physical or chemical energy. The need for postulating any unconscious mental processes was in this way entirely avoided: the chain of physical events was unbroken and complete.

There were no doubt many reasons why the 'Project' was never finished and why the whole line of thought behind it was before long abandoned. But the principal reason was that Freud the neurologist was being overtaken and displaced by Freud the psychologist: it became more and more obvious that even the elaborate machinery of the neuronic systems was far too cumbersome and coarse to deal with the subtleties which were being brought to light by 'psychological analysis' and which could only be accounted for in the language of mental processes. A displacement of Freud's interest had in fact been very gradually taking place. Already at the time of the publication of the Aphasia his treatment of the case of Frau Emmy von N. lay two or three years behind him, and her case history was written more than a year before the 'Project'. It is in a footnote


to that case history (Standard Ed., 2, 76) that his first published use of the term ‘the unconscious’ is to be found; and though the 
ostensible theory underlying his share in the Studies on Hysteria 
(1895d) might be a neurological one, psychology, and with it 
the necessity for unconscious mental processes, was steadily 
creeping in. Indeed, the whole basis of the repression theory of 
hysteria, and of the cathartic method of treatment, cried out for 
a psychological explanation, and it was only by the most contorted 
efforts that they had been accounted for neurologically 
in Part II of the ‘Project’. A few years later, in The Interpretation 
of Dreams (1900a), a strange transformation had occurred: not 
only had the neurological account of psychology completely 
disappeared, but much of what Freud had written in the 
‘Project’ in terms of the nervous system now turned out to be 
valid and far more intelligible when translated into mental 
terms. The unconscious was established once and for all.

But, it must be repeated, what Freud established was no 
more a metaphysical entity. What he did in Chapter VII of The 
Interpretation of Dreams was, as it were, to clothe the metaphysical 
entity in flesh and blood. He showed for the first time what the 
unconscious was like, how it worked, how it differed from other 
parts of the mind, and what were its reciprocal relations with 
them. It was to these discoveries that he returned, amplifying 
and deepening them, in the paper which follows.

At an earlier stage, however, it had become evident that the 
term ‘unconscious’ was an ambiguous one. Three years previously, 
in the paper which he wrote in English for the Society 
for Psychical Research (1912g), and which is in many ways a 
preliminary to the present paper, he had carefully investigated 
these ambiguities, and had differentiated between the ‘descriptive’, 
‘dynamic’ and ‘systematic’ uses of the word. He repeats 
the distinctions in Section II of this paper (p. 172 ff.), though 
in a slightly different form; and he came back to them again in 
Chapter I of The Ego and the Id (1923b) and, at even greater 
length, in Lecture XXXI of the New Introductory Lectures (1933a). 
The untidy way in which the contrast between ‘conscious’ and 
‘unconscious’ fits the differences between the various systems of 
the mind is already stated clearly below (p. 192); but the whole

1 Oddly enough it was Breuer, in his theoretical contribution to the 
Studies, who was the first to make a reasoned defence of unconscious 
ideas (Standard Ed., 2, 222 f.).
position was only brought into perspective when in *The Ego and the Id* Freud introduced a new structural picture of the mind. In spite, however, of the unsatisfactory operation of the criterion 'conscius or unconscious?', Freud always insisted (as he does in two places here, pp. 172 and 192, and again both in *The Ego and the Id* and in the *New Introductory Lectures*) that that criterion is in the last resort our one beacon-light in the darkness of depth psychology.\(^1\)

1 The closing words of Chapter I of *The Ego and the Id*.—For English readers, it must be observed, there is a further ambiguity in the word 'unconscious' which is scarcely present in the German. The German words *bewusst* and *unbewusst* have the grammatical form of passive participles, and their usual sense is something like 'consciously known' and 'not consciously known'. The English 'conscious', though it can be used in the same way, is also used, and perhaps more commonly, in an active sense: 'he was conscious of the sound' and 'he lay there unconscious'. The German terms do not often have this active meaning, and it is important to bear in mind that 'conscious' is in general to be understood in a passive sense in what follows. The German word *Bewusstein*, on the other hand (which is here translated 'consciousness'), does have an active sense. Thus, for instance, on page 173 Freud speaks of a psychical act becoming 'an object of consciousness'; again, in the last paragraph of the first section of the paper (page 171) he speaks of 'the perception of mental processes' by means of consciousness; and in general, when he uses such phrases as 'our consciousness' he is referring to our consciousness of something. When he wishes to speak of a mental state's consciousness in the passive sense, he uses the word *Bewusstheit*, which is translated here 'the attribute of being conscious', 'the fact of being conscious' or simply 'being conscious'—where the English 'conscious' is, as almost always in these papers, to be taken in the passive sense.
**THE UNCONSCIOUS**

We have learnt from psycho-analysis that the essence of the process of repression lies, not in putting an end to, in annihilating, the idea which represents an instinct, but in preventing it from becoming conscious. When this happens we say of the idea that it is in a state of being ‘unconscious’,¹ and we can produce good evidence to show that even when it is unconscious it can produce effects, even including some which finally reach consciousness. Everything that is repressed must remain unconscious; but let us state at the very outset that the repressed does not cover everything that is unconscious. The unconscious has the wider compass: the repressed is a part of the unconscious.

How are we to arrive at a knowledge of the unconscious? It is of course only as something conscious that we know it, after it has undergone transformation or translation into something conscious. Psycho-analytic work shows us every day that translation of this kind is possible. In order that this should come about, the person under analysis must overcome certain resistances—the same resistances as those which, earlier, made the material concerned into something repressed by rejecting it from the conscious.

I. JUSTIFICATION FOR THE CONCEPT OF THE UNCONSCIOUS.

Our right to assume the existence of something mental that is unconscious and to employ that assumption for the purposes of scientific work is disputed in many quarters. To this we can reply that our assumption of the unconscious is **necessary and legitimate**, and that we possess numerous proofs of its existence.

It is **necessary** because the data of consciousness have a very large number of gaps in them; both in healthy and in sick people psychical acts often occur which can be explained only by presupposing other acts, of which, nevertheless, consciousness affords no evidence. These not only include parapraxes and dreams in healthy people, and everything described as a psychical symptom or an obsession in the sick; our most personal daily experience acquaints us with ideas that come into our head

¹[See Editor’s Note, p. 165 footnote.]
we do not know from where, and with intellectual conclusions arrived at we do not know how. All these conscious acts remain disconnected and unintelligible if we insist upon claiming that every mental act that occurs in us must also necessarily be experienced by us through consciousness; on the other hand, they fall into a demonstrable connection if we interpolate between them the unconscious acts which we have inferred. Again in meaning is a perfectly justifiable ground for going beyond the limits of direct experience. When, in addition, it turns out that the assumption of there being an unconscious enables us to construct a successful procedure by which we can exert an effective influence upon the course of conscious processes, this success will have given us an incontrovertible proof of the existence of what we have assumed. This being so, we must adopt the position that to require that whatever goes on in the mind must also be known to consciousness is to make an untenable claim.

We can go further and argue, in support of there being an unconscious psychical state, that at any given moment consciousness includes only a small content, so that the greater part of what we call conscious knowledge must in any case be for very considerable periods of time in a state of latency, that is to say, of being psychically unconscious. When all our latent memories are taken into consideration it becomes totally incomprehensible how the existence of the unconscious can be denied. But here we encounter the objection that these latent recollections can no longer be described as psychical, but that they correspond to residues of somatic processes from which what is psychical can once more arise. The obvious answer to this is that a latent memory is, on the contrary, an unquestionable residuum of a psychical process. But it is more important to realize clearly that this objection is based on the equation—not, it is true, explicitly stated but taken as axiomatic—of what is conscious with what is mental. This equation is either a petitio principii which begs the question whether everything that is psychical is also necessarily conscious; or else it is a matter of convention, of nomenclature. In this latter case it is, of course, like any other convention, not open to refutation. The question remains, however, whether the convention is so expedient that we are bound to adopt it. To this we may reply that the conventional equation of the psychical with the conscious is totally

Erfahrung macht uns mit Einfällen bekannt, deren Herkunft wir nicht kennen, und mit Denkresultaten, deren Ausarbeitung uns verborgen geblieben ist. Alle diese bewußten Akte blieben zusammenhänglos und unverständlich, wenn wir den Anspruch festhalten wollen, daß wir auch alles durchs Bewußtsein erfahren müssen, was an seelischen Akten in uns vorgeht, und ordnen sich in einen aufzeigbaren Zusammenhang ein, wenn wir die erschlossenen unbewußten Akte interpolieren. Gewann an Sinn und Zusammenhang ist aber ein vollberechtigtes Motiv, das uns über die unmittelbare Erfahrung hinaus führen darf. Zeigt es sich dann noch, daß wir auf die Annahme des Bewußten ein erfolgreiches Handeln aufbauen können, durch welches wir den Ablauf der bewußten Vorgänge zweckdienlich beeinflussen, so haben wir in diesem Erfolg einen unfähigenden Beweis für die Existenz des Angenommenen gewonnen. Man muß sich dann auf den Standpunkt stellen, es sei nichts anderes als eine unhaltbare Anmaßung, zu for dern, daß alles, was im Seelischen vorgeht, auch dem Bewußtsein bekannt werden müsse.

Man kann weitergehen und zur Unterstützung eines unbewußten psychischen Zustandes anführen, daß das Bewußtsein in jedem Moment nur einen geringen Inhalt umfaßt, so daß der größte Teil dessen, was wir bewußte Kenntnis heßen, sich ohnedies über die längsten Zeiten im Zustande der Latenz, also in einem Zustande von psychischer Unbewußtheit, befinden muß. Der Widerspruch gegen das Unbewußte würde mit Rücksicht auf alle unsere latenten Erinnerungen völlig unbegreiflich werden. Wir stoßen dann auf den Einwand, daß diese latenten Erinnerungen nicht mehr als psychisch zu bezeichnen seien, sondern den Resten von somatischen Vorgängen entsprechen, aus denen das Psychische wieder hervorgehen kann. Es liegt nahe zu erwidern, die latente Erinnerung sei im Gegenteil ein unzuverlässiger Rückstand eines psychischen Vorganges. Wichtig ist es aber sich klarzumachen, daß der Einwand auf der nicht ausgesprochenen, aber von vornherein fixierten Gleichstellung des Bewußten mit dem Seelischen ruht. Diese Gleichstellung ist entweder eine petitio principii, welche die Frage, ob alles Psychische auch bewußt sein müsse, nicht zuläßt, oder eine Sache der Konvention, der Nomenklatur. In letzterem Charakter ist sie natürlich wie jede Konvention unwiderlegbar. Es bleibt nur die Frage offen, ob sie sich als so zweckmäßig erweist, daß man sich ihr anschließen muß. Man darf antworten, die konventionelle Gleichstellung des Psychischen mit
inexpedient. It disrupts psychical continuities, plunges us into
the insoluble difficulties of psycho-physical parallelism, is open
to the reproach that for no obvious reason it over-estimates the
part played by consciousness, and that it forces us prematurely
to abandon the field of psychological research without being able
to offer us any compensation from other fields.

It is clear in any case that this question—whether the latent
states of mental life, whose existence is undeniable, are to be
carved out as conscious mental states or as physical ones—
threatens to resolve itself into a verbal dispute. We shall there-
fore be better advised to focus our attention on what we know
with certainty of the nature of these debatable states. As far as
their physical characteristics are concerned, they are totally
inaccessible to us: no physiological concept or chemical proc-
cess can give us any notion of their nature. On the other hand,
we know for certain that they have abundant points of contact
with conscious mental processes; with the help of a certain
amount of work they can be transformed into, or replaced by,
conscious mental processes, and all the categories which we
employ to describe conscious mental acts, such as ideas, pur-
poses, resolutions and so on, can be applied to them. Indeed, we
are obliged to say of some of these latent states that the only
respect in which they differ from conscious ones is precisely in
the absence of consciousness. Thus we shall not hesitate to treat
them as objects of psychological research, and to deal with them
in the most intimate connection with conscious mental acts.

The stubborn denial of a psychical character to latent mental
acts is accounted for by the circumstance that most of the
phenomena concerned have not been the subject of study out-
side psycho-analysis. Anyone who is ignorant of pathological
facts, who regards the paraphrases of normal people as accidental,
and who is content with the old saw that dreams are froth
["Träume sind Schäume"] has only to ignore a few more problems
of the psychology of consciousness in order to spare himself any
need to assume an unconscious mental activity. Incidentally,
even before the time of psycho-analysis, hypnotic experiments,
and especially post-hypnotic suggestion, had tangibly demon-

1 [Freud seems himself at one time to have been inclined to accept
this theory, as is suggested by a passage in his book on aphasia (1891b,
56 ff.). This will be found translated below in Appendix B (p. 206).]
2 [Cf. The Interpretation of Dreams (1900a), Standard Ed., 4, 133.]
strated the existence and mode of operation of the mental unconscious.¹

The assumption of an unconscious is, moreover, a perfectly legitimate one, inasmuch as in postulating it we are not departing a single step from our customary and generally accepted mode of thinking. Consciousness makes each of us aware only of his own states of mind; that other people, too, possess a consciousness is an inference which we draw by analogy from their observable utterances and actions, in order to make this behaviour of theirs intelligible to us. (It would no doubt be psychologically more correct to put it in this way: that without any special reflection we attribute to everyone else our own constitution and therefore our consciousness as well, and that this identification is a sine qua non of our understanding.) This inference (or this identification) was formerly extended by the ego to other human beings, to animals, plants, inanimate objects and to the world at large, and proved serviceable so long as their similarity to the individual ego was overwhelmingly great; but it became more untrustworthy in proportion as the difference between the ego and these ‘others’ widened. To-day, our critical judgement is already in doubt on the question of consciousness in animals; we refuse to admit it in plants and we regard the assumption of its existence in inanimate matter as mysticism. But even where the original inclination to identification has withstood criticism—that is, when the ‘others’ are our fellow-men—the assumption of a consciousness in them rests upon an inference and cannot share the immediate certainty which we have of our own consciousness.

Psycho-analysis demands nothing more than that we should apply this process of inference to ourselves also—a proceeding to which, it is true, we are not constitutionally inclined. If we do this, we must say: all the acts and manifestations which I notice in myself and do not know how to link up with the rest of my mental life must be judged as if they belonged to someone else: they are to be explained by a mental life ascribed to this other person. Furthermore, experience shows that we understand very well how to interpret in other people (that is, how to fit into their chain of mental events) the same acts which we

¹ [In his very last discussion of the subject, in the unfinished fragment “Some Elementary Lessons in Psycho-Analysis” (1940b), Freud entered at some length into the evidence afforded by post-hypnotic suggestion.]

² [In seiner endgültig letzten Erörterung des Themas in den unvollendet gebliebenen “Some Elementary Lessons in Psycho-Analysis” (1940b) geht Freud ausführlich auf das von der posthypnotischen Suggestion ableitbare Beweismaterial ein.]
refuse to acknowledge as being mental in ourselves. Here some special hindrance evidently deflects our investigations from our own self and prevents our obtaining a true knowledge of it.

This process of inference, when applied to oneself in spite of internal opposition, does not, however, lead to the disclosure of an unconscious; it leads logically to the assumption of another, second consciousness which is united in one’s self with the consciousness one knows. But at this point, certain criticisms may fairly be made. In the first place, a consciousness of which its own possessor knows nothing is something very different from a consciousness belonging to another person, and it is questionable whether such a consciousness, lacking, as it does, its most important characteristic, deserves any discussion at all. Those who have resisted the assumption of an unconscious psychological are not likely to be ready to exchange it for an unconscious consciousness. In the second place, analysis shows that the different latent mental processes inferred by us enjoy a high degree of mutual independence, as though they had no connection with one another, and knew nothing of one another. We must be prepared, if so, to assume the existence in us not only of a second consciousness, but of a third, fourth, perhaps of an unlimited number of states of consciousness, all unknown to us and to one another. In the third place—and this is the most weighty argument of all—we have to take into account the fact that analytic investigation reveals some of these latent processes as having characteristics and peculiarities which seem alien to us, or even incredible, and which run directly counter to the attributes of consciousness with which we are familiar. Thus we have grounds for modifying our inference about ourselves and saying that what is proved is not the existence of a second consciousness in us, but the existence of psychological acts which lack consciousness. We shall also be right in rejecting the term ‘subconsciousness’ as incorrect and misleading. The well-known cases of ‘double conscience’, (splitting of consciousness) prove

1 [In some of his very early writings, Freud himself used the term ‘subconscious’, e.g. in his French paper on hysterical paralyses (1893)] and in Studies on Hysteria (1895), Standard Ed., 2, 69 n. But he disrecommends the term as early as in The Interpretation of Dreams (1900a), Standard Ed., 5, 615. He alludes to the point again in Lecture XIX of the Introductory Lectures (1916–17), and argue it a little more fully near the end of Chapter II of The Question of Lay Analysis (1926a).]

2 [The French term for ‘dual consciousness’]
(I) JUSTIFICATION FOR THE CONCEPT

nothing against our view. We may most aptly describe them as cases of a splitting of the mental activities into two groups, and say that the same consciousness turns to one or the other of these groups alternately.

In psycho-analysis there is no choice for us but to assert that mental processes are in themselves unconscious, and to liken the perception of them by means of consciousness to the perception of the external world by means of the sense-organs. We can even hope to gain fresh knowledge from the comparison. The psycho-analytic assumption of unconscious mental activity appears to us, on the one hand, as a further expansion of the primitive animism which caused us to see copies of our own consciousness all around us, and, on the other hand, as an extension of the corrections undertaken by Kant of our views on external perception. Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psycho-analysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes which are their object. Like the physical, the psychological is not necessarily in reality what it appears to us to be. We shall be glad to learn, however, that the correction of internal perception will turn out not to offer such great difficulties as the correction of external perception—that internal objects are less unknowable than the external world.

1 [This idea had already been dealt with at some length in Chapter VII (F) of The Interpretation of Dreams (1900a), Standard Ed., 5, 615–17.]

...tung) beweisen nichts gegen unsere Auffassung. Sie lassen sich am zutreffendsten beschreiben als Fälle von Spaltung der seelischen Tätigkeiten in zwei Gruppen, wobei sich dann das nämliche Bewußtsein alternierend dem einen oder dem anderen Lager zuwendet. Es bleibt uns in der Psychoanalyse gar nichts anderes übrig, als die seelischen Vorgänge für an sich unbewußt zu erklären und ihre Wahrnehmung durch das Bewußtsein mit der Wahrnehmung der Außenwelt durch die Sinnesorgane zu vergleichen. Wir hoffen sogar aus diesem Vergleich einen Gewinn für unsere Erkenntnis zu ziehen. Die psychoanalytische Annahme der unbewußten Seelentätigkeit erscheint uns einerseits als eine weitere Fortbildung des primitiven Animismus, der uns überall Ebenbilder unseres Bewußtseins vorspiegelte, und anderseits als die Fortsetzung der Korrektur, die Kant an unserer Auffassung der äußeren Wahrnehmung vorgenommen hat. Wie Kant uns gewarnt hat, die subjektive Bedingtheit unserer Wahrnehmung nicht zu übersehen und unsere Wahrnehmung nicht für identisch mit dem unerkennbaren Wahrnehmen zu halten, so mahnt die Psychoanalyse, die Bewußtseinswahrnehmung nicht an die Stelle des unbewußten psychischen Vorganges zu setzen, welcher ihr Objekt ist. Wie das Physische, so braucht auch das Psychische nicht in Wirklichkeit so zu sein, wie es uns erscheint. Wir werden uns aber mit Befriedigung auf die Erfahrung vorbereiten, daß die Korrektur der inneren Wahrnehmung nicht ebenso große Schwierigkeit bietet wie die der äußeren, daß das innere Objekt minder unerkennbar ist als die Außenwelt.

1 [Eine ausführliche Erörterung dieses Gedankens findet sich schon in Kapitel VII, Abschnitt F, der Traumdeutung (1900 a), Studienausgabe, Bd. 2, S. 583–5.]
II. Various Meanings of 'the Unconscious'—
The Topographical Point of View

Before going any further, let us state the important, though inconvenient, fact that the attribute of being unconscious is only one feature that is found in the psychical and is by no means sufficient fully to characterize it. There are psychical acts of very varying value which yet agree in possessing the characteristic of being unconscious. The unconscious comprises, on the one hand, acts which are merely latent, temporarily unconscious, but which differ in no other respect from conscious ones and, on the other hand, processes such as repressed ones, which if they were to become conscious would be bound to stand out in the crudest contrast to the rest of the conscious processes. It would put an end to all misunderstandings if, from now on, in describing the various kinds of psychical acts we were to disregard the question of whether they were conscious or unconscious, and were to classify and correlate them only according to their relation to instincts and aims, according to their composition and according to which of the hierarchy of psychical systems they belong to. This, however, is for various reasons impracticable, so that we cannot escape the ambiguity of using the words 'conscious' and 'unconscious' sometimes in a descriptive and sometimes in a systematic sense, in which latter they signify inclusion in particular systems and possession of certain characteristics. We might attempt to avoid confusion by giving the psychical systems which we have distinguished certain arbitrarily chosen names which have no reference to the attribute of being conscious. Only we should first have to specify what the grounds are on which we distinguish the systems, and in doing this we should not be able to evade the attribute of being conscious, seeing that it forms the point of departure for all our investigations.

Proceeding now to an account of the positive findings of

1 [Freud recurs to this below on p. 192.]
2 [Freud had already introduced these abbreviations in The Interpretation of Dreams (1900a), Standard Ed., 5, 540 ff.]

In positiver Darstellung sagen wir nun als Ergebnis der Psychoanalyse

In positiver Darstellung sagen wir nun als Ergebnis der Psychoanalyse

1 [Freud kommt auf S. 151, unten, darauf zurück.]
2 [Diese Abkürzungen wurden von Freud schon in der Traumdeutung (1900a) eingeführt; s. Studienausgabe, Bd. 2, S. 517 ff.]
psycho-analysis, we may say that in general a psychical act goes through two phases as regards its state, between which is interposed a kind of testing (censorship). In the first phase the psychical act is unconscious and belongs to the system Ucs.; if, on testing, it is rejected by the censorship, it is not allowed to pass into the second phase; it is then said to be 'repressed' and must remain unconscious. If, however, it passes this testing, it enters the second phase and thenceforth belongs to the second system, which we will call the system Cs. But the fact that it belongs to that system does not yet unequivocally determine its relation to consciousness. It is not yet conscious, but it is certainly capable of becoming conscious (to use Breuer's expression) —that is, it can now, given certain conditions, become an object of consciousness without any special resistance. In consideration of this capacity for becoming conscious we also call the system Cs. the 'preconscious'. If it should turn out that a certain censorship also plays a part in determining whether the preconscious becomes conscious, we shall discriminate more sharply between the systems Pcs. and Cs. [Cf. p. 191 ff.] For the present let it suffice us to bear in mind that the system Pcs. shares the characteristics of the system Cs. and that the rigorous censorship exercises its office at the point of transition from the Ucs. to the Pcs. (or Cs.).

By accepting the existence of these two (or three) psychical systems, psycho-analysis has departed a step further from the descriptive 'psychology of consciousness' and has raised new problems and acquired a new content. Up till now, it has differed from that psychology mainly by reason of its dynamic view of mental processes; now in addition it seems to take account of psychical topography as well, and to indicate in respect of any given mental act within what system or between what systems it takes place. On account of this attempt, too, it has been given the name of 'depth-psychology'. We shall hear that it can be further enriched by taking yet another point of view into account. [Cf. p. 181.]

If we are to take the topography of mental acts seriously we must direct our interest to a doubt which arises at this point.

1 [See Studies on Hysteria, Breuer and Freud (1895), Standard Ed., 2, 225.]
2 [By Bleuler (1914). See the 'History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement' (1914d), above, p. 41.]

aus, daß ein psychischer Akt im allgemeinen zwei Zustandsphasen durchläuft, zwischen welche eine Art Prüfung (Zensur) eingeschaltet ist. In der ersten Phase ist er unbewußt und gehört dem System Ubw an; wird er bei der Prüfung von der Zensur abgewiesen, so ist ihm der Übergang in die zweite Phase versagt; er heißt dann 'verdrängt' und muß unbewußt bleiben. Besteht aber diese Prüfung, so tritt er in die zweite Phase ein und wird dem zweiten System zugehörig, welches wir das System Bw nennen wollen. Sein Verhältnis zum Bewußtsein ist aber durch diese Zugehörigkeit noch nicht eindeutig bestimmt. Er ist noch nicht bewußt, wohl aber bewußtseinsfähig (nach dem Ausdruck von J. Breuer)1, d. h., er kann nun ohne besonderen Widerstand beim Zutreffen gewisser Bedingungen Objekt des Bewußtseins werden. Mit Rücksicht auf diese Bewußtseinsfähigkeit heißen wir das System Bw auch das Vorbewußtseins. Sollte es sich herausstellen, daß auch das Bewußtwerden des Vorbewußten durch eine gewisse Zensur mitbestimmt wird, so werden wir die Systeme Vbw und Bw strenger voneinander sondern. [Vgl. S. 150.] Vorläufig genüge es festzuhalten, daß das System Vbw die Eigenschaften des Systems Bw teilt und daß die strenge Zensur am Übergang vom Ubw zum Vbw (oder Bw) ihres Amtes waltet.

Mit der Aufnahme dieser (zwei oder drei) psychischen Systeme hat sich die Psychoanalyse einen Schritt weiter von der deskriptiven Bewußtseinspsychologie entfernt, sich eine neue Fragestellung und einen neuen Inhalt beigelegt. Sie unterschied sich von der Psychologie bisher hauptsächlich durch die dynamische Auffassung der seelischen Vorgänge; nun kommt hinzu, daß sie auch die psychische Topik berücksichtigen und von einem beliebigen seelischen Akt angeben will, innerhalb welchen Systems oder zwischen welchen Systemen er sich abspielt. Wegen dieses Bestrebens hat sie auch den Namen einer Tiefenpsychologie erhalten. Wir werden hören, daß sie auch noch um einen anderen Gesichtspunkt bereichert werden kann. [Vgl. S. 140.]

Wollen wir mit einer Topik der seelischen Akte Ernst machen, so müssen wir unser Interesse an einer dieser Stelle auftauchenden Zweifels-

1 [S. Studien über Hysterie (Breuer und Freud, 1899).]
2 [Von Bleuler (1914).]
When a psychical act (let us confine ourselves here to one which is in the nature of an idea) is transposed from the system Ucs. into the system Cs. (or Pos.), are we to suppose that this transposition involves a fresh record—as it were, a second registration—of the idea in question, which may thus be situated as well in a fresh psychical locality, and alongside of which the original unconscious registration continues to exist? Or are we rather to believe that the transposition consists in a change in the state of the idea, a change involving the same material and occurring in the same locality? This question may appear abstruse, but it must be raised if we wish to form a more definite conception of psychical topography, of the dimension of depth in the mind. It is a difficult one because it goes beyond pure psychology and touches on the relations of the mental apparatus to anatomy. We know that in the very roughest sense such relations exist. Research has given irrefutable proof that mental activity is bound up with the function of the brain as it is with no other organ. We are taken a step further—we do not know how much—by the discovery of the unequal importance of the different parts of the brain and their special relations to particular parts of the body and to particular mental activities. But every attempt to go on from there to discover a localization of mental processes, every endeavour to think of ideas as stored up in nerve-cells and of excitations as travelling along nerve-fibres, has miscarried completely. The same fate would await any theory which attempted to recognize, let us say, the anatomical position of the system Cs.—conscious mental activity—as being in the cortex, and to localize the unconscious processes in the subcortical parts of the brain. There is a hiatus here which at present cannot be filled, nor is it one of the tasks of psychology.

1 [The German word here is 'Vorstellung', which covers the English terms 'idea', 'image' and 'presentation'.]
2 [The conception of an idea being present in the mind in more than one 'registration' was first put forward by Freud in a letter to Fließ of December 6, 1896 (Freud, 1950a, Letter 52). It is used in connection with the theory of memory in Chapter VII (Section B) of The Interpretation of Dreams (1900a), Standard Ed., 5, 539; and it is alluded to again in Section F of the same chapter (ibid., 610) in an argument which foreshadows the present one.]
3 [Freud had himself been much concerned with the question of the localization of cerebral functions in his work on aphasia (1891b).]
4 [Freud had insisted on this as early as in his preface to his translation of Bernheim's De la suggestion (Freud, 1888–9).]
to fill it. Our psychical topography has for the present nothing to do with anatomy; it has reference not to anatomical localities, but to regions in the mental apparatus, wherever they may be situated in the body.

In this respect, then, our work is untrammeled and may proceed according to its own requirements. It will, however, be useful to remind ourselves that as things stand our hypotheses set out to be no more than graphic illustrations. The first of the two possibilities which we considered—namely, that the Cs. phase of an idea implies a fresh registration of it, which is situated in another place—is doubtless the cruder but also the more convenient. The second hypothesis—that of a merely functional change of state—is a priori more probable, but it is less plastic, less easy to manipulate. With the first, or topographical, hypothesis is bound up that of a topographical separation of the systems Ucs. and Cs. and also the possibility that an idea may exist simultaneously in two places in the mental apparatus—indeed, if it is not inhibited by the censorship, it regularly advances from the one position to the other, possibly without losing its first location or registration.

This view may seem odd, but it can be supported by observations from psychoanalytic practice. If we communicate to a patient some idea which he has at one time repressed but which we have discovered in him, our telling him makes at first no change in his mental condition. Above all, it does not remove the repression nor undo its effects, as might perhaps be expected from the fact that the previously unconscious idea has now become conscious. On the contrary, all that we shall achieve at first will be a fresh rejection of the repressed idea. But now the patient has in actual fact the same idea in two forms in different places in his mental apparatus: first, he has the conscious memory of the auditory trace of the idea, conveyed in what we told him; and secondly, he also has—as we know for certain—the unconscious memory of his experience as it was in its earlier form. Actually there is no lifting of the repression until the conscious idea, after the resistances have been overcome, has

\[\text{vorläufig nichts mit der Anatomie zu tun; sie bezieht sich auf Regionen des seelischen Apparats, wo immer sie im Körper gelegen sein mögen, und nicht auf anatomische Urtümlichkeiten.}\]

 Unsere Arbeit ist also in dieser Hinsicht frei und darf nach ihren eigenen Bedürfnissen vorgehen. Es wird auch förderlich sein, wenn wir uns daraufhin mahnen, daß unsere Annahmen zunächst nur den Wert von Versuchssstellung beanspruchen. Die erstere der beiden in Betracht gezogenen Möglichkeiten, nämlich daß die bw Phase der Vorstellung eine neue, an anderem Orte befindliche Niederschrift derselben bedeute, ist unzweifelhaft die gröbere, aber auch die bequemere. Die zweite Annahme, die einer bloß funktionellen Zustandsänderung, ist die von vornherein wahrscheinlichere, aber sie ist minder plastisch, weniger leicht zu handhaben. Mit der ersten, der topischen Annahme ist die einer topischen Trennung der Systeme Ubw und Bw und die Möglichkeit verknüpft, daß eine Vorstellung gleichzeitig an zwei Stellen des psychischen Apparats vorhanden sei, ja, daß sie, wenn durch die Zensur ungehemmt, regelmäßig von dem einen Ort an den anderen vorrücke, eventuell ohne ihre erste Niederlassung oder Niederschrift zu verlieren. Das mag befremdlich aussehen, kann sich aber an Eindrücke aus der psychoanalytischen Praxis anlehnen.

Wenn man einem Patienten eine seinerzeit von ihm verdrängte Vorstellung, die man erraten hat, mitteilt, so ändert dies zunächst an seinem psychischen Zustand nichts. Es hebt vor allem nicht die Verdrängung auf, macht deren Folgen nicht rückgängig, wie man vielleicht erwarten konnte, weil die früher unbewußte Vorstellung nun bewußt geworden ist. Man wird im Gegenteil zunächst nur eine neuerliche Ablehnung der verdrängten Vorstellung erzielen. Der Patient hat aber jetzt tatsächlich dieselbe Vorstellung in zweifacher Form an verschiedenen Stellen seines seelischen Apparats, erstens hat er die bewußte Erinnerung an die Ge

\[\text{hörspur der Vorstellung durch die Mitteilung, zweitens trägt er daneben, wie wir mit Sicherheit wissen, die unbewußte Erinnerung an das Erlebte in der früheren Form in sich. In Wirklichkeit tritt nun eine Aufhebung der Verdrängung nicht eher ein, als bis die bewußte Vorstellung sich nach Überwindung der Widerstände mit der unbewußten}\]

1 [The topographical picture of the distinction between conscious and unconscious ideas is presented in Freud’s discussion of the case of ‘Little Hans’ (1909b), Standard Ed., 10, 120 f., and at greater length in the closing paragraphs of his technical paper ‘On Beginning the Treatment’ (1913c).]
entered into connection with the unconscious memory-trace. It is only through the making conscious of the latter itself that success is achieved. On superficial consideration this would seem to show that conscious and unconscious ideas are distinct registrations, topographically separated, of the same content. But a moment's reflection shows that the identity of the information given to the patient with his repressed memory is only apparent. To have heard something and to have experienced something are in their psychological nature two quite different things, even though the content of both is the same.

So for the moment we are not in a position to decide between the two possibilities that we have discussed. Perhaps later on we shall come upon factors which may turn the balance in favour of one or the other. Perhaps we shall make the discovery that our question was inadequately framed and that the difference between an unconscious and a conscious idea has to be defined in quite another way.¹

¹ [This argument is taken up again on p. 201.]


Wir sind also zunächst nicht imstande, zwischen den beiden erörterten Möglichkeiten zu entscheiden. Vielleicht treffen wir späterhin auf Momente, welche für eine von beiden den Ausschlag geben können. Vielleicht steht uns die Entdeckung bevor, daß unsere Fragestellung unzureichend war und daß die Unterscheidung der unbewußten Vorstellung von der bewußten noch ganz anders zu bestimmen ist.²

² [Dieses Thema wird auf S. 160 wiederaufgenommen.]