

**Foreword to Unrepressed Unconscious, Implicit Memory, and Clinical Work:
Consciousness, mentalization and attachment**

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The notion of the unrepressed unconscious has been a major psychoanalytic puzzle since the inception of the discipline. Psychoanalytic thinking about the nature of consciousness has always implicitly distinguished between a non-conscious and a dynamically unconscious mental content, whether marked by distinctions such as repressed versus unrepressed, preconscious versus unconscious or, using Sandler's three-box model, past versus present unconscious. Where the line is drawn, how the distinctions are made, may depend more on the subject matter on which the scholar is focused, which in turn calls for particular metapsychological models.

This excellent book attempts to map this somewhat controversial field and addresses the dichotomy from six distinct perspectives that share the wish to integrate contemporary neuroscience with psychoanalytic perspectives, using the clinical setting as the primary constraint on theory-building. In this foreword to a unique and outstanding contribution by the major scholars in this field, I can do no more than set out the distinction between the Freudian and current approaches to the dichotomy and introduce our own rather limited perspective (Fonagy & Allison, in press), which has the advantage of drawing on the past work of many of the contributors to this volume.

Like the neuroscientists and attachment theorists contributing to this work, I would favour a psychoanalytically informed reconsideration of the nature of consciousness, which could shed light on the distinction between an "unconscious part of

the mind” (the base of the Freudian “iceberg”, which, as this book amply illustrates, is not only accepted but entirely endorsed by modern neuroscience) and the unconscious with which psychoanalysis tends to concern itself – the thoughts and feelings generally referred to as being “dynamically unconscious”. Mark Solms (1997) provided a comprehensive review of Freud’s struggle with the concept and nature of what is available to phenomenal scrutiny and what is hidden from or inaccessible to it. The focus of Freud’s interest was always the unconscious. Freud time and again assures us that consciousness is a given. In *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, Freud (1938) writes: “We know two kinds of things about what we call our psyche (or mental life): firstly, its bodily organ and scene of action, the brain (or nervous system) and, on the other hand, our acts of consciousness, which are immediate data and cannot be further explained by any sort of description” (p. 144); “...if anyone speaks of consciousness we know immediately and from our most personal experience what is meant by it” (p. 157); and “There is no need to characterize what we call ‘conscious’: it is the same as the consciousness of philosophers and of everyday opinion” (p. 159). In the *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (Freud, 1933), he says: “There is no need to discuss what is to be called conscious: it is removed from all doubt” (p. 70).

Freud explored present preoccupations, memories, current or recent physical sensations, descriptions and physical manifestations of emotions and more in pursuit of associative networks that hint at the mental states that consciousness hides and disguises. Historically, this approach to consciousness has characterised the psychoanalytic discipline. However, the chapters in this volume suggest that seeing consciousness

merely as a route to concerns outside awareness underestimates its role in the dynamics of mind and clinical psychoanalysis.

In his *Outline*, Freud (1938) did acknowledge the mysteriousness of consciousness, stating that: “The starting-point for this investigation is provided by a fact without parallel, which defies all explanation or description—the fact of consciousness” (p. 157). Clearly, the unconscious mind cannot be explicated without reference to consciousness. In *The Resistances to Psycho-Analysis*, Freud (1925) wrote: “what is mental is in itself unconscious and [...] being conscious is only a quality, which may or may not accrue to a particular mental act and the withholding of which may perhaps alter that act in no other respect” (p. 216). Freud thought that mental processes were “only made conscious by the functioning of special organs” (Freud, 1924, p. 198). The association of consciousness with perception leads Freud to combine them most of the time in a single system (Pcpt.-Cs.). (See also Freud, 1900, p. 574; 1915, p. 171; 1917, p. 143; 1923, p. 18; 1925, p. 216; 1939, p. 97; 1940, p. 283, p. 286.)

It has been suggested that Freud failed to elaborate his theory of self-awareness (Fonagy & Allison, in press; Solms, 1997). Consciousness for Freud is consciousness of self, for this feature was its distinguishing characteristic: “...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” (Freud, 1915, p. 170). The Freudian view is that mental activity is unconscious in itself, and that consciousness is not a proportion of mental activity but rather a reflection or

perception of it, and that it represents this process in an “incomplete and untrustworthy” fashion (Solms, 1997, p. 684).

However, Freud implicitly recognised that coming to know the unconscious part of the mind is not possible without approaching it via consciousness. “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” (Freud, 1915, p. 166). Yet the idea that consciousness was the epistemological bedrock for explorations of the unconscious was probably not fully accepted by Freud. Husserl (1936) understood that what is unconscious can be discovered only on the basis of making consciousness the prior subject matter, and suggested that the science of the unconscious would be a failure because it did not take the understanding of consciousnesses as its point of departure.

I would like to touch briefly on Solms’ (1997) radical interpretation of Freud’s view that both external sensory self-awareness and internal states of mind were “perceived”. Solms (1997) wrote: “When you perceive the same apparatus through an internal sensory modality, you perceive it ... as a ‘state of mind’ ... These two perceptual realizations of yourself are on exactly the same conceptual level ... although one is described as objective and the other as subjective... The only difference between them is that one represents the portion of reality that is ‘you’ in an external perceptual modality, while the other represents ‘you’ in an internal perceptual modality” (p. 699). Thus, for Solms the contents of consciousness are the data of the senses, the data of memory and the inward appreciation of affects, and the process is the same process that produces sensation and perception, thought and affect. If consciousness results simply from more

complex integration of the same basic processes that produce other mental phenomena and requires no new neural processes, then major implications follow.

The Danish Husserlian phenomenological philosopher Dan Zahavi (1999, 2005) has severely criticized the circularity of the “reflection theory” of self-awareness which suggests that self-consciousness entails an act of reflective consciousness reflecting on itself by means of a second act of reflective consciousness. Reflection described in this way presupposes a pre-reflective act of consciousness in which self-consciousness is anchored – it needs to be experienced if it is to be perceived. Experience, which is supposed to be reflected upon, already entails consciousness – so how was experience of mental states achieved? Zahavi argues that it is improbable that our awareness of ourselves entails exactly the same mechanism as our perception of external objects. The circularity of “reflection theory” is due to its failure to specify a mechanism whereby mental phenomena become available to internally directed perception.

Perhaps Freud should not have tried to circumvent phenomenology when discussing consciousness¹ because it may enable us to distinguish between the unconscious of neuroscience (the *implicit unconscious*, which is the concern of this volume) and our dynamic sense of the unconscious (the “seething cauldron”), which Liz Allison and I have called the *psychoanalytic unconscious* (Fonagy & Allison, in press). The implicit unconscious lacks the properties of consciousness, but in order to make sense of this and similar statements we need to define these properties.

¹ The philosophical approach placing phenomenology at its centre (Heidegger, 1959; Husserl, 1936; Sartre, 1957) has always had considerable appeal for psychoanalysts (e.g., Laing, 1982; Loewald, 1965) but it has undoubtedly become more popular with the rise of the relational school of psychoanalysis (Bromberg, 1998; Stern, 1997). The key questions that phenomenologists concern themselves with around the nature of knowledge, truth, and understanding are also the central questions that the psychoanalysts try to answer both in relation to the essential subject matter of their discipline (the science of the unconscious) and the phenomenological experience with which an individual patient presents them.

Phenomenologists have conceptualised these in terms of the *inner horizon* within an object, which separates what is manifest or apparent about it from a latent field of possibilities, *coherence*, which is necessary to enable us to consciously perceive an object as such, and *intentionality*, which is the central structure of an experience – its quality of being directed toward or being about something². The unique feature of consciousness from a phenomenological perspective is this striving for wholeness or, as Heidegger’s ontological approach would have it, “Being”, a certain quality of three-dimensionality, the experience that can be “walked around”. Many psychoanalytic views of consciousness of course also stress the notion of bringing coherence and integration, particularly Kleinian–Bionian psychoanalysis with its emphasis on the cycling of the Ps↔D positions³. An act of consciousness can be viewed as an intentional synthesis of sensory givens into a coherent whole. Perception is a much more complex process than we tend to assume and when it comes to the perception of internal events, the challenge is even greater.

With colleagues I have tried to describe the interpersonal developmental processes leading to the creation of psychic reality (Allen & Fonagy, 2006; Allen, Fonagy, & Bateman, 2008; Bateman & Fonagy, 2006; Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002; Fonagy, Gergely, & Target, 2007) and we have stressed that internal representations of their constitutional states do not arise from within the infant; rather, the infant internalizes the caregiver’s visible or otherwise sensorially available representation to form a representation of the self. The infant needs closeness to another human being

² As Sartre (1957) phrased it: “intentionality is what makes up the very subjectivity of subjects” (p. 49).

³ We should note, however, that the notion of consciousness as intentional means that we cannot conceive of a “container” that houses consciousness, and it is therefore probably not compatible with the Bionian conceptualization of the process of thinking (Bion, 1959).

who, via contingent marked mirroring actions, can create an external image congruent with the infant's internal state; once internalized, this image serves as a representation of it. This initially dyadic consciousness of affect facilitates the emergence of a symbolic representational system for affective states, assists in developing affect regulation and selective attention⁴, but is linked not to consciousness but to a quality of representations captured by phenomenological descriptions as coherent or possessing an intentional quality. For the normal development of phenomenal experience (Sandler's distinction between the mental representation and the psychic structure that generates it is relevant here), the child needs to be exposed to a mind that has their mind in mind, reflecting and enabling them to reflect on their embryonic conscious intentions without overwhelming them.

The converse of this developmental assumption is that *internal states that are not confirmed by contingent congruent responses from the object world will not achieve experiential status either consciously or unconsciously*. It is the infant's and child's unmirrored, unreflected internal states that make up the seething cauldron of Freud's conceptualisation of the id. Sexual and aggressive impulses come to be major organizers of unconscious states of mind because they are unmirrored. In our view the key role

⁴ The distinction we have made between primary and second-order representation may be similar to Edelman's (2004) elaboration of primary and higher not-order consciousnesses. Edelman considers the latter to be restricted to self-reflective ("reflective cognizing"; Kim, 2005) humans capable of turning consciousness back on itself, and bringing with it the capacity to delay judgment and refrain from responding immediately to environmental cues. There is superficial similarity between these ideas and Sartre's distinctions between "pre-reflective" and "reflective" consciousnesses, and consciousness and "knowledge" – only the latter being accompanied by "experience". The suggestion has also much in common with Damasio's (1999) sophisticated and beautifully argued statements about consciousness such as: "The secret of making consciousness may well be this: the plotting of a relationship between any object and the organism becomes the feeling of a feeling" (p. 313). In pointing to a "feeling of a feeling", Damasio ascribes consciousness to a second-order state of the brain being in possession of information regarding a first-order feeling state (knowing about being the feeling of the thereby known). Damasio's conceptualization of consciousness is as the interaction of the "self-system" and "non-self system" with very rapid shifts back and forth between "self-system" representations and the representations of sensory images (see also Edelman, 1989).

played by sexuality in accounts of the unconscious is not due to an inherent conflict between sexuality and adaptation to a civilized world necessitating repression, but a consequence of the bizarre human condition that infantile sexuality is an internal state that is not to be reflected on and mirrored by the attentive caregiver (Fonagy, 2008). The mother inevitably fails to mirror the infant's sexual excitement. Infantile aggression is another state of mind that is unlikely to be adequately mirrored by carers and can consequently become part of a residue of what, following Bion's (1963) thinking, we might refer to as "unmetabolized" internal states. But the vast bulk of what is not mirrored is what cannot be mirrored. This may be because it is not sufficiently coherent to be mirrored by another mind. It is too disconnected, insufficiently linked to what has gone before or what is evident in the present. Or it may be something that generates too much "unpleasure", triggering a biologically formed reluctance in the object to respond contingently (as could be the case with sexual excitement and aggression). It is the chaotic, the fragmentary, the destructive that are not re-presented to the child, and these are the emergent characteristics⁵ of the repressed unconscious. Our unmirrored experiences will always remain unnameable and unconscious because categorization and meaning arise out of the mirroring of experience by an attentive adult. The unconscious mind of our psychoanalytic metapsychology is a repository for internal states that remain unmanageable because they were never mirrored and therefore never acquired a symbolic or second-order representation. These ideas are felt to be inherently alien because they are internal experiences – that is, they are felt to be sitting within the self, but can be the

⁵ Emergent characteristics are ones that may be causally explained by the behaviour of elements of a system but are not the property of any of the individual elements of the system, nor the summation of the properties of the elements (e.g., the liquid quality of water is explained by the combination of hydrogen and oxygen atoms into the water molecule, but neither hydrogen nor oxygen is a liquid at room temperature).

object of meaningful experience (Being, in Heidegger's sense) only when they are externalized and felt as if they belonged to the other.

The assumption of the relational (or co-constructed nature of) consciousness may help to clarify an aspect of the subject matter of this volume. The unrepressed unconscious is that part of the non-phenomenologically accessible mind that has the potential for relational representation, of being mirrored or contingently responded to even in the absence of such shared experience. The pre-conscious can be conceptualised as designating mental contents that could become conscious with the help of the searchlight of attention. In our formulation, that searchlight is not guided from within. Rather, it is guided by another mind focusing on the mental world of the subject. It is the process of interaction and the simultaneous experience of thought or feeling that creates the potential for phenomenal experience. The unrepressed unconscious awaits such external validation. The repressed unconscious waits in vain as, under normal circumstances, the agent cannot contingently respond to give meaning to the experience.

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