

MATT FFYTCHÉ

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The unconscious, cornerstone of psychoanalysis, was a key twentieth-century concept and retains an enormous influence on psychological and cultural theory. Yet there is a surprising lack of investigation into its roots in the critical philosophy and Romantic psychology of the early nineteenth century, long before Freud. Why did the unconscious emerge as such a powerful idea? And why at this point? This interdisciplinary study breaks new ground in tracing the emergence of the unconscious through the work of philosopher Friedrich Schelling, examining his association with Romantic psychologists, anthropologists and theorists of nature. It sets out the beginnings of a neglected tradition of the unconscious psyche and proposes a compelling new argument: that the unconscious develops from the modern need to theorise individual independence. The book assesses the impact of this tradition on psychoanalysis itself, re-reading Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* in the light of broader post-Enlightenment attempts to theorise individuality.

Matt Ffytche is a lecturer at the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex. His research focuses on the history of psychoanalysis, and critical theories of subjectivity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He is a co-editor of the web-based digital archive, 'Deviance, Disorder and the Self'.

The Foundation of the Unconscious **Schelling, Freud and the Birth of the Modern** **Psyche**

Matt Ffytche



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For Andrea

Light cast over our camp as if in day by reason and seeks cover underground.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction: the historiography of the unconscious

Part I The subject before the unconscious

- 1 A general science of the I: Fichte and the crisis of self-identification
- 2 Natural autonomy: Schelling and the divisions of freedom

Part II The Romantic unconscious

- 3 Divining the individual: towards a metaphysics of the unconscious
- 4 The historical unconscious: the psyche in the Romantic human sciences
- 5 Post-idealism and the Romantic psyche

Part III The psychoanalytic unconscious

- 6 Freud: the *Geist* in the machine
 - 7 The liberal unconscious
- Conclusion

Bibliography

Index

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Introduction: the historiography of the unconscious

We want to make the I into the object of this investigation, our most personal I. But can one do that?¹

The historiography of psychoanalysis needs radical revision. This book poses the question: where does psychoanalysis begin? Which is to ask both when can we begin with it historically, and how exactly does it emerge? The conventional answer to those questions has, for many decades, been the one provided by Freud himself: that it begins in Vienna, out of a combination of Freud's private clinical work with neurotics, his collaboration with Josef Breuer in the treatment of hysteria, and the period of depression which inaugurates his own self-analysis in the 1890s, all of which fed into the genesis of the *Interpretation of Dreams* – the work which for many marks the opening of the 'Freudian' century. More recent scholarship has greatly extended our knowledge of Freud's formative contexts, including the publication of his correspondence with Wilhelm Fliess, and studies of the intellectual ambience of the Viennese medical school and Freud's earliest work on neuro-anatomy, as well as the crucial impact of his period of study with Charcot in Paris.³ Psychoanalysis, evidently, has broader roots than Freud's own self-investigation. Two reassessments, George Makari's *Revolution in Mind* and Eli Zaretsky's *Secrets of the Soul*, both draw on such revisions in psychoanalytic scholarship and shift the focus of study away from Freud's own biography and towards colleagues, collaborators and the broader cultural climate. Even so, there remains a seemingly unshaken consensus that psychoanalysis is born out of the melting pot of late nineteenth-century Viennese modernity. According to Zaretsky, 'we have still not historicized psychoanalysis', but he takes this to mean exploring the breadth of its appeal and its contradictory impact on twentieth-century culture. Carl Schorske's *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* is, for Zaretsky, still the greatest attempt to 'grasp psychoanalysis historically'.⁴ Equally, for Makari, what is needed is a lateral broadening of the frame of inquiry in order to identify the many different fields from which Freud 'pulled together new ideas and evidence... to fashion a new discipline'.⁵ None of these works, with the exception of Sonu Shamdasani's ground-breaking reassessment of the work of C. G. Jung,⁶ pay any attention to the longer-range history of the 'unconscious psyche', or tie Freud's work back into the earlier nineteenth century's fascination with the obscure tiers, functions and forces at work below the level of consciousness, the secret histories of the self. It is as if these notions emerge wholly unannounced in the 1890s.

The object of this study is to provide a new and more complex account of the emergence of the idea of a psychic unconscious, and so to explore the possibility of giving psychoanalysis a much deeper historical context. There are good grounds for locating this moment historically at the threshold of the nineteenth century in Germany, under the wings of Romanticism and post-Kantian idealism. Here, at the very least, one finds the initial integration of a theory of the unconscious with the mind's inner medium, named as the 'psyche' or the 'soul' (*Seele*, the word still used by Freud to indicate the psychical apparatus). Both of these terms, already at this time, were set in the context of a psychological theory and a therapeutic practice which developed out of and alongside a concern with

mesmerism and animal magnetism. Here, too, in the work of figures such as the idealist F. W. J. Schelling and the nature philosopher and anthropologist G. H. Schubert,⁷ one finds many of the characteristic idioms associated with psychoanalytic theory in the twentieth century: the notion of an internal mental division and a dialogue between a conscious and an unconscious self; the sense of concealed or repressed aspects of one's moral nature; a new concern with memory and the past, and with both developmental accounts of the self and reconstructions of the origins of consciousness. The first two items listed here – the unconscious and repression – are those suggested by Freud as the principle cornerstones of psychoanalytic theory, according to his 1923 Encyclopaedia article on 'Psychoanalysis', the other two being the theory of sexuality and the Oedipus complex.⁸

Moreover, though Zaretsky sees in Freud 'the first great theory and practice of "personal" life'⁹ and Makari finds him trying to win for science 'the inner life of human beings',¹⁰ both accounts strangely eclipse that moment, a hundred years earlier, which saw the production of Rousseau's *Confessions*, Fichte's theory of subjectivity, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and Wordsworth's *Prelude*. This same period gave rise to both the various kinds of self-investigation practised by German Romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel, J. W. Ritter and Novalis, and also J. C. Reil's coinage of *psychotherapie*, Carl Moritz's *Magazine for Empirical Psychology* and many other similar initiatives all organised around the secular investigation of personal and interior life.¹¹ Finally, there emerges at this time a specific theoretical focus on the foundation of consciousness in earlier, more primitive and unconscious stages (both from the point of view of individual development, and as an issue for cultural history as a whole), as well as a new kind of psychological interest in peculiar or pathological states of mind, including forms of madness, but also sleep, dreams and trances.

Various writers have at times suggested more distant points of inception for the basic concepts of psychoanalysis, including Lancelot Law Whyte in his slim 1960 volume *The Unconscious Before Freud*, and more importantly Henri Ellenberger, whose still unparalleled scholarship in *The Discovery of the Unconscious* traces the therapeutic contexts of depth psychology back through various nineteenth-century trends to the vogue for mesmerism in the eighteenth century.¹² Ellenberger's work and that of Odo Marquard in the 1980s, both of which I will consider further below, provide important accounts of the way in which psychoanalysis links back to Romantic intellectual contexts.¹³ Yet still surprisingly little work has been done on the interconnection of the various Romantic and idealist notions of the psyche and the unconscious, their links to an emerging field of psychology, or their relation to a 'Freudian unconscious' at the other end of the century.¹⁴ Whatever contemporary interest there is in influences running between psychoanalysis and the epoch of Romanticism has come not from the history of ideas, or the history of psychology, but from contemporary debates in literary theory and continental philosophy. Two obvious examples are *The Indivisible Remainder* by Slavoj Žižek and *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy* by Andrew Bowie, both of which have wanted to make a case for the close links between the work of Schelling and the conceptual apparatus of psychoanalysis.¹⁵ For Žižek, for instance, Schelling's *Ages of the World* [*Weltalter*] is 'a metapsychological work in the strict Freudian sense'.¹⁶ Such publications undoubtedly brought this rather obscure backwater in intellectual history on to the contemporary agenda and were the first indications of a more recent Schelling revival.¹⁷ More recently, Joel Faflak's *Romantic Psychoanalysis* has advanced similar theoretical arguments, this time drawing on the work of British Romantic writers such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and De Quincey.¹⁸

There are, however, a number of reasons why such works are not particularly helpful to this

investigation. One is that the idea of psychoanalysis which they seek to identify in the works of Romantic authors is not so much Freud's, but Freud read through the lens of Lacanian and postmodern continental theory. (For Bowie, psychoanalysis is one out of many areas of modern theory in relation to which he is keen to establish Schelling as a foundational thinker – others include deconstruction, Marxism and the postmodernism of Richard Rorty.) This is not just a dispute over the roots of psychoanalysis – 'Lacan versus Freud'. The problem is rather that psychoanalysis is assimilated too directly to the terms of the European philosophy of the subject. It is frequently a question of mapping post-Lacanian theory on to an older idealist and post-idealist philosophy (by which it had already been informed via figures such as Alexandre Koyré and Alexandre Kojève) rather than investigating the way in which proto-psychoanalytic concepts themselves emerge in the early nineteenth century, and what their original implications were. Faflak's *Romantic Psychoanalysis* is an intricate and thoughtful study, thoroughly immersed in the task of unearthing the relevance of Romantic forms of psychological and aesthetic reflection for contemporary debates on the 'fragility' or structural elusiveness of subjectivity. However, he uses the term 'psychoanalysis' in the wider sense given it by the philosophers and literary critics of deconstruction, for whom it means submitting the grounds of subjectivity to a process of infinite inquiry. Such analyses are in turn directed towards establishing the historical groundlessness of subjectivity, or an 'interiority inconsistent with itself'.¹⁹ What is at stake in such texts, then, is really an argument about the postmodern 'de-centred subject', and a (plausible) attempt to locate certain anticipations of this debate within Romanticism. Likewise Žižek and Bowie equate the terms and structures of Romantic philosophy directly with those of contemporary theory. But in making the connection between psychoanalysis and German idealism, such works are not primarily pursuing the genealogy of psychoanalytic concepts at all. What is missing is a concern with how and why the terminology of the unconscious psyche emerges in this Romantic context in the first place. Where does it emerge from, and how and why does it begin to function so centrally within psychological theory?²⁰

A second problem is that such works tend to deal with psycho-theoretical questions in a way that abstracts them from frameworks of historical enquiry, beyond the bare essentials of descriptive contextualisation. This means that they fail to incorporate a dynamic and critical sense of the shifting cultural connotations of such crucial terms as 'psyche', 'personal identity', 'spirit' and 'individual existence', over the course of one or two centuries, likewise the striking shift in assumptions about the nature of 'self-consciousness', 'independence', 'individuality' itself, and so on. They fail, that is, to give an adequate representation of the ideological pressures which, over time, have pulled the 'unconscious' and the 'psyche', one way or another, into different signifying contexts which fundamentally change their meaning. Positioning Schelling's work in relation to Kant, Žižek is nonetheless keen to read Schelling's work radically out of context as exhibiting a 'double non-contemporaneity to his own time'.²¹ But though formal accounts of the structure of psychic and subjective life may beg to be read philosophically and trans-historically, there are serious problems with such an approach. Do terms such as 'subjectivity' and 'psyche' mean the same things in the nineteenth, twentieth and now twenty-first centuries? What would 'metapsychology' have meant for Schelling, and could he ever have intended it in the Freudian sense?

By abstracting such concepts from wider debates in nineteenth-century psychology, anthropology, political theory, religion and from metaphysics, or from cultural and aesthetic theory, one loses crucial interpretive factors. What is really being argued through the notion of an unconscious? What issues are thinkers attempting to resolve as they reorganise their theory of mind? It may be that cultural and socio-political factors are crucial in accounting for the way the notion of a psychic

unconscious moves centre-stage at this point in time, casting its shadow back over the Age of Reason. When Žižek describes Schelling's ideas as emerging in a brief flash, which 'renders visible something that was invisible beforehand and withdrew into invisibility thereafter',²² he may be suggesting that the historical emergence of new concepts must itself sometimes be modelled on the obscure and unknowable irruptions of the unconscious itself, but such an assumption forecloses any attempt to give the unconscious itself a history.

The broader unconscious

In wanting thus to recognise how concepts of the psyche and the unconscious function in more general currents of intellectual and cultural history in the early nineteenth century, I am not aiming simply to temper contemporary perspectives with a more sensitive reconstruction of the past. Rather my concern is that the angle of vision has been much too narrow. The study of the unconscious – which Buchholz and Göttsche have termed the '*Zentralmassiv* of psychoanalysis'²³ – requires to be opened up, vastly, before we can begin to make sense of such issues as the emergence of a strictly 'psychoanalytic' unconscious and the rationale for its appearance in modernity. We need to look beyond the Freudian and Jungian paradigms, let alone the Lacanian or Derridean, to the outlines of a broader nineteenth-century interest in the unconscious for which there is no single logic and no single history. The unconscious we associate with psychoanalysis – and which remains one of the most fundamental concepts in contemporary psycho-dynamic theory, of whatever persuasion – is a fragment of a much larger puzzle. By the end of the century, it had in fact become so ubiquitous a concept that the question is not so much 'did Freud inherit the unconscious from earlier in the century', but which versions of it did he inherit?

Already in the late eighteenth century there emerged notions of a life force which governs the organic and developmental functions of the body – described by Herder as 'the inner genius of my being'²⁴ – and which is either entirely distinguished from the soul, or imagined to represent unconscious capacities within it. As the nineteenth century advances, such ideas are partly translated into the discourse of an 'unconscious', an example being the writings of Carl Gustav Carus, whom C. G. Jung cited as a forerunner to his own work. Besides such vitalist ideas there is the Romantic medical and philosophical interest in the phenomena of mesmerism and somnambulism, documented by Ellenberger and others, and connected with this are various attempts to theorise the different unconscious forces, functions and powers governing trance and hypnoid states reported in the burgeoning literature on psychopathology. On a different front there are philosophical debates running throughout the century, from the immediate post-Kantians to figures such as J. S. Mill and later Franz Brentano, which are concerned to establish the limits of reason, or to argue for or against the possibility of unconscious ideas. Yet another avatar of the unconscious, which increases its hold as one moves through the century, is the evocation of the buried past of the mind, to which we could add a broader sense of the unconscious as the primeval, the inherited, or the deep historical past. Also of great importance to any survey of the nineteenth-century unconscious is Schopenhauer's more metaphysical portrait of nature as a vast organism with its own unconscious will, which was further developed in the light of evolutionary theory by Eduard von Hartmann in his *Philosophy of the Unconscious* which ran to eleven German editions between 1868 and 1904 and was first translated into English in 1884.²⁵ Another crucial tributary of the concept is Johann Friedrich Herbart's descriptions of the way ideas in the mind are thrust above or below the threshold of mental perception according to

particular degrees of mental force – notions which fed through into Gustav Fechner’s psychophysical investigations of the 1850s. Both of these writers influenced some of Freud’s earliest ideas on repression in terms of the vicissitudes of quantities of psychical energy. Somewhere we must also take into account Romantic theories of genius and creativity as emanations of unconscious life, as well as such poetical and spiritual descriptions of the unconscious as ‘the darkness in which the roots of our being disappears, the insoluble secret in which rests the magic of life’.²⁶

Many of these languages of the unconscious tend towards the overtly religious or metaphysical – at times the unconscious signals nothing less than the immanent and mysterious power of a divine creator, or of ‘nature’ or the ‘absolute’ which come to stand in for this in only partly secularised ways. But equally, and from early on in the century, the unconscious is used in a more limited and empirical way to indicate automatic functions such as reflexes. Further into the Victorian period, neurological and physiological usages emerge, such as ‘unconscious cerebration’, and finally from the 1880s onwards there are the new psychiatric and psychological coinages emerging in the work of Pierre Janet, F. W. H. Myers and others, including the subconscious, the subliminal, and the dissociated aspects of the self.²⁷

Attempts to trace the impact of these instances of the unconscious through to Freud and to Jung have been necessarily piecemeal. Jung openly acknowledged his debt to many of these precursors, particularly the work of Schelling, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Carus. But there are also obvious traces in Freud’s writings of the legacy of mesmerism and psychophysics, Romantic literature and the philosophy of nature. As Buchholz and Gödde argue, ‘Freud was in no way prepared to content himself with a clinical psychology. The claims of his metapsychology aim far beyond that and lay claim to a terrain that had been traditionally leased to theology and philosophy’.²⁸

A complete understanding of the rationale for the development of the unconscious in the nineteenth century would require nothing less than a cultural history of the nineteenth century itself, and a sensitivity not only to ‘influences’ of various generations of thinkers on each other, but also to confluences between radically different yet cognate terms, and various permutations and infiltrations across disciplinary fields. This would hardly amount to a ‘tradition’ – certainly, nothing so clear as a tradition linking Freud to the Romantics. Such a study could at most sketch the evolution of a set of ideas and problems, linked to a term distributed across quite far-flung contexts. The unconscious pervades psychiatry, medicine and psychology, but also philosophy, religion and metaphysics and theories of nature and history, as well as more popular psychological and cultural elaborations in novels, poems and moral essays, in such a way that one can hardly begin to describe its ‘specific’ provenance. Did Freud imbibe the term in a medical context, or from student discussions of Nietzsche or Schopenhauer, from his interests in myth and Victorian anthropology, or even from youthful readings in Jean-Paul Richter, E. T. A. Hoffmann and Ludwig Börne.²⁹

For these reasons, this book is not so directly concerned with tracking a specific ‘line of influence’ from Schelling to Freud. But why, then, turn to intellectual shifts in Germany in the early 1800s? What specifically can be found there to inform us of what is going on later in the century? My conviction is that there is something instructive about examining the inception of a concern with the unconscious. It is true that one can trace instances of this concern back indefinitely, and certainly late eighteenth-century thinkers interested in an unconscious were aware of certain specific precursors – most obviously Leibniz’s notion of *petites perceptions*, the mass of smaller details which go to make up the quality of more general sense perceptions, but of which, taken individually, we may be unconscious. However, something happens in the early nineteenth century which introduces some

dramatic changes to the way in which such a discourse of the unconscious functions. Its usage and usefulness is greatly expanded – many of the different versions of the unconscious listed above are already in operation in this early phase, as subsequent chapters will show. The term is also already tied to a new interest in the psyche and starts to take on a quite novel central role within psychological, philosophical and metaphysical argument about the nature and development of subjective identity. From having been a side issue, the unconscious becomes a fulcrum for certain tendencies within the natural and human sciences, and Friedrich Schelling is central to this development.

Certain things are also apparent in the early 1800s that will be harder to make out one hundred years on, partly because by then, even though it remains a highly contested idea in some fields, aspects of the unconscious (conceptually, ideologically and metaphorically) will have become part of the general background of late Victorian cultural and scientific understanding. By going back to the beginning of the century it is possible not only to trace more clearly the logic by which philosophical and psychological notions of the unconscious emerge and begin to interact, but also to learn from informative debates on the necessity of the unconscious as a core principle for the human sciences, and even more particularly in psychology. In examining such arguments, we can see that the unconscious is not just implicated in psychology insofar as psychology becomes interested in acknowledging and investigating phenomena on or beyond the fringe of consciousness – such as dreaming and madness. Right from the start, an unconscious within the individual is central to psychology for additional reasons, one of which is the role it plays in enabling philosophers and psychologists to conceive of autonomy, spontaneity, creativity or self-development within individuality. Here Zaretsky's insight that Freud 'gave expression to possibilities of individuality, autonomy, authenticity and freedom that had only recently emerged' is perhaps crucial.³⁰ Where Zaretsky is at fault, though, is in his timing which places the emergence of these concerns in what he calls the second industrial revolution, 'roughly 1880s to 1920s'.³¹ Although many individuals may only have gained practical experience of certain freedoms towards the end of the nineteenth century, the idea of those freedoms had been elaborated long before this in writings of the Romantic period.

I should emphasise here that, though I am making Schelling central to this investigation of the emergence of the idea of the unconscious, and of the moulding of this unconscious into forms which will be incorporated into an emergent Romantic psychology, Schelling would not have perceived himself as a 'psychologist', or have wanted to carve out a philosophical role for psychology in the modern sense.³² He was, however, concerned to centralise the role of the 'psyche' – as opposed to 'consciousness' or 'reason' – within a new ontology of the self, to the extent that some of his works develop a philosophy of the unconscious psyche. For this reason, and particularly in this period, it is important not to determine the boundaries of 'psychology' too exclusively, or to limit its meaning either to later notions of an experimental science, or to earlier ones which specifically announce themselves as 'psychologies'.³³ As we shall see, philosophical and psychological constructs were constantly impinging on each other, influencing each other's attempts to materialise the constitution of inner life. This is particularly the case where increased attention to the unconscious is concerned.

Methodological problems

If one accepts that an investigation into the development of Romantic and idealist concepts of the unconscious psyche will provide an extremely valuable framework for understanding the later

emergence of psychoanalysis and its success within the human sciences, as well as locating these in relation to wider movements in European thought and culture, the task still poses some very particular difficulties for the historian of ideas.

First of all, as noted, the term 'unconscious' has a propensity to slip away as a coherent object for historical analysis, because of its diffusion across a wide number of discursive contexts. The notion of an 'unconscious' was articulated, extended and correlated, this way and that, between philosophy, psychology, natural history, spiritualism and literature throughout the nineteenth century before it became more restrictively associated with the new science of psychoanalysis. Thus any attempt to stabilise its history within a particular institutional or cultural domain is bound to tell only a small portion of the story.

Secondly, there is the particular difficulty in historicising concepts of mind per se. It is one thing to deal with the broader repercussions of action in politics and society, where questions of internal motives can be relegated to the position of secondary and speculative features of a historical account. But it is another to deal with the 'ego', the 'soul' or the 'I' as themselves historical constructs. Can these, to mirror Freud's question in the *New Introductory Lectures*, be made into the object of an investigation?³⁴ Can they be extracted as historical objects, even if one is assured of their shifting historical definitions? How does one historicise or even locate the interchanges between modes of lived self-perception and, for instance, the broader transformations of religious and scientific languages?

Thirdly, there are still major obstacles to the interpretation of German idealism within the framework of materialism and empiricism which has so dominated Anglo-American intellectual history. Many aspects of the German conceptual terrain appear radically alien from the other side of this interpretive rift, and it is quite common for historians of mind, or of psychology, who are happy to attend to aspects of Kant and Schopenhauer's thought, to steer carefully around philosophers such as Schelling and Fichte because of the difficulties of reconstructing their assumptions. Work by Frederick Beiser, Terry Pinkard and Karl Ameriks has begun to rectify this situation to some extent as regards philosophy, but little impact has been made as yet on the historiography of psychology. Graham Richards in his survey of psychological ideas from 1600 to 1850 squeezes an allusion to German idealism from Fichte to Hegel into a half-paragraph, though he is able to devote much more space to the empiricist responses to Kant of Fries, Herbart and Beneke.³⁵ Edward S. Reed investigates the Romantic assumptions of the Shelleys, but makes only a few scant references to the idealists and the German Romantic *Naturphilosophen*.³⁶ This, despite the fact that Schelling exerted a very broad influence over the continental development of natural and biological science and psychology in the first half of the nineteenth century, as well as on the post-Romantic concept of the imagination and, as I will argue, the psychic unconscious. For Stefan Goldman it is Schelling in 1800 who uses the term 'unconscious' as a substantive for the first time, in the context of his analysis of the unconscious conditions of self-consciousness and the sources of art.³⁷

Fourthly, there are difficulties in establishing a neutral set of reference points for such an enquiry given the complex ideological conflicts waged over languages of mind even now, in which the various schools of psychoanalysis are themselves vociferous protagonists. As Irma Gleiss argues, 'the psychoanalytic movement has taken great pains to marginalise its Romantic companions – for instance, C. G. Jung and Georg Groddeck'.³⁸ Psychoanalysis already has various internal narratives concerning the historical inception of psychoanalytic structures – including those outlined by Freud in

Totem and Taboo, Civilization and Its Discontents and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* – which generally identify this inception with distant moments in cultural, if not species, prehistory. Leaving these aside, there is the fiercely guarded tendency, already noted, to associate the prehistory of psychoanalytic concepts with the prehistory of Freud's own career leading up to the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. At one extreme, there are those studies which equate the emergence of psychoanalysis entirely with the process of Freud's own self-analysis and investigation of his dream life (for instance by Anzieu and Grinstein).³⁹ In looking beyond Freud for the beginnings of nineteenth-century interest in a psychical unconscious, one is moving somewhat critically against the tide. Historical investigations which seek to establish alternative contexts for the emergence of psychoanalytic structures cannot help but present themselves, in some way, as acts of delegitimation. Frank J. Sulloway's *Freud: Biologist of the Mind*, for instance, bears the subtitle 'Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend'.⁴⁰

One major exception to the occlusion of Romantic and idealist contributions to psychoanalytic concepts, within psychoanalytic historiography, must be made for Henri Ellenberger's landmark volume on the *Discovery of the Unconscious*, which is still unsurpassed in its historical range and the multiplicity of perspectives it sheds on the emergence of what he identifies as 'dynamic psychiatry' or 'dynamic psychotherapy'. That book traces the origins of such dynamic theories of mental life 'through a long line of ancestors and forerunners', going all the way back to the eighteenth century, where Ellenberger pursues the fortunes of the mesmerist movement into Germany and thus into transformative contact with Romantic philosophy. He provides brief accounts of the psychological theories of Schelling, G. H. Schubert and C. G. Carus, as well as comparisons with the framework of Freudian metapsychology.⁴¹ However, Ellenberger is examining a particular aspect of the psychoanalytic phenomenon – 'the mystery of the mechanism of psychological healing' from exorcism to hypnotism to talking cure. He investigates why 'certain patients respond to a certain type of cure while others do not', a phenomenon 'of great theoretical importance to the study of psychiatry as the basis of a new science of comparative psychotherapy'.⁴² In this case, approaching the 'problem of the psyche means being able to set the therapeutic claims of psychoanalysis in a wider framework of historically identifiable practices, including mesmerism, hypnotism and Romantic psychiatry. But in focusing on the history of therapy, he gave less attention to the history of conceptual development around the ego, the psyche and the unconscious – concerns which only partly overlap with his own.

All these hindrances to study – the diffuse application of the concept of an unconscious; the difficulty of historicising concepts of mind; paradigmatic confusion over the terms of German idealism; and the resistance of psychoanalysis to its historicisation – have in one way or another impaired historians' ability to assess the significance of the intersection between theories of the unconscious and theories of the psyche in the early nineteenth century, or of the links running forwards to new accounts of individuality and interiority in modernity. With this in mind, the object of this study is simply to establish a more developed understanding of the relationship between the terms of psychoanalysis and their historical inception in the context of post-Kantian idealism and Romanticism. But it is also my belief that broadening the framework for thinking about the emergence of the psychic unconscious does more than enable one merely to uncover further historical reaches of Freud or Jung's cultural inheritance. These contexts reveal unrecognised historical implications of the psychoanalytic project itself. That is, by disturbing the roots of psychoanalytic historiography we can allow new perspectives and wholly new questions to emerge. In this light I want to consider two major theoretical studies which *have* situated the unconscious in just such a way – not in relation to medical positivism in *fin de siècle* Vienna, but to a nexus of issues emerging at the beginning of the century.

One of these works establishes a genealogical relation between Freudian psychoanalysis and German idealism, the other relates the unconscious – as theoretical object of psychoanalysis – to a paradigmatic upheaval at the end of the eighteenth century that gave birth to the modern human sciences. In both cases this greater temporal reach makes the unconscious diagnostically central within a broader account of modern culture and its distinctive ideological transformations.

Marquard

The first text is Odo Marquard's highly original and provocative study, *Transzendentaler Idealismus Romantische Naturphilosophie, Psychoanalyse*, which, though now twenty years old, has yet had little impact on historical research on psychology in the Anglo-American world.⁴³ The book is concerned with the philosophical genealogy linking psychoanalysis to the project of German idealism – as Marquard puts it, 'The point was to show that certain elements of psychoanalysis were actually "philosophical" ones'.⁴⁴ He begins with a description of how Kant's transcendental philosophy was drawn towards the terrain of aesthetics in *The Critique of Judgement* in an attempt to reconcile the structure of rational thought, as Kant conceived it, with the idea of human freedom. In Marquard's reading, the path taken by philosophy at this juncture led in a particularly unpromising direction – towards a decline or enchantment of the Enlightenment commitment to self-awareness and political self-determination. Marquard suggests, in part, that the turn to aesthetics, in order to theorise a mode for the spontaneous operation of judgement, disengaged thinking and acting from the terrain of social and political conflict in which the nature of freedom – and the possibility of its historical production – is ultimately to be defined. There was, as it were, a dangerous hiving-off of the enquiry into subjective freedom from historical and social contexts within which such questions are immediately implicated and, at the same time, the substitution of a more illusory and gratifying terrain for study (that of aesthetic consumption). On the other hand (and it is this development with which Marquard is particularly concerned) Kant's allied attempt to speculate on the teleological structure of nature as an organic whole threatened to bolster the transcendental account of human freedom in another way. The danger for the Enlightenment project was that it would illicitly substantiate an account of human potential – potential freedom and potential harmony – by giving it a speculative basis in 'nature', at the very same time as these ideals were failing to materialise in human history. For all its seeming concreteness and 'materiality', the turn to a philosophy of nature was in danger of shoring up a grand metaphysical illusion. Marquard's target is not so much Kant himself as the propensity, in post-Kantian philosophy, for transcendental projections of the structures underlying human experience to be formulated as an aesthetics, and for such aesthetic theories to embed themselves in speculative theories of natural history: 'Where historical reason has become "transcendental", that is, indeterminate as to its goal and means ... the hope emerges that nature will replace that which is failing.'⁴⁵

It is this tendency in the development of German thought to 'transport the political definition of history, into a definition of history split off from the political' which particularly arouses Marquard's critical concern.⁴⁶ A similar analysis is made of Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education*: they 'break off without having resolved the dilemma posed between beauty and the political'. Marquard sees this as symptomatic of a political resignation so decisive that the dilemma can only be forgotten. In Schiller's later *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*, the role of the artist is solicited 'no longer in relation to history and the state, but in its relation to "Natur"'.⁴⁷

But how does this relate to the history of psychology? These are the first steps in Marquard's complex narrative about ideology in early nineteenth-century Germany which shows German philosophy shifting its engagement with cosmopolitan political history towards a concern with transcendental aesthetics, and then on to theories of nature and natural teleology. The second stage in the argument explores the consequent flourishing of a Romantic philosophy of nature – Marquard has Schelling and his disciples primarily in mind – which develops a metaphysical account of the unconscious grounds of human life in nature as a counterweight to the instabilities originally diagnosed in history and politics. Again, he reads this further 'falling away from the historico-political framework towards nature' as an affliction born of historical pessimism: 'Where the transcendental philosophy fails to ground the historical hopes of humanity, historico-philosophically on political reason, the attempt of natural philosophy forces them to be grounded on the unconscious grounds of "nature".'⁴⁸ Translated into natural-historical, rather than political-historical terms, transcendental philosophy – its theory of man, of subjectivity and of human freedom – is elaborated in the early 1800s in terms of unconscious grounds and 'unknown history'. That is to say, this subjectivity and this freedom are thought to exist as a potential, and this potential is elicited via speculative constructions of the natural history thought to precede it. Human freedom is something continually evolving out of its origins in nature. Their muse is 'a Mnemosyne who no longer recollects history but rather prehistory'. Ironically, for the generation writing in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the philosophy of development now 'becomes predominantly a philosophy of the past'.⁴⁹

The final step in Marquard's argument is that psychoanalysis is simply a modification of the methods of thinking originally adopted by transcendental philosophy and then transformed into such a philosophy of nature: 'One could say that psychoanalysis is a disenchanting Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, that's why it thinks in the manner of this *Naturphilosophie*.'⁵⁰ In support, he provides a list of various conceptual features the two ideologies hold in common, for instance, the transition from mind to 'nature', the stress on recollection and clarifying the prehistory of the ego, as well as the project of consciously retrieving unconscious histories. He suggests that the relationship between the two periods has remained unnoticed largely for the reason that Schelling's writings are no longer read.

Marquard's account of the emergence of such terms as 'repression' and 'unconscious nature', and his identification of their ideological function in this early nineteenth-century context, is penetrating and persuasive and adds immensely to our perception of the relationship between psychoanalysis and its prehistory within other disciplinary fields. However, from the point of view of a history of psychology, his final negative judgement on that set of ideological transformations is distorted. His work becomes a polemic directed by philosophy against the emergence of nineteenth-century anthropology and psychology. In his reading, psychoanalysis is a final symptom of transcendental philosophy's falling away (implicitly through lack of critical nerve) from an engagement with political reason. For Marquard, psychoanalytic psychology is shot through with appeals to historical experience – to the past, to recollection, to unconscious grounds – which function culturally as a way of displacing conscious historical experience (social and political) into these speculatively constructed and somewhat mythical unconscious dimensions of human life. But what from Marquard's standpoint of 'political reason' appears as a narrative of *Verfall*, might be recast, from an alternative disciplinary perspective, as a narrative about the emergence of new sciences of human life and experience. For surely, what he is charting, without ever acknowledging it in such terms, is also the emergence of a more empirical and secular psychology, which draws on medicine and philosophy as well as aesthetics and new theories of organic nature in order to develop an account of human being adequate to the

post-Enlightenment age. What happens when such a narrative is retold from the perspective of a history of psychology, as a discipline which, rather than merely perverting the course of political philosophy, is seeking its own new foundations by transforming the moral and spiritual languages of body, soul and mind?

Foucault

The second work to situate psychoanalysis in relation to the idealist period is Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, which gives the 'unconscious' a special role within Foucault's account of an 'epistemic shift' in modernity.⁵¹ The middle section of this work sketches a portrait of the classical period (i.e. the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) in which knowledge was perfectly homogenous 'All knowledge, of whatever kind, proceeded to the ordering of its material by the establishment of differences and defined those differences by the establishment of an order.'⁵² The field of knowledge – its reflection of the 'order of things' in the world – was co-extensive with certain practices of representation inherent in the production of taxonomies, tables and systems of classification. According to Foucault, there was as yet no sense of a 'gap' between the power to arrange and connect such systems and notions of the structure of the world itself, nor of the constructive input of humankind as the agent of such organised knowledge. But at the end of the eighteenth century, the argument runs, this efficiently functioning paradigm broke down. Questions were raised about the origin of representation as a specific form of thinking, and representation itself lost 'the power to provide a foundation ... for the links that can join its various elements together'.⁵³ At the same time, 'man', the newly perceived agent of knowledge, became the object of a new kind of investigation – that of the 'human sciences'. These sought to replace 'representation' with a set of more foundational principles, derived from examination of the productive activities of human life itself: 'on the horizon of any human science there is the project of bringing man's consciousness back to its real conditions.'⁵⁴

To some extent Kant is again the major exemplum of this epistemological turn. His *Critique of Pure Reason* 'sanctions for the first time ... the withdrawal of knowledge and thought outside the space of representation'.⁵⁵ But, as a result, a problematic duality is installed within the human sciences at their very inception. On the one hand, they have as their object the life, histories and cultures of empirical human beings; but on the other hand, because human life is now to provide a basis for the theory of knowledge in general, human experience becomes the focus of a new kind of foundational project, to be pursued beneath and beyond the merely empirical and descriptive investigations of human culture and history. The connective power which had, in the classical epoch, been attributed to representation itself, must now be sought 'outside representation, beyond its immediate visibility, in a sort of behind-the-scenes world even deeper and more dense than representation itself'.⁵⁶ Seen in this way, the emergence of the 'problem of the unconscious', for Foucault, is not a contingent theoretical issue that happens to appear in the nineteenth century; rather it is 'ultimately coextensive' with the very existence of the human sciences and is the shadow cast by the human sciences themselves.⁵⁷

Foucault's interest in the unconscious centres on the ways in which society, emerging self-consciously as itself the agent of representation, attempted to establish a hypothetical relationship to the deeper or foundational basis of its own practice, whether this was viewed in logical, historical or

evolutionary terms. But this means that the unconscious indicates a very diverse set of ideological phenomena. At some points Foucault seems to use it as shorthand for the whole project of German idealism itself – ‘A transcendental raising of level that is, on the other side, an unveiling of the non-conscious is constitutive of all the sciences of man’.⁵⁸ At other points, his concern is with those aspects of human phenomena which escape the rationalising drive for self-consciousness of a cogito. It represents the ‘unthought’ aspects of human life and production. In yet other moments, Foucault alludes to the attempt to ground human existence through the intellectual recovery of distant historic origins. Foucault assimilates all these different versions of the unconscious to a single principle which forms a powerful undertow within his account of the nineteenth century as a whole. Psychoanalysis, in this story, is the point at the threshold of the twentieth century where the necessary relation between the human sciences and an ‘unconscious’ breaks out into the open as a named theoretical object, just as in Foucault’s earlier scheme of the eighteenth century ‘representation’ became a conscious issue for the nineteenth century. The twentieth century becomes conscious of the unconscious – which is not the same as saying that the unconscious is dissolved. Rather, it appears for the first time: ‘Whereas in the human sciences advance towards the unconscious only with their back to it ... psychoanalysis points directly towards it, with a deliberate purpose ... towards what is there and yet is hidden.’⁵⁹ Psychoanalysis sets itself the task of ‘making the discourse of the unconscious speak through consciousness’.

This account of the emergence of the unconscious raises some intriguing questions. For a start, it sheds some light on Foucault’s own implicit methodological assumptions – namely, that intellectual phenomena in the nineteenth century are being re-read through the lens of French structuralist debate in the 1950s and 1960s. The unconscious which the human sciences struggle towards is revealed (in the light of the work of Saussure and Levi-Strauss) as being the inferred prior system of signification underlying discursive performance: ‘the system is indeed always unconscious since it was there before the signification, since it is within it that the signification resides and on the basis of it that it becomes effective.’⁶⁰ But if the unconscious is something that is everywhere implicit in the nineteenth century but emerges into consciousness in the twentieth (and becomes clearer still in the 1950s), then what do we make of the emergence of the ‘psyche’ and the ‘unconscious’ at the *beginning* of the epoch under review? What of the contribution of figures such as Schelling who, taking up and transforming Kant’s transcendental concerns, was already altering the notion of epistemology to incorporate an explicit principle of unconsciousness? And what of Carus’ mid-century assertion that ‘The key to an understanding of the nature of the conscious life of the soul lies in the sphere of the unconscious’?⁶¹

What is missing from Foucault’s account is first of all a more adequate evocation of the German, as opposed to the French, intellectual context stretching from the mid eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century (thus developing across the period in which Foucault posits his epistemic break). That context is concerned precisely with such transcendental objects as consciousness, knowledge, structure, groundedness and, eventually, the unconscious and history – the very objects which Odo Marquard examines. One would want, at the least, a more careful depiction of the relationship between the emergence of the human sciences and these already complex speculations on the nature of knowledge and justification. But in fact, beyond Kant, Foucault makes very little reference to the German context. Jürgen Habermas noted the absence of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* in *The Order of Things*, and also suggested Schelling as evidence of a much earlier awareness of human being ‘as the remote product of a history ... of which it is not master’.⁶²

But there is a second kind of omission in Foucault’s account, which one might describe as the

moral and political pressures bearing down upon the terms of the discursive shift which he isolates as an autonomous epistemological occurrence. This is of course an intentional product of the structuralist approach which is concerned to abstract and isolate the structures of discourses as agents of their own history – the ‘folding over of each separated [epistemological] domain upon its own development’, in the way Foucault describes the transitional process.⁶³ But by concentrating on the emergence of epistemological structures as in some sense free-standing entities, he precludes any investigation of how representation, order, connectedness and grounds were entangled in particular ideological commitments and projections. Early nineteenth-century debates about the ‘order of things’ inherit not only the mantle of an epistemological crisis, but also an ontological mission linked to concrete moral and political claims. The formative debates of idealism and Romanticism occurred during the period of the French Revolution; their convictions were tested, in Germany, by the subsequent invasion of German states by Napoleonic forces. Alongside their radical questioning and refounding of epistemological structures, German thinkers explicitly applied themselves to the question of human freedom and to the possibility of describing a human order on grounds finally detached from the heritage of political absolutism. As will emerge in [Chapter 1](#), the task of probing the transcendental origins and coherence of knowledge for a thinker such as Fichte is substantially bound up, first of all with reaction against a perceived dogmatism or moral slavery in human experience, and secondly with the pursuit of an alternative basis on which to theorise human unity, one which, as with Kant, is to be found within oneself, rather than imposed from above or patterned on the unrationalised conventions of the past.

The liberal unconscious

The first Idea is naturally the notion of *my self* as an absolutely free being.⁶⁴

Both Foucault and Marquard are concerned to make a point about the emergence of modernity. They both bring psychoanalysis back into contact with a period in which the unconscious began to carry a new structural weight in the depiction of individual life, and they redefine the significance of psychoanalysis itself within that broader historical framework. And yet they detach their accounts from what one would think are the most prominent and long-lasting features of ideological shift in this period: the socio-political pressure to overcome the vestiges of feudalism and absolute government; and the revised moral and spiritual vocabularies occasioned by Enlightenment pressure on religious tradition. This book argues that any changes in the way the structure of experience, subjectivity and inner life is theorised at the opening of the nineteenth century must be read in that double context. By doing so, I believe one can gain a new perspective on the foundation of the unconscious, and the unconscious *as* a foundation, which is worked theoretically into the heart of processes affecting the life of the individual. In particular, this book sets out to demonstrate the close relationship between the invention of a psychic unconscious and the new clamour in the Romantic period for descriptions of an autonomous, self-creating individual, which was to be so significant for later forms of liberal ideology.⁶⁵

The unconscious, insofar as it forms the basis for a new science of the individual mind (in part philosophical and transcendental, in part natural-scientific, in part a form of moral self-description) is *prima facie* not detachable from nineteenth-century attempts to give an account of autonomy,

originality and independence in the individual, or the wider desire to find new languages and new conceptions of human and social order. It is useful to look again at Zaretsky's suggestion that people have drawn on Freudian psychoanalysis in the twentieth century 'to help recast the promise of individual autonomy', which encompasses 'the freedom to think one's own thoughts and to decide for oneself what to do with one's life', and, furthermore, that autonomy is no longer restricted to the sphere of morality but applies as well to 'creativity, love and happiness'.⁶⁶ The freedom of thought and the self-direction and creation of one's own life, as well as the idealisation of love, are of course the *leitmotifs* of Romantic philosophical, moral and aesthetic debate. Already in the 1790s, writers in Germany were strenuously pursuing the implications of subjective freedom raised by the Enlightenment, and particularly the ramifications of that idea for personal and psychological life. The core argument of this book is that the increasing interest in an unconscious psyche reflects not simply the attempt to produce an adequate account of the phenomena of interior life, but also a concern with establishing the possibility of a self-caused self, or a self the logic of whose development is irreducibly detached from more systematic forms of explanation, or from the idea of its manipulation by external authorities or other determining causes. Such ideas would have an immense (if contested) appeal, particularly within liberal theories of individuality, and thus at the broadest level this book is concerned with attempts to describe a stable 'basis' to the self in the nineteenth century and beyond, into the domain of psychoanalysis itself.

Many accounts of liberalism, and of an associated concern with the free development of individual life in Western thought, mark a transformation in the culture of individuality effectively at this same point in post-Revolutionary Europe – where freedom and self-development become constellated as part of an emerging vocabulary of self, in reaction against eighteenth-century absolutism and rationalism. Importantly, this shift in the envisaged role of individuality concerns not so much the emergence of political movements (though it has inevitably accompanied them) but the elaboration of a complex set of ideas – moral, metaphysical, ontological – about the qualities of selfhood, which are gradually worked into traditions of broader liberal theory, becoming part of the world view of post-Enlightenment modernity.⁶⁷ For John Gray, essential to an understanding of liberalism is an insight into its background in modern European individualism – the conception of ourselves 'as autonomous rational agents and authors of our own values'.⁶⁸ These features 'are fully intelligible only in the light of the several crises of modernity' which include the dissolution of the feudal order in Europe and the French and American revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century.⁶⁹ Likewise, Charles Taylor finds that 'The ethic of authenticity is something relatively new and peculiar to modern culture', building on earlier concepts of individualism (from Locke or Descartes) but essentially born at the end of the eighteenth century.⁷⁰ People 'in the culture of authenticity (who have adopted that ideal)' according to Taylor, 'give support to a certain kind of liberalism'.⁷¹ And again, this individualising freedom – ambivalent, for Taylor, but at least symbolic of modernity – 'was won by our breaking loose from older moral horizons', from the larger hierarchical order, in some cases 'a cosmic order', in which people used to see themselves.⁷² Terry Eagleton has associated the emergence of 'bourgeois culture' and the middle class in modernity with a liberal humanism centred on the notion of an 'autonomous human subject'.⁷³ However ghostly its existence, this autonomous subject is no mere 'metaphysical fantasy' – it remains somehow indispensable to modern culture 'partly because the subject as unique, autonomous, self-identical and self-determining remains a political and ideological requirement of the system'.⁷⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville famously parodied this individualising aspect of the emergence of modern democracy, in which 'people form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands', and in which 'each man is forever

thrown back on himself alone'.⁷⁵ However, this critique is nowadays commonly associated with its inverse, accepted as being part of the ontological core of liberalism, taken in this wider cultural sense and a key aspect of the modern idea of freedom.

The important thing to note here is not that the nineteenth century sees the birth in Germany of a self-consciously political 'liberal' movement (what liberalising tendencies there are at this point are short-lived and remain tied to strong notions of the state), nor a sudden recognition of the fact of individuality as the self-evident starting point for moral and political forms of self-description (against this, one might consider the tendency for German or later British idealists, such as Bernard Bosanquet or F. H. Bradley, or monists such as Herbert Spencer, to begin with the idea of the state, society, or life in general, as a transcendent spiritual or organic fact). What does appear in the wake of the 'crises' of modernity is an intensification of a conjectural movement towards core notions – freedom, autonomy, vitality, self-development – which are recurrently emphasised in accounts of the self, particularly once such terms become detached from wider idealist and Romantic assumptions about holism and pantheism.⁷⁶ One thinks, for instance, of Wilhelm von Humboldt's contention that each person should strive to develop himself 'from his own inmost nature, and for his own sake', or 'by his own energies, in his perfect individuality',⁷⁷ which was taken up in J. S. Mill's defence of originality, 'individuality of power', and a person 'whose desires and impulses are his own',⁷⁸ and eventually in Hobhouse's belief that 'society can safely be founded on this self-directing power of the personality'.⁷⁹ But the coherence or integrity of such conceptions of individuality – pitched ambivalently as they are between a commitment to 'individualism' and the search for a new kind of moral and political order – carries with it a new kind of crisis, which is the intellectual struggle within liberal theory over the security of its own ideological foundations. Partly this insecurity is prompted by the spectre of rampant individualism itself, as Andrew Vincent puts it: 'the bulk of liberal theory might be described as a half-conscious holding operation against the implicit threat of individualism'.⁸⁰ Or as Terry Eagleton observed, 'once the bourgeoisie has dismantled the centralising political apparatus of absolutism, either in fantasy or reality', the question arises as to 'where it is to locate a sense of unity powerful enough to reproduce itself by'.⁸¹ Eagleton's presentation of this predicament is very close to Marquard's narrative of the travels of transcendental philosophy from political history to *Natur*, and both shed light on Tocqueville's earlier observation that 'the concept of unity becomes an obsession' in democratic culture, to such an extent that the Germans were 'introducing pantheism into philosophy'.⁸² Schelling's own Romantic concern for 'creative life' and the power of 'asserting one's own individuality' is always counterbalanced by a metaphysics of nature as an organic whole, and by the 1830s will have been assimilated to a much more reactionary conception of social order and state authority.⁸³ He himself can hardly be classed as a liberal thinker.

Theories of liberalism wrestle with a second kind of insecurity, and this concerns more simply how individuality can actually be 'thought', how it can be conceived of and theoretically underpinned without being reabsorbed into overarching ideas of coherence, rational order or the system, but equally without unleashing the threat of fragmentation. Notions of individuality have to be defended not only in relation to the State, but also against the need to argue from universal principles, with little sensitivity for the kind of contingent or 'individual' factors which the demands for private, inward and autonomous development of the self seemed to require. Quite apart from nineteenth-century struggles over politically diverse freedoms such as the extension of the political franchise, the freeing of economic markets, or freedom of the press – all of which involve notions of the 'freedom of the

individual' – there is a struggle over the concept of individuality itself. How should one ground the *descriptions* of such self-creating individuals and their moral bases? From the start, the ideologues of liberal freedom were forced to draw on notions of 'constitution' which lay beyond the sphere of practical politics in the realms of art and literature, nature philosophy, metaphysics and psychology.

The unconscious

The unconscious and the psyche are deeply implicated in the constructions of selfhood which emerge from these foundational debates about freedom and individuality. The psychological individual is not suddenly 'revealed' beneath the tattered cloak of religious orthodoxy at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a self-evident empirical framework for understanding mental life. It, too, is implicated in the ideological search for new foundations, which accompanies 'the conception of ourselves as autonomous rational agents and authors of our own values'.⁸⁴ Because of this, the unconscious and the psyche are quickly caught up in speculative cross-currents of scientific, aesthetic, moral and political thought, where they are linked in diverse ways to the fortunes of the individual. First of all, they take on a role within psychological description and psychiatric investigation. There are processes within our minds and bodies which seem to operate unconsciously, and there are states of mind (dream, madness, poetic invention) of which we are not wholly consciously in control. The unconscious psyche, in this sense, is something to be reckoned with because it is part of the psychology of the empirical individual, the component unit of liberal theory – and a part, moreover, which stirs anxieties over the liberal belief in the societal role of reason. Secondly, the unconscious and the psyche also function as tacit forms of holism operating across a community of individuals: there are psychic and unconscious aspects of mind which reveal our groundedness in wider processes of nature, empirically (theories of instinct, for instance) or spiritually and mystically. Once the individual is notionally amputated from the organic body of society,⁸⁵ versions of the unconscious start to reconceive that greater organic body in such a way that moral and political anxieties concerning fragmentation are allayed, though without wholly compromising the experience of self-directedness within the individual. Thirdly, the introduction of irrationalism into philosophical mode – by Schelling in particular – enables the conceptual altercation between 'freedom' and 'control', 'individuality' and the 'system', to fall out differently. The very notion of system becomes complex, dynamic, organic and in certain ways obscure. The psychic unconscious thus provides boundaries and borders for thinking the consistency of individual life in all sorts of new and different ways. Most importantly, it provides a solution to the problem of thinking independence, spontaneity, particularity, originality and self-authorship against, or alongside, the universal legislation of reason. At the same time, the unconscious is itself in the process of being given an empirical and scientific body, insofar as it is involved in scientific accounts of the self-developing structures of individual life – in nature philosophy, in embryology and biology, and above all in psychology.

The argument

What is proposed here is a way of thematising the origin of modern concepts of the psyche such that they are not detached from this wider set of crises in the understanding of subjective identity at the threshold of the nineteenth century. I will argue for the emergence of an unconscious, and forms of unconsciousness, as a mediator in descriptions of freedom and individuality, and thus indirectly but

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