

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND  
PHILOSOPHY OF MIND  
Unconscious Mentality in the  
Twenty-first Century

*Edited by*  
*Simon Boag, Linda A. W.*  
*Brakel, and Vesa Talvitie*

KARNAC

First published in 2015 by  
Karnac Books Ltd  
118 Finchley Road  
London NW3 5HT

Copyright © 2015 to Simon Boag, Linda A. W. Brakel, and Vesa Talvitie for the edited collection, and to the individual authors for their contributions.

The rights of the contributors to be identified as the authors of this work have been asserted in accordance with §§ 77 and 78 of the Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978-1-78220-179-3

Typeset by V Publishing Solutions Pvt Ltd., Chennai, India

Printed in Great Britain

[www.karnacbooks.com](http://www.karnacbooks.com)

# CONTENTS

<i>ABOUT THE EDITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS</i>	vii
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	
Psychoanalysis and philosophy of mind	ix
<i>Simon Boag, Vesa Talvitie, &amp; Linda A. W. Brakel</i>	
<i>CHAPTER ONE</i>	
Wish-fulfilment revisited	1
<i>Tamas Pataki</i>	
<i>CHAPTER TWO</i>	
The significance of consilience: psychoanalysis, attachment, neuroscience, and evolution	47
<i>Jim Hopkins</i>	
<i>CHAPTER THREE</i>	
Freud's aesthetics: artists, art and psychoanalysis	137
<i>Michael Levine</i>	

CHAPTER FOUR

- Beyond the philosophy of the (unconscious) mind:  
the Freudian cornerstone as scientific theory, a cult,  
and a way of talking 163  
*Vesa Talvitie*

CHAPTER FIVE

- Unconscious knowing: psychoanalytic evidence in support  
of a radical epistemic view 193  
*Linda A. W. Brakel*

CHAPTER SIX

- In defence of unconscious mentality 239  
*Simon Boag*

- REFERENCES 267

- INDEX 293

## ABOUT THE EDITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

**Simon Boag** is a senior lecturer in psychology at Macquarie University where he teaches personality theory, research methods and the history and philosophy of psychology. He has published extensively in the area of Freudian repression and unconscious mental processes, philosophy of mind, conceptual research and is the author of *Freudian Repression, the Unconscious, and the Dynamics of Inhibition* (Karnac). He can be contacted at: [simon.boag@mq.edu.au](mailto:simon.boag@mq.edu.au) (see also his website: [www.simon.boag.com](http://www.simon.boag.com))

**Linda A. W. Brakel** is associate professor (adjunct) of psychiatry and research associate in philosophy at the University of Michigan. She is also on the faculty of Michigan Psychoanalytic Institute and practises psychoanalysis in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She has authored and co-authored articles on topics ranging from empirical studies testing psychoanalytic concepts to those on the philosophy of mind and action. Her most recent works are three interdisciplinary books: *Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and the A-Rational Mind* (Oxford), *Unconscious Knowing and Other Essays in Psycho-Philosophical Analysis* (Oxford), and *The Ontology of Psychology: Questioning Foundations in the Philosophy of Mind* (Routledge). She can be contacted at: [brakel@umich.edu](mailto:brakel@umich.edu)

**Jim Hopkins** is visiting professor in the psychoanalysis unit of the Research Department of Clinical and Health Psychology at University College London, and was Kohut visiting professor of social thought in the School of Social Thought, The University of Chicago, for 2008. He is also emeritus reader in the philosophy department, King's College London. He has co-edited books including *Psychoanalysis, Mind, and Art: Perspectives on Richard Wollheim* (Blackwell) and *Philosophical Essays on Freud* (Cambridge University Press) and has published numerous articles on the philosophy of psychoanalysis, as well as other topics, such as consciousness and interpretation. He can be contacted at: jim.hopkins@kcl.ac.uk (see also his website: [www.jimhopkins.org](http://www.jimhopkins.org)).

**Michael P. Levine** is professor of philosophy at the University of Western Australia. He is editor of *The Analytic Freud* (Routledge) and has recently co-authored *Prospects for an Ethics of Architecture* (Routledge), *Thinking Through Film* (Wiley-Blackwell), *Politics Most Unusual* (Palgrave Macmillan), *Integrity and the Fragile Self* (Ashgate), *Racism in Mind* (Cornell University Press). He is currently writing a book with Bill Taylor on catastrophe, urban disaster, ethics and the built environment. He can be contacted at: michael.levine@uwa.edu.au

**Tamas Pataki** is an honorary senior fellow in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne. He has published extensively on the philosophy of mind and co-edited with Michael Levine *Racism in Mind* (Cornell University Press) and is the author of *Against Religion* (Scribe) and *Wishfulfilment in Philosophy and Psychoanalysis: The Tyranny of Desire* (Routledge). He can be contacted at: tpataki@unimelb.edu.au

**Vesa Talvitie** is a doctor of psychology, licensed psychotherapist, organisational consultant (FINOD), and currently works as an occupational psychologist for the City of Helsinki. In addition to numerous articles on psychoanalysis in Finnish and English, he is the author of *Freudian Unconscious and Cognitive Neuroscience: From Unconscious Fantasies to Neural Algorithms* (Karnac) and *The Foundations of psychoanalytic theories—Project for a scientific enough psychoanalysis* (Karnac). He can be contacted at: vesa.talvitie@alumni.helsinki.fi (see also his website [www.vesatalvitie.fi](http://www.vesatalvitie.fi))

## INTRODUCTION

# Psychoanalysis and philosophy of mind

*Simon Boag, Vesa Talvitie, & Linda A. W. Brakel*

Freud's philosophy of mind is at once one of his most contentious and enduring contributions to our understanding of human functioning. Psychoanalytic theory makes bold claims about the significance of unconscious mental processes and the wish-fulfilling activity of the mind, citing their importance for understanding the nature of dreams and explaining both normal and pathological behaviour alike. If true, then psychoanalytic explanation makes a substantial impact to our understanding of human behaviour; it informs us that what people do often belies their true motives—and that these motives themselves may not even be known to the person who holds them. However, since Freud's initial work, both modern psychology and philosophy have had much to say about the merits of psychoanalysis, especially with respect to the possibility of unconscious mentality. Freudian thinking has been heavily criticised by both those outside of psychoanalysis and those within. Of the latter, the tension between clinicians and theoretician/scientists has been pronounced: Freud's metapsychology has fallen out of favour with many for not reflecting the clinical situation, and the development of object-relations accounts has called into question the fundamental motives that Freud proposed. Whether psychoanalysis is a scientific or hermeneutic exercise has also been debated.

The state of affairs is reflected in the current discussions of plurality in psychoanalysis—or psychoanalyses, as some would say (e.g., Wallerstein, 1995). Changes in mainstream psychology have also led to adaptations within psychoanalytic theory. For instance, psychoanalysis has been re-conceptualised in terms of cognitive theory and information-processing (Erdelyi, 1974, 1985), and the developments in affective neuroscience have underscored the development of neuropsychanalysis (Panksepp, 1998, 1999). The increasing interest in neuropsychanalysis is itself a new direction that is not welcomed by all (Blass & Carmeli, 2007) and its conceptual underpinnings are critically questioned (Talvitie, 2009, this volume). One also wonders what Freud would make of some of the developments in psychoanalysis, including the mentalisation movement as advanced by Fonagy and colleagues (e.g., Fonagy, 1999; Fonagy & Target, 2000); therein defence and unconscious processes recede into the background and instead a failure to develop a theory of mind finds prominence.

Given the current state of psychoanalysis, one may then wonder whether there is any merit in revisiting the fundamentals of Freudian theory again. After all, some may think, surely advances in science generally and psychology specifically have overtaken Freud's anachronistic, early twentieth-century thinking. There are, however, several reasons for re-examining the fundamentals of the psychoanalytic conception of mind. For a start, while some of the specifics of Freudian theory have found little currency in contemporary discussions, it is the fundamental factors in Freudian thinking—unconscious mentality, wish-fulfilment, and defence—that nevertheless generally enjoy prominence across the various psychoanalytic perspectives. Furthermore, any new psychoanalytic perspective tends to define itself by specific differences with classical Freudian theory. However, even more fundamentally, Freud in many respects left more questions than answers. His theory was never completed and his aversion to philosophy possibly prevented him paying critical attention to fundamental issues that can only be addressed philosophically, such as the relation between mind and body, or mind and consciousness. What is required then is a critical re-examination of Freudian concepts via a joint scientific and philosophical appraisal of psychoanalytic theory.

The new developments in psychology, philosophy and psychoanalysis raise new challenges and questions concerning Freud's theory

of mind. This book centres upon the major concepts in psychoanalysis, including the notion of unconscious mental processes and wish-fulfilment and their relationship to dreams, fantasy, repression, religion, art, and morality. These are central concepts because they provide the theoretical building blocks that allow a move beyond describing psychological and behavioural phenomena in order to explain them in terms of complex psychodynamic processes. However, these concepts are not all considered equally coherent. Taken as such, this volume can be considered a companion volume to our other edited work (*Philosophy, Science and Psychoanalysis*—Boag, Brakel, & Talvitie, 2015). In both volumes we provide a fresh, critical appraisal and reflection on Freudian concepts, and address how the current evidence and scientific thinking bears upon Freud's original ideas.

There are two major themes contained within this volume. The first theme addresses the topic of explanation in psychoanalysis. Freud's theory is seen by many as situated within, and extending, the ordinary folk-psychological "desire plus belief model" (Boag, 2012; Brakel, 2009; Cavell, 1993; Gardner, 1993; Hopkins, 1988, this volume; Mackay, 1996, 1999; Pataki, 2000; this volume; Petocz, 1999; Wollheim, 1991, 1993). On this view, *intentional* action arises from a motivational state or "desire" component, guided by an instrumental cognitive or "belief" component. Here, when explaining person *P*'s doing *A*, it is understood that: (i) *P* desires *B*; and (ii) *P* believes that doing *A* leads to *B*. The "belief" component includes knowledge, memory and phantasy and specifies the known possible means of satisfaction (or of avoiding frustration). One could say here that explanation could thereby never be reduced to neural events alone, even if neural events are nevertheless implicated in believing and desiring. Accordingly, the relation of neuropsychology to psychoanalytic explanation requires very careful consideration—and Talvitie (this volume) proposes that this has yet to occur. However, there are also opportunities for enhancing psychoanalytic explanations in terms of current research, neuroscientific or otherwise, even if philosophical issues still require much further consideration.

Tamas Pataki opens this section by addressing the fundamental psychoanalytic thesis of wish-fulfilment and its relevance to unconscious intentionality. He argues for the fundamental role of Freudian wish-fulfilment for both interpretation and explanation of symptoms, the analysis of dreams, and the understanding of art, religion, and even

prejudice. Jim Hopkins then examines psychoanalysis in the context of modern neuroscience and evolutionary theory, as well as refreshing psychoanalysis in terms of insights from attachment research. He examines the explanatory context of Freudian theory, demonstrating similarities between the types of explanations both Freud and Darwin employ, and how Freud's explanation then deepens our understanding of human existence. Hopkins' contemporary stance, moreover, draws upon current research from a variety of fields, including neuroscience and sleep research. Next, Michael Levine develops a psychoanalytic discussion about understanding art and the mind of the artist. He addresses views about art and the artist in terms of key long-standing questions concerning the ethics of art and their relation to art's aesthetic.

The second major theme addresses the current debate concerning the nature of unconscious processes. Vesa Talvitie critically assesses whether the cornerstone of psychoanalysis—the unconscious and the possibility of repressed ideas located in the unconscious part of the mind—can be coherently sustained, drawing attention to the sociological factors impinging on scientific discourse generally and psychoanalysis specifically. Linda A. W. Brakel then examines the psychoanalytic topic of primary process mentation, providing both theoretical and empirical evidence for unconscious processes. Finally, Simon Boag raises philosophical arguments in defence of unconscious mental processes, through a fresh examination of Brentano's argument against unconscious mentality.

This debate presented here is an extension of Freud's view on the unconscious, under critical discussion during Freud's lifetime (for example, see Münsterberg, 1909, pp. 125–157). This topic still draws attention to the conflict between empirical findings that suggest the possibility of unconscious mentation, and philosophical perspectives claiming that the very notion of an unconscious *mental* process is untenable. As the philosopher Ernest Nagel states: "And as for the notions of unconscious psychic processes processing causal efficacies—of unconscious, causally operative motives and wishes that are not somatic dispositions and activities—I will not venture to say that such locutions are inherently nonsense, since a great many people claim to make good sense of them. But in all candour I must admit that such locutions are just nonsense to me" (Nagel, 1959, p. 47). Indeed, in the same volume in which Nagel's comments appear, the psychoanalyst Heinz Hartmann admits that Freud himself gave reason for such criticism: "As to the

psychology of unconscious processes, I think it can be said that Freud in developing that part of analysis was much less interested in the ultimate ‘nature’ or ‘essence’ of such processes—whatever that means—than in finding a suitable conceptual framework for the phenomena he had discovered” (Hartmann, 1959, p. 7).

In the pre-analytic philosophy era, Freud’s restricted exploration regarding the ontology of mental processes and unconscious mentation was perhaps both understandable and prevalent. However, ever since Freud’s time there has been considerable pressure from two directions to rigorously account for the mental unconscious and to minimally describe what it actually refers. One direction is the fast developing field of neuroscience, which has challenged the division of labour between psychology and brain science. Multicolour brain-scan images and high-tech methods, in general, attract people, and there is a danger that the weight of neuroscience-driven viewpoints will become far overemphasised. Thus there is a growing need to determine the nature and essence of mind and its relation to neuroscience (see, for example, Bem & Looren de Jong, 2006; Bennett & Hacker, 2003; Boag, 2012; Talvitie, & Ihanus, (2011a, 2011b), especially with respect to the mind-body problem (see Brakel, 2013 for extended discussion of this issue)).

The other (related) direction pressing for explanation of unconscious mentation involves the philosophy of mind. Here, too, technological innovations have played a considerable role. The development of computers, for instance, has given rise to the computer-metaphor for understanding brain-mind processes (i.e., the analogy between the brain and computer’s hardware, and mind and computer’s software). The computer analogy provided a fresh viewpoint to the age-old Cartesian mind-body problem, and inspired philosophers to engage in lively discussions concerning epistemology. Thought-experiments like the “Chinese Room Argument” (Searle, 2002), “Twin earth” (Putnam, 1975), and “Mary the super color scientist” (Jackson, 1982) have figured in these debates. Clearly, especially as the questions concerning the essence of mind and mental phenomena have become extremely topical in other domains, psychoanalysis cannot be a credible academic discipline if it (still) ignores the challenge of providing a coherent account of unconscious mentality. Our volume is an attempt to do just that.