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RECOGNITION IN THEORY

Psychoanalytic Theory and the Epistemology of Recognition[1]

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Contemporary recognition theory, inaugurated with Axel Honneth's 1995 *The Struggle for Recognition*, has engaged with psychoanalytic theory in two main ways. First, it is argued that psychoanalysis provides a *developmental theory* that centers our need for recognition, our growing capacity to recognize others, and the disruptions and ambivalences to which this need and capacity are characteristically subject (Benjamin 2015).[2] For example, in *The Struggle for Recognition,* Honneth turns to psychoanalysis, especially Donald Winnicott and object relations theory, in order to develop a conception of love as a primordial form of recognition, where the symbiotic "fusion" of the infant–mother relationship provides the earliest and paradigmatic case of recognition.[3] More recently, in her 2021 *Critique on the Couch: Why Critical Theory Needs Psychoanalysis*, Amy Allen argues (against Honneth) that Melanie Klein provides a relational story of psychic genesis that emphasizes ambivalence, aggression, and phantasy[4] and that rejects a straightforward, uni-directional "stage model" of psychic development in favor of a model of differently organized, intersubjective psychic "positions," which the subject must negotiate throughout life.

Second, and building off the developmental theory, it is argued that psychoanalysis provides a moral psychology or philosophical anthropology that is more *realistic* and less idealizing than the alternatives. Psychoanalytic theory is seen to provide, as Allen puts it, "a clear-eyed, sanguine conception of what actually motivates persons to act in the ways that they do" (2021, 4). For example, Honneth applauds psychoanalysis' avoidance of moralistic and rationalistic idealism insofar as it emphasizes "the constitutive boundaries of human rationality" (Honneth 2012, 195). Other theorists have gone further, arguing that psychoanalysis emphasizes not only (negatively) the limits of human rationality but also (positively) the constitutive role of unconscious or nonrational forms of thinking, aggression, conflict, and phantasy (see for instance Allen (2021), Judith Butler (2007), Jonathan Lear (1999b), and Joel Whitebook (2001, 2021). With this more realistic moral psychology or philosophical anthropology, psychoanalytic theory can contribute to more nuanced explanations of individual and social behavior, which more idealized moral psychologies tend to regard as contingent privations or pathologies.

Taken together, psychoanalysis and recognition theory articulate a conception of the human being as an essentially recognitive being, yet where both the need for recognition

and the capacity to recognize others are normatively ambiguous, only ever unevenly realized, and subject to elaboration in unconscious phantasy. Crucially, while such unconscious elaborations can sometimes constitute forms of pathology calling for treatment or correction, they *need* not. This point is essential, for to regard the various unconscious phantasies surrounding the need and capacity for recognition exclusively through the lens of pathology-to-be-corrected would be to retain the very moralistic and rationalistic idealisms – what Jacqueline Rose calls "psychic utopianism" (1983, 18) – that psychoanalysis is supposed to help us avoid. In this way, psychoanalytic theory is meant to help us see and come to terms with ourselves as we are, rather than as we wish or imagine ourselves to be.

In this paper, I elaborate on a third way of bringing psychoanalysis and recognition theory together, where this third way should contribute to the other two. I am interested in how the concept of recognition (and a cognate notion that I will introduce with Sigmund Freud: *Sympathy*[5]) can clarify something distinctive about our relationship to psychoanalytic *theory,* insofar as we are at once readers and authors of the theory *and* the theory's object. The thesis for which I will argue is that psychoanalytic theory calls for what I will call an *epistemology of recognition.* In brief, it is not sufficient theoretically to understand the theory; we must be able, to some extent, to recognize *ourselves* in the theory and *find ourselves recognized* by the theory. Or as Freud puts it in a passage to which I'll turn in the next section: we must be able to *sympathize* with the theory. Just as recognition theorists have argued that a detached, contemplative, or purely theoretical relationship with other persons or ourselves is insufficient, so too, I argue, a detached, contemplative, or purely theoretical relationship with psychoanalytic *theory* is insufficient.

There is a twist though. Crucially and obviously, psychoanalysis develops a theory of *unconscious* mental life; it is a theory of mental activities and contents of which we are not pre-theoretically, first-personally, or ordinarily aware. Using a phrase from, respectively, Friedrich Nietzsche, Julia Kristeva, and Timothy Wilson, psychoanalytic theory shows that we are *strangers to ourselves.*[6] So it might seem that psychoanalytic theory would be precisely one that we do *not* and perhaps could not recognize *as* ourselves or find ourselves recognized therein, but would rather find strange or alien or wholly new. One of our tasks, then, is to explain how these two aspects hang together: if psychoanalytic theory presents us as, at least in certain respects, strangers to ourselves, what would it mean to *recognize* that picture?

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To begin, let me clarify how I will be using the notion of *recognition* in speaking of an "epistemology of recognition." Axel Honneth uses this phrase in his 2001 paper *Invisibility: On the Epistemology of "Recognition,"* which asks what must be "added" to theoretical cognition or perception of another human being in order to constitute an act of recognition. By the end of this paper, as in *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (2008), Honneth ultimately rejects an additive approach to recognition (as though first you perceive or cognize a person, and then something else is added in order to become recognition). Instead, Honneth argues, recognition is genetically and categorially *prior* to theoretical cognition. In these works, recognition names a primordial, affectively-engaged attitude of involvement with other persons, which is antecedent to and a pre-condition for theoretical cognition, as well as for more sophisticated recognitive attitudes such as love, respect, and esteem. Moreover, following Hegel, recognition is for Honneth an essentially reciprocal relationship: I can

only recognize you if you can recognize me and insofar as I can recognize you recognizing me (or at least recognize you as capable of doing so). So understood, recognition has three key dimensions: It is affectively engaged, person-directed, and it is reciprocal.

When I speak here of an epistemology of recognition with respect to psychoanalytic theory, I will use "recognition" in a distinct though related sense. Outside of proper recognition theory, the notion of recognition may be invoked to characterize an epistemology that is distinctive of a certain class of objects that themselves "embody" forms of human understanding: for example, social practices, works of art, crafts and tools, texts, and some theories (see, for instance, Collingwood 1946; Honneth 2008; Moran 2016). While these phenomena are not individual persons, they are person-like, and even person-involving, insofar as they involve a sensibility, point of view, and understanding of themselves and the world. As Robin George Collingwood writes of history:

> history consists of the thoughts and actions of minds, which are not only intelligible but intelligent, intelligible to themselves, not merely to something other than themselves: because they contain in themselves both sides of the knowledge-relation, they are subject as well as object
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> (Collingwood 1946, 112; cited in Moran 2016, 319)

Continuing, Collingwood argues that the historian must be able to look at the facts of history "from the inside, and tell us what they look like from that point of view" (Moran 2016, 118). While we can also cognize or understand these objects from a detached theoretical perspective, as if we were spectators occupying a perspective that is external to the form of understanding that the phenomena embody, it is also possible to *recognize* these phenomena, and arguably the latter is the proper epistemology for this class of phenomena. I can be said to "recognize" the practice, text, tool, craft, artwork, or theory when I can "inhabit" the sensibility, point of view, and form of understanding that the object embodies and find myself recognized by it, as when I recognize the form of life exhibited in a painting's narrative or form, or when I recognize a practice by inhabiting, even if only partially, its perspective.

This kind of recognition has two dimensions: I recognize the object, first, when I can (even if only partially) recognize myself *in* the object, and second, when I find myself recognized *by* the object. Because of this, our cognitive-affective attitudes toward and relations to these objects are not unlike the kinds of attitudes and relations we adopt toward other persons. As Stanley Cavell writes with respect to art in particular, "the answer to the question 'What is art?' will in part be an answer which explains why it is we treat certain objects, or how we can treat certain objects, in ways normally reserved for treating persons" (2002, 189).[7]

So, I can be said not just to cognize but recognize a work of art like Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* when, for example, I can inhabit both the twilight consciousness of its characters and the text's own perspective on the metaphysically uncertain boundaries between persons, and when I find myself, or dimensions of myself, recognized by this text. For instance, when Woolf uses free indirect discourse to describe Mrs. Ramsey thinking of herself as a "wedge-shaped core of darkness," I recognize this as a way one might experience oneself, and (thereby) find something of myself recognized. Or, I can be said to not just cognize but recognize a (for me) culturally remote practice like Catholic confession, when I can inhabit the perspective within which confession makes sense, and when I can

recognize myself in it and see aspects of myself recognized by it. Finally, I can be said to recognize psychoanalytic theory's conception of, say, unconscious phantasy or infantile sexuality when I do not just intellectually or theoretically comprehend the concept but can, to some extent, "inhabit" that perspective, recognize myself in it, and find dimensions of myself recognized by it.

Notice that in each case, recognition is not necessarily automatic or obvious: *To the Lighthouse* is a formally difficult book; Catholic confession is not a practice I engage in; unconscious phantasy and infantile sexuality are not part of the repertoire of folk psychological terms with which I normally understand myself or others. In each case, there are obstacles to recognition, and some of these obstacles may constitute forms of resistance, since I may not *want* to recognize myself *that way*. In such cases, the object retains its alterity, and recognition may be oblique.

This all suggests, first, that a kind of "secondary sense" of recognition can apply to objects, specifically objects that themselves embody forms of human understanding.[8] Second, there is a kind of secondary sense of reciprocity: I can recognize a practice, work of art, text, or theory insofar as I find myself recognized *by* it.[9] Third, while the affective profile may be different depending on whether the object is a person, a practice, an artwork, or a theory, recognition here is likewise affectively engaged; put otherwise, the object engages me not just as a theoretical or cognitive subject but as an affective and sympathetic subject. Fourth and finally, recognition will not always be straightforward or harmonious; it may be difficult and/or resisted, and to that extent "oblique" or even "uncanny."

My aim in the rest of this paper is to show that psychoanalytic theory, and specifically Freud's last metapsychology of *Es, Ich,* and *Über-Ich*, involves us in such an epistemology of recognition. But, again, because psychoanalytic theory articulates a conception of the *unconscious* mind, because the theory reveals us to be other than we ordinarily take ourselves to be, there will be obstacles to recognition, and some of these obstacles may constitute resistance. In fact, Freud addressed this topic – the topic of our relationship and resistance to psychoanalytic theory – in his 1917 essay titled *A Difficulty on the Path of Psychoanalysis*. He writes:

> I will say at once that it is not an intellectual difficulty I am thinking of, not anything that makes psychoanalysis hard for the hearer or reader to understand, but an affective one – something that alienates the feelings of those who come into contact with it, so that they become less inclined to believe in it or take an interest in it. As will be observed, the two kinds of difficulty amount to the same thing in the end. Where sympathy [*Sympathie*] is lacking, understanding will not come very easily [*wird sie auch nicht so leicht verstehen*].
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> (Freud 1955b [1917], 137)

Freud here anticipates that his audience may be capable of understanding his theory intellectually or theoretically, but that they would encounter an "affective difficulty," which might "alienate" them from the theory or incline them away from it. But then he suggests that, in fact, there can be no adequate understanding without sympathy: If one cannot "sympathize" with the picture – in my terms, if one cannot *recognize* the theory, recognize oneself in the theory, and find oneself recognized by the theory – then one will not be able to understand it. Put positively, to understand psychoanalysis, you must be able to recognize or sympathize with it.

In the next sections, I provide textual support for the idea that Freud's metapsychology calls for an epistemology of recognition, engaging both with Freud and Freud's readers. I end the paper by exploring, briefly, three questions. First, when and why should a theory of mind be subject to this epistemology of recognition? Second, if Freud's is a theory of the unconscious, what could it even mean to *recognize* ourselves in this picture? Third, what is the relationship between the epistemology of recognition and psychoanalytic therapy?

But let us now turn to Freud's last metapsychology of *Es, Ich,* and *Über-Ich*.

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Metapsychology is psychoanalysis' "speculative superstructure [*spekulative Überbau*]" (Freud 1959a [1925], 32); it provides a broad theoretical standpoint on the mind that is both informed by and guides empirical and clinical research. Over the course of his career, Freud articulated four metapsychologies: dynamic, economic, topographical, and structural.[10] These are not meant to replace one another; rather, they offer different perspectives or frameworks and are mutually consistent. The final structural model analyzes the mind into *Es, Ich,* and *Über-Ich*, "realms, regions, or provinces, into which we divide an individual's mental apparatus" (Freud 1964 [1933], 72), where these mental provinces are distinguished not primarily with respect to consciousness and unconsciousness, but in terms of the *type* of mental activity and mental content proper to each. The *Es* or id names the instinctual region of the total psychical personality governed by the primary processes and the pleasure principle. The *Ich* or ego is the site of psychic order, reason, and commonsense, governed largely by the secondary processes and the reality principle, and "puts itself forward as the representative of the whole person" (Laplanche & Pontalis 1973, 452). The *Über-Ich* or superego, governed by primary processes and the pleasure principle, is the inner agency of self-observation and self-criticism, constituted by the internalization of parental demands and prohibitions.[11]

Reflecting on all four metapsychologies, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis suggest that the final structural theory represents a methodological departure from the first three, in a way that is instructive for the present paper. They write:

> It is clear even from the choice of names for the agencies that the model here is no longer one borrowed from the physical sciences but is instead shot through with anthropomorphism … To this extent then, the theory of the psychical apparatus tends to resemble the way the subject comprehends and perhaps even constructs himself in his phantasy-life.
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> (1974, 452)

The structural metapsychology marks a change in methodology with respect to the earlier theories because the dynamic, economic, and topographic models all analyze the mind as a kind of complex object and provide external, observational, or "third-personal" theories of the mind's functioning: the observer–theorist conceives of the mind as a network of energies or as a complex apparatus governed by different kinds of mental processes and contents. Laplanche and Pontalis suggest that these metapsychologies are modeled on the kind of explanation offered by the physical sciences. And for our purposes, I can add: these metapsychologies, for the most part, involve an object-epistemology, not an epistemology of recognition.[12]

By contrast, Laplanche and Pontalis propose that the final structural theory "resembles" how the subject "comprehends and constructs" himself in phantasy, which is to say,

unconsciously. This tells us not only something about Freud's theory but also about its object and how we apprehend both the theory and its object. For if the theory "resembles" how the subject "comprehends and constructs himself" in unconscious phantasy, this tells us that the theory's object – unconscious mental activity – is *reflexive*: it is not a kind of sub-personal mental activity that can be defined wholly functionally, but (also) a self-representation that is not self-conscious. As Sebastian Gardner puts this important point, "the assumption [of psychoanalysis] is that *the mind experiences itself*, and that it does this in a sense that amounts – although it is different from and much cruder than propositional self-knowledge – to its *self-representation*" (2007, 143).

As I read him, Gardner is emphasizing that the unconscious mind is *reflexive* – the mind *experiences* itself, it is *for itself* in a way that amounts to a kind of self-representation – and yet this self-representation is not everywhere or straightforwardly *conscious*. Again, we must appreciate how crucial this is for understanding the metapsychology of Es, Ich, and Über-Ich, since these name not just distinct mental *functions* but the mind's "self-representation" of its own functions. It is this unconscious yet reflexive "self-representation" that is the focus of and reflected in the last metapsychology.

Finally, consider how Richard Wollheim makes the same general point:[13]

> [Freud's structural] theory not only provides a model of the mind and its workings, but also coincides with or reproduces the kind of picture or representation that we consciously or unconsciously make to ourselves of our mental processes. The theory, in other words, tries to capture or reproduce the fundamental concepts under which the activities of the mind occur.
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> (1981, 203)[14]

Wollheim's claim is that the mind already "pictures or represents" itself and its "processes," and that this picture or representation is "captured or reproduced" by the structural theory of *Es, Ich,* and *Über-Ich*. Once again, the idea is that the structural theory neither simply describes or models the mind's structure and function nor does it anthropomorphize that structure merely as a kind of helpful heuristic.[15] Rather, the structural theory recognizes and reflects the mind's own (unconscious) picture or representation of itself, and thus theorists and readers of the theory will be able to, not only theoretically understand the theory but recognize it: we can in some sense recognize ourselves in it (in our unconscious "self-representation") and find ourselves (our unconscious "self-representation") recognized by it. (I return to the difficulty and strangeness of recognizing an unconscious representation shortly.)

In the next section, I analyze passages from *The Question of Lay Analysis,* written three years after *The Ego and the Id*, where this epistemology of recognition becomes explicit. We will also begin to appreciate Freud's rationale as to *why* it is important that his theory of mind should "keep in contact," as he puts it, with the mind's own representation of itself.

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Freud begins his presentation of the structural theory in *The Question of Lay Analysis* with a methodological prefatory remark:

> In psycho-analysis … we like to keep in contact with the popular mode of thinking and prefer to make its concepts scientifically serviceable rather than to reject them. There is

no merit in this; we are obliged to take this line; for our theories must be understood by our patients [*unsere Lehren von den Patienten verstanden werden sollen*].

(Freud 1959b [1926], 195)

Freud here suggests that psychoanalysis does not postulate mental states and processes that are necessary for a more complete or satisfactory psychological explanation, but which are utterly disconnected from how we "comprehend and construct" ourselves. Rather, Freud says that psychoanalysis is "obliged" to "keep contact" with our popular psychological concepts and make them "scientifically serviceable" (rather than simply reject them, either as mistaken or as eliminable, reducible to some other explanatory vocabulary).[16] In addition, Freud insists that there is "no merit [*kein Verdienst*] in this"[17] since a psychoanalytic theory is "obliged" to ground its vocabulary in popular psychological concepts *because* such a theory "must be understood" by its patients. Thus, we see that there is a specifically *therapeutic* rationale for the method (I return to this question later).

Freud continues:

Putting ourselves on the footing of everyday knowledge, we recognize in human beings a mental organization which is interpolated between their sensory stimuli and the perception of their somatic needs on the one hand and their motor acts on the other, and which mediates between them for a particular purpose. We call this organization their *'Ich'* [I]. Now there is nothing new in this. Each one of us makes this assumption without being a philosopher, and some people even in spite of being philosophers.

(Freud 1959b [1926], 195)

Surprisingly, Freud here describes his theory of unconscious mental life, his metapsychology, his "speculative superstructure," as *nothing new*, but as "on the footing" with popular psychological concepts or "everyday knowledge" (a footing that is lost in Brill and Strachey's translations of the ordinary German terms *Es, Ich, Über-Ich* into the scholastic, Latinate *id*, *ego*, *superego*). As we shall see in what follows, Freud will suggest that each of these unconscious mental personas or parts is "nothing new" but is, in some sense, already known or "secretly familiar" (Freud 1955c [1919], 245), and so recognizable.

Now with regard to the mental organization that psychoanalysis calls *Ich*, Freud says that without being a philosopher (or, in one of Freud's characteristic swipes at philosophers, *even in spite of* being one) and with no specialist's knowledge, each us already "makes this assumption": that I am an I or that I "have" an I or ego. Freud is making a significant claim here: it is not just that the mind *has* a mental organization and functionally specifiable agency that psychologists call "*Ich,*" in the same way that the brain can be said to "have" a frontal lobe or mirror neurons, where the latter are scientific discoveries divorced from our pre-theoretical ways of thinking and talking. Rather, Freud is suggesting that the mind has a certain organization that we each call I, and that each of us already assumes this: we take ourselves to be or have such an organization, to be an I. Put more precisely and strongly, Freud is suggesting that to be or have an I *is* to take oneself as such (to "make this assumption"). Or again: for the mind to *be* organized into an I is for it to take itself to be so organized. As Jonathan Lear puts this quasi-idealist point, "the I must have psychological reality *for itself* … part of what it is to be an individual is to recognize oneself to be one" (Lear 1999a,

134, 135, emphasis added).[18] This means that to read Freud's theory of the *Ich*, where being an I involves "recognizing oneself to be one," is to read the theory reflexively, as a theory of oneself.

Continuing, Freud writes:

> But [the *Ich*] does not, in our opinion, exhaust the description of the mental apparatus. Besides this 'I', we recognize another mental region, more extensive, more imposing and more obscure than the 'I', and this we call the '*Es*' ['it']. The relation between the two must be our immediate concern.
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> (Freud 1959b [1926], 195)

Now it might at first seem that Freud here suggests that "we" means "we analysts," and that it is analysts who recognize the other mental region, the obscure *Es*. This would amount to a kind of specialist's knowledge and specialist's terminology, and as such, a departure from the kinds of assumptions that each of us already makes about ourselves. That is, it might seem that Freud has cut contact with the popular, familiar modes of thinking. But in fact, Freud clarifies that even the obscure *Es* is already familiar to us, that is, to us persons. Returning to a passage partially cited earlier:

> You will probably protest at our having chosen simple pronouns to describe our two agencies or provinces instead of giving them orotund Greek names [FR: or Latinate names]. In psycho-analysis, however, we like to keep in contact with the popular mode of thinking and prefer to make its concepts scientifically serviceable rather than to reject them. There is no merit in this; we are obliged to take this line; for our theories must be understood by our patients, who are often very intelligent, but not always learned. The impersonal 'it' is immediately connected with certain forms of expression used by normal people. '*It shot through me*,' people say; '*there was something in me at that moment that was stronger than me*'. [*Es hat mich durchzuckt, sagt man; es war etwas in mir, was in diesem Augenblick stärker war als ich*]. '*C'était plus fort que moi*.'
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> (Lear 1999a, my underline)

Keeping in contact with popular thinking involves demonstrating that even the "more extensive, more imposing and more obscure" *Es* is, in some sense, however obscurely, already familiar. This is surprising, since it would seem that if anything could count as a genuine psychoanalytic revelation or revision vis-à-vis familiar psychological discourse, it would be the "discovery" of the unconscious or the *Es*. And so it might seem that I could fail to know about the *Es* in roughly the same way I could fail to know about neurons. But against this, Freud argues that certain characteristic forms of expression and self-description provide evidence that each of us is already aware, in some sense, of the *Es*. For example, we say "the idea shot through me," or "something in me was stronger than me," or, for example, "I don't know what came over me," or "I don't understand where this feeling came from," and so on. What unifies these expressions is that they function to *distance* me (the *Ich*) from various mental states and also present me as somehow passive with respect to those states: It is not *my* idea, it is not *me*; rather, some*thing* other than me somehow *enters* my mind from without, some*thing* was *in* me that overpowered me. These phrases describe something that is "in" my

mind that is not me (not *Ich*), something I experience as both "in" me and yet "other" than me. For Freud, our familiarity with these expressions is evidence that we are already familiar with the more obscure id. Thus, to "learn" of the id by reading Freud is to learn of something I already "know" about myself – or feel or intuit or suspect about or recognize in myself.

Crucially, it is only insofar as I take or recognize myself as *Ich* that I can stand in these various kinds of reflexive relationships with my own mental states, identifying with some thoughts and feelings (as *Ich*), distancing myself from others (as *it*). So according to the structural theory, it is not just that the different mental provinces operate in accordance with different principles and processes, it is that one part of the mind – the *Ich* – *takes itself* to be distinct from and distinguishes itself from other parts of the mind – the *Es*, the essential characteristic of which is "the fact of its being alien to the ego" (Freud 1964 [1933], 72). For notice that one mental system or agency being *alien to* another is not the same as two functionally distinct mental systems being *different from* one another. In the latter case, such differences could be observed and described theoretically and third personally, and these systems may be wholly unaware of and indifferent to each other: they're simply different.

But if X is *alien to* Y, it is not just that X and Y are indifferently different from each other, but that X is something *for* Y: X is *foreign* to Y, *not indigenous*, *not proper*; X is not supposed to be there. It also suggests that Y may register X not only as strange, unusual, other, but also, potentially, as frightening, intrusive, or hostile. In the case of the relationship between ego and id, my proposal is that Freud is describing a relationship wherein the ego reflexively registers some of its contents and processes as alien to it, and so as id. Freud characterizes the unconscious as an "inner foreign country" (Freud 1964 [1933], 62), or he writes that "impulses appear which seem like those of a stranger, so that the ego disowns them; yet it has to fear them and take precautions against them. The ego says to itself: 'This is an illness, a foreign invasion [*eine fremde Invasion*].'"(1959b [1917], 141–142) Note, again, that this describes, not just functionally differentiated systems or parts of the mind, but, reflexively, the mind's own self-representation of parts of itself as proper, as *Ich*, and other parts (thoughts, activities, pleasures, wishes, etc.) as an alien or a foreign invasion or an illness, as though something were in "my home" but not of it, and not good for it.

What this all suggests is that the structural metapsychology articulates the differences between mental systems *reflexively*, as if from the perspective of one of them, the ego, and yet not consciously. So, for example, while at one "level" the ego registers the id as a foreign invasion, at the "level" of consciousness the person may feel vague anxiety, or develop a symptom, or make a slip of the tongue, or have a strange dream. The person is not straightforwardly conscious of these self-representations and intra-psychic negotiations as such. And yet they are reflexive: these inner differences are something *for* the mind; they reflect the way the mind represents itself, its own complexity and heterogeneity, *to* itself. This, as I see it, is the distinctively psychoanalytic insight: the mind engages in reflexive yet unconscious activity; it elaborates self-representations of which it is not straightforwardly conscious. And this is why the theorist and reader of the theory are able to not just cognize but to recognize the theory.

Freud makes this same point about the *Über-Ich* in *On Narcissism*, written in 1914, about a decade before *The Ego and the Id*. Freud writes:

It would not surprise us if we were to find a special psychical agency which … constantly watches the actual ego and measures it by that ideal. If such an agency does exist, we cannot possibly come upon it as a *discovery*; we can only *recognize* it

[*so kann es uns unmöglich zustoßen, sie zu entdecken; wir können sie nur als solche agnoszieren*]; for we may reflect that what we call our 'conscience' has the required characteristics.

<div align="right">(1957a [1914], 95, emphases added)</div>

The *Über-Ich* is characterized as in some sense familiar because we already take ourselves to have a conscience; the latter is a kind of pre-theoretical datum, with a characteristic phenomenology and folk psychological significance. What Freud calls the *Über-Ich* is, or better *is* involved, with what we colloquially call conscience. But for our purposes, what is especially important about this passage is the epistemology it describes: the *Über-Ich could not possibly be* something we could *discover*; we can *only recognize* it (*Agnoszieren* is a slightly unusual Austrian verb meaning "to recognize" (*anerkennen*) or "to identify" (*identifizieren*). An example given in Austrian-German dictionaries is *einen Toten agnoszieren*, to recognize a corpse).[19]

When it comes to both empirical investigation and theory construction, we can discover or posit something new and heretofore unknown. As Gardner observes, "insofar as we adopt an outlook governed purely by theoretical considerations, we will be led to postulate states defined by causal role, in response to demands formulated in exclusively third-person terms, and not constrained by experience in any nontheoretical sense" (Gardner 1995, 156). For example, we can simply *not know* that a specific region of the brain is active during the recall of skills but not in the recall of facts, and this fact about the brain can then be discovered and studied. This is something new. Or, a theorist may posit a kind of unconscious mental state in order to fill an explanatory gap, where this mental state remains entirely remote from and unconstrained by experience, and because of this, there is no possibility of our *recognizing* it. To learn about such a state is to discover something entirely new. But Freud says that the *Über-Ich* cannot possibly be discovered; we can "only recognize it." What does this mean?

I propose that here *recognition* specifies the epistemology of apprehending something that is in some sense unknown but also "secretly familiar," something of which we are "dimly aware in a remote corner of [our] own being" (Freud 1955c [1919], 150). More specifically, recognition is *reflexive*: grasping Freud's theory and its object involves recognizing the theory as articulating what one secretly or dimly knows, at some level or in some corner, *about oneself*. As I've already hinted, in this kind of case, recognition will be *uncanny*, in Freud's technical sense, since one here recognizes something that is ordinarily hidden but has come to light, i.e., aspects of the unconscious (Freud 1955c [1919]).[20]

It is important to emphasize here the role that Freud's clinical work played in his theory construction. For Freud did not (or not only) observe and analyze the mind as if it were a given object; he *listened* to people talk in an unusually unguarded imaginative way about their experiences, their dreams, their memories, their fantasies, their random thoughts, and he listened to their silences. Consider how Freud describes what he learns– though does not "discover" – about the super-ego by listening to his patients:

Recognition (*Die Anerkennung*) of this agency [the super-ego] enables us to understand the so-called 'delusions of being noticed' or more correctly, of being watched, which are such striking symptoms in the paranoid diseases and which may also occur as an isolated form of illness … Patients of this sort complain that all their thoughts are known and their actions watched and supervised; they are informed of

the functioning of this agency by voices which characteristically speak to them in the third person ('Now she's thinking of that again', 'now he's going out'). This complaint is justified; it describes the truth. A power of this kind, watching, discovering and criticizing all our intentions, does really exist. Indeed, it exists in every one of us in normal life. Delusions of being watched present this power in a regressive form, thus revealing its genesis.

(1957a [1914], 95–96)

Just as the alienness of the id can only be apprehended from the perspective of the ego, so too with the "watching" and "criticizing" functions of the *Über-Ich*. Freud is not just functionally characterizing a part of the mind that he calls the *Über-Ich*, he characterizes that functioning *as* apprehended from the ego's point of view, where the ego experiences the *Über-Ich* as watching and criticizing (which, Freud writes, tells us about its genesis: the super-ego develops through internalizing parental figures and the child's imaginative relationship to them[21]). Again, the point is not that ordinary people know, theoretically, that they "have a super-ego" or think of themselves under this description.[22] Rather, to feel guilt or pangs of conscience or to feel persecuted by one's own self-criticism is to apprehend the super-ego indirectly and affectively. In turn, to read Freud is to find an account of a feeling with which one is already to some extent familiar, and this means that one will be able to not just cognize or understand the theory, but recognize it.

To conclude this section: aligning myself with Gardner, Laplanche and Pontalis, and Wollheim, I have argued that the structural theory reflects the mind's unconscious self-representation in phantasy. Developing this view further, I argued that the epistemology proper to psychoanalytic theory and inquiry is one of *recognition*: the theorist or reader, with an unconscious of her own, does not simply discover parts of the mind, but recognizes them. The theorist or reader recognizes herself *in* the theory and finds herself recognized *by* the theory. But because what the theory recognizes is what in us is unconscious or repressed or otherwise defended against, this predicts that we may also defend against recognizing and being recognized by the theory. The theory occasions a kind of recognition that we may not want or like, which suggests a form of recognition that may not (or not immediately or obviously) have the positive, identity-confirming qualities of Honneth's recognitive attitudes of love, respect, and esteem. Just as in life we tend to recognize the unconscious obliquely and affectively – paradigmatically, through anxiety, guilt, dreams, slips, incongruous desires, and so forth – so too our recognition of psychoanalytic theory may be oblique and affective. In the best case, Freud tells us, it will take the form of sympathy.

In his Tanner Lectures, Honneth draws on several authors, philosophical traditions, and disciplines in order to argue that what he calls recognition precedes, genetically and categorially, theoretical cognition. A lesson he takes from Cavell's work on acknowledgment is that "we can understand the meaning of a particular class of linguistic propositions only if we are in that stance or attitude which [Cavell] describes as 'acknowledgment'" (Honneth 2008, 50) and what Honneth calls recognition. We cannot even understand other people's behavioral expressions or statements of emotion without adopting a recognitional stance (Honneth 2008, 49). Honneth characterizes this reminder of the priority of recognition as "therapeutic," a way of resisting "the everyday seduction of the cognitivist model" (Honneth 2008, 50). My argument has been that Freud says something similar about psychoanalytic theory. In order to understand psychoanalytic theory in the way it calls to be understood, intellectual facility alone

is insufficient; what's needed is an affective capacity, what Freud calls sympathy and what I call recognition. In the next and final section, I will briefly suggest how a sympathetic or recognitive relationship with psychoanalytic theory can itself be construed as "therapeutic."

<center>*</center>

Let us return to the three questions I promised to consider. First, if not all theories of mind involve an epistemology of recognition, then when and why should a theory of mind be such that we should be able to recognize the theory and recognize ourselves in the theory?[23] Second, if Freud's is a theory of the unconscious, what could it even mean to *recognize* ourselves in this picture? Finally, what is the relationship between the epistemology of recognition and psychoanalytic therapy?

First, I have argued throughout for a reading of (Freudian) unconscious mental activity as *reflexive*. As Laplanche and Pontalis and Wollheim suggest, the mind "pictures or represents" itself to itself, both consciously and unconsciously. This suggests that an epistemology of recognition is a way of respecting and insisting upon the essential reflexivity of its object. As Richard Moran writes, when it comes to a mind or a person, the object of knowledge exerts a kind of *pressure* on the theory and any knowledge claimed of it, "a pressure that it can in principle *recognize itself in this knowledge*" (Moran 2011, 253, emphasis added). In the case of the mind, the object of knowledge claims a legitimate say with respect to the terms in which it shall count as being known (Moran 2011, 254). Unlike nonreflexive objects like atoms or brains, persons and minds are things that "do have a perspective on what it is to be properly known, *do* have some say in the matter as to what shall count as being known and being understood" (Moran 2011, 253). It is because the mind is reflexive, self-representing, that its picture or representation of itself should be reflected in the theory, in a way that involves an epistemology of recognition. Put otherwise, if the mind could not recognize itself in its theorization, this would count as a legitimate criticism. Legitimate, but not decisive. For as Moran wisely notes, from the fact that the mind *cannot* or *will not* recognize itself in its theorization, we do not yet know where the fault lies, in the theory or in the mind. Is the theory misrepresenting the mind, or is the mind refusing, defending against, the prospect of recognizing itself in the theory? (Moran 2011, 253). On the other hand, if I too readily recognize or sympathize with a theory, does this mean, speaking psychoanalytically, that it is gratifying a wish or fantasy about myself or about human beings? Or perhaps my ready recognition of the theory is evidence that some kind of ideology is at play?[24] Recognition as such does not validate or invalidate a theory, and we must be cautious here; but its possibility and importance with respect to certain objects and theories can help us clarify the kind of object or theory it is, or aspires to be.

The second question asks: doesn't psychoanalysis provide a radically new picture of the mind that functions precisely to *unmask* or *demystify* the popular picture? And so doesn't psychoanalysis provide a picture of the mind that we will almost by definition *not* recognize as a picture of ourselves? Isn't it the case that we take ourselves to be "masters of our own house" and would be shocked to *discover* that we are not?

Throughout, I have suggested that the kind of recognition proper to psychoanalytic theory will be oblique or uncanny rather than obvious or unproblematic. It is not like recognizing oneself in a mirror or in a folk psychological picture. It is more like recognizing one's dreams as one's own, as expressive of one's mind. So, in requiring that the mind

be *able* to recognize itself in the theory, the recognition requirement does not stipulate that a theory should present a picture of the mind that is simply familiar – Freud's picture obviously is not. And it is not to say that such a theory could not reveal heretofore unrealized or unacknowledged dimensions of the mind or show the mind to be different than we'd thought it was – as Freud's obviously did. Freud so often prefaced his essays and lectures by warning his audience that they would resist what he said. As we've seen, in saying this, he wasn't expressing doubt that his audience would be able to *understand* his theory, theoretically. He was advising them that they would find it difficult to accept, to acknowledge as true of themselves, precisely because its picture is incongruent with their (our) ordinary, daily self-understanding. Freud perceived a risk that his audiences would fancy that they could comprehend his theories intellectually and abstractly, at a distance, and come out unscathed. The task for Freud's readers is then not just the formidable task of understanding the theory, but of moving from alienation to recognition or sympathy. To understand Freud's theory in the recognitive, sympathetic sense is to come out a little scathed.

I want to close with the third question: if not all theories of mind are recognitive[25] – as much cognitive science, for instance, arguably is not – then what is the criterion for deciding when a theory of mind should reflect the mind's picture of itself, and so be "recognizable"? My tentative proposal is that a theory of mind should be "recognizable" to the extent that the theory's aim is *therapeutic*, where the therapy seeks to engage with and transform the subject's self-representation and self-understanding (where these are to be understood broadly and can include unconscious fantasy). Hence, Freud's assertion that his theory must be understood – or I would say, his theory must be recognizable – by his patients. But I think the therapeutic dimension of psychoanalysis goes beyond the clinic and extends to the theory itself. The theory itself, when recognized or sympathized with, can be a kind of therapy. This, I think, is what Thomas Mann was admiringly proposing in his speech for Freud's 80th birthday, *Freud and the Future*, in 1936. Mann writes:

> Freud is of the opinion that the significance of psycho analysis as a science of the unconscious will in the future far outrank its value as a therapeutic method. But even as a science of the unconscious it is a therapeutic method, in the grand style, a method overarching the individual case. Call this, if you choose, a poet's utopia; but the thought is after all not unthinkable that the resolution of our great fear and our great hate, their conversion into a different relation to the unconscious which shall be more the artist's … may one day be due to the healing effect of this very science.
>
> (Mann 1959, 377–378)

Mann here suggests that Freud's theory or "science" of the unconscious is itself a therapy "in the grand style," a therapeutic method that overarches the individual case and extends beyond the clinic. As I would spell this out, to come not just to understand but to recognize and sympathize with Freud's theory involves coming to occupy – however unevenly, precariously, and prone to defense – a different relation to oneself, to one's own unconscious. In facilitating these different reflexive relations, the theory or science itself is "healing." Thus, the theory's therapeutic aims can be realized not only when applied within the clinic (case by case), but through a certain kind of recognitive, sympathetic understanding of the theory.[26]

Notes

1 This paper is a revised version of my *Die Seele abbilden: Über Freuds Methodologie und Metapsychologie* (2022). I thank the publishers of *WestEnd* for permitting me to re-work and re-present this work here.

2 In fact, it was Jessica Benjamin (1988) who first worked to bring together Winnicott and Hegel (Honneth acknowledges this (1995, 98)).

3 Later, in light of empirical studies of infant object-orientedness, Honneth (2012) revised his emphasis on fusion, arguing now that "episodes" of fusion function as the "'zero-point'" of all experiences of recognition (2012, 228–229).

4 Psychoanalytic theorists often use the "Ph" spelling of *phantasy* when they want to specify *unconscious* phantasies as distinct from, say, pre-conscious or conscious fantasies. For Freud, unconscious phantasy enjoys a kind of "reality" comparable to objective or external reality. As he writes in the *Introductory Lectures* (1963 [1916]): "[Phantasies] too possess a reality of a sort. It remains a fact that the patient had created these phantasies for himself, and this fact is of scarcely less importance for his neurosis than if he had really experienced what his phantasies contain. The phantasies possess psychical as contrasted with material reality, and we gradually learn to understand that in the world of neuroses it is psychical reality which is the decisive kind" (368).

5 Honneth suggests that recognition and sympathy are cognate terms in (2008). See also Honneth's *Seely Lectures*, published as, *Recognition: A Chapter in the History of European Ideas* (2020), for how the idea of sympathy in 17th century British philosophy played a role in the rise of the properly intersubjective conception of recognition.

6 Nietzsche uses this phrase in the opening paragraph of *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1888) and Julia Kristeva uses the phrase as the title for her 1994 book. And in 2002 Timothy Wilson published a book of popular science, *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious*.

7 Thus I think Honneth is wrong to suggest that "Cavell appears to limit the validity of that which he calls 'the stance of acknowledgment' solely to the sphere of interpersonal communication. Any notion suggesting that we also necessarily find ourselves already in a recognitional stance towards nonhuman objects is apparently alien to his theory" (2008, 51).

8 Honneth (2008).

9 Cavell is again instructive here. He takes guidance from (his picture of) Thoreau's picture of reading as "exposure to being read" and suggests that certain practices of reading texts involve "turning the picture of interpreting a text into one of being interpreted by it" (Cavell 1984, 51). In my terms, I would say that certain practices of reading involve a vulnerability or exposure to being recognized by it.

10 While I discuss the fourth, structural model in the text above, here is a brief synopsis of the other three metapsychologies: The *dynamic* model analyzes the mind's parts in terms of active intrapsychic conflicts. It is not just that certain mental contents are unconscious in the sense of not being presently on one's mind or not conscious (Freud calls this "preconscious). Rather, on the dynamic model, some mental contents are *pushed* out, rejected, held away from consciousness by force (defense and resistance). The *economic* model analyzes mental structure, activity, and content in terms of mobile mental energy or drives, and the mind's capacities for facilitating and discharging that energy. The economic theory is often characterized as both the most speculative of the metapsychologies (Freud calls it "our mythology" (1964 [1933], 95)) and also the theory most indebted to physiology, and so the theory that is least distinctively psychoanalytic; as Freud writes, it "rests scarcely at all upon a psychological basis but derives its principal support from biology" (1957a [1914], 79). Third, the *topographical* or first structural model analyzes the mind into psychical groupings or systems: unconscious, preconscious, and conscious psychic "places" or parts, where these parts are differentiated not in terms of anatomical or cerebral localization but with reference to each part's characteristic forms of mental functioning (distinctive processes and principles) and their mutual interaction. Here, "unconscious" and "conscious" denote not qualities of the mental (as in the first metapsychology) but "mental provinces" (1964 [1933], 72). The fourth metapsychology is sometimes described as the "second" structural model.

11 The structural theory is the component of Freud's theory that is most often engaged by contemporary analytic philosophers. For example, several moral philosophers have attempted to map Freud's and Kant's moral psychologies onto each other and to argue that Freud provides the developmental account of first-personal moral thinking that Kant never did. See Deigh, Longuenesse,

Scheffler, and Velleman. Jacques Lacan also compares Kant and the concept of the super-ego in *Kant avec Sade*, and following Lacan, Alenka Zupančič in *The Ethics of the Real.*

12 I say "for the most part" because I argue that even Freud's economic metapsychology is, to some extent, recognitive. See my 2022.

13 And following him, Gardner (2007, 181; 2012, 47). Gardner was the first to recommend Wollheim's work to me in a conversation, so I am indebted to him for the reference.

14 See also Wollheim's "The Mind and the Mind's Image of Itself" (1969).

15 For one example in contemporary popular cognitive science, where an author both makes heuristic use of such personification of cognitive processing and worries about his readers taking it too literally, see Kahneman (2013). He writes: "System 1 and System 2 are so central to the story I tell in this book that I must make it absolutely clear that they are fictitious characters. Systems 1 and 2 are not systems in the standard sense of entities with interacting aspects or parts. And there is no one part of the brain that either of the systems would call home … The characters are useful because of some quirks of our minds, yours and mine. A sentence is understood more easily if it describes what an agent (System 2) does than if it describes what something is, what properties it has" (29).

16 This is then evidence for thinking that Freud at least sometimes and in certain respects conceived of psychoanalysis as continuous with commonsense or folk psychology. As Thomas Nagel puts this position: "the core of his contribution lies … in a form of insight that depends not on the application of specifically psychoanalytic laws but on the extension of the familiar forms of psychological explanation beyond their traditional, rational domain" (1994, 41) where this "is an extension of psychological explanation to further phenomena within the domain of its original application, that is, the lives of human beings with minds" (ibid., 44). See also Gardner (1995; 2000) for explicit discussion of this connection or continuity. This extension-of-ordinary-psychology reading of Freud is usually contrasted with interpretations that regard Freud as engaging in sub-personal psychological explanation of the kind that might be superseded through advances in cognitive science.

17 In specifying that there is "no merit" in his methodology, I interpret Freud as insisting that he has not elected some idiosyncratic, novel methodology, for which he would then be responsible and for which he might merit either praise or criticism. Rather, he has been "obliged" to take up this methodological constraint for clinical reasons. This recalls Freud's (defensive) early characterization of his early case studies: "I have not always been a psychotherapist. Like other neuropathologists, I was trained to employ local diagnoses and electroprognosis, and *it still strikes me myself as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science. I must console myself with the reflection that the nature of the subject is evidently responsible for this, rather than any preference of my own.* The fact is that local diagnosis and electrical reactions lead nowhere in the study of hysteria, whereas a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of imaginative writers [*Dichtern*] enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulas, to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of that affliction" (1955a [1895]). In each case, Freud affirms that he is not personally responsible for his unusual method, and that it is instead somehow demanded by the nature of the subject.

18 Making the same kind of point, Wollheim writes: "the development of the ego's self-awareness, and, in consequence, the development of the ego itself, are essentially bound up with the concept of the ego. Without such a concept neither self-awareness nor, ultimately, existence itself could be attributed to the ego … The concept of the ego is essential to the development of the ego" (1981, 215).

19 Thanks to Andreja Novakovic for discussing this with me.

20 In *The Uncanny*, Freud begins by claiming (protesting?) that he is not himself especially familiar with the feeling of the uncanny, that "it is long since he has experienced or heard of anything which has given him an uncanny perception" (1955c [1919], 219) and later writes, a little coyly: "I should not be surprised to hear that psychoanalysis, which is concerned with laying bare these hidden forces, has itself become uncanny to many people." Following this remark, I suggest that our sympathy with or recognition of psychoanalytic theory will be, to some extent, uncanny.

21 For an interpretation of the super-ego, in relation to Kantian moral psychology, see my Authority and Ambivalence: Kant, Freud, and Moral Psychology (Mind, forthconing).

22 Though now, more than one hundred years after *The Ego and the Id* and in light of "the pervasive influence of Freudian ideas on modern self-consciousness [where] we employ these forms of understanding constantly" (Nagel 1994, 43), many more people do "know" that they "have" a super-ego. Thanks to Matt Congdon for raising this idea.

23 Note that in this paper I have not discharged the antecedent.

24 The canonical text linking recognition with the workings of ideology is Althusser's *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (Althusser 2014).

25 In the history of Western philosophy, hard cases include, for instance, Lucretius, Leibniz, Spinoza, and Nietzsche. Are these theories – of atoms, monads, substances and attributes, drives – recognizable, and do they aspire to be recognized? Why or why not? Which of these theories aspires to be a kind of therapy, and of those that do, is their aim that we should be able to recognize ourselves in the theory?

26 I'd like to thank Axel Honneth, Karen Ng, Andreja Novakovic, and Alex Wolfson for conversations about these ideas. I'd also like to thank Sophie Côte, Béatrice Longuenesse, Jake McNulty, Richard Moran, and Martin Stone for discussing these ideas in an earlier version of this paper in our psychoanalytic reading group. And special thanks to Matthew Congdon for his careful edits of this essay.

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