

THE ORIGINS OF FREUD'S THEORY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS: A PHILOSOPHICAL LINK

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The recent publication of Freud's correspondence to his school friend, Edward Silberstein, has provided new impetus for research into Freud's relationships with the philosopher Franz Brentano. In several letters Freud expresses his great admiration for both the man and his ideas (Boehlich, 1990). Their personal rapport and the impact of Brentano's early intentionality thesis on Freud's work has been detailed elsewhere.¹ In this paper I will address one possible objection to any claim that the philosopher could have influenced Freud on a theoretical level. It may be argued that there could be no significant theoretical influence because the psychoanalyst constructed a model of mental functioning which presupposes an unconscious, while Brentano was a philosopher of consciousness, who denied the very existence of unconscious ideas.

I will demonstrate that, despite his rejection of unconscious mental functioning, Brentano presents a systematic investigation into what he perceives to be the strongest arguments in favour of the existence of unconscious ideas. I argue that it is this analysis which provided Freud with a template for a coherent account of the unconscious. Brentano's discussion is detailed in his seminal early text *Psychology From an Empirical Standpoint* (1874) which was published the very year that Freud began to attend his lectures in philosophy at the University of Vienna.²

1. (Barclay, 1959m; 1964), (Cohen, 1998m; 1998), (Fancher, 1973), (Frampton, 1991), (Merlan, 1945; 1949).

2. In a short article entitled "Brentano and Freud – A Sequel", Philip Merlan published the contents of a document which he had requested from the University of Vienna archives. It was the list of courses in which Freud had enrolled between the years 1874 and 1876: The results show that Freud was enrolled in the courses given by Brentano: in Freud's third, fourth and fifth semesters (winter 1874/5, Summer 1875, and Winter 1875/6 respectively), "Readings of Philosophical writings"; in addition, in his fourth semester (summer 1875) "Logic"; in his sixth semester (summer 1876), "The philosophy of Aristotle". These were the only non-medical courses taken by Freud during his whole course of studies (eight semesters) (Merlan, 1949).

Freud and his friend Peneth discussed the question of unconscious ideas on one of the occasions when they were invited to visit their teacher at home.³ Brentano began by stating his regret about the chaotic condition of philosophy in Vienna. Peneth responded by criticising the leading Herbartian, Robert Zimmerman, whose lectures he had attended at the university. This led Brentano to comment upon the work of Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841), who is often hailed as a significant scientifically minded precursor of Freud's theory of the unconscious. "He [Brentano] utterly condemned his a priori constructions in psychology, thought it unforgivable that Herbart had never deigned to consult experience or experiment to check whether these agreed with his arbitrary assumptions, declared himself unreservedly a follower of the empiricist school which applies the methods of science to philosophy and to psychology in particular ..., and mentioned a few remarkable psychological observations that demonstrate the untenability of Herbart's speculations" (Boehlich, 1990: 102, letter from Freud to Silberstein, 13 March, 1875).

Brentano's dismissal of both Herbart and the unconscious mind in general, might lead one to conclude that he had no influence on the development of the psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious. It is true that Brentano denied the existence of an unconscious mind, basing his ultimate rejection on grounds that there is a correlation between the intensity of the conscious presentation and the "intensity of the inner perception referring to it" which are combined in order to produce a mental act (Brentano, 1874: 137). However, before reaching this conclusion, he undertakes a meticulous critique of specific theories of the unconscious, each of which fails to sustain a convincing argument. Although he finds each account to be flawed, Brentano frequently offers a possible corrective, suggesting certain conditions and principles which must be observed by anyone hoping to formulate a reasonable thesis to support the existence of unconscious ideas.

I will argue that this analysis may have acted as a scaffold upon which Freud could build a sustainable theory of the unconscious. One which would not fall prey to the weaknesses identified by the teacher who proclaimed, in his *Psychology*, that the concept of unconscious ideas cannot be rejected "as a gratuitous and arbitrary fiction, if it fulfils, to the

3. Freud and his friend Peneth visited Brentano's home twice during their enrolment in his philosophy courses. These encounters are detailed with enormous enthusiasm in letters written by Freud to Silberstein on the 13th and 15th of March 1875 (Boehlich, 1990).

degree to which they remain valid, the conditions mentioned above or other similar conditions" (*Ibid.*: 107).

Brentano presents an analysis of the four argument types which offer the best chance of sustaining the claim for unconscious ideas. Firstly, there are certain facts which can only be explained if one accepts "the hypothesis of an unconscious mental phenomenon as their *cause*"; for example, learning a language without being conscious of so doing (*Ibid.*: 105). Secondly, it may be argued "that a fact given in experience must bring about an unconscious mental phenomenon as its *effect*, even though none appears in consciousness" (*Ibid.*: 105). For example, "the roar of the surf is an auditory experience made up of inaudible concepts – no droplet of water could be said to roar" (Krantz, 1990: 746). A third argument might "try to show that in the case of conscious mental phenomena *the strength of the concomitant consciousness is a function of their own strength*, and that, because of this relationship, in certain cases in which the latter is a positive magnitude, the former must lack a positive value" (Brentano, 1874: 105). Due to this relationship, there may be instances where the mental phenomenon itself is not noticed because it "lacks a positive value", although the cause is noticed, because it has a "positive magnitude" (*Ibid.*: 105). There may be psychic experiences which simply go unnoticed because they are not strong enough to impinge upon our consciousness.⁴ The fourth argument claims that any denial of unconscious thoughts entails a belief in an *infinitely complex* account of mental phenomena. If every mental act is an object of which we are conscious, then I must also be conscious of the fact that I am conscious, (since my own conscious becomes the object of which I am conscious). This implies an infinite regress which can only be halted by the introduction of some unconscious idea, as a point at which the process stops (*Ibid.*).

Freud's account of unconscious mental functioning appears to address many of the objections raised by his former teacher, and often fulfils the criteria he sets down. I will exemplify this through an analysis of the argument from cause which Brentano identifies as the one "most

4. In his development of a theory of the unconscious mind Freud utilises the theoretical tools which Brentano, and other philosophers, used to explain consciousness. For example, when talking about the rationale for containing unconscious desires through mechanisms of taboo and prohibition in his anthropological text, *Totem and Taboo*, Freud says: "If we replace unconscious desires by conscious impulses we shall see that the danger is a real one. It lies in the risk of imitation, which would quickly lead to the dissolution of the community" (Freud, 1912-13: 87). This analytical mechanism of a grounding of the logic of unconscious desires and unconscious fantasies in a case of conscious processes, which have been displaced from the source of explicable rationality, is the basis of Freud's explanation of unconscious dynamics.

frequently tried" (*Ibid.*). His analysis of the argument from cause is developed more fully than most of the others and provides an excellent example of the terms and conditions which he specifies. I will show that, for the most part, Freud appears to construct his own hypothesis in accordance with Brentano's requirements. This can be seen most clearly in Freud's essay "The Unconscious" in which he presents a "justification for the concept of the unconscious" (Freud, 1915*e*: 167-173), and in his paper "A Note on The Unconscious in Psychoanalysis" in which he is "prepared to meet with" what he identifies as "philosophical" objections (Freud, 1912*g*: 50).

The fact that Freud constructs his account of unconscious ideas through an argument from cause is evidenced on the very first page of *Studies on Hysteria*: "A chance observation has led us over a number of years to investigate a great variety of different forms and symptoms of hysteria with a view to discovering *the perpetuating cause – the event* which provoked the first occurrence often many years earlier of the phenomenon in question" (Freud and Breuer, 1895*d*: 53).

Similarly, Freud opens his essay on "The Unconscious" by claiming that he can "produce good evidence" to show that unconscious ideas "can produce effects even including some which finally reach consciousness" (Freud, 1915*e*: 167). Again, in "A Note on the Unconscious", Freud offers "proofs or signs" of unconscious mental functioning by relating an account of post hypnotic suggestion, in which the hypnotist's words, although not available to consciousness, become an active cause of subsequent behaviour (Freud, 1912*g*).⁵ According to Freud, unconscious causes are also apparent in the case of parapraxes, hysterical symptoms and dreams, the meaning of which can often be brought to conscious awareness through the psychoanalytic method. For example: If the hysterical woman vomits she may do so from the [unconscious] idea of being pregnant. She has, however, no knowledge of this idea, although it can easily be detected in her mind, and made conscious to her, by one of the technical procedures of psychoanalysis (Freud, 1912*g*: 52).

For Brentano the term "consciousness" is intentional, it implies a mental act which is directed towards an object. There is always a direct awareness of the fact that one is engaged in a mental act which he calls "secondary object", and there is an indirect awareness of the object toward which the mental act is directed, which he calls the "primary object" (Brentano,

5. The subject of hypnosis later constructs reasonable explanations for his actions (Freud, 1912*g*: 51). This became known as the mechanism of "false connections" (Freud and Breuer: 1895*d*, 125fn).

1874: 102). Similarly for Freud, in the case of unconscious ideas there is always a direct awareness, or at least a potential for direct awareness, of the secondary object, and an indirect, unconscious, awareness of the primary object. While we are aware of unconscious ideas insofar as we know that we are experiencing a mental phenomenon, it is not possible to recall the original object of that mental act. That is to say, we cannot re-find the original intentional object of an unconscious idea. There may be a substitution of objects so that the original primary object remains unconscious while an alternative idea reaches consciousness. For example, on a conscious level one might believe that she/he is nervous about finding the venue for my exam. However, the nervousness is actually derived from an unconscious fear of failure.

It is possible to present a Brentanian reading of Freud's claim that to be conscious of something includes an "awareness", whereas "an unconscious conception is one of which we 'are not aware'" (Freud, 1912g: 51). It is the primary object which defies awareness, while direct knowledge of the secondary object is maintained. Since our knowledge of the primary object is not direct, there is always a moment, after we have become aware of the secondary object, when we remain unaware of the primary object. It is possible to speculate that this moment could be extended so that the primary object may remain outside our awareness, in a state of "latency", to use Freud's term. Indeed Brentano is willing to investigate the possibility that there are "mental phenomena which are not objects of consciousness" (Brentano, 1874: 102). Thus he poses the question: "All mental phenomena are states of consciousness; but are all mental phenomena conscious, or might there also be unconscious mental acts?" (*Ibid.*: 102).

Several philosophers such as John Locke and John Stuart Mill dismissed the concept of "unconscious consciousness" as an error in logic. They argued that we can only know about an idea after it has become conscious; and since only conscious ideas are known, there can be no knowledge of an "unconscious" idea. Brentano considers this to be a weak argument which excludes any appeal to experience. He does not see the possibility of unconscious mental functioning as a contradiction in terms, and is convinced that "a person who raises the question of whether there is an unconscious consciousness is not being ridiculous in the same way he would be had he asked whether there is a non-red redness" (*Ibid.*).

Brentano presents a history of the notion of unconscious ideas in addition to a survey of his contemporaries' views. In both cases he finds that the theory of unconscious ideas has "numerous proponents even

among men who in other respects may adhere to doctrine which are not exactly congenial" (*Ibid.*: 103). The popularity of this theory has not been recognised due to a lack of conventional terminology which often leads to confusion. Many authors who do not appear to advocate unconscious ideas do so and vice versa.⁶ Once Brentano has clarified each view, through a regularisation of the terminology, he identifies the strongest arguments which truly support unconscious mental functioning.

He begins by asserting and answering a general objection to the existence of an unconscious. It may be argued that it is "self-evident and necessarily the case that there can be no unconscious ideas in the domain of our experience, even if such ideas should exist within us; otherwise they would not be unconscious" (*Ibid.*: 105). This suggests that it is not possible to use appeals to experience as evidence against unconscious ideas, or even to use personal testimony to support their existence. Brentano answers this by claiming that the objection is correct insofar as it is not possible to use direct experience as evidence in the case of unconscious ideas. However, he believes that it is possible to use "indirect" evidence drawn from "empirical facts" (*Ibid.*). This, claims Brentano, can form the basis for a reasonable claim that unconscious ideas exist.⁷ At this point in the *Psychology*, the editor Oskar Kraus notes: "The question is, whether there can be a state of consciousness not accompanied by a secondary consciousness. *Unconscious determining factors* (Freud) are quite compatible with this" (Brentano, 1874: 105f).

Kraus's assertion is borne out in Freud's essay "The Unconscious", where Freud claims that we can only come to know an unconscious idea "after it has undergone transformation or translation into something conscious" (Freud, 1915e: 167). Remaining close to Freud's way of thinking it is correct to say that, one way or another, our knowledge is connected to consciousness, even when it concerns a knowledge that is situated in the unconscious, because this latter knowledge is only available to us by provoking it into consciousness.

6. For example, Gustav Theodor Fechner appears to promote the existence of unconscious mental functioning, until we realise that he defines "all mental phenomena [as] conscious" (Brentano, 1874: 104). This is also an error which Freud criticises when he writes: "At this point we may be prepared to meet with the philosophical objection that the latent conception did not exist as an object of psychology, but as a physical disposition for the recurrence of the same psychical phenomenon, i.e., of the said conception. But we may reply that this is a theory far overstepping the domain of psychology proper; that it simply begs the question by asserting 'conscious' to be an identical term with 'psychical', and that it is clearly at fault in denying psychology the right to account for its most common facts, such as memory, by its own means" (Freud, 1912g: 50).

7. Freud also believes that "a gain in meaning is a perfectly justifiable ground for going beyond the limits of direct experience" (Freud, 1915e: 168).

The Argument from Cause

Brentano offers three conditions which must be satisfied in order to establish the existence of unconscious ideas through the argument from cause. In each case I will indicate how Freud either strives to overcome Brentano's objections or to fulfill his requirements. In this way I will attempt to substantiate Reymond Fancher's claim that "Freud clearly tries to ensure that his early demonstrations of the unconscious conform to Brentano's three rules" (Fancher, 1977: 224).

Brentano, Condition 1: It is only possible to establish that an unconscious mental act is a cause of some "fact which is supposed to be its effect", if "the fact itself be sufficiently established" (Brentano, 1874: 106). Brentano criticises authors such as E. von Hartmann who attempts to argue for unconscious ideas on the basis of an unproven hypothesis such as clairvoyance.

Freud: Freud also criticises those who take the unconscious to be "something mystical" (Freud, 1913j: 178). He chooses a more scientific approach, taking great care to detail and document the empirical evidence which supports his claim that unconscious ideas exist. Ernest Jones is amongst those who describe Freud's method as "an inductive one, built up step by step on the basis of actual experience without the introduction of any *a-priori* speculative hypothesis" (Jones, 1953: 147). Freud gathers evidence from numerous and meticulously detailed case histories, textual analyses and general observation of his own mental phenomena and those of other people. Fancher agrees that, in this sense, Freud, "meets the requirements of Brentano's first rule" (Fancher, 1977: 224).

Brentano, Condition 2: It must be possible to provide a rational and consistent explanation of unconscious ideas in the same way as conscious ideas. There is a similarity between a conscious intention to act and an unconscious intention to act, both are capable of being brought "about by a corresponding cause" (Brentano, 1874: 106). For example, I might consciously decide to leave my keys in a friend's house as an excuse to return later. Similarly, I might forget my keys unconsciously, thus betraying my wish to return, even though I may not be aware of this wish. Brentano specifies this condition further by elaborating three points which I will name principles 1, 2 and 3.

Brentano, Condition 2, Principles 1 and 2: Firstly, one would have to demonstrate, "through experience, that conscious mental phenomena have always involved similar consequences" (*Ibid.*:106-107). Secondly, the examples cited in support of an unconscious must be properly representative and must not omit consequences which could be observed in alternative cases. It is possible that the causes we believe to be unconscious in a particular case are, in fact, due to "a concomitant conscious which is missing in these cases" (*Ibid.*: 107).

Freud: Condition 2, Principles 1 and 2: Although, in Freud's view, both conscious and unconscious acts have an original intention towards some primary object, repression may prevent that object from coming to consciousness.⁸ However, the repressed object finds a way through the psychic defences and emerges into consciousness through slips of the tongue and pen, bungled actions and various symptomatic acts. These actions "give expression to something which the agent himself does not suspect in them, and which he does not as a rule intend to impart to other people" (Freud, 1901*b*: 191). For example: "A young father presented himself before the registrar of births to give notice of the birth of his second daughter. When asked what the child's name was to be he answered 'Hanna' and had to be told by the official that he already had a child of that name. We may conclude that the second daughter was not quite so welcome as the first had been" (*Ibid.*: 224).

This case represents the father's unconscious desire to have just one child. Furthermore, Freud does not leave himself open to the charge that this particular case may be unusual and thus not properly representative of unconscious mental functioning. It is one of seventeen examples in his chapter on "Errors" in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901*b*). This chapter is typical insofar as it is largely devoted to the elaboration of examples. It is surrounded by eleven other chapters with a similar structure.

Brentano: Condition 2, Principle 3: Finally, according to Brentano, our understanding of the world is based upon a comparison between our experiences and our assumption of general laws. These laws render our

8. In the *Project* Freud explains: "To put it crudely, the current memory stinks just as an actual object may stink; and just as we turn away our sense organs (the head and nose) in disgust, so do the preconscious and our conscious appreciation turn away from memory. This is repression" (Freud, 1950*a*: 323).

surroundings predictable and intelligible. Therefore, he argues, it is necessary to posit those laws which would govern unconscious mental functioning. In his view, it is important to establish that the laws governing unconscious ideas neither contradict nor violate the laws of conscious mental functioning, "so that any possible peculiarities can be understood on the basis of the lack of the concomitant consciousness" (Brentano, 1874: 107). Like the laws which govern the external world, such as gravity, the laws of unconscious mental functioning may not be directly perceivable but can be known through inference, as they "reveal themselves in their effects" (*Ibid.*). These laws must be verified through empirical observations and lead us to explanations of previously mysterious phenomena. In addition to this, the new theory should enable us to predict events which were previously unknowable (*Ibid.*: 108).

Most proponents of unconscious ideas believe that unconscious mental activities are homogeneous with conscious mental activities (*Ibid.*: 107).⁹ Brentano endorses this as the most useful approach; if there were little or no compatibility between conscious and unconscious thought it could be argued that, so called "unconscious ideas" are not mental acts at all, but physiological phenomena.

Freud, Condition 2, Principle 3: Freud considers conscious and unconscious processes to be similar to one another in many respects. In fact, with the help of the psychoanalytic method it is possible to transform many of one's unconscious ideas into conscious thought. In this respect he claims that "all the categories which we employ to describe conscious mental acts, such as ideas, purposes, resolutions and so on, can be applied to them" (Freud, 1915*e*: 169). He also addresses Brentano's concern that a lack of compatibility between conscious and unconscious thought may lead to the conclusion that "unconscious ideas" are physiological phenomena. According to Freud: "The obvious answer to this is that a latent memory is, on the contrary, an unquestionable residuum of a *psychical* process" (*Ibid.*). He then dismisses the objection on the basis that it implicitly equates consciousness with all mental acts (*Ibid.*). Freud rejects this conventional equation between the psychic and the conscious, because it "disrupts psychical continuities, plunges us into the insoluble difficulties of the psycho-physical parallelism, is open to the reproach that for no obvious reason it over-estimates the part played by consciousness,

9. Although there have been cases where a philosopher considers conscious and unconscious mental phenomena to be heterogeneous, Brentano considers this approach to weaken the case considerably. He criticises Hartmann for holding this view (Brentano, 1874: 107).

and that it forces us prematurely to abandon the field of psychological research without being able to offer us any conceptualisation from other fields" (*Ibid.*).

In Freud's view, unconscious ideas are like conscious ideas which have been prevented from reaching consciousness by the mechanism of repression. As he explains, a "latent" memory is "an unquestionable residuum of a *psychical* process" rather than a physiological occurrence (Freud: 1912g: 50). This leads him to conclude that unconscious ideas should not be considered as "residues of somatic processes" (Freud, 1915e: 169). He clearly states his position in the paper "The Claims of Psycho-Analysis to Scientific Interest" (1913j), taking parapraxis as an example of unconscious mental functioning: "Parapraxes are full-blown psychical phenomena and always have a meaning and an intention. They serve to define purposes, which owing to the prevailing psychological situation, cannot be expressed in any other way. These situations as a rule involve a psychic conflict which prevents the underlying intention from finding direct expression and diverts it along indirect paths. A person who is guilty of parapraxis may notice it or overlook it; the suppressed intention underlying it may well be familiar to him; but he is usually unaware, without analysis, that the intention is responsible for the parapraxis in question" (Freud, 1913j: 167).

Freud makes a distinction between "preconscious" (*vorbewußt*) thought and unconscious (*unbewußt*) thought. The former conforms to Brentano's laws of consciousness. As Freud (1912g: 56) explains, "[t]he latent thoughts of the dream differ in no respect from the products of regular conscious activity". They are ideas which can be recalled to consciousness despite the interference of resistance. Unlike preconscious thoughts which are in the general domain of consciousness, thoughts which come from the unconscious are necessarily withheld from consciousness through the mechanism of resistance. Thus, the laws which govern conscious and preconscious ideas are the same, but these "differ widely from the laws of unconscious activity" (*Ibid.*). The laws of the unconscious include "*exemption from mutual contradiction, primary process* (mobility of cathexis), *timelessness*, and *replacement of external by psychical reality*" (Freud, 1915e: 191). In Freud's view a knowledge of these laws allows the psychoanalyst to "exert an effective influence upon the course of conscious processes" (*Ibid.*: 168). Thus Freud is looking for an extension of law based understanding of mental processes beyond those currently considered to underpin conscious mental processes, while Brentano is more concerned to emphasise the reduction of the mysterious to currently

conceived mental laws. These positions are not in contradiction, but there is a difference of emphasis.

Brentano, Condition 3: Brentano's third condition states that unconscious ideas could only be posited as the cause of other mental phenomena if no other explanation is reasonable. Furthermore, we may find examples of effects which emerge into conscious which are similar to what have been described as "unconscious" causes (Brentano, 1874: 109). However, we cannot assume that these effects are the result of unconscious causes because it "is not true that similar effects have similar causes" (*Ibid.*). Therefore, an effect which appears to be caused by unconscious factors may be the result of habit or possibly the effect of "inborn dispositions" (*Ibid.*: 110). Habitual judgments are originally based upon inferences, but they often become so familiar that they appear to be the result of direct experience.

In Brentano's view, of all the thinkers who have suggested theories of unconscious mental functioning, not one has complied with this third condition (*Ibid.*: 109-116).¹⁰ However, when he exemplifies this, with reference to "the most important" authors, we find that the instances upon which Brentano comments are all examples of what Freud would describe as preconscious mental phenomena rather than unconscious ideas (*Ibid.*: 110). For example, he cites a number of examples from H. Ulrici: "It happens that very often someone speaks to us, but we are absentminded and, therefore, at the moment do not know what he is saying. A moment later, however, we collect ourselves, and then what we have heard comes to consciousness" (quoted in Brentano, 1874: 113).

Brentano does not consider this to be an example of unconscious mental functioning because this instance can be explained in other ways. For example, it is possible that the individual sees something which simply re-evoked the memory through a simple process of association (Brentano, 1874: 113).

Freud, Condition 3: In his essay "The Unconscious" Freud (1915e) argues that the notion of unconscious ideas is "*necessary*" in order to explain the frequent, and otherwise inexplicable, gaps and inconsistencies apparent in conscious thought. These include parapraxes, dreams, psychical symptoms, and even the familiar experience of ideas simply

10. Brentano illustrates this with reference to Hamilton, Lange, Helmholtz, Hartmann and several others (Brentano, 1874: 109-116).

coming to mind without any apparent reason.¹¹ He writes: "All these conscious acts remain disconnected and unintelligible if we insist upon claiming that every mental act that occurs in us must also necessarily be experienced by us through consciousness; on the other hand, they fall into a demonstrable connection if we interpolate between them the unconscious acts which we have inferred" (Freud, 1915*e*: 168).

In Freud's view consciousness only deals with a small portion of our mental content, the remainder is either preconscious or unconscious (*Ibid.*).

In conclusion we can see that, for Brentano, a sustainable theory of unconscious mental functioning would be supported by empirical evidence, it would demonstrate the similarities between conscious and unconscious thought, and define the laws which appertain to each. This theory would only seek to explain events which defy explanation in terms of consciousness alone. I have shown that Freud addresses these demands, either implicitly or explicitly, and in some cases he does so with direct reference to unnamed "philosophers" (Freud, 1915*e*; 1912*g*; 1913*j*). Freud's continuing concern with the philosophical debate presented to him by Brentano is illustrated by the following passage published in "The Claims of Psycho-Analysis to Scientific Interest": "It is true that philosophy has repeatedly dealt with the problem of the unconscious, but with few exceptions, philosophers have taken up one or other of the two following positions. Either their unconscious has been something mystical, something intangible and undemonstrable, whose relation to the mind has remained obscure, or they have identified the mental with the conscious and have proceeded to infer from this definition that what is unconscious cannot be mental or a subject for psychology. These opinions must be put down to the fact that philosophers have formed their judgment on the unconscious without being acquainted with the phenomena of unconscious mental activity, and therefore without any suspicion of how far unconscious phenomena resemble conscious ones or of the respects in which they differ from them (Freud, 1913*j*: 178).

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11. "These not only include parapraxis and dreams in healthy people, and everything described as a psychical symptom or an obsession in the sick; our most personal daily experience acquaints us with ideas that come into our head we do not know from where, and with intellectual conclusions arrived at we do not know how" (Freud, 1915*e*: 168).

Summary

The Origins of Freud's Theory of the Unconscious: A Philosophical Link

The recent publication of Freud's correspondence to his school friend, Edward Silberstein, has provided new impetus for research into Freud's relationship with the philosopher Franz Brentano. In this paper I will address one possible objection to any claim that the philosopher could have influenced Freud on a theoretical level. It may be argued that there could be no significant theoretical influence because the psychoanalyst constructed a model of mental functioning which presupposes an unconscious, while Brentano was a philosopher of consciousness, who denied the very existence of unconscious ideas. I will demonstrate that, despite his rejection of unconscious mental functioning, Brentano presents a systematic investigation into what he perceives to be the strongest arguments in favour of the existence of unconscious ideas. Although he finds each account to be flawed, Brentano frequently offers a possible corrective, suggesting certain conditions as principles which must be observed by anyone hoping to formulate a reasonable thesis to support the existence of unconscious ideas. I argue that it is this analysis which helped Freud to formulate a coherent account of the unconscious which does not fall prey to the objections Brentano levelled against preceding conceptions of unconscious mental processes.

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Key words

Brentano, Consciousness, Freud, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, Unconscious.