In this paper I propose to say something about why certain key psychoanalytic concepts, particularly that of the unconscious, are special because of a studied, and therapeutically important, ambiguity or paradoxicality which affects them. Before I examine these concepts, however, the first section of this paper discusses some of Sartre's views on psychological explanation. On the one hand, this gives me a way of introducing the dichotomy of self-evident irreducibility and existential lucidity which underlies my account of the unconscious. On the other hand, it is important because I take Sartre to be addressing, less successfully, the very same question that Freud dealt with by introducing his ambiguous concepts.

I

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre describes three different levels of desires, or, as I shall sometimes say, more generally, of mental states. At one end there are concrete desires aimed at particular types of actions. This category includes such desires as the desire to swim, or to eat an apple, as well as more general desires, such as the desire to dominate, to succeed, and so on. It is out of these kinds of desires that what Sartre characterizes as 'psychological' explanations of the sort found in biographies are made.¹

At the other end, Sartre discerns a desire that he believes to be inherent in all human being in virtue simply of the nature of being itself. Thus, he arrives at it not by way of empirical investigation, but by a deduction from the very concepts he uses to describe being as such. Since the details of the
conclusion are not specifically relevant, we need not consider the deduction. Suffice it to say that this desire is the desire for being-in-itself-for-itself, the desire to be God, "a being who is what he is—in that he is all positivity and the foundation of the world—and at the same time a being who is not what he is and is what he is not—in that he is self-conscious and the necessary foundation of himself." This, as I have said, is the desire of all human being (being-for-itself) in virtue only of the nature of its being as such.

In between these two levels, the first and the third, comes a second. The first level includes mental states that are themselves in need of explanation. If we know that someone is ambitious, or wants to write, we feel it reasonable to expect some explanation of these facts. They themselves explain some facts, such as particular actions, but do not seem anything like the end of the explanatory story. The third level, the desire for being-in-itself-for-itself, the common aim of all humanity, is, however, too general to explain the first level of desire. If it is the common aim of all people, then it cannot explain why one person is like this, and another like that. Being all pervasive, it has no power to differentiate. Between these two levels, therefore, it is necessary to suppose that there is another level which, on the one hand, is particular, and serves, among other things, to distinguish one person from another, and on the other hand, is self-evidently irreducible, in the way that ambition and love of music are not. That is, it must provide genuine explanations for the concrete states of the first level, and yet must reveal itself as not being susceptible to, or in need of, any explanation itself, since the third level desire is too general to perform that task of explanation. This second level Sartre calls "radical choice," or a person's "original (or fundamental) project." He writes:

there is no question here of finding again an abstract behind the concrete; the impulse towards God [an example of a fundamental project, and not to be confused with the desire to be God, the ontologically given aim of the third level] is no less concrete than the impulse towards a particular woman. On the contrary, it is a matter of rediscovering under the partial and incomplete aspects of the subject the veritable concreteness which can be only the totality of his impulse toward being, his original relation to himself, to the world, and to the Other, in the unity of internal relations and of a fundamental project. This impulse can be only purely individual and unique.
This original, or fundamental, project is the upsurge of freedom in man. Although all original projects are ways of concretizing the desire for the ontologically given end of being-in-itself-for-itself, the project can still be considered free inasmuch as "while the meaning of the desire is ultimately the project of being God, the desire is never constituted by this meaning; on the contrary, it always represents a particular discovery of its end."  

Turning now to Sartre's attitude toward Freudian explanations, we can identify why he thinks they are inadequate. If, for example, we say of someone that he has some symptom that is a result of the fixation of his libido at the oral stage, we want to know why that person's libido was fixated there. In Sartre's terminology, we want to know what part that fixation plays in the person's fundamental project. How is he revealing, in that fixation, "the total relation to the world by which [he] constitutes himself as a self?"  

To understand the kind of answer Sartre wants, we must distinguish two senses in which one can ask "why." In one sense, such questions can be answered by citing any form of explanation (or part of an explanation), where explanations ideally consist of antecedent conditions and laws that together entail, or, in statistical explanations, probabilize the occurrence of the fact to be explained. This is not the sense in which Sartre wants to know why someone has an oral fixation. In this other sense, what are sought are the reasons an agent has for some action. We want to know how something about an agent fits into our picture of him as an essentially rational, motivated entity. Let us call explanations of this second kind "existentially lucid."  

Sartre's criticism of Freud is that the latter is unable to offer explanations that are both existentially lucid and self-evidently irreducible. If psychoanalysis uses concepts like instinct, the unconscious, libido, and the like then its explanations are not, because of their use of these concepts, explanations that expand our view of the agent as a rational creature. This is because such concepts are psycho-biological, and not genuinely psychological. But if psychoanalysis uses only purely psychological concepts, then Sartre objects that its explanations are not self-evidently irreducible. Whatever irreducibility they obtain will only be because they would be "presented as the postulate of the psychologist and the result of his refusal or his incapacity to go further."  

Furthermore, to the degree that psychoanalysts do give existentially lucid explanations, they repudiate these distinctively Freudian concepts, and in particular the unconscious. Sartre refers approvingly to Stekel, an analyst who departed from Freud's own project and "has been able to carry my project to its logical conclusion." The crux of the psychosis view is that there exists an 'existential' cause for the neurosis, which goes on to say:  

on the one hand  

to the fact that it is  

which at first sight it appears there exists an explicitly reflective cause that it in fact implies that the  

In other words, explanations in terms of other ambiguous concepts like organic intrudes in phenomenological consciousness. I take this to be a reductio of all other psychoanalytic explanations that are not in terms of  

Sartre's overall position is that psychoanalysis, that of the human, that of the human, that of the human, that of the human, that of the human. It will not be in need of an explanation refers to the project. Before this upsurge, the project had in terms of whose destiny, the human, human, human, human, human, human.  

It seems to me simultaneously that meets these requirements in terms of motivation, it seems legitimate to ask. The answer is which it is not possible to view that it is always irrational.  

what we are dealing an irreducible cause of which would leads us to the result.
FREUD'S AMBIGUOUS CONCEPTS

analyst who departed sufficiently from Freud to write: "every time I have been able to carry my reflections far enough, I have established that the crux of the psychosis was conscious."8 And after referring to Stekel, Sartre goes on to say:

on the one hand the explanation by means of the unconscious, due to the fact that it breaks the psychic unity, can not account for the facts which at first sight it appeared to explain. And on the other hand, there exists an infinity of types of behavior in bad faith which explicitly reject this kind of explanation because their essence implies that they can appear only in the translucency of consciousness.9

In other words, explanation in terms of the unconscious (and implicitly, in terms of other ambiguous Freudian concepts) violates 'psychic unity' and intrudes in phenomena that can only appear in the translucency of consciousness. I take this to be a claim that the phenomena in question require explanations that are existentially lucid, and that the unconscious, and other psychoanalytic concepts, cannot provide such explanations.

Sartre's overall position seems to hinge on the possibility of a level of explanation, that of the original project, which a) is still existentially lucid but b) reveals itself as not being in need of existentially lucid explanation. It will not be in need of existentially lucid explanation because this level of explanation refers to the upsurge of freedom that constitutes the person; before this upsurge, this self-defining original project, there is no subject in terms of whose desires, and other states of mind, we could give any existentially lucid explanation. The original project is the ground of all human, existentially lucid, explanations.

It seems to me simply false that there could be any level of explanation that meets these requirements. For any assertion about an individual's motivation, it seems there is always a "why?" question that it would be legitimate to ask. The original project is designed to be something about which it is not possible to ask "why," but Sartre dissociates himself from the view that it is always possible to ask "why" even at his first level of mental states:

what we are demanding then . . . is a veritable irreducible; that is, an irreducible of which the irreducibility would be self-evident, which would not be presented as the postulate of the psychologist and the result of his refusal or his incapacity to go further, but which
when established would produce in us an accompanying feeling of satisfaction... This is not the childish quest of a 'because', which allows no further 'why'? It is on the contrary a demand based on a preontological comprehension of human reality and on the related refusal to consider man as capable of being analyzed and reduced to original givens, to determined desires (or 'drives'), supported by the subject as properties by an object.\textsuperscript{10}

Sartre seems to be making two separate claims in this paragraph. First, he is saying that explanations in terms of 'given' desires are unsatisfactory. But from the recognition of this unsatisfactoriness, it is a big jump to the second claim, that there is a level that is both self-evidently irreducible and still existentially lucid. We can give good reasons why this level of the original project, or radical choice ('radical' implying self-evident irreducibility and 'choice' implying the commitment to existential lucidity) should be impossible. What sense can we make of the notion of choice in a person except as against a background of psychological states of that person? In the absence of such a background of goals, desires, habits, character traits, not to mention beliefs, would not any outcome initiated by the person be simply arbitrary, random, and meaningless?

Sartre has correctly seen the horns of a dilemma, the unacceptability of ceasing explanation at the level of psychological givens, such as ambition or love of music, on the one hand, and our reluctance to admit in the explanations of the behaviour of people what is not existentially lucid, on the other. But by asserting the possibility of radical choice, he has impaled himself on both in a vain attempt to preserve both self-evident irreducibility and existential lucidity. We can maintain existential lucidity by giving more and more general existential characterizations of human behaviour. Thus, a desire to eat an apple can be explained by a desire to incorporate nature, which can be explained, in its turn, by the desire to overcome being-in-itself. Even if the overcoming of being-in-itself is the original project, it seems that we can still ask why the person has this as his original project. It is not open to Sartre to answer that the original project is explained in terms of the third level of desire, the ontologically given desire for being-in-itself-for-itself, since this third level, being entirely general, is no longer capable of explaining the particularity of the original project. The option of keeping existential lucidity can only be pursued at the cost of giving up self-evident irreducibility.

Alternatively, we can think of the dilemma we posed above in terms of a natural lucidity. If it is a natural lucidity that certain state causes our inner lives in the way in which it just described, what is identified as relevant, it might very well be something outside the circle of the self.

It seems to me that further study of the dilemma we pose in terms of the concept of radical choice bears beyond explanations and the natural classification as either conscious or unconscious. Despite the abundant evidence, explanations like those of biological energy that bear names like Sartre, attempt to explain the elements of both self-evident irreducibility and the subjective essence was to invoke a subject that is more like unconscious desire. These concepts face issues beyond the extent existentially that is the Id, a part of the self, a term Sartre calls "It." To that extent, and hence, when off-form, we lose in the sense that one cannot answer the question noted above.

A good example of the two is the one where the concept of instinct. It is difficult to explain this point of view, one where there is a sense between the two.
Alternatively, we can opt for self-evident irreducibility at the expense of existential lucidity. Such an option might involve explanation in terms of natural causes. If it is established as a law that one's neurons being in a certain state causes one to eat an apple, then of this explanation there is a way in which it just doesn't make sense to ask "why" in the sense which we identified as relevant to Sartre. (Of course, further natural explanations may very well still be possible.) But such explanations have clearly gone outside the circle of the human, the existentially lucid.

II

It seems to me that Freud can be seen as attempting to resist both horns of the dilemma we posed, but more successfully than Sartre did with his concept of radical choice. Freud, like Sartre, obviously wanted to go beyond explanations in terms of everyday psychological states which he classified as either conscious or preconscious. The way he did this was not, despite the abundance of comparisons from hydraulics, etc., to opt for explanations like those of the physical sciences, using concepts like psychical energy that bear no relation to existentially lucid concepts. Nor did he, like Sartre, attempt to find a level of explanation that satisfied the requirements of both self-evident irreducibility and existential lucidity. What he did was to invoke a range of concepts that have a designedly ambiguous nature. The explanatory repertoire of psychoanalysis consists of concepts like unconscious desires, infantile wishes, instincts or drives, and so on. These concepts face in two directions. Unconscious desires are desires, and to that extent existentially lucid, yet at the same time they are assigned to the Id, a part of the self that Freud designated with the extraordinary title of "It." To that extent, they are influences acting on the self from outside it, and hence, when offered as part of an explanation are irreducible, in the sense that one cannot ask of them "why" in the second sense of this question noted above.

A good example of the kind of ambiguous concept I am talking about, and one where the ambiguity is explicitly recognized by Freud, is the concept of instinct. Freud writes in this connection:

if now we apply ourselves to considering mental life from a biological point of view, an 'instinct' appears to us as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representa-
tive of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.\(^{11}\)

If Freud's solution is to introduce concepts that are fundamentally ambiguous, why is his solution better than Sartre's? How, indeed, is it a solution at all? One way of putting the difference between Freud and Sartre, which in many ways is very slight, is by saying that whereas, for Sartre, incompatible demands were to be genuinely satisfied by a given element in his existential ontology, for Freud, the incompatibilities are crystallized into an ambiguous, or equivocal, conceptual tool that is intended neither to resolve, nor itself to be a resolution of, the tension between the demands of irreducibility and lucidity. Freud's approach accepts a tension which Sartre's tried to resolve.

This characterization of the difference between Freud and Sartre depends on the introduction of the concept of a tool. To see the place of this concept, and its justification, we must consider the question of the context of explanation. Everything Sartre says is intended to help us construct explanations of someone. Even where his examples are in the first person, nothing hinges on the purpose for which explanation is made. In psychoanalysis, however, the idea of offering explanations to someone, specifically, to the person who is being explained, is crucial. Freud believed that one could accept psychoanalytic therapy and reject its theory altogether. Thus, the place to look for the significance of Freud's ambiguous concepts is not their role in metapsychology, though I would not dismiss this as an uninteresting question, but their role in therapy. And I want to suggest that it is precisely the ambiguity of these concepts that can enable therapy to be efficacious.

It is worth pointing out, however, that if one thinks of Sartre's concept of the original project not as theoretical, or descriptive, but as therapeutic, it is quite possible a case could be made for it similar to that which I am about to attempt for Freud's ambiguous concepts. Indeed, part of the appeal of Sartre's existentialism is that it does have a therapeutic role, and it is presumably no coincidence that Sartre was also a dramatist and novelist. His existential views often feature as a practical force in the reasoning of his characters, influencing their behaviour as much as describing their inner lives. I would thus welcome the attempt to develop a therapeutic use for the concept of the original project, or radical choice, however much I think it is inappropriate as a description of human reality.

I turn now to the question of whether psychoanalytic concepts, those concepts, that is to say, which is one of the most fundamental ideas of Freud 1937, Anna Freud, in her book from the id to the ego, elaborates from psychoanalysis, should be reserved for the stuff of life.\(^{12}\) It is, then, the notion that invites exploration, the ambiguously ambiguous nature of the unconscious.

In his paper "The unconscious," the term 'unconscious' later became known, he exists alongside a kind of somatic and topographical unconscious, the conscious, the conscious merely thrown into sensory in which the unconscious consists of processes that are governed not by the contents of the unconscious but by ideas in the unconscious.

no negativity (exemption from cathexes) reality—therapeutic processes

Now according to Dennett, and Dworkin, possibility of propositional coherence, rational propositional coherence, rational propositional coherence, but let me try to say something about this theory that it is the coherence, rational coherence, rational
I turn now to the question of how Freud's ambiguous concepts function in psychoanalysis, and I shall do this by way of an examination of one of those concepts, the unconscious. The unconscious, the Id, is, of course, one of the most fundamental and distinctive concepts of psychoanalysis. In 1937, Anna Freud was able to write that whenever "research was deflect- ed from the id to the ego—it was felt that here was a beginning of apostasy from psychoanalysis. The view was held that the term psychoanalysis should be reserved for the new discoveries relating to the unconscious psychic life." It is, therefore, not surprising if it is this key concept that most invites exploration and that offers the best means of demonstrating the ambiguous nature of psychoanalytical explanations.

In his paper "The Unconscious," Freud distinguishes various senses of the term 'unconscious'. In one sense, it refers to a particular structure that later became known as the Id. This structural, or topographical, sense exists alongside a descriptive use that covers equally what is part of the topographical unconscious and what is part of the system Pcs., the preconscious, the contents of which are potentially accessible to consciousness merely through attention. It is the unconscious in the first of these senses in which we are interested. According to Freud, the structural unconscious contains ideas, or propositional attitudes as we might now say, that are governed by radically different principles from those which govern the contents of the conscious and preconscious systems. In particular, for ideas in the unconscious, there is

no negation, no doubt, no degrees of certainty. . . . To sum up:
 exemption from mutual contradiction, primary process (mobility of catathymesis), timelessness, and replacement of external by psychical reality—these are the characteristics which we may expect to find in processes belonging to the system Ucs."

Now according to many philosophers, such as Donald Davidson, Daniel Dennett, and David Lewis, there is a constitutive link between the possibility of propositional content and certain principles—principles of coherence, rationality, and consistency—which should govern such propositional content. Space does not permit me to defend this view here, but let me try to say what it amounts to, since it is against the background of this theory that I wish to consider the unconscious. These principles of coherence, rationality, and consistency are normative principles that direct how the various intentional concepts they govern should function. So
they would include principles based on deductive rationality such as "if you believe that p and q then you should believe that p," and "if you believe that p then do not believe that not-p." They will also include principles connected with inductive reasoning and with action, such as "draw inductive conclusions on the basis of all available relevant evidence" and "perform those actions which you judge it best to perform all things considered." The application of these principles to the concepts of belief, desire, action, and inference is not, however, an a posteriori matter. We do not discover that in fact these principles hold for those concepts. Anything that cannot be interpreted as more or less conforming to these principles cannot be interpreted as a bearer of propositional content at all. These principles implicitly define the concepts they govern. The question of whether people who have beliefs and so on are rational is thus not a factual question. As Davidson says: "to have propositional attitudes is to be a rational creature."16

From the perspective of this philosophical view, there is something very problematic about Freud's characterization of the unconscious. I don't mean by this that there is something problematic in Freud's advocacy of such a conception of the unconscious, but rather, that Freud has characterized the unconscious in such a way that it is problematic. In a sense, one could say that it is a virtue of the philosophical approach to content adopted here that it allows us to see Freud's unconscious as problematic. Other views of content, that do not make a constitutive link between content and rationality, would not be able to see the Freudian unconscious as problematic in just this way.

How, exactly, is the unconscious problematic on this view of content? Freud asserts that ideas in the unconscious are exempt from mutual contradiction. But unless we can say of something that if it believes that p then it ought not, and therefore, on the view sketched above, generally will not, believe that not-p, then our very right to consider that thing as entertaining propositional content, as having ideas, is challenged. Again, surely, if something has beliefs, those beliefs must be capable of being negated and doubted, yet Freud claims that ideas in the unconscious are not subject to negation and doubt.

But the problem is more serious even than this. For it is part of the aim of psychoanalysis to open up channels of communication between the unconscious and the conscious. Indeed, regardless of what is to be achieved in therapy, "it must be said that the Ucs. is continued into what are known as derivatives, that it is part of the neurotic mechanism that influences the Ps. and the Pcs."17 Not only does this work in a difficult way, but it threatens the very foundations of communication.

When Freud says that the unconscious is such that it will gradually be revealed, he means that the contents of the unconscious will gradually be strengthened by the strength of the desires to which they are attached. Thus principles of the unconscious, which account the rationality of the activity of the unconscious in terms of those principles, will gradually be strengthened. The strength of the contents of the unconscious, in fact, the very strength of the desires, is why, as the unconscious is revealed, it threatens the very foundations of the analyst's talk about the rational demands of the conscious.

The practice of psychoanalysis, by linking its patient to his unconscious, reveals the very principles that account for the deliverances of the neurotic mechanism.18 It reveals the previously unknown existence of a second, unconscious system within the patient. This unconscious, seems to be the source of all the patient's alien. It is something that he is unable to withstand or control.

So far, then, from the point of view of the theory of content I have been making, the conscious is alien. It is something that is revealed as such in the threat of the unconscious.

But now consider the possibility of the existence of the unconscious...
such as “if you believe others would judge you in the same light, you believe that you are also of the same light.” The principles of logic and common sense, the principles of induction and induction of experience,” and then it makes no difference whether all things are known or whether all things are only facts of belief, or whether one is at all. We do not experience it. Anything learned in common sense or by the principles of logic is not fact, not all. These are the principles of the unconscious principle that is to be a problematic. This is the problem between logic and the unconscious principle.

What is a self of content? The principle of contradiction states that p then it is not q, and q not p, and the same as entertainment. It seems, surely, if p is not q, and q is not p, and the same as entertainment and the common sense and the possibility of the unconscious principle. Then the unconscious principle is necessary because the data of consciousness have a very large number of gaps in them . . . [P]sychical acts often occur which can be explained only by presupposing other acts, of
which, nevertheless, consciousness affords no evidence. . . . A gain in meaning is a perfectly justifiable ground for going beyond the limits of experience.\footnote{\textsuperscript{18}}

The very reason for positing the unconscious is precisely to supplement consciousness in order that consciousness should become explicable, that it should conform to the principles that are supposed to govern it. Without positing unconscious mental activity, the contents of consciousness might be in danger of failing to conform sufficiently to those principles that are a precondition of there being any thought at all. In this passage, the unconscious, far from threatening the conscious self, is the savior of the self. The data of consciousness are ‘gappy’; psychic unity can only be preserved by positing the unconscious. The unconscious is all that stands between the self and madness, characterized as a wild flight of ideas insufficiently connected to form a rational self. And since our supposition is that if there is no rational content there is no content at all, the unconscious is now required for the existence of propositional content.

So, on the one hand, the unconscious is characterized in terms that make its existence inimical to the existence of a self which thinks, while on the other hand, the very existence of that self seems to require the supposition of the unconscious. The unconscious is at once something that threatens the unity of the conscious self, and is required by the principles of that unity. It is both alien and proper to the self of which it is the unconscious. This ambiguous status of the unconscious is reflected in the way its contents are introduced into the analysis.

It is worth pondering the question of how the contents of the unconscious make their way into the analysis, for it is easy to overlook it. The contents of the unconscious cannot be revealed by the patient, for they are, precisely, unconscious. But they cannot be introduced by the analyst, for to suppose that the analyst knows better than the patient what is in the latter’s mind attributes to the analyst a kind of knowledge to which he cannot, and would not, lay claim. But if neither the patient nor the analyst knows what is in the unconscious, how is it ever to become conscious?

The dilemma is resolved through free association, but of course, this is just another of Freud’s ambiguous concepts: words uttered by the patient which reveal to him and to the analyst his own mind! The patient is both himself (it is, after all, his unconscious) and not himself, because what is being broached is both alien and proper to him. Free association is, paradoxically, not only a means of self-discovery but, yet the very opposite.
paradoxically, the demonic possession of the patient by himself, which is yet the very opposite of self-possession.

One could say that the practice of free association turns the space of the analysis into the unconscious itself. In everyday life, our interaction with other people takes the form of what we might call discourse. This interaction is necessarily governed by the principles of rationality that we looked at above. (This is emphatically not to say that all interaction must be 'rational' in the sense of non-emotional, or scientific. It is simply that, as Davidson argues,⁹ certain minimal assumptions of rationality must be made for meaning to be constituted at all.) Where these assumptions fail, as they do, for instance, with the psychotically insane, discourse, what we think of as normal interaction, can no longer continue. But if the unconscious enters into the analysis, and if the unconscious is, as Freud claims, exempt from the principles of rationality, then it follows that analysis itself is no longer a form of discourse. Another mode of interaction must replace that of discourse, and this mode is that of free association. Free association as a mode of interaction in which the patient is both himself and not himself, and the unconscious, as a kind of logical space in which logic is challenged, are correlative.

My use of 'free association' is possibly somewhat extended. What is at stake is not simply saying whatever comes into one's head. It is a matter of achieving not only the free association of ideas, but also a non-discourse based (a free) mode of association with the analyst. However, there is some justification for extending the concept of free association in this way. The 'fundamental rule' of psychoanalysis, that the patient say whatever comes into his head, without censoring it or subjecting it to criticism appropriate to everyday life (free association traditionally characterized) is not something which can be straightforwardly obeyed. Rather, as Anna Freud says, "what concerns us is not simply the enforcement of the fundamental rule of analysis for its own sake but the conflict to which this gives rise."⁰ Unfortunately, she does not take the step of seeing in the faltering attempt to achieve free association a whole new mode of interaction. She still thinks in terms of analyzing the Id when free association is successful, and analyzing the Ego, and its defenses, when it is not. But when one goes beyond this way of thinking which seems to see the patient as two minds sharing the same mouth, it becomes clear that free association is a problematic concept within psychoanalysis.

The attempt at free association is a replacement for discourse, which
must be the province of the rational if it is to be maintained. By replacing the space of rational discourse, where the constitutive function of the normative principles of rationality is unquestioned, with the space of the unconscious, articulated not through discourse but through free association, analysis throws the subject into doubt. This is not to say that it makes the subject doubt. Analysis is not a form of critical self-evaluation, as many like to think it is. No amount of evaluation or reflection could serve to change the subject. Analysis actually places a question mark over the subject’s existence. It is only if the subject is thus thrown into doubt that the possibility emerges that he can in some way reconstitute himself.

The current fashion for ‘language’, along with Anna O.’s initial characterization of psychoanalysis as ‘the talking cure’, combine to mislead us. One’s feeling that mere talking doesn’t change anything is, I think, justified. And talking is, indeed, incidental to psychoanalysis. One can, and here I am being rather facetious, imagine a patient having sessions five times a week for four years, neither he nor the analyst saying a word, and the patient ending up much improved. (Of course, only if he had a good analyst!) But the serious point is that in psychoanalysis, something actually happens, as it must if anything is to be achieved, and that what happens is that the subject’s very existence as a subject, a rational discoursor, is questioned by taking that subject as standing in a relation to the unconscious, that space which is his and yet not his.

We have come, then to the significance of Freud’s ambiguous concepts. Offering explanations to the patient in terms that, however, self-evidently irreducible, are existentially opaque, makes the patient truly a patient, a point of convergence for the operation of forces which are nothing to do with him. However much Freud talks of hydraulics and other physical sciences in his metapsychology, it is part of the repertoire of no decent analyst to interpret to the patient in terms of mere energy, impersonal and mechanical. On the other hand, to interpret to the patient in terms that are completely lucid is equally ineffective. If lucid explanations are never irreducible, if the patient can always wonder why, the analysis will meander interminably. It will be shallow, where analysis is meant to be deep; in other words, it will mean that the patient’s unconscious remains unengaged. These two positions, of self-evident irreducibility without lucidity, and of complete lucidity without irreducibility, provide models for two types of psychotherapy with which psychoanalysis might be contrasted: behaviour therapy and so-called humanist, or existential, therapy.

What is required is a means of interpreting to the patient that, unlike...
behaviourist therapy, avoids making him into an object, and yet, unlike humanist therapies where therapy is seen precisely as a heightened form of discourse, is able to penetrate by offering to the patient something that is somehow new to him, that is not lucid to him, something that can affect him. The means of doing this lie in Freud's ambiguous concepts, and particularly the concept of the unconscious, as a space which is both threatening to, and necessary for, the very existence of the subject as a rational, discoursing being.21

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NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 90.
3. Needless to say, it will not help to introduce further levels between the second and the third, since this will only delay the problem.
5. Ibid., p. 566–7. This raises the problem, which I mention only to evade, of how compatible the original project is with freedom of the will.
6. Ibid., p. 563.
7. Ibid., p. 54.
8. Quoted in Sartre, p. 54.
10. Ibid., p. 560–1.
15. Davidson, Essays on Actions and Events, p. 231.
18. Ibid., p. 168.
19. See Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation, passim.
21. I would like to thank my fellow members of the Golders Green Kreis, on that occasion Oliver Black, Donald Franklin, Chris Hull and Jo Wolff, for a discussion of an earlier draft of this paper that helped me identify several weaknesses which, I hope, I have been able to remedy.