The Epistemological Basis for Psychoanalytic Knowledge

A Third Way

Frank Summers

Way Beyond Freud

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The epistemological status of psychoanalysis has become the object of heated debate in recent years as the evidential basis for its clinical theories and procedures has been increasingly questioned. Objectivists view psychoanalysis as a natural science that can be tested by the same objective methods as any other natural science. On the other side, the advocates of relativism contend that psychoanalytic truths are relative to the situation and standpoint of the observer. It is the contention of the present paper that neither side of this argument recognizes the unique nature of psychoanalytic knowledge, and, therefore, neither position provides an epistemological basis for psychoanalysis. Both the objectivist and relativist viewpoints will be examined in detail to illustrate the fundamental flaws in each position. It will be argued that only a specifically human science standpoint avoids the unresolvable problems of the other two positions and provides a valid epistemological basis for psychoanalytic science.

OBJECTIVISM

According to objectivism, psychoanalytic inquiry differs from that of the

natural sciences only in the aspect of nature being investigated, so that the methods and causal principles applicable to psychoanalytic data are no different from that of the natural sciences (eg, Holt, 1972; Wallerstein, 1986, 1988). The objectivist argument tends to rely heavily on Popper's (1962) critique of positivism and his alternative view of scientific method as "conjecture and refutation" (Blight, 1981; Holzman, 1985; Wallerstein, 1986, 1988). The positivist critique is that psychoanalysis has not proven its hypotheses because it has not compiled observations to demonstrate their truth (Grünbaum, 1984). Psychoanalytic objectivists point out that Popper (1962) in his thorough critique of positivism showed that no amount of observations can ever conclusively prove a theory because future observations could theoretically disprove it and that there are no observations without theories. Popper concluded that science does not proceed "blindly," by compiling random lists of observations, but by conjectures, leaps of imagination, that are then tested. Scientific theories are demarcated from nonscientific statements by virtue of their falsifiability. While all theory purports to "explain," only falsifiable statements are scientific theories. Objectivist psychoanalysts argue that psychoanalysis is a series of propositions, "conjectures," awaiting tests that could refute them, and, therefore, is no different from any other science. In their view, the Popperian view of science shows that psychoanalysis is a science with the same methods as any other science.

Some objectivists view the analyst as a natural scientist within the analytic setting and use various analogies for the analyst's stance, such as looking through a microscope (Bachrach, 1989). Rubenstein (1976, 1980) believes the analyst predicts an event likely to be derivative of an unconscious motive, and if the prediction is confirmed, the unconscious motive is assumed to be present. According to Blight (1981), the analyst understands the patient's motives at the experiential level, but invokes nonexperiential mechanisms to explain via causation, and this level of explanation is the natural scientific aspect of psychoanalysis. For example, the patient's excessive sympathy may be understood clinically as a defense against underlying feelings of cruelty, but the scientific level explains this defense by the mechanism of reaction formation. Similarly, Eagle (1980) contends that the analyst searches for both motives (or reasons) and causes, but only the latter provides explanation, the hallmark of natural science. Other objectivists, like Holzman (1985) and Wallerstein (1986, 1988), believe the psychoanalytic setting is too contaminated for objective investigation and, therefore, the ultimate validation of psychoanalytic hypotheses must come from controlled extraclinical experimental research. Despite these differences, the fundamental principle of objectivism in all its forms is that the subject matter of psychoanalysis is the natural world, and the task of the analyst is to explain its workings via the methods of the natural sciences.

There are several problems with the objectivist position. First, the

objectivist model is self-contradictory because the contention that knowledge is gained by the testing of natural phenomena is itself not testable. The objectivist contradicts himself in the very statement of his position because objectivism relies on a truth claim (that all scientific knowledge is testable) that is not founded on the testability it claims is the only basis for scientific knowledge. Such a contradiction in itself vitiates truth claims for objectivism and renders it an untenable ground for psychoanalysis.

Second, the objectivist's reliance on Popper's critique of positivism for the justification of a "unitary" view of science is unfounded. Far from endorsing a distinctly human science with its own methods, the positivist position is that there is only one method for science, the observation of nature, and any endeavor not subject to the canons of natural science is not scientific. Therefore, Popper's attack on the positivist view of science is not relevant to the distinction between natural and human science. Positivism holds to the unitary view of science espoused by objectivism (Ayer, 1946). The fact that Popper believed in one method for all science does not in any way imply that psychoanalysis fits that method; in fact. Popper concluded that psychoanalysis is not scientific because it is hopelessly unverifiable. To contend that the methods of the natural sciences constitute the appropriate mode of investigation for all science it must be shown that human science proceeds best by these methods, and Popper's critique of positivism includes no such demonstration.

This point leads to the third, and perhaps most psychoanalytically significant, flaw in objectivism. Rather than fitting the methods of the science to the domain of inquiry, the objectivist predetermines his method and then attempts to fit the data to it. In this sense, the objectivist is in the position of the drunk in the old story who looks for his watch under the lamppost in the alley because the light is there even though he lost it up the street. The objectivist position applies the methods appropriate to the investigation of the material world to the analytic process despite the fact that analysis investigates psychological reality, the experiencing subject as presented in language, rather than the material world. Absent any demonstration that psychological reality is material reality, or, at least, is best understood by the methods used to investigate the latter, there is no reason to believe the natural science model fits the analytic process, and the equation of psychoanalytic data with the material world is an unfounded theoretical prejudice.

If psychoanalysis claims to have objective knowledge, it must conform to the standards of objectivism: falsifiability and the logic of explanation. From the objectivist viewpoint, if all variables except one are not controlled, no causal inferences can be drawn because the only criterion for a scientific hypothesis is its falsifiability (Popper, 1962). However, controlled experimentation, although it can examine general hypotheses, could only validate an interpretation if it were somehow replicated in an experiment.

Such a replication is not only a practical difficulty, it is, in principle, an impossibility because the clinical situation in which the interpretation was made is not replicable, and replication is the criterion for objectivist science. Any less stringent criterion for objective truth does not fulfill the objectivist standard of verifiability, and, therefore leaves psychoanalysis open to scathing attacks from philosophers of science (eg., Nagel, 1959; Scriven, 1959; Grünbaum, 1984) who point out that the uncontrolled nature and lack of independent investigators in the analytic process reduce any truth claims generated in this setting to unfounded speculation. It must be emphasized here that if psychoanalysis is regarded as an objectivist science, there is no answer to these charges because psychoanalytic investigation fails to meet objectivist criteria for knowledge.

Additionally, the claim that analysis is a natural science because the analyst uses "nonexperiential mechanisms" in his understanding is precisely the sort of "pseudo-science" that objectivist philosophers have so aptly criticized. In the example used by Blight, employing the concept "reaction formation" is not an explanation because it does not add to the clinical understanding that the patient uses oversolicitousness to hide his cruelty. As long as psychoanalysis claims to be an explanatory science of observables, such attacks are warranted because any putative explanatory "mechanism" can be no more than a label for phenomena already understood.

The impossibility of conducting controlled scientific experiment has been recognized by objectivists who believe that extraclinical investigation is the method of verification for psychoanalytic hypotheses (eg., Holzman, 1985; Wallerstein, 1986, 1988). While controlled experiments can test the validity of general hyptheses, they cannot assess the validity of interpretations because of the impossibility of replicating clinical process.

The critique of objectivist philosophers cannot be dismissed as the complaint of an outmoded positivist philosophy of science. Nonpositivist philosophers such as Popper (1962) and Scriven (1959) are no less relenting in their attacks on psychoanalysis than positivists such as Grünbaum (1984). If psychoanalysis must claim to be a natural science, these philosophers win the argument. It is at this point that we must turn to the viewpoint of the relativists who have provided the most commonly voiced epistemological alternative to this view of psychoanalysis.

RELATIVISM

In reaction to the difficulties of the objectivist stance, the relativist regards the analyst's viewpoint as relative to her perspective. There are several variations of epistemological relativism. The most well-known is Schafer's view (1983, 1992) that the essence of psychoanalysis consists of analyst and patient creating a narrative together. The patient's verbalizations

are a narrative performance out of which the analyst selects some aspects to retell the story based on her “precritical assumptions,” theories, and ways of understanding. Because other narratives are always possible, there are no objective psychoanalytic data that compel definite conclusions, and the chosen narrative is always subject to revision and new interpretation as analyst and patient "co-author a script.” The role of the patient becomes greater as she becomes a more reliable interpreter. The essence of psychoanalysis is the construction of narratives, and there is nothing beyond the narration that can be used to adjudicate analytic truth. While narrations cannot be regarded as objective or definitive, they are useful.

Well aware that his position may be construed as solipsistic, Schafer (1983) attempts to answer such an objection with his view that psychoanalytic constructions are subject to the rules of verification, coherence, consistency, and completeness. The interpretation that fulfills these criteria and fits the events outside the analysis is preferred to alternatives that do not.

Spence (1982) bases his hermeneutic position on a detailed criticism of analytic reasoning to show that the analyst has no claim to “historical truth,” knowledge of events as they occurred. Spence argues that the patient’s experience is not directly accessible to the analyst because (1) the patient must use language to mediate feelings and thoughts, and language can never

capture the experience itself, and (2) the patient is asked to associate freely, making her communications elusive and unclear. The analyst inevitably uses the "haze of his own experience" to "fill in" the missing pieces of the patient's communications, resulting in "unwitting interpretations" that become the nonverbalized basis for additional constructions, thus multiplying distortions. Furthermore, analysts mistake created structural, linguistic similarities between current happenings and the past for an actual, causal relationship between the past and present. The "link" with the past is not a causal connection but a linguistic creation of the analyst to develop an aesthetically pleasing story.

Despite these difficulties, in his early work Spence believed psychoanalytic interpretations possessed "narrative truth," a consistent, coherent, comprehensive account, which has both an aesthetic and a practical component. Aesthetically, a good analytic interpretation finds a "home" for an "anomalous happening" by fitting the event into the patient's life story. Therapeutic effectiveness is a product of the linguistic and narrative closure effected by reducing life to organizing principles, rather than correspondence to actual events. Thus, according to Spence's early view, as an aesthetic expression, the good interpretation has no more correspondence to facts than art or music; as a pragmatic statement it creates its own truth.

In his later work, Spence (1993, 1994), no longer finding rhetorical

persuasion an acceptable alternative, attacks psychoanalysis for its reliance on rhetoric rather than evidence. He calls on psychoanalysis to overcome the relativity of the observer, separate out the influence of historical and cultural bias, and found psychoanalysis on evidence from the "bottom up," rather than from "top down" theoretical bias, in order to become a science.

A recent version of the relativist position originates with the relational model of psychoanalysis. Analysts of this school argue that the psychoanalytic situation is a relational matrix mutually constructed by analyst and patient (Mitchell, 1988). From this viewpoint, the analyst's embeddedness makes it impossible for her to perceive the relationship from "outside," so the analyst's understanding has no claim to special knowledge or objective truth (Mitchell, 1993). Analysis is a meeting of two subjectivities, neither of which has any greater claim to the truth than the other (e.g., Stolorow et al., 1987).

A version of the relational epistemological position is Hoffman's (1991, 1998) social, or dialectical, constructivist paradigm, a paradigm he contrasts to positivism or objectivism, the view that therapists are "capable of standing outside the interaction with the patient, so that they can generate rather confident hypotheses and judgments ..(p. 165) about the patient as well as about their own participation in the process. Hoffman's paradigm is based on the concept that interpersonal experience is distinguished from knowledge of the physical world by its inherent ambiguity. In Hoffman's perspectivist

epistemology,

> the personal participation of the analyst in the process is considered to have a continuous effect on what he or she understands about himself or herself and about the patient in the interaction. The general assumption in this model is that the analyst's understanding is always a function of his or her perspective at the moment. . . what the analyst seems to understand about his or her own experience and behavior as well as the patient's is always suspect. . . . (Hoffman, 1998, p. 136)

Hoffman concludes that "analysts working in this model would assume . . . that their own particular ways of understanding their contributions would be skewed in keeping with their personal participation in the process" (p. 138).

Nonetheless, Hoffman opposes his epistemological position to unqualified relativism: "ambiguity and uncertainty do not connote the disappearance of an objective reality and the rule of unqualified relativism. On the contrary it is objectively the case that experience is intrinsically ambiguous" (p. xxii). In oppostition to "radical relativism," Hoffman believes in an "objective framework within which constructive activity takes place," consisting of universal characteristics of human experience (p. xxiii). Hoffman goes on to claim that these universal features of human experience "exist no less 'objectively' for being functions of human construction and perception than do facts which exist independent of such activity. . .(p. 22). Furthermore, despite the fact that alternative interpretations are always possible, "some

interpretations may be said to fit the patient's experience more than others" (p. 165).

Relativism, while attempting to avoid the pitfalls of objectivism, also has weaknesses. First, this epistemological position is as self-contradictory as the objectivism it seeks to replace, because the claim of relativism is not treated as relative to any perspective but rather as an absolute, a form of knowledge the relativist claims does not exist. To be consistent, the claim of relativism must be viewed as a relative position, but then it would not have the truth the relativist claims for it. Consequently, relativism cannot be stated without contradicting itself. The same may be said of perspectivism. To claim that the analyst has a perspective on truth assumes knowledge of a reality on which one has a perspective, in contradiction to the perspectivist view of truth.

Secondly, if, according to relativism, all interpretations are relative, there is no basis forjudging any interpretation as more valid than any other, and psychoanalysis is reduced to solipsism in which all truth claims are equal and psychoanalysis has no claim to knowledge of any sort (Orange, 1992). Realizing this pitfall, each version of relativism offers criteria by which to adjudicate among interpretations. Schafer (1983) contends that all interpretations and constructions are subject to the constraints of coherence, consistency, verification, and completeness. The problem with this solution is that once verification is set forth as a criterion of interpretive validity, a

reality beyond the narrative is assumed as a criterion against which the narrative is evaluated. Furthermore, Schafer does not provide any basis for his other three criteria. Either the more coherent interpretation of the data is nearer the truth, or there is no basis for this preference. The only alternative is to make criteria for adjudication among interpretations a matter of personal taste not subject to justification, in which case truly "anything goes," and Schafer's effort to differentiate his position from solipsism fails. Furthermore, Schafer's criteria of coherence, consistency, verification, and completeness are treated as transcendent, universal criteria of knowledge in direct contradiction to his relativistic epistemology. To avoid lapsing into a solipsistic "anything goes" position, relativism invokes absolute principles it claims do not exist.

Spence's solution was to justify analytic understanding on the basis of aesthetic appeal and rhetorical persuasiveness. The problem here is that many patients enter treatment with accounts of their problems and lives that possess considerable aesthetic appeal and persuasiveness, but maintain symptoms and character pathology. According to Spence's criteria, no analysis should be necessary because the patient already possesses the narrative truth that analysis provides. Furthermore, charismatic leaders and demagogues simplify life into organizing principles and create their own truth, the two sources of efficacy Spence attributes to psychoanalytic interpretation. Therefore, Spence's early position cannot differentiate

psychoanalysis from other forms of rhetorical persuasion, such as religious or political zealotry. His views result in the reduction of psychoanalysis to the provision of "useful fictions." The untenability of Spence's position is reflected in his statement that "imaginary interpretations achieve truth status" (Spence, 1982, p. 171). An "imaginary interpretation" by definition is an interpretation concoted by the imagination, a fantasied production, as opposed to an interpretation based in reality. Spence criticizes the interpretations he calls "imaginary" for lacking evidential basis. After Spence argues for the lack of truth value of such interpretations, to call them "true" in any sense is a blatant contradiction of his own position.

Spence's more recent viewpoint is subject to the same pitfalls as any objectivist position (see pp. 113-116 above). In his first position, he found psychoanalysis valid despite its lack of evidential truth, whereas in his later view, he found the flaws in psychoanalytic knowledge neither acceptable nor necessary.

Hoffman states with the absolute certainty of objectivism that objectivity is not possible because the analyst's participation in the process "skews" her perceptions. Hoffman claims to know that interpersonal experience is ambiguous, and the analyst is a continual participant in the process; again, these statements are treated as absolute knowledge in opposition to perspectivism. If the analyst cannot be certain because of his

particpation, how can Hoffman be certain about human experience given his participation in it? According to Hoffman's epistemology, participation in the human process should render objective knowledge impossible. But he does not treat his view of human experience or the analyst's knowledge as uncertain; he sees it as objective knowledge. If there is some basis for his claim, then he has undermined his paradigm, and if there is no basis for it, then he is wrong. Hoffman's judgment of the analyst's fallibility is founded on a type of knowledge he regards as impossible. Furthermore, to judge any experience as "skewed" is to assume knowledge of reality against which the experience is assessed.

In fact, Hoffman attempts to separate himself from "radical relativism" by asserting objective knowledge of a "pre-existing world" independent of social consensus and universal characteristics of human experience. If Hoffman does have such objective knowledge, why does the analyst not have equal claim to objective knowledge of the patient? His paradigm is built on the concept that the analyst, as a participant in the process, cannot claim knowledge of what goes on. Nonetheless, he claims objective knowledge of a "pre-existing world," its inherent ambiguity, and universal experience—despite the fact that he participates in this very world. By laying claim to objective knowledge, Hoffman is adopting a stance of certainty outside his own participation, the impossibility of which is the basis for his constructivism. In the same way, Hoffman insists that some interpretations fit

the patient's experience better than others, but the analyst's "skewed participation" should render such a judgment impossible. Hoffman's "qualified relativism" does not work because once he acknowledges that objective knowledge is possible, the stance of standing outside of participation and knowing reality is assumed as a possibility in direct opposition to constructivism.

In reviewing Hoffman's work, Richard Moore (1999) points out that to define an external reality at all departs from the constructivist paradigm, and Hoffman's claim of universality implies

> that as a theorist he is able to see beyond the influence of culture and history and, in particular, that his ideas about human nature, on which he bases his views, are not themselves constructed. While these ideas are quite reasonable within a positivist framework, it is hard to find any foundation for them in a constructivism that has claimed to disdain any "preestablished given or absolute." (p. 100)

Moore's conclusion is that Hoffman has unnecessarily abandoned the constructivist paradigm in order to avoid radical relativism.

Moore's solution is to develop a pure constructivism undaunted by radical relativism. He proposes as the standard for mental health "a fairly explicit, but as yet undeveloped, notion of an optimal process of construction" (p. 155). Clinical technique, then, would be focused on facilitating a joint construction of reality, "rather than correcting a deficient process of

adherence to an objective reality" (p. 155). The focus of analysis, then, "is not on correcting individual constructions, but on understanding through participation, and thereby modifying, the process of construction" (p. 156). From this viewpoint, internal conflict is regarded as "a deficiency in the processes of construction that. . . may produce internal conflict when [these processes] fail to assimilate adequately a more diverse potential reality" (p. 156).

This brief summary of Moore's outline of a pure constructivist clinical model is enough to show that he makes judgments that belie his "pure constructivism." To make a judgment of "optimal construction" implies a stance outside the constructive process in opposition to constructivism. The very judgment of "a deficient constructive process," cannot be made within the constructivist paradigm. Any criteria Moore would apply to make such judgments can have no place in his "pure constructrivist model." Further, his statement that deficiency leads to conflict by failing to integrate a "diverse potential reality" contradicts his constructivist model, because if such a reality is not yet constructed, it cannot exist according to Moore's constructivist view of reality.

As we have seen, rather than examining the nature of the psychical for the methods that best fit its investigation, the objectivist imports methods from the natural sciences and assumes their relevance to psychological

science. Relativism sees the error of such an unjustified application, but assumes that the only alternative is a relative view of reality. The root of the problem, then, is that relativists share with objectivists the assumption that the only knowledge is objective knowledge. Realizing that objectivism is untenable, these theorists adopt a relativist epistemology that inevitably faces the logical conclusion of solipsism. Then, faced with having to yield all claims to psychoanalytic knowledge, the relativist proposes criteria for interpretive validity designed to avoid the conclusion that every interpretation is as valid as any other. Such criteria either do not work, as in the case of Spence, or contradict relativist epistemology.

Objectivism and relativism share the belief that the only knowledge is objective knowledge; the difference is that the objectivist believes that such knowledge is attainable in the analytic process, whereas the relativist does not. Surprising as it may seem, both objectivists and relativists accept the positivist principle that only the objectively verifiable is valid knowledge. However, if one does not adopt this positivist view of knowledge and the nature of science, then the failure of objectivism to provide a foundation for psychoanalysis does not vitiate psychoanalytic claims to knowledge. A path is opened for the possibility of another type of knowledge, a uniquely psychoanalytic form of knowledge that is not objective but has equal claim to validity.

TOWARD A HUMAN SCIENCE MODEL

To apply objectivist criteria to psychoanalytic interpretations is to assume that psychoanalysis is an observational science that aims, like all observational sciences, to discover relationships among observable facts (Ricoeur, 1970). However, the analyst's task is not to find relationships among observables but to discover meaning and motivation through the medium of speech. Ricoeur points out that this distinction is absolutely fundamental because without a firm grasp of the unique nature of the psychoanalytic field of investigation psychoanalysis cannot be grounded as a legitimate scientific endeavor.

Psychoanalytic inquiry, as an effort to uncover meaning and motivation of an experiencing subject, is a human science in Dilthey's (1923/1979) sense. The *Geisteswissenschaften*, or sciences of the mind, have as their subject matter human experience as opposed to nature, which is the subject of the *Naturwaschten*, or natural sciences. As Dilthey pointed out, human sciences are interpretive, or hermeneutic. A hermeneutic science is a discipline that attempts to find the meaning or motive in a class of human events, such as a the historian's investigation of historical documents to ascertain the motive of historical actors. In Dilthey's view, a hermeneutic discipline is a science the methods of which involve rules of interpretation, not observations or their manipulation.

Psychoanalysis is a paradigmatic hermeneutic science because its target is the meaning of experience to the patient as expressed through speech. Because observations cannot uncover meaning, objectivist methods are inapplicable to psychoanalytic inquiry. In addition, the inapplicability of objectivist methods is immediately demonstrable by the fact that people do understand each other in ordinary human discourse without recourse to the methods of objective science. Psychoanalytic method and logic of justification involve the rules for interpreting from what is said to what is meant. It follows that the criteria for interpretive validity come from the rules for interpreting speech.

Husserl's (1925/1977) phenomenological investigations showed that we are able to understand others because we have had similar experiences ourselves. The very fact that we can speak to each other of our experiences and understand each other indicates an essential human sameness of experience. When I tell anyone, even a positivist, that I had a dream, the other understands what I said. This understanding is won not by objectivist methods but by using one's own dreaming experience. We can understand the other because we have enough similar experience to put ourselves imaginatively into the other's experience and know what the other means.

What must be emphasized here is that although our understanding of others is not objective, neither is it relative. When a child says "I'm going to

play baseball," the statement is not interpretable relative to each listener. It means the child is leaving with the intent of playing a certain game with certain rules. That meaning is not dependent on the interpretation of the listener. Anyone who thought that the child was going to sit on a park bench would not understand the meaning of the statement. The fact that such meanings are grasped without "objective" evidence indicates the existence of subjective knowledge, knowledge of meanings and motivation understood in their immediacy, what Dilthey calls verstehen.

The subject of meaning takes us beyond the dichotomy of objectivism and relativism. As the hermeneutic philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer (1976) has pointed out, meaning is neither "objective," subject to observable proof, nor relative to the viewpoint of the observer. The meaning of speech inheres in the speech act, but it requires listening to be brought to completion (Gadamer, 1976; Bernstein, 1981). In this way, Gadamer intends to show us that meaning lies beyond the relativist-objectivist distinction. Any act of speech, like any historical document or other form of human behavior, is not interpretable in any way the observer or listener chooses, but interpretation by an other is required to complete the act of meaning. Although interpretation is limited by the meaning that inheres in the speech, there is no objective way to arrive at meaning. Knowledge of meaning is subjective knowledge. Relativism does not distinguish between the subjective and the subjective-relative because it presumes all knowledge to be objective.

Borrowing a phrase from his teacher Heidegger, Gadamer has pointed out that the myth of objectivism is that we can somehow get beyond our "world horizon," the context of our experience. Some relational theorists have used Gadamer's thought to justify the relativist view that the analyst's understanding is limited to a given viewpoint. In fact, Gadamer was as opposed to relativism as he was to objectivism. The fact that our horizon is part of our experience does not mean that we cannot understand another world horizon. In fact, Gadamer points out that we do just that: understanding the other is what he calls a "fusion of horizons." Gadamer pointed out that far from being imprisoned in our language, the very essence of language involves a transcendent function. Language is open and continually changing with new experience. It is this openness of language that allows for the fusion of horizons, the understanding of the other.

Similarly, Gadamer sees and appreciates the multiplicity of viewpoints in any understanding of the other. There are typically several ways to interpret human data, whether the evidence be historical, anthropological, or psychological. The self possessing inherent multiplicity, any particular experiential moment can be viewed from different vantage points. As we have seen, Schafer concluded from this fact that the analyst's knowledge is relative, but this conclusion does not follow any more than the fact that many different correct statements may be made about a chair means that the perception of the chair is relative. Different aspects of self experience can be highlighted at

any given moment, just as a number of different truthful statements may be made about a chair. The fact that several different interpretations accurately reflect an aspect of self experience does not vitiate the truth of any particular interpretation.

If we cannot find any corresponding experience of our own with which to grasp what we are being told, we are mystified, and if we wish to understand, we ask questions about the meaning in an effort to find something that we can grasp from our own experience. If our dialogical inquiry is successful in establishing this common ground, we then build by a series of inferences to arrive at understanding. This process consists of a kind of reasoning, an empathic reasoning that is the basis for psychoanalytic reasoning. As Strenger (1991) puts it, ". . . analytic reasoning can be broken down into thought processes which every human being performs constantly. The analyst's implicit knowledge about the appropriateness of behavior, thought, and emotion is not that far removed from the ordinary sensibilities of mature members of a culture" (p. 93). Psychoanalytic understanding, then, is no more and no less than a highly sensitized refinement of the empathy used in everyday communication.

Similarly, the understanding of unconscious motivation is built on everyday human interaction. For example, we notice that every time Joe buys something, Henry buys a better, more expensive brand of the same item.

When Henry denies that he feels any competition with Joe, we do not believe him; we believe his pattern of behavior. In so doing, we ascribe an unconscious motive to Henry. We can be certain of our interpretation because we know what it is like to be competitive and even how it feels to not want to acknowledge our competitiveness. It is this ordinary understanding of motives on which psychoanalysis builds its more complicated, depth understanding of human motivation. The difference between the analyst and everyday interaction is that the analyst uses the unique methods of psychoanalytic inquiry to ascertain why Henry is so competitive with Joe and why he cannot see this transparent motivation.

In the psychoanalytic arena, both Kohut (1959) and Waelder (1962) put the foundation of psychoanalytic understanding in everyday human interaction by defining its method as empathy and introspection. When Kohut defined empathy as vicarious introspection, he adopted the view that the source of psychoanalytic knowledge of the other is the analyst's experience that allows him to put himself in the patient's place and see the world from the patient's viewpoint. Kohut pointed out that without empathy and introspection inquiry is limited to either externally-observed behavior or the somatic realm, neither of which is the domain of psychological facts. By defining psychoanalytic tools as empathy and introspection, Kohut grounded the discipline as a self-sufficient domain. In this way, Kohut applied at the clinical level what Husserl founded on the philosophical level; empathy is the

unique method of understanding the other and all findings of a science of the other result from it.

These considerations show that the postmodern scientific paradigm cannot be the basis of psychological science as has been advocated by Toulmin (1986). According to this philosopher, the recognition of the dependence of the observed on the observer in modern physics issues in a postmodern scientific paradigm that can be applied to psychoanalysis. In this paradigm, however it may differ from its classical counterpart, the attitude of the scientist remains one of abstracting from experience to quantify observed data. For this reason, the postmodern scientific paradigm can never be used as a basis for a science of the experiencing subject. Unfortunately, Kohut could not resist the temptation to attempt to found the psychoanalytic method on postmodern science. By arguing for the justification of the empathic and introspective methods on the basis of the postmodern recognition of the dependence of the observer on the observed, Kohut attenuated the self-sufficiency of psychoanalysis he had achieved by defining the field as the domain of empathy and introspection. This move is unnecessary once psychoanalysis is defined by empathy and introspection because these tools define a self-sufficient method of understanding the other.

Richard Rorty (1980, 1981), a contemporary postmodernist philosopher, attacks the belief that knowledge can be founded. Rorty takes

the postmodernist insistence on the dependence of the observed on the observer to the conclusion that truth is whatever is perceived at a given time. Consequently, for Rorty, “truth” is whatever consensus is achieved at the moment and is subject to change with shifting consensual agreement. Like all relativists, Rorty contends that his views do not mean that any opinion is as good as any other. However, as with all relativists, his abdication of any basis for truth claims leaves him unable to provide criteria by which to adjudicate among conflicting truth claims. His contention that not all opinions are equal requires a transcendent category, such as reason, to adjudicate among truth claims. His denial of such categories leaves him no way to avoid solipsism.

The dependence of the observed on the observer so emphasized by relativists such as Hoffman has its foundation not in any paradigm of the natural sciences but in the intentionality of consciousness (Husserl, 1913/ 1931). Because consciousness intends an object and the world can be known only via our experience of it, neither the world nor consciousness can be conceived of without the other. This mutual dependence does not mean that perception is “relative,” but that the world and consciousness are “cogiven" (Husserl, 1931/1969). Indeed Husserl, who illuminated this connection, showed that our concepts of reality and fantasy, as well as all other acts of consciousness, are built into the structure of consciousness. We decide that something is real rather than fantasied when the experience fits a rational coherence. The fact that we know the world only through our experience of it,

rather than somehow “relativizing” our knowledge of the world, is the very structure of any such knowledge.

Any interpretation that fits the clinical data is epistemologically valid, but among the possible interpretations, the decision of which is used at any given moment is a clinical judgment. Good clinical technique requires the analyst to choose the interpretation that has the most transference meaning, affective resonance, and utility for the patient. Relativists such as Schafer confuse this clinical judgment with the epistemological validity of interpretation. The fact that no "particular interpretation is compelled by the data” only means that there is more than one possible accurate interpretation, the choice of which is made for clinical reasons, not that the analyst’s knowledge is “relative.”

Relativism fails to see that transcendent categories are built into understanding. The relativist cannot even state his position without appeal to such categories. Analogously, objectivism, to claim its own position, relies on subjective knowledge that it does not believe exists. This is why both relativism and objectivism are contradictory: they rely on the type of knowledge they claim does not exist. This type of knowledge allows us to understand each other and is the basis for psychoanalytic knowing.

As the science of understanding the other, psychoanalysis uses the

method that befits its object of investigation. Thus, Kohut's definition of the psychoanalytic method as one of empathy and introspection does not make psychoanalysis a "soft science" of imprecise methods as charged by objectivists, such as Holzman (1985), but defines the very nature of the science of the other and fits the method to the subject of investigation.

When we ascribe a motive or meaning to the other, we judge its validity by what it explains, how it fits, the other's actions and behavior. The subject matter of psychoanalysis is precisely the meaning of experience. It follows that coherence is the criterion for interpretive accuracy, and interpretations that do not fit the self experience are inaccurate, just as in ordinary discourse to call a generous person "selfish" does not fit and is, therefore, inaccurate.

For example, the analyst who hypothesizes that her patient sabotages her successes out of excessive guilt due to an oedipal victory, derives from the patient's experience of mother, father, and guilt an explanatory principle by which she hopes to understand the meaning of success and positive experience, their connection with guilt, and related phenomena. The interpretation is accurate to the extent that it makes intelligible the patient's pattern of ruining successful experiences. If analytic material arises that does not fit this explanation, it must be abandoned or modified.

It is a strength of relativism that it tends to use coherence as the

criterion of interpretive validity. However, relativists do not see that they contradict their relativism by its espousal because coherence is not relative but a transcendent category. As we have seen, the relativist is unable to account for why an interpretation that "fits" is preferred to one that does not. We can now see why: coherence is the criterion for reality. The basis of the principle of coherence is that rational fitting together is the criterion for reality (Husserl, 1913/1931). *Narrative* coherence is an insufficient criterion for interpretive validity, as we saw above. An interpretation does not simply make a story, it makes intelligible that which had been unexplained. The interpretation that best fits is preferred due to its approximation to the reality of the patient's experience and ability to articulate the previously nonverbalized aspects of it. Other interpretations are always possible, but their validity must be argued on the basis of their ability to account for the unintelligible.

Unlike relativists, objectivists see that if psychoanalysis is to be a legitimate science, it must have a concept of reality and be able to make truth claims. Objectivists see the importance of criteria for truth, but they have the wrong ones. Relativists have the right criteria, but do not see that their standards for interpretive validity are transcendent, defining reality and contradicting the relativist position. The human science model adopts the relativist's way of understanding analytic material, but in a nonrelativist fashion.

Interpretations of motives are valid to the extent that they can account for actions, that is, the extent to which behavior and actions fit the motive. The interpretation that does not fit is a "blind constitution" (Husserl, 1913/ 1931) and must be abandoned. The elucidation of individual principles from which the meaning of behavior can be derived is the psychoanalytic understanding of motivation. If other behavior does not fit the interpretation, it must be modified, abandoned, or supplemented with other principles.

This human science criterion does not mean that psychoanalysis can avoid the responsiblity of demonstrating its effectiveness compared to other therapeutic methods. However, any such investigation must be kept clearly separate from the validity of: (1) psychoanalysis as an interpretive science; and (2) any particular interpretation.

Psychoanalysis adds to the ordinary experiencing of others the finding that others' motives, although in principle understandable, are often hidden from view. The uncovering of meaning and motives outside of awareness, but accessible in principle, is the unique subject of psychoanalytic investigation. To achieve this end, psychoanalysis uses a specialized method of depth exploration: free association, dream interpretation, and transference. Thus, the science of psychoanalysis may be defined as the systematic, depth investigation of previously unknown meaning and motivation in the other resulting from a unique method of inquiry. These uniquely psychoanalytic

tools are technical refinements of ordinary empathy and introspection.

The human science model provides the means for psychoanalysis to pursue its unique search for truth freed from blind faith in objective truth, a faith that has fostered a reductionistic self-misunderstanding and created obstacles to analytic progress. The abandonment of this faith does not damage the analyst's claim to knowledge, as implied in both relativism and objectivism; rather, it allows the analyst to appreciate the uniqueness of the understanding of others and to conduct psychoanalytic inquiry with criteria befitting its object of investigation. Only by recognizing the distinctive character of human science can the rich uniqueness of psychoanalytic understanding be appreciated and the full potential of psychoanalytic science be realized.

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