

## VARIETIES OF PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPERIENCE

THINKING FOR CLINICIANS: PHILOSOPHICAL RESOURCES FOR CONTEMPORARY  
PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE HUMANISTIC PSYCHOTHERAPIES. By *Donna  
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The stated purpose of this book is to provide the psychoanalytic clinician with “tools and context for thinking about psychotherapeutic work and theories” (p. 1). The tools in this case are philosophical; the aim is to feel “more at home and competent in the world of ideas” (p. 2). The author’s emphasis is to use philosophical ideas to improve clinical work. She sees philosophy as an antidote to the frequent psychoanalytic tendency to get caught up in schools and exclude other forms of thinking. We fail to question our basic assumptions and operating principles. Her attitude is one of fallibilism, a doctrine that beliefs do not need to be grounded in certainty. She would hold theory lightly, as well as “any particular view of meaning in the patient’s experience” (p. 6). Her guiding principle is that of a hermeneutic spirit. This would include a sensitivity to dialogue between therapist and patient, each grounded in their particular worlds and cultures. These are all reasonable attitudes. I would add a further question. Can philosophical thought offer conceptual insight to psychoanalytic theory?

The author assumes that the reader has a working knowledge of major philosophical theories. Readers with an extensive background in philosophy will probably find the discussions lacking in sufficient detail.

The book focuses on five twentieth-century European philosophers: Martin Buber, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. She calls these her philosophical friends and wants us to know them. I think it is of some importance that all of them lived in the time and milieu of Freud. Their philosophies were shaped by the same forces that shaped early psychoanalysis. A little philosophical history may be helpful here. In my opinion, the two philosophical giants of the Continental tradition in early-twentieth-century Europe are Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger.

Husserl (1859–1938) was a major force in the study of phenomenology. Phenomenology means giving an account of various phenomena, of the various ways things can appear. Appearances are real; they belong to being. Things are now part of the ontological world. A central doctrine of phenomenology is intentionality. Every act of consciousness is intentional, the experience of something. All our awareness is directed toward objects. Every intending has its intended objects. In phenomenology we alternate between the natural attitude, in which we are absorbed into our world, and the phenomenological attitude, in which we stand back and reflect on the inner structure and essence of things and the way we understand them. Husserl's first phenomenological work, *Logical Investigations*, was published in 1900, the same year as *The Interpretation of Dreams*. He taught at Halle, Göttingen, and Freiburg. His background was in mathematics and science rather than philosophy. One of his major teachers was Franz Brentano, who also mentored Freud in his university days.

Heidegger (1889–1976) began teaching at Freiburg at the same time as Husserl. Husserl considered Heidegger his most successful pupil. Heidegger succeeded Husserl as professor at Freiburg. *Being and Time*, his major work, was published in 1927. Heidegger turned the phenomenal investigation toward being. Being is always situated in the world. It is thrown-into-the-world and faced with its own death. This leads to anxiety, existential guilt, and the potentiality of an authentic existence. Heidegger can be understood as pushing the concept of intentionality to its human limits. All of the philosophers in this book, except for Wittgenstein, either build on or react against these two giants.

One of the problems with a book such as this is the tendency to oversimplify complex conceptual systems. In a book intended for nonphilosophers, this is inevitable and often useful. However, it can also lead to error. I will try to illustrate this with two of the philosophers mentioned, Buber and Merleau-Ponty, that I know well.

*Martin Buber*. Buber (1878–1965), is best known for *Ich und Du* (1923). *Ich-Du* (“I-Thou” or “I-You”) is an intimate dialogue that stresses the mutual, holistic existence of two beings. It is a concrete and authentic encounter. The whole universe is seen in the light of the *Du*. Our whole being is involved. There is no withholding of the self. Everything is risked and nothing is held back. The *Du* is viewed in the full freedom of the Other. Buber describes it as an interpenetration, yet the individual identity of each participant is preserved. It is a genuine living in the present. Common words and situations used to describe the *Ich-Du* relationship

include encounter, meeting, mutuality, exchange, two lovers, owner and pet, two strangers on a train. Mis-meetings can cause alienation and fear. Buber believes surprise and the necessity of the unforeseen is a key element in the *Ich-Du* relationship.

The *Ich-Es* (“I-It”) relationship is nearly the opposite of *Ich-Du*. The “I” finds an idea or conceptualization of the other and treats that being as an object. The *Ich* always remains somewhat apart, observes and judges. All such objects are considered merely mental representations, created and sustained by the individual mind. It is the objective view. Another person can be treated as an *Es*. The *Ich-Es* relationship is in fact a relationship with oneself; it is not a dialogue, but a monologue. The *Ich-Es* relationship always takes place in the past. In the past, there is no novelty or creativity.

Inclusion (*Umfassung*) is a relating in which the “I” does not forfeit any of its self, yet can live through the concreteness of the other. The standpoint of the other comes to be included in the “I.” Confirmation (*Bestätigung*) allows the presence of the Thou in the I, a partner in the dialogue. It is not approval. It includes the recognition of real guilt and accepting the whole potentiality of the Other.

I would disagree with the author on one important point. She states that Buber is not a mystic. Buber always insisted that the dialogic principle (the duality of primal relations that he called the *Ich-Du* and the *Ich-Es*) was not a philosophical conception but a reality beyond the reach of discursive language. From Kant he developed the idea that the phenomenon is always the gateway to the noumenon, just as the noumenal cannot be encountered other than in concrete phenomena. Thus Buber managed to infuse the seemingly dry Kantian distinctions with an immediate sense of reality. This measured view dominated Buber’s thought, but there was also a streak of enthusiastic Nietzschean endorsement of the primacy of life in its immediacy and its superiority. The *Ich-Du* relationship connects in some way with the eternal relation to God. Buber says by being open to the *Ich-Du*, God will eventually come to you. The relationship with God is that of a mutual dialogue in which each is the other’s *Du*. God is the one being that can never be turned into an *Es*. “Every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou” (p. 75). Buber’s mysticism is an “enraptured dynamic of relation” (p. 87), not a dissolving of the *Ich-Du*. Buber has been criticized by philosophers as being vague, too idealistic, and too rigid in his categories. He is better thought of as a theologian.

The author rightly points out that Buber stands for dialogue, relationship, spontaneity, and authenticity. To my mind, Buber raises the important

and complicated question of love in the analytic setting. Specifically, is it necessary that the analyst develop a genuine love for the patient if he or she is to be cured? Freud (1915) debated whether transference love between patient and analyst is as genuine as any other love. On the one hand, transference love is only a repetition. “Against the genuineness of this love,” Freud wrote, “we advance the fact that it exhibits not a single new feature arising from the present situation, but is entirely composed of repetitions and copies of earlier reactions, including infantile ones” (p. 167). But then transference love is not different from any other type of love. Freud concludes: “We have no right to dispute that the state of being in love which makes its appearance in the course of analytic treatment has the character of a ‘genuine love’” (p. 168). Smith (2006) raises the key question: If love in analysis is both genuine and meant to be analyzed, then how do we manage this? The analyst must hold in mind two totally contradictory tasks. If the love is passionate and genuine, there are boundary temptations and violations. If the love is not passionate and genuine, there is no cure. Smith’s answer is that the analyst must be both, passionately engaged yet fully the observer. There is a small but persistent literature that argues that the analyst must be libidinally or passionately attached to the patient if an effective cure is to be had (Ferenczi 1928; Balint 1953; Tower 1956; Nacht 1962; Racker 1968). Loewald (1988) argued that the analyst’s love for his patient comes from the original unity experienced in infancy, from which it takes its power. Friedman (2005) argues that it is precisely in remaining unattached that he is fully able to appreciate the genuineness of the patient’s love; the analyst’s love is a loving reading. Here I think Buber is not much help. The *Ich-Du* does not take into account the asymmetry of the analytic relationship, nor does it allow us to think about how we can be genuine yet maintain an interpretive stance. The *Ich-Es* seems too objectified and mechanical.

*Maurice Merleau-Ponty*. In her chapter on Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), the author states, rightly, that his philosophy of embodied perception makes four claims.

1. The first is a recasting of the Cartesian mind-body dualism. Since Descartes, the twin tendency of Western philosophy has been to see the world as either empirical or rational. Empiricism claims that consciousness is shaped by the world apart from human experience. The objective world is strictly separated from the subjective world. The subjective world can know objects only through experience. In empiricism, the world is built up from simple components. Perceptions tend to be absolute, unambiguous,

and sharp-edged. In psychology, empiricism takes a behavioral view, the act as a reaction to a stimulus. It ignores the connection of meaning between object and act. Rationalism or idealism holds that all knowledge is a priori, known by the subject prior to experience. The mind organizes or constitutes the things in experience, and we can never know the thing in itself outside of experience. The world is seen as mental representation. In classical philosophy, Plato tends toward idealism and Aristotle toward empiricism. We can see the same struggles in psychoanalysis. Psychic determinism, psychic reality, and internal representations would all be idealistic. The here-and-now transference would be more empirical.

2. Orange points to Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on holism, at first based on the claim that perception has a gestalt-like character. Perceptual wholes cannot be reduced to their component parts. Behavior is not just a conditioned response but a series of complex meanings. Perception cannot be extricated from its situatedness.

3. Perception is always embodied, a lived experience. Traditionally in philosophy, the body is described as merely an object that contains the transcendent mind. For Merleau-Ponty, consciousness is not just something that goes on in our heads. Rather, our intentional consciousness is experienced in and through our bodies. The body is not a machine, but a living organism. There is no meaning that is not embodied. The current of a person's intentional existence is lived through the body. We are our bodies, and consciousness is not just locked up inside the head. Experience, then, is always given to us in a dialogue. Perception, for Merleau-Ponty, is not a simple act of sensory stimulation; it is a complex intentional arc of mind, body, and intentional objects. There is no lived distinction between the act of perceiving and the thing perceived. It is a "creative receptivity."

4. It follows then that inner and outer experience cannot be adequately distinguished. All experience is described from the viewpoint of embodied perception. Orange describes Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as more everyday and familiar than Husserl's or Heidegger's, a claim I would agree with, though Merleau-Ponty himself is by no means an easy read.

I would like to emphasize two concepts of Merleau-Ponty that Orange points to but gives less weight to than perhaps they deserve. The first concept is perceptual consciousness, or pre-personal consciousness, a theme developed most fully in *Phenomenology of Perception* but present in all his works. For Merleau-Ponty (1958), phenomenology means "the world is always 'already there' before reflection begins—as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive

contact with the world” (p. vii). This presence is a “world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks” (p. x). There is a prereflective unity of subject and world that takes the form of an embodied consciousness. It is the totality of experience accessible to perception. Perception, for Merleau-Ponty, is not just a sensory phenomenon; it is the totality of experience open to perception. It is a consciousness that is opaque, ambiguous, and unreflected. Perception exists below the level of conscious awareness. The world is a correlate of lived-body experience. There is a vast ground of shared perceptual life that underlies personal and conceptual experience. It is the lived body engaged in the world. “Every act of reflection, every voluntary taking up of a position is based on the ground and the proposition of a life of pre-personal consciousness” (p. 242). Experience is then built upon an original, prereflective, ambiguous ground that is the world-horizon. Experience begins in the prereflective, and reflection is always an abstract derivative of this primordial, prereflective lived experience. Perceptual consciousness is found not in the subject but in the between, in the field of interaction. Others are seen as part of an embodied image. The perceivable thing belongs neither to the one who perceives nor to what is perceived. We live in an intersubjective world not reducible to our consciousness. The intersubjective world is an interwoven fabric.

The second concept is that of skilled coping and prereflective experience. Skilled coping is a shift from “I think,” the emphasis of traditional philosophy, to “I can.” “I can” precedes and grounds “I think.” It is a way to find yourself around, getting a maximum grip. Skillful coping does not require a mental representation or an agent to act. It is prereflective. Rather than desires or intentions, the body-subject forms intentional arcs and achieves equilibrium with the world. Actions are habitual and competent. An intelligence in the body is learned through repeated embodied efforts. Layers of sedimented meaning underlie and make possible skilled coping. Skilled coping is similar to Heidegger’s concept of ready-to-hand. Rather than knowledge, Merleau-Ponty (1973) calls for a perceptual faith, “of inhabiting the world by our body, of inhabiting the truth by our whole selves, without there being need to choose nor even distinguish between the assurance of seeing and the assurance of seeing the true” (p. 28).

Similarly, speech does not simply transmit thought, but accomplishes or completes it. Merleau-Ponty makes the distinction between a *spoken* language and a *speaking* language. The spoken language is the sedimentated world of acquired linguistic meanings that I have at my disposal. The speaking language is the expressive gesture that underlies the spoken language.

The “original” speech expresses the emotional essence of our encounter with the world. We speak as we sing when we are happy. To speak is to sing the world in a melody of words.

Ambiguity is the concept that lived relationships can never be fully grasped by consciousness. Meaningful behavior is lived through. We are not fully capable of a disembodied reflection on our activities. There are no “now” moments because understanding is conditioned by orientation toward the future and a looking back. What is outside is also inside, an interdependence and encroachment between objects and ourselves, “one sole and massive adhesion to Being which is the flesh” (p. 270).

In relation to psychotherapy, the author brings up what she calls “traumatic living memory.” This is a bodily based memory of felt trauma that often cannot be expressed in words but determines how the patient is being-in-the-world. I agree with Orange as to the existence of these layers of personality that are very hard to get to in conventional psychoanalysis or psychotherapy, yet are vital to any lasting personality change.

In regard to psychoanalytic theory, I would add the following. Of all the philosophers mentioned by the author, Merleau-Ponty is the only one to have sustained a hermeneutic dialogue with Freud throughout his life. He was appointed chair of child psychology at the Sorbonne in 1949, for which he read widely in the psychoanalytic literature. He attended the seminars of Jacques Lacan and was friendly with Paul Ricoeur, who wrote a monumental work on Freud. Merleau-Ponty thought that the Freudian unconscious was a central insight, but that Freud was grounded in inadequate language to express the meaning of the unconscious. For Freud, the unconscious was situated in the subject and was composed of representations and linguistic expressions. For Merleau-Ponty, the Freudian unconscious was part of the reflective consciousness. The true unconsciousness is the perceptual consciousness (Phillips 1988, 1996). He sees “the Freudian unconscious as an archaic or primordial consciousness, the repressed as a zone of experience that we have not yet integrated, the body as a sort of natural or innate complex, and communication as a relation between incarnate beings of the sort who are well or badly integrated” (Merleau-Ponty 1982–1983, p. 67). Thus, the unconscious is opaque, nonlinguistic, always bound up and engaged in the world of objects. It is inherently intersubjective, a bond between subject and object based on the body.

In defense of Freud, Ricoeur points out that the Freudian unconscious is “primarily and essentially . . . a struggle against the patient’s resistances” (Ricoeur 1970, pp. 406–407). Here the emphasis is on a subjective

consciousness facing the world. The Freudian unconscious is not coexistent with consciousness but a separate system (Phillips 1988, 1996). I believe that many modern psychoanalysts have moved closer to Merleau-Ponty. He found in the work of Melanie Klein the mechanisms of projection and introjection, in which the subject incorporates the other and the other incorporates the subject (Merleau-Ponty 1973). Wilfred Bion, working from Klein, postulated a prereflective, prelinguistic unconscious similar to the perceptual unconscious. Hans Loewald's reworking of primary process as a unity of world and thing is close to the prereflective unity of subject and world. Donnel Stern, from the interpersonal tradition, thinks of the unconscious as opaque and unformed (for an expansion of this idea, see White in press). Thomas Odgen writes of the intersubjective third. Orange points to Kohut and the intersubjective thinking of Atwood and Stolorow as a psychoanalytic phenomenology.

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