FREUDIAN EXPLANATIONS, RATIONAL EXPLANATION, AND MEANING

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September, 1977
Abstract:

Can the explanations which Freud gives of neurotic symptoms be seen as fitting into the pattern of rational explanation? After some clarification of the notion of a rational explanation, I shall be examining what I take to be the only plausible ways of trying to construe Freudian explanations as explanations of this type—by treating Freudian cases first as analogous to ordinary cases of pretending (Section II), secondly, as analogous to cases of superstitious belief (Section IV), and finally as analogous to cases involving acts of communication (Section V). I shall be arguing that none of these ways of construing many of the Freudian explanations is successful.
FREUDIAN EXPLANATIONS, RATIONAL EXPLANATION, AND MEANING

How are we to construe the explanations which Freud gives of neurotic symptoms? Can they be interpreted as rational explanations, that is, as explanations in terms of the individual's reasons for exhibiting the symptoms? Or are they merely causal explanations? A complete Freudian explanation of a neurotic symptom involves a number of component explanations of different types, and I shall restrict myself to examining only one of these types of explanation: the type of explanation where the symptom is explained in terms of unconscious factors which are repressed. I shall be arguing that a large number of Freudian explanations of this type cannot be construed as rational explanations.

My examination of Freudian explanation of symptoms is to be seen against the background of the discussion which originated in Analysis in the later forties and early fifties and which has continued on and off up to the present in various books and articles. The general position I shall be examining is stated by Anthony Flew as follows:

"The concepts which psychoanalytic theory seeks to extend are precisely those in terms of which rational agents give account of their own conduct and that of other rational agents . . . . [an account in terms of the agent's] motives for--reasons for--acting thus and thus, . . . [and of] the purposes, plans, and intentions which he had in mind."3

And R. S. Peters, who later goes on to attack it, states the position in this way:

1In drawing the distinction between rational explanations and merely causal explanations I am of course not denying that rational explanations may be a species of causal explanations (see D. Davidson, "Action Reasons and Causes," Journal of Philosophy, LX, (1963)).


"Much has been made in recent discussions of the thesis that Freud's theory of unconscious wishes is a way of offering reasons for phenomena which were previously thought to be explicable only in terms of causes. It is often asserted, even, that Freud showed that men are more rational than was previously assumed, that he extended the model of man adopting means to ends into the unconscious."4

I shall examine this position with respect to the one type of Freudian explanation (the type of explanation on which the participants in the discussion have tended to focus) from a number of different angles, some familiar, others, I hope, relatively fresh. Although I shall come out on the side of the attackers, it will not necessarily be for the reasons they have advanced. In particular I shall be examining what I take to be the only plausible ways of trying to construe Freudian explanations of this type as rational explanations—by treating Freudian cases first as analogous to cases of pretending (Section II), secondly, as analogous to cases of superstitious belief (Section IV), and finally, as analogous to cases involving acts of communication (Section V); and I shall be arguing that none of these ways of construing many of the Freudian explanations is successful. I want to stress at the outset that the central aim of the paper is to attack not Freud's theory, but rather a certain interpretation of parts of it, and that I shall not therefore be exploring the further question of whether any of my remarks may have critical implications for the theory itself.

In order to focus the problem, some preliminary remarks are required. We need to give some clarification of our claim that there are a number of different types of Freudian explanations of neurotic symptoms, and we need to say a few things about the notion of a rational explanation.

First, what does a Freudian explanation of a neurotic symptom look like? Assuming some familiarity with Freud's picture of the mind as a homeostatic system and with his key concepts of psychic energy, idea or representation, and repression, let us consider two examples.

1) The patient was spending a summer at a resort where his sweetheart, Gisela, and her attractive English cousin, Dick, were also vacationing. "The idea suddenly occurred to him that he was too fat (German 'dick'), and that he must make himself thinner. So he began getting up from the table before the pudding came and tearing along the road without a hat in the blazing heat of an August sun. Then he would dash up a mountain at the double, till, dripping with perspiration, he was forced to come to a full stop." Freud's explanation of these compulsive symptoms is that the patient had repressed the desire to get rid of or to kill Dick, and of course with it the ideas of attacking and getting rid of Dick, and that part of the energy attached to the idea of getting rid of Dick has found

4Peters, Motivation, p. 62.
release by attaching itself to a substitute idea verbally associated with
the original, the idea of "getting rid of fat."5

(2) A boy with a stern father developed the obsessive thought of being
eaten by a wolf. The interpretation is that the boy had repressed the
idea of loving and being loved by his father, and that the blocked energy
found partial release by attaching itself to the idea of being eaten by a
wolf.6

There are at least three complementary types of explanations involved
in Freudian cases. First, there is the explanation of why the individual
or patient exhibited a certain symptom in terms of his having a repressed,
and therefore unconscious, desire. Secondly, there is the explanation of
why the individual or patient repressed the desire in question in terms of
his tendency to avoid too high a level of anxiety and ultimately in terms
of the mind's tendency to maintain equilibrium with respect to psychic
energy. And finally there is the explanation, supplementary to the first,
in which the dream or symptom is explained as a manifestation of repres­
sive forces. Thus, in the second example the boy's obsessive thought of
being eaten by a wolf is accounted for by explanations of both the first
and the third types. It is explained first as a manifestation of his
repressed affectionate desire towards his father by way of his association
between being cuddled and hugged by his father, and being eaten by a wolf;
but it is also explained as a manifestation of forces repressing his af­
fectionate desire by way of his association between being castrated by his
father and being eaten by a wolf.

The general question is whether or not these three types of Freudian
explanations fit into, or can be construed as fitting into, the pattern of
rational explanation. The central case of rational explanation is the
explanation of a person's action where the action is explained in terms of
the reason why the person performed the action. I take it that the form
of such an explanation is as follows: the person, A, desires to do Y,
believes that doing X is a means to, or an instance of, doing Y; and
therefore does X. "I went to the store because I wanted to get some apples"
is a rational explanation which, when spelled out into the above form,

5"Notes Upon A Case of Obsessional Neurosis," from Three Case Histories,
associations appear most frequently in Freud's explanation of dreams,
they also appear in a good number of his accounts of neurotic symptoms.
Furthermore, there are many cases of hysteria, obsessional neurosis,
fetishism, etc. in which verbal associations are not centrally involved
but in which the connexion between the unconscious desire and symptom is
strange and far-fetched, to say the least.

6"From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," also in Three Case Histories.
becomes: I wanted to get some apples, I believed that going to the store was a means of getting some apples, and therefore I went to the store.  

A rational explanation of a person's action shows the action to be intelligible in the light of his desire and belief. It would be misleading, however, to say that a rational explanation of a person's action always shows the action to be rational. If a person's action is to be rational, then the minimum sufficient requirement for a rational explanation, namely that the person performed the action because of a desire and belief which can be fitted into the above form, needs supplementation. For example, if the action is to be rational, then the person must have no additional belief that there is another course of action open to him which is a better means than X to doing Y, and no additional belief that there is another course of action open to him.
which is more in his interest, or morally better, than X. I shall be arguing not simply for the weaker thesis that many Freudian explanations of neurotic symptoms fail to show that the symptomatic actions are rational, but for the stronger thesis that the Freudian explanations are not even rational explanations in the minimum sense.

I shall be assuming that the notions of an unconscious desire and of an unconscious belief are coherent; so the general question before us is whether or not the three types of Freudian explanations are, or can be easily reformulated, as rational explanations, in which either the desire or the belief, or both, are unconscious. The question as applied to the second and third types of explanations raises interesting but somewhat different issues than the question about the first type of explanation, and so I shall be restricting myself to dealing with just the first type of explanation.

II

Let us see if we can fit the explanations of the first type in our two examples into the pattern of rational explanation. A first attempt gives us:

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8Another necessary requirement which might be suggested, but which is, I think, too severe, is that the explanatory belief and desire must themselves be rational, that is, justifiable in the light of the person's further desires and beliefs.

9Although he does not draw the above distinction, Alexander, in "Rational Behavior" can be taken to be arguing that many Freudian explanations fail to show that the symptomatic actions are rational (but see Audi, "Psychoanalytic Explanations," for difficulties with Alexander's account); he seems to assume, however, that at least Freud is giving rational explanations.

10In order to avoid misunderstanding I should note that a certain intuitive leeway will be allowed in what is to count as a permissible reformulation of a Freudian explanation into the rational pattern. If Freud explains a symptom in terms of an individual's unconscious desire to do Y, then what has to figure in the reformulation is not necessarily that desire but at least a desire closely connected to it, for example, a general component desire or a second-order desire to satisfy the desire (see Part II below), or a desire to say or tell someone that one has the desire (see Part V below).

11To consider the second type of explanation, for example, in spite of Freud's frequent talk of the "purposes" of repression and his comparisons between repression and familiar human actions (repression is like ordering a guest out of one's living room), there is some question as to whether repression can be seen as an action at all.
(1) The patient wanted to get rid of Dick, believed that getting thin was a means to, or an instance of, getting rid of Dick, and therefore tried to get thin.

(2) The boy wanted to be loved by his father, believed that being eaten by a wolf was a means to, or an instance of being loved by his father and therefore imagined, or entertained the thought of, being eaten by a wolf.

Our reaction to this first attempt is to reject it: it just seems intuitively implausible to postulate that the individuals have such odd beliefs as those above.

But perhaps our first attempt was too crude. After all there are many everyday explanations which we would intuitively classify as rational explanations, but which take a bit of thought to spell out clearly. Let us consider some examples, and see whether our Freudian cases might be seen as analogous to them.

(a) Wanting to smoke a cigarette, but finding none available, I pick the straw out of my drink and suck on it.

I think that we would say here that reference to my desire to smoke a cigarette gives us part of, or at least points to, a rational explanation of my action of sucking on the straw.

(b) Norio, an assembly-line worker in a Japanese radio factory, is angry with his supervisor and wants to hit him; and so he spends a few hours in the factory gymnasium punching an effigy of his boss.

Here again I think we would say that reference to Norio's desire to hit his boss provides part of a rational explanation of his action of punching the effigy.

It is not immediately obvious, however, how these two examples fit into our pattern of desire, belief, and action. It will not do, or at least it seems that it will not do, to suppose that the relevant beliefs are my belief that sucking on the straw is smoking a cigarette, and Norio's belief that his punching the effigy of his boss is hitting his boss. Surely Norio knows that what is in front of him is a mere effigy.

We might try to force the examples into the rational mold by bringing in second-order desires and beliefs. On this approach the cigarette example would be spelled out as follows:

I desire to satisfy my desire to smoke a cigarette, believe that my sucking on the straw will partly satisfy that desire, and therefore suck on the straw.

The trouble with this attempt, however, is that the second-order-reformulation fails to account for an important feature of the example. The example provides us with an implicit explanation of why I am sucking on the straw and in doing so enables us to see that my sucking on the straw partly satisfies my first-order desire to smoke a cigarette. The second-
order reformulation fails to enable us to see this; it only shows us that the action satisfies the second-order desire.

I think that we can see how to fit the first example into the pattern of rational explanation by noticing that the desire in question, namely my desire to smoke a cigarette, involves a number of component desires, one of which is my general desire to suck on something. The implicit rational explanation then makes reference to the general component desire and can be spelled out as follows:

I desire to suck on something, believe that sucking on the straw is sucking on something, and therefore suck on the straw.

Unfortunately, a similar maneuver with the Norio-example is not possible, for there is no relevant component desire. The only candidate would be the general desire to hit something. But surely Norio does not want to hit anything or anyone; he wants to hit his boss. There is another approach, however, which I think will work for this example. What is going on in the factory gymnasium is that Norio is pretending to hit his boss. His pretending to hit his boss involves his putting himself into a certain imaginative frame, that is, his imagining that the effigy is his boss, and relatedly, his imagining, for example, that his boss is fighting back, or that his boss has been hurt by his left hook. Now it is quite clear that generally Norio does not believe that effigies of people are people and that the effigy in the gymnasium is his boss. Still, I want to say that as he progressively involves himself in the activity of hitting the effigy, he comes to have the momentary, or better, temporary, belief that the effigy is his boss. If I am right about this, then it is easy to see how the example can be fitted into the pattern of rational explanation.

Can we fit our two Freudian examples into the rational pattern by interpreting them in a similar way to the way in which we interpreted our two everyday examples? Neither of the Freudian examples seem to be analogous to the cigarette-example. The only general desire which I can think of in the Dick-example is the patient's general desire to get rid of any man who might threaten his relationship to Gisela. But that desire does not seem to be of any help. So perhaps we might have more success if we try to see the Freudian examples as analogous to the Norio-example and to construe them as cases of pretending, or at least as cases analogous to cases of pretending.

Let us continue to work with the Dick-example. On the new interpretation in performing the various actions of getting thin the patient is to be seen as pretending, or doing something analogous to pretending, that he is getting rid of Dick. Is this a plausible interpretation?

It might be objected that if someone is to pretend to do Y by doing X, then there must be certain relevant similarities between doing X
and really doing Y, and that there do not seem to be any relevant similarities between the patient's actions of getting thin and any actions which we can imagine as actions of really killing Dick. The notion of relevant similarities is rather vague. It is true that there are limitations on what actions one can perform if in performing them one is to pretend to do others, but perhaps these limitations are not as narrow as one might think. Maybe we would not know how to begin to obey the command: smoke a cigarette and in so doing pretend that you are catching a touchdown pass. But what about: smoke a cigarette and in so doing pretend that you are killing Smith? I think we can see that someone with a vivid imagination might successfully carry out this second command. How would he do it? Well, he would have to put himself in a somewhat uncommon, but not too strange, imaginative frame. For example, he might imagine that Smith is locked in a nearby closet and that fumes from the cigarette would cause him to suffocate. Similarly, it does not seem inconceivable that the patient in our Freudian example might be pretending, or doing something like pretending, to get rid of Dick in performing the actions of getting thin. Of course he would have to form an appropriate imaginative frame, but we can imagine what such a frame might be. For example, he might be imagining that Dick has a heart condition and will soon collapse, etc. So it is conceivable that the patient in performing the actions of getting thin might be pretending to kill Dick. The question remains: is there any reason to think that he is?

If in performing his getting-thin actions the patient is pretending to kill Dick then he must have put himself into a relevant imaginative frame. If he had put himself into the frame which we sketched above, then we would expect that the frame would be projected in the further details of his symptomatic activity, for example, the patient's occasionally looking back (to make sure that the imagined Dick was still behind him), or his performing actions which we could easily interpret as his urging Dick to catch up with him. And these further details are in fact absent in the Dick-example. But not only is it clear that the patient has not put himself in the above imaginative frame; it is also difficult to think of any relevant frame into which his symptomatic activity in all its details (his getting up from the table, his running up the mountain-side, perhaps his not wearing his hat) could be fitted. Now in ordinary cases of pretending we could discover whether or not a person had a certain frame by asking him. But we cannot use this test in the Dick-example and other psychoanalytic cases, since the frames are supposed to be unconscious. Still, especially since neurotic symptoms usually persist over a period of time, we would expect that at least parts of the frame would manifest themselves in some of the dreams and conscious fantasies of the patient. And finally, if the psychoanalytic treatment is successful, we would expect that the
patient would eventually consciously remember\textsuperscript{12} having had such a frame. But in the case of our patient in the Dick-example, and in other similar Freudian cases, none of this evidence is forthcoming.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{III}

Many Freudian cases cannot be fitted into the pattern of rational explanation by being construed as analogous to cases of pretending. But perhaps there is some other way in which we can fit them into the pattern. At this point, however, it might be objected that it is pointless to continue the search on the grounds that any attempt to postulate unconscious beliefs of the relevant sort in any of the Freudian cases is bound to be unsuccessful. The attempt is bound to be unsuccessful since it seems to conflict with some of Freud's basic theoretical views.

According to Freud, it is important to distinguish between two fundamentally different types of mental processes: the primary processes, connected with the id; and the secondary processes, connected with the ego. Unlike the secondary processes, the primary processes are said to be unchecked by any logical contradiction and not to involve thinking, calculating, or judging in any way at all. Furthermore, the processes by which the unconscious desire gives rise to a symptom or dream are, according to Freud, primary processes. And, when combined, these two theoretical claims by Freud seem to entail that in all cases of dreams and symptoms the unconscious desire never

\textsuperscript{12}It might be objected that strictly speaking it is misleading in the context of Freud's later theoretical works (see especially \textit{The Ego and the Id}, Part II) to hold that what is repressed (and therefore unconscious) can ever become conscious. For, according to Freud, the content of an unconscious state is in some sense non-verbal whereas the content of the conscious state into which it is transformed when resistance is removed is primarily verbal. Nevertheless, it can be plausibly argued that enough similarities are preserved in the transformation to allow us to speak of identity, that is, to say that what the patient is now consciously aware of is just that state which formerly was unconscious.

\textsuperscript{13}I am not denying that some Freudian cases can be construed as cases of pretending (and it may be that we will have better luck in trying to construe our example of the wolf-phobia in that way), but only that there are a large number of cases where such a construal will clearly not work.
gives rise to its manifestation through the mediation of a belief, much less a belief of the relevant sort. 14

What are we to make of this objection? It seems to me that there is a weaker and a stronger way of taking it, depending on how we interpret Freud's remarks about the two processes. According to the weaker version Freud can be seen as doing no more than stressing the point that the unconscious desire is linked to the dream or the symptom by means of associations, and often a long chain of associations at that. But, the weaker version would continue, associations are not beliefs, and therefore the mediators between the unconscious desires and their manifestations cannot be beliefs. According to the stronger version of the objection, Freud can be seen as claiming not simply that associations are involved in the transition between the unconscious desires and their manifestations, but also that the transition involves nothing more than associations.

Let us first consider, and reject, the weaker version. Now, whatever associations are, I think that it is at least clear that it is possible for a certain person to associate a with b without having the belief that a is a means to b or the belief that a is b, that is, beliefs of the sort which would fit into the pattern of rational explanation. For example, suppose that I associate a certain tune with lightening. The explanation of why I formed that association might be that I first played the tune on a stormy evening. It is clear that my having that association is compatible with my not believing, for example, that playing the tune will cause lightening. But although a person's associating a with b does not entail his having beliefs of the relevant sort, it is by no means incompatible with his having such beliefs. Indeed a person's having the belief that a is a means to b may often causally explain his associating a with b; and, under special circumstances, a person's association of a with b may partly cause in him, or give rise to, the belief that a is a means to b. In the Dick example, the patient's association of Dick with fat gives rise to a belief that we are clear the patient has, the belief that he is too fat. And if it is possible for the patient's association to give rise to that belief, might it not...
give rise to the belief that getting rid of fat is a means to getting rid of Dick?

According to the stronger version of the objection, Freud, in his remarks about the two different mental processes, is seen as claiming that although associations may give rise to beliefs in ordinary cases, this causal process occurs rarely, if ever, in psychoanalytic cases. But we have to reject this version of the objection as well. The main reason is that even if this strong interpretation of Freud's theoretical views is plausible, Freud's practice can be seen to be inconsistent with these views. For in some of the detailed descriptions which he gives in his case histories Freud allows for, and even sometimes explicitly postulates, mediating beliefs.

For example, in the case of Dora, one of a number of complementary explanations which Freud gives of a young woman's bouts of hysterical coughing is that she wants her father to break off his relationship with his mistress and to devote more of his attention to her. As we follow the details of the case, it becomes plausible to suppose that Dora has the unconscious belief that her being ill, or her simulating illness, is a means of getting her father's attention. Dora does eventually avow both that she has the belief and that the belief was part of the reason why she was coughing. But, more important, it is quite clear that Dora has the general belief that illnesses can be means to emotional ends: this belief shows up in her inferences and judgments about other people. For example, Dora is quick to accuse her cousin of developing gastric pains in order to be sent off on a vacation to the mountains.

Again, in an example from the Interpretation of Dreams, Freud partly explains a woman's dream involving a candle in terms of an unconscious sexual desire. Here one might think that this is a typical case where only associations are involved. But consider what Freud says. "Some transparent symbolism was being used in this dream .... But could a carefully brought up young woman, who had been screened from the impact of anything ugly, have known that a candle might be put to such a use? As it happened she was able to indicate how it was that she obtained this piece of knowledge."16 It is quite clear that Freud is claiming here that the woman has the mediating belief that candles can be used as symbols for the male genital.


16 The Interpretation of Dreams, pp. 219-220 (my italics).
IV

In either version the above objection against postulating unconscious beliefs in any of the Freudian cases has turned out to be unsuccessful. But if this is so, then on what grounds can we support our earlier intuition that in many Freudian cases, and especially in those cases which involve far-fetched associations, it is inappropriate to postulate such beliefs? For at this point someone might agree with us that it is implausible to interpret cases such as the Dick-example on analogy with pretending and yet still want to hold that mediating beliefs are involved in such cases. He might say that the relevant comparison to make is that between the Freudian cases and ordinary cases where we are willing to ascribe superstitious beliefs to individuals. We have no difficulty in saying that Jones believes that some harm will come to him if he walks under a ladder, that the passenger believes that he will prevent the plane from crashing by staying awake and alert, and that the husband believes that his marriage will collapse if he loses his wedding ring. So why not construe the patient in the Dick-example as having the superstitious, but of course unconscious, belief that getting thin is a means to getting rid of Dick?

For the sake of variety, let us supplement the Dick-example with another example. The example is that of the girl of nineteen who, as part of a rather complicated bedtime ritual, prevents the bolster from touching the back of the bedstead. Freud gives us the following explanation of this peculiar action. "The bolster had always seemed a woman to her . . . and the upright back of the bedstead a man. She wishes, therefore, by magic ceremony, as it were, to keep man and woman apart; that is to say, to separate the parents and prevent intercourse from occurring." Notice that his description of the girl's action as something like a magic ceremony suggests that Freud himself, at least in this case, would be sympathetic to an account in terms of superstitious belief.

Without producing a rigorous analysis of belief, I think that it would be fair to say that if an individual has a certain belief, then that belief must manifest itself in the wider pattern of his actions, his other beliefs, his avowals, and his thoughts and fantasies. That is not to say that the belief must be consistent with all of his actions, other beliefs, etc. In the case of an unconscious belief most of the individual's avowals may be in conflict with the belief; and the phenomenon of superstitious belief shows that the belief may be in conflict with some of the individual's other beliefs. Nevertheless, there must be a reasonable number of actions, other beliefs, etc. -- let us call these indicators -- which are present, and which are entailed by, or, if you want, explained by, the belief.


Consider the case of the husband who has the superstitious belief that his marriage will collapse if he loses his wedding ring. If it is appropriate to ascribe to him a superstitious belief, rather than a mere feeling or reaction, that will be because a number of indicators such as the following obtain. If he loses the ring, he will be upset. If he loses the ring, he will spend a lot of time searching for it. If he fails to find it, he will claim that he can observe signs of disintegration in his marriage. He believes that in the past a great number of marriages collapsed after the loss of a wedding ring. Now this last indicator usually fails to obtain, and because of its absence we are willing to say that the belief is superstitious and irrational. But the presence of the first three indicators, and others like these, is sufficient for us to ascribe the belief to him.

Similarly, if we are to postulate beliefs in the Dick-example and in the bolster-example, then we should also expect that a number of belief-indicators will obtain. In the Dick-example the list of indicators should include something like the following. On coming back from his run the patient is surprised when he finds that Dick is still around. Or, if he is not surprised, this is because he seems to notice in Dick the first signs of the expected fatal illness. The patient shows signs of being suspicious about other slimmers (who knows what victims they may have in mind!). The patient believes that there is a plausible physical or psychological account which connects a person's getting thin with another person's death. Now although Freud does not describe the case in great detail, placing it in the context of other similar examples of Freud's makes it reasonable to suppose that all of the above indicators are missing, and not just the last one.

The bolster-example seems at first glance a bit more difficult to rule out as a case of superstitious belief. It might be argued that if the girl really has something like a superstitious belief that keeping the bolster from touching the bedstead will cause her parents not to make love, then we should expect that she will perform the ritual act at other times besides bedtime: for instance, on some afternoon when she suspects that her parents are intending to make love. But it seems that the performance of the ritual act always occurs only at bedtime.

Still, in reply to this argument, it might be suggested that we can retain the hypothesis that the girl has the superstitious belief by postulating additional irrational beliefs. Perhaps the girl has somehow maintained a childhood belief that her parents make love only at night, or perhaps she believes that the ritual act is effective only at night. And one can find Freudian cases where this kind of maneuver has some

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plausibility. I am thinking of a case in which Freud explains a pa-
tient's exhibitionist-like actions in terms of the patient's unconscious
hostility towards his father. The implication here is that the patient
believes that in exhibiting himself he is defying his father. But it
turns out that his father has been dead for some time. So how can he
have the above belief? Here again one might try to save the explanation
by saying that the patient also believes in some sense that his father
is still alive. And in this case the additional hypothesis gains at
least some plausibility when we discover that the patient has developed
a belief in the after-life, and has frequent fantasies in which his
father's ghost visits him.20

Consideration of fantasies, however, is just what does rule out the
bolster-example as a case involving a mediating belief, and also pro-
vides additional support for ruling out the Dick-example. For one would
expect that in these cases the beliefs in question would manifest them-
selves at least occasionally in the fantasies and dreams of the individ-
uals, and in fact they never do. Take the wedding-ring example again.
If the husband has the superstitious belief in question, then, upon
losing the ring, most probably he will have fantasies or dreams in which,
for example, a scene in which he discovers the lost ring is followed by
a scene in which the couple live happily ever after. And if we are to
postulate beliefs in the Dick-example, the bolster-example, and other
Freudian cases like these, we should expect to discover similar manifes-
tations. In the bolster-example we might expect that the girl would
have anxiety dreams in which a scene in which she omits to separate the
bolster from the back of the bed is followed by a scene in which her
parents are making love. Or, if it is objected that we should not ex-
pect the belief to manifest itself in such an obvious form -- since even
in dreams the repressive forces are supposed to be partly active, then
we can replace the above dream with a dream the first part of which in-
volves her omitting to perform the ritual act and the second part of
which involves, say, her father entering a church. But in fact one
rarely, if ever, finds in Freud reports of fantasies or dreams which
are similar to either of the invented dreams above.

V

The last way in which we might try to construe the Freudian explana-
tions as fitting into the pattern of rational explanation is by treating
the neurotic symptoms as in some sense symbolic, or partly symbolic.
So in the Dick-example the patient's action of getting thin is to be
seen as symbolic of his getting rid of Dick; and in the bolster-example,
the bolster and the back of the bed are to be seen as symbols of the

20 This example is taken also from the Rat-Man case history, Three Case
Histories, pp. 34, 61-62. The suggestion that we save Freud's ex-
planation of this example by postulating additional irrational beliefs
on the part of the patient is made by R. Wolheim in his book Freud,
girl's mother and father respectively. At first glance, it looks as if this suggestion immediately runs into the difficulty which arose earlier in the context of the Norio-example. For even if we grant that many neurotic symptoms are in some sense symbolic, the connexion between the relevant unconscious desire and the symptom remains mysterious. If the girl unconsciously wants to physically separate her real mother and father, why should she go on to perform the action of separating the symbols? Of course, one might say that what is happening is that the individuals are somehow confusing the symbolic actions or symbols with what they symbolize, which is just to say that the individuals believe, momentarily or otherwise, that the symbolic actions or symbols are what they symbolize. But we have already argued that it is implausible to postulate such beliefs in these and many other Freudian cases.

Now Freud often uses the metaphor of translating one language into another in discussing the work of interpreting symptoms (and of course dreams) in terms of unconscious desires. Taking the metaphor seriously, we might try to fit the Freudian explanations into the rational pattern by construing the symptoms as analogous to linguistic utterances. On this view what the patient in the Dick-example is to be seen as doing is not trying to kill Dick, but rather doing something analogous to saying or meaning that he wants to kill Dick. Now I think that it would be misleading to talk about the language of symptoms (and dreams), since they seem to lack at least two important characteristics of language, namely grammar and conventionality. We might still try to preserve the analogy by making use of the more general notion of speaker's meaning, a notion introduced by H. P. Grice, and which can be illustrated by means of the following examples:

(1) In uttering the words "It is raining," I meant that it was raining.
(2) In holding up the white flag, the enemy soldier meant that he was surrendering.
(3) In holding up his broken toy to his father, the child meant that he wanted his father to fix the toy.

So the revised suggestion is that we construe the Freudian symptoms as utterances (taken of course in a wide sense) by which the neurotic individual can be seen to mean something in the above sense.

What is it for a person or speaker (again taken in a broad sense) to mean something, for example to mean that p? Grice suggests that it is for the speaker to have a certain complex audience-directed intention. If in uttering x the speaker is to mean p, then he must intend, first, to produce in a certain audience the belief that p, and secondly, to produce that belief in the audience by means of the audience's recognition that he intends to produce the belief in the audience. Furthermore,

the recognitional intention can itself be broken down into two components: first, the speaker's intention that his utterance has a certain feature, \( f \), and that the audience recognize that it has \( f \); secondly, the intention that the audience infer from the utterance's having \( f \) that the speaker has the intention to produce in him the belief that \( p \). For example, if the speaker is to mean that it is raining by uttering the words "It is raining," then he must have the intention that "It is raining" have the feature of being an English sentence which is conventionally used to mean 'It is raining,' that his audience recognize that it has this feature, and that his audience infer from its having that feature that the speaker has the intention to produce in him the belief that it is raining.

In the above example and in (2) the speaker meant something by the use of conventional means, but he might also use non-conventional means to mean something. This is the case in (3) and in the following example:

(4) Bruno: What opera are we going to this evening?
Richard: Holds up a rose.

Here, in holding up the rose, Richard meant that they were going to Rosencavalier, even though holding up a rose does not conventionally mean anything. Of course, if Richard were to mean what he did, then he must have intended that Bruno infer from his holding up the rose that he, Richard, had the intention to get Bruno to believe that they were going to Rosencavalier. And a necessary condition for Richard's having that intention is that he believed that Bruno would form the association between his holding up the rose and Rosencavalier.

A full analysis of speaker's meaning along Gricean lines would of course turn out to be much more complicated than our above sketch, but the sketch will do for our purposes.

Turning to the Freudian cases, if we are to construe them as cases of speaker's meaning, then they will come out reformulated as follows:

(5) In performing the actions of getting thin, the patient meant that he was getting rid of Dick, or that he wanted to get rid of Dick.

(6) In exhibiting her symptomatic cough, Dora meant that her father was to pay more attention to her, or that she wanted her father to pay more attention to her.

(7) In performing the bedtime ritual of preventing the bolster from touching the back of the bed, the girl meant that her parents were to keep physically apart or that she wanted her parents to keep physically apart.
Is it plausible to construe the Freudian cases in the above way?^22 It might be objected that even if there are no problems with the notion of an unconscious desire, there may be some with the notion of an unconscious intention. So we shall have to assume that the notion of an unconscious intention is coherent. But even if we grant this assumption, there still remain a number of difficulties with the suggested account.

First, in some cases, and especially those of hysteria, the construal in terms of speaker's meaning would make the symptomatic action seem self-defeating. Take the Dora case. It would seem that if Dora wants her father to believe anything, it is that she is genuinely ill. But her symptomatic cough can be construed as a communicative act only if it is assumed that she believes that her father will see the cough as an action, that is, as something within her control, and therefore that he will be likely to believe that she is only feigning illness. This difficulty is not a serious one, however. Indeed the difficulty only arises if we assume that an alternative rational account of the symptomatic action can already be given — in Dora's case the account given earlier which implied that Dora had the belief that getting her father to believe that she was genuinely ill was the only means available of getting him to pay more attention to her.

Secondly, there is the problem of whether or not it is plausible to hold that the neurotic individuals have the required audience-directed intentions, or, for that matter, any audience-directed intentions at all. Who is the audience supposed to be? In the Dick-example, perhaps it is the patient's sweetheart, Gisela. In the bolster-example, it seems that the position of the audience could only be occupied by the girl's parents. But, as we suggested earlier, in many cases, including of course these two, the symptomatic acts are not performed in the presence of anyone. So we can justifiably hold that the individuals in these cases have audience-directed intentions only if we are also willing to hold that they have certain background beliefs about their audiences. For example, the individual might have the belief that his audience will always come to hear about his particular symptomatic acts at some future time; or he might have the belief that his audience has the mysterious power to instantaneously know whatever the individual is doing. But in most cases, for reasons similar to those we used earlier to rule out the presence of

^22Thomas Szasz, for one, seems to think that at least hysterical symptoms can be construed in this way. In his book, The Myth of Mental Illness, Delta Books, New York (1961) esp. pp. 115-163 he gives an intriguing account of hysterical symptoms in terms of what he calls indirect communication, for example, hinting at, and alluding to. The construal in terms of speaker's meaning, even restricted and refined in this way, still fails to evade the general objections below.

unconscious superstitious beliefs, it is quite implausible to suppose that the neurotic individuals have such beliefs as these.

Finally, there is the problem of whether or not we want to hold that the neurotic individual has certain additional required beliefs about his audience. Most Freudian cases cannot be seen as involving utterances which conventionally mean anything, so, if we are to construe them as cases of speaker's meaning, we shall have to treat them as cases where the speaker means something by non-conventional means. The Freudian cases, then, will have to be seen as analogous to the broken-toy example and the Rosencavalier-example. But remember that a necessary condition of the speaker's meaning something in the non-conventional cases is that he believes that his audience will form certain appropriate associations, for example, the association between the rose and Rosencavalier. So in our Freudian cases, if the individuals are to be seen as meaning something, they also must believe that their audiences will form the appropriate associations. For example, our patient will have to believe that Gisela will form the association between his actions of getting thin and his getting rid of Dick. Or, the girl will have to believe that her parents will form the association between the bolster and back of the bedstead and themselves. But is there any reason to hold that the individuals have such unconscious beliefs as these? Again I think not. For when we work through the examples we soon see, once again, that there are as few indicators of this type of belief as there were earlier of the means-end type of belief. Doubts can even be raised about the claim that the neurotic individual at least believes that he has formed the appropriate association -- one might argue that his holding this belief is a necessary condition for his holding the belief about his audience -- on the grounds that it is one thing to form an association and another thing to believe that one has formed it.

So, along with the accounts in terms of pretending and in terms of superstitious belief, we must also reject the speaker's-meaning, or communicative-act, interpretation of the Freudian cases. And if I am right in thinking that these three accounts are the only likely ways of trying to fit the Freudian cases into the pattern of rational explanation, then I have shown that many Freudian explanations are not rational explanations but at the most merely causal explanations.

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June, 1977