

**The Psychoanalytic Mind: From Freud to Philosophy.** Marcia Cavell.  
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Whether theorizing or practicing, psychoanalysts hold certain assumptions about the nature of mind: for example, what "mind" means, and how one should go about interpreting a mind. How does the meaning applied to mind affect both the interpretations given by psychoanalysts and the symbols they use? Focusing on Freud's psychoanalytic theory, philosopher Marcia Cavell explores the two prongs of this question.

According to Cavell, "some of the confusions and problems" associated with psychoanalysis originate in the tension "between mechanistic and non-mechanistic elements in Freud's concept of mind, or between a humanistic and a scientific understanding of psychoanalysis." This, in turn, reflects a conflict between "a traditional, 'subjectivist' view of the mind, and another view, . . . which strains in a different direction . . ." (p. 2).

The emergence of the latter view began with Freud. Meaning, and even mind, became interpersonal products which cannot arise outside a social context. This view makes interpretation central to psychoanalysis for "unlike introspection and soliloquy [it] presumes a multiplicity of minds sharing a common language." Self-knowledge results not from introspection but from an interpersonal understanding. Hence, "the clinical setting [becomes] less . . . an occasion for private catharsis than . . . [a] space for a certain kind of dialogue in which transference and counter-transference relationships between patient and analyst are crucial" (p. 2).

Anti-subjectivists make their claims about the origin of mind and meaning not just on empirical evidence but also on logical grounds. They hold that meanings do not inhere in the mind without external constraints; on the contrary, the world influences what things and events will have meaning for particular minds. Minds can only arise in concert with other minds. An infant raised alone having had no human contact, thus having no concept of there being others in the world like itself, will never develop a mind.

Cavell believes, along with others like Donald Davidson, that "the role of external reality in one's 'inner,' 'subjective' world is far more important than either classical psychoanalytic theory or even current psychoanalytic practice holds" (p. 6). In *The Psychoanalytic Mind*, she supports this idea through critical discussions of

views held by W.V. O. Quine, Daniel Dennett, Thomas Nagel, Richard Wollheim, Ronald de Sousa, and several others.

Of Quine's Indeterminacy of Translation, Cavell wants to retain two features: (i) in establishing the meaning of a sentence, experience must play a role; and (ii) the meaning of a sentence cannot be derived without connection to other sentences.

Given this, how, she asks, could Quine's radical interpreter — an anthropologist faced with the task of interpreting an unknown language that has no similarities to existing languages, and which therefore cannot be interpreted by using a translation manual — get started? For the answer, Cavell turns to Davidson. His theory assumes both that we can usually determine when someone is making an assertion or claiming something to be true, even when we do not understand the language of which the person speaks; and that truth applies to some aspect of the event or object to which the assertion refers. As Cavell summarizes it, "successful communication presumes . . . that we inhabit a common world, and that there is a causal connection between world and speaker/believer which helps to constitute both meaning and content" (p. 29).

This externalist view does not require that one know *what* beliefs in a network of beliefs are causally-related to the world; it only requires that such a relation exist for some core set of beliefs. From such a base, a coherence among beliefs spreads, always subject to adjustment and interpretation as new beliefs form and others get thrown into the rubbish heap. As Davidson observes, "we can make sense of differences all right, but only against a background of shared belief. What is shared does not in general call for comment; it is too dull, trite, or familiar to stand notice. But without a vast common ground, there is no place for disputants to have their quarrel!" (quoted in Cavell, p. 31).

When we take this view to the psychoanalyst's couch, we find that irrationality becomes apparent "only against a background of rationality" (p. 33). This assumption enables both analyst and patient, in tracing the threads of the patient's beliefs, to make "sense of apparent non-sense" (p. 33). Here, the ability of the analyst to empathize becomes crucial.

According to Cavell, empathy involves "discovering and widening the common base we share, exercising my imagination in regard to the beliefs and desires you may have in respect to which your behavior seems more or less reasonable to you" (p. 34). Empathy can exist only if you and I share some common ground. An internalist view would have to negate the possibility of anyone being able to empathize with another.

Cavell restates her ontological and epistemological views in this way. "If we are genuinely in a state of knowledge . . . then [some part of] what we believe must be the way the world is. This is what's right about correspondence theories. But we also must have good reasons for thinking this is the way the world is, reasons which can only take the form of other beliefs. This is what's right about coherence theories" (p. 35).

So features of the external world — and we don't know which features — constrain what we hold as true of that world. Knowledge is derived both from correspondence to particular aspects of the world which forms certain of our beliefs, and from the coherence of our network of beliefs. From this Cavell shows that neither subjectivity nor objectivity exist without the other, and that we need to posit an external world in order for either to arise.

"The belief that there is an apple on the table draws a line to the world, or seems to. But what fixes the terms joined by the line?" How can I know of this as "an

external *object* which can be seen from different perspectives and which I may have right or wrong" (p. 37)? As Carol Rovane puts it:

The basic idea is that one cannot recognize that one's beliefs constitute a subjective point of view on something objective, or independent of one's beliefs, except insofar as one also recognizes other subjective points of view. Hence self-conscious believers must also be self-conscious communicators, i.e. interpreters of others. (quoted in Cavell, p. 38)

Subjectivity and objectivity depend as much on each other for their existence as do language and thought. An organism having an inner subjective world, and thus intentionality, must also inhabit an objective world through which it both meets and interacts with other creatures of its kind.

The view which Cavell is suggesting, that subjectivity cannot logically follow without presuming the existence of objects external to itself, contrasts with an internalist view of subjectivity, the proponents of which hold that "there is an ineffable something that it is like to be an infant, or a bat" (p. 117). Nagel and Wollheim claim an ineffable something adhering to experience that goes beyond the content of experience, and this ineffable something only the percipient can know. "Such a view can only be supported, if at all, by an internalist view according to which the content of a mental state is determined entirely from within" (p. 119). And this view, Cavell has shown, is untenable. (She does give something back to the "what it is like" notion of experience, but it brings with it no additional theoretical purchase.)

### *On Emotions*

Cavell holds what she calls the cognitivist view of emotions:

(a) Talk of mental phenomena cannot be reduced to talk of either brain states and/or behavioural dispositions. However, both physical and psychological accounts are necessary for a complete account of mental phenomena.

(b) Emotion entails thought. "Thought is not [the] accomplice" of emotion, "but part of its very constitution" (p. 138). Hence, reason applies equally to emotions as it does to beliefs, both of which can be rational or irrational. There is no such thing as passionless cognition or uninformed passion.

Cavell surmises that children may "have affective responses to . . . paradigm situations before they have a complex of mental states and emotions per se, that before they feel jealousy, exactly, they are pained by situations that will later cause them jealousy" (p. 154). Early response, prompting certain habitual behaviour, may guide the development of the more complex emotions. "Indeed it seems that more behavior is built in relating specifically to the development of emotion than to belief. If this is so, then emotions have a central place in any story about the advent of mind" (p. 154). Susanne K. Langer certainly believed this to be the case. In her

final and major work, the three-volume *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling* (1967, 1972, 1982), she proposed that emotions were "a special evolution of feeling." Cavell talks about a continuum of feeling ranging from perception through to the emotions. This was part of Langer's point.

That emotions should be given epistemological status seems clear from the arguments Cavell puts forward. "If emotions, and the valuing and appraisals of various sorts that are constitutive of them, are inextricable . . . from desires and beliefs, inextricable both in the activity of third-person interpretation and in the mind itself, then it may be arbitrary not to grant emotions a fitness to the world, a kind of truth, similar to that of beliefs" (p. 156). If we must grant emotions this status, then schooling in feeling would lay a valuable foundation for "the discernment of complex properties of the world" (p. 157). Many scholars are beginning to recognize this. Daniel Goleman (1995), for example, has recently urged educators to consider the development of emotional intelligence extremely important to a student's ability to achieve in other areas.

Marcia Cavell packs a lot into the 276 plus pages of *The Psychoanalytic Mind*, as is evident from her discussions of emotions — and also from her exposition of, and comments about, the internalist/externalist views of subjectivity. But the packing is neither sloppy nor haphazard. Her arguments are lucid, balanced, and perceptive. One may not agree with her; but if so, one will have a coherent position against which to argue.

### References

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