THE HERMENEUTIC METASCIENCE OF
PSYCHOANALYSIS

I. PRELIMINARY ORIENTATION

It has come to be realised that psychoanalysis and psychotherapy in general require a philosophy of science of their own. So far, however, there has been little agreement on the basic approach required in constructing a metascience for this branch of research. Earlier attempts, conducted in the spirit of positivism, showed that the methodology evolved for the elucidation of the natural sciences was inadequate in the case of psychoanalysis (Nagel, Ellis). Nor has the hermeneutic textual analysis model borrowed from the humanities proved suitable as such. The most recent hypotheses and experiments seem to be seeking a combination of these two main approaches (Habermas, Apel, Lesche; a general account of these scholars is to be found in Radnitzky 1968 II).

Such a summary combination, however, brings difficulties of its own. The positivist and the understanding (verstehende) traditions represent irreducible directions in the quest for knowledge. Their respective metasciences are concerned with completely different modes of knowledge. How are these mutually divergent types of analysis to be coordinated in a metascience of psychoanalysis? A mere reference to some kind of alternation between quasi-naturalistic explanations and hermeneutically established stages of understanding (Apel 1968, 1971, Habermas 1970a, Radnitzky 1968 II) is not enough. In psychoanalysis the explanations (interpretations) are also found to be understanding. In the analysis of the authors mentioned, the structure of the explanations in the understanding remains undetermined. In other words, as the analysis proceeds, how is the explanation partly an understanding of the person analysed?

The above orientations are not, however, the only alternatives. To develop a metascience of psychoanalysis we must first ascertain the peculiar nature of the psychoanalytical process and take this as the point of departure. It seems perfectly clear that psychoanalysis brings us up against the problem of understanding. However, understanding and/or meanings
cannot be regarded in psychoanalysis simply as "texts" whose philosophical analysis is the hermeneutics of language. Psychoanalysis is concerned with understanding and meanings which have never been and will never be language for the subject analysed. The practical object of investigation in psychoanalysis, as I have sought elsewhere (1969) to indicate, is precisely the problematic of understanding as it manifests itself in the lived world. The primary task of a metascience of psychoanalysis would thus be to analyse the overall structure of understanding in order to make comprehensible the constitution of the different meaning functions with which it operates.

The proposed metascience — which would be hermeneutic in a new, widened and deepened sense — would be concerned with the analysis of the transcendental conditions of understanding in consciousness. In hermeneutics also what is already experienced and known is conceived to be the transcendental conditions for further experience and knowledge. This dynamic aspect of transcendentalism in hermeneutics would seem to afford a promising point of departure for the development particularly of a metascience of psychoanalysis. Conceived in this way, however, hermeneutics is only a term referring to a basic philosophical orientation, just as positivism is. What the hermeneutic metascience of psychoanalysis is or can be will only be seen when the psychoanalytical process has been subjected to a detailed foundational study. It is also essential that hermeneutics be thoroughly and consistently applied to show how the basic concepts of psychoanalysis: the unconscious, insight, repression, resistance, transference, motive etc., are what they are assumed to be.

The few references Apel and Habermas make to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy in the metascience of social sciences cannot be taken as hermeneutic analysis in the sense implied here; rather they are interesting challenges to undertake such an analysis. It seems that a hermeneutic metascience of psychoanalysis cannot at the present stage be even mapped out without reference to the instigators of the modern hermeneutic method, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. It is difficult to see how the minimum metascientific requirements, that is, an analysis of the basic structure of the concepts psychoanalysis operates with, could be fulfilled without a knowledge and application of these scholars' exhaustive analyses of the nature of understanding. Elsewhere I have used the hermeneutics of Husserl and Heidegger to outline the basic features of a metascience of