

Throughout this book, I will be primarily concerned with the ground, scope, and range of the unconscious abyss and its manifestations in subjective spirit. Hegel focuses his attention primarily on the role of the abyss in the recollection stage of theoretical spirit. But by showing how it is anticipated in other parts of his philosophy, we will see that the unconscious plays a central role in his overall system. Throughout the evolution of spirit, there is unconscious spirit asleep within its nocturnal world only to be awakened from its internal slumbers to discover itself as soul, the life of feeling, an “*immediate, unconscious totality*” (EG § 440, *Zusatz*), and then it takes yet another shape as consciousness. As consciousness ascends toward the Absolute, every content of consciousness originally exists and is preserved unconsciously within the mode of feeling. Thus, the life of feeling is primordially associated with the domain of the abyss in all its archaic shapes. In its beginning, spirit originally manifests itself as the unconscious.

As a general structure, the unconscious is *aufgehoben*, continually being annulled, preserved, and elevated. The unrest of the dialectic perennially provides and re-provides the intrapsychic structures, operations, and contents of the unconscious as it redefines and reconfigures itself through such movement. As a telic structure, “intelligence as this unconscious abyss,” unconscious spirit is grounded in the subject. Thereby, the subjective ground of the abyss continually informs the dialectic throughout spirit’s unfolding, transforming into new shapes in its drive toward unity and truth, preserving old ones within the domain of the psychological.

Over the course of these proceeding chapters, I will argue for several key theses:

1. Hegel provides a coherent and surprisingly well articulated theory of the unconscious which becomes a pivotal concept in his entire philosophy of spirit;
2. The unconscious is the foundation for conscious spiritual life, that
3. plays a role in both mental health and illness;
4. Because all mental life has its genesis in unconscious processes, the abyss maintains an ontological and logical priority in the very constitution of spirit;
5. Conscious ego development is the modification of unconscious structure;
6. Having its origins in the unconscious soul, reason is the exalted dialectical outgrowth of desire;
7. Although the unconscious undergoes dialectical evolution, it is never fully sublated, remaining a repository where failed or diseased shapes of spirit return; and
8. Hegel’s theory of the unconscious anticipates and parallels Freud’s discoveries in many remarkable ways; thus his theory is of significance for psychoanalysis today.

In chapter 1, I examine the concept of original ground (*Grund*) and show how Hegel was profoundly influenced by several historical sources that in all likelihood contributed to his conceptualizations of the unconscious abyss. Jacob Boehme’s theosophic Christianity made a favorable impression on Hegel, and we may suspect Boehme has special significance for Hegel’s thought. Boehme offered an elementary dialectic and advanced the notion of the mystical being of the deity as the *Ungrund* (“unground”), or the ground without a ground. Boehme was above all interested in the soul, the first subject matter of Hegel’s Philosophy of Spirit. Emerging from an inner darkness through internal division and external projection, the *Ungrund* serves as a prototype for the abyss of the feeling soul, thus giving rise to a negative dialectic. Boehme’s *Ungrund*, like spirit, is the being whose

essence is to reveal itself through orderly stages of progression as it ascends toward self-consciousness, a subject who desires pure self-recognition. But Hegel's understanding of the *Ungrund* derives from several other sources in addition to Boehme, including neo-Platonism, Fichte, and Schelling. Hegel owes much to Proclus (through Creuzer), Plotinus, Erigena, and Schelling. He was familiar with several neo-Platonic texts, which were a likely source for his ideas. Furthermore, Hegel was deeply engaged with Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and with Schelling's philosophy of identity (*Identitätsphilosophie*) and philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*). His own philosophical thought developed out of their respective philosophies. Boehme had a profound impact on Schelling who was one of the first philosophers to emphasize the importance of irrationality. Schelling's revision of Kant's and Fichte's transcendental idealisms led him to develop a systematic conceptualization of the unconscious. Hegel's views on the unconscious abyss may be said to have partially derived from these different conceptualizations of the *Ungrund*. He was no doubt influenced by his historical predecessors, but as an independent thinker, his treatment of the abyss shows its own theoretical novelty.

After examining the historical precursors that set the stage for understanding Hegel's unique position on the unconscious, we turn our attention to a careful

exegesis of Hegel's texts. Chapter 2 details Hegel's theory of unconscious spirit and the soul. Specific attention is given to key passages in the Anthropology section of the *Encyclopaedia* outlining his references to the abyss and the unconscious processes of the soul's epigenetic development. Through a series of internal tensions, divisions, externalizations, and reincorporations, the dialectic becomes the logical model for the unconscious awakening and flourishing of the soul. The soul awakens to find itself immersed in nature and the life of desire and feeling, which it must overcome through a series of mediated dynamics resulting in the ego of consciousness. I will repeatedly argue that the soul attains for itself a prereflective, nonpropositional self-awareness or unconscious self-consciousness which becomes the template for consciousness and self-conscious spirit. Due to his views on the dialectical operations of the unconscious soul and the primitive presence of the ego, we can engage Hegel in a theoretical dialogue with Freud. Chapter 3 addresses Hegel's philosophical psychology and the operations of intuition, recollection, and thought within theoretical spirit, with a specific focus on the role of the abyss during the stages of presentation, imagination, and phantasy. Before the formal psychological operations of spirit are examined, however, I give a complete account of Hegel's model of the mind and how it developmentally unfolds as sublation through internal division, differentiation, and modification beginning with the natural soul and progressing to sentience, feeling, ego, consciousness, and self-consciousness as a self-articulated complex totality. By understanding Hegel's developmental stage progression of the soul, we are able to see how the burgeoning ego becomes the central agency for both unconscious and conscious activity and is the ontological force behind the appearance of consciousness that makes the psychological operations of spirit possible. Spirit essentially is the actualization of a progressive ego expansion that culminates in pure self-consciousness. Hegel's relation to and anticipation of key psychoanalytic concepts are further explored by juxtaposing his notions on the splitting of the ego and the internal modifications of the unconscious to Freud's tripartite model of the mind. Here we are able to see remarkable resemblances between their respective theories on the nature of unconscious drive and desire, ego organization, the primacy of conflict and destruction, and the structure and processes of consciousness.

Chapter 4 looks more closely at the dialectic of desire. The presence of desire is often attributed to the appearance of self-consciousness, but by way of our anthropological treatment of the soul, desire has its foundation in the

unconscious. This brings us to address a criticism that has been launched against Hegel's theory of intersubjectivity and self-recognition, namely, that his model of self-consciousness is circular. By readdressing Fichte's argument against the reflection thesis of self-consciousness, and Hegel's treatment of the coming into being of unconscious spirit, I show that this criticism is unwarranted. The feeling soul attains an initial self-certainty of itself as an unconscious self-consciousness, which becomes the logical and developmental model for consciousness and self-consciousness to arise.

introduction 17

This reassessment of Hegel's position on self-consciousness allows us to reinterpret the struggle for recognition represented in the master-slave dialectic. I show that Hegel's account of self-consciousness outlined in the *Encyclopaedia* and the *Berlin Phenomenology* changes significantly from the *Phenomenology* of his Jena period. However, his Jena work proves useful for understanding a general theory of neurosis. By focusing on the alienation, anxiety, and despair of neurotic spirit typified in stoicism, skepticism, and unhappy consciousness, we are able to see the universal and initial dimensions of madness.

Hegel's theory of abnormal psychology is the topic of chapter 5. Rather than offer an extensive taxonomy on the phenomenology of mental illness, Hegel is interested in understanding the ontology or underlying conditions that inform psychopathology. For Hegel, the ontology of madness has its structural form in the symbiotic and undifferentiated universality of the feeling soul. This self-enclosed womb of the soul is the state or condition that all forms of psychopathology assume, ranging from the more severe forms of thought disorder and psychosis that Hegel mentions when he discusses mental derangement and insanity to milder types of symptoms and conditions such as folly or absentmindedness.

The question of madness brings us to confront the issue of whether spirit fights within itself the progressive and elevating thrust of the dialectic for the regressive withdrawal back into the pit of its earlier being. Spirit struggles to achieve absolute unity, but in times of illness it is drawn back to its primitive unity, which it had previously surpassed. This withdrawal, fixation, and regression back to its original undifferentiated being suggests that the unconscious abyss exceeds the elevating process of the dialectic. In the sick soul, as in absolute knowing, spirit strives to sustain a universal merger with an all-encompassing unity, though such unity is vastly different in the diseased mind.

Our final chapter discusses Hegel's contributions to metapsychology and its implications for contemporary psychoanalysis. It is my hope throughout this project to show the remarkable similarity between Hegel's and Freud's ideas on the unconscious as the indispensable psychic foundation of the mind. Hegel is a proper precursor of Freud, and although largely unknown to psychoanalytic discourse, Hegel's philosophy contributes to psychoanalytic thought. There is a preponderance of evidence in traditional and contemporary psychoanalytic theory to conclude that the unconscious is dialectical both in its structural organization and its internal content.²⁰ In general, psychoanalysis would contend that the dialectical modes of spirit are themselves differentiated and modified forms of primordial mental processes maintained through ego activity, such as the continuity between desire and reason, mechanisms of defense, compromise formation, ethical development and the pursuit of valuation, aesthetic sublimation, and the higher intellectual operations of cognition.²¹ For example, the process of the self returning to itself due to its own self-estrangement is what in psychoanalysis is called, "projective identification."²² This defensive maneuver of the ego or self is generated by the projection of a certain aspect of the self onto the object world, which is then identified with and finally re-introjected back into

18 THE UNCONSCIOUS ABYSS

the subject. In effect, the self rediscovers itself in the product of its own projection and then reintegrates itself within itself as reunification. This is the generic

structural movement of the Hegelian dialectic, whereby internal division, external projection, and reincorporation function as a mediating and sublimating dynamic. Furthermore, the unconscious is overshadowed by negativity and conflict in both Hegel and psychoanalysis, a point that will be continually reinforced. For Hegel, however, the tempestuousness of the nocturnal abyss as the dialectic is in the service of elevating spirit to higher forms, while in classical psychoanalysis, the dialectical maneuvers of the ego are partially in the service of defending itself from an austere reality, such as the tumultuous forces within. Furthermore, the dialectical patterns in psychoanalysis mainly operate on—but are not limited to—the personal, psychological level, while in Hegel the dialectic extends to the history of the human race. Despite differences in theory and method, Hegelian and psychoanalytic conceptualizations of the unconscious share many similarities, particularly in reference to the nature of desire and drive, ego development, madness and neurosis, and the role of the dialectic. While Freud's metapsychology has incurred criticism due to its problematic epistemology and natural science framework—a framework vilified by analytic philosophers as not being a science at all,²³ there is much room for a reinterpretation of the unconscious that preserves the integrity of the self, (and that of spirit), as a telic agent without resulting in a conceptual scheme of the unconscious that is lost in biological reductionism.²⁴ Perhaps Hegelian and psychoanalytic theory can offer something to one another. While Hegel emphasizes the role of the universal, Freud emphasizes the particular, each having its respective truths in our understanding of what it means to be human. Hegel's philosophy, however, may be especially significant for the future of psychoanalysis. If we are to espouse Hegel's great insight that reality—including every intellectual discipline—is about *process*, evolution, transfiguration, and change, then his implications for psychoanalysis may bring about a new relation between wisdom and science.