

# Philosophical Assumptions in Freud, Jung and Bion: Questions of Causality.

April 1st, 2000 | [Add a Comment](#)

*Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 2000, 45, 109–121

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**Abstract:** The historical development of concepts of causality in philosophy is described. Since the Enlightenment and the growth of science, exponents of the two most important concepts, determinism and teleology, have been in conflict. At the inception of psychoanalysis at the end of the nineteenth century this conflict was particularly intense. It was the cause of the first major schism in psychoanalysis between Jung and Freud. Psychoanalytic theorists have continued to disagree over this issue. Post-modernist philosophy has abolished all metaphysics and therefore called into question concepts of psychic causality. Parallel to, but uninfluenced by this development, Bion has developed a psychoanalytic conceptualization which may be seen as transcending causality. The clinical and theoretical implications of these developments are described.

## Introduction

From the inception of psychoanalysis, its theorists have been struggling with the problem of psychic causality. However, the question of causality in general is one which humans have pondered since they began to reflect on existence. The conflicts about causality in psychoanalysis therefore can be understood and discussed more productively if the philosophical issues being expressed are clarified.

The pre-Socratic philosophers were the first to conceptualize causality using rational speculation. Following the pre-Socratics, Plato (1974), via his concept of the forms, made a systematic attempt to formulate the essence of reality and therefore, by implication, causality. He said that physical objects in the real world were imperfect replicas of their ideal forms. For example, no triangle that we draw on a chalkboard can be absolutely perfect, however, there is a conceptually perfect form of a triangle. According to Plato, human concepts, such as justice or love, also have their ideal expressions. He called these the virtues and said that they were inherent in ideal human nature and could be actualized by the application of reason. The dialogues of Socrates were demonstrations of this process of discovering a sense of absolute truth. Although Plato did not develop a theory of causality, the development of virtue was the goal of human existence.

Aristotle, Plato's student, observed human and non-human nature directly. Examining the growth of living things, he developed a four-fold concept of causality (Aristotle 1995). The two most important categories were the efficient cause, that which pushes a process into action, and the final cause, that which explains why an entity reaches a specific state of being. For example, the final end of an acorn is an oak tree, its goal. The Greek word for final expression is *telos*, and the mode of conceptualizing causality

in terms of *telos* is called teleology. Teleology was Aristotle's reworking of Plato's idea of the forms.

In Aristotle's schema the form was like an object's blueprint guiding it towards its final expression. Because of chance events or impediments however, the object might never reach its ideal. Aristotle also saw animal life, including that of human beings, as having inborn goals.

In the 17th century, with the beginning of the Enlightenment, there was a shift in the understanding of reason. Metaphysical speculation was no longer acceptable and a change in the interpretation of sense data occurred whereby it was shorn of its teleological associations. This empirical method led to the successes of Newton and Galileo and the rise of deterministic science. The practical successes of science led to a discrediting of teleology and limiting of its relevance to theology. The early scientific thinkers thought of the world as a machine and in this view God was identified with natural laws that moved the machinery. Efficient causality became the only legitimate mode of explanation. This type of thinking was called determinism.

At the end of the eighteenth century Immanuel Kant revised the Enlightenment view on epistemological grounds, saying that knowledge of the world is limited by cognitive capacities (Kant 1965). This led him to divide the world of objects into what we could know, which he called the phenomenal world, and what we could never know, which he called the noumenal world or the thing-in-itself. Kant's epistemological move opened the way to new formulations of teleology as his immediate philosophical successors took up his idea of a two tiered reality but criticized his formulation as being too abstract and posited a state beyond immediate experience which could be eventually realized.

The Romantic philosophers, led by Schelling, said that this state could be realized through intuition, imagination and feeling (Schelling 1978). The Idealists, led by Hegel, said that mind could progressively realize itself through human historical development (Hegel 1977). According to Hegel the *telos* was the complete realization of all that could be known. He called this absolute mind which was by inference the mind of God. Both schools maintained that humans were not just another form of static being like physical objects, but were dynamic beings that became, albeit in different ways and with different ends.

Schopenhauer, challenging Hegel's rationalism, said that the other side of reality was the will, which was forever seeking expression (Schopenhauer 1969). He said that the will was guided in its expression by forms, similar to those described by Plato, and that the ultimate goal of human life was to escape, via asceticism, from the power of the will. Schopenhauer's concept of the will influenced Freud in his development of the libido hypothesis.

In the nineteenth century the Enlightenment emphasis on empiricism and determinism was bolstered by the success of the physical sciences. Scholars took up these methods in the new disciplines of sociology, anthropology and psychology which came to be known as the human sciences. The teleological views of the Romantics and Idealists also influenced the human sciences and by the end of the century there was an intense conflict. At stake in this were two radically different views of the nature of the human being. The determinists viewed humans as being driven by forces beyond their control to which they had to accommodate. The teleologists saw humans as having a purpose,

which was some version of striving towards individual self development.

This was the intellectual climate in which Freud and Jung began their investigations of neuroses and psychoses. Both men, extending the work of the French school of psychiatry led by Janet, postulated the concept of unconscious causality to explain the clinical phenomena that confronted them. Freud and Jung initially insisted that psychoanalysis was a physical science. Freud proposed libido, an efficient cause, as the determinant of all psychic phenomena.

Freud's adherence to determinism, however, led Jung to discover its limits, and to propose teleological explanations for mental life. Their respective inabilities to tolerate deterministic and teleological explanations were a major determinant of their eventual break. Later, Bion can be seen as transcending the issue of causality altogether by proposing a non-metaphysical view of psychoanalysis.

### The work of the Freudians

Freud's theory went through many modifications. He had two main models of the mind. In the first model which was the most deterministic, he thought of consciousness as being impelled by the unconscious sexual instinct which he called libido. In this, the topographical model (Freud 1900), he asserted that if libidinal expression was inhibited intrapsychically, it would be discharged as anxiety. By the time of his second, the structural model (Freud 1923), he had added aggression as a second instinct (Freud 1920). In this model, instinctual expression was brought under control by the super-ego, the repository of cultural attitudes. In 1926 he said that anxiety was the response of the ego, under the hegemony of the superego, to the pressure of instinctual demands for expression (Freud 1926). In the single instinct model, libido, via the process Freud called sublimation, was channeled into culturally acceptable forms of expression (Freud 1905). In his final dual instinct theory a more complex view of sublimation was developed in which aggressive and sexual drives amalgamated to form more complex modes of expression (Freud 1923).

Although all these models were deterministic there was a teleological element implied in the concept of sublimation in that its activity, by implication, led to an increasingly more mature ego. More teleological still were Freud's concepts of identification as an outcome of the Oedipal conflict, and of secondary narcissism which lead to the desire to live up to the goals of the ego ideal. However, for Freud, there was no final resolution of inner strife. There was no synthesis of opposites in a higher unity. Freud was firmly opposed to all teleological concepts of God. He maintained that there was no divine reason, plan, or purpose in nature. Nor was there a lasting order in human nature.

Freud's most deterministic thinking occurred in the early part of his career and this aspect of his thinking was challenged by some of his followers. Jung was the most famous schismatic colleague. Others such as Rank (Rank 1929), who developed some of the first ideas on object relations, and Ferenczi (1955), who stressed the importance of the therapeutic elements in the analytic relationship, differed from Freud but stayed in the psychoanalytic fold. The differences were framed in terms of disagreements on the primacy of libido as a motivating force, but looking back we can see the arguments as being challenges, via teleology, to the hegemony of determinism.

Abraham, one of Freud's closest early collaborators, is considered as the unwitting father of object relations theory (Meltzer 1971). He proposed the idea of conflict between modes of expression around erogenous zones (Abraham 1979). These ideas were taken up by Melanie Klein, his student and analysand, in whose work teleological elements can be seen in her ideas concerning the attainment of more stable whole object relations (Klein 1975). She did, however, retain Freud's determinism in her own concept of instincts. Simultaneously, Fairbairn was also developing concepts of mental splitting. In contrast to Klein, he abandoned the concept of libido and developed a completely teleological theory in which the *telos* was the re-established unity of the self (Fairbairn 1952). Fairbairn did have to return to determinism in that he proposed a primary drive to attach to objects.

Hartmann's development of ego psychology where the emphasis was on adaptation to the environment, while being more teleological than Freud's theory, retained the instinct theory and therefore a strong element of determinism (Hartmann 1939). Ironically, Anna Freud's idea of developmental lines (Freud, A. 1966), a form of teleology, led to the most explicitly teleological psychoanalytic theory when Heinz Kohut proposed a developmental line for the self. He initially had a dual-track theory of self and instinctual development, but he eventually abandoned the latter to propose a model which was teleological in its focus on self development as a goal of analysis (Kohut 1971). The interpersonal analysts also partly broke with Freud over the de-emphasis on instincts.

Frieda Fromm-Reichman (1950), Harry Stack Sullivan (1953), and Karen Horney (1939) were the best known members of this group. Horney, in particular, was very explicit in her endorsement of teleology. Given the opportunity, she said, the human being would develop his/her full potential or real self. She said that the discovery of one's real self leads to a healthy integration which is experienced as a sense of wholeness. Horney believed that the purpose of insight was to free the self to resume its growth.

### The work of the Jungians

Jung (Jung 1912a) first broke with Freud by enlarging the concept of libido from a purely sexual force to heterogeneity of all possible psychic forces. He retained the term libido which, as Jung chose to define it, was similar to Schopenhauer's will. Jung's period of more global determinism was short lived however, because in his paper 'On psychic energy', first conceived in 1913 but not published until 1928, he made a much more radical break with Freud by proposing that the psychic causality is primarily teleological (Jung 1928a). Jung, through his experiments with the word association test, had already developed the idea that the unconscious was composed of multiple units of subjectivity, which he called complexes (Jung 1912b). He said that these complexes were affect-laden representations of self and object in relationship. They had been split off from consciousness, which he called the ego complex, due to adaptation to the social environment. Jung said that analysis was initiated when the attitude of the unconscious, more specifically that of a split-off complex, was brought into a conscious relationship with the attitude of consciousness, the ego complex. Analysis then proceeded via the integration of these opposing attitudes to form a more adaptive attitude. This new attitude, and an accompanying new epistemology was the *telos*. Jung called this process individuation and compared it to the incarnation of God's purpose (Jung

1928b).

Jung saw the unconscious as pulling consciousness towards integration. He said the integration was mediated by what he called the transcendent function (Jung 1916) which he later called the Self, capitalized to distinguish it from the self as identity (Jung 1929). This is the Self in a teleological role guiding the pieces of the psyche towards itself (Jung 1951).

Throughout his life Jung developed other concepts of psychic causality. In his early theory of archetypes he said that they were patterns of instinctual expression, an efficient cause, analogous to those seen in animals (Jung 1919). He also saw archetypes teleologically as representations of ultimate forms, a concept identical to Plato's (Jung 1917). In his final concept of archetypes he combined teleology and determinism, saying that archetypes had a spiritual and an instinctual pole, implying that psychological development often involved a conflict between instinct expression and spiritual development (Jung 1947).

Despite this interesting attempt to take account of efficient and final causality, in his mature writings such as *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Jung was primarily a teleologist (Jung 1955). Here he proposed that mature ego development occurred via the integration of archetypal polarities, in particular anima (the feminine archetype) with the ego complex of the male, and animus (the masculine archetype) with the ego complex of the female.

Despite Jung's attempts to provide through the archetype a concept of efficient causality, his teleological theory became predominant. This overemphasis led to the first major split in Jungian psychology when the influence of parent– child interaction on human development was re-emphasized by a London group led by Michael Fordham. Jungians have now organized themselves into classical and developmental schools (Samuels 1985). Interestingly, this split is the reverse of the original Freud/Jung split; the schismatics, the developmentalists have espoused efficient causality and are agnostics regarding a *telos*.

Fordham says that the infant is born with a unified primal Self, which is like Jung's Self in that it contains the full archetypal potential of the human. Fordham says that the primal Self splits into fragments, based on archetypal elements contained in it as it seeks contact with objects. Fordham calls this process deintegration (Fordham 1957). If the experience with the object is good, the self and object representation is integrated with other good self/ object representations to form an ego. Unpleasant self/object representations are split off, become unconscious, and form the complexes. Under the influence of the integrating potential of the Self, now in a teleological role, the ego and complexes integrate (Fordham 1958). Fordham's theory is an even balance of both forms of causality, efficient and final.

All Jungian theory, like other post Freudian theories, is an object relations theory, its uniqueness being its emphasis on the integration of the spiritual and the personal via the concept of the archetypes. Post Jungians (Hillman 1972; von Franz 1997) have developed the latter in different ways. However, there has been little original development of the object relational aspects of Jungian theory. Post Jungian theorists have chosen to make amalgamations with Kleinian and self psychological ideas.

## The work of Bion

Bion can be considered an aesthetic theorist who does not pin down but rather bursts open the possibility of understanding what lies beyond the trajectories of our current abilities to think. Bion said, 'It is un-psychanalytical to adhere to some rigid system as a substitute for using our minds' (Bion 1990, p. 201).

His reference to rigidity here includes fixed notions of causality in either the direction of determinism or of teleology. Thus one can argue that Bion's thinking supersedes notions of causality, placing it outside of its gravitational pull. Instead of causality, Bion speaks of suspension of ideas and particularly, the suspension of memory and desire which may be attached to determinism and teleology. Possibly Bion considered causality a dogmatism which evaded the immediacy and complexity of experience, thus stripping it of aesthetic qualities and denuding meaning itself.

Bion's writing evidences immediacy and irreducibility. He disrupts both the separation of author and reader, as well as that between content and linguistic style. Rather than reading Bion, one is thrown into his mind and asked to have a look around. So too, Bion writes about psychoanalysis as engaging *both* parties – making it dangerous work for patient *and* analyst in the catastrophic change it requires of each. Issues of causality, he says, relate more to 'the peace of mind of the discoverer than to the object of his research' (Bion 1967, p. 163).

Bion's thinking offers no reassurance related to deterministic and teleological models. Bion's dialectic is 'between catastrophe and faith'. This is not religious faith but more, how even dim awareness of what is unknowable places insuperable demands on one's psyche (Eigen 1985). In this model, causality is not locatable and definitive, but only known as what Bion calls a *selected fact* (Bion 1983, 1989) which may take on importance only in its link to other *selected facts*. This significance of linking, so central for Bion, is not equivalent to Freud's free association which exhibits a causal relation. More accurately, it is what could not have been except through effort in tolerating elements and links to – what is, what is not and that which could not have been – eventually resulting in an aesthetic, though perhaps unknowable, link.

For Bion, thinking *about* psychoanalysis cannot be cut away from *doing* psychoanalysis, which is in one moment conceptual, in another, pre-conceptual or may remain altogether aconceptual. If one looks at Bion's theories, he is a scientist and part-philosopher struggling to create a model of the mind (see his development of the Grid (Bion 1989) which categorized symbolization of thought). But his clinical insights (Bion 1994) suggest a picture of one involved in a creative yet volatile act. I am referring here to Bion's description of moments when something 'unsaturated' emerges between two individuals. This nascent idea or feeling state may be a communication between patient and analyst (in which desire is expressed), but more importantly, it points toward the singularity of the moment (such that desire and possessiveness have no place). Often such a state just pushes its way through without notice or invitation and is closer to what Marshak (1999) calls an *expression* that either emerges from or presses toward a catastrophic moment. Bion insists on the moment's 'catastrophic' nature in that it disrupts not only previously held meaning but places life itself at risk.

The unsaturated moment may allow for a new thought, a quiet ripple, a mutative leap. The emergent state may be closely related to the artist's act of submitting to the

material, what pushes through, which identifies the artist and simultaneously destroys him or her through its unknown content. As with art, this moment exerts pressure, not just because of its implications but more radically because of its existence in and of itself. In such an event, when the nature of experience is both solid and fluid and both conscious and unconscious states of mind oscillate, it is always a question of whether the experiencer is the container or the one being contained by thinking. Any description of what is taking place is a fragmentary one, one that is nascent, as yet unknown and ready to mutate.

An unsaturated moment does not always lead to symbolization of experience but may represent what cannot be symbolized. In this sense, its expression does not point to causality but rather frees itself from it through the particularity of a moment. It is not only what it represents and fails to represent, but also the form it takes. (We can see it in psychoanalysis more easily than in art. There *is* form but it is always in states of forming and un-forming.) If the artwork succeeds in being more than it claims to be, then perhaps psychoanalysis represents by accident and in unpredictable ways what could never have been previously thought.

To connect this more closely to Bion, we might turn to his impression of the analytic relationship. He says, the more unobstructed the relationship that the psychoanalyst has with his patient, the more subtle it is. It is an ineffable experience. The psychoanalyst's interpretations must be of a state of mind which the more difficult it is to describe in sensuous terms the more he aspires to be accurate. (Bion 1967, p.120) Bion describes here an aesthetic quality of psychoanalysis. We can see how far behind he has left a strictly scientific focus.

Aesthetics then is not simply another vertex from which to study psychoanalysis but is a mode of *being* in analysis which makes questions of causality secondary to the study of expression, whether that is in art or in psychoanalysis.

In *Cogitations*, Bion says that 'the individual needs a constant supply of truth as inevitably as his physical survival demands food' (Bion 1992, p. 99). It was Bion's project *not* to define anything, least of all truth, but to set up conditions for allowing what is true to break through. His emphasis in this area is so strong that while he is seen as elaborating his predecessors Freud and Klein, he actually reinterprets their work through his split-second lens, for example, in warnings that memory and desire interfere in one's clinical focus (Bion 1970). This eschewing of memory and desire is not identical to Freud's maintenance of free-floating attention. It involves a more radical disclaimer regarding causality with such emphasis on the particularity of the moment that one is offered no second chance.

Bion's crisis of the moment and the anxieties this generates in patient and analyst bears analogy to his statements that we are not the creators of our thoughts but that thoughts are pressed upon us. He says, 'Thinking has to be called into existence to cope with thought' (Bion 1967, p. 111). While he initially embraced Plato's theory of the pre-existence of ideas, he then considered this too much a medium (Bion 1992). He then developed the term *alpha function* (Bion 1967), an intentionally empty concept to describe 'an essence in process'. *Alpha function* allows the development of *alpha elements* which constitute material for dreamthoughts and thinking, thus lending meaning to experience. The individual feels compelled not only to relate, but of

necessity to express the new idea. Bion's new idea is a mutative one that could not have been predicted through causal chains. It is not a pre-existing truth but a *being in* that bursts upon us through the tension of holding together disparate parts. The aliveness of it then is not in the thought itself, but in the existence of what holds true through linking. This moment of 'being true' is not lasting. Mutations are inevitable but certainly not predictable.

Related to this, Bion describes the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of experience allowing the psychotic and non-psychotic aspects of the personality to exist side-by-side. He describes the beginnings of thought, the shape, sound or colour in the phonetic murmurings of the patient, as well as the unknowable nature of the psyche such that one speaks and another knows. Simply stated, 'We say what we say and others tell us what we have said'. This last point of discussion may be Bion's most important: that knowledge is not an individual matter, at least not knowledge that leads to transformations. It is learning through being and it is inherently object-related.

Given these thoughts, some might point to a teleological Bion. But his work implies that one can go forward or backward or even be left behind. Instead of causality, the later Bion speaks of evolution (Bion 1983), not in the Darwinian sense but in the momentariness of experience and its fragmentary appearance. Order and form, yes, but temporarily. The future may not be predictable even in fantasized form; however an individual is at times capable of a complex thought which evidences and embodies such possibility. Bion's thinking disturbs as he engages the reader rather than describes what he has on his mind. This approach is not new among thinkers but it always emphasizes that the content of what one conveys cannot be separated from its form. This could not be more true than in psychoanalysis where *what is said* has as much to do with *how* and to *whom* and stands in unknown tension to what is not or cannot be said.

## Summary

Taking up the parallels between psychoanalytic and philosophical thinking I see some relationships of Bion's work and post-modernism, once again in that, like the post-modernists (Rosenau 1992), he calls into question certain metaphysical concepts, particularly causality. In this respect Derrida (1973) is the most interesting of the post-modernists. He says that because we are beings in language we can never completely grasp the meaning of our experience.

Like Kant, in this respect, he says that there is a realm of experience we can never fully know. However, unlike Kant, Derrida sees humans as being limited by the fact that they are beings in language rather than beings limited by categories of mind such as time, space and causality. Derrida's work has led to the method of deconstruction in which any meaning structure can be dismantled in an infinite regress.

How did Bion arrive at such similar conclusions? Undoubtedly, it was partly due to his return to the data of analysis to identify what he called the elements of psychoanalysis (Bion 1989). It is interesting to note also, that in the thirties Samuel Beckett was Bion's analysand (Anzieu 1989). In addition to his renown as a playwright Beckett was also a skilled literary critic. Prior to this analysis, Beckett published a critique of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (Proust 1982). In this monograph Beckett says of Proust's literary method: By his impressionism I mean his non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitude of their perception, before they have been

distorted into intelligibility in order to be forced into a chain of cause and effect.

(Beckett 1931, p. 66) Were Proust, Beckett and perhaps even Bion part of a *Zeitgeist*?

Jung in the last part of his life was very interested in acausality, which he called synchronicity. However, unlike Bion who theorized about mental acausality only, Jung (1952) attempted to describe mind as partaking in acausality in relation to matter. He said: Synchronicity therefore means the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state. Jung, using the ideas of Schopenhauer and Leibnitz, reasoned that synchronicity was a function of the inherent unity of the components of mind and matter. He supported his idea empirically with the discoveries in quantum physics and his own studies of parapsychology.

Jung realized that acausality was an element of human mental life. However, he approached its understanding in a modernist mode, ironically, postulating an underlying cause, that of primal order to explain it. Bion, however, does away with metaphysics altogether, is able to explain mental events without any reference to the concept of causality.

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