The Truth of Psychoanalysis

ADAM PHILLIPS

We have art that we may not perish from the truth.
—Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

"PSYCHOANALYTIC treatment is founded on truthfulness," Freud writes in his 1915 paper "Observations on Transference Love," making us wonder what this truthfulness is about, while allowing us to assume that both the psychoanalyst and the patient will try to be as truthful as possible. By translating the title as "Observations on Transference Love" in the Standard Edition of Freud's work, James Strachey suggests that there is a distinctive kind of love, identified by psychoanalysis, that we can call transference love and can distinguish from other kinds of love. And this, of course, is how psychoanalysis works: the analyst shows the patient what she is transferring from her past and projecting onto the analyst in order to help the patient discover the real truth of her desire. But Freud warns us right at the beginning of the paper that

> for a cultivated layman—the ideal civilized interlocutor for psychoanalysis—affairs of the heart are of a different order of magnitude from everything else; they are, so to speak, inscribed on special parchment, unsuitable for any other form of inscription.

Here Freud lumps all affairs of the heart together (and makes us wonder about the uncultivated, uncivilized interlocutor for psychoanalysis that he seems to fear). Affairs of the heart—"inscribed on special parchment"—involve a certain kind of writing, a certain kind of language, and a certain kind of regard. The relationship between language and love is announced as somehow the heart of the matter. And there is perhaps a reverence or awe in approaching this writing about love. Such writing may be akin to sacred writing, writing that makes special kinds of truth claims. At its most minimal, Freud is reminding

us of a long tradition of real significance, in which truth is sanctioned and guaranteed by divine or supernatural authority. But what Freud was to contribute to this tradition is a description of love and sexuality as thoroughly secularized—sexuality uncoupled from the sacred.

And yet the issue Freud is struggling with in this paper, and is unable to resolve, is where there are different kinds of love, whether transference love is, as it were, true love, or merely the regressive reiteration of an earlier, partly incestuous love for the parents that psychoanalytic treatment induces and then uses as the medium of cure. It would be reassuring to believe (reassuring for the analyst but not necessarily for the patient) that transference love, the love that can occur in psychoanalytic treatment, is different in kind—and that it conceals the truth of the patient's real desire. But there are female patients (never male patients, in Freud's account), women of what Freud calls "elemental passion," who refuse to believe this. Such women can be seen as the heroines, the chorus, as it were, of the paper. "With this type," Freud writes to his fellow analysts—and he clearly wants this to be a recognizable "type" of woman—"you have a choice to make: either return her love or suffer the hostility of a woman scorned." The stakes are high. But in this paper Freud allows himself an unavoidable equivocation: "To sum up," he writes—and as summings up go it is, as Freud knows, peculiarly disturbing,

> you have no right to deny the title of "genuine" love to an infatuation that makes its appearance during analytic treatment. If it appears so far from normal, that is easily explained by the circumstance that falling in love even outside analytic therapy is more reminiscent of abnormal than normal mental phenomena. All the same it has a few outstanding characteristics that assure it of a special place. 1. It is provoked by the situation; 2. It is highly intensified by the resistance that dominates this situation; and 3. It manages to pay little regard to reality. It is less astute, less concerned about the consequences, more blind in its estimate of the loved one than we are willing to concede to a normal state of love. But we must not forget that it is precisely these departures from the norm that constitute the essence of falling in love.

As he goes backward and forward on himself, Freud clearly has the courage of his uncertainty in his account of what he calls in this paper the "socially ungovernable passions"—love as infatuation, called up from the past by psychoanalytic treatment. And another element of uncertainty (and guilt) that may be intimated in the paper, though it is never made explicit, is that there might be something misogynistic about psychoanalytic treatment: that it might exploit something about women, about female desire (Freud never describes a male patient's infatuation with an analyst). In this explicitly gendered account, the women don't know what they are talking about, while the man knows what he is talking about—and what the women are talking about.

But Freud says emphatically, in a way that virtually undoes the distinction his paper depends upon, that so-called transference love is "genuine"; it's far from normal, but then falling in love in general is "abnormal." Transference love in its recklessness and blindness is precisely that departure from the norm that constitutes the essence of falling in love. And what he calls, cautiously, transference love's few outstanding characteristics—provoked by the situation, intensified by the resistance that dominates the analytic setting, paying little regard to reality—are all entirely applicable, as Freud knows, to ordinary falling in love.

Freud's money, of course, is on the fact that the analyst doesn't reciprocate; but then the lack of reciprocation—the resistances and refusals that characterize falling in love—never stopped anyone. Love can be mutual, but it is never identical. Transference love has what Freud calls a "special place" in psychoanalysis as the precondition for the treatment; but, Freud begins to wonder—as he does about all transference phenomena—is it the obstacle or the instrument? It was part of the psychoanalytic project to find ways of turning obstacles into instruments: resistances, defenses, regressions, transferences all became the point, not simply or solely the problem, for psychoanalysis. The obstacle was the medium of progress.

Yet if transference love is different (has a "special place"), but is also exactly the same as falling in love more generally, psychoanalytic treatment—"founded on truthfulness," as Freud says in the

paper—suddenly looks very different. It appears risky, more perilous, less under the omniscient and omnipotent control of the analyst or of the theories of psychoanalysis. Once the analyst acknowledges that he may not know what is best for the patient—that is, that he may not know the truth, nor have a method for discovering the truth of the patient's desire—then the project of psychoanalytic treatment is less clear. If the analyst can say that the patient wasn't being truthful when she fell in love with the analyst—that really she was simply and solely transferring her earliest elemental love of her parents onto the analyst—then the analyst knows what he is doing: he is showing the patient the meaning of her mistake, the significance of her category error, her preference for the past, and her unconscious translation of the present into the past. She is concealing her wish not to know the truth of her desire, which the analyst can then reveal to her: both her ways of not knowing, and the nature of her desire. And the analyst is safe.

But if the patient is being truthful when she falls in love with the analyst, then the question for the analyst is, what to do with, about, or for, the truth of the patient's desire? After all, who is in a position to know the truth of anyone's desire? If "psychoanalytic treatment is founded on truthfulness" (in Strachey's translation), then the psychoanalyst has to wonder—as Freud is doing in this extraordinary paper—how do we recognize the truth, and what is the truth for? Or, what good is the truth? What is truth in the service of? Is the truth, by definition, curative? And, of course, what is to be done when anyone recognizes the truth? And the truth here is something to do with love; love is the way we talk about truth, Freud is saying, and truth is the way we talk about love. At least this is what psychoanalysis has led him to. And, indeed, what these women of so-called elemental passion have led him to. Sexuality, Freud discovers—whatever else it is—is a way of talking about what people want from each other or imagine what they want from each other.

"How do we recognize true love?" is not, of course, a new or indeed an insignificant question. But Freud implicitly redescribes the question about love as a question about truth and its usefulness,

because the women of elemental passion who fall in love with their analysts cannot be persuaded that it is merely transference love. They seem to be immune to the evidence, and Freud can't easily persuade us or himself that there is a difference between true love and transference love. Freud, and we his readers—and those analysts who are flattered and terrified by their passionate patients—all more or less secretly identify with these women of elemental passion, who believe in the truth of their desire and can't be argued out of it. They are the people who know they are right; and we have all had that experience of being absolutely right, of telling the truth, and of needing people to believe us. Psychoanalysis, in other words, has something to say about states of conviction and certainty; about people who believe they are telling the truth; and about, at its most extreme, what Christopher Bollas calls, "the fascist state of mind," a state of mind in which all self-doubt is dispelled. Madness, Winnicott once said, is the need to be believed. We only need to be believed when we believe we are telling the truth, or when we are determined to deceive. If you are telling the truth, why wouldn't you need to be believed? What kind of truth, if any, is exempt from the urge to coerce assent, from the will to demand agreement or consensus?

"We demand strict truthfulness of our patients," Freud writes in this provocative paper; and of course, as he knows, patients are being at their most truthful in allowing their transferences free play. Transference love involves the patient doing what she takes to be telling the truth. We need to remember that the strict truthfulness referred to here—and demanded by the analyst—is the patient saying whatever comes into his head. That is to say, truth, and truthfulness, the whole idea of telling the truth, are radically redescribed in psychoanalysis. After psychoanalysis, "honesty is the best policy" acquires a meaning different from its apparently simple seventeenth-century sense, as truth-telling becomes linked with coercion—the coerciveness of both the analyst and the patient. Psychoanalysis demands that the patient says whatever comes into his head, and that the analyst discerns the truth in what is said. Truthfulness floats free of the intention to tell the truth.

Strachey's translation reads, "psychoanalytic treatment is founded on truthfulness," and he gives the paper the title "Observations on Transference Love," as though the paper is about something called transference love. Alan Bance in the New Penguin Freud translation entitles the paper, "Observations on Love in Transference," which suggests that it is love that is being discussed, and that love comes in many forms that cannot always be distinguished. (Love may be like truth in this regard; it, too, may come in many forms and refer to disparate and contradictory phenomena.) Bance translates the passage I quoted somewhat differently: "psychoanalytic treatment is built on truthfulness. That is the basis of a fair amount of its education effect and its ethical value. It is dangerous to abandon these fundamentals."

Freud never shied away from psychoanalysis as education—as being of a piece with education—and as an ethical practice. And here, clearly, he joins up psychoanalysis with this culture's ultimate, and apparently most unassailable, traditional value, *truth*. He is making psychoanalysis into a conventional, recognizable pursuit. Not a threat to the culture, but another way of reinforcing its values. If Freud had said that psychoanalysis is built on lies, as he might have, he wouldn't have been able to do anything with it.

And he would almost certainly have known of a rather more skeptical, contemporary view of truth, represented most eloquently by Nietzsche: "truths are illusions we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors which have become habitual, and drained of sensory force." In this formulation, truth is convention rather than revelation; it is convention masquerading as knowledge. And this rather different, modern, ironized, or just more practical view of truth would turn up later, for example, in Richard Rorty's version of American pragmatism, when he says that there is nothing deep inside us that we haven't put there ourselves, and that the correspondence theory of truth is itself a metaphor. So by basing psychoanalysis on truthfulness, and the pursuit of truth, Freud is keeping himself and his so-called psychoanalysis in the then legitimate and respectable realm of science, while also protecting an allegiance to bourgeois honesty. Though in the full knowledge, of course, that truth is always a contested term. And that honesty is a mixed blessing.

The aim of "scientific thinking," Freud writes in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1916–1917),

> is to arrive at correspondence with reality—that is to say, with what exists outside us and independently of us and, as experience has taught us, is decisive for the fulfillment or disappointment of our wishes. This correspondence with the real external world we call "truth."

There is our wishfulness and—in the correspondence theory of truth—an account of what defeats our wishing. The truth, in this story, is whatever wishing cannot change. And yet, in "Observations on Love in Transference," Freud comes close to saying that there may be two kinds of truth: the truth of wishing and the truth of a reality beyond wishing. It is the truth of wishing that Freud is fearful of—and, indeed, fascinated by—and that has made psychoanalysis always a potentially conservative and reactionary project, defending a so-called reality principle that can itself be not so much a truth but a fiction, a fiction passionately held to (a fiction Freud will describe as "invested with affect"). After all, how can Freud be so sure that the correspondence theory of truth—or the reality principle itself—is exempt from the wishfulness he finds everywhere in his patient's lives? Every intention to change the present, any project for the future, begins as a wish, often a wish from the past. And because the wish is always, in a sense, already there, it presents itself as an object of potential knowledge, especially, in the psychoanalytic story, a knowledge of causality. (It should be noted that an interest in causes can lead to an omniscience that an interest in consequences never can, which is why psychoanalysis needs American pragmatism. In pragmatism, *description* of consequences replaces *explanation* of causes.) It is the wish that takes us from the past into possible futures. There is no conceivable politics or erotic life or development without wishing.

So in writing about love, Freud discovers (as others had before him) that truthfulness and love are uneasy bedfellows—and sometimes mutual saboteurs. When he writes about transference love, or about truthfulness, Freud is sustained by conventional essentialisms: it goes without saying that we want truth and not lies; it goes without

saying that we recognize true love when we see it; it goes without saying that we know the difference between a wish and a reality; it goes without saying that a patient couldn't possibly be in love with her doctor, that the psychoanalytic patient couldn't possibly be in love with his analyst (and nor, of course, should the doctor be in love with his patient). As long as we know what love and truth and, indeed, professional practice are, we know what we are doing. In psychoanalysis, Freud wants to believe, we use love as a way of getting to the truth; and it is truth that we want because it makes us better (as though above all we want to be better). Therefore, the analyst must stay strong and must not, with his patient, yield to the desire for love, or let desire and the desire for love trump the desire for truth. Science as the self-cure for hysteria. Empiricism as the self-cure for passion. Reality as the cure for wishing. Truth as the cure for love.

And yet what psychoanalysis kept revealing to Freud was just how precarious these distinctions and assumptions and presumptions are. Psychoanalytic treatment may be "founded on truthfulness," but if psychoanalysis keeps exposing, despite its stated aims, the equivocal complications of truthfulness, then how strong are those foundations? If truthfulness was neither the precondition nor the aim of psychoanalytic treatment, then what would the analyst be doing? And what would the patient go to psychoanalysis for? What would a psychoanalysis without foundations—or just without truth seeking—be like? Wishing could be the foundation of psychoanalysis, with whatever follows on from it.

Freud presumes that truth is the patient's object of desire. The patient goes to psychoanalysis with a view to being honest to and about himself, and to have his determined self-deceptions revealed to him by the analyst ("we demand strict truthfulness from our patients"). But it dawned on Freud—as it would to many of his later followers and critics—that this positions the analyst as the arbiter of truth, as the one supposed to know. If he is not supposed to know, what is he then supposed to be doing? There can only be truthfulness if somebody knows the truth when they hear it.

As always, we depend upon, we call upon, the available and most persuasive descriptions in the culture to know what we know, to find out what we know. We rely on what appears to be already known. Wittgenstein (a onetime contemporary of Freud's in Vienna) asks in the *Philosophical Investigations* why, when someone points, do we look at what they are pointing at, rather than looking up their arm? We look at what they are pointing at because we have learned the rule, the convention. We live a form of life in which this is what we do. How, when someone talks about truthfulness or love, do we know what they are talking about? We have learned the rule, the convention, the language games. But what are the conventions that help us recognize truth when we hear it?

Many commentators after Freud—both followers and detractors—when they have not been questioning his truthfulness, have wanted to help Freud with his problem about truth. Quoting Freud's letter to Wilhelm Fleiss of September 1897—"There are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that it was impossible to distinguish between truth and fiction invested with affect"—John Forrester comments in his aptly entitled book *Truth Games*,

> "impossible to distinguish between truth and fiction"—it is on recognition of this "fact" about human beings that psychoanalysis is built. What distinguishes Freud's project then is that he recognized this fact, and did not throw up his hands in despair (as he seemed tempted, but not that tempted, to do). Freud discarded the idea that, as long as one concerns oneself solely with a patient's utterances, there exists a criterion by which one can distinguish the words as truth or fiction.

Once again it is a question of the foundation of psychoanalysis. For Forrester, the foundation involves discarding the idea that "there exists a criterion by which one can distinguish the words [of the patient] as truth or fiction"; but, he adds, the psychoanalyst must not be tempted to despair, by which he means the despair of being without foundations, without available criteria to make what seems to

be the necessary distinctions. (Freud's women of elemental passion could be described, at least from the psychoanalyst's point of view, as being unable to tell the difference between wish and reality, between truth and fiction invested with affect.) The foundation that psychoanalysis is built on is an absence, a suspension of the capacity to distinguish between truth and fiction because there is no criterion available to make the distinction. And, indeed, perhaps fiction invested with affect is a truth, or a version of truth, worth having, one that psychoanalysis takes seriously.

Once again, it is assumed that we know, or think we can recognize and distinguish, two discrete phenomena, truth and fiction, but in psychoanalysis, at least, we may not need to or be able to. Forrester, here, could be described as helping Freud discard the idea of truth or of foundational criteria, as though some notion of truth, or some criterion that distinguishes truth from fiction, distorts or disrupts something essential about psychoanalysis. We might say that psychoanalysis is the practice that needs to do without our being able to distinguish truth from fiction. Once, say, you start trying to work out whether fantasies or desires or feelings are true, you lose too much, because the quest for evidence displaces the feelings that are felt, in all their indeterminateness, inarticulacy, or wishfulness. So-called methods for the pursuit of truth can, then, be strangely impoverishing, as though the pursuit of truth—of something called truth in religion or philosophy or science—could be merely a form of oversimplification, as though truth as an object of desire was akin to what psychoanalysis describes as a sexual perversion or a fetish, construed to narrow the mind and coerce feeling. When Freud writes, "There are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that it was impossible to distinguish between truth and fiction invested with affect," he keeps alive the idea of there being truth in the unconscious, while telling us that it is impossible to recognize it. There is truth, but not for us.

If Freud was a pragmatist (which he was not), concerned with consequences, we could imagine that he was saying here, if you drop the distinction between fantasy and reality, or the distinction between fiction and truth, where does it get you, what would it make possible?

What can you do without those distinctions that you can't do with them? Or, more moderately, and sticking to the traditional vocabulary, what would our lives be like if we valued our wishes every bit as much as we value so-called reality? These are the kind of disturbing thoughts that could lead you to say, "Where id was, there ego should be," or that might make you think that a strong ego was the solution rather than the problem. Or that might make you ask, more truthfully, as Freud did at the end of the Schreber case, a case of a man with paranoid delusions, "It remains for the future to decide whether there is more delusion in my theory than I should like to admit, or whether there is more truth in Schreber's delusion than other people are as yet able to believe." Freud abdicates from the position of being the one who knows the difference between truth and delusion; and who intimates, by the same token, that our ideas about truth may be akin to—may serve the same function as—delusions.

Psychoanalysis after Freud has gone in fear of the collapsing of distinctions; and this, one could say, is why it has put its money on language, because it is only in language that distinctions, and indeed histories, even truths, can be made. "The truth of history is the truth of language," the philosopher Michel Henry writes, as if to say the only truth we have is in language, and we need to acknowledge that and all that it precludes. Our formulations of truth come in language, and so truth may not always be what we most want and need (there is more to our personal history than our linguistic accounts). Truth—our descriptions in language of what we take to be the truth—may not only be what inspires or informs us. Henry, with barely concealed suspiciousness of Lacan, believes that psychoanalysis has misled us by fetishizing language at the cost of what he calls "affectivity as the revelation of being in itself." "Life is lost the moment it is named," Henry writes in his fervent critique of Freud and the need to name that is psychoanalysis, as though we should see the truth of language—the truth that only resides in language—as a delusion.

In privileging language over feeling, representation over affect, Henry wants us to be wary of the Freudian, language-driven truth project. "The drive representative," he writes in *The Genealogy of*

Psychoanalysis (the title telling us that Henry wants to do to psychoanalysis what Nietzsche did to morality), "is not only representation: it is also affect. . . .[And] affect is not merely a drive representative. It is actually representation's foundation." Where Lacan describes us as the animals captured and tortured by language, Henry writes, less histrionically, "representation reclaims what originally stands beyond it." Representation, that is to say, language, for Henry colonizes an affective prelinguistic, vitalist, somatic core; it usurps its source; it reclaims, it calls something back into an alien and alienating medium. The bodily self in all its vital and ineluctable immediacy is estranged in language, or so Henry contends. Language, and the truths it supposedly persuades us of, is at once, in this account, a necessary tool and a radical distraction. It is, of course, a paradoxical picture. So yet another version of a psychoanalysis without a concept of truth would be a psychoanalysis that was not bewitched by language. If the precondition for a concept of truth is the use of a language, then language can mislead us with its truth.

Once Freud began to describe what he called the unconscious—the necessity of a self-deception born of fear, of unacceptable desire—truth and truthfulness became the essential perplexities of psychoanalysis. Without a concept of truth, however tacit, however unconscious, however taken for granted—without a distinction between wish and reality—psychoanalysis, in its beginnings, would not have known what to do with itself, or what it was doing. Feeling potentially unmoored from the abiding, virtually sacred tradition of truth telling, Freud struggled as a man of the Enlightenment to live and work as if truth and truthfulness were the heart of the matter for psychoanalysis, as if the truth could to some extent free us, even if it could not make us free (free us from our distracting and tormenting wishfulness). But Freud's equivocations about truth and truthfulness invite us to imagine a psychoanalysis that would no longer need to talk about truth. A psychoanalysis in which a concept of truth would be the very thing that betrays, that sabotages, the psychoanalytic project.

When William James wrote in *Pragmatism* that "truth is what happens to an idea," he was referring to truth as an aftereffect, as part

of the rhetoric of affirmation we recruit to affirm the value of something after the event ("That's true!" would be like saying, "Well done" or "Excellent" or "I agree"). So when Freud writes that "psychoanalytic treatment is founded on truthfulness," we could take him to be saying, from a pragmatic point of view, that psychoanalytic treatment is founded on a certain way of talking that we psychoanalysts find useful, valuable, and pleasurable. And that we want to find out where this way of talking—this new kind of conversation that was deemed to be a new kind of medical treatment—might lead. The culture will tell us that, like all medical treatments, it should lead to cure; and then as pragmatic psychoanalysts—more interested in experiments in living than in known aims and ends—we would ask, "But where does cure lead to? What kind of lives do the cured live?"

Truth, or the even less plausible The Truth, is, in this context, preemptive; like a fetish or a so-called perversion it identifies—or overidentifies—our object of desire. It tells us, as Freud both tried and tried not to do in "Observations on Love in Transference," what the analyst and the patient really want. But then, like the women of elemental passion, as Freud intimates in yet another nuance of his paper, we may all be suffering from thinking that we know too exactly what we really want. The analyst supposedly really wants truth, the women of elemental passion really want to love and be loved by their analyst. What if individuals in certain kinds of cultures hold themselves together by claiming to know what they want? Or wanting to be told what they want? And here, all too easily, truth turns up in certain contexts as the assumed object of desire. Wishing is a problem because of its intrinsic omniscience. And omniscience is a refuge from dread.

Psychoanalysis invites us to find out what our objects of desire may be, inspired as they are by the omniscience of our wishes about them. What, Freud began to wonder, has truth got to do with desire? Or again, what has knowledge got to do with wanting? Or, what has wishing got to do with reality? Psychoanalysis, unlike certain philosophical and religious traditions—and unlike all political regimes—assumes that we never already know what we want. The truth of our

desire—if that is a useful way of talking—can only ever be an experiment and a risk. Psychoanalysis suggests that knowing and wanting don't necessarily go together, that knowing what we want can be the most defensive thing we ever do. Because it is always initially based on wishful fantasy rather than learning from experience.

The truth that our wishing tells us is that we know what we wish for, but we really don't know what we want until we risk trying to find out; the truth that reality tells us is that this knowledge can be wrong because what we want doesn't always exist (to desire is what John Stuart Mill called "an experiment in living"). And then there is the possibility that Freud can't quite formulate, that truth as an object of desire may be the problem, not the solution. That what psychoanalysis may really be about is what it is to have an object of desire.

"Two currents of ideas are very prominent in modern thought and culture," Bernard Williams writes in his telling and remarkable book, *Truth and Truthfulness*:

> On the one hand there is an intense commitment to truthfulness—or, at any rate, a pervasive suspiciousness, a readiness against being fooled, an eagerness to see through appearances to the real structures and motives that lie behind them . . . . Together with this demand for truthfulness . . . there is an equally pervasive suspicion about truth itself: whether there is such a thing; if there is, whether it can be more than relative or subjective or something of that kind; altogether, whether we should bother about it, in carrying on our activities, or in giving an account of them.

If we are committing ourselves to truthfulness, Williams asks, what, if anything, are we committing ourselves to? It is a stark opposition: either truthfulness is what we most intensely want, or the thing we claim to most intensely want may not exist, may be, to use Williams's words, "relative or subjective," or even quite irrelevant to doing what we do and "giving an account of" it. If we substitute the word "sexuality" for "truthfulness" in this passage, we get a clearer sense of what might be at stake:

> On the one hand there is an intense commitment to sexuality—or, at any rate, a pervasive suspiciousness, a readiness against being fooled, an eagerness to see through appearances to the real structures and motives that lie behind them. . . . Together with this demand for sexuality. . . there is an equally pervasive suspicion about sexuality itself: whether there is such a thing; if there is, whether it can be more than relative or subjective or something of that kind; altogether, whether we should bother about it, in carrying on our activities, or in giving an account of them.

Read with this substitution, we can imagine that for Freud *sex* was the new word for *truth*, and *truth* then lost its traditional moorings. (It would be Foucault, among many others, who would question whether, or in what sense, a person's sexuality, their desire, was the truth about themselves.)

As Williams goes on to ask in his book, "if you do not really believe in the existence of truth, what is the passion for truthfulness a passion for? Or—as we might also put it—in pursuing truthfulness, what are you supposedly being true to?" I take this to be Williams asking a question about objects of desire, about what we think we want, and are most intensely committed to. It is, I think, a psychoanalytic question—or a psychoanalytic inflection of a traditional philosophical question—to ask, If you do not really believe that your object of desire exists, what is the passion for it a passion for? In pursuing your object of desire, what are you being true to (and if your object of desire doesn't exist, what, if anything, are you then being true to)? Clearly, if our objects of desire don't exist or aren't quite what we think they are—or even if we just have serious doubts about their existence—then our lives look very different: "carrying on our activities, or. . . giving an account of them," in Williams's words, will need to be radically redescribed if our objects of desire don't or may not exist.

When we are talking about truth, then—just as when we are talking about sexuality—one of the things we are talking about is our relation to our objects of desire. Do they exist and what are they for? And if they don't exist, what are we for (what are we doing here, and what are we in favor of)? So, on the one hand, we can think of Freud's work as an inquiry into sexuality and the unconscious; but on the

other hand we might think of Freud's work as an inquiry into objects of desire. An inquiry into what it is to be human animals who, like other animals, could be described as having objects of desire, but, unlike other animals, have their objects of desire entangled in the labyrinth of words that we call language. When Freud is writing about truth and truthfulness, or about love and sexuality, he is writing, above all, about the nature and significance of there being objects of desire, which are eventually found and formulated in language, or other forms of representation. He is writing about the fact that our objects of desire—our relation to them—make us who we are. Freud's question then becomes, what is an object of desire? And, what are we so that we organize ourselves around them, and constitute ourselves through them? The truth of our desire—and of our so-called selves—is that we desire. This could be the most fundamental, and most banal, formulation of Freud's inquiry. Without objects of desire we wouldn't know what to do with ourselves. And that could be, in William James's words, another good place "to be going on from."

JOAN MITCHELL (1925–1992) was an American abstract expressionist painter. Her work appears courtesy of the Joan Mitchell Foundation (joanmitchellfoundation.org).

OMEDI OCHIENG teaches rhetorical theory, argumentation, and criticism at Denison University. He is the author of two books: *Groundwork for the Practice of the Good Life: Politics and Ethics at the Intersection of North Atlantic and African Philosophy* (Routledge) and *The Intellectual Imagination: Knowledge and Aesthetics in North Atlantic and African Philosophy* (University of Notre Dame Press).

ADAM PHILLIPS's *On Wanting to Change* is just out from Penguin. Its sequel, *On Getting Better*, is due out in November.

RICHARD'S SIEBURTH's edition of Baudelaire's *Late Fragments* will be published by Yale University Press next spring.

EDWARD TENNER is a distinguished scholar of the Lemelson Center for the History of Invention and Innovation at the National Museum of American History and a visiting scholar at both Rutgers University and Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study. His most recent book is *The Efficiency Paradox: What Big Data Can't Do*. An earlier version of his essay on shadows was delivered in German as a lecture at the Museum für Gestaltung in Basel in 2002 and published in *Schatten, Schatten: Der Schatten—das älteste Medium der Welt* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2003).

MARINA WARNER is a writer of fiction, cultural history, and criticism. She is Professor of English and Creative Writing at Birkbeck College, London, and a Distinguished Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. Her most recent books are *Forms of Enchantment: Writings on Art and Artists* and *Inventory of a Life Mislaid: An Unreliable Memoir.* She is now at work on a study of Sanctuary.

ROBERT WESTBROOK is Joseph F. Cunningham Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Rochester. He is the author of *John Dewey and American Democracy* (1991). He is at work on an essay on Bill Bradley, which will eventually appear in these pages.

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