

Truth in a Time of Disinformation

Psychoanalytic Insights

Edited by

JEAN ARUNDALE



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To my children, Lindsey and Scott, our love sustains me.

*To my esteemed colleagues in psychoanalysis,
whose work continues to inspire.*

To everyone who seeks Goodness, Truth, and Beauty.

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Introduction

Jean Arundale

“**B**eauty is truth, truth beauty.” Keats’ enigmatic line from “Ode on a Grecian urn” opens up a vista, alluding to truth not as a bare proposition or fact but as something radiant and alive. When it joins with other patterns of understanding, it reveals an elegance, a coherence that feels unmistakably beautiful. It is an attempt to gather fragments of human experience, uniting with the whole. At its height, truth rises towards the sublime; when lies creep in the result is ugliness.

Seeking truth is intrinsic to humans as they work to find their place in the world. Cicero (44 BC) wrote that “Nature has planted in our minds an insatiable longing to see the truth.” From the ancient Platonic ideals of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, to the Enlightenment’s devotion to reason, truth has been the foundation of trust, knowledge, and civilisation. It enables societies to make informed choices, build relationships, and stay connected to what is real. Without truth, the human mind and human culture descend into delusion and chaos.

This book has its origins in a profound concern about the state of truth in today’s world, a situation in which lies and misinformation have become a dangerous virus, masquerading as ordinary life, that is invading global cultural foundations. Misinformation is spreading into

the public discourse, many false narratives and downright lies being perpetrated, invading institutions that were established under the rule of law; the corrupting attacks on truth are having serious consequences for the pillars of our society and to the zeitgeist. The phrase “post-truth era” has become a cliché, yet it describes a grave condition. Lies repeated by politicians and amplified by media are mistaken for veracity. Trust in institutions erodes; facts compete with conspiracy; cynicism becomes the first reflex in public discourse. As Hannah Arendt warned, “The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the dedicated Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction, true and false, no longer exists” (Arendt, 1951, p. 474).

This movement is driven by narcissism, power, and greed. The narcissist, intoxicated by omnipotence, refutes reality itself, turning what *is* into what he wishes it to be. This tyranny of the mind, when enacted on a collective scale, becomes disastrous. The most powerful nations now shrug at evidence and dismiss reason, as if facts themselves are lost.

The measure of truth in these narcissistic times has morphed into feeling states. If what is right or true depends only on what people *feel*, we have moved beyond the boundaries of civilisation. The collective search for truth gives way to narcissistic self-creations: “my truth”, “my story”, “my reality”. This cultural shift, from shared reality to subjective authenticity, has fractured public life into tribes and echo chambers.

Philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard (1984) saw this coming. He wrote that modern societies have lost faith in “grand narratives”, the overarching stories that once unified knowledge and meaning. Truth, he argued, had become local and plural, shaped by language games and internal rules rather than universal principles. Today, social media is the theatre of this fragmentation, a hall of mirrors where every reflection claims authority.

Nietzsche (1906) had already warned that all “facts” are really interpretations; whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power, not truth. In our era, that prophecy has come to pass. Truth has been subordinated to demagoguery.

Truth has become subjective: Fukuyama (2018) pointed out that those who urge “Be who you are”, from Nietzsche to Ayn Rand and others, inadvertently were central to the cultural disintegration leading to the

radical individualism that flourished over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, laying the foundation for today's identity politics. This primacy of identity has meant that to question another's "truth" is now seen as a transgression, a moral assault on their being. Societies retreat into tribes, unwilling to hear one another, regressing into a shouting match between competing realities. Democracy, which depends upon compromise and persuasion, struggles to survive in such a climate. The consequences are visible: tribalism, inequality widening into anger, public institutions losing legitimacy, and leaders who thrive not on solutions but on division. Austerity, greed, and the worship of wealth have replaced civic responsibility. Many ask: where are the bold ideas? Where are the leaders willing to hold the centre? Who is able to stand up and articulate the truth without fear?

When we lose touch with reality, we lose our orientation in the world. This distortion of truth begins early: the first lie a child tells his parent marks the dawning sense that his mind is private, boundaried, distinct. Lies, paradoxically, are part of the development of subjectivity. Yet the mind's capacity to create illusion can also destroy its grasp on the real.

Another force now destabilising our sense of reality is the rapid advance of AI and its ability to fabricate convincing images and texts that circulate widely. Combined with the flood of lies and misinformation on social media, it creates a world in which trust grows increasingly tenuous.

Psychoanalysis has long studied the defences against the truth: denial, projection, splitting, wishful thinking, turning a blind eye, and the repetition compulsion that binds a person to their suffering. Only when inner truth becomes conscious can it be thought about, acted upon, and allow change.

Winnicott's (1971) distinction between the true and false self recognised the importance of authenticity, being true to oneself. To find oneself, one must clear away the inner debris, trauma, narcissism, ego rigidity, conflicts, that distort the personality. But psychoanalysis, too, has been infected by the cultural fragmentation. Schools of thought, too, have formed silos, subscribing to their own language and models, rejecting others. How can we afford to ignore the range of insights from the different traditions that can helpfully inform us? The analytic community mirrors the political world: tribal, defensive, reluctant to engage with difference. Was Freud himself partly responsible for

this inward turn that mistakenly prioritises emotion and feeling? His revolutionary discovery of psychic reality shifted the cultural focus from external truth to inner consciousness. That insight liberated the modern self, yet it may have inadvertently laid the groundwork for our current predicament, where subjective feeling is treated as ultimate authority.

There are many possible ways to interrogate psychoanalysis and culture for their truth value. The chapters in this book will explore psychic truth, the unconscious, phantasies, dreams, our theoretical framework, truth in the consulting room, reality, and more, all in the search for truthful representations, methods, and models.

A very brief history of our concepts of truth

Before focusing on psychoanalytic questions, a very brief history of the quest for truth will remind us of what we have gained and what now may be imperilled in the evolution of civilisation. Truth has a long and complex history across philosophy, religion, science, politics, art, and language.

Turning to the philosophers, a nineteenth-century German legend said, “Philosophy bakes no bread.” Hegel (1821) famously replied, “True, philosophy does not bake bread, yet it provides something higher—it nourishes the spirit.” From antiquity onwards, thinkers have negotiated this tension between the practical and the ideal. Socrates sought truth through dialectical enquiry in conversation with people in Athens, foreshadowing the psychoanalytic method. For Plato, truth existed in eternal and immutable ideas; to find the truth, one must emerge from the cave, the walls of which display a false world of appearance, and step into the light of perfect forms, where truth resides. Aristotle went on to offer the first formal definition of truth: the correspondence theory—truth corresponds to reality, external correlations.

Losing a grip on sense data as reality, in medieval thought, religious belief prevailed; Christian, Islamic, and Jewish philosophers blended philosophy with theology in which truth was often identified with the will of God. The early modern period, by contrast, divided along the lines of rationalism and empiricism. Descartes’ *cogito* epitomised the former, grounding truth in the thinking subject, while Locke

and Hume championed observation, measurement, data collection, and experience as the foundations of knowledge. Kant subsequently proposed that truth emerges from the interplay between mind and world: we cannot know things-in-themselves but only appearances structured by our inbuilt categories of perception and cognition. Hegel reimagined truth as a dynamic historical process, the progressing of the human spirit through the joining of opposites, whereas Marx quite differently jumped to materialism as the ultimate truth, the dynamics of production and social conflict, warning against the ills of capitalism with its excess profit.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, philosophers proposed several competing theories to define truth. The traditional correspondence theory held that truth reflects reality, while the coherence theory claimed that truth is found in the consistency within systems of belief. Pragmatic theory, championed by thinkers like James and Dewey, saw truth as what proves useful or effective in practice. In contrast, deflationary or minimalist theories argued that to call a statement true is merely to affirm it, not to add anything beyond the statement itself. Challenging them all, Nietzsche rejected the notion of objective truth altogether, viewing it as a human construct shaped by language, perspective, and power.

In the contemporary landscape, analytic philosophy has pursued truth through the logical analysis of concepts, seeking clarity and logical precision, while Continental thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida recapitulated Nietzsche, questioning the very objectivity of truth, highlighting how power and language shape what we accept as true. Science and artificial intelligence have shifted attention towards models, prediction, and utility, eschewing metaphysical questions altogether. Common sense realism also put in its bid for the truth.

Meanwhile, postmodernism describes our present predicament, the loss of ideas of universal or objective truths, seeing only the operations of power in determining what counts as real, and the importance of the cultural concerns of the individual.

Thus, in this rapid trip through its history, truth has evolved from a metaphysical ideal (Plato), to a logical concept (Aristotle), to a theological principle, medieval thinkers, to the great Germans' systems (Kant and Hegel), to a practical or linguistic construct (modern and postmodern

thinkers). Its definition varies across cultures and disciplines, but truth remains a central concern in our quest to understand reality.

Our cultural heritage

From the birth of ideas and throughout the history of philosophy we have built and developed our minds and humanity: to mention a few, detecting reality from appearance, the need for external correlates, inherent internal perceptual structures, logic, ethics, the influence of dynamic social realities, class struggle, practicality, common sense, the postmodern dilemma, all these are embedded in our contemporary thinking.

Kant (1784) observed that all truth is representation; there cannot be a final word. In the history of thought, we can see that in all the sciences, in philosophy, in the arts, truth is not only represented by empirical facts but by metaphor, analogy, simile, and parable. As we strive towards better representations, each era of philosophical investigation, with its methods and models, has contributed to the cultural richness of human thought that are relevant today. In this age of misinformation, we need not lose, indeed we are inextricably entwined with, the insights and methods from the rich sources of knowledge from our cultural past. Ultimately, the climate of lies and narcissistic fantasies cannot wipe out these truths.

Can we afford to be tribal, living in silos or halls of mirrors, engaging only with the echo of our own beliefs and shutting out the new ideas discovered by our neighbours? Can interest groups or nations afford to exist when treating one another as hostile, disagreeable adversaries? There is a price.

Psychoanalysis also faces these risks: loyalties to particular ideologies or leaders can limit our openness to learning from the wider field.

Psychoanalysis joins with philosophy to supply tools to help us to analyse and understand what's happening in the world. They help us to question our assumptions, recognise the limits of our knowledge, and explore how meaning is created between people.

The chapters in this book offer different perspectives, yet they also demonstrate the value of thinking together. This holds true, whether in clinical work, scientific inquiry, or cultural debate; creative dialogue is the way to understanding and growth.

Psychoanalytic truth

Although Freud did not develop the idea, he wrote of an epistemophilic instinct, an innate drive to know, originating in the sexual curiosity of infancy and childhood, later gradually expanding into scientific and intellectual inquiry. What begins as a derivative of sexuality and scopophilia becomes redirected towards mastery, comprehension, and the pursuit of knowledge (Freud, 1909b, p. 245; 1916–17, pp. 327–328).

Melanie Klein's (1928) adaptation of this was to connect it to the child's curiosity about the inside of the mother's body and having to contend with the attendant aggression and guilt. Wilfred Bion (1965) transformed the concept into K, the desire for knowledge, one of his three drivers of the psyche, along with love and hate. Bion held that the human need for truth is as crucial as the need for the nourishment of food. Building on Klein's thoughts about curiosity and object relations, for Bion, pivotally, the epistemophilic instinct is foundational to the development of thinking: thinking about experience.

Despite his descriptions of instincts (*trebes*), recently retranslated as drives, Freud was a rationalist, writing and testing his theories against rational argument; however, it is also true that Freud was a positivist, arising as he did from a cultural period in Vienna that was infused with logical positivism.

Positivism is a philosophical viewpoint that asserts that genuine knowledge is exclusively derived from empirical observation of clinical phenomena and scientific evidence. Logical positivism holds that meaningful statements must be empirically verifiable by logical necessity, rejecting metaphysical claims as without meaning. Freud was clear that true propositions arise from the clinical situation, from the patient, not imposed by the analyst's theoretical presumptions, lopping off bits of the patient that do not fit the paradigm, a Procrustean Bed. Although he claimed to be an empiricist, his early written case histories often did not show clinical evidence for the theories that he was developing. In the theoretical edifice he was building, it was left to his followers to require clinical evidence to more rigorously substantiate the truth: that is, what is actually going on with the patient as it emerges from the unconscious in the analytic dialogue.

Psychoanalysis has been the target of volumes of criticism from its detractors in attempts to demonstrate that it is neither a natural nor

an empirical science, as it has obstacles that militate against scientific principles: namely the principle of predictability, unable, as it is, to make formulations that cannot be refuted or replicated (Fonagy, 2003). Due to the concept of overdetermination, which Freud used frequently, particularly in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a)—the idea that any given statement, symptom, dream, or action can have multiple underlying threads of meaning—there is ambiguity. That is to say, a single expression can be the result of several unconscious motives, defences, desires, or conflicts converging together, including lies. So how can psychoanalysts do their work of making the unconscious conscious, interpreting unconscious phantasy, without falling short of scientific acceptability?

The rationalist within Freud—and in my view as well—would argue that rational necessity underpins the formulations and interpretations of unconscious content. Within the analytic session, the analyst's accumulated knowledge of the patient, combined with an intense yet freely floating attention to the utterances and behaviours emerging in the here and now of the consulting room, converge to form a field of meaning. This agglomeration of information, with high probability, points towards an unconscious significance that serves as the missing link—the bridge that connects and renders coherent the patient's dilemma, position, or character. Logic dictates that this particular unconscious phantasy or meaning, and no other, is the one indicated at that moment.

Psychoanalysts accept this interpretive anomaly as the generative source of working hypotheses, which can, of course, be refuted by the patient or accepted as clarifying insights that advance the analytic process. Intuition plays a powerful role in this interpretive act, yet it is continually tested against reason and logical consistency. Equally crucial is pattern recognition, one of the most essential capacities an analyst must cultivate, through which the analyst detects recurring motifs or unconscious configurations that organise the patient's psychic life.

In this way, new ideas can emerge directly from the clinical encounter. In the attempt to understand and to break new ground, hypotheses are formed in response to the unfolding material. Joseph Sandler proposed that truth and new ideas originate within the unconscious,

and that the analyst's task is to listen for their emergence. As Sandler (1983, p. 38) suggested, "research should be directed towards making explicit the implicit concepts of practising psychoanalysts. This process may contribute to the development of new ideas and refinements in psychoanalytic theory." He further insisted that "the investigation of the implicit, private theories of clinical psychoanalysis opens a major new door in psychoanalytic research. Exploring these private formulations can lead to innovation and the generation of novel conceptual insights" (Sandler, 1983, p. 39).

From this perspective, we arrive at the crucial conclusion that the single case study is scientifically respectable, verified by eminent researchers such as Skinner (1938), Luria (1968), Allport (1942), and Kazdin (2011), bringing together behavioural and psychoanalytic methodology. The single case study is intrinsic to psychoanalytic tradition, training, theory, and practice, as the bearer of psychoanalytic truth. This view aligns with the broader coherence of psychoanalytic thought in which the detailed case study serves not just as an illustration but as the living ground from which psychoanalytic knowledge grows.

Psychoanalytic truth: The arguments

Apropos of the single case study, Thomas Ogden in Chapter 1 explores the way language shapes and reveals emotional, experiential truth, not only through verbal discourse but also through the breaks, silences, and disjunctions, moments when communication falters or shifts unexpectedly. He identifies three distinct forms of analytic dialogue: direct discourse, tangential discourse, and discourse of non sequiturs, different ways of co-creating experiential truth. Through detailed clinical examples, Ogden shows how language communicates and is the lived emotional process through which truth emerges. He concludes that the analyst and patient "dream" truth into being together through their evolving ways of speaking and listening, turning the analytic encounter into a space where previously unbearable or "unlived" experiences can finally be felt and articulated.

In his theory of truth, Ronald Britton in Chapter 2 proposes we all have shared assumptions, which he describes as *natural belief*, an ordinary, taken-for-granted belief system formed in childhood, that underlies

and shapes how individuals perceive reality; for instance, belief in the existence of the external world, of other minds, or a stable self. As the mind grows, these beliefs, along with a multitude of new phantasies, notions, ideas, thoughts arising from experience, imbued with emotion, form what is called the internal world or psychic reality. Britton conveys his essential work on the Oedipus complex and the development of the “third position”, a mental space from which one can observe and reflect upon experience. When beliefs are taken as facts, the analytic session offers a place where they can be scrutinised and tested for their truth value, revising them when necessary. When beliefs fail the reality test, they must be mourned and relinquished. Importantly, Britton posits a knowledge-drive alongside the drives of love and aggression, a dynamic psychic function that shapes psychic reality.

In Chapter 3, Mark Solms addresses the fundamental question of whether unconscious phantasies genuinely “exist”. Solms maintains that unconscious phantasies are basic mental structures that underpin all thought and emotion, the instinctual drives, and object relations. Whether in symbolic form, non-verbal, or as visual images, all unable to be measured, Solms argues they are no less real, saying that the criterion for existence should be causal efficacy, their ability to shape experience and behaviour. Unconscious phantasies function as dynamic, organising models of internal life, valuable for their explanatory and therapeutic power rather than for their metaphysical status. These hidden unconscious phantasies, if connection can be made, circumvent the ego and its defences, the internal enemies of truth such as projective identification, transference, denial, wishful thinking, turning a blind eye, clinging to hope over evidence. Founded in clinical observation, in the immediacy of the moment, they are real because they matter.

Jorge L. Ahumada’s article, Chapter 4, discusses how the concept of truth has evolved from ancient science and philosophy to modern psychoanalysis. From thinkers such as Pythagoras, Aristotle, and Descartes to modern scientists like Einstein and Poincaré, the concept of truth has moved from absolute universals to recognising the role of intuition, unconscious thought, and fallibility. Ahumada argues that gaining self-awareness goes against our natural tendencies and involves a painful but necessary shift from seeking pleasure to facing reality.

Through observational vignettes of infant behaviour, he shows how the earliest experience gives shape to the infant's life. Ahumada indicates the importance of working through deep, often preverbal emotional realities, requiring us to rethink what we mean by knowing, understanding, and healing in the human mind.

In Chapter 5, David Bell explores the philosophical and psychoanalytic implications of postmodern relativism and the fate of truth in its remit. Bell argues that while postmodernism's critique of authority and absolute truth has merit, its denial of objective truth undermines the foundations of psychoanalysis, which depends on a distinction between reality and illusion. He situates psychoanalysis firmly within the modernist tradition, emphasising its commitment to uncovering deeper realities beneath appearances and its belief that knowledge, though limited, can liberate. Through clinical examples, Bell illustrates how denying objective truth leads to psychological fragmentation and solipsism, and how its prioritising of subjectivity can mask a form of narcissism. In contrast, psychoanalysis acknowledges the painful but necessary struggle towards greater objectivity and self-knowledge. Ultimately, Bell contends that truth—imperfect and provisional though it may be—is indispensable to both psychoanalytic theory and human understanding.

In the context of increasing demands for empirical evidence-based scientific validation within mental health disciplines, Gregorio Kohon in Chapter 6 critically examines the relationship between psychoanalysis and the concept of research. The qualities inherent in psychoanalysis such as indeterminacy, undecidability, overdetermination, and hyper-complexity, Kohon asserts, mean that psychoanalysis, operating as it does within a realm of uncertainty that resists fixed truths or universal conclusions, cannot be an exact science, featuring outcome studies or standardised measurements. He compares psychoanalytic interpretation to a musical performance: improvisational, intuitive, and deeply subjective. But there is no fixed score, and the analyst's role involves creativity, emotional resonance, and responsiveness to each patient's uniqueness. He concludes that psychoanalysis can be studied by examining detailed single cases, with its theory and body of knowledge, as its guide, preserving the distinctive epistemological character of psychoanalysis.

Responding to Kohon's reflections on the uneasy relationship between psychoanalysis and research, Alessandra Lemma in Chapter 7 agrees with Kohon in ascertaining that reliable, repairable truths cannot be supplied by psychoanalysis. She agrees with Kohon's critique of the dominance of scientific paradigms, particularly the privileging of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) as the "gold standard", which is not in a position to grasp the complexity and singularity central to psychoanalytic work. Drawing on her own experience in the NHS during the rise of evidence-based therapy initiatives like Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT), Lemma highlights how research can become an idealised tool that simplifies mental health care for political or economic reasons, ignoring the messy reality of psychic suffering. While she agrees with Kohon's caution against "scientism", nevertheless she believes research remains essential in order to advance psychoanalytic knowledge and accountability. Lemma stresses that single case studies, though valuable for capturing individuality, must be written with methodological rigour to avoid bias, and she points to the possibility of combining psychoanalytic and empirical perspectives in a "space of conjunction", a potential for interdisciplinary dialogue that can enrich both, thus securing the place of psychoanalysis in the wider mental health landscape.

The whole truth and nothing but the truth?

As an advocate of the whole truth, in this encompassing and beautifully written paper, Hanna Segal in Chapter 8 presents a vision of the analytic process that has the ring of truth, that captures the fabric of work in the consulting room. She speaks cogently in favour of Freud's great project of abandoning dogma in the medical world and establishing truth. There is a struggle in every analysis to find what is true about the patient; there are resistances, as the patient fights against the knowledge of unpalatable truths about themselves, such as shame, guilt, hate, greed, selfishness, unwarranted aggression. Finding out what is real although undesirable is an important part of growing up, also in analysis. Often there are cherished beliefs that have been lifelong comforts but at the same time have inhibited growth and development. These must be mourned and relinquished. Omnipotence and delusions must be overcome by reality testing. When there are internal attacks

against knowledge and truth, particularly in angry and aggressive patients, these must be acknowledged and understood. As unwanted parts of the self are revealed, the patient is in a position to choose to face the truth and the possibility of modification. In accepting difficult aspects of one's personality, the reward is greater mental freedom, the capacity to move about in an expanded mind.

In Chapter 9, John Steiner explores the parallels between psychoanalysis and classical drama, using Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* and Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* in order to exemplify how denial, illusion, and avoidance can maintain a false but comforting status quo until the truth emerges and comfort collapses. To find the truth, he argues that both analysts and audiences need to navigate a dual role: emotionally engaged participants and detached observers. The ironic stance, Steiner suggests, allows acknowledgement of both the need for illusions and the harshness, sometimes unbearable, of truth. Through these plays, Steiner illustrates how the determined pursuit of truth, without empathy or timing, can lead to tragedy. While truth is essential in psychoanalysis, it must be tempered with kindness, empathy, and self-reflection. Irony allows for this balance, helping analysts avoid the rigidity, allowing a compassionate balance between confronting reality and sensitivity to the patient's capacity to bear it.

In Chapter 10, Elias da Rocha Barros explores in a vivid and stirring paper the impact of trauma on the individual's psychic life and how this can be ameliorated. Whether the trauma is physical or emotional, it profoundly affects, damages, and partly destroys the mind; it affects the capacity to symbolise and integrate experiences, creating a "hole of vulnerability". It metastasises, it operates like a psychic sepsis, diminishing the will to live, with a sense of home and belonging lost. When trauma remains unrepresented there will be repetitive suffering. Trauma can only be metabolised when given meaning and place, time, and a narrative frame. The author makes an important shift in focus, away from the original traumatic event, to memories, dreams, linked events, re-significations, and related emotional experiences. Da Rocha Barros presents two fascinating case studies that show the work on metabolisation; truth is not presented to the patient by the analyst but is co-constructed in a shared emotional experience.

Sara Collins in Chapter 11 argues that Freud's later work marks a shift from viewing analytic reconstruction as the recovery of an objectively knowable past to understanding it as a matter of psychological probability. Freud's early archaeological metaphor suggested that analysts could piece together fragments of memory like pottery shards to reveal a true childhood history, but he gradually recognised that memory is unreliable and that objective proof is mostly unattainable. Collins points out that Freud's reflections in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939a) demonstrate this transition, relying not on factual certainty but on "psychological probabilities". She proposes that contemporary psychoanalysis should move away from the pursuit of historical truth and instead embrace authenticity, an account of the past that is emotionally credible and emerges within the analytic relationship. In this view, change occurs not through uncovering factual events but through the co-creation of meanings that feel real, coherent, and transformative for the patient. Two case studies are presented.

The particularity of truth

Guiseppe Civitarese in Chapter 12 examines Bion's unconventional concept of truth in an extra-moral, emotional, and intersubjective sense. Civitarese explains that for Bion, truth is not a factual proposition but a form of emotional nourishment essential for psychic growth. Lies, correspondingly, are not always moral failures but defensive operations that block contact with emotional reality. Bion's ideas such as *truth as food for the mind*, *thoughts without a thinker*, and the centrality of "O", ultimate being, challenge positivist views of the mind. Clinically, Bion shifts the focus from detecting factual truth to the development of the capacity to think. Post-Bionian analytic field theory radicalises this further, bringing in the "we" of a shared emotional field, instead of individual statements by analyst and patient. Civitarese shows that Bion offers a profoundly non-moralistic, intersubjective, and dynamic vision of truth that reshapes psychoanalytic theory and technique.

In his Chapter 13, Eran Rolnik writes movingly about the experience of practising psychoanalysis in the midst of political upheaval and threats towards freedom of thought, arguing that analytic practice

cannot be insulated from political reality. Rolnik traces a historical lineage from Freud's advice to Ferenczi to contemporary debates about neutrality, showing how psychoanalysts have long grappled with authoritarian pressures and the temptation to withdraw from politics. Drawing on both theory and personal testimony from Israel amid democratic backsliding, Rolnik demonstrates how threats to democracy undermine not only public institutions but also the analytic setting, constraining free association, truth-seeking, and psychic integrity. He proposes that psychoanalysis and democracy are parallel projects of *parrhesia*, fearless truth-telling, that mutually reinforce one another, and that analysts must acknowledge the political conditions that shape mental life and their own capacity to think and work freely.

David Howell Morgan in Chapter 14 explores the profound relationship between poetry and psychoanalysis, arguing that both disciplines serve as gateways to unconscious truth. Drawing on Freud, Bion, Winnicott, and a range of poets like Heaney, Lorca, and Hughes, Howell Morgan contends that poetry has often anticipated psychoanalytic insight, accessing the unconscious through metaphor, symbol, and tone in ways that psychoanalysis later attempts to name and structure. A capacity for engaging with the complex and a deep respect for metaphor as the voice of the unconscious are at its heart. The access to unconscious truths through metaphor, ambiguity, and form rather than direct explanation is illustrated in clinical vignettes in which patients speak in metaphor, revealing the analyst's task as one of listening, holding, and waiting rather than explaining. Symbolic imagination is vital to both poetry and analysis; both require patience, openness to uncertainty, and a reverence for what remains unsaid.

In the context around untruth in the child sexual abuse scandal, Christopher Bollas in Chapter 15 begins by reflecting on the rise of questionable abuse allegations in the 1970s and 80s, when inexperienced therapists and social pressure led to a wave of false memories and exaggerated claims of childhood abuse. Drawing on Freud's theory of deferred trauma, when genuine traumatic shock is experienced belatedly after cognition matures, the author emphasises that trauma often manifests later in life, triggered by seemingly unrelated events, and can be difficult to differentiate from individuals who genuinely struggle with true traumatic memories. "False memories" can become

self-reinforcing narratives, a form of self-traumatisation, where the individual perpetuates their suffering through identification with victimhood. This process of identification with the life of another is illustrated through a case study, illustrating what Bollas names as *appropriative identification*, as an extreme form of *pathological envy*: individuals unconsciously “steal” others’ identities, qualities, and social worlds, amounting to psychological identity theft. This process can be convincing on the surface but is, at its core, a *deluded invasion*, a destructive fusion, taking over the other’s individuality, and demands careful clinical handling.

In Chapter 16, Jean Arundale writes of the link between truth and freedom: the desire for personal and social freedom is universal and ageless. However, at the present time, these social freedoms are threatened and require protection in the face of political movements towards autocracy. Personal, internal freedom is equally threatened by living within false narratives and inauthenticity. This chapter explores the vital importance of facing truth in both the public discourse and the internal world. Defensive refusal to recognise psychic truth can limit or enslave the individual. Insights into personal truth, achieved through the psychoanalytic method, it is argued, facilitate emotional and intellectual freedom and development. Citing the theories of Bion, Freud, Segal, Civitarese, and Klein, Arundale contends that psychoanalysis also proposes to free the mind from undue psychic suffering, promoting thinking, authenticity and self-determination, the freedom to speak out, and for the patient to be unafraid of things as they are. Arundale provides material from two analytic patients whose encounters with unconscious truth were liberating.

End note to the Introduction

Seeking truth is not only a fascinating pursuit in itself but also a vital instinct for the survival of democracy and civilisation, enabling discovery and progress. Orwell’s 1984 warned of a world where the very concept of objective truth could be erased under authoritarian rule—are we moving towards such a reality? How can we preserve a mindset grounded in truth that has external correlates and evidence-based foundations? We need people who can fearlessly stand up and articulate the truth.

Truth possesses a beauty of its own, its elegance reflects authenticity and integrity, with the power to transform both inner and collective realities. Debate and argument are indispensable means of finding truth when differences arise among people or schools of thought. Psychoanalysis, in particular, offers a unique model for thinking and working together. Truth arises in any field when serious discussion takes place to find it.

This question of which psychoanalytic theories best represent truth of the mind was at the heart of the book *The Freud–Klein Controversies 1941–45* by Pearl King and Riccardo Steiner (1991). The Controversial Discussions were a prolonged series of meetings of the British Psychoanalytical Society between 1942 and 1944, when the Viennese school led by Anna Freud and the followers of Melanie Klein debated fundamental theoretical divisions. Such conflicts are inevitable where differing models coexist, yet they also mark the vitality of a living science.

The Discussions ended on a note of tolerance while still maintaining a need to debate differences, alongside an agreement to share equally in the tasks of training and governing the society. Riccardo Steiner (2025) reminds us of the concluding words of Klein:

As long as this Society has any claim to be called a scientific society there must be disagreement ... though it need not be embittered by personal animosity. A scientific society is a group of people who are seeking to discover new truths, not a group who are resting content at any stage in the search for knowledge ... (King & Steiner, 1991, p. 204)

Further to this, Marjorie Brierley, who played a mediating role in the debate, wrote in 1942:

Scientific truth can never be absolute because hypotheses are formulated in the light of contemporary knowledge. In consequence, as knowledge grows, older hypotheses become inadequate and have to be revised, expanded, or reformulated to contain new facts ... a continuous process of adaptation of theory to continually expanding facts. (Brierley, 1942, quoted by Steiner, 2025, p. 669)

This book presents efforts to reveal truth, not final and immutable but as hypotheses, formulations, and insights that are the best attainable at the time, open to debate, to be tested, developed, disagreed with, or refuted.

After the wildest beauty in the world,
For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something had been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold ...

Wilfred Owen, "Strange meeting" (1919)

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