

SPECIAL REVIEW

A. GRÜNBAUM: *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis. A Philosophical Critique*. Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, Calif. (1984). xiv + 310 pages. £13.95; \$16.95.

Psychologists, like most scientists, are somewhat impatient with philosophers who attempt to investigate what they are doing, and perhaps even tell them what they may be doing wrong and where they depart from the true path of scientific investigation. By and large this distrust is probably justified. Many philosophers have not taken the trouble to become really familiar with the science about which they pontificate, and what they have to say often strikes the practising scientist as irrelevant, obscurantist or sometimes even foolish.

No such reaction would be justified to Professor Grünbaum's new book. In his previous work he has been a commentator and critic of modern physics, and it could hardly be said that in this capacity he neglected his homework. Similarly, in now coming to grips with the pretensions of psychoanalysis, he clearly has read practically everything that would be relevant to his task, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that he probably knows more about the Freudian opus than do most psychoanalysts.

Again, philosophers do undoubtedly have something to contribute to science, be it only their ability to use logic in an impartial way, and to analyse the many linguistic and other problems that arise in a particular methodological or fundamental position. E. Erwin has been an excellent critic of behaviour therapy, along these lines, and Grünbaum has provided us with an absolutely essential critique of psychoanalysis. Let no one be put off by the fact that this book is written by a philosopher. It goes to the roots of psychoanalysis in a manner which other philosophers, such as B. A. Farrell in his book on *The Standing of Psychoanalysis*, have tried to do, but have conspicuously failed to achieve. What, then, are the points Grünbaum has concentrated on? In the first instance, he dismisses (quite rightly) a criticism of psychoanalysis originally proposed by Karl Popper, namely that as a theory it is not falsifiable. Falsifiability as a criterion of the demarcation between science and pseudo-science has been very popular, even among scientists, but it clearly breaks down in precisely those instances which Popper himself adduces as examples of pseudo-science, namely psychoanalysis, Marxism and astrology. All three, he maintains, are not falsifiable, and are therefore pseudo-sciences. Clearly Popper has not bothered to do his homework. All three disciplines abound in falsifiable predictions, and indeed a great number of these have in fact been falsified. In my book (with David Nias) *Astrology—Science or Superstition?* I have listed a large number of astrological predictions, and the experiments which were done in order to test them. Similarly, Marx certainly made a variety of predictions based on his theory, such as that the revolution would break out in the most advanced, rather than the least advanced countries, and that war was a consequence of the capitalist system, and would not exist between socialist states. The fact that these predictions were made, and are testable, hardly suffices to make Marxism and astrology into sciences. Popper was right in calling them pseudo-sciences, but for the wrong reason. They are pseudo-sciences, as is psychoanalysis, on grounds already laid down by Sir Francis Bacon whose stress on induction was misunderstood and badly misrepresented by Popper. Grünbaum succeeds in redressing the balance, and shows that while psychoanalysis is scientific on Popper's criteria, it fails to be so on Bacon's! In view of the popularity of Popper's criterion, this clarification is in itself a worthwhile endeavour.

Another criticism of Freud which is dismissed by Grünbaum is that of the hermeneuticians, such as Habermas, Ricoeur and Klein. As Grünbaum points out,

"their proposed philosophical reconstruction of the clinical theory rests on a mythic exegesis of Freud's own perennial notion of scientificity. And, of-a-piece with this contrived reading, their paradigm of the natural sciences is wildly anachronistic".

At the end of his criticism, Grünbaum makes the following comment:

"Flawed as Freud's own arguments will turn out to be in the succeeding chapters, their caliber will be seen to be astronomically higher, and their often brilliant content incomparably more instructive, than the gloss and the animadversions of Freud's hermeneutic critics, who so patronizingly chide him for scientism. So much for their unjustified demand that we abjure the very standards of validation by which Freud himself wanted his theory to be judged."

All this criticism is well-taken. Freud at least tried to be scientific; the hermeneutic philosophers would strip him of this virtue, and indeed declare it to be a vice! This is absurd, and Grünbaum shows it to be so.

Grünbaum next turns to what is the most essential part of his critique, in a chapter entitled "Did Freud Vindicate His Method of Clinical Investigation?" Grünbaum's argument, in brief, is that "Freud gave a cardinal epistemological defense of the psychoanalytic use of clinical investigation that seems to have hitherto gone entirely unnoticed". This pivotal defence Grünbaum entitles 'the Tally Argument', and on it Freud based five claims, each of which is of the first importance for the legitimation of the central parts of his theory. These five claims are stated by Grünbaum in the following manner:

- (1) Denial of an irremediable epistemic contamination of clinical data by suggestion.
- (2) Affirmation of a crucial difference, in regard to the *dynamics* of therapy, between psychoanalytic treatment and all rival therapies that actually operate entirely by suggestion.
- (3) Assertion that the psychoanalytic method is able to validate its major causal claims—such as its specific sexual etiologies of the various psychoneuroses—by essentially *retrospective* methods without vitiating by *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, and without the burdens of prospective studies employing the controls of experimental enquiry.
- (4) Contention that favourable therapeutic outcome can be warrantably attributed to psychoanalytic intervention *without* statistical comparisons pertaining to the results from untreated control groups.

- (5) Avowal that, once a patient's motivations are no longer distorted or hidden by repressed conflicts, credence can rightly be given to his or her introspective self-observations, because these data then do supply probatively significant information.

It is impossible, even in an extended review like this, to state the details of the tally argument, or its brilliant dismemberment by Grünbaum. No brief statement can do justice to Freud's careful arguments, or to Grünbaum's careful destruction of these arguments. This chapter alone demonstrates clearly the difference in understanding, insight and critical sense between the usual run of Freudian supporters and critics, on the one hand, and Grünbaum, on the other. Few of his earlier supporters or critics have been properly aware of the problem that Freud tried to tackle, or have been able to see through his attempts to the inevitable failure which they encounter. As an example, take the demonstration by Grünbaum that therapeutic success plays the pivotal role in the tally argument. It is for this reason that I have always insisted on the vital importance that therapeutic failure of the psychoanalytic method has for the Freudian theory. Followers of Freud, including philosophers like Farrell, have usually insisted that therapeutic failure does not necessarily impugn the Freudian theory; Grünbaum makes it clear that this is quite untrue, even on Freud's own showing. This chapter alone demonstrates how valuable a philosopher's logical method of reasoning can be in a complex scientific field, such as is constituted by Freud's arguments for psychoanalysis. The chapter is an intellectual delight to read, and hopefully will be an educative experience for followers and critics of Freud alike.

The next part of the book is entitled "The Cornerstone of the Psychoanalytic Edifice: Is the Freudian Theory of Repression Well-founded?" This part is more empirically oriented, and constitutes a masterly dismemberment of the widespread belief that there is empirical evidence for Freud's theory of repression. Again the chapters constituting this disproof must be read in detail because no summary could do justice to the logic of the argument. Whether it will convince psychoanalysts themselves, of course, must remain doubtful; they have not in the past been found too receptive as far as criticism, however justified, or logical analysis, however destructive, of their prophet's work is concerned. It is difficult to see how an impartial scientist, reading these pages, could retain any faith in the psychoanalytic belief in the theory of repression.

The last part of the book, simply entitled "Epilogue", consists of three chapters dealing variously with the method of free association, a critique of Freud's final defence of the probative value of data from the couch, and Karl Popper's indictment of the clinical validation of psychoanalysis. Interesting as these are, they are a slightly disappointing ending to a brilliant book which might have ended on a more constructive note, or with some generalizations of far-reaching import. Judging by their subject matter, these three chapters could have been incorporated in the earlier parts, leaving the epilogue to be of rather more general impact and interest. It is not that the reader is likely to disagree with their content, but rather that they are of more specific and less general importance than the preceding two parts, and hence ill-suited to constitute an epilogue. However, let us be grateful for small mercies and enjoy the sight of a razor-sharp intellect at work on these topics.

Judging the book as a whole, I would say it is the most important discussion of the topic to be found in the literature. As the subtitle makes clear, it is 'a philosophical critique' of the foundations of psychoanalysis, and as such rather different from the kind of critique that experimental psychologists are wont to make, although it does often refer to their empirical work. Clearly only a philosopher could have written it, and equally clearly something of the kind was needed to answer the many claims made by modern psychoanalysts who are unhappy with the kind of empirical work that has done so much to discredit their discipline. With remorseless logic Grünbaum destroys their arguments, shows them to be logically defective or factually empty, and leaves them nowhere to hide their nakedness. The whole book can be read by anyone familiar with psychoanalysis, but without any specialized philosophical knowledge. It is an admirable book that spells the end of psychoanalytic pretensions. Readers of this journal who may have occasion to debate issues such as these with psychiatric colleagues are well advised to arm themselves with the arguments presented by Grünbaum: they will not find any better elsewhere!

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References

- Eysenck H. J. and Nias D. K. B. (1982) *Astrology—Science or Superstition?* Temple Smith, London.
Farrell B. A. (1981) *The Standing of Psychoanalysis*. OUP, Oxford.