

Psychoanalysis: The Controversy Behind Freud's Legacy

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Both Freud and psychoanalysis have been criticized in very extreme terms. Exchanges between critics and defenders of psychoanalysis have often been so heated that they have come to be characterized as the Freud Wars. Karl Popper argued that psychoanalysis is a pseudoscience because its claims are not testable and cannot be refuted; that is, they are not falsifiable. For example, if a client's reaction was not consistent with the psychosexual theory then an alternate explanation would be given (e.g. defense mechanisms, reaction formation). Karl Kraus, an Austrian satirist, was the subject of a book written by noted libertarian author Thomas Szasz. The book *Anti-Freud: Karl Kraus's Criticism of Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry*, originally published under the name *Karl Kraus and the Soul Doctors*, portrayed Kraus as a harsh critic of Sigmund Freud and of psychoanalysis in general. Other commentators, such as Edward Timms, author of *Karl Kraus - Apocalyptic Satirist*, have argued that Kraus respected Freud, though with reservations about the application of some of his theories, and that his views were far less black-and-white than Szasz suggests.

Grünbaum argues that psychoanalytic based theories are falsifiable, but that the causal claims of psychoanalysis are unsupported by the available clinical evidence. Other schools of psychology have produced alternative methods for psychotherapy, including behavior therapy, cognitive therapy, Gestalt therapy and person-centered psychotherapy. Hans Eysenck determined that improvement was no greater than spontaneous remission. Between two-thirds and three-fourths of "neurotics" would recover naturally; this was no different from therapy clients. Prioleau, Murdock, Brody reviewed several therapy-outcome studies and determined that psychotherapy is not different from placebo controls.

Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, as a sociological analysis without meaning to criticize, claimed that the institution of psychoanalysis has become a center of power and that its confessional techniques resemble the Christian tradition. Strong criticism of certain forms of psychoanalysis is offered by psychoanalytical theorists. Jacques Lacan criticized the emphasis of some American and British psychoanalytical traditions on what he has viewed as the suggestion of imaginary "causes" for symptoms, and recommended the return to Freud. Together with Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari criticised the Oedipal structure. Luce Irigaray criticised psychoanalysis, employing Jacques Derrida's concept of phallogocentrism to describe the exclusion of the woman from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theories.

Due to the wide variety of psychoanalytic theories, varying schools of psychoanalysis often internally criticize each other. One consequence is that some critics offer criticism of specific ideas present only in one or more theories, rather than in all of psychoanalysis while not rejecting other premises of psychoanalysis. Defenders of psychoanalysis argue that many critics (such as feminist critics of Freud) have attempted to offer criticisms of psychoanalysis that were in fact only criticisms of specific ideas present only in one or more theories, rather than in all of psychoanalysis. As the psychoanalytic researcher Drew Westen puts it, Critics have typically

focused on a version of psychoanalytic theory--circa 1920 at best--that few contemporary analysts find compelling. In so doing, however, they have set the terms of the public debate and have led many analysts, I believe mistakenly, down an indefensible path of trying to defend a 75 to 100-year-old version of a theory and therapy that has changed substantially since Freud laid its foundations at the turn of the century." A further consideration with respect to cost is that in circumstances when lower cost treatment is provided to the patient as the analyst is funded by the government, then psychoanalytic treatment occurs at the expense other forms of more effective treatment.

Freud's psychoanalysis was criticized by his wife, Martha. René Laforgue reported Martha Freud saying, "I must admit that if I did not realize how seriously my husband takes his treatments, I should think that psychoanalysis is a form of pornography." To Martha there was something vulgar about psychoanalysis, and she dissociated herself from it. According to Marie Bonaparte, Martha was upset with her husband's work and his treatment of sexuality.

Charges of Fascism

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in their 1972 work *Anti-Œdipus*, take the cases of Gérard Mendel, Bela Grunberger and Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, prominent members of the most respected associations (IPa), to suggest that, traditionally, psychoanalysis enthusiastically embraces a police state:

" As to those who refuse to be oedipalized in one form or another, at one end or the other in the treatment, the psychoanalyst is there to call the asylum or the police for help. The police on our side!--never did psychoanalysis better display its taste for supporting the movement of social repression, and for participating in it with enthusiasm. notice of the dominant tone in the most respected associations: consider Dr. Mendel and the Drs Stéphane, the state of fury that is theirs, and their literally police-like appeal at the thought that someone might try to escape the Oedipal dragnet. Oedipus is one of those things that becomes all the more dangerous the less people believe in it; then the cops are there to replace the high priests. "

Dr. Bela Grunberger and Dr. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel were two psychoanalysts from the Paris section of the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPa). In November 1968, disguising themselves under the pseudonym André Stéphane, they published *L'univers Contestationnaire*, in which they assumed that the left-wing rioters of May 68 were totalitarian stalinists, and psychoanalyzed them saying that they were affected by a sordid infantilism caught up in an Oedipal revolt against the Father.

Notably Lacan, mentioned this book with great disdain. While Grunberger and Chasseguet-Smirgel were still disguised under the pseudonym, Lacan remarked that for sure none of the authors belonged to his school, as none would debase themselves to such low drivel. The IPa analysts

responded accusing the Lacan school of "intellectual terrorism". Gérard Mendel, had instead published *La révolte contre le père* (1968) and *Pour décoloniser l'enfant* (1971).

Scientific Criticism

Peter Medawar, an immunologist, said in 1975 that psychoanalysis is the "most stupendous intellectual confidence trick of the twentieth century". Early critics of psychoanalysis believed that its theories were based too little on quantitative and experimental research, and too much on the clinical case study method. Some even accused Freud of fabrication, most famously in the case of Anna O. (Borch-Jacobsen 1996). An increasing amount of empirical research from academic psychologists and psychiatrists has begun to address this criticism. A survey of scientific research suggested that while personality traits corresponding to Freud's oral, anal, Oedipal, and genital phases can be observed, they do not necessarily manifest as stages in the development of children. These studies also have not confirmed that such traits in adults result from childhood experiences (Fisher & Greenberg, 1977, p. 399). However, these stages should not be viewed as crucial to modern psychoanalysis. What is crucial to modern psychoanalytic theory and practice is the power of the unconscious and the transference phenomenon.

The idea of "unconscious" is contested because human behavior can be observed while human mental activity has to be inferred. However, the unconscious is now a popular topic of study in the fields of experimental and social psychology (e.g., implicit attitude measures, fMRI, and PET scans, and other indirect tests). The idea of unconscious, and the transference phenomenon, have been widely researched and, it is claimed, validated in the fields of cognitive psychology and social psychology (Westen & Gabbard 2002), though a Freudian interpretation of unconscious mental activity is not held by the majority of cognitive psychologists. Recent developments in neuroscience have resulted in one side arguing that it has provided a biological basis for unconscious emotional processing in line with psychoanalytic theory i.e., neuropsychology (Westen & Gabbard 2002), while the other side argues that such findings make psychoanalytic theory obsolete and irrelevant.

E. Fuller Torrey, writing in *Witchdoctors and Psychiatrists* (1986), stated that psychoanalytic theories have no more scientific basis than the theories of traditional native healers, "witchdoctors" or modern "cult" alternatives such as est. Some scientists regard psychoanalysis as a pseudoscience. Frank Cioffi, author of *Freud and the Question of Pseudoscience*, cites false claims of a sound scientific verification of the theory and its elements as the strongest basis for classifying the work of Freud and his school as pseudoscience. Among philosophers, Karl Popper argued that Freud's theory of the unconscious was not falsifiable and therefore not scientific. Popper did not object to the idea that some mental processes could be unconscious but to investigations of the mind that were not falsifiable. In other words, if it were possible to connect every conceivable experimental outcome with Freud's theory of the unconscious mind, then no experiment could refute the theory. Noam Chomsky has also criticized psychoanalysis for lacking a

scientific basis.

Mario Bunge, an epistemologist from McGill University, Canada, says that the psychoanalysis is pseudoscience, mostly because of its lack of coherence or correspondence with other well-established branches of science, like neurology, neurophysiology and psychiatry.

Some proponents of psychoanalysis suggest that its concepts and theories are more akin to those found in the humanities than those proper to the physical and biological/medical sciences, though Freud himself tried to base his clinical formulations on a hypothetical neurophysiology of energy transformations. For example, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur argued that psychoanalysis can be considered a type of textual interpretation or hermeneutics. Like cultural critics and literary scholars, Ricoeur contended, psychoanalysts spend their time interpreting the nuances of language -- the language of their patients. Ricoeur claimed that psychoanalysis emphasizes the polyvocal or many-voiced qualities of language, focusing on utterances that mean more than one thing. Ricoeur classified psychoanalysis as a hermeneutics of suspicion. By this he meant that psychoanalysis searches for deception in language, and thereby destabilizes our usual reliance on clear, obvious meanings. Supporting criticism regarding the validity of psychoanalytic therapeutic technique, numerous outcome studies have shown that its efficacy is related to the quality of the therapist, rather than the psychoanalytic school or technique or training, while a French 2004 report from INSERM (Study removed by decision of the French Health Minister Douste-Blazy), says instead, that psychoanalysis therapy is far less effective than other psychotherapies (among which Cognitive behavioral therapy).

Theoretical Criticism

Some theoretical criticism of psychoanalysis is based on the argument that it is over simplistic and reductive, because it reduces everything to the idea that we are all driven by our sexuality and does not take into consideration other factors. For example: class, political ideology, ecosystem or even spirituality. People like the Freudo-Marxist Wilhelm Reich redress this, as does Carl Gustav Jung by factoring in economic and political factors (such as relationship to the means of production in the case of Reich), culture and ideas like the paranormal in the case of Jung respectively. However, there is no clean break between the theories of Freud and Jung. For example, Jung's theories on alchemy as externalized individuation were rooted in Freud's ideas on projection but factored in culture and spiritual teachings. Psychoanalysts have often complained about the significant lack of theoretical agreement among analysts of different schools. Many authors have attempted to integrate the various theories, with limited success. However, with the publication of the Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual much of this lack of cohesion has been resolved.

Jacques Derrida incorporated aspects of psychoanalytic theory into deconstruction in order to question what he called the 'metaphysics of presence'. Freud's insistence, in the first chapter of *The Ego and the Id*, that philosophers will recoil from his theory of the unconscious is clearly a

forbear to Derrida's understanding of metaphysical 'self-presence'. Derrida also turns some of these ideas against Freud, to reveal tensions and contradictions in his work. These tensions are the conditions upon which Freud's work can operate. For example, although Freud defines religion and metaphysics as displacements of the identification with the father in the resolution of the Oedipal complex, Derrida insists in *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* that the prominence of the father in Freud's own analysis is itself indebted to the prominence given to the father in Western metaphysics and theology since Plato. Thus Derrida thinks that even though Freud remains within a theologico-metaphysical tradition of "phallogocentrism", Freud nonetheless criticizes that tradition.

The purpose of Derrida's analysis is not to refute Freud, which would only reaffirm traditional metaphysics, but to reveal an undecidability at the heart of his project. This deconstruction of Freud casts doubt upon the possibility of delimiting psychoanalysis as a rigorous science. Yet it celebrates the side of Freud which emphasises the open-ended and improvisatory nature of psychoanalysis, and its methodical and ethical demand that the testimony of the analysand should be given prominence in the practice of analysis. Psychoanalysis, or at least the dominant version of it, has been denounced as patriarchal or phallogocentric by some proponents of feminist theory. Other feminist scholars have argued that Freud opened up society to female sexuality, with French feminism based on psychoanalysis.

Some post-colonialists argue that psychoanalysis imposes a white, European model of human development on those without European heritage, hence they will argue Freud's theories are a form or instrument of intellectual imperialism.

Freud's psychology based analysis of Michelangelo's Moses has received attention from several critics. Some critics have an appreciation for Freud's interpretation because of the popularity of his psychoanalytical theories. Some find that his psychological approach is a unique way to analyze a piece of art. Others find his analysis flawed based on Biblical references.