

A RESPONSE TO GRÜNBAUM'S REFUTATION OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Jon Mills, PsyD, PhD, ABPP

Toronto Society for Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Trent University

Adolf Grünbaum has been a staunch critic of psychoanalysis for over three decades. The general thrust of his attacks are unwavering in content and focus and regurgitate the redundant point that psychoanalysis is not a true science. I wish to offer a modest defense of psychoanalysis as a human science and argue that Grünbaum commits a category mistake in comparing psychoanalysis with the physical sciences, thus he upholds a standard of scientific inquiry that cannot be applied to our field. As a philosopher, he furthermore lacks a proper epistemology of knowing how to appropriately evaluate the validity of clinical data and focuses on select aspects of Freudian theory he uses as a straw man to unjustly refute the whole discipline of psychoanalysis itself.

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Some investigators . . . who are unwilling to accept the unconscious, find a way out of the difficulty in the fact that . . . in consciousness . . . it is possible to distinguish a great variety of gradations in intensity or clarity. . . . The reference to gradations of clarity in consciousness is in no way conclusive and has no more evidential value than such analogous statements as: "There are so very many gradations in illumination—from the most glaring and dazzling light to the dimmest glimmer—therefore there is no such thing as darkness at all," or "There are varying degrees of vitality, therefore there is no such thing as death." Such statements may in a certain way have a meaning, but for practical purposes they are worthless. This will be seen if one tries to draw particular conclusions from them, such as, "there is therefore no need to strike a light," or, "therefore all organisms are immortal." Further, to include "what is unobservable" under the concept of "what is conscious" is simply to play havoc with the one and only piece of direct and certain knowledge that we have about the mind. And after all, a consciousness of which one knows nothing seems to me a good deal more absurd than something mental that is unconscious. Freud (1923/1961, fn, p. 16).

Adolf Grünbaum may arguably be psychoanalysis' most tenacious critic. What sets him apart from other critics such as Frederick Crews, however, is that he has more substance, breadth, and sophistication to his critiques. Analysts reading his most recent contribution

Jon Mills, PsyD, PhD, ABPP, Toronto Society for Contemporary Psychoanalysis; Department of Psychology, Trent University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jon Mills, PsyD, PhD, ABPP, 1104 Shoal Point Road, Ajax ON L1S 1E2, Canada. E-mail: jmills@processpsychology.com

to this journal (see Grünbaum, 2006) may likely become immediately defensive, derisive, and provoked by his wholesale dismissal of our profession. Perhaps this was part of Grünbaum's intent given that he customarily writes as a polemicist with a dramatic flare of negation. The broad structure of his essay is to first put in their place everyone who challenges him or has disagreed with his work in the past, only to quote his numerous publications to establish his unquestionable authority. He then proceeds to denounce key aspects of Freudian theory with obsessive scrutiny, only to conclude that there is no scientific credibility to psychoanalysis whatsoever.

When all is said and done, after reading through his article, one is left with the overall conclusion that: "There is not one damn shred of scientific evidence to psychoanalysis—period." How does an analyst begin to respond other than reactively denounce his propositions as preposterous? There is a cornucopia of empirical evidence in the cognitive neurosciences, attachment field, infant-observation research, developmental psychology, clinical psychopathology, and the therapeutic process that are corroborations, validations, extensions, revisions, and emendations of Freud's contributions, work Grünbaum chooses not to mention or engage in this context. He also chooses not to mention the modifications and radical shifts in theory and practice since Freud's time. Given that he is thoroughly familiar with the history of psychoanalysis, it is surprising that in an anniversary issue of this journal devoted to Freud's legacy that he would further omit any substantial discussion with regard to the broad spectrum of theoretical orientations and traditions that have emerged from Freud's work and comprise the psychoanalytic domain. Notwithstanding the empirical (hence scientific) research that has emerged in psychoanalysis since Freud's time, Grünbaum remains focused on Freud and stays very close the text.

We could offer a lengthy bibliography pointing to the scientific merit of Freud's theories and therapy, but admittedly this would fail to address Grünbaum's arguments, and I imagine he would draw into question the validity of that database anyway. Regardless, his arguments should be taken very seriously and addressed through scholarly inquiry if our profession wishes to continue to advance, but I am not inclined to engage him on this tedious level given the limited nature of this forum. Here I will confine myself to a few remarks. What I hope to offer for reflection is how Grünbaum's understanding of psychoanalysis (1) is skewed, (2) lacks a proper epistemology from within the framework of clinical practice, and (3) is based on a misguided application of natural science to the behavioral and social sciences, as well as the humanities, where psychoanalysis is said to have its proper home.

Grünbaum's critique is notably intimidating and erudite, and likely to be overwhelming to those not learned in his discipline. There is a logical acumen to his specific criticisms despite his blanket generalizations and categorical abnegation of Freud's theoretical corpus. But there is also an overall straw man to his sweeping dismissal: by ruminating on the minutia of specific aspects of Freud's theories, he generates the false impression that the whole Freudian edifice is precarious, when Grünbaum is actually focusing on a select set of problematics and then making an unwarranted generalization—as if his criticisms debunk the entire body of psychoanalytic knowledge and practice.

Grünbaum has led us to believe that Freudian theory and technique is essentially bankrupt despite the fact that Freud is arguably the father of modern day psychotherapy and psychiatry. It may prove useful to recall that Freud was the principal person to establish and articulate the basic technical principles of psychotherapy, including establishing rapport with patients, forming a therapeutic alliance, pointing out defenses and compromises in the service of resistance, self-protection, and repetition, forming an

authentic manner of relatedness with patients, examining the transference, interpreting unconscious wishes and conflicts, and reaching the affect as part of the working-through process. Freud formulated a broad edifice of normative human psychology and psychopathology upon which clinical diagnoses still largely rest today, and introduced what is generally considered to be the most complex theory of mind and human nature that rivals any competing school of psychology. Psychoanalysis has infiltrated academe throughout the world, particularly in the humanities and behavioral sciences, not to mention the fact that many psychoanalytic concepts are an indelible part of popular culture. No small feat indeed. Then what are we to make of such a totalistic refutation of a discipline that has not only survived over a century of evolution and fine-tuning, but in many remarkable ways holds prominence in many parts of the contemporary world?

It is important for the readership of this journal to understand the particular philosophical tradition that Grünbaum is coming from along with his imported biases, and how this shapes the context of his overall critique. Grünbaum represents a very conservative perspective known as philosophy of science that is closely identified with the analytic tradition, here the term “analytic” meaning the Anglo American philosophical tradition where the gold standard of logic, argument and clarity, and scientific methodology corners the market on truth and objectivity. This tradition is often opposed to the European Continental tradition of philosophy where the nature of subjectivity and culture is both celebrated and deconstructed from within competing contexts of individual experience, society, and linguistic order. These camps often, but not always, have an adversarial relationship, and when certain theoretical differences pose fundamental incompatibilities, we may observe an extreme splitting between each side that is acrimonious and caustic. The structure and tenor of Grünbaum’s critique clearly points to his cherished identifications with the school he wishes to champion; and he equally conveys an air of superiority that goes along with the analytic tradition’s collective group narcissism. Grünbaum disfavors Continental perspectives and is quick to dismiss or devalue hermeneutic, phenomenological, and postmodern interpretations. He unabashedly has his own agenda and mission, which does not mean that it is not inherently invalid; however, one needs to be aware of the contentiousness and competition that exists between these two broad divisions in philosophy.

Grünbaum pulls no punches in attempting to discredit the notion of repression, a dynamic unconscious, the nature of transference, and the free associative therapeutic process. The corollary of his implications is that dynamic mental processes such as unconscious conflicts, relational patterns of repetition, and defensive maneuvers do not actually occur. For any practitioner reading Grünbaum’s critique, one may question whether he knows anything about clinical practice or what actually transpires in the consulting room when one person is suffering and seeking relief from disabling symptoms through analytic treatment. Grünbaum is aware and knowledgeable of what clinicians and analysts do, but he does not have first-hand epistemic experience or direct phenomenological engagement with patients, thus his impression of clinical work is bound to be incomplete at best and inaccurate at worse. This is understandable given that he is not a practitioner, but it is important to stress that he misrepresents and at times distorts what goes on in actual clinical practice. Clinical experience, namely, what it actually means to work with patients—annuls his propositional attitudes.

Just as he reproaches psychoanalysis on its epistemological failures, he himself has certain epistemological vulnerabilities by virtue of the fact that he is not a practicing clinician. This does not debunk his criticism a fortiori, but only alerts us to his framework of operating conceptually and without professional knowledge of clinical phenomenology.

Such vulnerabilities compromise his self-imposed authority and his ability to have a full-range of experience where the nuances of verbal and nonverbal disclosure, content and context, affect and emotion, symptom formation, cognitive appraisals, and personal history are ostensibly intertwined into a comprehensive framework of dynamic formulation that properly typifies analytic conceptuality. He is confined only to the written text—his subject of analysis—not the real agency of the person on the couch or the intersubjective system that constitutes the analytic dyad. In order to properly critique a method, here the method of psychoanalysis, one should be thoroughly familiar with its procedural operations. Reading Freud's technique papers and clinical case studies is far removed from actually being formally trained, not to mention how one can easily get a skewed picture of what actually goes on in contemporary practice.

It goes without saying that the internal motives of an individual's mind is of most interest to psychoanalysts. It is natural to wonder why Grünbaum would spend most of his professional career refuting a discipline unless he felt a personal identification with the need to refute something in himself he finds unsavory. It is not illegitimate per se to consider these variables when assessing the merit of Grünbaum's argumentation, only that it would be in poor taste and unnecessarily ad hominem to pursue this line of thinking any further. Let us stay on philosophical ground.

Grünbaum is a philosopher of science and is not a scientist. He has certain ideals and assumptions that don't apply to those actual scientists who conduct empirical work. He does not actually engage in experimentation. Like many philosophers of science, he operates under a theoretical ideal of what science should be like rather than how it is actually conducted. He presumably has some illusion that pure objectivity can be achieved through rigorous control of experimental methods, when even the most hard-core natural scientists like experimental physicists would denounce this assumption. In his introduction to Richard Feynman's (1995) book on the elementary principles of physics, Paul Davies writes:

There is a popular misconception that science is an impersonal, dispassionate, and thoroughly objective enterprise. Whereas most other human activities are dominated by fashions, fads, and personalities, science is supposed to be constrained by agreed upon rules of procedure and rigorous tests. It is the results that count, not the people who produce them.

This is, of course, manifest nonsense. Science is a people-driven activity like all human endeavor, and just as subject to fashion and whim. In this case fashion is set not so much by choice of subject matter, but by the way scientists think about the world. (p. ix)

Science is as much a subjective enterprise as is psychoanalysis.

For Grünbaum, science presumably follows a methodology based on experimentation, verification, and falsifiability of any given theory guiding procedural principles. Following Kuhn and others, if these principles do not apply, then any field of study is not a true science. Given that one cannot directly observe and measure unconscious mental processes by virtue of the fact that they do not appear in-themselves to the human eye to be directly observed, controlled, manipulated, and quantifiably measured, then by extension, according to Grünbaum, psychoanalysis does not fit the bill. His entire argument revolves around the notion that psychoanalysis fails as a science—as he defines it. But is he not committing a category mistake on what constitutes science, hence failing to take into account variances and differential modes of inquiry, hypothesis generation and testing, data collection, and differential aspects of procedural self-definition? To me he appears to apply a very rigid definition of what he believes constitutes science and the nature of the empirical. For example, he is wed to the notion that true science can only be experimental

in nature. In fact I would say that he presents a rather skewed picture not only of what genuine scientists define as science but also that which constitutes the varieties of scientific activity. Grünbaum privileges a certain ideal, presumably under the rubric of pure objectivity, a biased proposition to begin with that begs the question of a legitimate discourse on theory and method.

In actual psychoanalytic practice, the clinician is not concerned about a statistical spread-sheet based on a so-called “carefully controlled” study where sample populations and control groups are employed, each of which are manipulated by factorial designs. For those of us who have actually engaged in empirical research, we all know how easy it is to manipulate control variables and data in order to get statistically significant results so as to promote our own preferred theories. Factorial manipulation allows us to manufacture data—it does not observe every condition that impacts on or determines such data. An empirical study is only confined to the particular—not the “objective” universal. We make theoretical leaps of faith when treading in those waters. In the consulting room, however, what is both the particular and the universal is the individual patient. The notion of objective science often becomes meaningless, superfluous, or irrelevant for the clinician in the moment of engaging the analysand with his own psychic reality.

In psychoanalysis, what is scientifically germane is that particular patient’s internal experience in relation to his life history, current phenomenology, and attitude toward the relationship with the analyst where the only statistically pertinent sample is ($N = 1$). As Paul Verhaeghe (2004) alerts us: “there is no precise unity of measurement for anxiety, for neurosis, and other states. This is the classic problem of reliability and validity . . . Consequently, the results still require interpretation, and it is at this point that the experimental field proper is left behind” (p. 14). By insisting that psychoanalysis conform to a superimposed ideal of natural science fails to properly understand that the study of human subjectivity cannot be sufficiently reduced to such a unit of measurement. And even if it were possible to provide a unity of measurement, let us say of neurosis, it would have to be compared to some ideal normative standard or criteria of non-neurosis or normalcy—itself an impossibility. And even if for argument’s sake such a pristine standard existed, the scientist would still be subjectively interpreting his object(ive)—whether verifiable, falsifiable, or not. Although Freud heralded that psychoanalysis was a natural science, in his day the distinctions within the sciences did not exist as they do now. In light of this fact, Bowman (2002) argues that these antiquated and misapplied notions of physical science and biology under the seduction of positivism serve as a fortified defense against accepting psychoanalysis as a scientific endeavor. I would further argue that this rigid identification with the so-called “correct” version of science has become an ideology taken over by a false consciousness designed to maintain a pretense of superiority over the humanities. Grünbaum’s fundamental argument that psychoanalysis fails as a science rests on a category mistake by virtue of the fact that psychoanalysis cannot be legitimately compared to other hard sciences where clear-cut distinctions of objective criteria correspond to a pure or ideal state, norm, mutually exclusive category, or unalterable point of reference where quantification of measurement is related to an unadulterated and nontransformable standard. In the human sciences, none exists.

Grünbaum seems to be preoccupied with debunking psychoanalysis on the matter of causality, especially on the nature and operations of unconscious motivation. In fact, he is invested in seeing Freud only as a causalist to the point that any other interpretation or application of his theories are deemed illegitimate. For example, not only does he reproach psychoanalysis as pseudoscience, he further fails to give credence to psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic discipline. Does theory of interpretation not bear some relevance to our

trade? When Freud uses the language of causality, he is attempting to isolate the elementary processes that give rise to unconscious mental events. He is not addressing the philosophical problem of causality per se, but instead is addressing a clinical audience accustomed to using a vernacular that attempts to delineate and mark the course of antecedent events that are presumably received, processed, and mediated by mind, which then become catalysts for transformative mental action. This is what Freud meant by psychic determinism. Is not Grünbaum aware of the fact that for Freud, and for the whole field of psychoanalysis, psychic life is overdetermined? Freud was indispensably instrumental in irrefutably showing us how mind is governed by many competing causal forces that operate simultaneously and on stratified levels of dynamic activity and complexity. In fact, any attempt at causal explanations are necessarily subject to the same limitations Grünbaum uses against psychoanalysis for the simple fact that causality is overdetermined and interdependent on a complex host of contextual relations.

Grünbaum is quick to negate Freud for importing causal claims in his arguments, but Grünbaum also makes causal attributions himself. In vilifying Freud's theory of repression, Grünbaum (2006) states: "I claim that *factors different from their painfulness determine whether they are remembered or forgotten*. For example, personality dispositions or situational variables may in fact be causally relevant" (p. 267, italics in original). Notice Grünbaum uses the signifiers "determine" and "causally" to promote his global and embarrassingly vague thesis that character traits or environmental conditions are primary factors of causation. But of course they are, an obvious point to most of us. At least Freud attempts to account for how those forces come into being to begin with and are operative within the individual psyche; and in turn, how intrapsychic dynamics are necessarily social and relational. Furthermore, how they are indeed collectively embedded and realized historically and culturally. Perhaps Professor Grünbaum would be inclined to tell us how "personality dispositions" and "situational variables" are ultimately caused? Then, in applying the same criteria of science he uses to negate Freud, would he be so kind to tell us: How do you know?

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