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# CAN PSYCHOANALYSIS SURVIVE?

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*If you ask me, the answer can be yes, if the psychoanalysts show a readiness to submit their discipline to the sink or swim ordeal of scientific evaluation. Unfortunately since the days of Freud, Psychoanalysts have been refusing to play by the ordinary rules of scientific theory building by ignoring or rather rejecting any evidence that demonstrates the unfoundedness of its proposition and treating them as irrelevant. Referring to the rigid and uncompromising attitude of psychoanalysts Crew (1988) observes "Like other faiths, Freudianism readily rebounds when confronted with seemingly fatal objections, for its believers have rendered it inseparable from their private sense of spiritual vitality and worth".*

Theories are said to open new vistas of knowledge and on this count psychoanalytic generalizations can justifiably be called a theory of human behaviour. It is a fact that Psychoanalytic idea has probably had as great an impact upon our times as Darwin's theory had upon his. No aspect of human behaviour and no area of modern thought has remained untouched or unaffected by Freudian conception of human nature. But the impact or popularity of an idea can not be taken as a proof of its scientific validity or truthfulness. There is a certain established procedure of theory construction which is followed both by natural and social scientists.

Briefly speaking objectivity, observation, hypothesis formation and revision by further observation of facts are the basic principles or pillars on which the scientific method of theory construction rests and any deviation from these principles has never been tolerated by the scientific community. The application of these principles requires that the accumulation of data must precede the development of a theory. When sufficient data have been accumulated the scientist should organize and analyze this data and try to bring some order to the observed phenomena, note the regularities and express these in the form of tentative generalizations or hypothesis. Then he should test these hypothesis by further observation and arrange the tested

comprehend that which escaped their attention previously. It is also considered essential that the researcher in his eagerness to prove his theory should not distort or ignore the data which are abberent to the theory and should show a willingness to revise and modify it when necessary. In the words of Lesse (1968) "The essence of scientific method is its dynamic self correcting nature".

Using the criteria set out above, even the most tolerant judge will hesitate to term psychoanalysis a science. This has always been so. The academic community with its commitment to scientific methodology has always viewed psychoanalysis unfavourably. I am hesitant to quote what Watson, the founder of Behaviouristic movement said about Freudian theory, because I am inclined to think that Waston was no less extremist and rigid than Freud and he also committed some of those follies (though to a lesser extent than Freud)which Freud committed. But when realistically oriented, objective and neutral judges and some of the former students of psychoanalysis point out the weaknesses and drawbacks of Freudian theory, one feels compelled to take note of them. Not only this, when empirical evidence and logic of scientific method fail to verify and support Freudian position one is left with no other option but to take them seriously.

Lest you may conclude prematurely that I am determined to criticize and reject every thing that has a "construed by Freud stamp on it" let me clarify that I have great respect for Freud's intuitive genius, his keen observation power, his creativity and the knack he had at expressing his ideas in a coherent and logical manner. Further, I have no hesitation to admit that Freud opened new vistas of knowledge by identifying aspects of man's behaviour which were hidden from the psychologists' attention and some of these concepts if used judiciously can contribute immensely to our understanding of human behaviour.

His emphasis upon the study of the individual as living whole, the importance of intentions and desires in determining and directing human behaviour and the role of early life experiences in personality formation are some of his important and revolutionary contributions that justify him a place in the list of great thinkers. But as I have stated earlier the originality, impact or popularity is not a measure of a theory's scientific validity. As it stands today, there is considerable evidence that psychoanalytic ideas contain serious errors and in the presence of such impressive evidence one finds it difficult to accord scientific status to Psychoanalysis.

A survey of literature on Psychoanalysis reveals that renowned authorities have raised a number of serious questions concerning psychoanalysis. It is not possible for me to discuss all these questions because such an exercise will require a full length monograph. Hence, here, I will deal only with the most crucial issues. Since the very beginning psychoanalysis has been criticized on the ground that in its formulation Freud has neglected or rather violated the cannons of Scientific Method. (Jastrow 1948, Crew 1988, Holt 1989m Kardinar 1966, Spence 1989, Hilgard 1966). To quote Holt (1989)"Psychoanalytic theorizing is a set of undefined theoretical terms of vague meaning that are linked loosely by a largely metaphorical rehetoric so that one is never sure just what is being asserted. This kind of theory does not generate testable propositions, the bits of wisdom and insight it undeniably contains are confusingly mixed together with large amount of dross".

In order to appreciate the implications and significance of the above mentioned quotation one must bear in mind that Freud was basically a clinician who observed certain characteristic behaviour pattern in his neurotic patients and formulated certain assumptions to explain these feature. These assumptions were later on integrated into system or theory and they now form the core postulates of Psychoanalytic theory. One might wonder that if this is how the theory was formulated how can he be accused of violating the cannons of scientific method? But when one notes that these assumptions are based on the analysis of a few disturbed cases, one begins to doubt the scientific validity of these assumptions, especially when these are claimed to be applicable on normal healthy human beings, despite indications that empirical evidence in support of this claim is hard to find (Erwin, 1988).

In order to explain what I mean by violation or neglect of the cannons of scientific method, I refer to the concept of "dynamic unconscious" and its processes, especially "repression". The Freudian unconscious is a hypothetical construct---- having no directly observable existence. To quote Freud, "We call a psychical process unconscious whose existence we are obliged to assume---for some such reasons as we infer it from its effect--- but of which we know nothing. In order to explain a slip of tongue, for instance, we find ourselves obliged to assume that the intention to make a particular remark was present in the subject. We infer it with certainty from the interference with the remark which has occurred, but the intention did not put itself through and was thus unconscious" (Freud 1933, p.102). But when one asks Psychoanalysts how did Freud read from what was observable to what was subjective and hidden? They present evidence collected through free association and dream analysis.

In view of the fact that evidence was collected in a "reactive" way --- inferred from what transpired (in the form of a dialogue) between the patients and analyst in the consultation room, its scientific validity is any body's guess. This issue assumes extraordinary significance when one notes that in his writings Freud has suggested that the analyst should act in authoritarian manner and must insist that the patient recalls the cause of a symptom. He expressed the hope that the analyst's technique will cause "thoughts to emerge which the patient never recognizes as his own and which he never remembers". (Freud 1985). Thus, it can be argued that Freud's method of investigation--- a method in which a patient's unconscious mind is explored by free association by an analyst who insists that he knows the patient's mind better than the patient, could lead to false results because the pressure of an authoritarian therapist can create a desire in the patient to please him by fabricating recollections and/or accepting interpretations forced on him by the therapist. Referring to this Waterhouse (1940) comments that "Freudian analysis is like a "Third-degree" police examination which would make the patient ready to agree to any theory thrust upon him" (p.8).

Many years ago Vaihinger cautioned against the irresponsible use of hypothetical constructs because, this practice can lead to "as if" type of explanations. In the same vain William James called the tendency to reduce one set of phenomenon to another, as "nothing but" explanations. A critical examination of Freud's method of theory building reveals that Freud has made use of "as if" and "nothing but" construction rather generously. Thus, Freud, has argued that Neurotic symptoms, dreams and slips occur "as if" there are complexes, repressions etc and that these repressions and complexes, etc are "nothing but" sexual in nature.

As it stands today, neither Freud nor any of his followers has been able to produce objective validation criteria by means of which the basic tenets of psychoanalysis could be independently evaluated by a neutral judge. Unless such a criteria is developed "the extent to which the analysts" interpretation actually causes its own confirmation through its suggestive power will remain unknown" (Frosh, 1989) and psychoanalysis will continue to be regarded as "junks shop psychology (Oosgood, 1956) by academic psychologists.

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