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DO I DREAM OR AM I A DESKTOP?
FROM THE PROBATIVE VALUE OF FREE ASSOCIATIONS
TO A NEW SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATION OF PSYCHOANALYSIS
INSIDE THE NEUROSCIENCES

Abstract

The author describes the strongholds of Grünbaum's critique of psychoanalysis starting from the dispute with Popper apropos of his use of psychoanalytic theory as an example for the falsification concept in the demarcation of science from pseudo-science. While in Popper's opinion psychoanalysis is clearly a pseudo-science qua not eligible for any falsification, Grünbaum has a different view. He demonstrates, through his "tally argument" that psychoanalytic theory is falsifiable and so, it can be considered a science following Popper's idea.

On the other hand Grünbaum develops different convincing examples leading to the same conclusion: if psychoanalysis possesses the epistemological structure of a science it is certainly a science not in good health. From this specific topic Grünbaum challenges Popper on his field giving a central role to eliminative inductivism as a reliable method to evaluate psychoanalysis compared to Popper's falsification concept, especially when considering the key problem of free associations as the main evidential support for psychoanalytic theory till now.

Further theoretical developments of psychoanalysis do not seem to strengthen its fragile foundations, since they all rely on intra-clinical methods of evaluation, mainly on the probative value of free associations, which Grünbaum considers insufficient as a scientific criterion of confirmation.

So, psychoanalysis may be considered one of the many psychotherapies available, exercising a therapeutic effect on certain conditions of illness but by virtue of its incidental factors, common to other techniques of treatment, as the emotional support given to the patient combined with the attempt made by the analyst to reach a causal reconstruction of the patient's illness. If so, the different developments of psychoanalytic theory have been not more than attempts to offer individual explanations more suitable to the needs of the patients than to the epistemological demands posed by Grünbaum's critique.

It is now time that psychoanalysis may be comprised again in the mainstream of neuropsychological research, side by side with other different therapeutic approaches based on the individual relationship between a therapist and his/her patient, in order to understand what really happens "on the couch".

