

PATRICIA KITCHER, *Freud's Dream: A Complete Interdisciplinary Science of Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (1992), x + 245 pp., \$24.95 (cloth).

Over the last two decades a series of important books have reshaped thinking about Freud and psychoanalysis. These revisionist works have attacked both the validity and scientific status of Freud's psychoanalytic claims. More than anyone else, H. Ellenberger inaugurated this general reassessment of Freud's theories with his monumental *Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970). In a historical tour de force, Ellenberger showed how deeply indebted Freud was to his nineteenth-century predecessors in dynamic psychiatry. Freud emerges from Ellenberger's history as a mere child of his times. Ellenberger's compelling historical tapestry went a long way toward dispelling the powerful mystique of the "Freud legend."

It took Freud watchers almost a decade to digest Ellenberger's message and to put it to further scholarly use. When this second wave of reappraisals finally began, it did so with a vengeance. One of the first efforts in this new wave of criticisms was my own *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (Sulloway 1979). Flawed biological assumptions, I argued, lay at the heart of Freud's psychoanalytic claims. My historical critique was soon followed by many able treatments that exploded the pretensions of psychoanalysis from a wide variety of perspectives. Most notable among these revisionist analyses are Grünbaum's *Foundations of Psychoanalysis* (1984), Eysenck's *Decline and Fall of the Freudian Empire* (1985), Crews's *Skeptical Engagements* (1986), and Hobson's *Dreaming Brain* (1988). Even this impressive list omits many important contributions to the critical chorus against Freudian theory. One might wonder what more could possibly be added to this torrent of negative assessment.

In *Freud's Dream*, Kitcher offers a stunning contribution to this on-going intellectual fray. Her argument is at once original, penetrating, and decisive. Indeed, her reasoning is so straightforward, and so obviously true, that it is a wonder that no one articulated it sooner. One reason for the wait is that Kitcher's powerful insights depend on the various critiques that have emerged during the previous decade. Her central thesis is that Freud was an *interdisciplinary* theorist, a circumstance that is crucial, she maintains, to understanding the merits and demerits of psychoanalysis. Kitcher builds her case with painstaking diligence, surveying Freud's intellectual debts to neurophysiology, evolutionary biology, sexology, and a variety of social science fields such as linguistics and anthropology. Freud's synthetic vision was remarkable, Kitcher demonstrates, and this interdisciplinary breadth constituted much of his undeniable appeal.

Freud's talents as an interdisciplinary theorist, Kitcher elaborates, contained the seeds of his destruction. By tying his claims about the mind/brain to so many different disciplines, Freud's eclectic approach "made his theories hostage to unfavorable developments in other fields" (p. 63). In other words, Freud placed too many speculative bets on too many dubious horses. With the passage of time, most of Freud's once promising steeds have turned out to be disappointing nags. Neither Freud nor his followers were willing to acknowledge these injudicious wagers or to revise their theories accordingly. Instead, psychoanalysts consistently welshed on their speculative bets. Kitcher sees a warning in this story for other interdisciplinary theorists, particularly those now flourishing in computational psychology.

Kitcher begins her powerful critique with a reassessment of Freud's controversial metapsychological assumptions. Based on notions that were once current in neurophysiology, Freud conceived of the mind as a sophisticated reflex arc. The task of the brain, like that of single neurons, was to discharge energy (a process that Freud dubbed the "pleasure principle"). Freud's theories of dreaming and neurotic symptom formation were both firmly rooted in this neurophysiological tradition, which was dominant in the 1890s. Alas, Freud's key assumptions were badly mistaken because the mind is highly integrated and does not function like a single neuron. Even single neurons do not behave in the simplistic manner Freud posited.

Given the obvious shortcomings of Freud's metapsychology, psychoanalysts have tried to separate the "clinical" from the metapsychological aspects of Freud's theorizing. As Kitcher convincingly explains, this tactic misrepresents Freud's theories and leaves them

without an adequate conceptual foundation. One of Kitcher's original contributions to this debate is her argument that Freud endorsed metapsychology as a general "directive", and that he was open in principle to revisions when it came to the neurophysiological details. Unfortunately, these details were so intricately woven into the fabric of Freud's clinical reasoning that their abandonment proved impractical.

Kitcher repeatedly identifies a tendency toward circular reasoning in Freud's interdisciplinary arguments. For example, Freud "extrapolated the action of the individual neurons to the entire system" (p. 160). He then took clinical evidence as confirmation of these neurophysiological assumptions. This evidence was constructed, however, in order to fit Freud's metapsychological assumptions, so whatever consilience emerged in the process was spurious. Similarly, Kitcher observes about Freud's libido theory: "He did not predict a physiological discovery; he presumed it and constructed his theory around it" (p. 168). Freud then took clinical evidence as proof of these controversial assumptions. The situation with dreaming is no different. Numerous assumptions drawn from sexology allowed Freud to interpret dreams in an orthodox psychoanalytic manner. Naturally, such interpretations then bolstered his faith in sexology.

By the 1920s many of Freud's fundamental premises about the mind were under attack by specialists in the fields from which Freud had borrowed these ideas. He reacted with a variety of rhetorical devices, claiming, for example, that these assumptions were only "working hypotheses" and that they could easily be revised, or even discarded altogether. When confronted with expert opinion on such key issues as Lamarckian inheritance, Freud revealed his true colors. In 1938 he wrote, "I must, however, in all modesty confess that . . . I cannot do without this fact in biological evolution". Indeed, Freud was deeply dependent on Lamarckian assumptions, which underlay his unique claims about psychosexual development.

What ultimately doomed Freud's interdisciplinary dream? Kitcher identifies a variety of impediments that kept Freud from accepting fundamental changes to his theories. Age was a factor. By the early 1920s Freud was almost seventy. Like many older scientists, he was not particularly responsive to intellectual change. Freud also possessed a natural tendency to trust in theories drawn from outside his own sphere of expertise. Psychoanalytic education created another serious problem. With its highly privatized training methods, Freud's dogmatic professional organization strongly reinforced his movement's isolation from the rest of science. Ultimately, Kitcher argues, psychoanalysts lost touch with scientific reality and hence with their interdisciplinary responsibilities.

It is instructive to compare Kitcher's arguments with Grünbaum's (1984, 1993) influential critiques of Freudian theory. As Kitcher notes, Grünbaum tends to minimize the role of metapsychological assumptions in Freud's theorizing, concentrating instead on "the evidence from the couch". More than anyone else, Grünbaum has exposed many serious flaws in Freud's clinical arguments, especially Freud's claims about pathological repression. Still, such important criticisms fail to address the main source of Freud's errors. The principal failings of psychoanalysis are not clinical but *extraclinical*. As a clinician, Freud extracted psychoanalytic meaning from thought and behavior by means of his various metapsychological assumptions. The very basis of Freudian "interpretation" was rooted in these assumptions and could not proceed far without them. In short, from Kitcher's interdisciplinary perspective, concentrating on the faults in Freud's clinical arguments runs the danger of overlooking the psychoanalytic forest for the trees. Given Freud's extensive interdisciplinary errors, the whole Freudian forest is irreparably blighted. The time when a good tree surgeon might have helped is long since past.

For all of the power of Kitcher's argument, one sometimes gets the feeling that she builds Freud up simply in order to knock him down. Kitcher's frequent resort to double negatives in describing Freud's interdisciplinary flights of fancy is symptomatic of this strategy. Freud's speculative hypotheses are said to have been "hardly frivolous" and "not unreasonable", and Freud's appeal to metapsychology is described as "no vice." Similarly, some of Freud's most dubious notions are acknowledged to be "speculative, but not wildly so." Such measured appraisals serve a purpose. They allow Kitcher to grant legitimacy to Freud's interdisciplinary strategy until relatively late in life, when the flaws in his working

hypotheses finally became evident. Freud's ultimate failure, according to Kitcher, was in not responding seriously to these scientific challenges.

In my view, Freud's failings date from the earliest years of psychoanalysis and reside in his day-to-day behavior as a scientist. Freud's reckless attitude toward disconfirming evidence during his waning years was nothing new. For more than four decades Freud rarely paid sufficient attention to contradictory evidence, even from his own patients. Some of his patients, like the famous Wolf Man, were appalled by Freud's constant twisting of the facts to suit his theoretical needs. Indeed, Freud was deeply enamored with a series of arbitrary and unreliable methods, such as free association and the symbolic interpretation of dreams, precisely because they allowed him to confirm his favorite hypotheses.

Ultimately Freud failed because he was a lousy scientist, not because he engaged in interdisciplinary theorizing. Darwin was nearly as interdisciplinary as Freud, but he conducted himself with exemplary scientific caution every step of the way. Unlike Freud, Darwin did not wait until his last few years to face the music. Darwin dealt with contradictory evidence day by day with a conscientiousness that made him physically ill from worry.

Still, Kitcher has hit on something very important in her trenchant critique of Freud's speculative enterprise. What she describes as Freud's "tremendous overconfidence" as an interdisciplinary theorist guaranteed that, when he *did* fail, he failed *big*—on a level with Aristotle and Ptolemy rather than Mesmer or Gall. More clearly than ever before, Kitcher's perceptive analysis of Freud's thinking allows us to understand the true source of his scientific shortcomings. For this reason, her book constitutes the single best account of why psychoanalysis has failed so resoundingly as a theory of the mind. *Frank J. Sulloway, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.*

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