## Psychoanalysis

### AT: Falsifiable

#### **It is falsifiable – their indicts rely on factual errors and academic abuse that ignore randomized controlled trials, follow-up studies, control groups, and neuroscience – 54 leaders in the science field vote neg**

Target and Hopkins 10 (Mary Target PhD - Professor of Psychoanalysis at University College London, Professional Director of the Anna Freud Centre, and Clinical Associate Professor in the Yale University School of Medicine, Jim Hopkins - Visiting Professor at UCL and Reader Emeritus in Philosophy at King's College London and Kohut Visiting Professor of Social Thought at the University of Chicago, “On psychoanalysis”,NewScientist, 27 October 2010, <https://www.newscientist.com/letter/dn19567-on-psychoanalysis/>, MG s/o EMuse)

We were disappointed by Mario Bunge’s piece on the scientific status of psychoanalysis (2 October, p 22). As a senior philosopher of science, he could have offered interesting arguments, but instead he founded his criticism of the discipline on **factual errors.**

Psychoanalysis has developed greatly since Freud’s time, producing substantial research and productive connections to other branches of science. Many basic psychoanalytic propositions have been **widely accepted**, such as the formative impact of early childhood relationships on adult personality. Some of Freud’s specific propositions have been eclipsed by later formulations – as you would expect for bodies of knowledge evolving for more than a century, and certainly for any science. The basic idea of a dynamic unconscious that actively shapes conscious experience and relations with others has made **productive connections with disciplines such as neuroscience**.

Psychoanalysts have been testing the outcomes of psychoanalytic therapies for decades, using **randomised controlled trials and systematic follow-up studies**, as called for by Bunge in his article. Most trials have found good evidence of the effectiveness of psychoanalytic therapies, when tested in the same way as other approaches. Contrary to Bunge’s assertion, studies included in Jonathan Shedler’s review of meta-analyses of therapeutic outcomes of psychoanalytic therapy did, of course, **have control groups** (American Psychologist, vol 65, p 98).

The **54 signatories to this letter include distinguished researchers in psychoanalysis in the science faculties of leading world universities**, who have acquired major public grants and have published papers in high-impact, peer-reviewed scientific journals. This level of scientific contribution compares very well with that in other clinical professions.

Readers expect contributors to their debates to be informed as to the facts, and scientific progress requires a respect for evidence. In this spirit we respectfully offer some facts to reassure those concerned by Bunge’s entertaining jibes.

Full list of signatories:

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From Jim Hopkins, department of philosophy, King’s College London, and research department of clinical, educational and health psychology, University College London

Anyone inclined to credit Bunge’s claim that psychoanalysts are “foreign to the scientific community” should consider **examples**. The psychoanalyst John Bowlby founded the burgeoning field of attachment research partly to test hypotheses inspired by psychoanalysis about the role of parents.

The psychoanalyst Mark Solms has contributed to the neuroscience of dreaming with research indicating that REM sleep and dreaming are dissociable, and that dreams are caused not by the REM mechanisms themselves but by basic motivational systems which are common to all mammals and which arguably form the core of emotion and emotional experience in human beings.

Programmes linking psychoanalysis and neuroscience were initiated by analysts **20 years ago**, and the journal Neuropsychoanalysis was established in 1999 with an editorial board including leading neuroscientists, cognitive scientists and psychoanalysts. For the past 10 years there have been yearly conferences at which neuroscientists and psychoanalysts have presented research and discussed areas of overlapping interest (video proceedings and other information available at neuropsa.org.uk/npsa).

Psychoanalytic journals publish contributions involving psychoanalysts and neuroscientists. Leaders in neurophysiological research on depression have recently put forward an explicitly Freudian model in the **Annals of General Psychiatry** (vol 7, p 9). This year in Brain, neuroscientists Karl Friston and Robin Carhart-Harris undertake to “demonstrate consistencies between key Freudian ideas and recent perspectives on global brain function that have emerged in imaging and theoretical neuroscience” to show “construct validity” for Freudian concepts and enable “dialogue between psychoanalysts and neurobiologists” (vol 133, p 1265).

Such collaboration may, of course, contradict rather than confirm psychoanalytic hypotheses, but **it is enough to falsify** Bunge’s claim that psychoanalysis should be seen as pseudoscience. Or rather, it would be enough, if Bunge’s claim itself were subject to evidence, rather than **abuse masquerading as philosophy.**