

DISCUSSIONS

THE SEVEN STRATEGIES OF THE SOPHISTICATED PSEUDO-SCIENTIST: A LOOK INTO FREUD'S RHETORICAL TOOL BOX

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SUMMARY. In my 'Seven Sins of Pseudo-Science' (*Journal for General Philosophy of Science* 1993) I argued against Grünbaum that Freud commits all Seven Sins of Pseudo-Science. Yet how does Freud manage to fool many people, including such a sophisticated person as Grünbaum? My answer is that Freud is a *sophisticated* pseudo-scientist, using all Seven Strategies of the Sophisticated Pseudo-Scientist to keep up appearances, to wit, (1) the Humble Empiricist, (2) the Severe Selfcriticism, (3) the Unbiased Me, (4) the Striking but Irrelevant Example, (5) the Proof Given Elsewhere, (6) the Favorable Compromise, and (7) the Display of Methodological Sophistication. One should note that not all strategies are disreputable in themselves. But all are used very cunningly so as to hide weaknesses in Freud's arguments. To be fair, quite a few of his methodological remarks are sophisticated enough. As Freud combines these sophisticated remarks with an appalling methodology in practice, I call him a sophisticated pseudo-scientist. I do not claim that these rhetorical strategies are specific to him.

Key words: pseudo-science, rhetorical strategies, humble empiricism, sophisticated pseudo-scientist, Freud

INTRODUCTION

Not long ago it was common knowledge in most Anglo-Saxon circles that Freud was a pseudo-scientist, and that Popper had made clear why: Freud did not meet Popper's demarcation criterion of falsifiability.¹

The general problems with the demarcation problem are well-known. And as far as Freud's theory is concerned, Popper is just wrong. Grünbaum convincingly argued that Freud's theories are widely open to criticism² and that Freud was acutely aware of the methodological importance of falsifiability.³ Actually Freud himself occasionally revised his theories in



the light of unfavorable evidence.⁴ So it is almost undeniable⁵ that Freud's theory is falsifiable. That is, Freud's theory is not a pseudo-science according to Popper's criterion. So perhaps Grünbaum is right after all: rather than being a pseudo-scientist, Freud was a sophisticated methodologist who has not been given a fair treatment.

Grünbaum hinges his case mainly on the so-called Tally Argument, an argument whose crucial importance he was the first to realize, so he claimed. 'The epistemological considerations that prompted Freud to enunciate his Tally Argument make him a sophisticated methodologist' (1984, p. 128).⁶ However we should ask whether the Tally Argument is actually so sophisticated, – assuming that Freud used it? In my (1992) I argued that the Tally Argument is not: it is no more than an application of a common medical model, and it possesses the sophistication of present-day evangelists.

So is Freud a pseudo-scientist after all? In my 'Seven Sins of Pseudo-Science' (1993) I argued that he commits all Seven Sins of Pseudo-Science. But how could someone with such sophisticated remarks, such confessed respect for empirical matters be a pseudo-scientist? We should realize that a pseudo-scientist will try to act like a real scientist. This is what he aims to be, or at least pretends to be. And so he may well succeed in keeping up appearances.

Yet how does Freud manage to fool many people, including such a sophisticated person as Grünbaum? My answer is that Freud is a sophisticated pseudo-scientist, using all Seven Strategies of the Sophisticated Pseudo-Scientist to keep up appearances. One should note that some of the strategies are disreputable indeed. For instance, giving irrelevant examples and unreliable references and offering dishonest compromises are shocking in themselves. Yet on the other hand, several other strategies, such as stressing that one is a humble empiricist, being severely self-critical, and demonstrating one's lack of bias, are in themselves quite respectable. So it is not that they lack respect that makes Freud's use of these latter strategies reproachable; it is his reproachable use of them.

To be fair, quite a few of his methodological remarks are sophisticated enough. As Freud combines these sophisticated remarks with an appalling methodology in practice, I call him a sophisticated pseudo-scientist. Here I present his Seven Strategies of the Sophisticated Pseudo-Scientist. I do not, of course, claim that these *rhetorical strategies* are specific to him. My claim is that Freud wields them all the time in an effort to convince the reader of the scientific status of his theories.