

BOOK REVIEW

PHILOSOPHY, WHAT PHILOSOPHY?

The Freud Wars: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis. By Lavinia Gomez. Hove, East Sussex: Routledge, 2005, pb ix + 210pp., £17.99.

In the mid-1990s, the *New York Review of Books* was home to an extended attack on the credentials of psychoanalysis by Frederick Crews, based in large part on the work of Adolph Grunbaum. Crews' writing drew responses from quite a number of others, notably Thomas Nagel. A decade on, Lavinia Gomez uses this debate to discuss the nature of psychoanalysis, comparing Grunbaum and Nagel against each other and against Jurgen Habermas, and ending up with a discussion of the links between the mental and the physical. This book is described as a 'fascinating introduction to philosophical thinking on psychoanalysis . . .'

It certainly has a few fascinating features. Of its 178 pages of text, excluding glossary, index and bibliography, only 106 are actually by Gomez. The remainder consists of reproductions of work by the three authors she is considering. This enables her, when arguing against Grunbaum, never actually to give any extended account of the position she is arguing against, presumably because we can read it for ourselves if we're interested. It also means that for that full account of what her opponent thinks, we have to wait until she's given her refutation, unless we read the book out of order. When discussing

Nagel, she gives a brief outline of his position but rather than discuss those views she is actually more concerned with the arguments that Grunbaum and Nagel make with each other, leaving the reader even more to search around for her subject matter. Habermas gets a slightly clearer run than Nagel, but the problem is still the same.

Grunbaum held that psychoanalysis could be judged against standard scientific criteria and be shown to fail, Nagel that it was a science but required a new set of criteria to judge it and Habermas that psychoanalysis was a form of hermeneutics: a non-scientific explanatory method. She finds fault with all these.

Through this she points us to an area she flags up right at the beginning, Freud's meta-psychological concerns about the relationship between the mental and the physical, which she describes as the thing that most interests and concerns her, though she admits she has only barely opened up the topic; and this gives rise to the most fascinating thing of all. To philosophers, Freud's concern is one that they have been grappling with for hundreds of years, in the form of what is known as the mind-body problem, with the figure of Descartes being absolutely central. It may therefore surprise one that, in a book described as 'an introduction to the philosophy of psychoanalysis', not one of the major historical philosophical contributors to this debate is mentioned, apart from Nagel, until one gets to a reference to the relatively minor figure of Strawson. So one is given no idea that Descartes in his *Meditations* gave an

argument for a fundamental dualism between mind and body that every successive philosopher has had to reply to, that Kant tried to find another way from the mental to the physical, that Spinoza looked for a fundamental unity in all things through his theory of the monad, that Hegel described a method for bringing irreconcilables into dialectic, that Wittgenstein argued that concepts of mind were incomprehensible unless placed into interpersonal and embodied contexts; nor would one find any of the essential contributions that, say, Hume, Berkeley, Russell, Sartre, the mind-brain identity theorists, Averroes, John Searle, Hilary Putnam, Brentano, Dennett, Fodor, Honderich, or Gilbert Ryle, to name at random just a few of the thinkers past and present who have tackled aspects of this area, would offer. Now, in a short book of 100 pages, one would expect to find no more than two or three of the most important of these discussed, with a few others mentioned in passing, but to find nothing of Descartes' presentation of the mind-body problem, or of the relation of Habermas's views to Kant and Wittgenstein, frankly stretches credibility beyond all bounds.

That the book originated in an MA thesis doesn't let Gomez off the hook either, for making the transition from an acceptably narrow examination of a problem at necessarily limited depth to something that proclaims itself an introduction to a philosophy of psychoanalysis for general readers absolutely demanded that she introduce the basic *philosophical* ideas.

To be candid, one would hardly wish to review this book, rather than return it to the reviews editor with a polite request to be excused the task, were it not for its starting point. For Crews' articles in the *New York Review of Books* were among the most provocative political attacks on psychoanalysis made in recent years. Crews was writing

from a particular right-wing standpoint, attacking not merely psychoanalysis but the culture in which it existed and exists and also what he held it to be doing to that culture. Those who responded to Crews for the most part saw this; Nagel certainly seems to have done, but chose to answer Crews from a different angle. Psychoanalysis certainly does have an unavoidable political aspect in its emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual experience and the validity of people's exploration of their own world. Crews' articles were seeking to draw us back to a world-view in which there can be an externally valid or correct understanding that the person ought to have of themselves. Habermas, though not a direct party to the response to Crews, has interesting things to say in criticism of Freud from a left-wing point of view. (On a personal note, I remember following the debate avidly, and find it next to impossible to understand how anyone looking at the articles even now could have failed to notice the politics.)

Moreover, it is strongly arguable that this political aspect is part of the very essence of psychoanalysis. That means that any description of what happens in the psychoanalytic setting cannot avoid the interaction between the client or patient and their cultural and political surroundings. Without that, we are not attending to all that the person is bringing into the room. (Note, too, that the political extends to how individuals experience or are culturally supposed to experience their own body, the way they apprehend it, and how they relate to it. Actually, though not often discussed in those terms, the mind-body problem itself can be seen to have a political aspect, as it's a discussion of what we are *au fond*.)

Freud's works on society are not perhaps his strongest but he certainly appreciated this part of psychoanalysis. To a limited extent so did Jung, but Adler, Ferenczi and,

supremely, Reich, among those who either followed or were heavily influenced by Freud, all developed the political strand implicit in psychoanalysis. A book that starts from the Crews debate and describes itself as an introduction to the philosophy of psychoanalysis, tackling mind and body, but

doesn't deal with the political at all overtly is doubly disappointing.

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