

# WHAT IS A MIND?

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



## WEEK 3 – ASK MARK, QUESTION 4

Which leads us to the fourth and last question and it goes like this; beside the name, what parts of psychoanalysis are relevant in neuro psychoanalysis? This is not criticism but a request for clarification as unconscious processes have so far been discussed in general terms and I found nothing else that was reminiscent of psychoanalytical approaches.

So this question, you must remember it's a very unusual thing. I'm one of the very few neuroscientists I know who took the trouble or found it necessary to train as a psychoanalyst. And the reason is because I felt there was something lacking in the neuroscience of the early 1980s, which is the period I'm talking about. I imagined, I like all of you no doubt thought that the really interesting thing about the brain, as opposed to the liver and the stomach, is that it feels like something to be a brain. I am my brain; the brain is the organ of the mind.

And so I fondly imagined that I was going to learn all about that by becoming a behavioural neuroscientist. But I didn't, I was taught about language and memory and perception and skilled movement and so on. All of these instruments of the mind. But the mind itself was left out of account. There was no psyche in neuropsychology.

And it was when I asked my professors, "but what about feelings and what about consciousness and what about the self, what about motivation, what about personality", etc, the obviously really big ticket items about the mind, they honestly said to me... One, actually I very much – I remember him very fondly - but my one professor kindly advised me that I must not ask questions like that, it's bad for my career.

And that's where I realised, gosh, I've got to look elsewhere to learn about these things and that's why I turned to psychoanalysis. Because psychoanalysis, for all of its faults, because psychoanalysis really also has many limitations, but the wonderful thing about psychoanalysis is that unlike other branches of mental science it takes as its starting point the actual lived life of the mind, the subjective experience of being a mind. And with that come all of these topics that I've been saying are for me the big ticket items, the obviously really serious matters that need to be understood if we're going to make any headway in understanding the mind.

So why I then turned as a neuroscientist to psychoanalysis was because I wanted to bring that type of model of the mind, that type of way of thinking about the mind, a way of approaching that perspective upon the mind, methods that come with it, that's what I wanted to bring into neuroscience. And in so doing, by the way, I was mindful of the fact that I would also be doing something good for psychoanalysis because I would be bringing simultaneously the scientific rigour of neuroscience into psychoanalysis.

And when I said earlier psychoanalysis has many faults, that's one of them. There's always been this very uncomfortable ambiguity in psychoanalysis between discovery and invention. Freud says he's found this, Jung says he's found something else, Adler says he's found something else. And I'm using the extreme examples.

Even within orthodox psychoanalysis there's a plurality of different schools, schools of wisdom, it's an embarrassment in a discipline that claims to be a science to have so many competing points of view and nobody can decide between them because there is no method by which we can do that in psychoanalysis.

But leaving that side out of account, the primary goal, my primary goal was to bring the real lived life of the

mind, which is what psychoanalysis is about, to bring that into neuroscience. Now what does that mean? It means everything that's been learnt about the mind subjectively realised in psychoanalysis over a hundred years, all of that can now be brought into neuroscience in order to guide our research.

So what I've been talking about in this course, trying to point out what the neural correlates are of something like the capacity for subjective consciousness, something like intentionality etc., this is trying to bring the basic stuff of the volitional intentional agent of the mind, the self that, the thing that psychoanalysis is about, trying to bring that into neuroscience.

The tools that psychoanalysis offers are of two kinds, the one kind which is a very important one is the conceptual armamentarium, the theoretical models that it has built. It's the only discipline that has concepts for things like narcissism, things like love, it has analysed what love is made of, what relationships are made of, what do we mean by an attachment to, an affectionate bond to another...These are really the ingredients of a lived life.

To have tools that pass these things into their component parts as a result of subjective research, which is the other thing that psychoanalysis contributes, which is methods for investigating subjectivity. These tools then become our starting point in trying to bring the lived life of the mind into neuroscience. Now it goes without saying that that's just a starting point. Bringing these terms and concepts, this conceptual armamentarium and these methods into neuroscience is a starting point whereby we can then try to do better science with those things to improve both neuroscience and psychoanalysis.

So that's what I mean by neuropsychanalysis. I am very much aware that I do myself no favours in the neurosciences. My colleagues were first absolutely dismayed, what are you doing with psychoanalysis? It was like an astronomer saying to his colleagues saying he is going to study astrology, that's how they saw it.

So I want you to understand how much I value what psychoanalysis stands for. So much so that I was prepared to put that name on the discipline that I'm trying to develop notwithstanding all the baggage that comes with it, because I think that that approach to the mind is so valuable and the theoretical yield of that approach over the last 100 years is an enormously valuable starting point for us to try to take the science of the mind, the whole science of the real mind further. And I hope that that's an adequate answer to the question.

So there you go, thanks very much for those four questions, I always enjoy receiving them and I enjoy answering them and I'm looking forward to next week. Thanks very much, bye.



Mark Solms, 2016

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