

## Attack on psychoanalysis

**To the Editor:** It saddened and yet amused me to read Sean Kaliski's offensive, dismissive, facile, and obviously grossly misinformed attack on psychoanalysis in the the March *SAJP*.<sup>1</sup> How astonishing that such words could come from a professor of psychiatry!

What is so amusing in Kaliski's dismissal of psychoanalysis' claim of unconscious motivation informing our thoughts and behaviour is that he then proceeds to supply us with a profoundly deterministic view (which is what he accused analysis of) of the brain's 'unconscious' activity affecting our every behaviour and thought, to the extent that we have no free will. Isn't this what Freud was saying over a hundred years ago, but using a very different model to Kaliski's neurobiological one?

It would be interesting to hear Kaliski's view on just how the brain's neurobiological activity is translated into Psyche's imagistic mode of expression – it is these images that the depth psychologist uses, always mindful of the fact that a biological basis to Psyche is a given. Every schoolboy knows that there can be no psychic life without a physical brain!

I would recommend that Kaliski read the Nobel laureate Eric Kandel's views on matters analytic and neurobiological<sup>2,3</sup> to get some understanding of the deeply reconciliatory stance that can be taken in these matters. Both Freud and Jung totally accepted the biological basis of mind and in fact saw it as a way forward for their disciplines.

In view of Kaliski's strong views on this matter, this letter may serve to open a discussion forum in your journal on matters analytic, neurobiological and legal. I am also of the view that Kaliski owes the analytic fraternity an apology for his offensive attack.

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*Poste restante*

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**Professor Kaliski replies:** Dr Lakie's 'saddened yet amused' tirade is reminiscent of a religious zealot's outrage at a perceived insult to his treasured faith. In the arena of science one does not owe anyone an apology for expressing contrary (even if strongly put) opinions, and no true scientist would regard such as an offensive attack. In fact Dr Lakie's use of the term 'analytic fraternity' betrays an essential truth. The disciples of Freud, Jung *et al.* are not really scientists. Anyone who has bothered to read Popper, or any other philosopher of science, will realise that Freud and his co-religionists fail the core tests of what constitutes scientific endeavour. Even their quaint impenetrable terms defy clarity. What, for example, does Dr Lakie mean by the 'Psyche's imagistic mode of expression'? But, oh dear, he accuses me of supplying readers with a 'profoundly deterministic view', which is apparently appalling. My simplistic understanding of determinism is that given a set of circumstances there can only be one outcome. No one proposes that this applies to humans, or indeed to events in the universe at large. What neuroscientists are *possibly* discovering is that we make decisions outside conscious awareness. This does not mean that we are being controlled deterministically, nor does it confirm that we do indeed possess that dark dungeon of dreadful desires, called the 'id' (or 'the unconscious'). If science were to find that we are actually automatons, we will just have to accept it. That is surely the nature of the advancement of knowledge. Nevertheless, the thrust of my article was not to trash the precious edifice of psychoanalysis, nor despoil its temples. Read it again. I compared the contentious arcane pronouncements that analysts used in court to those neuroscientists may introduce in the future. My point was that just as the courts were taken in by the babblings of psychoanalysts (and their variants), so they will probably embrace the empirical data produced by brain scientists. And ironically my actual conclusion was that we will have to rely on philosophers to sort this out. Philosophers always consider the facts, and change their opinions accordingly. They are our true and trusty companions in science in this 21st century.

1. Kaliski SZ. 'My brain made me do it' – how neuroscience may change the insanity defence (Editorial). *South African Journal of Psychiatry* 2009; 15(1): 4-6.
2. Kandel ER. *In Search of Memory*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.
3. Kandel ER. *Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and the New Biology of Mind*. Arlington, Va.: APA Publishing, 2005.