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Observer Bias in Perceptions of Responsibility

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At the end of his article "Crowd Psychology in South African Murder Trials" (October 1991), Colman stated, "It can be difficult . . . to maintain . . . detached neutrality . . . in the South African trials described" (p. 1078). It can also be difficult to maintain detached neutrality in reading (or writing) articles such as Colman's. We each found ourselves initially applauding the acceptance by the courts of the mitigating psychological factors. However, after reading the article we asked ourselves how we would feel if the person on trial was White (say, a police officer) involved in the brutal murder of, say, a Black protester, an event not unknown in South Africa. To this issue we had a different set of responses. Reflection brought mixed feelings about the inconsistency. On the one hand, we each approve of our sense of moral indignation on behalf of the weak rather than the strong. On the other hand, it is untenable to consider mitigating circumstances for some kinds of offenders and not for others. Clearly, the question of the admissibility of mitigating psychological factors should be decided with reference to settings that are less emotionally charged than those Colman described.

The issues of freedom and responsibility not only are psychological but are fundamentally philosophical and societal. At a philosophical level, the paradox that genetic and environmental influences can in the end extenuate all behavior, good and bad, has been discussed at length by Dennett (1984), and others, as have reasons for maintaining the concept of individual responsibility. At the societal level, the interests of society in deterrence, particularly of crimes by the strong against the vulnerable, deserve a good deal of consideration. Colman has done a service by drawing attention to this new trend in legal deliberations and, in at least two readers, to a disturbing lack of neutrality in themselves in deciding on its desirability. We suggest that psychologists who have a pe-

culinary interest in the outcome may not be the best persons to judge the desirability of such evidence.

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On Psychoanalysis and Academic Psychology

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Gail Hornstein (February 1992) has argued that through its long-standing clash with psychoanalysis, academic psychology has benefited, and commonalities have emerged. This colorful and informative depiction of the battle between psychoanalysis and academic psychology has two especially important virtues. First, Hornstein incisively identified the high stakes of the confrontation, namely, the setting of ground rules for the "science of the mind" (p. 254). Second, she demonstrated that the apparent tolerance and even advocacy of psychoanalysis within mainstream academic psychology, for instance in the experimental testing and co-option of psychoanalytic theory, have been among the most effective ways of preventing psychoanalysis from playing a formative role in the conduct of the science.

At stake in this battle is the very way in which psychological science is constituted. Therefore, a clear understanding of the epistemological assumptions and methodological orientation of psychoanalysis is of great importance. Hornstein's article reflects a common vagueness in the state of knowledge concerning the psychoanalytic ground rules of science. Like most psychologists, Hornstein identified psychoanalysis primarily as theory and therapy, and she almost completely ignored its conception of psychology as a scientific discipline. She promoted the misleading impression that psychoanalysis has "nothing to do with [research] method" (p. 254). Such mystifying characterizations as "finding some way to peer through the watery murk of consciousness to the subaqueous reality that lay beyond" (p. 255) and "substitut[ing] a new, subjective standard for psychological truth" (p. 258) must be countered with a line of scholarship that precisely articulates the philosophy of science and research methodology that is operative in psychoanalytic practice (see Kvale, 1986; Politzer, 1928; Radnitzky, 1968). There are some indications that American psychoanalysts are

beginning to focus on these issues (e.g., Atwood & Stolorow, 1984; Spence, 1982). The basic assumptions that Hornstein concluded are shared by academic psychology and psychoanalysis—psychic determinism, the importance of childhood, and optimism about personality change—largely bypass the problematic foundations of psychological science that she identified as the stakes in the battle. However flexible and broad-based academic psychology may have become because of psychoanalysis, their respective ground rules remain mutually opposed. It would be wrong to conclude that a deep resolution of differences has been achieved.

Whereas the theories and therapy of psychoanalysis have been criticized, modified, and in some instances discarded, the largely ignored psychoanalytic ground rules for the science of psychology are sound and continue to have great value. Under the profound influence of Franz Brentano (see Wertz, in press), Freud distinguished the approach of psychology from that of the natural sciences, which had proven deficient in such areas as neurosis, dreams, and parapraxes. He began by suspending concerns with the physical and biological spheres as well as all theorizing and inferential thought (Freud, 1916, 1926/1978). Instead, he developed a *descriptive science* based on the *direct observation* of psychological life, with a focus on its *meaning*. The data through which meaning is grasped are descriptions of (a) the phenomenon itself in its plain visibility, (b) the individual's speech, (c) personal life circumstances, and (d) the cultural milieu (Freud, 1916; see Wertz, 1987, for a full exposition with additional references). All these data are relevant and necessary because for Freud, as for Dilthey and Husserl, meaning (by its very nature) rests not in an isolated event but in the *nexus* of psychological life. The meaning of a psychological process consists of its intention or purpose, its whence and whither, its position or role in the continuity of the total psychic order (Freud, 1916). Indeed, meaning is grasped most securely when it is consistently apprehended through multiple relations and throughout the interrelation of all of the four above-mentioned sources of data (Wertz, 1987). On many occasions, Freud insisted that training in mathematics, natural sciences, and medicine was not only irrelevant but harmful for psychologists because it directs students away from properly psychological attitudes and subject matter (Freud, 1916, 1926/1978). Instead, he advocated study of the humanities and the arts along with extensive and