The Myth of Psychoanalysis: Wittgenstein Contra Freud

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By Steve Hoenisch

1 "A Way of Speaking"

"Myth," Roland Barthes writes in *Mythologies*, "is a type of speech."1 It is a language, a system of communication, he says, making explicit the connection between speech and myth. Ludwig Wittgenstein, despite the similarities between his view of language and that of Ferdinand de Saussure,2 the Swiss linguist from whom Barthes borrowed the foundations of his semiological theory, never quite made the connection so directly but continually bumped up against it in his remarks on psychoanalysis: Wittgenstein repeatedly said that psychoanalysis is a "way of thinking,"3 "a way of speaking,"4 and "a powerful mythology."5 The connection between psychoanalysis and language was readily perceived by Jacques Lacan, influenced like Barthes by structuralism. For Lacan, the methodological aspects of psychoanalysis are directly mediated by language:

> "The technique [of psychoanalysis] cannot be comprehended, nor therefore correctly applied, if the underlying concepts are misconstrued. It is our task to demonstrate that these concepts assume their full sense only when oriented in the domain of Language, only when ordered in relation to the function of the Word."6

Lacan also thought that the psychoanalyst must be an expert in the manner of speaking of the patient, in the use of words to convey emotional states: The psychoanalyst's understanding of emotional ills coincides with his knowledge of language. Lacan believed that the professional mediocrity he perceived as undermining psychoanalysis "could be corrected by a proper return to that area of knowledge in which the analyst ought to be past master: the study of the functions of the Word."7

Jacques Derrida, a poststructuralist like Lacan, elevates the study of the words used in psychoanalysis to the understanding of a perspective. The psychoanalyst must understand what the patient is saying, the patient's perspective. Derrida writes: "When one attempts, in a general way, to pass from an obvious to a latent language, one must first be rigorously sure of the obvious meaning. The analyst, for example, must first speak the same language as the patient."8

The relation between psychoanalysis and language, then, has not gone without the attention of prominent philosophers. Thus it comes as no surprise that Wittgenstein, one of the preeminent philosophers of language, had something to say about the intersection of language and psychoanalysis. Such excepts as those quoted above bring to the fore some particularly significant issues that Wittgenstein touched on in his remarks on Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis: In question is the nature of the relationship between language and psychoanalysis; at stake is the scientific status of psychoanalysis, the kind of knowledge derived from its procedures, and – most important for my purposes here – the results of its application to the patient's problems.

2 Ambiguity and Ambivalence

In his remarks on Freud, there is both ambiguity and ambivalence in Wittgenstein's views. The ambivalence stems from Wittgenstein's admiration of Freud combined with his staunch condemnation of psychoanalytic theory. This ambivalence perhaps underscores the tension Wittgenstein felt between his own loyalty to science and his intuition that only mythologies – that is, invented manners of speaking – dissolve problems lying beyond the scope of scientific analysis.

The ambiguity lies in Wittgenstein's praising of Freud's theory while repeatedly condemning it as unscientific, an ambiguity that has led at least one scholar astray: Grahame Lock concludes, as quoted by Jacques Bouveresse in *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, that "Wittgenstein is the 'disciple' of Freud who seems to do nothing but raise objections to his master."9 Even though Wittgenstein indeed raises objections to Freud, many of

them are leveled against Freud's view of his own theory, not against the explanatory power of the theory itself. For Wittgenstein, psychoanalysis is based in myth, not science. But this position must not be taken as merely a criticism of Freud, as Lock has done. Although it is an attack on Freud's view that his theory is a science, it is also a glorification of its inventiveness in going beyond a scientific theory to explain the scientifically unexplainable. Wittgenstein believed Freud "had something to say."10 Freud, Wittgenstein would have said, "invented a line of thinking."11 And it is a view of Freud's psychoanalysis that bodes with Wittgenstein's view of his own developed philosophical method, leaving Wittgenstein to see himself as a disciple of Freud, even though he did not believe he had himself invented a new line of thinking.

Yet such a position – that Wittgenstein believed psychoanalysis to be based in myth, not science – has theoretical consequences that go beyond the motivations for a disciple raising objections to his master. The first is how psychoanalysis, if it is a myth, can solve psychological problems. The second is the status of a Wittgensteinian form of psychoanalysis if it, too, is based in myth.

Wittgensteinian psychoanalysis can, in fact, be seen as based in two separate but connected myths. The first is the general myth of all psychoanalysis, of all theories without experimental backing and successful predictive power. The second is Wittgenstein's own myth, "the manner of speaking" of his mature philosophical method, a form of linguistic analysis which in broad terms consists in the use of the language game and the primitive state as well as an attention to context, a connection to life, and the evaluation of specific cases without generalizing from them.

3 The Myth of the Scientific Solution

My central thesis is that if, as Wittgenstein says, Freudian psychoanalysis is based in myth, its application to actual psychological problems does not, indeed cannot, resolve them. Instead, all it can do is clarify them or present them in a different light. Implicit in my argument is that this is how Wittgenstein thought of the results of psychoanalysis, much like he thought of the application of his philosophical technique to philosophical problems, especially those of metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics. As such, Wittgenstein is also subverting a larger myth: that the insights gained in psychoanalysis lead to the scientific resolution of psychological problems.

One of Wittgenstein's remarks about psychoanalysis, made in 1938, explicitly confirms that he saw the results of psychoanalysis not as a resolution of psychological problems, but as merely a way of changing the way they are seen, thereby dissolving them through clarification:

"In a way, having oneself psychoanalyzed is like eating from the tree of knowledge. Knowledge acquired sets us (new) ethical problems; but contributes nothing to their solution."12

Although Bouveresse cites this passage, he, I believe, misses the significance of it. As Bouveresse invokes Brian McGuinness's view that an essential feature of Wittgenstein's attitude in life, philosophy, ethics, and aesthetics was "an extreme restraint and reserve that were utterly opposed to all forms of exhibitionism and explain his deliberate renunciation of theory in philosophy,"13 he uses the quotation in an attempt to sum up Wittgenstein's attitude (a renunciation of theory) that stretched toward psychoanalysis. Yet, I believe, the context in which Bouveresse uses the remark leads him to belittle its import and neglect its substance: that psychoanalysis does not and cannot resolve problems but only alters the way they are seen, perhaps clarifying them in the process. The substance of the remark is more intimately connected to Wittgenstein's position on the role of philosophy in relation to age-old metaphysical problems than to his attitude toward psychoanalysis: Philosophy, Wittgenstein believed, can alter the way metaphysical problems are seen by putting them in sharper relief, but cannot solve them. For one thing, the metaphysical problems may be unsolvable. For another, they may not be problems at all, but only appear, through the haze of language, as problems.

4 Sudden Shifts in Character

The same can be said about psychological problems. Wittgenstein begins the remark extracted above with a hedge, "in a way," alluding to other possible notions of what psychoanalysis can do. The allusion, of course, raises the question that there could be another way. One possibility, addressed by Wittgenstein in a separate comment made in 1946, is that psychological problems are not problems at all, just shifts in character: "Madness need not be regarded as an illness. Why shouldn't it be seen as a sudden – more or less sudden – change of character."14

Wittgenstein obviously meant this as a local suggestion: It is made on the micro-psychological level of the individual and the therapist's perception of the individual's character. Yet Wittgenstein's micro-psychoanalytic suggestion falls under a powerful macro-psychoanalytic argument made some twenty-five years later: Michel Foucault, in Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, advances the theory that madness is the result of a change in character in the Western world's manner of thinking: That of the enlightenment and, more specifically, the Cartesian order. For Foucault, madness is not a scientifically defined state of mind but rather a constructed way of seeing and categorizing a state of mind. For Foucault, psychoanalysis – indeed, the entire category of madness and all its subcategories – is the result of a more or less sudden change in human character on the global level. And Foucault's macro-level analysis would, a fortiori, include Wittgenstein's micro-level suggestion, a position that Wittgenstein would perhaps even endorse. In the remark, the word "less" is italicized, showing that Wittgenstein believed the change need not, in fact, be all that sudden, which further supports my interpretation of Wittgenstein's remark and its connection to Foucault's macro-psychoanalytic thesis.

Moreover, in Wittgenstein's remark the words "seen as" suggest that Wittgenstein may have been thinking that mental illness is not necessarily a reality of its own, as modern-day "scientific" psychoanalysis would have us believe, but the result merely of a way of viewing a person in a certain manner. Psychoanalysis, then, becomes not just a manner of speaking, but also a manner of seeing, a way of arbitrarily segmenting personality attributes.

Yet these characterizations of mental illness as (in Wittgenstein's view) a sudden change in character of an individual and (in Foucault's view) as a sudden change in character of the human condition, point, with consistency, to another feature of Wittgenstein's thought on Freud: That he considered Freud's theory a myth, not a science.

5 Implications of the Shift

Wittgenstein's alternative perception of mental illness as a sudden change in character shifts the nature of mental illness away from the necessity of a scientific explanation: A change of character may be motivated or not, may be caused or not, and so forth. It may just happen, and it need not necessarily be explained, especially by a single, all-embracing theory such as Freud's. In fact, it is this kind of explanation – the kind stemming from a propensity toward essentialism – to which Wittgenstein objects: "the truth is that there is no one reason."15 This "whole way of thinking," for Wittgenstein, "wants combatting."16

But Wittgenstein's objection, I want to argue, goes even deeper than arguing against a single explanation in favor of choosing from a multiplicity of them depending on the case in question. There may not be a scientific explanation for a particular mental illness at all; the illness may not even be amendable to such an explanation. Freud's rhetorical question, "Do you want to say, gentlemen, that changes in mental phenomena are guided by *chance*?," draws the following response from Wittgenstein: "Whereas to me the fact that there aren't actually any such laws seems important."17

If I am correct in my interpretation here, it lends credence to my thesis. If there is no one reason for any particular recurring psychological phenomenon, then psychoanalysis cannot impart a cure based on a scientifically inspired insight. At best, it can only put forth a possible reason, an invented cause, and persuade the patient to believe it.

6 The Cure: Persuasion

Psychotherapy may in fact produce a cure, but it stems not from insight, as Freud would probably argue in general terms, but from *"persuasion,"* as Wittgenstein puts it in his argument against Freud's view.

The psychoanalyst's art, then, lies in finding, based on available information obtained from the patient and through transference, the most persuasive argument for the patient to see his problems in a different light – to be persuaded to see the world and his relation to it differently. In this change of perspective, brought about by argument, not insight, lies the cure. Or, to put it another way, the cure lies not in the insight but in being persuaded that the insight is right.

What, though, allows the patient to be persuaded that the insight is correct? Bouveresse responds to this question from Wittgenstein's corner: "The success of the psychoanalytic explanations would be inexplicable if these explanations did not have a particular 'charm'."18 The success of the argument, so to speak, is in turn due more to the charm of the insight than the insight itself. Wittgenstein explains: "If you are led by psycho-analysis to say that really you thought so and so, or that really your motive was so and so, this is not a matter of discovery, but of persuasion."19 Thus, for Wittgenstein, it is not an insight at all that leads to the cure, but being persuaded to adopt a particular point of view. "In a different way," Wittgenstein says, "you could have been persuaded of something different. Of course, if psychoanalysis cures your stammer, it cures it, and that is an achievement. One thinks of certain results of psychoanalysis as a discovery Freud made, as apart from something persuaded to you by a psychoanalyst, and I wish to say this is not the case."20

But just what is persuaded to the patient by the therapist? What form, in other words, does the insight take? Bouveresse supplies an answer: "Wittgenstein himself thinks that the psychoanalyst is primarily in search of a 'good' story that will produce the desired therapeutic effect once it is accepted by the patient, and yet neither the patient's assent nor therapeutic success in itself proves that this story is true or even should be true."21

7 A Manner of Talking

As Peter Gay points out in his biographical introduction to the Standard Edition of Freud's works, Freud discovered in his treatment of Anna O., the founding patient of psychoanalysis, that symptoms could be talked away.22 But the discovery that talk could alleviate symptoms does necessarily entail either that the psychological problem has been cured or that the problem's true cause has been uncovered.

In fact, the strength of Wittgenstein's position only rematerializes in the context of Freud's limited observation that problems can be talked away: It shows that, at its very foundation, from its earliest days onward, psychoanalysis has been a "way of speaking." To the patient it becomes, by extension, a metaphor, a manner of talking: The problems are not so much resolved as talked away.

The two primary modes outlined above that yield the "cure" – a persuasive argument and a good story – rest in turn on their own nature: one is rhetoric, the other narration. Both are ways of speaking. That settled, the question then becomes whether there is any scientific basis for either the argument or the story, for the good talk.

8 Is There Science Behind the Good Talk?

Even though Freud would certainly balk at the suggestion that the force of his theory's ability to dissolve a patient's problems lies in its persuasive perspective and rhetoric, he nevertheless alludes to the possibility of the role of persuasion. In revising his theory of dreams, he writes that

"We have to transform the manifest dream into the latent one, and to explain how, in the dreamer's mind, the latter has become the former. The first portion is a *practicall* task, for which dream-interpretation is

responsible; it calls for a technique. The second portion is a *theoretical* task, whose business it is to explain the hypothetical dream-work; and it can only be a theory."23

With reference to the last part of this remark, I would like to suggest that a theory, when taken in isolation and without supporting empirical data obtained from experiment and proven predictive power, can only be a persuasive device, a dogma, a conjecture that Willard van Orman Quine might call a "dogma of empiricism" when it is placed under the larger heading of science. Yet, when seemingly right, such a theory can have a persuasive allure. This is how Wittgenstein saw Freudian analysis: It "provides explanations which many people are inclined to accept."24 Why? Because "it has the attraction of which mythological explanations have, explanations which say this is all a repetition of something that has happened before."25 Behind the good talk lies not only a myth, but a particularly seductive one.

The mythological basis for the theory begins to emerge when a sample of the rhetoric in Freud's writing is analyzed. In at least one case, Freud's language, though characterized on the surface by appeals to science, may have been calculated to be persuasive without scientific support. Despite the scientific metaphors with which Freud infuses the discussion – latent dream thoughts "are contained in the associations like an alkali in the mother-liquid"26 – he goes on to give the process of wringing the latent dream thoughts from the manifest ones an air of philosophical argument rather than of scientific proof: With respect to formulating the latent dream thoughts from the manifest thoughts and from associations, Freud says, "we intervene on our own; we fill in the hints, draw undeniable conclusions, and give explicit utterance to what the patient has only touched on in his associations."27 The rhetoric contained in this passage – "fill in the hints," "draw undeniable conclusions," "give explicit utterance to" – alludes, it seems, more to the argumentative basis for the interpretation than to its scientific basis. Yet, as the passage continues, Freud anticipates this rebuttal and addresses it. But his refutation of persuasion in favor of science is in turn itself based on rhetoric and intuition, not science:

"This sounds as though we allowed our ingenuity and caprice to play with the material put at our disposal by the dreamer and as though we misused it in order to interpret into his utterances what cannot be interpreted from them. Nor is it easy to show the legitimacy of our procedure in an abstract description of it. But you have only to carry out a dream-analysis yourselves or study a good account of one in our literature and you will be convinced of the cogent manner in which interpretative work like this proceeds."28

It is precisely this "ingenuity" that Wittgenstein so admired in Freud: His genius in formulating a manner of speaking about something hitherto beyond the boundaries of rational discourse. Perhaps, though, it is in confusing rational discourse with scientific method that leads Freud into the trap of insisting that his theory is based in science when it was, at least at the time, unverifiable through experiment. "Freud is constantly claiming to be scientific," Wittgenstein says. "But what he gives is speculation – something prior even to the formation of a hypothesis."29

The legitimacy of the procedure is precisely what Wittgenstein protests, demanding that if it is indeed as scientific as Freud says it is, it should be explicable in terms that render it verifiable in the same way as any other scientific method. It must be more than merely an argument from intuition. Wittgenstein, it might be noted, liked "to play the exciting game of dream interpretation"30 with his sister Margarete, who had herself been psychoanalyzed by Freud, allowing him, as Freud suggests, to carry out a dream analysis, yet the argument from intuition remains unconvincing for Wittgenstein. Even after having done it himself and probably having read some accounts of them, dream interpretations remained for Wittgenstein far from scientifically cogent procedures.

There is another connection to be made here, too. It pertains to the crucial distinction Wittgenstein makes between reasons and causes. "The difference between a reason and a cause," Wittgenstein says, "is brought out as follows: the investigation of a reason entails as an essential part one's agreement with it, whereas the investigation of a cause is carried out experimentally."31 For Wittgenstein, Freud's technique is a search for reasons, not causes.

But how is it that, as with the case of Anna. O., such psychoanalytic talk, without being based in science, makes the patient feel better, alleviates her anxiety, seemingly "cures" her problems? It is because, Wittgenstein says, it alters the perspective from which people view their problems in such a way as to make

them acceptable, bearable, easier. The powerful mythological basis of Freudian theory renders it not only convincing but also practical. "When people do accept or adopt this [mythological explanation]," Wittgenstein says, "then certain things seem much clearer and easier for them."32 Wittgenstein believed psychoanalysis does not solve or cure psychological problems but clarifies them in such a way that they become easier to handle.

9 The "Disciple of Freud"

Wittgenstein admired Freud for developing a way of speaking that rendered expressible – and held the potential to clarify – problems, conflicts, desires, and emotional states. This was the ingenuity that Wittgenstein saw in Freud, and it was Wittgenstein's own hopes of developing a way of speaking, a line of thought, to clarify philosophical problems. These hopes led Wittgenstein to call himself a "disciple of Freud": He, too, wanted to invent a manner of speaking to deal with age-old philosophical problems that had for so long escaped clarification. Yet Wittgenstein, after developing his own way of speaking – the language game and other techniques – did not claim that it was science.

10 Wittgensteinian Psychoanalysis

Thus, I am also concerned with Wittgenstein's own acknowledgements about his philosophical technique and the implications of it if applied to psychological, rather than philosophical, problems and why such a technique might be more powerful, at least theoretically, than Freud's.

As Wittgenstein acknowledges, the technique of language games, though useful, is itself the application of a mythology – a manner of speaking. It is not a scientific method. Wittgenstein, admiring Freud, said of his work, "It's all excellent similes."33 Wittgenstein said nearly the same thing about his own work in philosophy: "What I invent are new *similes*."34

At the same time, Wittgenstein's technique is one that clarifies but does not resolve philosophical problems. As Ray Monk puts it in summing up Wittgenstein's perspective, philosophy's "puzzles . . . require, not solution, but dissolution."35 Wittgenstein is not so much seeking a resolution of the problem but a disappearance of it: "For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear."36

Therefore, if Wittgenstein's philosophical technique is recast as a form of psychotherapy, as has been done, its results are, a fortiori, only the clarification, not the resolution, of psychological problems. If correct, such a position lends support, by association, to my first thesis.

Yet, even though Wittgensteinian psychoanalysis does not solve problems, it has two connected aspects that may make it superior to the Freudian model. It discards the postulation of the unconscious, and it withdraws any claim to be scientific. Discarding the unneeded theoretical machinery of the unconscious renders the Wittgensteinian model more parsimonious. Withdrawing the claim to be scientific renders it more honest, acknowledging as it does its mythological, rather than scientific, basis. As such, Wittgensteinian psychoanalysis demythicizes Freudian psychoanalysis while retaining its powerful – and necessary – mythological basis.

11 The Necessity of Mythology: Desire

The necessity of a fundamentally mythological approach to psychological problems lies in the relation of desire to language. The problem is one of expression. The human being, Vincent Descombes says in the forward to *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, is "a 'divided subject': The subject does not emerge until he speaks, but when he speaks, he loses himself in language and is condemned to desire without being able to signify the object of his desire in an articulate message."37 Desire transcends language, rises above its purview. The

best we can do, it seems, is express ourselves in cliches, many of which quickly become an integral part of the language that mediates the exchange between therapist and patient and, similarly, between lover and other.

Descombes continues: "The subject is therefore divided, due to his condition as a speaking being, between what he can ask in the language he shares with others, and what he continues to desire – which is always 'something else.' "38

The problem, then, is one of expression. The solution lies in inventing a manner of speaking – a mythology. For Freud, that manner of speaking was grounded in the postulation of the unconscious. Giving expression to unconscious desires and their conflicts became the centerpiece of psychoanalysis. How, then, can the same results be obtained, the same conflicts clarified, without resorting to the unconscious? Does psychoanalysis, stripped of the unconscious, lose its explanatory power? Can people talk about and alleviate their psychological problems and conflicts, their desires, without recourse to the unconscious *as a mechanism*?

12 The Unconscious

Wittgenstein thought, Bouveresse says, that "we have an imperative need for philosophical clarity to save us from the misdeeds of psychoanalysis."39 The central misdeed that Wittgenstein saw in psychoanalysis was the unconscious. Indeed, Wittgenstein, Bouveresse writes in the preface to *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, "regarded the unconscious as really no more than a manner of speaking which creates more philosophical difficulties than the scientific ones it claims to resolve."40

Descombes discusses one of the philosophical difficulties that perhaps Wittgenstein had in mind. "What Freud puts into question, according to Lacan, is the very possibility that human beings can claim to be the center of anything. The notion of the unconscious ought to be understood as bearing witness to the impossibility of anyone attaining what the philosophers call the state of satisfaction in harmony with the self (or, in speculative Hegelian terms, self-identity triumphing over all alienations and internal divisions)."41 On Freud's view, at least as interpreted by Descombes, we are doomed: We can never be the center of anything, not even ourselves.

But on Wittgenstein's view, we are not doomed, because nothing is, in principle, unconscious. Wittgenstein's philosophical method assumes, Bouveresse says, that "there is nothing 'hidden' to exhume, that everything is in principle immediately accessible to the surface, and that we already know, in a way, everything we need to know."42 We thus already possess the possibility of obtaining the understanding that can lead to psychological improvement without having to unearth our repressed desires.

13 A Solution Emerges

The germ of the solution begins to materialize in remarks made by Wittgenstein: In describing his philosophical technique, Wittgenstein says that "the philosopher gives us the word with which the thing can be expressed and made inoffensive."43 It would probably not be an inappropriate stretch to say that Wittgenstein would probably sanction the substitution of "psychoanalyst" for "philosopher" in this quotation, foreshadowing our solution.

It is made explicit by Lacan: "Whether it sees itself as an instrument of healing, of formation, or of exploration in depth, psychoanalysis has only a single intermediary: the patient's Word."44 Without its scientific basis, the unconscious can lead both patient and analyst astray. The use of the patient's language, however, being the "single intermediary," can alone lead to a dissolution of the psychological problem.

As Bouveresse points out while discussing the basis for reducing philosophy to a form of psychotherapy, Freud puts forth a similar view about the role of language in therapy. Bouveresse sums it up thus: "The disappearance of hysterical symptoms occurs when the process at the source of the troubles can be reproduced and 'expressed' (*ausgesprochen*); more precisely, when the patient has become capable of giving a detailed account of the process and giving voice to the accompanying affect."45

But in Wittgensteinian psychoanalysis, the emphasis is on the words, without regard to whether the "process" at the source is expressed accurately, since its accurate reproduction is scientifically futile. The scientific proof is, in turn, replaced by the element of persuasion discussed above.

Thus it is that the role of language in psychoanalysis is seen by Freud and Wittgenstein in opposing ways: For Wittgenstein, the language lies at the foundation of the myth that creates psychoanalysis. The language is the psychoanalytic machine. For Freud, on the other hand, the language becomes a scientific mechanism in the psychoanalytic machine, a cog that allows the patient to express and, in turn, conquer his or her problems. The unconscious is the ghost in the machine. Thus, if Wittgensteinian psychoanalysis can work in practice without appealing to an unconscious, it would be a superior theory – it expels the ghost from the machine.

14 A Brief Case Study: The Meaning of Dreams

For Freud, the meaning of a dream could often be revealed through the interpretation of it. For Wittgenstein, however, the meaning of a dream, like any other form of language, would be given by its use; interpretation alone, for Wittgenstein, does not determine a dream's meaning.

Seen as a form of language, a dream's meaning, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, becomes what it is used to accomplish or reveal in the psychotherapeutic situation. As such, the dream and the psychoanalytic interpretation of it become merely another element in the argument, so to speak, that the psychotherapist uses to persuade the patient that a given insight is somehow the right insight, the insight that will help dissolve the problem at hand. After all, in Wittgenstein's view, "any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning,"46 a position which contrasts sharply with Freud's anti-structuralist view: Some dream elements, he says, "are to be regarded as *symbols* of something else. As contrasted with the other dream-elements, a fixed meaning may be attributed to them, which, however, need not be unambiguous and whose range is determined by special rules with which we are unfamiliar."47

Aside from the obvious objection that one cannot suppose that the range is determined by rules with which we are unfamiliar, neither Wittgenstein nor Saussure, the father of linguistic structuralism, would have it that any signs, linguistic or otherwise, could have a fixed meaning. It is in Freud's assertion that some dream symbols carry a fixed meaning that he falls victim to a scientific dogmatism when he is, in fact, engaged in making a myth, albeit a myth with meaning for the human spirit. Let me make more explicit this relationship between science and symbol.

15 The Delusion of Science and Meaning as Use

Freud, for his part, sees the use, or function, of dreams only in psycho-physiological terms. He does not see their use in the psychoanalytic moment as determining their meaning, a position nearly opposite of Wittgenstein's. For Wittgenstein, a dream's meaning becomes its use in the psychotherapist's and patient's attempt to dissolve or see differently the situation or conflict that is producing the psychological problem in question. The dream's use, that is, determines its meaning. For Freud, a dream has meaning well before it is used in an exchange between therapist and patient. In fact, the dream has meaning of two types, one superficial and the other subterranean, the first being the manifest dream thoughts and the second the latent dream thoughts. Roughly, the therapist works through the manifest dream thoughts and the associations contained in them, in combination with other associations, to unmask the psychoanalytically more significant latent dream thoughts, which are in turn used to help solve the problem at hand.48 For Freud, then, meaning precedes and determines use.

There is, of course, a deeper reason for the opposition of Freud's and Wittgenstein's views toward the meaning and use of dreams, a reason that for Wittgenstein goes beyond the paradigm of his philosophy of language and a reason that for Freud goes beyond using the dream to reveal an underlying cause or conflict: science.

Again, here, Freud and Wittgenstein stand in direct opposition: From Freud's perspective, a dream must have meaning prior to its use, for the whole of the proclaimed scientific basis of his theory rests upon such an independent meaning. Freud does not hesitate to note the connection between the symbolic language of dreams and science. Within the context of presenting his revised theory of dreams in *New Introductory Lectures*, he writes, "What is in question is principally the symbolism in dreams and the other methods of representation in them."49

From Wittgenstein's perspective, on the other hand, the dream can have no independent meaning, for that would imply a scientific foundation to psychoanalytic theory. To conform to Wittgenstein's overall position on Freud, the scientific basis for Freud's theory must be denied on every level; otherwise, Wittgenstein would create an opening through which Freud and his followers could reassert psychoanalysis as a scientifically grounded theory.

16 Conclusion

There is ambiguity and ambivalence in Wittgenstein's attack on Freud's self-proclaimed scientific approach. Ambiguity because what comes across as a clear criticism of Freud contains a glorification in its own faint reflection. Ambivalence because Wittgenstein's views on Freud's work – admiration combined with staunch condemnation – underscore the tension for Wittgenstein between his own loyalty to science and his intuition that it is our mythologies, our inventing new manners of speaking, that dissolve problems lying beyond the reach of scientific analysis.

There is, then, for Wittgenstein, a level at which scientific explanations become misplaced, irrelevant. Useless. It is here that mythical explanations must step in and save us, providing the insights that only a mythology can supply. "My aim," Wittgenstein says poignantly, "is to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense."50 Freudian psychoanalysis serves exactly such a function. And the formulation of such a powerful, persuasive mythical explanation deserves the highest regard, a regard that Wittgenstein bestowed upon Freud. The admiration, however, ends as soon as the mythical explanation is proclaimed to be science. It must be seen for what it is: A perspective that sheds new light on problems beyond the scope of science.

17 Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 109.

2. See, for instance, *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games with Words*, by Roy Harris (London: Routledge, 1988).

3. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* , ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press), p. 44.

4. Jacques Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*: The Myth of the Unconscious, trans. Carol Cosman (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 26. Bouveresse is quoting Wittgenstein from Lectures, Cambridge 1932-1935.

5. Wittgenstein, *Lectures & Conversations*, p. 52.

6. Jacques Lacan, "The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), p. 8.

7. Ibid. p. 5.

8. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 32.

9. Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, p. 41.

10. Wittgenstein, *Lectures & Conversations*, p. 41.

11. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch, ed. G. H. von Wright (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 19e.

12. Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, p. 5. He is quoting Wittgenstein from Culture and Value, p. 34e.

13. Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, p. 5.

14. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 54e. Italics in original.

15. Wittgenstein, *Lectures & Conversations*, p. 50.

16. Ibid. p. 50.

17. Ibid. p. 42. Italics in original.

18. Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, p. 123.

19. Wittgenstein, *Lectures & Conversations*, p. 27.

20. Ibid. p. 27.

21. Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, p. 53.

22. Peter Gay, Introduction to the Standard Edition of Freud's *The Ego and the Id* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1960), p. xiv.

23. Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1965), p.

24. Italics in original.

25. Wittgenstein, *Lectures & Conversations*, p. 43.

26. Ibid. p. 43.

27. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, p. 15.

28. Ibid. p. 15.

29. Ibid. p. 15.

30. Wittgenstein, *Lectures & Conversations*, p. 44.

31. Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, p. 6.

32. Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, p. 26. He is quoting Wittgenstein from Lectures, Cambridge 1932-1935.

33. Wittgenstein, *Lectures & Conversations*, p. 43.

34. Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin, 1990), p. 357. He is quoting from "Wittgenstein's Lectures" by G. E. Moore.

35. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, p. 19e. Italics in original.

36. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 298.

37. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1958), No. 133. Italics in original.

38. Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, in the foreword by Vincent Descombes, p. x.

39. Ibid, in the foreword by Vincent Descombes, p. x.

40. Ibid. Preface, written by Bouveresse, p. xix.

41. Ibid. p. xvii.

42. Ibid., in the foreword by Vincent Descombes, p. x.

43. Ibid. p. 9.

44. Ibid. p. 10. Bouveresse quoting Wittgenstein's "Big Typescript," p.

45.

46. Lacan, "The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, p. 9.

47. Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, pp. 10, 11.

48. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, No. 198.

49. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, pp. 15-16. Italics in original.

50. For an explanation of Freud's theory of dreams and the uses of manifest and latent dream thoughts in psychoanalysis, see Freud's *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, especially Lecture xxix, pages 8 through 37, of the Standard Edition.

51. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, p. 27.

52. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, No. 464.

18 Related Essays

- Points of Contact and Criticism Between Wittgenstein and Freud
- Notes from a Presentation on Wittgenstein and Freud
- A Wittgensteinian Approach to Discourse Analysis
- Interpretation and Indeterminacy in Discourse Analysis
- Indoctrination and Resistance in Psychotherapeutic Dialogue
- Construction of The Double As Social Object