

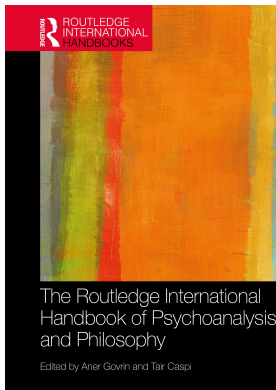
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6

WITTGENSTEIN

Disciple of Freud?

Edward Harcourt

In the mid-1940s, Wittgenstein described himself to Rush Rhees as ‘a disciple of Freud’ and ‘a follower of Freud’ (LC: 41). Wittgenstein was ‘greatly impressed when he first read Freud’ (Malcolm 1958/1984: 39); on first reading *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he thought, ‘Here at last is a psychologist who has something to say’ (Rhees 1984: 136). To Malcolm he praised Freud’s ‘extraordinary scientific achievement’, and to Drury – several years after Freud’s death – he said ‘no one today can do psychoanalysis the way [Freud] did’ (Rhees 1970: 154). Elsewhere, however, Wittgenstein was less enthusiastic. Freud’s ‘whole way of thinking wants combatting’; it requires ‘a very strong and keen and persistent criticism to see through the mythology’ (LC: 50); he offered ‘fanciful pseudo-explanations’ (CV: 62); ‘unless you think *very* clearly psychoanalysis is a dangerous and a foul practice’ (Majetschak 2008: 39); Freud’s followers had made ‘an abominable mess’ (Moore 1954–55: 107 [20]). Is it possible cleanly to subtract what Wittgenstein criticized in Freud from what he admired or, as Rhees put it, ‘to separate what is valuable in Freud’ from what should be rejected? (LC 1966: 41; cf. DB: 16–17).¹

I’m going to begin by briefly surveying Wittgenstein’s connections with Freud. I shall then examine the comparison Wittgenstein – and some of his followers – drew between psychoanalysis and philosophy as Wittgenstein conceived it: to the extent that the comparison is illuminating, this would help explain at least Wittgenstein’s admiration for Freud, if not his reservations. I then turn to the account of Wittgenstein’s view of Freud that is probably most widely held by defenders of psychoanalysis. On this account, Freud misunderstood the nature of psychoanalysis, saying falsely that the unconscious is a scientific discovery and that psychoanalysis is a scientific enterprise; for what psychoanalysis *really* does is ‘interpretation’, or giving ‘reasons’ not ‘causes’. Thus Wittgenstein’s positive and negative attitudes to psychoanalysis are shared out neatly between Freud’s bad philosophy – his theoretical account of what he was doing – and his good ‘psychology’ or, perhaps more aptly (since Wittgenstein often describes psychology as itself a science), his good first-order insights into the human mind. I’ll argue that while this account has something going for it, it neither does full justice to Wittgenstein nor is independently fully credible. In order, therefore, to make full sense of Wittgenstein’s complex attitude to Freud, we need to look elsewhere.

I

Although Freud went on producing new work until his death in 1939, the only works by Freud cited by Wittgenstein date from before the First World War: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 1953–66a/1900), *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (2002/1901) and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1953–66b/1905), and (co-authored with Breuer) *Studies in Hysteria* (1953–66/1895). But Wittgenstein began to discuss psychoanalysis in his writing only around 1930 (Wittgenstein 2000 MS 109: 174). Was it only then that Wittgenstein read these works? We do not know, but the works of Freud he cites are of a much earlier date, and his discussions of them lack detail, so it is possible that Wittgenstein was relying on memories of reading done much longer ago. Be that as it may, Wittgenstein surely knew of psychoanalysis well before 1930. His family's library contained the Breuer and Freud volume, and the Wittgenstein siblings enjoyed swapping jokes with one another, influenced by Freud's 1905 book (Prokop 2003: 104). Wittgenstein's sister Margarete sent her teenage son Thomas for analysis with Freud, because he had a stammer (Prokop 2003: 202, 222), presumably between 1916 and the early 1920s given that the boy was born in 1906; Wittgenstein begins a discussion on the criteria for the truth of psychoanalytic interpretations in 1938 with the words 'suppose you were analyzed when you had a stammer' (LC: 25).

Whatever the truth as to when Wittgenstein first read Freud, indirect personal connections would have made psychoanalysis salient to his mind from the mid-1920s. A junior member of the Vienna Circle, Heinrich Neider, is on record as saying that 'numerous members of the Vienna Circle were in analysis' (Bouveresse 1995: 7), and this was certainly true of Schlick (Money-Kyrle 1979: 266); Wittgenstein's meetings with the Circle started in 1928. Frank Ramsey travelled to Austria in 1923, visiting Wittgenstein in Puchberg to question him about the *Tractatus* (Misak 2020: 140), and again in 1924, also to have analysis with Theodor Reik, an early follower of Freud (Forrester 2004: 11; Misak 2020 162); Ramsey then argued with Wittgenstein about Freud in England in 1925 (Forrester 2004: 17; Paul 2012). Psychoanalysis was in any case fashionable in the Cambridge circles to which Ramsey belonged (Misak 2020: 100), and with which Wittgenstein would come into contact when he returned to Cambridge in 1929. Wittgenstein's sister Margarete, who became interested in psychoanalysis apparently before Wittgenstein and remained in contact with him throughout his life, constitutes a third line of connection. Already in 1918, she complained – as Wittgenstein himself did later – about Freud's insistence on the sexual meaning of dreams ('pity he's so [. . .] one-track', Prokop 2003: 100).² She found *Civilization and Its Discontents* 'dreadfully bad' when it was published in 1930: as long as Freud confined himself to 'the bodily and the psychical', he got it 'about 90% right', but 'when he gets philosophical and deals with guilt, happiness and such, he comes out with unfortunate rubbish' (Prokop 2003: 202). Still, she entered analysis with Freud in 1937, and in 1938 helped to get permission for him to leave Austria for England, receiving an inscribed copy of *The Future of an Illusion* from Freud the day he left (Nedo & Ranchetti 1983: 301) and a letter from him from England (Subotincic 2000: 60). She also composed, apparently in the early 1940s, a 'psychoanalytical investigation' of the success of the Nazis (Prokop 2003: 245 n. 415), though it was never published.

II

At a certain stage of his philosophical development, Wittgenstein took very seriously the comparison between psychoanalysis and his own (or at least what he thought of as his own) method in philosophy. But how close is the comparison really, and why was Wittgenstein so interested in it?

Wittgenstein began explicitly comparing Freud's method and his own around 1930, when he started writing what became the Big Typescript, and this goes on till the writing down of TS 220, in 1937 or 1938 (Baker 2004a, 2004b; Majetschak 2008). The most developed versions of the comparison are in the Big Typescript itself (PO: 158–99) and in 'Dictation for Schlick' and 'Our Method', dictated to Waismann (Baker 2003: 1–83; 277–311). The comparison takes off from an idea which to my knowledge has no echo in Freud, that philosophical problems stem from false 'analogies' or 'pictures' suggested by language. Philosophical puzzlement is then said to be a cause of mental unease (Moore 1954–5: 114 [27]) – also presumably the state of anyone who goes in for psychoanalysis. Philosophy, like psychoanalysis, is said to cure this unease by bringing what is unconscious to consciousness ('[A] simile at work in the unconscious is made harmless by being articulated' [Baker 2003: 69; cf. Wittgenstein 2000, MS 109: 174; PO: 162–5 (409); PG: 381–2]); and, less frequently, to have to deal with resistances to giving up such analogies ('What has to be overcome is not a difficulty of the intellect but of the will', PO: 160–1 [407]). The success of this philosophical cure depends – as Wittgenstein sometimes said, the success of psychoanalytic interpretation (LC: 25, 44, 52) and therefore of psychoanalytic treatment – on the 'analysand's' assent to a 'diagnosis' (LC: 164–5 [410]; Baker 2004a: 159). Giving assent removes the destructive power of the analogy and brings about 'a new way of seeing things' (Baker 2004a: 158).

Freud would readily have acknowledged that psychoanalysis proceeds by making the unconscious conscious, and that the difficulties in doing so are due to resistances on the analysand's part (Majetschak 2008: 52). Other aspects of the comparison, by contrast, depend on Wittgenstein's own counter-Freudian understanding of what Freud was *really* doing, of which more later. But even if we grant all that, the comparison falters. As Baker has argued, while psychoanalysis addresses conflicts of 'conative or affective states', philosophy seems to address only conflicts 'in ways of seeing things', in people's 'prejudices or dogmas [which] clash with each other and creat[e] fogs of confusion', or between different things which – thanks to these dogmas – we feel driven to say; in psychoanalysis we are concerned with 'patterns of behaviour (e.g. manifestations of an Oedipus complex)', whereas in philosophy – seemingly – our concern is 'with patterns in the uses of our words' (Baker 2004a: 153, 159).

Alice Ambrose (who helped to transcribe the *Blue Book*), Morris Lazerowitz and their followers (Lazerowitz 1985; Ambrose 1966, 1972; Lazerowitz & Ambrose 1984; Kennick 1970) accept the limitations of the comparison as stated, but attempt to repair its limitations by adding in a third layer of the 'three-layer structure of a philosophical theory' (Ambrose 1972: 25) on Wittgenstein's behalf, suggesting moreover that Wittgenstein only failed to do so himself because he couldn't bear to (1972: 25). On their view (non-Wittgensteinian), philosophers mistakenly believe that their words are 'being used to express a theory' when they simply 'herald a redefinition' (Lazerowitz 1985: 209). This is close to Wittgenstein's *Blue Book* view of philosophical disagreements over solipsism or over the existence of an unconscious mind. *Part* of the Wittgensteinian philosopher's task is therefore to 'expose the verbal content behind the ontological façade' (Lazerowitz 1985: 209). But, Lazerowitz continues, it's *difficult* for philosophers to accept that their theories are 'mere linguistic contrivance[s]' (Lazerowitz 1985: 211), because these theories are held in place by 'unconscious ideas', which it is psychologically costly for the philosopher to give up (1985: 236–7). Thus in Lazerowitz's view philosophers cannot acknowledge that 'one cannot think of what does not exist' is a mere 'redefinition', because treating the claim as substantive serves to fend off anxiety. Why? Because the *unconscious* meaning of those words is that 'there is something [sc., the penis] . . . not possessed by some and whose loss is feared by others' and 'whose non-existence is too painful to be thought of' (i.e., is such that one 'cannot think' of it; 1985: 238). But Ambrose and Lazerowitz's 'completion' of Wittgenstein's method

is a dead end. For one thing, solipsists and others usually offer arguments for their views and an explanation in terms of unconscious defences is only attractive to the extent that the argument is weak: if the argument is strong, a good explanation of why the solipsist thinks as he does is already available. But Ambrose and Lazerowitz's diagnoses apply to philosophical positions *per se*, independently of the arguments anyone offers for them.

Secondly, philosophical problems are usually addressed in a way that bypasses the 'sufferer's' personal life: we don't ask fellow philosophers about their dreams, their childhood (etc.) to help them out of a philosophical tangle, because it's not clear why doing so would make a difference; but this sort of question is essential in psychoanalysis. This is not to say that philosophical problem-solving isn't tailored to the philosopher concerned (Baker 2004a: 210): different people may need different approaches to help them get philosophically unstuck. But still, none of these different bits of tailoring need involve the examination of a philosopher's personal life. Of course, even if this investigation of the personal is usually missing from philosophy, perhaps it shouldn't be. But in fact it's precisely this kind of personalization that is *missing* from Ambrose and Lazerowitz's version of therapeutic philosophy: philosophical solipsism (for example) is at once a 'symptom', but – quite unlike a 'symptom' for the psychoanalyst – a symptom whose meaning we can determine without knowing anything much about the person whose symptom it is (Brearley 1984: 183).

Eugen Fischer's view (2004, 2012), while contrasting sharply with that of Ambrose et al., also takes the analogy between philosophy and psychological therapy very seriously. Like Baker, Fischer is clear that the conflicts philosophy deals with *aren't* emotional ones – Wittgensteinian 'drives to misunderstand' (Fischer 2004: 107) are 'diseases of the intellect' (CV 50); philosophical disquietude is sufficiently explained by the thought that mere platitudes get 'distorted' 'through inadvertent misinterpretation or mindless inference, in line with ideas [one] unreflectively rejects' (Fischer 2004: 112). So though Wittgenstein's philosophy is indeed therapeutic, the therapy to compare it with is not psychoanalysis but cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which proceeds by 'identifying and . . . breaking the relevant cognitive habits' (2004: 91).

Supposing for a moment that philosophical tangles are cognitive and not emotional, is there any point to the comparison between philosophy as Wittgenstein saw it and psychoanalysis? One could still say that a philosophical theory can be *like* 'a kind of neurotic symptom' (Lazerowitz 1985: 236–237; for a more nuanced version of the comparison, see Wisdom 1964: 181; Farrell 1946a, 1946b) without actually being one. But it would be a distant likeness: as Baker has argued, the comparison with psychoanalysis breaks down at just the point at which it might begin to be theoretically useful. Why then, would Wittgenstein insist on the comparison? The best we can say is that Wittgenstein made as much of the comparison as he did only because at the time he was writing, CBT – worlds away from psychoanalysis, on the spectrum of 'talking cures' – had not yet been invented. But since Wittgenstein could hardly have known that with the advent of CBT and other talking therapies psychoanalysis would one day be but a species of a larger genus, that explanation is unsatisfactory.

But are philosophical problems, for Wittgenstein, merely cognitive? To say so fails to do justice to Wittgenstein's assertion that philosophical problems are 'deep disquietudes' (PI: 111), still less – though such remarks are rare in Wittgenstein – to the idea that to solve philosophical problems we need to overcome resistances of the will (PO: 160–1 [407]). Wittgenstein's struggle with philosophical problems seemed to be all-consuming; the high colour of the language in which he speaks of them and their solution betrays the presence of powerful emotions (Lazerowitz & Ambrose 1984: 13). So it is not credible that he should have thought of them simply as intellectual problems, however troubling they too can be. Wittgenstein, in my view,

saw philosophical puzzlement not as a neurotic symptom but as the token of his fallen state (cf. Kenny 1984; Forrester 2004: 17). So ridding himself of it was, for him, a way of transforming himself from the bad person he thought he was (FB: 61) into somebody ‘decent’, and it’s this that explains the more than intellectual significance which philosophical puzzlement, and finding a way out of it, had for him.³

Does this view rehabilitate the comparison between philosophy and psychoanalysis? Partly, because psychoanalysis engages emotional and personal problems and so, on this view, does philosophy, so the view brings the two closer together than they are on either Baker’s or Fischer’s view but without the mistakes of Ambrose and Lazerowitz. But only partly. First, it would be controversial to claim that psychoanalysis aims at the moral improvement of the analysand (Hartmann 1960). Secondly, the rehabilitation depends on an understanding of the significance of philosophical puzzlement which, I’ve said, was Wittgenstein’s but is certainly not mandatory: one could be as philosophically puzzled as Wittgenstein, and by the same questions, and yet *not* see that as a token of one’s fallen state. We would thus have a partial explanation of Wittgenstein’s claim that he was a ‘disciple of Freud’, but because it depends at a crucial point on something personal to Wittgenstein, the appeal of psychoanalysis cannot be expected to carry over to everyone who finds themselves philosophically puzzled.

III

I turn now to what one might call the ‘bad philosopher, gifted *Menschenkenner*’ account of Wittgenstein’s view of Freud. This account has been developed very fully, though in each case differently, since Wittgenstein’s time by philosophers such as Alisdair MacIntyre (2004) and Ilham Dilman (1983, 1984, 1988; cf. Allen 1997). The main sources of the account lie in Wittgenstein’s objections to Freud, and these revolve mainly around the unconscious, and the partially overlapping topics of the interpretation of dreams and jokes, and of the nature of explanation in psychoanalysis. I address these in turn.

Wittgenstein’s most extensive remarks about the unconscious occur in the *Blue Book* (BB: 23, 57; cf. AWL: 39ff.) Psychoanalytic talk of ‘unconscious thoughts, acts of volition, etc.’ is philosophically neutral, he says, since all that has happened is that a ‘new notation’ – that is, a new use of the words ‘thought’ and so on – has been introduced. Indeed this usage *couldn’t* involve a mistake, since notations on their own do not *say* anything, and can ‘at any time be retranslated into ordinary language’ (BB 23). Thus, Wittgenstein argues, we could introduce the expression ‘unconscious toothache’. But the phenomenon dressed up as unconscious toothache by the new notation – a toothache in a particular tooth that comes and goes, perhaps – is highly familiar (cf. PG: 48, 106, 181; PI: 149).

So why is psychoanalytic talk of the unconscious worthy of philosophical attention? The answer, at least in the *Blue Book*, is that the notation ‘call[s] up new pictures and analogies’ (BB: 23), so it is easy to think – falsely – that its use reports a new discovery. If we are unaware of what’s going on, we will ‘be misled into thinking that a stupendous discovery has been made’, like ‘the psychoanalysts [who] . . . were misled by their own way of expression into thinking that . . . they had, in a sense, discovered conscious thoughts which were unconscious’ (BB: 57). Or, alternatively, we shall be ‘tempted to deny the possibility’ of unconscious thoughts (BB: 57; like those ‘revolted’ by ‘the idea of there being’ such things, *ibid.*). Either way, the objection is not to Freud’s first-order claims but rather to his philosophical packaging of them: it’s ‘the hypothetical part of his theory, the [un]conscious, . . . which is not satisfactory’ (AWL: 39; Cioffi 1998: 206) – a compressed phrase which surely means not that the hypothesis that there is an unconscious is false, but rather that the status of talk of the unconscious is not that

of a hypothesis. The thought that it *is* a hypothesis either leads Freud to overstate (or misstate) his own claims or expose him to undeserved criticism.

Wittgenstein presses a related, but richer, set of philosophical objections to Freud in the context of his discussions of Freud on dreams and, to a lesser extent, jokes. According to Wittgenstein, Freud gets it wrong about the link between the criteria for the truth of psychoanalytic interpretations and the status of psychoanalysis as a kind of science. This objection, which extends beyond dreams and jokes to distinctively psychoanalytic claims to knowledge more generally, is summarized by Moore in his notes on Wittgenstein's 1932 lectures:

[Psychoanalysis] does not enable you to discover the *cause* but only the *reason* of, e.g., laughter. . . . [P]sychoanalysis is successful only if the patient agrees to the explanation offered by the analyst, and . . . since this is so, what is being agreed to isn't a hypothesis.

(Moore 1954–55: 108 [21])

Freud, in other words, claims that the criterion for the correctness of a psychoanalytic interpretation of a dream or joke is the analysand's assent (cf. Wittgenstein 1979: 39–40). But assent, Wittgenstein argues, could not be the criterion for the truth of a causal hypothesis. So it cannot in Wittgenstein's view also be the case – as Freud claims – that the interpretation is a hypothesis about the dream's (or the laughter's) unconscious causes.

Now there are many phenomena, dreams apparently included, where in Wittgenstein's view explanation does depend on assent, for example having something on the tip of one's tongue (the speaker's saying “that's it!” . . . certifies the word as having been found' [CV: 68; cf. LC: 18]), or overruling another's claims about their feelings (2000: MS 110: 230). A third such type of explanation is what Wittgenstein calls 'aesthetic explanations', explanations which are not 'causal' but do 'what aesthetics does: puts two factors together'; and Wittgenstein sees some psychoanalytic explanations as of this kind (e.g., of jokes; AWL 39), and Freud's connection between the foetal position and sleep (AWL 39; cf. LW II: 86). Indeed it is even in order, in explanations where the analysand's assent is the criterion for correctness, to say that the explanation gives the analysand's unconscious state of mind (e.g., the unconscious reason for the joke), as long as we do not make the mistake of thinking that in so saying, we are saying something 'as to what was happening at the moment when he laughed' (Moore 1954–55: 108 [21]). Thus, so far at least, Wittgenstein's objection to Freud is very modest. Freud's explanations themselves are in order, as is his use of the word 'unconscious'. The problem lies only in his self-understanding. This self-understanding would fit a 'psychologist' (i.e., a kind of scientist) since 'in psychology' we are 'interested in causal connections' (AWL: 38). But Freud himself – had he only been able to see it – wasn't one.

This account of Wittgenstein's stance vis-à-vis Freud is of a piece with some of Wittgenstein's views on other matters (e.g., mathematics): in clearing away the self-misunderstandings of psychoanalysis, philosophy would be 'leaving [psychoanalysis] as it is' (PI 124). But the account is risky for someone trying to mount a philosophical defence of psychoanalysis. Some readers of this chapter will have made claims to the effect that some individual unconsciously felt such-and-such or acted out of an unconscious desire, only to be asked, 'but where is your evidence for the existence of an unconscious mind?' These challenges are an irritant, and if Wittgenstein's idea that psychoanalytic talk of the unconscious merely introduces a notational change puts them to an end, Wittgenstein will have done us a service. Nonetheless, if *all* psychoanalysis does is introduce a notational change – and a potentially misleading one at that – while the first-order 'insights' left over are only facts, such as that toothaches can come and go, that we knew all about

anyway, it is not clear what's so great about it – or, therefore, why Wittgenstein would have described himself as a 'disciple of Freud'.

IV

There is more, however, to Wittgenstein's stance than this, for several reasons. First, Freud's scientific self-misunderstanding has consequences: he doesn't stick to the limits of interpretation which the assent criterion imposes but corrects the patient if their explanation doesn't accord with his 'hypothesis'. This is a mistake he, as it were, would not have dared to make had he realized what he was doing. So the project of – as Dilman puts it – removing the 'philosophical froth' (Dilman 1983: 3) from the first-order substance of Freud's work has a real point to it, since it shows that without the 'froth', psychoanalytic practice would not be 'left as it is' but, on the contrary, improved. That point goes some way towards rescuing the account which locates all of Freud's mistakes (as Wittgenstein saw them) in his philosophy rather than in his first-order views. But the account is limited nonetheless, because Wittgenstein's negative commentary on psychoanalysis does not relate only to Freud's philosophical account of his first-order views but to those views themselves.

On dreams, Wittgenstein agreed with Freud – though of course also with a great many others (Freud 1953–66a/1900: 1–5) – that dreams seem to have something puzzling and in a special way interesting about them, so that we want an interpretation of them (LC 45; cf. CV 75, 79; LW II §§195–6).

But he thought Freud was wrong – and this is a first-order and not a philosophical objection – to claim that all dreams are wish-fulfillments (LC 42; CV 50; Rhees 1970: 154). Nor is it that all dreams – the 'bawdy' Wittgenstein hated (LC 24) – that they all have sexual meaning (LC 23–4, 47–8).⁴ He also said that 'in Freudian analysis the dream is as it were dismantled. It loses its original sense *completely*', because it substitutes an interpretation for 'the dream story [which] . . . has its own charm, like a painting that attracts & inspires us' (CV 78–9).

Moreover, the (first-order) dream-explanations Freud offers are, in Wittgenstein's view, unreliable in a way that saying what was on the tip of one's tongue is not: *a propos* Freud's explanation of a patient's 'beautiful dream', Wittgenstein says 'this ugly explanation makes you say you really had these thoughts, whereas in any ordinary sense you really didn't' (LC 20). People are 'charmed' by the kind of interpretation Freud is prepared to recognize as correct, so they assent to it, but this complicating 'charm' is no part of the operation of the assent criterion *per se*. Whereas in saying what's on the tip of one's tongue one is free to answer without undue influence from elsewhere, in Freud assent is contaminated by the 'charm' of his various 'mythologies' which attract us overwhelmingly to certain kinds of explanation. As to what this 'charm' is, Wittgenstein makes various suggestions: the charm of the ugly (LC 23), the charm of 'origins' (LC 43) or the 'secret cellar' (LC 25), the 'new mythology'. Wittgenstein is at least as hostile to the particular mythology that Freud is (in Wittgenstein's view) merely campaigning for as he is to the fact that Freud misunderstands his activity as a kind of science.

V

I want to raise two more questions for the account of Wittgenstein on Freud that locates all the shortcomings in Freud's philosophy. The first is this: if psychoanalytic explanations are not 'hypotheses', does the account have a satisfactory view to offer of what they are instead? The

second parallels the question I have already raised about the comparison between psychoanalysis and Wittgenstein's view of the correct method in philosophy: does what's left over when we subtract both the (allegedly) mistaken philosophy and what Wittgenstein found objectionable in Freud's first-order views help to explain why he said – even if this was not all he said – that he was a 'disciple of Freud'?

On the first question, Wittgenstein's assimilation of Freudian dream- or joke-interpretations to 'aesthetic investigations' needs to be handled with care. In such investigations, various things are 'laid alongside' the initial object of investigation. Whether that achieves anything depends on somebody's assent – but whose assent? Wittgenstein's idea is that if dream-interpretations were not contaminated by Freudian suggestion, it's the *analysand's* assent that would properly be decisive. But although you can 'make a person see what Brahms was driving at by showing him lots of different pieces by Brahms' (Moore 1954–55: 106 [19]), it is one's interlocutor's assent, not Brahms's, that's relevant to the success of this exercise in 'plac[ing] things side by side' (AWL 40). Moreover, if you fail to make your interlocutor 'see what you see', this is not proof that you didn't, after all, see anything, but simply 'an end of the discussion' (Moore 1954–55: 106 [19]; cf. LC 20–1). So if dream-interpretation were exactly like 'aesthetic investigation', Freud would be justified in ignoring the analysand's dissent in favour of his own interpretation even without the (in Wittgenstein's view false) assumption that psychoanalytic interpretations are 'hypotheses': we can't expect every two people to 'see' the same thing. This wouldn't matter if Wittgenstein's objection to Freud is just that Freud chooses objects of comparison which Wittgenstein finds distasteful. But if the objection is – as it seems to be – also methodological, comparing psychoanalytic interpretation with 'aesthetic investigation' (which puzzled Moore; Moore 1954–55: 105 [18]) does not help Wittgenstein to make good his case.

But is the analysand's assent really the criterion of correctness for explanations that refer to unconscious thoughts and feelings? The idea is supposedly central to Wittgenstein's rejection of the claim that psychoanalytic explanations are causal hypotheses, but is it true? Did even Wittgenstein think it was?

Consider Wittgenstein's discussion of unconscious motivation in the 'Lectures on Aesthetics':

Suppose Taylor and I are walking along the river and Taylor stretches out his hand and pushes me in the river. When I ask why he did this he says: 'I was pointing out something to you', whereas the psycho-analyst says that Taylor subconsciously hated me. . . . When would we say that Taylor's explanation was correct? When he had never shown any unfriendly feelings, when a church-steeple and I were in his field of vision, and Taylor was known to be truthful. But, under the same circumstances, the psycho-analyst's explanation may also be correct. . . . The explanations could in a sense be contradictory and yet both be correct.

(LC 22–3)

This is striking: the unconscious explanation 'may . . . be correct', and yet there is no mention of Taylor's assent. What's relevant to its correctness is a further fact, that 'the person pushed in had a similarity with the father of the other person' (LC 22–3; cf. RPP I §225). The explanatory model Wittgenstein has in mind here seems closer to 'aesthetic investigation' than to the analysand's-assent-as-criterion model: even if, absent one's interlocutor's assent, reason-giving is surely not simply at an end (because, for instance, further reasons might lie in general observations about the emotions to which human beings are subject), certainly the reasons in the Taylor case 'are in the nature of further descriptions' (Moore 1954–55: 106 [19]). So, how to

reconcile Wittgenstein's treatment of 'unconscious motive' in the Taylor case with his treatment of dream-interpretations? Perhaps further facts about the analysand are relevant in the former case but not in the latter. But though this *might* be true of claims about what is on the tip of one's tongue, it is surely not so for dreams: a psychoanalyst (or indeed anyone else) may be familiar with details of the dreamer's preoccupations, and with more general facts about what people in the dreamer's predicament think or feel, which suggest interpretations of the dream which the dreamer may well not acknowledge.

Even by Wittgenstein's lights, then, assent is not the sole criterion for the correctness of a psychoanalytic explanation. It thus seems indeterminate, so far, whether psychoanalytic explanations are hypotheses or not. Is the explanation-as-hypothesis view excluded by the idea that interpretation is a matter of 'further description' (as it sometimes clearly is)? If 'further description' is just another species of 'aesthetic explanation' where failure to get the other to 'see what you see' is just 'an end' of the discussion (Moore 1954–55: 106 [19]), then yes. But if exchanges of reasons in the psychological case are not to be thought of in this 'no fact' way, why couldn't psychological explanations proceed by 'further description' precisely because adding further descriptions is a way, if not of establishing a particular causal hypothesis, at least of ruling out inadmissible ones?

Moreover, consider what Anscombe calls the phenomenon of 'mental causation' (Anscombe 1957; cf. Wittgenstein REF), that is, claims such as 'the spider made me jump', which can easily be reformulated in terms of the authority of assent. ('Was it the spider that made you jump?' 'Yes.') Such claims seemingly state a (mental) cause, but the reporter is authoritative about it. So even to the extent that assent *is* a criterion of correctness for psychoanalytic explanations (such as dream interpretations), it would seem that it does not rule out the causal character of the explanation. We might insist on a distinction between a causal *claim* (which is confined to a particular case) and a causal *hypothesis* (which perhaps relates an observed effect to a presumptive cause because like pairs of phenomena have been observed to be so related in the past). That's part of Anscombe's point in drawing attention to the phenomenon: we can know some causes without having to draw upon previously established correlations. But if the assent criterion helps to rule out a hypothetical model of explanation, it looks as if it doesn't on its own rule in an altogether non-causal one, or therefore the idea that psychoanalytic explanations 'give reasons' where this is meant to exclude anything causal.

But even if it did, if the Wittgensteinian reconstruction of psychoanalysis includes the thought that psychoanalysis consists *simply* of 'interpretation' or 'giving reasons', it doesn't stand up. Psychoanalytic discourse is highly various, and alongside its interpretations of dreams, utterances and so forth and philosophical (or 'metapsychological') components, it also includes a number of claims, both general and particular, about human beings and their behaviour. While statements in the first two categories are not, let us grant, hypothetical, statements in the third category clearly are. Many statements in this category made by Freud are false (e.g., that 'the mental apparatus endeavours to keep the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible'; Freud 1953–66c: 9), but his successors have made considerable efforts to repair a problem (Lacewing 2018) which 'hermeneuticism' (Cioffi 1998: *passim*) pretends to magic away. No one-dimensional theory about psychoanalytic discourse, whether hermeneuticism or scientism, can be right (Farrell 1981).

The 'bad philosopher, good *Menschenkenner*' account therefore doesn't make a very convincing case either that particular psychoanalytic interpretations (e.g., dream interpretations) state 'reasons not causes' or for hermeneuticism generally, or indeed provide a convincing reconstruction of the complexity of Wittgenstein's own thinking on the subject.

VI

Now to the second of my two questions for the ‘bad philosopher, good *Menschenkenner*’ account. Wittgenstein can of course be positive about Freud’s first-order views. According to the *Blue Book*, the psychoanalysts *did* discover something, though it wasn’t the existence of the unconscious: ‘new psychological reactions’ (BB 57; Moore 1954–55: 102 [15]) and ‘phenomena and connexions not previously known’ (BB 57; Moore 1954–55: 102 [15]). Unlike the ‘toothache’ case, that is, there’s something both non-trivial and (unlike the ‘secret cellar’ mythology) worthwhile, that’s left over when one abstracts from the theoretically misleading way in which psychoanalysis presents it. Moreover, Wittgenstein does not seem always to have regarded the language of unconscious states of mind as a terminological innovation (and so *a fortiori* not as an innovation liable to be misunderstood as a discovery). In a typescript from 1946–7, he says that ‘we’ – not just ‘the psychoanalysts’ – would (‘perhaps’) say that a man who ‘suddenly climbs on a chair and then gets down again’ without being able to say why, though ‘he reports having noticed this and that from the chair, and that it seems as if he climbed up in order to observe this’, had ‘acted with *unconscious* intention’ (RPP I §225; cf. LC 22–3; PI II.xi: 217). And in a 1931 manuscript, Wittgenstein speaks, without a trace of scare quotes, about ‘unconscious contempt’ (Wittgenstein 2000, MS 155: 30V–31R).

All the same, unconscious explanations of behaviour by way of thoughts, emotions, intentions and the like are a commonplace, at least in imaginative literature way before Freud (and continue to be so now; Whyte 1978; Gödde 2010), and surely Wittgenstein could not have failed to be aware of this. Indeed, this type of explanation is exemplified by Wittgenstein’s case of the man who ‘suddenly climbs on a chair’. So while this case goes well beyond a set of trivialities on a par with toothaches that come and go, such cases surely cannot be the ‘new psychological reactions’ (etc.) which Freud is said to have discovered. But until we can identify those, we are left without an account of why Wittgenstein thought Freud was a gifted observer of his fellow human beings, rather than merely not an egregiously bad one.

In search of what Wittgenstein thought was both exciting and really new in Freud, I shall appeal to two types of consideration.

The first is that psychoanalysis deploys a variety of forms of explanation beyond the simple appeal to an unconscious intention, of which I shall mention three.

In the first kind of case, we form an intention to utter a sentence, weak-willedly fail to act on it (e.g., out of fear), but the sentence ‘escapes us’ nonetheless (Freud 2002: 87–88). Here, the intention needn’t be unconscious: it’s rather that intentions the agent had – indeed intentions he is fully able to avow – explain the action so well that we say the ‘mistake’ was an intentional action.

Two further explanatory roles for the unconscious are exemplified by Freud’s case of a girl’s obsessively arranging her bedding before she went to bed (Freud 1953–66b: 264–269). The arranging of the bedding itself is (consciously) intentional. But these intentions (e.g., to prevent the pillow from touching the headboard) do not fully explain the action, since – unlike, for example, kicking a stone or uncrossing one’s legs – actions of this kind do not make sense without further reasons, and yet the girl was unable to articulate any such further reasons. Freud of course points us to unconscious further reasons: the girl’s obsessive routine stopped her parents from going to bed, thereby stopping them from having sexual intercourse and thus from producing a sibling rival for her, an outcome she (unconsciously) very much did not want. But, as MacIntyre has stressed, this is not – like Wittgenstein’s ‘chair’ case – a matter of the girl’s acting for reasons albeit unconsciously, but of her ‘acting *as if* unconsciously guided by reasons’. For here, ‘the motives that control [her] behaviour’ ‘preclude [her] from acting as

a practical reasoner does', since they preclude her from asking whether her reasons for action are *good* reasons (MacIntyre 2004: 25–26). But clearly, the girl could have stopped her parents from going to bed in many different ways, so we still lack an explanation for the details of the routine, about which the girl was inflexible. To take one such detail, the girl would fluff the eiderdown in such a way that it made a hump, then flatten it again. Freud argues that the girl was thereby intentionally abolishing of her mother's (imagined) pregnancy (1953–66b: 268). But it would not make all the difference needed even if the intention was conscious: compare the case where a parent cuts their leg and their child strokes it to 'make it better', which can be intentional on the part of the child even though it knows the stroking will have no healing effect. To see how abolishing the pregnancy is what the girl is intentionally doing, we need to see the relation between the action and the intention as mediated by the *symbolic* connection – which the girl also cannot articulate – between the hump in the eiderdown and pregnancy (Gardner 1993: 116).

These explanations all differ substantially from the explanatory pattern exemplified by Wittgenstein's 'chair' case, and whose availability we did not need psychoanalysis to grasp. Wittgenstein does not indeed observe these types of explanation himself, but were he to be aware of them, it would supply grounds for his claim that Freud had 'discovered new psychological reactions'.

The second type of consideration is, as with Wittgenstein's interest in the methodological comparison between philosophy and psychoanalysis, partly personal in character. There are passages in Wittgenstein's philosophical writings where psychoanalysis is simply assumed rather than discussed: the painter 'guided by forces in his unconscious' who produces a likeness of M when intending to draw N from memory (RPP I, §262), or the groundless and mistaken conviction that a city lies to the right rather than to the left, which one might try to explain 'as it were psychoanalytically' (PI II xi, p. 215). Wittgenstein also made extensive reference to Freudian 'phenomena and connexions' in his own non-philosophical writing (i.e., where the philosophical evaluation of Freud was not in question). In a 1930 diary entry, for example, commenting on his love of cinema, Wittgenstein compares films to dreams and says, without any attempt at justification, 'Freudian thoughts/methods can be applied to them directly' (DB 28–31). Wittgenstein's diaries frequently record dreams, some of them with interpretations (DB *passim*; FB: 181). He and his sister Margarete wrote to one another describing their dreams and offering interpretations of a psychoanalytical kind: that is, though the interpretations are not narrowly Freudian in suggesting a fantasized wish-fulfilment or sexual meaning, they show that Wittgenstein accepted that his dreams would express matters of personal importance that were on his mind at the time (e.g., racial identity, or his then intended wife Marguerite Respinger). Indeed, notwithstanding his philosophical strictures against psychoanalysis elsewhere, he seems absorbed by this activity of interpretation and more or less uncritical of its basis: getting the dream right is important, but the method pursued in so doing isn't scrutinized. In a 1948 letter to one of his sisters, and not in the context of any philosophical discussion of psychoanalysis, he offers a psychoanalytical interpretation of the fact that he couldn't get a Mendelssohn passage out of his mind (FB: 194; cf. RPP I §262; PI II.xi: 215):

Es ist natürlich *sehr* schön, aber gewiss eine Musik die mir nicht sehr nahe geht; und sie entspricht nicht meiner Stimmung. Es muss also ausser-musikalische Gründe haben, dass sie mir so standig einfällt. Freud würde vielleicht sagen, und vielleicht mit recht, dass ich mir damit immer sagen will 'Ich bin ein Esel'; weil mir besonders oft der Teil durch den Kopf geht, in welchem der Esel schreit.

(FB 194)⁵

Passages such as these show how far Wittgenstein internalized psychoanalytical ways of thinking, quite independently of his philosophical appraisal of Freud: applying psychoanalytical ideas to his own dreams or thoughts had become as it were second nature to him. I suggest that the evidence for his having found in Freud ‘phenomena and connexions not previously known’ rests as much on his non-philosophical deployment of psychoanalytic ideas as in the cogency of any philosophical reconstruction of Freud he offers. In his non-philosophical thinking, then, Wittgenstein was perhaps indeed a ‘disciple of Freud’.

Notes

- 1 This paper is indebted to Harcourt (2017).
- 2 All translations from Prokop (2003) are mine, but thanks to my colleague Dieter Jaksch for help with the slang.
- 3 I develop this suggestion further in Harcourt (2012).
- 4 Cf. Wittgenstein’s admiration for ‘I will show you differences’ from *King Lear* (Monk 1990: 537).
- 5 ‘Of course, It’s *very* beautiful, but definitely a kind of music that doesn’t touch me very closely; and it doesn’t fit my mood. So, the fact that it comes so often into my head must have an extra-musical explanation. Freud would perhaps say – and perhaps rightly – that I’m trying to tell myself “I’m an ass”, because the bit that comes into my head especially often is the one where the donkey brays.’ (My translation.)

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- BB Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1958/1969). *The Blue and Brown Books [1933–1935]*. Ed. R. Rhees. Second edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- CV Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1977/1998). *Culture and Value: A Selection from the Posthumous Remains*. Ed. G. H. von Wright in collaboration with H. Nyman. Revised edition of the text by A. Pichler. Trans. P. Winch. Oxford: Blackwell.
- DB Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1999). *Denkbewegungen: Tagebücher 1930–1932, 1936–1937. [Movements of Thought: Notebooks 1930–1932, 1936–1937]*. Ed. I. Somavilla. Frankfurt: Fischer.
- FB Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1996). *Familienbriefe. [Ludwig Wittgenstein: Family Letters]*. Ed. B. McGuinness, M. C. Ascher, and O. Pfersmann. Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky.
- LC Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1966). *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief. [1938–1946]*. Ed. C. Barrett. Oxford: Blackwell.
- LW II Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1992). *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology (Vol. 2). [1949–1951]*. Ed. G. H. von Wright and H. Nyman. Trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M.A.E. Aue. Oxford: Blackwell.
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- RPP I Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1980). *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology (Vol. 1). [1945–1947]*. Ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell. References are to Numbered Sections.
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