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## **REVIEWS. Jacques Bouveresse: Philosophie, mythologie et pseudo-science. Wittgenstein lecteur de Freud (Paris: Editions de l'Éclat, 1991).**

Many French philosophical books have been published in recent years about “virtual” relationships between Freud and Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein’s thought has become increasingly influential among French philosophers, though in a way quite different from the typical Anglo-American style of “analytic philosophy.” Wittgenstein’s growing prestige, however, clashes with (what remains of) the authority of Freudian psychoanalysis, which has dominated French thought for the past 25 years. How can one consider Wittgenstein an inspiration for a new way of thinking and, at the same time, claim to be Freudian?

The rare examples we have of Wittgenstein’s opinions on psychoanalysis are ambiguous and puzzling. There is no doubt that in a way Wittgenstein admired Freud’s work. However, in private conversations he expressed grave doubts about the scientific speciousness of psychoanalysis. How, then, can one reconcile Wittgenstein, the self-proclaimed “disciple of Freud,” with the Wittgenstein who said, “analysis is likely to do harm” or “[Freud] has not given a scientific explanation of the ancient myth: what he has done is to propound a new myth”?(1)

On the French philosophical scene, Jacques Bouveresse is considered the specialist on Wittgenstein. He is one of the few French philosophers who could be labeled an “analytic philosopher.” Distancing himself from most of the Parisian *maîtres penseurs*, Bouveresse has published many books on Wittgenstein (2). In *Philosophie, mythologie et pseudo-science*, he attempts to explain the apparent contradiction in the Viennese philosopher’s appreciation of Freudianism. Wittgenstein admired Freud—Bouveresse writes—insofar as Freud had a quality he regarded as essential in philosophy: the capacity to propose new and enlightening analogies with which to understand at once familiar and puzzling events. For him, Freud’s achievement was essentially his proposal of genial comparisons—for example, comparing a dream with a rebus. Freud’s charm lay essentially in the way he represented some facts and phenomena. But, according to Bouveresse, Wittgenstein rejected the explanatory ambitions of psychoanalytic theory, which were essential for Freud. For Wittgenstein, psychoanalytic interpretations were not explanations in the sense of the word “explanation” in any genuine science. Therefore he rejected the reality of the Freudian unconscious itself. Interpreting the supposed meaning of a dream, slip of tongue, or neurotic symptom, is very different from discovering the cause. So, according to Bouveresse, Freud was the victim of an old philosophical error: he was self-deceived by the idea that understanding the (even unconscious) reasons for a behavior is equivalent to discovering its causes.

At first sight, Bouveresse’s criticisms appear similar to Habermas’ and Ricoeur’s hermeneutical criticisms of Freudian theory. They believe Freud was the victim of a self-misunderstanding, in that he tried to give to the psychoanalytic approach the form and structure of a physical science, according to the positivistic prejudices of his times. But, in so doing, he missed the specific originality of psychoanalytic practice as a kind of

hermeneutical interpretation.

There is an increasing belief among psychoanalysts today, even outside the hermeneutic influence, that psychoanalysis has both good and bad aspects. The good aspect is its clinical approach; the originality of psychoanalytic conversation and strategy. The bad aspect is the Freudian theory of the Self. But this distinction between a good (clinical, hermeneutical, conversational) and bad (theoretical, “scientific,” metapsychological) Freud is too lenient for Bouveresse. For him, this confusion between the “scientific form” of Freud’s theories and his actual procedure cannot be clarified, thereby clearing psychoanalysis of its positivistic biases. “In [Freud’s] case, the confusion is not accidental and does not have, in the end, only a philosophical relevance; [this confusion] is in a certain way constitutive [of Freud’s theory]” [p. 138]. For Wittgenstein, the essence of all psychoanalytic interpretations is based on this misunderstanding or confusion.

“biology of mind” (to use Frank Sulloway’s words), but he is wrong to conclude that this was Wittgenstein’s major point. Bouveresse is well aware that Wittgenstein, unlike his neo-positivistic followers, did not generally consider sciences the field most relevant to human life and to philosophical investigation. The older he got, the more Wittgenstein showed an increasing antipathy towards the scientific achievements of his time. In this sense, while highlighting the unscientific character of psychoanalysis was significant for Wittgenstein, it was not very likely—as Bouveresse seems to believe—that he thereby rejected much of psychoanalysis. A careful reading of Wittgenstein’s private notes wherein he refers to Freud, reveals a kind of ethical dissent to psychoanalysis more relevant than the epistemological rejection.

Moreover, it is doubtful that Wittgenstein’s critique of Freud pivots around the distinction between “reasons” and “causes.” Take the example (which Freud used to draw out his idea of libido) of hunger. Is recognizing hunger as the motivation for an action—such as stealing bread—the same as detecting a cause or attributing a reason? If a homeless person steals bread and tries to justify his action by saying “I was hungry,” we can say that perhaps we are dealing with an interpretation of reasons, because the context in which the man said “I was hungry” is a juridical one, where hunger can be considered only as a motivation for a crime, or even a way to partly offset its seriousness. A biologist working on bulimia, experimenting to find out why some women eat so much, may deal with hunger as a cause, or as an effect of an unknown cause. In this case, the question is why a bulimic woman is hungry even if her body does not require more food. But it is clear that the common expression “to be hungry” itself refers to something unspecified: the hunger can appear as a cause, an effect of a cause, or a reason or motivation, according to our different “linguistic games.” “Hunger” as a linguistic concept is neither cause nor reason, but a global experience with which human beings play, giving it different functions, and from it making science, laws, rules, art or haute cuisine.

a priori exclude a linguistic game (psychoanalysis or anything else) which is able to use “hunger,” “desire,” or “anguish” as at once the reason and cause of an action, or something in between.

Bouveresse is right to note that Freud, interpreting all dreams as the fulfillment of a desire, is not able to explain—in a scientific sense—the production of a dream. Interpretation does not imply explanation. On this point, Wittgenstein was certainly right. But the real problem for philosophy is that, interpreting dreams according to his key, Freud was able to lead patients to a new kind of insight about themselves. Something similar happens when a critic or art historian proposes a new insight into an old work of literature or art: the new insight does not explain why and how the work was made, but it can open new perspectives into reading the work.

This new reading perhaps does not appear truer to us—if we want to limit the privilege of using the word true to scientists—but more likely, more convincing. This is why Freud called his book *Traumdeutung*, “Interpretation of dreams,” and not “Science of dreams.” But perhaps it is too rigid to say our knowledge can come solely from sciences. In our everyday lives we make many (more or less plausible) interpretations which derive from a kind of perspicuous insight, or representation (*übersichtliche Darstellung*), and not from

some scientific theory. For Wittgenstein, psychoanalysis was closer to an aesthetic “explanation” than to a scientific one, but for him an “aesthetic explanation” was not necessarily confused or false. When he recommended the *übersichtliche Darstellung*, he was, of course, proposing neither a scientific hypothesis nor a mere arbitrary interpretation: he was recommending a kind of “plausible description” (something perhaps practiced by every good psychoanalyst).

Let me quote an anecdote. While watching television with friends once, I was struck by an interviewer’s slip of the tongue while interviewing a movie star at a horse track. The star appeared particularly ill at ease, and at a certain point the interviewer referred to her as a “very brilliant horse...” I asked my friends on the spot (none of whom was in any way involved in psychoanalysis) what they thought of this slip. Almost everybody read it as an unconscious way of poking fun at this star, whose wit was no better than that of a horse. Almost everybody swore that this interviewer was macho and essentially contemptuous of women, a heterosexual who considered women pretty objects worth no more than good horses. When I later did some research on this interviewer using TV magazines, I discovered that his real personality was entirely fit to the image provided by this slip.

I apologize for bringing up an anecdote. But I did so as a reminder that in everyday life we draw a lot of inferences through psychological insights, inferences often close to Freud’s conceptions. These everyday extrapolations are not grounded in some scientific, falsifiable, universal laws as in physics, but they work, and result in grasping something of the hidden lives of others. Some philosophers, following C.S. Peirce, call these inferences abductions: formulation of an hypothesis for a particular concrete case, without reference to any universal law as in physics (abductions are very common in the world of detectives, and this explains why a long tradition in American movies and novels equates psychoanalysts with detectives: both use the same logical tool).

It is too often said that psychoanalysis clashes with common sense and rationality, but since Freud’s glance has penetrated our common approach to life, his conceptions reveal themselves closer to some psychological common sense than was heretofore supposed.

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Compared to Wittgenstein, Bouveresse appears narrow-minded towards non-scientific knowledge; more conservative than his master. Philosophers are often conservative because they tend to reduce new language games, and new forms of life, to those already known, established and clear-cut. Philosophers often try to reduce the originality of psychoanalysis as a “language game” to (a) some kind of scientific explanation, or (b) some kind of magic, suggestive performance. They do not find much middle ground for something original between physics and astrology. (Philosophers sometimes fail to recognize that even the hard sciences have an array of different “games.” For example, paleontology and ethology proceed according to very different rules from physics because, rather than stating universal laws, they make historical reconstructions.) The attempt to propose new paradigms is discouraged by the constant reference to old and established ones. There is a conservative penchant among philosophers, Bouveresse included.

**Although Wittgenstein and Bouveresse are right to denounce Freud’s scientific illusions, the major question remains: what kind of “linguistic game” is psychoanalysis?**

ézanne began to paint landscapes in a new way, they were not being scientific, but they nevertheless conveyed some feeling of truth about landscapes. Every praxis and art emits an aura of knowledge (linguistics as a serious discipline originates from the epistheme, the knowledge, conveyed by literary practice and oratory; political economy utilizes the practical knowledge conveyed by the business world; and so on). In this sense, Freud may not be scientific when he says “every dream fulfills a desire,” but his new interpretative key produces in many subjects some sort of “insight” which falls between knowledge and mere interpretation. The psychoanalyst, too, will accumulate awry knowledge (as opposed to straight,

scientific knowledge) by provoking people with his interpretations. Freud's theories can be seen not as simply confusing causes and reasons, but as expanding the normal and usual way by which insightful people build a kind of knowledge based on interpretation of reasons. Even a Catholic priest, having heard confessions for years, at a certain point is able to draw some picture of how Catholics live their sexual problems. His knowledge of guilt feelings among Catholics, while based on practice rather than some scientific method, can nevertheless be perspicuous.

Bouveresse is perfectly right in considering certain Freudian axioms, such as "nothing is casual in human behavior, everything is determined," to be the result of philosophical prejudices. Modern physics does not assume that everything in nature, even details, is strictly determined, from the fall of a leaf from a tree to a slip of the tongue. Bouveresse reminds us that the belief in strict determinism in all aspects of life is typical of magical thinking, and not of scientific method.

In any case, a clever psychoanalyst is always a split person: although he knows that Freud's theory is based on some arbitrary and blatant metaphysical assumptions, he must nevertheless recognize that, in everyday practice, the concrete application of these unconvincing assumptions produces some "effects of truth." Like most philosophers dealing with psychoanalysis, Bouveresse discusses Freudian theories, but rarely psychoanalytic practice. But practicing psychoanalysts cannot be satisfied just knowing that basic Freudian assumptions are rooted in some pseudo-scientific biases. They wish to understand also why their practice often works, despite its implausible or uncertain theoretical origins. To explain the effects—not only therapeutic—of this practice as just a matter of suggestion is too simplistic; a way of reformulating, rather than answering, the real question. As every psychoanalyst knows, it is not true that an analysand, over time, comes to accept the analyst's interpretations because of the analyst's authority. Rather, the analyst has an authority over the analysand because his interpretations convinced him insofar as they appear true. It is easy to accept that psychoanalysis is based on suggestive persuasion, but this suggestion also persuades through a feeling of truth.

Magic is generally convincing because it makes a display of power; psychoanalytic persuasion does not evoke power, but rather truth. In our skeptical times, an analyst can "seduce"—and keep—a client only if the analysand at some point feels the analyst is telling him some truths. Bouveresse can say that a feeling of truth is not a truth, but it is very important in any case to explain and analyze the fact that some speech gives people a feeling of truth, while others do not. And the later Wittgenstein, with all his concerns about psychology, felt that these kinds of questions deserved philosophical interest.

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Bouveresse gives credence to philosophers of science such as Popper and Grünbaum, and seems to reject the idea that Wittgenstein anticipated the approaches of Kuhn and Feyerabend to the history of science [see p. 68]. Kuhn does not think that everything in scientific theories has to be proved or checked. There are what he calls scientific "paradigms," implicit rules which organize the research for evidence but are not themselves falsifiable. Some philosophers think Freud's idea that every dream fulfills a wish is close to the Kuhnian paradigm. But Bouveresse retorts that psychoanalytic paradigms are empty, because up to now (a century after the birth of psychoanalysis) these paradigms have not led to genuine hypotheses and theories. At this point, Bouveresse cites Darwinian theory—and I regret that he does not analyze further this important parallel between Darwin and Freud. Neither Darwinism nor Freudianism produced theories which could predict the future, given some counter-factual pre-conditions: they present themselves as historical reconstructions, as models to explain the past and not (experimentally) the future.

"Wittgenstein," Bouveresse writes, "does not tell us if he considered the Darwinian theory a scientific theory or not" [p. 68]. (I would add: ". . . because the scientific character of some theories was not their most important aspect for him.") Bouveresse, for his part, thinks Darwin's interesting theory was very successful when it was yet unproved; and when Darwinian theory was later proved, or at least corroborated in Popper's sense, it was no longer fashionable. Bouveresse stresses that such is not the case with Freudian theory.

But Bouveresse is aware that for a long time there was (and still is) the legitimate suspicion that Darwinism was just a Kuhnian paradigm, something essentially unprovable (or unfalsifiable or irrefutable), because it was based on a circular argument: I explain the existence of a species by its adaptation to the environment; but I prove this adaptation evoking the actual existence of the species. In this sense, Darwin's original paradigm was similar to Freud's paradigms such as "a dream always fulfills a desire (if I dream something clearly frustrating, an analyst can always say "this frustration is just what your unconscious desired!"). But the unprovable or irrefutable character of a paradigm, according to Kuhn, does not prevent the generation of genuine provable and/or falsifiable theories. Even if Darwin's original paradigm was unprovable (as all paradigms essentially are), after half a century some genuine Darwinian theories started to emerge. Bouveresse stresses, rightly, that this did not happen with Freud's paradigm: we do not yet have a genuine scientific theory drawn from the Freudian paradigm.

It is impossible here to analyze whether Freudian assumptions inspired any psychological predictions having the features of rough scientific hypotheses. Even if the Freudian paradigm may later inspire some hypotheses in the sense of physics, it remains true that, unlike Darwinism, it is an empty shell, because it is devoid of scientific theories. But in this century, how many social or "human sciences" (sciences humaines, as they are called in France) have generated any real theories as in physics? From this point of view, psychoanalysis is in no worse a situation than any of the other "human sciences." The Darwinian paradigm found more quickly a scientific "research program" like modern genetics probably because living species are easier subjects for inquiry, as in physics, than are human dreams, hatreds or loves.

Even the most rigorous social sciences rarely produce falsifiable hypotheses. They generally work with models, which are not falsifiable, because their application to real processes as a rule disproves them. A model tells us how some actors would behave in some ideal, simple situation, and we might think that this model is pertinent—that it essentially describes the process that is going on—even if real behavior is far from the standards described by the model. (And we need an esprit de finesse to realize when and where a model has to be abandoned, when and where facts really refute it.)

In this sense, Freudian theory is just like a model (which is a kind of Kuhnian paradigm). Of course, if we take the Freudian statements "every dream fulfills a desire" or "every slip of tongue expresses a desire" as genuine hypotheses, it is easy to laugh them off, as Bouveresse does. But we can grasp something more complex about Freud's significance if we consider his statements as models or Kuhnian paradigms: we may think of our dreams as tending to fulfill our desires, and from this we might one day articulate a theory. In short, the Freudian model (not theory!) says "desire plays a bigger part in our lives than we had ever suspected: reflecting on our slips, dreams, or jokes, we can acquaint ourselves with it."

Darwinism's original creative idea was that a species survives by changing in order to adapt itself to its own environment, in order to survive. Of course, we know from ethology that many animal features are linked to adaptation to the environment in the sense that they are very attractive to possible sexual mates. Male deer have large antlers not as an adaptation to their outside environment, but to seduce females; and the female deer's desire for the males' antlers is not at all explainable in terms of adaptation to her outside environment. Still... Darwin's theory remains valid even in these cases if we take it as a model, because it tells us "a male deer has to adapt itself to the rules of mating... which is why it develops huge antlers; if they are too huge, it will seduce all the females of the herd, but will succumb; the size of the antlers tends to be compatible both with the survival of the individual and reproduction, that is, with its adaptation to its environment." ~

Of course, Wittgenstein never spoke about paradigms, models, or falsifications regarding psychoanalysis. But his ideas on these topics were going in a slightly more complex direction than the one described by Bouveresse. The French scholar seems to have been overpowered by his desire to get rid of the overwhelming Freudian impact on French philosophy, in this case using Wittgenstein's thought as a weapon. But, of course, he might say that even this statement is too Freudian, and that implies a prejudice. ...

**Notes:**

(1) Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Conversations on Freud," in C. Barrett, ed., *Lectures and Conversations* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press), pp. 41-52.

(2) Wittgenstein: la rime et la raison (Paris: Minuit, 1973); *Le mythe de l'intériorité. Expérience, signification et langage privé chez Wittgenstein* (Paris: Minuit, 1976); *Le pays des possibles. Wittgenstein et l'invention de la nécessité* (Paris: Minuit, 1988) and many others.