This paper presents Freud’s argument that the clinical process of psychoanalysis must continually combat the patient’s resistance to the analyst’s interpretations. It also presents systematically Wittgenstein’s counterargument. Wittgenstein contends that psychoanalytic interpretations are enormously attractive and that their “charm” predisposes the patient to accept them. He traces their charm to six sources, each of which is discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

Freud contends that the typical response to a psychoanalytic diagnosis is one of disgust and horror. This sort of response, he argues, induces patients to resist such diagnoses. If Freud is right, the clinical process of psychoanalysis must continually combat the patient’s strong presumption that the analyst’s interpretations are false.

Not only does Wittgenstein deny Freud’s claim, he goes on to affirm the contrary. Wittgenstein contends that psychoanalytic interpretations are enormously attractive and that their attractiveness predisposes the patient to accept them. He traces their attractiveness or “charm” to six different sources. In this paper I will present and discuss each of these sources. Additionally, I will discuss Freud’s contention that psychoanalytic interpretations are profoundly unattractive.

2. THE REPULSIVENESS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC INTERPRETATIONS

Freud maintains that psychoanalytic interpretations are repulsive for two reasons. First, one has an aversion to them "... because the interpretation will inevitably be felt as something of a blow to the individual’s self-esteem." A patient can accept a proposed interpretation, according to Freud, only at the expense of his self-image. Freud frequently dismisses criticism of his theory on the ground that it is motivated by the wish to retain an unrealistically favorably self-image. In Totem and Taboo he says that the psychoanalytic conception of mankind ushers in a Copernican revolution. What he has in mind is nicely expressed by Tom Stoppard:
Copernicus cracked our confidence, and Einstein smashed it. Well, it's over now. Not only are we no longer the still center of God's universe, we're not even uniquely graced by his footprint in man's image.

It smashes our confidence even more, Freud suggests, when we learn of our deep-seated Oedipal wishes. According to Freud, we do not submit gracefully to this aspect of reality. Here, he contends, we have an example of primary process thinking in the functioning of "normal" adults: they deny ("resist") reality because doing otherwise would be painful.

The second reason that psychoanalytic interpretations are unattractive, according to Freud, is that they reveal a part of reality to which we have a strong unconscious aversion. Speaking of the "grown-up, normal man's] ... rejection... of the central complex of the neurosis," Freud says

We are forced to believe that such a rejection is above all the product of man's aversion to his former incest wishes which have since succumbed to repression.

On this reasoning, our aversion to Oedipal wishes is "displaced" onto (transferred to) the theory which forces us to pay attention to Oedipal wishes. If the normal adult occasionally lapses into "primary process thinking" (the hallmark of which is the inability to distinguish mind-independent reality, that is, what is the case, from what one wishes were the case), it is even more common in neurotics' cognitive processes: as in the case of "normal grownups", primary process thinking results in the rejection of psychoanalytic interpretations.

Freud's position can be summarized as follows. First, the analyst is continually confronted with interpretations which are an affront to his feelings of personal self-worth. Second, these interpretations draw attention to aspects of reality to which he has an unconscious aversion. As Freud points out, few things are more demeaning and repellent than discovering one's wish to kill his father and have sex with his mother. Because of these two factors, Freud argues, patients are strongly inclined to reject psychoanalytic interpretations.

3. THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC INTERPRETATIONS

Wittgenstein claims that psychoanalytic interpretations possess enormous appeal. Rush Rhees reports him as saying that the idea of the unconscious is "an idea which has a marked attraction." In his "Lectures on Aesthetics," Wittgenstein characterizes Freud's interpretations as "interesting" and "charming." The connexions [Freud] makes," Wittgenstein says, "interest people immensely. They have a charm." He notes that many psychoanalytic explanations... are adopted because they have a peculiar charm. In Culture and Value Wittgenstein says that a Freudian interpretation "... has a charm of its own." One of Wittgenstein's expositors, Frank Cioffi, observes that

A succinct way of giving Wittgenstein's view of Freud is simply to state that he stands [Freud's] propositions on their heads. In a letter to Normal Malcolm, he said of
WITTGENSTEIN ON THE "CHARM" OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Freud: 'He always stresses what great forces in the mind, what strong prejudices work against the idea of psychoanalysis but he never says what an enormous charm this idea has for people just as it has for Freud himself'.

When Wittgenstein speaks of the "charm" of psychoanalysis, he is describing what he regards as an almost magical quality. On his view, psychoanalytic diagnoses "bewitch" or "cast a spell" on the patient, which brings about a suspension of criticism. It is worth noting that the German verb 'verzaubern' may be alternatively translated as 'to charm', 'to bewitch' or 'to cast a spell on'.

The magical appeal of Freudian interpretations, on Wittgenstein's account, makes it easy for the patient to be persuaded of their truth. The patient has the same sort of interest in such interpretations that he has in a "painting which attracts and inspires us." According to Wittgenstein, if a psychoanalytic interpretation proved mistaken ("is not the right...story"), we would be disappointed and feel "deprived of something." Contrary to Freud's insistent denials, Wittgenstein tells us that we want psychoanalytic interpretations to be true. Their attractiveness as works of art, Wittgenstein suggests in his "Lectures on Aesthetics," seduces us into saying "Yes, that must be true." By acknowledging that a psychoanalytic interpretation is true, according to Wittgenstein, the patient is expressing his appreciation of its aesthetic appeal.

Wittgenstein's comparison between works of art and psychoanalytic interpretations is sufficiently clear if we consider the examples he gives to clarify his position. In both Culture and Value and his Lectures and Conversations, he expressly compares Freudian interpretations with mythical stories. He contends that a Freudian interpretation is like a mythical story in that both explain in a very engaging way how some state of affairs came about. On Wittgenstein's account, the ancient Greeks' beliefs that Zeus hurled thunderbolts and Demeter regulated the seasons stemmed partly from the immense charm and artistic appeal of such stories. The attractiveness of psychoanalytic interpretations, according to Wittgenstein, springs, at least in part, from the same source.

It is worth noting that other commentators view psychoanalysis similarly. Freud himself saw a considerable overlap between the respective domains of the psychologist and the artist. One of Freud's early collaborators, C.G. Jung, "...felt a great inner resistance" to the idea that his introspective psychology was a form of art rather than an investigation of "nature". In Memories, Dreams, Reflections, Jung says,

When I was writing down these fantasies, I once asked myself, 'What am I really doing? Certainly this has nothing to do with science. But then what is it?' Whereupon a voice within me said, 'It is art.' I was astonished. It had never entered my head that what I was writing has any connection with art.

Wittgenstein goes one step further: not only is psychoanalysis art, he contends, it is a work of considerable artistic appeal.
4. OTHER SOURCES OF THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

The attractiveness of psychoanalytic interpretations is not confined to their aesthetic appeal, according to Wittgenstein. He lists five other motives which may induce the patient to accept a particular interpretation. Psychoanalytic interpretations are (1) uncanny, (2) gratifying, (3) attractively repellent, (4) simplifying, and (5) iconoclastic.

In his article "Wittgenstein's Freud," Cioffi attempts to answer the question, "In what way are psychoanalytic explanations uncanny?" He has compiled an impressive list of cases from Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* to illustrate "...the protective, interest-serving relationship in which the unconscious so often stands to its possessor." Cioffi's examples show clearly how the unconscious mysteriously ("uncannily") intervenes at just the right moment and in just the right way. I will mention only one case. Cioffi reports that the unconscious

... assuages the sense of guilt by punishing moral breaches. In support of this view Freud cites a correspondent who informs him that he has observed how often men who turn round to look back at passing women in the street meet with minor accidents such as colliding with lamp-posts.

It is uncanny that these collisions occur precisely when punishment is appropriate. Wittgenstein claims, quite plausibly, that such poetic justice has a magical appeal.

Wittgenstein also traces the "peculiar attraction" of Freudian interpretations to the fact that they are "gratifying". He explains the curative power of psychoanalysis in terms of its similarities with mythology. A patient experiences relief, Wittgenstein suggests, when he comes to believe that his psychological problem is suitable subject matter for an epic tragedy. His self-esteem is raised by such an explanation, Wittgenstein argues, which provides "...an inducement to say, "Yes, of course, it must be like that."" This thesis is diametrically opposed to Freud's view, according to which the patient necessarily suffers a loss of self-esteem as a result of admitting the existence, for example, of Oedipal wishes. Contrary to Freud's claims, psychoanalysis provides explanations which tend to reinforce one's narcissistic self-image, according to Wittgenstein. In this sense they are "gratifying."

Psychoanalytic explanations may also be experienced as gratifying because they expand our conception of human agency. In *Totem and Taboo* Freud claims that his Copernican revolution would force man to a self-conception which places severe restrictions on his autonomy. But instead of placing limitations on our conception of human agency, Freud's theory does the opposite. Cioffi points out that

A prototypical Freudian utterance ... would assert of some phenomenon like a slip of the tongue, a lapse of memory, a reminiscence, a dream, a phobia, a hysterical system, or an obsessive thought, that though it might appear to be something which the patient has passively suffered, it was, nevertheless, motivated (and) purposive. ...
Insofar as psychoanalysis expands our conception of human agency, it may be seen as "gratifying."

I wish to say very little about Wittgenstein's cryptic claim that Freudian explanations are attractively repellent. He does not provide any argument in support of his claim, nor does he give examples to make clear what he has in mind. Nevertheless, for the sake of completeness, I will include a brief account, without explication, of the "attractive repellence" of psychoanalytic interpretations. In his "Lectures on Aesthetics," Wittgenstein says

Here is an extremely interesting psychological phenomenon, that this ugly explanation makes you say you really had these thoughts, whereas in any ordinary sense you really didn't.29

In the same lecture, he explicitly formulates his thesis about the persuasive power of the repellent:

There is a strong tendency to say: "We can't get round the fact that this dream is really such and such." It may be the fact that the explanation is extremely repellent that drives you to adopt it.30

Wittgenstein's choice of terms here is worth noting. He speaks of something which "drives" the patient to adopt an explanation rather than of the patient's assessing the explanation in terms of its accurately indicating the dream's latent content.

Wittgenstein also contends that psychoanalysis wins adherents because it is reductive. People often accept theories which say "this is really only this."31 He tells us that "Those sentences have the form of persuasion in particular which say 'This is really this.'"32 Reductive explanations are almost irresistible, according to Wittgenstein:

If someone says: "Why do you say it is really this? Obviously it is not this at all." It is in fact even difficult to see it as something else.33

As a theory of human motivation, Wittgenstein tells us, psychoanalysis is a powerful simplifier: everything is actually "bawdy," according to psychoanalytic teachings.34 For our purposes, Freud's denials that his theory is reductively pansexualistic are not as important as the fact that he is forced to make the denials. For he thereby concede sthat psychoanalysis is often seen as a reductive theory. Whether it actually is reductive doesn't affect Wittgenstein's argument either way, since Wittgenstein's point concerns the reception of psychoanalytic theory. In his "Lectures on Aesthetics," Wittgenstein traces the acceptance of psychoanalysis to "[t]he craving for simplicity. . .If your explanation is complicated, it is disagreeable. . ."35 He turns the tables on Freud by maintaining that primary process thinking results in the acceptance of psychoanalysis, rather than in its rejection. You accept a reductive theory, according to Wittgenstein, "mostly because you wish it to be the case."36

Finally, Wittgenstein notes that Freud's teachings serve to destroy prejudice. Wittgenstein observes that "The connections [Freud] makes
interest people immensely. They have a charm. It is charming to destroy prejudice." It is charming to destroy prejudice." The iconoclastic character of psychoanalytic interpretations has particular appeal for Wittgenstein himself. Psychoanalytic treatment induces patients to break their normal habits of thinking, according to Wittgenstein, to see things in a new way. He says that

[Psychoanalysis] makes certain [new] ways of behaving and thinking natural for [patients]. They have given up one way of thinking and adopted another.

Here is where Freud's influence on Wittgenstein is most evident. Because it is in general so well known, I will avoid a lengthy excursion into Wittgenstein's philosophical methodology. There is one similarity between his therapeutic approach and Freud's, however, which ought to be mentioned. Everyone familiar with Wittgenstein's work knows that he places great emphasis on curing "mental cramp." It is an integral part of Wittgenstein's methodology to provide alternative "ways of thinking," to suggest new "comparisons." Freud is particularly adept, Wittgenstein contends, at suggesting new "analogies," that is, at providing new ways of thinking. According to Wittgenstein, psychoanalysis combats some of our common prejudices. These prejudices include, for example, our notion of infantile innocence, our belief that women do not have sexual drives, and our idea that sexuality is exclusively genital. One of Freud's most important prejudice-shattering ideas is his dynamic conception of the unconscious: not only are we unaware of many of our thoughts, wishes, and desires, according to Freud, we are motivated to be unaware of them. In short, Freud introduces a new way of thinking, according to Wittgenstein, which serves to destroy old prejudices. For this reason Wittgenstein "... would speak of himself ... as 'a disciple of Freud' and 'a follower of Freud'."

For Wittgenstein, psychoanalytic treatment consists of the patient's being induced to see things in a new way. Wittgenstein's philosophical work, as is well-known, also aims at inducing "patients" to see things in a new way.

While Wittgenstein holds that the iconoclastic character of psychoanalysis contributes to its "peculiar attraction for us," he also holds, paradoxically, that Freud is a man of "colossal prejudice." For example, Freud never manages to shed either his essentialist or determinist presuppositions, according to Wittgenstein. The fact that Freud has these prejudices (among others) helps to explain the negative side of Wittgenstein's ambivalence toward Freud.

To understand further Wittgenstein's negative reaction to Freud's work one must consider the fact that psychoanalysis, if it is accepted at all, is usually accepted uncritically. Rhees reports Wittgenstein as saying that

... the enormous influence of psychoanalysis in Europe and America was harmful--"although it will take a long time before we lose our subservience to it." To learn from Freud you have to be critical; and psychoanalysis generally prevents this.

Psychoanalysis prevents criticism, Wittgenstein suggests, precisely because of the "bewitching" effect of psychoanalytic interpretations. Patients are bewitched into a state of credulity in much the same way that philosophers are bewitched into accepting essentialism, psycho-physical
WITTGENSTEIN ON THE "CHARM" OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

dualism, or referential semantic theories. In each case, Wittgenstein observes the patient’s tendency to suspend criticism. Whether under the spell of a psychoanalytic or philosophical explanation, there is a tendency to say "Yes, that must be so." 80

Wittgenstein is ambivalent toward psychoanalysis for the same kind of reason that black inhabitants of Portuguese colonies in the nineteenth century were ambivalent toward British intervention in their revolutions. Queen Victoria ordered British forces to establish British colonies after a successful revolt. Black revolutionaries quickly found themselves subservient to their revolutionary allies. Still, during the revolution against many pervasive prejudices, Freud’s theory exerts a liberating influence. As a provisional ally in the struggle against dogmatism, psychoanalysis has great appeal, Wittgenstein suggests: its iconoclastic character facilitates the patient’s acceptance of psychoanalytic interpretations.

5. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Wittgenstein lists six factors which predispose patients to accept psychoanalytic interpretations. Contrary to Freud’s claim, the patient’s initial response to a psychoanalytic diagnosis is not one of disgust and horror. Rather, according to Wittgenstein, the patient is charmed into accepting the diagnosis uncritically. On Wittgenstein’s account the real danger is not that the patient will resist a correct diagnosis, but that he will readily accept an incorrect one.

ENDNOTES


3 Ibid.


5 Freud, Totem and Taboo, passim.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 820.


9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid. 24–5


14 *CV*, 69.

15 Ibid.

16 *LC*, 25.

17 *CV*, 69; *LC*, 51.

18 "What Freud has done," according to Wittgenstein, "is to propound a new myth." (*LC*, 51).

19 *LC*, 51.


23 *WF*, 186.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 187.

26 *LC*, 51.


28 *WF*, 185.

29 *LC*, 25.

30 Ibid., 24

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 27.

33 Ibid., 24.

34 Ibid., 24ff.

35 Ibid., 36.

36 Ibid.
WITTGENSTEIN ON THE "CHARM" OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

37 Ibid., 24.
38 Ibid., 45.
39 Ibid.


42 LC, 41.

43 Ibid., 45.

44 Ibid., 26.

45 Ibid., 41.

46 Ibid., 18, 45, 48.


48 LC, 41.

49 Ibid.

50 CV, 69.