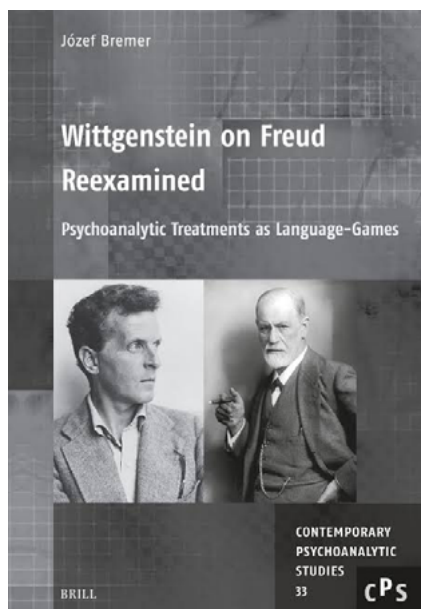


Józef Bremer, *Wittgenstein on Freud reexamined. Psychoanalytic treatments as language-games*

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The relationship between Freud's thought and Wittgenstein's philosophy raises a number of difficult questions concerning the status of psychoanalysis and the role of language in the articulation of psychic experience. Bringing Freud and Wittgenstein into dialogue raises questions that have recurred in the philosophical literature: whether psychoanalysis offers causal explanations or rather interpretations of meaning; how, within therapeutic practice, interpretation is to be distinguished from suggestion; and what role language plays in shaping our understanding of ourselves.

Against this background, Józef Bremer's book advances a coherent and methodologically explicit account. The author neither presents Wittgenstein as an external critic of psychoanalysis nor treats Freud as an easy target of epistemological demystification. Instead, he argues that both thinkers confront the same problem: the status of interpretation in relation to human experience.

Bremer's argument begins from the claim that psychoanalysis ought to be understood primarily as an interpretative practice. It is not, in the first instance, a theory of hidden psychic mechanisms, but a way of reorganising the field of meaning. On this view, the central question does not concern whether

psychoanalysis accurately describes the structure of the psyche, but rather how its interpretations function and what criteria are taken to be sufficient.

This shift in perspective allows Bremer to offer a revised reading of Wittgenstein's critique of psychoanalysis. This critique does not primarily concern the content of psychoanalytic claims, but the way in which they function within interpretative practice. In this context, the problem of the patient's acceptance of an interpretation assumes particular importance. The patient's assent cannot serve as a straightforward criterion of the truth of an interpretation, since that assent may be the result of suggestion, given the authority of the therapist, or from the very structure of the analytic situation.

Bremer interprets psychoanalysis above all by use of the terms 'language-game'. On this account, a language game is an ordered practice of speaking and responding in which the meaning of utterances depends upon rules of use and the dialogical context. Interpretation does not so much identify the hidden cause of an event as propose a particular way of understanding it. Psychoanalysis thus ceases to be a theory of psychic processes and instead functions as an interpretative practice that transforms the way the subject understands his or her own experience. Wittgenstein's critique does not, therefore, entail its rejection, but rather enables one to distinguish its therapeutic dimension from the ontological claims of metapsychology.

The most persuasive parts of the book concern the analysis of concrete therapeutic practices: free association, resistance, transference, countertransference and dream interpretation. Bremer brings out their complexity, avoiding their reduction to a simple schema of theory and application. Free association is not treated as a technique for uncovering hidden content, but as a linguistic practice in which the patient's spontaneous utterances reorganise the field of meaning of his or her experience. Similarly, resistance is not merely an obstacle, but an element of the therapeutic process that reveals tensions present in the way one narrates one's own life.

In this context, Bremer engages indirectly both with Karl Popper's well-known critique of psychoanalysis and, more fundamentally, with the interpretation proposed by Jacques Bouveresse — who analysed the tension between psychoanalytic explanation and the Wittgensteinian critique of philosophical illusion. If an interpretative system can accommodate every possible patient response, it forfeits clear criteria of falsification. Bremer's analyses do not refute this critique; they show why the problem remains significant even when psychoanalysis is understood as an interpretative practice, while at the same time attempting to moderate the more radical conclusions drawn by Bouveresse.

Particularly noteworthy are the reflections on dream interpretation and the notion of *reverie*. Bremer emphasises that dream analysis does not consist in decoding hidden content. The meaning of a dream is not given in advance, but emerges within dialogue and in the network of associations that arise in the course of conversation. Freud treated dreams as a privileged route of access to the unconscious, attributing to them a distinctive epistemic status. Wittgenstein, however, approached this claim with scepticism, pointing to the absence of unambiguous criteria for the verification of interpretations.

In this context, Bremer introduces the notion of *reverie*, understood as a specific state of the analyst's attention, akin to the principle of evenly suspended attention. Reverie involves a suspension of selective control and an openness to the emergence of images, affects and meanings not yet fully articulated in language. It does not, however, provide access to a privileged stratum of the psyche. As in the case of dreams, there remains the risk that the material will be subsumed under a pre-established interpretative framework. The value of reverie lies, rather, in cultivating a particular sensitivity to the dynamics of meaning as they unfold in dialogue.

Both dream analysis and the practice of reverie present psychoanalysis as a form of interpretative work in which the meaning of experience is not discovered but constituted in the relation between participants in the conversation. Wittgenstein's critique allows one to separate the therapeutic function of these practices from their theoretical claims.

Notwithstanding its considerable merits, Bremer's proposal gives rise to important critical questions. The most significant concerns the threat of linguistic reductionism. If psychoanalysis is described primarily as a language game, the role of affect and embodiment becomes difficult to account for as these dimensions cannot be fully reduced to the discursive.

A second reservation concerns the concept of therapy. In the book under discussion, it operates with two distinct senses, corresponding to the respective projects of Wittgenstein and Freud. In Wittgenstein, therapy is primarily grammatical in character: it consists in the dissolution of conceptual illusions and the attainment of clarity that removes the compulsive character of philosophical problems. It does not lead to the discovery of hidden psychic structures or to the transformation of such structures, but rather to a form of *quiet* grounded in the perspicuous use of concepts. In Freud, by contrast, therapy has an existential and transformative dimension: it aims at the working-through of psychic conflicts and the reorganisation of affect-laden experience. Its goal is not the elimination of tensions, but an increased capacity to understand and bear them.

Bremer rightly notes that a certain existential dimension is also present in Wittgenstein, visible in his personal tensions and existential worries, an approach which allows one to regard philosophy as a form of work on oneself. There nonetheless arises a tension that the author does not fully develop: the concept of therapy oscillates between grammatical analysis and a response to existential unease. The relation between these two senses remains insufficiently explicated.

A third limitation follows from the interpretative strategy adopted. The focus on Freud and Wittgenstein ensures analytical clarity, but it also sidelines later reinterpretations of psychoanalysis, such as those developed by Jacques Lacan and Paul Ricoeur.

Despite these reservations, Bremer's book constitutes a significant contribution to the debate on the relation between Wittgenstein's philosophy and psychoanalysis. Its strength lies in the combination of careful textual reconstruction with an analysis of therapeutic practice. The author does not reduce the Freud–Wittgenstein dispute to an opposition between demystification and defence but presents it as a dispute concerning the nature of interpretation, explanation, and the transformation of human experience.

In this respect, the book extends beyond the relatively narrow field of Wittgenstein studies. It opens up a space for dialogue between philosophy and reflection on psychotherapy, and demonstrates that philosophical analysis can make a substantive contribution to our understanding of practices through which individuals seek to grasp the meaning of their own experience.

*Andrzej KAPUSTA**

* Ph.D. (habil.), associate professor, Department of Philosophy and Sociology, UMCS w Lublinie. E-mail: andrzej.kapusta@umcs.pl.