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Ricœur and Freud: Beyond the archaeo-teleological principle

Abstract: This essay presents a re-reading of Ricœur's *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. Several scholars emphasize Ricœur's hermeneutic, quasi-Hegelian construal of Freud associated with his 'archaeo-teleological' approach. Ricœur indeed dialectically links the 'archaeology of the subject' with a teleology whose overtones are Hegelian. The first section shows how the archaeo-teleological principle functions, and explicates its presuppositions, one of which concerns Freud's dualisms and the allegedly smooth transition from one to the other pole of each binary opposition. The second section points up specific elements that complicate the archaeo-teleological structure. Ricœur's analyses in the second part of the book reveal a conceptual richness and gesture towards a radical, non-teleological reading of psychoanalysis. This section focuses on two Freudian dualisms (the death drive and life instincts, and the principles of pleasure and reality). The way in which both Freud and Ricoeur present these dualisms renders problematic the neat, one-directional organization of their two poles which archaeo-teleology presupposes, thereby affirming an uneasy and reversible relation between pleasure and reality, Eros and Thanatos. One can interpret Ricœur's text in such an alternative way so as to reveal the radicality of his thought against all those who underestimate its significance simply on the basis of its hermeneutic character.

The first volume in a series containing Paul Ricœur's essays and lectures held by the *Fonds Ricœur* in Paris was published in 2008, was devoted to psychoanalysis and was titled *On Psychoanalysis: Writings and Lectures*.[1] I will begin with a lengthy quote from the "Editor's Introduction" to that volume, in which Jean-Louis Schlegel, one of the two editors, expresses his concern about the reception and evaluation of Ricœur's collected essays:

> Even if the references to the history of philosophy are muted, the impression might arise that there is too much effort to integrate or reintegrate psychoanalysis into the continuity of Western thought and culture, to neutralizing its rupturing power, in short to manifesting

1 Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, originally published as *Écrits et conférences 1. Autour de la Psychanalyse*.

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> a more 'Hegelian' accent than Ricœur himself might have wished, thereby removing the sting of psychoanalytic 'science,' that 'disturbing uncanniness' which, to cite Freud's own expression, best characterized it and which, moreover, Ricœur himself so readily assumed in order to indicate what was original about Freud. Readers will have to make their own judgment on the basis of the texts gathered here.[2]

I fully share Schlegel's worry that a significant portion of the Ricœur readership may be tempted to think that the collection in question prioritizes, on the basis of Ricœur's own reading, a Hegelian interpretation of psychoanalysis, according to which his philosophy and thinking would be deemed to be not as radical as those of, for example, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida. By no means does this come as a surprise. After all, it is a tendency that Ricœur himself initiated and upheld throughout his writings in various ways, for instance, by proclaiming himself, on several occasions, a post-Hegelian Kantian. As far as psychoanalysis is concerned, Ricœur's quasi-Hegelian reading is associated with what he himself designates as his 'archaeo-teleological' approach to Freud in his 1965 work *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*.[3] In the so-called third book of that work, titled "Dialectic: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freud," Ricœur introduces and develops an archaeo-teleological construal of psychoanalysis, a construal which seeks to articulate the so-called 'archaeology of the subject' with a certain teleology whose Hegelian overtones cannot be missed. I will designate as 'Ricœurianism' this tendency to focus on a Hegelian influence on Ricœur's philosophy with a view either to commending or to discrediting it.

My article is divided into two sections. In the first one, I will explain the way this archaeo-teleological principle functions according to Ricœur's glossing in the Freud book. I will also reflect on the presuppositions and implications of this approach. In the second section, I will put forward the argument that there are elements in Ricœur's analyses which complicate the aforementioned archaeo-teleological structure and undermine a certain Ricœurianism that is content to acquiesce in Ricœur's allegedly unproblematic eschatology. Even if Ricœur himself remained faithful, to the very end, to a regulative, teleological and eschatological principle, I will argue that his detailed interpretation of psy-

2 Schlegel, "Editor's Introduction," 7–8.

3 Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, originally published as *De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud*. Ricœur's book originated in two series of lectures, the Terry Lectures at Yale University in 1961 and a further set of eight lectures at the University of Louvain in 1962. Thanks to Ricœur's professional status and academic influence in the intellectual scene of France in the early and mid-60s, this book made a major and positive contribution towards establishing the significance and relevance of Freud's work both for philosophy and psychoanalysis. The English translation will be abbreviated hereafter as FP and references will be given parenthetically in the text.

choanalysis in the second book of the Freud book, "Analytic: Reading of Freud," is richer and more intricate than this insofar as we can identify there instances that affirm a more radical, interruptive and non-teleological interpretation of Freud. Almost twelve years ago, in *Reading Derrida and Ricœur: Improbable Encounters between Deconstruction and Hermeneutics*, I put forward the idea that Ricœur's texts may be read in a way so that they may acquire a philosophical depth and a conceptual finesse that go beyond the straightforwardly hermeneutic claims they are usually associated with.[4] Without denying those hermeneutic claims and their significance, I still strongly believe in the possibility of opening up his writings and of arguing in favor of the radicality of Ricœur's thinking against all those who are content to evaluate or even discredit his philosophy merely on the basis of its hermeneutic nature.

1 The archaeo-teleological principle

The fact that in *Freud and Philosophy* the archaeo-teleological principle is prevalent is a common philosophical topos that several Ricœur scholars endorse more or less eagerly. There is little doubt that Ricœur's self-presentation is congruous with and has fueled this view, this Ricœurianism. I will only synopsize here the basic tenets of this archaeo-teleological principle in the third book "Dialectic: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freud," as other scholars and I have reflected on it in more detail elsewhere.

Firstly, Ricœur designates the first part of the equation as 'archaeology of the subject.' He borrows the term 'archaeology' from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's preface to Angelo Hesnard's book *L'Oeuvre de Freud et son importance pour le monde moderne*,[5] where Merleau-Ponty declares that the notion of archaeology constitutes "one of the most valuable intuitions in Freudian theory."[6] Ricœur devotes a whole chapter to the archaeology of the subject and it seems that one could isolate at least two features that determine its functioning.[7]

On the one hand, the archaeological motif complements the economic point of view and Freud's so-called 'energetics.' Ricœur calls this strand of psychoanalysis 'Freud's quantitative hypothesis' and one can identify here a series of

4 Pirovolakis, *Reading Derrida and Ricœur.*

5 Hesnard, *L'Oeuvre de Freud*.

6 Quoted by Ricœur in *Freud and Philosophy,* 417–418, n. 99.

7 See the chapter, "Reflection: An Archaeology of the Subject," in Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 419–458.

relevant intertwined concepts and functions[8]: the psychical apparatus and the taxonomy of the various types of neurones, the primary and the secondary process, the flows of physical energy and cathexis, the inaccessible instincts, primal repression, etc. One common denominator of all those economic or quantitative operations is their anti-phenomenological dimension, the fact that they presuppose and affirm an originary non-presence that would radically call into question the certitude and immediacy of a supposedly self-identical transcendental consciousness. Freudian psychoanalysis was appealing to Ricœur at the time because it provided some of the theoretical tools and clinical data that could help complicate the self-sufficiency of the phenomenological consciousness that Edmund Husserl had put forward from 1900 onwards. Given that phenomenology started to look a little outdated in France at some point in the early or mid-60s, Freud's archaeology of the subject furnished an alternative, non-Cartesian and non-egological account of consciousness, an account that acknowledged the significance of instinctual, unconscious activity as much as the economic and automatic regulation of pleasure and unpleasure as the primordial origin of the psychical system.

On the other hand, Ricœur writes that "it must be made clear that it is in reflection and for reflection that psychoanalysis is an archaeology; it is an archaeology *of the subject*" (FP, 420). The emphasis on reflection and subjectivity indicates that archaeology constitutes not only an operation that separates but also one that bridges. The distant and remote facts that archaeology has excavated are findings that lend themselves to meaningfulness and interpretation. Elsewhere in the same chapter, Ricœur contends:

> We must now see the underlying compatibility between the economic model and what I henceforth shall call the archaeological moment of reflection. Here the economic point of view is no longer simply a model, nor even a point of view: it is a total view of things and of man in the world of things [...] I regard Freudianism as a revelation of the archaic, a manifestation of the ever prior. (FP, 440)

Evidently, Freudian archaeology is charged with the task to reveal and make manifest, to bring to light the instinctual cause of traumatic events buried deep down into the timeless and indestructible subsoil of the unconscious or the id of the second topography. The regressive, archaeological movement towards the instinctual and its nonsignifying nature makes sense only when coupled with "the possibility of recognizing the emergence of desire in the series of

8 Ricœur provides a cautious and illuminating account of these economic concepts and functions of the psychical apparatus in the second book "Analytic: Reading of Freud."

its derivatives, in the density and at the borderline of the signifying" (FP, 454). Desire may be the unnameable and the nonspoken but, simultaneously, it is the wish and the potency to speak (see FP, 457).

Secondly, Ricœur's discussion of the archaeological function of psychoanalysis as a method intimately bound up with meaningful desire, with reflection, intersubjectivity and hermeneutics, has definitely paved the way for the transition to teleology proper, which takes place in the next chapter titled "Dialectic: Archaeology and Teleology." "What I wish to demonstrate, then," writes Ricœur, "is that if Freudianism is an explicit and thematized archaeology, it relates of itself, by the dialectical nature of its concepts, to an implicit and unthematized teleology" (FP, 461). After providing an account of the teleological model of consciousness according to Hegel and after reflecting on a potential relation between Hegelian phenomenology and Freudian psychoanalysis, Ricœur focuses on specific ways in which Freud's discourse may be said to have a teleological character.

To begin with, almost all of Freud's operative concepts manifest an antithetical structure by virtue of which they lend themselves to dialectics and teleology. Ricœur refers to several Freudian binary oppositions: sexual instincts versus ego instincts, object-libido versus ego-libido, life instincts versus death instincts, consciousness versus the unconscious, primal versus proper repression, the ego versus the world, the ego versus the id or the superego, etc. All such dichotomies are "presented, as in the Hegelian dialectic, as master-slave relationships that must be overcome" (FP, 477).

Next, Ricœur turns to the concept of identification in psychoanalysis. Freud's quantitative hypothesis and the corollary economics of desire apparently approach the psychical apparatus in terms of largely solipsistic operations. Nevertheless, psychoanalysis as therapy and the situations it reflects upon do not constitute solipsistic affairs. For example, the identification mechanism introduces prohibition and the notion of authority into the very heart of an allegedly solipsistic history of desire, thereby resulting in a certain differentiation of desire. By means of authority and prohibition, another consciousness is somehow interpolated into the unity of the ego, which now becomes associated with a different and even opposite ego. The economics of desire cannot adequately explain this situation, claims Ricœur, nor can the metapsychology theoretically elaborate and account for the analytic relation as an intersubjective drama. He writes: "I would say that what psychoanalysis recognizes under the name of identification is simply the shadow [...] of a process of consciousness to consciousness, and that this process has to be understood through another type of interpretation" (FP, 480). That other type of interpretation is a Hegelian one whereby the ego's desire is attained only through and thanks to another ego. Such a teleolog-

ical dialectics of desire constitutes an interpretative model that goes beyond the solipsistic construal of instincts and their vicissitudes insofar as it takes into consideration the interaction between consciousnesses. It is a dialectical, intersubjective model that is introduced into psychoanalysis in opposition to its metapsychology, topography and economics (see FP, 483).[9]

The archaeo-teleological principle presupposes not only dualism but also a hierarchy and a specific directionality from the negative to the positive pole of each opposition. The telos envisaged or anticipated does not have to be something realizable or even concretely conceptualized. It plays the role of a regulative ideal which opens a continuous and infinite horizon of struggle and interpretation, within which various actual dialectical conflicts can be identified, conflicts linked to the realm of finitude and the empirical. Ricœur thematizes such a teleological and regulative psychoanalytic truth when he writes: "Thereby, finally, is confirmed truth's character of being a task: truth remains an Idea, an infinite Idea, for a being who originates as desire and effort, or, to use Freud's language, as invincibly narcissistic libido" (FP, 458). In the second section, I will focus on two Freudian dualisms, that between the death drive and life instincts and the one between the pleasure and the reality principles, and I will argue that a neat teleological organization is prohibited by the way in which Freud articulates the terms of these dualisms.

2 Beyond?

There is no point in denying that the archaeo-teleological principle constitutes a major strand in Ricœur's reading of Freud. Moreover, Ricœur convincingly argues that archaeo-teleology actually is not imposed upon psychoanalytic discourse from the outside but, rather, is encouraged and supported by a hermeneutic tendency that guides Freud's thinking and psychoanalytic practice. Nevertheless, I would like to draw attention to certain moments in the second book of *Freud and Philosophy*, "Analytic: Reading of Freud," which cast into doubt the archaeo-teleology as much as the possibility of an unproblematic dialectical dualism and continuism in Freud. I will initially focus on the instinctual-psychological level and the text from 1920, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,

9 The next section of the Freud book is devoted to sublimation and is titled "The Implicit Teleology of Freudianism: The Question of Sublimation." Ricœur argues that sublimation, a mechanism that Freud never really developed or elaborated, is linked to those of desexualization, identification and idealization, and includes, therefore, an implicit reference to progression, to the teleological task of becoming conscious; see Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 483–493.

where the death drive is introduced and presented as the opposite pole of the life instincts.[10] I will argue that there is, in the final analysis, a peculiar co-implication but also a reversibility between the death drive and the life instincts which make it virtually impossible radically to distinguish between them in order then to identify a certain transition from one state of affairs to the next one.

At the beginning of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud expresses his bewilderment by the fact that there are psychical processes that seem to contradict the working of this principle which serves the goals of the sexual instincts. The introduction of the death drive will impose limitations on the validity and sovereignty of the pleasure principle. Even if the latter is now conceived in terms not of dominance but merely of a tendency, still Freud begins by examining certain psychical events whereby the functioning of the pleasure principle is inhibited. The very title of the essay indicates that there are tendencies that operate beyond the control of the pleasure principle, "more primitive than it and independent of it."[11] Freud's work begins with an account of cases that prevent the pleasure principle from being carried into effect, with exceptional cases that turn out to be incompatible with the goals of the more or less dominant pleasure principle.

One such tendency is the repetition compulsion, which the psychoanalyst has clinically observed in analysands suffering from traumatic neurosis and which is linked to the death drive: the patients' inexplicable compulsion to repeat situations of distress and failure which they had experienced during their childhood. Ricœur narrates the history of the diagnosis of this tendency in psychoanalysis and traces its provenance back to the distinction that Freud borrowed from Josef Breuer between free and bound psychical energy. He reaches the conclusion that the binding of energy and the corollary protection of the psychical system against external and internal stimuli constitutes a process anterior to the pleasure principle and to the free flow and automatic discharge of energy. The very existence of a psychical apparatus and a supposedly dominating pleasure principle appears to presuppose a more originary process whereby there is protection against the influx of energy, anticathexis and hypercathexis. This primary protective operation is not yet called 'death drive,' yet it is somehow associated with it insofar as it concerns a tendency beyond or before the pleasure principle.

The feeling of anxiety functions in a similarly defensive way. The positive and characteristic feature of anxiety is that it brings about a certain prepared-

10 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

11 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 17.

ness for danger, therefore, it acts as a shield against stimuli that may overwhelm the system. Whenever anxiety is altogether missing, we have a breach on the shield and trauma. The compulsion to repeat in traumatic neurosis, for example, is explained as an endeavor on the part of the system to develop, after the fact, the anxiety that was initially missing—thereby leading to neurosis—with a view to mastering the stimulus retrospectively. In other words, the repetition compulsion constitutes an operation beyond the pleasure principle to the extent that its aim is not to gain pleasure or to avoid unpleasure but, rather, to bind the traumatic impressions so as to trigger anxiety which would then function as a retrospective defense mechanism.

The compulsion to repeat, which presents a serious challenge to the pleasure principle, is portrayed by Freud in terms of an 'instinctual' and 'daemonic' power. While explicating this instinctual dimension, Freud writes: "*It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life."[12] From such a description of instinct as the tendency of the organism to repeat or to seek to restore inertia as a prior state of things it is only a small step to the positing of the death drive, which takes place in the following pages of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. "We shall be compelled to say," maintains Freud, "that '*the aim of all life is death*' and, looking backwards, that '*inanimate things existed before living ones*.'"[13] Ricœur cannot help recognizing here the significance Freud assigned to the repetition compulsion and the death drive, tendencies that are no longer secondary to a supposedly primary pleasure principle. On the contrary, he affirms that "this instinctual character decisively authorizes us to place inertia on an equal footing with the life instinct" (FP, 289).

The situation is gradually reversed in the fifth section of Freud's text. The more or less dominant tendencies now are not pleasure and the sexual instincts but, rather, the repetition compulsion, inertia and, in the final analysis, death: "Is it really the case that, *apart from the sexual instincts*, there are no instincts that do not seek to restore an earlier state of things?"[14] The answer to the question is positive, which means that from that point onwards Freud reverses the roles previously assigned to the two types of drives. The rule now appears to be the death drive and the primordial tendency towards inertia, both of which

12 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 36.
13 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 38.
14 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 41.

are *exceptionally* interrupted by the sexual instincts and other instances usually associated with life. Ricœur contends that the purpose of such emphasis on the compulsion to repeat and the death drive is to accustom us with the idea that death is a figure of necessity, a "remorseless law of nature," a "sublime *Ανάγκη* [Necessity]" rather than a merely accidental event that one might even somehow escape.[15] Ricœur immediately adds that the purpose of all this is "above all to enable us to sing the paean of life, of libido, of Eros! Because life goes toward death, sexuality is the great *exception* in life's march toward death. Thanatos reveals the meaning of Eros as the factor that resists death" (FP, 290 – 291). As a consequence, Ricœur goes on to thematize this dualism of drives in Freud's discourse and wonders "Just what is this dualism?" (FP, 291). In reflecting on this question, it becomes clear that there are three distinct levels on which the question has to be posed: the biological, the psychological and the cultural level.

The question initially emerges within the context of the discussion of the antinomical drives on the level of biology, where Ricœur points out that the dualism is not actually an ordinary dualism of two opposing tendencies but something more intricate: "Instead of being a clear delimitation of two domains, the dualism of Eros and Thanatos appears as a dramatic *overlapping of roles*. In a sense, everything is death [...] In another sense, everything is life [...] Thus the new dualism expresses the overlapping of two coextensive domains" (FP, 292). Ricœur portrays this relation in terms of a 'puzzling situation' and clarifies that this complex dualism is located on the level of forces, not on the level of purposes, aim and objects, which means that it does not coincide with Freud's anterior distinction between ego instincts and sexual instincts. On the contrary, the new puzzling dualism destabilizes all the distinctions and terms of the previous duality as it "cuts across *each* of the forms of the libido [...] Object-love is both life instinct *and* death instinct; narcissistic love is Eros unaware of itself *and* clandestine cultivation of death. Sexuality is at work wherever death is at work" (FP, 293). The overlapping of roles and the puzzling and unstable relation between life and death render problematic the idea of a simple dualism of two forces. As a consequence, their teleological organization, which crucially depends on dualism, becomes destabilized too.

This destabilization of the archaeo-teleological principle is further complicated by the speculative dimension of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In his cautious reading, Ricœur is aware of the fact that hypotheses and heuristic constructions play a major role: "The death instinct is not at first deciphered in its

15 See Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 45.

representatives, but instead is posited as a hypothesis or 'speculative assumption' about the functioning and regulation of the psychical processes [...] Thus we must always bear in mind that there is an excess of hypothesis compared with its fragmentary and partial verifications" (FP, 281–282). So far, the peculiar gigantomachia between Eros and Thanatos is only "an internal war of the id" (see FP, 296), a war that can give rise at best to biological speculation, which is not exactly congruous with the certain and definitive identities that archaeo-teleology presupposes.

Now, if one goes beyond the text of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, one is likely to discover a twofold transition in Freudian discourse: first, the daemonic tendency to repeat gradually becomes an aggressive tendency to destroy; second, there is a transition from biological expressions to more cultural ones (see FP, 294). The bridge between biology and culture is the properly psychological level of Freud's second topography. The destructive and aggressive force of the death drive is now confirmed on the basis of cases such as sadism, masochism, and the harshness and cruelty of the superego. Freud was puzzled by the fact that the superego, which essentially manifests itself as a sense of guilt, treats the ego with extraordinary cruelty, to such an extent that it becomes "as cruel as only the id can be."[16] Freud maintains that "what is now holding sway in the super-ego is, as it were, a pure culture of the death instinct."[17]

Things would be simple if a pure culture of death alone was at stake, if, in other words, the superego's tendency towards aggressiveness functioned autonomously and independently of any erotic factor. Nevertheless, this is far from being the case. Ricœur draws attention to the fact that the unconscious sense of guilt, which may also be described as a need for punishment, derives from the father complex whose main psychical locus is the id and whose libidinal ties are well known. The ego's desire for punishment is related to the wish to be punished by the father, which is one of the expressions of erotogenic masochism, whereby we are confronted with the curious mixture of taking pleasure in pain. Although the normal development of conscience and of morality entails the overcoming and the desexualization of the Oedipus complex, the reverse movement also takes place, according to which the libidinal dimension returns in order to haunt and resexualize morality. Ricœur affirms that "with the resexualization of morality the possibility of a monstrous fusion of love and death arises" (FP, 300). He does not see a similarly monstrous fusion of love and death in sadism, because the destructiveness of the superego's sadism becomes desexu-

16 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 54.
17 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 53.

alized by defusion and is, therefore, independent of any erotic factor. However, to the degree that this whole process is based on the fear of castration which then takes the form of the fear of conscience, one could arguably claim that a certain fusion of love and death persists, thereby rendering problematic once again the oppositional dualism and clear-cut distinction between Eros and Thanatos.

What happens with respect to the same dualism when the discussion moves to the level of culture? According to Ricœur, as soon as we move from the psychological to the cultural level, we also move from biological speculation to cultural interpretation. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, the death drive appears under the disguise not of the destructiveness of an individual superego but of the aggressiveness against others as an ineluctable feature of human nature.[18] From the very beginning of this section of the Freud book, Ricœur emphasizes that Freud's economic definition of culture in *Civilization and its Discontents* is marked by the strategy that Eros deploys against Death so as to neutralize or reduce its destructive effects.[19] He playfully links Freud's economics of culture to a certain 'erotics' to the extent that "the same Eros inspires the striving for individual happiness and wishes to unite men in ever wider groups" (FP, 303). In the cultural sphere, the death drive abandons the 'muteness' that characterized it thus far and becomes vocal and manifest in man's hateful and war-like behavior against his/her fellow human beings. It is thanks to this process of manifestation that Freud's cultural theory is finally capable of providing an interpretation of the death drive, only after leaving behind the latter's biological and psychological levels.

Ricœur confirms that guilt is the operation by means of which culture endeavors to limit the effects of human aggressiveness. The sense of guilt is not opposed to the libido. On the contrary, it serves the purposes and interests of Eros to the degree that it seeks to constrain my destructive egoism and to limit my violence against others. Hence Freud's well-known remark: "Civilization, therefore, obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city."[20] There is little doubt that Ricœur wishes to finish this chapter on a hopeful note. This is precisely why he recalls the pessimistic formula from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that "*the aim of all life*

18 Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*.

19 This section is titled "Culture as Situated Between Eros and Thanatos" and is the last section of the chapter on "The Death Instincts: Speculation and Interpretation"; see Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 302–309.

20 Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 123–124.

is death," to which he contrasts the supposedly more optimistic formula from the same work that life instincts struggle against death. The latter formula is taken up in *Civilization and its Discontents*, is further consolidated and rendered even more hopeful, to the extent that culture is now construed as "the great enterprise of making life prevail against death" (FP, 309). At this point, at the very end of the chapter titled "The Death Instincts: Speculation and Interpretation," Ricœur apparently remains faithful to his archaeo-teleological principle, according to which Eros gains somehow a certain anticipated precedence over against the destructiveness of the death drive.

Nevertheless, the complete phrase just quoted is as follows: "And now culture comes upon the scene as the great enterprise of making life prevail against death: its supreme weapon is to employ internalized violence against externalized violence; its supreme ruse is to make death work against death" (FP, 309). Although the first part of the sentence puts forward the hypothesis that life may somehow prevail against death, the second part affirms that actually there is no escaping of death and that the operation in question may be conceived of as an 'economy of death' alone. Death is made to work against death, internalized aggressiveness is deployed in order to neutralize externalized aggressiveness. We find death on both sides of this relation, so the prevalence of life that culture is supposed to secure is strangely grounded in a more profound and dominant ubiquity of death. One has to entertain the possibility that life just is this economy of death.[21]

The final chapter of the second book "Analytic: Reading of Freud" is titled "Interrogations" and is devoted to a re-examination of the reality principle, so one may reasonably wonder whether reality is congruous with the irreducibility of death affirmed above. There appear to be several reasons why reality is more compatible with death than Eros: reality struggles against illusion and is the opposite of fantasy, reality seems to have no relation with Eros insofar as it belongs to the sphere of necessity and the useful, reality has a tragic dimension in the sense that it holds in reserve death as destiny, reality symbolizes a world view, a wisdom that dares to face the harshness of life. Ricœur emphasizes the philosophical character of the reality principle and maintains that this is

21 In *Reading Derrida and Ricœur*, 58 – 81 and, more specifically, 65 – 67, I argued in favor of this idea of life as an economy of death according to Derrida's reading of Freud. Despite the sharp differences between the philosophies of Derrida and Ricœur, the latter's analyses in the Freud book seem to point towards a similarly aporetic structure. Indeed, while discussing the "contradictory and impossible" task of culture and the "unresolvable struggle between love and death" that we also seek to approach here, Ricœur surprisingly remarks that "civilization kills us in order to make us live"; see Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 323.

the locus where the philosophical tone of Freudianism becomes manifest (see FP, 325). More precisely, the philosophical tone is associated with a certain wisdom with respect to the burden of existence, even a resignation to the order of nature, which Ricœur compares to Spinoza's meaning of reality as much as to the Nietzschean *amor fati*. The last fifteen pages of this chapter seek to respond to the question whether the reality principle and the attitude of resignation present us with a reconciliation as far as the two opponents of the gigantomachia are concerned, Eros and Thanatos. Ricœur writes:

> The touchstone of the reality principle, thus interpreted philosophically, would be the victory of the love of the whole over my narcissism, over my fear of dying, over the resurgence in me of childhood consolations [...] I wish simply to gather together certain remarks [...] that broaden this respect for nature in such a way that the reality principle is brought more in harmony with the themes of Eros and death. (FP, 328)

Initially, Ricœur wishes to entertain this possibility of a harmonious dialectical synthesis, so he maintains that "resignation is basically a working upon desire that incorporates into desire the necessity of dying. Reality, insofar as it portends my death, is going to enter into desire itself" (FP, 329). He goes on to discuss several instances from Freud's writings which indicate that indeed there may be a certain combination of the two rival drives. He refers, for example, to Freud's citation of William Shakespeare's phrase from *The First Part of the History of Henry IV* "thou owest God a death"[22] and offers a brief analysis of the essay "The Theme of the Three Caskets," where a complex intertwining of death and desire is attained by means of intricate psychical processes such as substitution and wishful reversal.[23] These analyses lead Ricœur to a consideration of art and intellectual research as opposed to religion.

In the first place, art appears to constitute a human endeavor that aims to fulfil the final task of culture by diminishing instinctual charges, by reconciling the individual with the ineluctable, by compensating for irreparable losses through substitute satisfactions (see FP, 332–333). In other words, the work of art seems capable of bringing about a certain education to reality while also retaining its seduction and charm along the way leading from the pleasure principle to the reality principle. Ricœur recalls the essay from 1911, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," where Freud explicates the way in

22 Shakespeare, *The First Part of the History of Henry IV*, 88 (V.i.126).

23 See Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 329–332. See also Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets."

which art satisfies the reality principle while also seducing us aesthetically.[24] According to Ricœur's glossing, the artist

> is a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction that reality demands, and who transposes his erotic and ambitious desires to the plane of fantasy and play. By means of his special gifts, however, he finds a way back to reality from this world of fantasy: he creates a new reality, the work of art, in which he himself becomes the hero, the king, the creator he desired to be. (FP, 333 – 334)

Ricœur claims, however, that the reconciliation of the two principles that artistic and aesthetic experience initiates is not complete. Whatever may be achieved thanks to the work of art is primarily on the basis of the pleasure principle. Although Freud found the arts appealing in several senses, he did not have much sympathy for the aesthetic worldview, for he thought that the latter "goes only halfway toward the awesome education to necessity required by the harshness of life and the knowledge of death, an education impeded by our incorrigible narcissism and by our thirst for childhood consolation" (FP, 334). Ricœur points to the affinities between humor and the arts and contends that both border on the level of philosophical resignation to death but do not quite reach it: "Everything in Freud implies that true resignation to necessity, active and personal resignation, is the great work of life and that such a work is not of an aesthetic nature" (FP, 335).

In the second place, if art does not quite succeed in attaining a balanced reconciliation of Eros and death, what about scientific investigation as another advanced form of cultural activity? Ricœur turns next to Freud's *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, where the artist in question exemplifies the sublimation process by means of which the libido is converted into an instinct for intellectual curiosity and scientific research.[25] Freud, however, points to an affinity between Leonardo and Spinoza, which implies, according to Ricœur, that intellectual activity must be combined with an element of loving, otherwise it would end up in a betrayal of Eros.[26] Evidently, Freud identifies such a betrayal in Leonardo, who may have been theoretically knowledgeable about the necessities of nature but whose knowledge prevented him from enjoying and cherishing life. In other words, if scientific and intellectual activity constitutes a mechanism compatible with the reality principle which transforms and goes beyond

24 Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning."

25 Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*.

26 See Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, 75. See also Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 336 – 337.

the pleasure principle, the same mechanism has to be converted back towards Eros so that a certain balance may be achieved. The case of Leonardo, nevertheless, does not offer any indications of such a reconciliation between Eros and death.

Next, Ricœur goes on to quote Freud's final sentences from *Leonardo:*

> We all still show too little respect for Nature which (in the obscure words of Leonardo which recall Hamlet's lines) "is full of countless causes ['*ragioni*'] that never enter experience."
> Every one of us human beings corresponds to one of the countless experiments in which these '*ragioni*' of nature force their way into experience.[27]

Ricœur comments that these countless causes of nature are, in the final analysis, greater than the reality principle understood as the scientific worldview. This is to say that there is no 'beyond' the reality principle if the word 'beyond' signifies some knowledge or certainty on our part with respect to a teleological principle which would provide some orientation as it would definitively be lying 'beyond' something, pleasure or reality. Nothing indicates in Freud, writes Ricœur, that he "finally harmonized the theme of the reality principle with the theme of Eros" (FP, 337).

There is little doubt that one can identify in Freud a strand of scientism and another one of romanticism. Nonetheless, the relation between them is not a harmonious one. It is a "delicate equilibrium" or a "subtle conflict" (FP, 337) on both sides of which death figures: on the one hand, the reality principle and the resignation to death and to the necessities of blind nature; on the other hand, Eros and the demand to struggle against the instinct of aggression and self-destruction. Arguably, in all these fragile relations there is hardly any dualism or any definitive orientation. There is no certainty with respect to the directionality in these relations, no certainty that there is a smooth and continuous overcoming of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, of the death drive by the life instincts. Rather, Ricœur's meticulous analyses point to the fact that the opposing terms involved in all psychoanalytic structures are linked to one another in ways that blur any clear demarcation line between them and any orientation, thereby preventing the definitive and rigorous identification of either pole of a binary opposition. Ricœur acknowledges that life-pleasure and death-reality are associated with each other in puzzling relations.

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27 Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, 137. Also quoted by Ricœur in *Freud and Philosophy*, 337.

The archaeo-teleological principle that he puts forward in the third book of *Freud and Philosophy* presupposes that there is a telos or a final aim conceptualized in terms of a synthesis or a reconciliation of life and death, pleasure and reality. That telos would open up an horizon of infinite progress toward that remote ideal, and within this continuous and unified horizon various localized dialectical dualisms could be identified, such as those of the primary and the secondary process, the ego instincts and the sexual instincts, the pleasure and the reality principles, etc. In contrast to those prerequisites of the archaeo-teleology, Ricœur's presentation and commentary in the second book "Analytic: Reading of Freud" affirm that there is hardly any unification or reconciliation process in Freud, either within each one of his theories or between his theories, which he kept adjusting over the years: "Freud never unified his early world view, expressed from the beginning in the alternation of the pleasure principle and the reality principle, with the new world view, expressed by the struggle of Eros and Thanatos" (FP, 338). Ricœur explicitly thematizes here both the alternation or the reversibility of the terms of the dualism and the disjunction between his successive theories, as I argued above. The motif of alternation means that no significant priority may be assigned either to pleasure or to reality and, as result, the archaeo-teleology that presupposes such a priority is rendered problematic and actually impossible. Ricœur chooses to conclude this part of the book with Freud's final lines from *Civilization and its Discontents*, lines which once again allude to alternation and reversibility, and thereby shun the idealistic hopefulness and optimism that archaeo-teleology entails: "And now it is to be expected that the other of the two 'Heavenly Powers,' eternal Eros, will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary. But who can foresee with what success and with what result?"[28]

That final rhetorical question expressly points to the reversibility and to the irreducible co-implication of Eros and Thanatos, and, therefore, to the difficulty of rigorously distinguishing between the two so as to impose on them a teleological orientation. Freud added that final sentence to his text in 1931, when the specter of fascism started to become apparent in Europe. Ricœur's presentation in the second book of *Freud and Philosophy* does justice to the complexity of Freud's thinking and to the intricate relations that psychoanalysis reveals between concepts and processes that cannot be construed simply in terms of an oppositional, archaeo-teleological logic. Without rejecting the salience that Ricœur wishes to attribute, in the third book of his work on Freud, to the archaeo-teleological structure, I believe it is important, at the same time, to recognize and

28 Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 145.

underline an alternative and rigorous aspect of Ricœur's thinking, an aspect that offers a reading of psychoanalysis which not only would affirm the rupturing power of Freud's discourse but also would open up Ricœur's own text and philosophy to other, more radical and more original possibilities of interpretation.

Abbreviations

FP | Ricœur, Paul (1970): *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. Denis Savage (Trans.). New Haven: Yale University Press.

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