

## A MODERN DIALOGUE WITH FREUD

Gerald J. Gargiulo

FREUD AND PHILOSOPHY. Paul Ricoeur. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970. (Pgs. 573)

Ricoeur's text is both a provocative philosophical enterprise and a masterful reading of Freud, in which he analyses such questions as the meaning of psyche, the function of symbol and the reality of Eros. Although Ricoeur suggests some conclusions about these questions that must be critically examined, the work evidences a dignity of scholarship not readily seen today. Since it is a text of extraordinary complexity and sensitivity, my analysis will inevitably be somewhat cursory.

The text is divided into three Books respectively entitled: I, The Problematic: The Placing of Freud; II, Analytic: Reading of Freud; and III, Dialectic: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freud.

For Ricoeur, the problematic that one must experience in order to place and evaluate the thought of Freud derives from the apparently opposing functions of interpretation, understood in its most generic sense: interpretation as a vehicle for recollection of meaning, i.e. revealer of the sublime or sacred; or interpretation as an exercise of suspicion in the sense of decipherer of the repressed. By way of introductory classification Ricoeur places the religious concept of exegesis in the role of revealer of the sacred while psychoanalysis becomes an exemplar of a reductionistic, secular exegetical approach. The author begins with this level of understanding, although as the text develops it is subject to provocative and deeper readings. In

this section Ricoeur then outlines the specificity of symbol as container of double meaning, encompassing overt as well as covert meaning areas, which it is the specific aim of interpretation to decipher. With this basic understanding of symbol he begins the task of deciphering mind conceptualized within the Freudian model as force and meaning, i.e. as desire in search of interpretation. But if interpretation ultimately reveals the sacred and/or if interpretation unmask the hidden, how is one to know the path free from illusion? Aware of the delicacy of the task he has set for himself, Ricoeur quickly delimits the scope of consciousness, that is, the possibility of a false consciousness that equates mind with a simplistic understanding of "I think—therefore I am." "Such a cautionary move, however, brings him to his second Book—Freud proper and psychoanalysis, the discipline of listening to mind.

Before going on to Book Two, we might note that there is a certain initial polemical tone in Ricoeur's contrasting the functions of interpretation as revealing the sacred, and exercising suspicion in unmasking the hidden. Philip Rieff in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* has also approached this problematic area through an analysis of what he calls the different theories of theory. Contrasting religious man and psychological man, which designate for him historical-cultural consciousness, Rieff sees man's expectation of the function of theory as necessarily formative of man's findings. Thus in an understanding of the role of theory which sees its generic function as progressively revealing reality up to a highest being, one is able to speak of transcendental truth, of unchanging reality,

of God. In an alternate understanding of the role of theory in human conceptualizing, theory serves the role of helping man to organize his particular historical situation so that it functions better for him and thus meets his needs. The problem of the delineation of man's knowledge, which Rieff responds to in terms of his two theories of theory, Ricoeur confronts with his developed study of symbolism. Yet, as will be indicated further on, Ricoeur does not seem to be aware of Rieff's type of approach to this epistemological issue. Before developing his theory of symbolism, however, Ricoeur confronts Freud and his attempts to map consciousness, which becomes the subject matter of Book Two.

A major criterion for psychoanalytic competence is whether the writer has integrated into his perspective such classic texts as Freud's Scientific Project (1895), Chapter Seven of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and his essays. *The Unconscious, The Ego and The Id and Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Ricoeur not only studies these sources in detail but he integrates them with a view of Freud's progressive development. Throughout Book Two he shows both sophistication and depth in his philosophical reading of Freud and psychoanalysis. The latter is especially noteworthy because Ricoeur confesses in the preface that his work might suffer from his not being an analyst. Nevertheless, there are few American analysts or therapists writing today who take such care to master Freud before entering into a dialogue with him. Ricoeur employs a phenomenological methodology that makes this section on Freud in particular, condensed as it -is, unfold with a graceful internal consistency.

From Freud's earliest models of the psyche, using mechanical analogues, to his ripened thought on the battle between Eros and Thanatos, he set himself the task of listening to the mind. His first studies suggest a solipsistic model but, as is clear to anyone who reads beneath the surface, Freud understands instinct, or to use Ricoeur's insightful term, "desire," as directed toward another person. Indeed, for Ricoeur, primal repression flows from the very structure of desire "insofar as desire is from the very beginning confronted by another desire." Thus in the topographical model of the mind (conscious, preconscious, and unconscious), not only does Freud establish system models with which to designate the many tributaries inherent in mind, but he also traces instinct understood as desire in its search for meaning. Ultimately it is because desire has a semantics, as Ricoeur repeatedly shows, that Freud speaks about the "instinctual representatives" as being the object of his science. The ever-present biological is a force, which, in man, becomes desire, and thus there is the possibility of mind.

In studying the different vicissitudes of the instinctual representatives, be they manifested in ideas or affects, Freud posits the unconscious, preconscious and conscious as tools for an archeology of the mind. In 1923, when he presents his structural model of Ego, Id and Superego, it is because desires may be mapped not only in regard to place, as it were, but also in respect to an individual's personal history and his experiences with love and authority. Thus the drama of roles must be explicitly incorporated into one's perspective if one wishes to listen to mind more fully.

And the roles are the personal (ego), the impersonal (id), and the suprapersonal (super-ego).

In the id, there is the ever presence of desires; for the ego the task of a dialogue with personal time; and in the superego the burden of cultural history. In the unfolding of this drama of roles there is the gradual pain of recognition as id learns, so to speak, that it is not ego. And by not fleeing from the rendezvous with love and authority the ego progressively develops not only a spontaneity of desire (pleasure principle) but a capacity to hold desires within while mastering the script of the historical moment (reality principle). Freud has, however, many thoughts on reality, as Ricoeur makes clear. Before discussing these we must turn to the role of psychoanalytic interpretation understood within the drama of the psyche just mentioned.

Interpretation is a meaning-giving process of deciphering the hidden in the present. Interpretation takes place in time and, because the psyche plays its drama for an audience, interpretation is always personalized. Thus arises the psychoanalytic understanding of transference and the valid perspective on interpretation, which Ricoeur presents: that psychoanalytic experience is simply not an observable science as so many academic psychologists endeavor to see it. It cannot be verified as in physical and experimental sciences with a measurable degree of reliability, not because it is a defective science, but because its subject matter is personalized history as presented by one consciousness to another. The other is a second consciousness trained to listen to the drama with minimal intrusiveness and to communicate what he sees, what he experiences, to the player. For one might view neurosis as a

player reciting lines endlessly in search of their meaning. Neurosis and the more pathological conflicts are, accordingly, symbolic distortions of childhood desires and demands that cannot leave the scene until they have found a meaning. Because the analyst selects one avenue to search for personal meaning, Ricoeur sees psychoanalysis as more akin to history and thus not readily reproducible in the psychologist's laboratory. Furthermore, because interpretation deciphers the dynamic unconscious—tracing the historical fluctuations of desire, it is not reducible to phenomenology either.

After studying the complexity of the psychic systems and aware of the ever-present narcissism of which the mind is a child, Ricoeur ventures into an understanding of truth and its possible delimitation. This brings us to the third Book, Ricoeur's philosophical reflections on symbol and the meaning of reality vis-à-vis Eros, Ananke (necessity) and Thanatos.

Returning to the tension indicated in Book One, between the respective functions of interpretation as revealer of the sacred and "unmasker" of the hidden, Ricoeur presents a detailed study of the complex psychoanalytic concept of sublimation and its relation to symbol. Substantially differing from the other vicissitudes which desires undergo, sublimation not only changes, in technical terms, the aim of a particular drive but in addition to its successful achievement signals a new organization of consciousness, one productive of new meaning. Ricoeur presents Freud's thought on art as the clearest example of this and he uses these thoughts to unite the concepts of symbolization and sublimation. Within such a context

symbols can be seen as having both an archeology and teleology, that is, they contain both regressive hidden dimensions as well as progressive and new historical meaning. Ricoeur's thesis is that authentic symbols must be both a locus of the repressed—the hidden—of the childhood conflicts which stamp the historical development of mind as well as a harbinger of the highest historical insights of human consciousness —the "sublime or the sacred," to use the author's words. This approach to symbol, it seems to me, is comparable to the work Erik Erikson has done on the concept of identity in both its regressive dimensions and its progressive or epigenetic development. Identity, for Erikson, is like a two-edged sword cutting into the hidden past and out of that very past forging a new future.

In this connection it is important to realize that Freud's concentration on the regressive—the unmasking—was not because he denied the possibility of the progressive, but because he considered sublimation, which is not a repressive process, as non-neurotic. In Freud's writing on psychic determinism he notes that analysis can decipher the past but cannot therefore predict a future. Ricoeur seems aware of this since he notes that it is one of the rarely articulated premises on which psychoanalytic therapy relies. Man is capable of understanding himself, of reinterpreting his fantasies and of finding his true historical self. Having done that, the burden of the past is significantly lighter and he will be better able "to love and to work." Having said this, we must note that "necessity" or *Ananke*, as Ricoeur alludes to it, is certainly not mere adaptation or resignation to reality, although it is that.

Rather, by experiencing this at a deeper level, the individual develops a recognition and acceptance of the unchangeableness of the history he has undergone.

In Eriksonian terms, this becomes a recognition of the inevitability of the human life cycle and a need to achieve the self-understanding which can give new "liberating meaning" to the life experiences one has had. These are not closure concepts but simply limit concepts; and through these Erikson masterfully brings to the fore authentic but latent thoughts of Freud. And it is the achievement of the truth of one's history that is the most creative reading of the psychoanalytic concept of the reality principle. The reality principle does not refer merely to the recognition of external facts but even more to the truth of internal history. Free from repeating the past, libido—the child of Eros—is able to love with minimal oppression from the superego. Finally Ricoeur is aware, throughout most of the text, which in the battle of the giants Freud opts, in his cautious and analytic way, for Eros.

In the closing sections of the work Ricoeur moves to a more critical position in reference to Freud. In his analysis of different types of symbols he highlights the "prospective symbol"—those symbols which point to the horizon stretching before man's spiritual or consciousness quest. (This in contradistinction to those symbols that reflect the opposite horizon, as it were, separating man from his childhood.) These final chapters consist of highly condensed studies that involve primarily Hegelian models; their underlying assumption is that a theory of mind may enable one to reach ultimate and/or sacred reality. In this sense Ricoeur is in the primary tradition of Western

philosophy and theology, and his flight to the inexplicableness of the symbolism of evil as a reminder of the sup-posed "gaps" in man's knowledge is at least consistent. The issues involved in this discussion are too complex to resolve here, for ultimately Ricoeur is speaking about the experience of value in human consciousness. Yet the objectivity of value can be respected, it seems to me, without recourse to a particular reading of the symbolism of evil understood as indicating man's created and/or redeemable state. For to say that man is incomplete is to comment on his historicity; to notice defects is to appreciate evolution and to speak of evil is to be aware that power, in its many forms, may go astray.

Because Ricoeur apparently must go beyond the value of such prospective symbols as are reflected in art together with their capacity to raise human consciousness, he postulates in his discussion of the unfolding horizons the presence of the sacred—the "wholly other." And as noted above he seems surprisingly unaware of the epistemological model he is using, which ultimately allows him to make such postulates.

Thus the final pages of the text become more understandable but not any less disappointing in a work of such excellence. For we must finally note that, contrary to what one might expect, Ricoeur speaks of Freud's understanding of the reality principle predominately in terms of resignation, apparently overruling his own readings of that very concept which go beyond such a narrow interpretation. Consequently he sets up a dichotomy between Ananke and Eros that is a false one, for Freud and psychoanalysis are no philistine disciples of Ananke,

understood as mere resignation. Rather the analytic discipline, at its best, can free a man to find love—but it stops short, and consciously so, of naming that love or of committing the patient to a "commitment." But it does this in order that men can, with some measure of autonomy, name themselves.