

## THE SO-CALLED 'DEATH DRIVE': A SEXUAL DRIVE<sup>1</sup>

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This article will develop three successive perspectives:

- I. A *historical* or historico-critical perspective; that is, my interpretation of the appearance of the death drive and its function in the development of Freudian thought.
- II. A *metapsychological* perspective. What position are we to assign, in a metapsychology of the human being and the unconscious, to those forces which Freud described in an inappropriate manner as 'death' and 'life' drives?
- III. A third section will concern some remarks on a question of *general psychology*: by what factors are we to explain the crucial affective phenomena of love and hate, without a strict adherence to Freud's conception of them?

Since 1967 I have been able, at numerous moments, to develop these ideas. I will mention three books of mine which have been translated into English: *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (1967), *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (1970), *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (1987).

For those readers who have little knowledge of my ideas, I will clarify my position in advance with some general statements. These proposals are expressed here in a somewhat radical form.

1. The supposed originary conflict between life and death drives is absolutely not a biological opposition which exists in the living being, and consequently it has no pertinence to the science of biology.
2. This opposition is uniquely and wholly located in the domain of the human being – and not as a difference between sexuality and a non-sexual aggressivity, but in the heart of sexuality itself. If the Freudian terminology is to be retained, one should insert the adjective 'sexual', talking of the sexual death drives versus the sexual life drives.

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3. Rather than two hypothetical biological forces, this opposition concerns two distinct mechanisms in the sphere of human fantasy: the bound (secondary) process and the unbound (primary) process. Or, more accurately, two principles: the principle of binding, which would introduce order for the sexual life drives, and the principle of unbinding, which takes its power from the sexual death drives.
4. It is only in the broadest sense that these two principles correspond to the topographical difference between the ego and the id. The ego comprises elements which are both more and less bound, in the same way that in the deepest layers of the id there is more that is unbound, but also, closer to the surface, there are some more bound elements.

### ***I – Our Initial Remarks Will Thus Be Historical***

In Freud, as in every great thinker, the ‘history of ideas’ is not purely anecdotal, but is closely related to the content of the ideas. Of equal importance as the discoveries, are the paths and structures of thought which seek to account for the results. These paths can also be false paths, possibly due to the compulsion of earlier constructions or prejudices. Certain prejudices can even be shown to be at work from the outset. How, then, can a genuine and important discovery nevertheless take place in the context of an initial ‘going-astray’?<sup>2</sup>

*What discovery?* But first of all, what going-astray? The point of departure of this going-astray in Freud’s thought is in my view, as you know, the so-called ‘abandonment of the seduction theory’ (1897).<sup>3</sup> By using the phrase ‘so-called’, I indicate that my interpretation of this important theoretical turning-point is as far removed from that of Freud himself as from that of his opponents. Freud, exactly like those who wish to return to the material facts of seduction, remains trapped in a single opposition – that between material and subjective reality: between what are called ‘facts’ and what are called ‘fantasies’, the latter held to be purely subjective imaginings.

At this point I can only state, without being able to demonstrate, that Freud failed to generalize his theory, into a theory of ‘generalized seduction’, because he lacked a major category, a third category of reality – that is, the reality of the address or of the message as it derives, in a primordial fashion, from the other.

Let us pause a moment to consider the consequences of this going-astray for the conception of the drives. In order to do so, however, we must first clarify and emphasize the opposition between *drive* and *instinct*, perhaps the most significant opposition in psychoanalytic theory. In French psychoanalytic thought, this opposition has been known, and extensively elaborated, for more than 40 years. It was Lacan who first directed attention to it, even while he claimed falsely that the word ‘instinct’ never occurs in Freud.

The translator and Freud specialist, however, can state that Freud certainly made use of both concepts, and did so in a way which can be precisely differentiated.

*Instinct*, in Freud's language, always means the urge to some form of behaviour (or to some mechanism) which *in the individual* is organized in a more or less fixed form, *in the species* is pre-formed in a stable and stereotypical way, and – *regarding its aims* – is adaptive or regulated by a goal. For instance, Freud emphasizes in his *Introductory Lectures* that mankind, unlike most animals, lacks instincts allowing survival (Freud 1916–17, p. 413).

To bring to light how one should understand the concept of *drive*, there are no better explanations than those of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. It is the first edition of the book, that of 1905, that I have in mind here, for the later editions contain many additions – not only new discoveries but also generalizations capable of leading us astray.

The *Three Essays* of 1905 offer what I like to describe as an 'Odyssey of the instinct'. Firstly, the *disfigurement* of the sexual instinct ('sexual aberrations') and secondly the *loss* of instinct ('infantile sexuality'). Thirdly, one might speak of the '*rediscovery*' of the instinct. But *what* is thus rediscovered in the 're-organizations of puberty'? Certainly, in the ideal case, something like a genital normality and, via the Oedipus complex, a heterosexual object. One cannot, however, detect here a return to any true, substantial instinct: what is rediscovered is only a *false instinct*, hesitant, seemingly 'simulated', inhabited by all the infantile perversions which in the course of the process have been necessarily repressed.

The object remains a contingent one, linked to what is arbitrary. The aim is far from any natural conformity: for example, the paths to procreation are multiple, for both man and woman, and they are prepared for by the most complicated fantasies. Here, one can no longer discover anything like that entertained by the popular conception of sexuality. Let us here quote the first lines of the *Three Essays*:

Popular opinion has quite definite ideas about the nature and characteristics of this sexual instinct. It is generally understood . . . to be revealed in the manifestations of an irresistible attraction exercised by one sex upon the other; while its aim is presumed to be sexual union . . . We have every reason to believe, however, that these views give a very false picture of the true situation . . . The popular view of the sexual instinct is beautifully reflected in the poetic fable [i.e. that of Aristophanes] which tells how the original human beings were cut up into two halves – man and woman – and how they are always striving to unite again in love . . . (Freud 1905, pp. 135–6)

Thus, Freud's investigations oppose to the *pre-formed instinct* described by Aristophanes, a sexuality whose characteristics are: (polymorphous) *perversion* in relation to the aim and the object; *auto-eroticism* – in other words, the subjection to unconscious fantasies; and, lastly, *the absence of binding* – hence, in a sense, anarchy and even destruction. And yet already, in 1905, the drive is not able to hold its own completely, in the unfolding of

Freudian thought, in opposition to an instinctual, 'Aristophanean' conception.

This point relates directly to an uncertainty about the origin and the production of unconscious sexual fantasies. Either, effectively, they arise bound up with the relation to the adult other, or they somehow precede that relation, are pre-formed. We must return here once again to the abandonment of the seduction theory: as soon as the relation to the other is no longer held to be a primary factor, endogeneity becomes the only possible source of fantasy. This happens in two ways which Freud and the Freudians never cease to develop, one after the other or both together: an endogeneity which is purely biological, and a phylogenetic-historical (or rather, phylogenetic-mythical) endogeneity – either the metabiological and metacosmological speculation of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, or the myth of parricide in *Totem and Taboo*.

In the midst of this initial uncertainty, then, a retrograde path, leading to a pre-analytic conception of a sexual *instinct* in man, remains open. That is to say: Freud's genuinely foundational discovery is endlessly put at risk by an improper theorization, in which a biological determinism – which is, moreover, not so much proved as simply invoked – renders communication between individuals secondary.

We will now make a great chronological leap, from 1905 to 1919. In so doing, we can only mention a concept to which I have devoted some careful consideration, that of propping or *leaning-on*: something I would describe as a latent concept or a crypto-concept in Freud's work.<sup>4</sup> By this, I mean that such a concept, although it forms the object of no individual article or specific presentation, plays an important role in the structure of the system, even if this role is only a provisional one. The role taken by propping (that is, the drawing of the sexual drive on the self-preservative drive) is an attempt to re-establish a certain autonomy of sexual drives in relation to biology. To deal swiftly with this question, which extends beyond the limits of this paper, I will offer a *Witz*: in the development of Freudian thought, the fate of the concept of propping is to remain . . . a 'propped' concept.

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#### *1919 – Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

An eminently speculative and, in many respects, a fragmentary text. Here, one would have to unpick what the text says explicitly (very often contradictory things), the function that the text fulfils in the economy of Freudian thought (in my view, this is what is most important), and finally, what subsequent kinds of interpretation will the text occasion – both interpretations by Freud and by his followers.

The commonest interpretation is that the great discovery which emerges here is that of aggression (as Freud says, and also Melanie Klein) or of

aggressivity. A savage, pure, non-sexual aggressivity, it is this which comes to bear the seal of the 'death drive', seemingly advanced as a major concept of natural biology. Here, before we move on, let us simply note that very few of the adepts who later come to deploy the so-called aggressive drive will recall that Freud first had in mind an originary self-destructiveness, and only secondarily an aggressivity re-directed to the external world.

Amongst the most radical of his successors one must include the Kleinians, and I would like to quote here some remarks of Paula Heimann (from her Kleinian period). In her article 'Notes on the theory of the life and death instincts', she claims that what brought the death drive to the fore was the experience of a destructiveness of a chemical purity, so to speak, which is only termed sexual falsely:

It is unnecessary to give instances. From time to time the world is shocked by reports of savagely cruel, 'bestial' murders committed by an individual or a group . . . in such cases the cruel acts are so calculated and worked out in detail that nothing but an instinctual urge for savage cruelty can be regarded as the motive and purpose . . . Strangely enough, such behaviour is usually regarded as perverse sexuality, and often such crimes are called 'sexual crimes' . . . The murdered victim of so-called sexual crime does not die from a sexual experience, however infantile it may be, but from the infliction of maximally cruel violence. The sexual aspect of the murderer's behaviour may possibly only be introduced in order to deceive the victim and so provide the opportunity for the aim of the urge to cruelty. (Heimann 1952, pp. 328-9)

The Kleinian reversal is remarkable here, for it is pushed to the limit. With Freud, one should insist to the present day on the fact that people refuse to acknowledge what is sexual in their behaviour; here, on the contrary, sexuality is nothing but a false alibi to allow the release of pure aggression!

One can note that when Freud understands his death drive retrospectively as an aggressive drive, he claims to be relating his discovery to the treatment of sadism and masochism. Yet this claim by Freud is among the most dubious: on the one hand, he had already previously highlighted and studied in detail the phenomena of sadism and masochism without the invocation of a specific drive; and on the other hand, if one looks closely at *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, one sees that observations of sadism or masochism (and still less the observation of the pure, non-sexual violence put forward by Paula Heimann) are never called on as an opening move in the introduction of the death drive.

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What, then, is essentially at stake in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*?

1. The repetition compulsion, which is a characteristic of the mode of functioning in unconscious processes. This compulsion of 'unconscious prototypes' is a feature of drives in general, and is in no sense a prerogative of the death drive.
2. Biological or metabiological speculation, linked to the repetition

compulsion: what does life in general thus repeat? To help answer, both abstract reasoning and biological experiments are called to the rescue; all with the presupposition that what is to be proved is the following: the living comes after the non-living, and consequently what is living can only aim towards death, since that is what preceded it. And when experiments seem to prove that the living, inherently, has only one aim – to keep itself alive – Freud's response is at once to sweep away all the experimental biology he had himself called on for help, making way for latent forces which are hypothetical and ultimately purely metaphysical:

The instinctual forces which seek to conduct life into death may also be operating in protozoa from the first, and yet their effects may be so completely concealed by the life-preserving forces that it may be very hard to find any direct evidence of their presence. (Freud 1920, p. 49)<sup>5</sup>

3. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, what is effectively advanced, by means of this speculation? Not exactly the death drive, but more accurately, the opposition between the drives of life and death. Thus, two types of drives. But are these forces indeed drives, in the psychoanalytic sense which we gave them above? Or are they not, with their grandiose appearance, rather instincts – in other words, general types of behaviour which are pre-determined as much in relation to what has preceded them as to their aims?<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt about the alleged aim of the death drive: the originary state of inorganic matter, a state where all forces are drawn into a final levelling-out. But much more interesting is the final aim, and at the same time the prototype, of the life drives. There are in fact two occasions in his whole work that Freud used the myth of Aristophanes; and here we have the second occurrence:

'The original human nature was not like the present, but different . . .' Everything about these primaeval men was double: they had four hands and four feet, two faces, two privy parts, and so on. Eventually, Zeus decided to cut these men in two 'like a sorb apple which is halved for pickling'. After the division had been made, 'the two parts of man, each desiring the other half, came together, and threw their arms about one another eager to grow into one'. (Freud 1920, pp. 57–8)

What a superb model – at once figuring pre-determination and a harmonious, fulfilling and well-adapted love life! Everyone, according to nature, must find their soul-mate or, more precisely, their 'body-mate'.

But what is disquieting, for the attentive reader, is this: in the *Three Essays*, Freud had used the myth of Aristophanes, that condensed version of 'popular opinion', as a foil, in order to bring out his own conception of sexual life. Yet here, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, we find the same myth given as the originary model, the prototype of Eros! It is certain, however, that between the sexual activity described in the *Three Essays* and the life drive figured as Eros in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, there is more than a difference of detail: each is opposed, point by point, to the other. The first

is auto-erotic, disintegrated and disintegrating; its only aim is satisfaction by the shortest route; it takes no account of the independence of the object, which is to a great extent exchangeable. Conversely, Eros is synthesis and the aspiration to synthesis; it is totally directed towards the object, the total object; its aim is to preserve this object, to improve and expand it – it loves the object just as it loves the ego itself, as its first object.

It would thus be mistaken to think that Eros has taken over the former sexuality in Freud, when it forms such an exact contradiction of it. But, conversely, it would be completely trivial to claim that Freud had quite simply changed his mind about sexuality as a whole, falling back on ‘popular opinion’ and henceforth adopting the pre-determinist and instinctualist views offered by the myth of Aristophanes – views which he had decisively refuted in the *Three Essays*. The only fruitful perspective, for us, is to consider the total modification as structural, in other words to recall that a change at one point in a system of thought cannot occur without corresponding changes at other points.

In the context of a going-astray – this was our hypothesis – *an authentic discovery* takes place. We have laid emphasis on the going-astray. But what, then, is the grandiose *discovery* which made necessary such a re-organization? It is not aggressivity, as that had already been exhaustively discussed by Freud.

The discovery, we propose, is that of *narcissism*, as it is introduced in the article of 1914. According to that radically new thesis, one must place alongside an anarchic, auto-erotic and unbound sexuality, another kind of sexuality which is solidly attached to object love. And yet further: the first object in which one encounters this link, the first total object is the ego itself; the ego which is constituted as a totality, and which allows the component drives to flow into a more or less complete unity.

‘On narcissism: an introduction’ (1914) is the first great text about love, and even about the passions of love; in other words – about Eros, and *not* about the erotic. The ego unifies the sexual drives, it is itself the prototype of a unitary object. It also absorbs, to a great extent, the interests of the self-preservative functions. ‘I will not eat any more’, says the young human being, not in the interests of survival, but for the love of love: because of love for the mother, but also because of love for the ego, which is itself the object of the mother’s love.

*It is thus here that the great discovery takes place.* But it is produced out of an insecurely based erotics – insecure with regard to the origin and the essence of the world of fantasy, its essential support. Thus, in the analysis of love, Eros threatens to become everything, unduly absorbing the erotic as a single drive.

In his disagreement with Jung, for whom the term ‘libido’ designates nothing but the concept of a vital energy, Freud does not have a very strong position, insofar as he had himself given impetus to such a coup. For Eros,



which is both narcissistic and also directed to objects, begins to absorb everything: it obscures, even as it serves as representative for, the persistent presence of the biological mechanisms of self-preservation;<sup>7</sup> but, worse still, it no longer allows for an account of the destructive and destabilizing aspects of *sexuality in itself*. The thesis, from which Freud does not budge right up to the end – that there is something essential in sexuality opposed to, and the enemy of, the ego – can no longer be heard from the moment when the sexual in psychoanalysis becomes part of the eternal hymn of universal love, which is precisely a correlate of the ego.

In the face of the risk that a victorious, narcissistic Eros might take over completely, there arises – in real life, just as much as in the development of Freudian thought – an imperious need to re-affirm the drive in its most radical form: as something ‘demonic’, obeying nothing but the primary process and the compulsions of fantasy. From this point of view, the so-called death drive would be nothing but the re-establishment of the untamed dimension of sexuality; and if it were still necessary to set up an opposition, this would be between the *sexual* ‘death’ and ‘life’ drives. This could only be done, however, with precautions – and by recalling that the words ‘life’ and ‘death’ here do not designate biological life or death but their ‘analogues’ in mental life and psychical conflict. This was the ultimate meaning I wished to give to the title of one of my first books, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (1976).

The ‘death drive’, then, is a concept which can only be correctly situated at a specific moment in the drama of the Freudian discovery. Outside of that context, it becomes an empty formula.

However, the more empty it is, the more appeal it has! Effectively, one can put it to whatever use is required. In the Kleinian system, the death drive is the extreme limit of destructive rage, such as is found, for instance, in the paranoid position. In Freud, however, eventually the exact opposite emerges: the death drive as the movement towards Nirvana; no longer death wrought by the drive, but the death of the drive, the negation of desire. It is towards that vision that we are drawn by an expression like ‘the silence of the death drive’ which evokes, once more, the silence of the galaxy. But what is there in common between the demonic ferocity of Klein and this image of inanimate matter, with its eternal peacefulness?

I have only referred to what takes place inside the world of psychoanalytic thought. But what happens outside it? In the general thought of cultured people, the death drive becomes a useful ideological theme. Let us think, for instance, of the self-styled psychological interpretation of fatal illnesses, of cancer or AIDS. But, further still, let us recall philosophy, where the death drive finds echoes, too easily, in Heidegger’s being-for-death or in Hegelian dialectics. I do not, to tell the truth, perceive any real consonance there, but rather an incommensurability which favours neither psychoanalysis nor philosophy.



As you have understood, it is not my intention to give support to any metaphysical speculations, nor is it to seek to salvage every moment in Freud's thought, right down to his last word. To 'put Freud to work' means to 'do justice' to him, to his discoveries but also to his errors – and still further, to the unfolding of his thought. But once the shell has been cracked and we can get at the nut, are we to continue to safeguard the pieces of that defensive crust, which has given rise to such misunderstanding?

Once the true opposition has been established, that between the bound and unbound forms of libido at work in psychical conflict, can we not attempt to formulate things in a renewed metapsychology; and thus, in the colloquial expression, quite simply 'chuck out' the death drive?

## *II – Metapsychological Remarks*

The origin of the opposition between unbinding and binding is to be situated precisely in the process of repression itself. It is repression which actually creates the unconscious, and it is according to the specific nature of this process that we must understand the qualities of the agency of the id as they are described by Freud: the absence of contradiction; the lack of any coherence or co-ordination of activity; the absence of negation and – it should be emphasized – of negative representations such as that of death or of castration; the absence of temporality.

In my way of conceiving things, all the specific characteristics of the unconscious are to be understood by relating them to the attempts at translation and temporalization ceaselessly undertaken by the child in the face of the messages coming from the adult other. First of all, the translation is an embryonic one, so to speak, which must initially deal with non-verbal kinds of address (gestures, for instance). The translation is 'put in order', put into 'narrative' and 'time', and finally 'put into the ego'. But repression, it must be stressed, is not a translation but, to use Freud's terms, a failure (*Versagen*) or refusal (*Versagung*) of translation which has to transcribe (*umschreiben*) the message into a language at a higher level, into another code.<sup>8</sup> If I have taken up the model of translation, extracting it from a few lines in the Freud–Fliess correspondence, so as to account for the particularities of the process of repression, this has not been done arbitrarily.

Taken as a whole, the process of translation can be understood either as a specialized kind of work in which one verbal language passes into another; or, rather, as a more general operation which allows the passage from one means of expression to any other. As soon as there is an act of addressing, there is also, on the side of the receiver, an attempt to translate – in other words, a determined mode of appropriation. Among the different 'languages', I put the principle emphasis, in maternal or parental care, on the gestural language.

Let us return to repression. Its mechanism, says Freud, is always 'highly individual' – that is, it works bit by bit; or rather, to be more precise, it is repression which breaks down what it deals with into bits, with no regard for any pre-existing forms of binding, whether of context, of grammar or of meaning. Now, the effect of the process of translation is precisely there – it concerns what has been neglected or *left aside*. Translation causes a coherent message to be led across (this is the meaning of trans-late: *tra-duire, trans-ducere*) into something no less coherent. But that which is not 'led across', which is 'lost', is not a second message (an unconscious message from the sender, as it might be put) which would immediately appear in the unconscious of the receiver. The waste-products or residues of translation are isolated, disfigured scraps, the reminiscences of what is addressed by adults as they care for the child: elements wrenched from their context, apparently arbitrary and meaningless.

In order to clarify my point, permit me to use an analogy which I take from the domain of specialized (verbal) translation. Let us imagine that I have to translate the following phrase into English: '*L'étalon court dans la ferme*'. To a competent translator, that would give the English '*the stallion is running on the farm*'. But, as you doubtless know, '*ferme*' and '*étalon*' also have other meanings, in other contexts. '*Étalon*' is also a measure of reference, a 'standard', as in '*l'étalon-or*', the 'gold standard'; and '*ferme*', in the technical vocabulary of carpentry, designates a key piece or truss in a structure, that which 'keeps secure' [*tient ferme*], the whole.

Therefore, spontaneously and naturally, our interpreter will have dropped aside other meanings, or rather other aspects of these two words, aspects which however are inherent possibilities of the French language, in which they ultimately make possible a pun.

This is only an example, or rather a model, which might easily give rise to confusion if it were taken to be the thing itself – in other words, if one overlooked the differences. There are two sorts of difference here: firstly, specialized translation, which presupposes the fixed codes of natural languages, is not identical to the general process of translation, which on the whole takes place beyond the verbal level; and secondly, what is latent in the messages addressed to the child, emanating from the adult, is not of the same nature as what is latent in a natural language – the former, in fact, belongs to the repressed sexual unconscious.

The messages of adults do not keep to a single, consistent level – that of care and tenderness. In this situation, quite specifically, the sexual fantasies of parents awaken and force or insinuate themselves into the heart of the self-preservative relation. The messages are 'compromised' – in the psychoanalytic sense of the term – and are so in a way that is unconscious to the sender himself. The child who tries to master these enigmatic messages goes to recover them via the codes he has available. What Freud designates as 'infantile sexual theories' are nothing but these codes: myths, little stories,

romances – albeit without words – which the child employs for its own self-theorization and self-temporalization.

A *consciousness* – in this sense (and perhaps in Hegel's sense) – rather than some ray of light, could be nothing but a coherent and self-temporalizing ego. That which we should designate as repression – and first of all as primal repression – is nothing other than an active expulsion of something from this constant process of unification, theorization and temporalization which is at work first in relation to messages from the outside, and subsequently in relation to what derives from the internal 'other'. It is precisely such an expulsion which accounts for the particularities of the unconscious: non-coherence, the non-bound or unbound, timelessness.

In this sense, the so-called death drive is in effect that 'pure culture' of otherness that we detect in the deepest layers of the unconscious. Equally, there is no doubt that the oldest remnants in the unconscious have an intimate kinship with sado-masochism. Here we should (in exception to the rule) stick with the Kleinian idea that the partial, as that which is unbound or even in ruins and comes from the object, goes together with the attack, destructiveness and persecution.

This is certainly so in the most inaccessible layers of the id. But very soon, from the activity of the ego and with the help of the cultural environment, there appear fragmentary scenes, pieces of fantasmatic sequences, which will be progressively absorbed by the great organizational forces, the complexes: the Oedipus, castration.

The forces of binding in the psyche are no less sexual than the other forces. Nevertheless, they always take as their source certain totalities: the totality of the fellow human as unified being; the totality of the ego, of its form and also its ideas, not to speak of its ideologies.

Thus, in the grandiose opposition of life and death drives, there is nothing mysterious or metaphysical. In question are two principles, of binding and unbinding, whose opposition is at work on the inside of the psychical apparatus.

In the first instance, for the new-born child, it is a matter of mastering by translation the seductive, enigmatic messages of the adult, without allowing too great an unbinding of the stimulus. From then on, the battle for binding must be waged against the internal other, in other words against the unconscious and its offshoots.

### ***III – Hate and Love***

I would like, in the concluding part of my article, to address a material question of psychology, which can be directly applied to clinical observation. It is a question of general psychology, which, we can be sure, has been discussed since the beginnings of human thought, but to which psychoanalysis should bring decisive clarification. It is a matter of the psychology

of the passions, namely of love and hate, which Empedocles already made into a pivotal opposition.

Freud was often preoccupied by this question, before and after 1919. An example is 'Instincts and their vicissitudes' (1915), where he discusses at length what he terms the 'material' opposition of love and hate. To put it briefly, he sees in these passions phenomena dependent on the ego (it cannot be said that a drive 'loves': only the ego can experience love) and, elsewhere, he refuses to consider the oft-noted reversal of love into hate so frequently observed as anything but appearance.<sup>9</sup> Such a polarity, forbidding any true passage from one to the other, is still further reinforced with the emergence of the life-drive/death-drive dualism, which clarifies things, to the extent of making them purely abstract. In the Kleinian tradition, the whole psychology of the passions is simplified, as the opposition between the two great instincts re-appears at every level. Henceforth, concrete phenomena are explained through mixtures or simple dialectics, in a sort of Manichean logomachy: in this respect, one cannot avoid emphasizing the ennui which exudes from Kleinian texts, and to compare them with the great *Menschenkenner* such as Stendhal or Proust, so nuanced and insightful, would be a little uncharitable.

In my estimation, only a 'genetic' and metapsychological conception of the complex forces in play could allow us to outline solutions offering a better account of experience. In my attempt at metapsychology, I propose that there exists, at the level of the sexual unconscious, an opposition – whose terms are at the same time superimposed:

- unbound (erotic) sexuality
- bound (narcissistic and/or object-related) sexuality

I should emphasize one thing: this opposition is completely human, *that is to say* it is totally informed, oriented by the life of fantasy. As such, it is the sole preoccupation of psychoanalytic practice, which has no point of contact other than fantasy.

One cannot, however, fail to see how this opposition comes to take up, and at the same time take the place of, taking it over by raising it to the plane of fantasy, a level which is more instinctual (that is, pre-formed): the level of self-preservation. Even while keeping clearly in mind the notion that the biological mechanisms in the human infant are extremely fragile and unable to assure its survival, we are not able to deny the pre-existence of some psycho-physiological 'wiring'. But the specificity of mankind is precisely that this 'wiring' is immediately invaded by the enigmatic messages of the other.

There would thus be three levels of factors:

- self-preservation (natural tenderness and aggressivity)
- the erotic
- bound sexuality

The last two levels strictly speaking constitute psychical conflict – the great preoccupation of psychoanalysis.

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I will not here undertake this tri-factorial description and analysis of love and hate. Instead, as a provocation, I will merely make some critical remarks concerning the famous adage *Homo homini lupus*,<sup>10</sup> which Freud takes from Hobbes and Plautus as an explicit stigmatization of the cruelty of mankind:

. . . to satisfy their aggressiveness on [their neighbour], to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. (Freud 1930, p. 111)

Freud goes on to propose, with no trace of caution, that the ‘atrocities’ of human history ‘reveal man as a savage beast’.

Let us formulate some simple questions, then, based on what we know from the observation – either everyday or scientific – of animal life.

Is the wolf, that *real wolf* – the one which has almost disappeared from our Western Europe – a ‘wolf to man’, and if so, in what sense? Let us take man here simply as what he is for the wolf: an animal of a different species – to be respected and fled from if stronger, to be attacked and eaten if a possible prey . . . and if the wolf is hungry. The behaviour of the animal towards its prey shows very little destructiveness, and absolutely no sadism. The leopard selects a young antelope from the herd, kills it with a few bites, then eats it peacefully with its offspring. There is no pleasure in causing suffering; no vague desire to massacre the whole herd in any holocaust! Such is – to put it schematically, and though there are some exceptions – aggressivity of a natural, self-preservative, animal kind. The wolf is not, for man or for any other species, a ‘wolf’ in the Hobbesian sense, a frightful monster.

Could the wolf, however, be a cruel ‘wolf’ for the wolf itself? Aggressive behaviour within a species is an established fact, something studied by ethologists. The wolf does not kill the wolf to feed itself. Sometimes two animals, two males in the pack, confront one another in a form of behaviour which has to do with prestige,<sup>11</sup> a struggle which takes place according to a relatively stereotypical ritual and which rarely ends in death, but rather, generally, in the subjection of the loser, in his humiliation and flight.

If we use the term *Lupus* to designate the emblematic figure in Hobbes, our conclusion must therefore be: the wolf does not behave as a *Lupus* towards other wolves. There is thus no trace, in the biology which Freud wishes to use as his fundamental reference, of the cruel, sadistic behaviour, the destructiveness with no aim but the sheer pleasure of destroying, which characterizes the human being. It is man alone who is a *lupus* to man. A conclusion which invalidates the ascription of any biological or even zoological basis to the sexual death drive – or, moreover, to the drive in general.<sup>12</sup>

My apparent digression about the wolf had two aims: firstly, and most importantly, to indicate once and for all the absolute incommensurability of human sadistic aggression and any animal nature. The Thirty Years War, Auschwitz or Cambodia can never be linked back to the 'biological animal' in us. The *intra-species* cannibalism of Pol Pot's soldiers, we have convince ourselves, is 100% 'human, all too human'!

My second intention was to direct us towards a tri-factorial analysis of what is termed aggressive behaviour. Firstly, there would be the level of simple self-affirmation, that of the living, active being. This, one might say, is what in American culture is dubbed a salutary aggressivity,<sup>13</sup> a quality which could be a requisite factor of successfulness. This level, it is claimed, is without fantasy, at least without any imagination or consideration of the suffering of the other, without any useless violence or cruelty. But to mention this level does not indicate any adherence to the ideological alibi according to which it somehow persists autonomously. This level can only, in truth, be observed in animals; in man it can only be postulated, and psychoanalysis shows that self-preservation is, on the contrary, very quickly and extensively taken over by sexual motivations.

The second level, conversely, is where the sexual death drive comes into effect. The intrinsic aim to inflict pain on the other (and on oneself) cannot be denied, even if it is camouflaged. It is this very taking into account of the suffering of the other which, for Freud, characterizes sado-masochism.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in this – the taking into account of the subjectivity of the other – how can one not see the inverted trace of the origin of the drive, in the enigmatic message coming from the other?

Finally, the third level – that of the narcissistic, specular relation, which has been emphasized by Lacan. This is the level of identificatory rivalry, of rage before the 'other myself'. Here, Lacan takes up the specular master-slave dialectic in Hegel; he also quotes an exemplary passage from St Augustine: 'I have seen with my own eyes and known very well an infant in the grip of jealousy: he could not yet speak, and already he observed his foster-brother, pale and with an envenomed stare' (Lacan 1977, p. 20).

On the other side, that of *love* and *being-in-love*, we should likewise try to rid the problem of the ambiguities with which Freud covered it, especially when he combined a theory of sexuality with a mythology of Eros, without distinguishing the two.

The three levels at work are the same as we drew up to analyse aggressivity: at the level of self-preservative functioning, one should situate tenderness (Freud's term), or in the more inclusive term of modern psychology, attachment.<sup>15</sup> The second level is that of the erotic, whose description dates from the *Three Essays*. Finally, the third is that of the love of the total object, of Eros at once narcissistic and object-related.

\* \* \*

I will limit myself to noting here, in addition, that such a multi-factorial psychology of love and hate might allow a more concrete account of the famous 'reversal into the opposite'. Freud never ceased to raise this problem, but always refused to accept that it was a question, at the level of drives, of an actual reversal. I will limit myself to the following remarks.

At the level of self-preservation and in animal psychology, where forms of behaviour and aims are fixed in place, there is no possibility, as it were, of reversal. On the other hand, in the erotic, aggression and pleasure are immediately mixed together, as can be seen perfectly in sado-masochism. It is the specular relation, lastly, which is the domain par excellence where an actual reversal takes place: suddenly and directly, it seems, specular love for the 'other me' can be transformed into specular hate, fascination becoming expulsion. In the mirror, 'you and I' are one and the same thing, a statement which can also be expressed 'either you or I'.

\* \* \*

In conclusion, I will simply summarize the way I have tried to clarify things in this field:

- by dispensing with the facile metaphysical opposition Eros/Thanatos
- by proposing a theory of the unconscious and the drives which takes full account of the origin of the forces in conflict in the human being, an origin in which the primordial relation is the relation to the adult other, the sender of messages
- by proposing a theory of psychical conflict in which this relation to the external other is at work, in an unceasing effort to contain the internal other.

### *Notes*

1. [This article has appeared in German in 1996 and French in 1997. The present text is a translation by Luke Thurston, revised by John Fletcher. Footnotes enclosed in square brackets are those of the translator.]
2. [In the original: '*fourvoisement*'. Laplanche gives this expression a specific conceptual status which our translation seeks to reflect by the consistent use of a substantive, 'going-astray' (literally, 'wandering off the path [*voie*]'). Cf. Laplanche 1996.]
3. [See the letter from Freud to Fliess of September 21st, 1897, in Masson 1985, p. 264.]
4. [For Laplanche's elaboration of *étayage*, 'propping' or 'learning-on', his translation of the Freudian term '*Anlehnung*', see Laplanche 1976, pp. 15-18.]
5. [Strachey's phrase 'instinctual forces' is clearly, for Laplanche, a misleading translation; it erases precisely the distinction between *Instinkt* and *Trieb* discussed above.] This is an argument which Freud had himself rejected in 'On narcissism' as being irrelevant and speculative: 'It may turn out that, most basically and on the longest view, sexual energy - libido - is only the product of a differentiation in the energy at work generally in the mind. But such an assertion has no relevance. It relates to matters which are so remote from the problems of our observation, and of which we



have so little cognizance, that it is as idle to dispute it as to affirm it . . . All these speculations take us nowhere' (Freud 1914, p. 79).

6. I do not claim that these two drives can only be conceived (as Freud thinks) as biological mechanisms. Both are supported by fantasies: on one side, the fantasy of inanimate interstellar matter, and on the other, the mythological scenario of Aristophanes.

7. Even if it is true that these do not participate as such in psychical conflict.

8. Letter from Freud to Fliess, dated December 6th, 1896. See Masson 1985, p. 207.

9. One would have to consider here the Schreber case, with the famous reversals of the formula 'I love him' (in a case of homosexual love).

10. The phrase *Homo homini lupus* ('Man is a wolf to man') derives from Plautus, *Asinaria*, II, iv, 88.

11. Here, the idea that narcissistic, specular behaviour is only present in the human being would have to be corrected.

12. Among many examples, see André Green, who opposes to the pole of 'socialization' that of primordial conflict, which 'one could call the natural dimension of the human subject – the human animal, in other words, the subject of drives' (Green 1980, p. 109). On this point, my opposition to Freudian thought – which is well embodied by Green here – entails the idea that the drive is not an original 'natural dimension' but a veritable second nature deposited in the human being by the effects of its relation to the adult socius.

The theme of the wolf, and its mythical and fantasmatic double, is vast. It has been notoriously dealt with in a great deal of well documented research. Freud's 'wolf man' is only a minute particle in this archive. In order not to overload my article, I will briefly mention several other openings of research:

(a) Is man not a wolf (or rather, a *lupus*) to his fellow animals? The condemnation of human cruelty towards animals is based on observations which people refuse – even today – to take into account. In reality, the 'beast' is not to be located where one might think!

(b) The domestication of the wolf into the dog seems to have taken place during prehistoric times. It could be thought that from that point onwards, an extraordinary split comes into effect: on one side, the good wolf, the dog, a companion to whom man is bound by a clearly narcissistic attachment (whose very expression is specular, with its symptomatic echoing syllables: *chien-chien*); and on the other, consigned to the shadows of otherness, the bad wolf, the lupus, the beast of the mountains or the forest, the werewolf, etc. Here, there is in human evolution a remarkable parallel with what I describe as a process of translation-repression: the wolf is translated into the dog, and the residue after the translation becomes the lupus.

(c) Is the wolf a unique case? A quick glance at the second great 'human conquest', the horse, is instructive: the prototype of the animal which haunts us at night is, in several languages, the 'night horse' or nightmare, concerning which Ernest Jones opened up so many lines of thought (Jones 1931). Just like the wolf, the savage horse is split, with an openly sexual residue (an incubus) and, moreover, a feminine residue. This serves to corroborate the idea of a 'feminine' essence to the drive and to originary sexuality (cf. André 1995).

(d) A long time ago (in my first analytic article), I proposed – without being heeded – that we should isolate, amongst animal phobias, those in which the anxiety-inducing animal was already an emblematic cultural figure. This idea resurfaces here, in a more firmly argued way: the lupus or the nightmare are prepared, as it were, culturally, to figure the internal attack of drives; the cultural process of their genesis (domestication of the good/fantasmaticizing of the bad) has a profound affinity with the individual genesis of the source-objects of the drives.

13. Or 'combativity', in the term proposed by Denise van Caneghem (1978).
14. Cf. Freud 1915a, and my analysis of this text in Laplanche 1976, pp. 85–102.
15. Here again, this level is only really observed in the animal, for in man it is immediately invaded by sexuality, passing through the adult socius.

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*Readers may also be interested in the most recent translations of Jean Laplanche's work. This listing is kindly provided by John Fletcher. – Ed.*

Laplanche, J. (1994) Psychoanalysis as anti-hermeneutics. *Radical Philosophy* 79, September/October, 1996.

Laplanche, J. (1999) *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher. London: Routledge. 'Jean Laplanche and the theory of seduction', special issue of *new formations*, ed. John Fletcher, Winter, 2002–3.

Two recent interviews with Jean Laplanche have appeared in English: by John Fletcher and Peter Osborne, *Radical Philosophy* 102, July/August, 2000; and by Cathy Caruth, *Postmodern Culture* 11(2), 2001 (<http://jefferson.village.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.101/11.2caruth.txt>).



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