

ΨA AND CULTURE III – EROS AND THANATOS

In September 2019, the third meeting ΨA and Culture was held in Belgrade. It coincided with the centennial of the Paris Peace Conference after the First World War and was titled “Eros and Thanatos”.

In March 1919, Freud made the first draft of his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (in German: *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*). However, the final version was finished in the first half of 1920 and fully ready in July.¹ It was in this booklet that Freud introduced his hotly debated and controversial concept: the death instinct or, as it was dubbed many years later, Thanatos. In that way, he rejected his previous axiom that the pleasure principle (*Lustprinzip* in German) was the dominant principle in the mental life of humans. The newly introduced instinct “postulates a wish to dissolve, annihilate oneself”²

A biographical element may have had some influence on Freud to formulate the concept of the death instinct, although he rejected all such claims.³ What is clear is that the experience of the Great War left a deep impression on him. In March and April 1915, he composed his paper “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death” in which he, for the first time, posited that “war cannot be abolished; so long as conditions of existence among nations are so different and their mutual repulsion so violent, there are bound to be wars.” He was even led to ask: “Is it not we who should give in, who should adapt ourselves to war?”⁴ The experience of the war “had also forced Freud to assign enhanced stature to aggression.”⁵ But in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he went a step further and claimed:

If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say that ‘the aim of all life is death’ and, looking backwards, that ‘inanimate things existed before living ones.’ (Freud’s italics)⁶

The booklet “acquired the reputation of a landmark in how Freud changed his mind and how daring he was in doing so”⁷ The introduction of the death instinct was not accepted by many psychoanalysts and elicited even less

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- 1 “Editor’s Note”, in *Beyond Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology, and Other Works, Standard Edition* - SE, Vol. 18, 3-4
 - 2 Charles Rycroft, *Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (Penguin), 26.
 - 3 Peter Gay, *Freud. A Life for our Time* (London: Max, 2006), 394-395.
 - 4 Sigmund Freud, “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death”, SE, vol. 14, 299.
 - 5 Peter Gay, *op. cit.*, 395.
 - 6 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, SE, vol. 18, p. 38.
 - 7 Gregory Zilboorg, “Introduction”, in Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1961), xii.

enthusiasm among wider audiences. Gregory Zilboorg noticed: “Perhaps Freud was right, even though neither the biologist nor the theologian would find it possible to agree with him.”⁸ Even the majority of Freud’s associates and followers could not agree with him about this drive. Nonetheless, some influential academics accepted this concept. Among them were psychoanalysts Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan and authors like Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown.⁹

In the Freudian interpretation, the two drives were in constant interplay. In 1937, he claimed that human life could be explained only by simultaneous activities of the primal drives: “Only by the concurrent or mutually opposing action of the two primal instincts – Eros and the death instinct – never by one or the other alone, can we explain the rich multiplicity of the phenomena of life.”¹⁰

The conference organised in 2019 was conceptualised as a discussion of the two instincts formulated by Freud in 1920 and their implications and antinomies. Twelve papers were presented at the conference in three panels. The first was entitled “Freud as our Contemporary”, the second “From Eros towards Thanatos”, and the third “The Death Instinct and other Topics”. The general line of the first two conferences ΨA and Culture – retracing encounters between culture and psychoanalysis – was maintained. A new issue, the relationship between psychoanalysis and neurosciences, was introduced.

Nine original presentations from the conference are present in the form of papers in this volume, with the addition of two new contributions. The preparations for the publication were interrupted by the Covid pandemic, and it took some time to reassemble the contributions and prepare this collection of papers.

The collection consists of three parts. The first is entitled “From Eros toward Thanatos” and starts with the paper on Eros by Prof. Žarko Trebješanin, co-founder of ΨA and Culture meetings. The paper analyses the notion of Eros and its features and discusses the relevance of Eros for both fundamental and applied psychoanalysis and its significance in countering destruction. Prof. Jelena Djordjević analysed the overlapping of the two drives in the area of ceremonies, rituals and feasts. Dušan Maljković discusses Freud’s contribution to understanding homosexuality and explores its relations to Eros and Thanatos. Finally, S. G. Markovich’s paper sees Freud as a dystopian author, analysing his most pessimistic book, *Civilization and its Discontents*, which heavily employed the topics of aggression and the death instinct, in the context of the dystopian decade (1923–1932).

The second part of the collection focuses on the overarching topic of all ΨA and Culture meetings: how psychoanalysis can help us understand so-

8 Ibid, 15.

9 S. v. “nagonsmrtni”, in Žarko Trebješanin, *Psihonaliza. Mali leksikon* (Beograd: Plato, 1993), 118,

10 Sigmund Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable (1937)”, in SE, vol. 23, 243.

ciety and culture and the historical contexts of psychoanalysis. In the first paper, Prof. Petar Jevremović explored the life of Austrian psychiatrist Martin Pappenheim, who interviewed Gavrilo Princip in prison using the psychoanalytic approach. Freud never commented on this interview, which has given rise to many questions that the author has discussed. The second paper, written by Prof. Galjina Ognjanov, deals with the opus of Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays. His approach to communication is seen as a consequence of his pessimistic views on human nature, which he shared with his uncle. The controversies of Bernays's approach and the unethical aspects of his campaigns have also been discussed. Dr Nataša Šofranac's contribution gives an overview of the immense relevance of Freud and psychoanalysis in interpretations of Shakespeare's works. Dragan Bisenić explores the relations between Freud, psychoanalysis and Islam in the context of the growing conflict between tradition and modernity in many Islamic societies. In the last contribution in this section, Novica Milić makes a "provocation" and tries to answer what Sigmund Freud might have said if he had analysed the Serbs.

The third part brings a novelty at ΨA and Culture conferences: a discussion of the relationship between neuropsychanalysis and classical psychoanalysis. In the first paper, Slobodan Nikolić explores the findings of neuropsychanalysis. He calls for a much closer collaboration between the two fields and believes that neuropsychanalysis could be used to validate or, if necessary, refute psychoanalytic concepts. In the last paper, Milan Popov employs the concepts of Antonio Damasio and finds neurological correlates for some traditional psychoanalytic concepts.

Encouraged by the reception of the previous three conferences, the editors of this volume have agreed to make plans for a fourth conference ΨA and Culture, dedicated to psychoanalysis and religion.

Vienna, October 5, 2023

S. G. Markovich