

Freedom in the Writings of Sigmund Freud and Paul Ricoeur

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I. Introduction: Freedom and Existential Angst

Jean Paul Sartre writes on freedom, “no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free.”¹ Sartre says that we can choose to reconcile freedom with all the other dimensions of human reality; our place, past, environment and fellowman are shot through with our personal responsibility. Given these realities, our choices and promises still fashion the self; to be the very best version of oneself.

Sigmund Freud seems to challenge Sartre’s optimal view of freedom through his theory of the unconscious. How can we be personally responsible when unconscious forces might be playing on our freedom?

This paper seeks to explore the topic of freedom in the writings of Sigmund Freud and Paul Ricoeur. It aims to follow our desire to be the very best version of ourselves given the Freudian challenges to freedom. It seeks to analyze and give voice to the Freudian concept of freedom by employing the paradigm suggested by Servais Pinckaers (Freedom of Indifference vs. Freedom for Excellence). This paper concludes with an “all too human freedom” as consent that is arrived at by Paul Ricoeur in his encounter with the thought of Freud.

II. Freedom in the Writings of Freud

Freudian Concept of Freedom

In his Book “The Interpretation Of Dreams” Freud speaks about

¹Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: an essay on phenomenological ontology* (London: Methuen & co., 1943), 439

freedom as relevant to man: The freedom to act as I am acting, to arrange my life as seems right to me, and to me alone.² This focal concept of Freudian Freedom is our optic in reading and turning to his writings. Given such a definition, we are guided promptly to see why Freud espouses determinism whenever he speaks about human volition. Moreover, given freedom as “*agire come si vuole*” (act as one wants), we are not left blind as to the reality of Freud’s use of the word freedom, as always paired with a desire to be away from work, commitments and compelling circumstances.

Freedom in the Freudian Letters

Freud used freedom seven times in his letters from the year 1885 to 1938;³ each one illustrates and makes clear his point concerning freedom. The letter to Martha Bernays dated Friday of 26 June 1885 contains thus:

*If the energy I feel within me remains with me, we may yet leave behind us some traces of our complicated existence. I don't think I am ambitious, although not exactly unsusceptible to recognition. I want to have you all to myself, some freedom, and a few possessions; I want to keep my nervous system intact and to be left in peace by the rest of my body.*⁴

This letter from Vienna used freedom as very closely connected with Freud’s general well being and deep longing to be with his future wife. A couple of letters carried this point as well: one addressed to Arnold Zweig, before moving from his home in Vienna XIX, Strassergasse 47 on September 30, 1934 tells of relative freedom and surplus leisure;⁵ while the other (written from Vienna IX, Berggasse 19 on May 12, 1938) to his brother, Ernst Freud, strongly speaks of dying in freedom and being with his family as a source of inspiration and strength for Sigmund Freud.⁶ The other letters are not as existential, though nonetheless, even if only tangentially, related to man’s longing to

²Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: an essay on phenomenological ontology* (London: Methuen & co., 1943), 439

³Sigmund Freud, *Letters of Sigmund Freud* eds. Ernst L. Freud, James Stern & Tania Stern; (New York: Basic Books, 1960).

⁴Ibid., 158.

⁵Ibid., 421.

⁶Ibid., 442.

act as one wants to act - ever longing for fullness and yet deep relatedness with others. Two letters from Vienna IX, Berggasse 19 used freedom in conjunction with an award from that city awarded to Freud: one addressed to Lou Andreas-Salomé on May 13, 1924; and the other to Marie Bonaparte on May 10, 1926.⁷ A letter to the same Lou Andreas-Salomé written in Hotel Bristol, Salzburg on July 27, 1916 details how the poet Rainier Maria Rilke ought to be congratulated for regaining his freedom as a poet.⁸

The other letter that also deserves citation at this point is addressed to James Putnam; it is the clearest and acutest illustration of Freud's sentiment and thoughts regarding freedom:

I stand in no awe whatever of the Almighty. If we were ever to meet I should have more reproaches to make to Him than He could to me. I would ask Him why He hadn't endowed me with a better intellectual equipment, and He couldn't complain that I have failed to make the best use of my so-called freedom. (By the way, I know that every individual represents a chunk of life energy, but I don't see what energy has to do with freedom --i.e., not being conditioned by circumstances.)⁹

In commenting on Putnam's 1915 Book, *Human Motives*,¹⁰ Freud laid down in strongest terms how freedom is self-determination and self-governance. To the very extent that before God he is willing even to ask: "why so little freedom?" Here freedom is to be responsible for the self and to determine the self; it is to be nobody else's slave but to be one's own master; freedom at its core according to the Freudian letters is to be not conditioned in any way.

Freedom and Determinism

Freud dedicated a chapter of *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* to lay down some of his most extensive theoretical writings on freedom.¹¹ Given his effort to thematize "unknown motives of

⁷Ibid., 350, 368.

⁸Ibid., 313.

⁹Ibid., 307-8.

¹⁰For reference, see James Putnam, *Human Motives* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Ayer Co. Publishing, 1973).

¹¹Sigmund Freud, "Book I: The Psychopathology of Everyday Life," *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* ed. and trans A. A. Brill (New York: Modern Library, 1938), 150-178.

certain inadequacies of the human psychic function,”¹² Freud is led to the conclusion that:

*[Though] many persons argue against the assumption of an absolute psychic determinism by referring to an intense feeling of conviction that there is a free will. This feeling of conviction exists, but is not incompatible with the belief in determinism. Like all normal feelings, it must be justified by something.*¹³

Here Freud seems to be saying that even the very conviction of asserting a free will is explainable by a hidden psychic dynamics that he describes thus as: ...not manifest[ing] itself in weighty and important decisions; on these occasions, one has much more the feeling of a psychic compulsion and gladly falls back upon it.

According to Freud, it is on the account of unimportant decisions that we somehow give way to our need to assert this freedom of the will:

*On the other hand, it is in trivial and indifferent decisions that one feels sure that he could just as easily have acted differently, that he acted of his own free will, and without any motives. From our analyses we therefore need not contest the right of the feeling of conviction that there is a free will. If we distinguish conscious from unconscious motivation, we are then informed by the feeling of conviction that the conscious motivation does not extend over all our motor resolutions. Minima non curat praetor. What is thus left free from the one side receives its motive from the other side, from the unconscious, and the determinism in the psychic realm is thus carried out uninterruptedly.*¹⁴

This Freudian writing on freedom may be faulted for its reduction of the discourse on freedom into matters of conviction as a sentiment. On the other hand, it is nonetheless a brilliant diagnosis of the human psyche that clings on to trivial matters as the very locus of his so-called free will. If such is the case, Freud is saying: indeed, if there is at all what we might call freedom, then it is but remotely relevant to human existence!¹⁵ If the Freudian thesis on psychic determinism is true, how then can we speak of

¹²Ibid., 150

¹³Ibid., 161.

¹⁴Ibid., 162.

¹⁵The human desire for full existence is laid out in the introduction of the present paper, that is, the bid to be the very best version of oneself. See page 1.

a freedom that is not by default? How can we speak of freedom that is not brought about by the mighty deterministic psychic dynamics of the unconscious?

On top of what Freud asserted above, in discussing the basic tenets of what will later be developed as the technique of free association,¹⁶ Freud in talking about simple numbers showed how decisions which appear to be entirely spontaneous and uncaused are nevertheless determined by deeper motives of which the person may have no knowledge at all.¹⁷ Here Freud is saying that that even the trivial and seemingly unmotivated actions, which we usually cling on to for our assertion of free will, is also held sway by unconscious dynamics that begins to unravel given the time and therapy.

Numbers, which we use in a particular connection extremely often and with apparent arbitrariness, can be traced by analysis to an unexpected hidden meaning. As an illustration, Freud related how this is true of one of his patients who were particularly fond of saying; "I have already told you this from 17 to 36 times." The patient was asked whether there was any motive for this expression of his. It soon occurred to him that he was born on the 27th day of the month, and that his younger brother was born on the 26th day of another month, and he had grounds for complaint that the younger had robbed him of so many of the benefits of life. Thus the patient represented this partiality of circumstances by deducting 10 from the date of his birth and adding it to the date of his brother's birthday! "I am the elder and yet am so cut short."¹⁸ Freud then proceeded in discussing how this spontaneous decisions in giving numbers is also true of words and like Cadillac and even full quotations from a forgotten poem like 'But the soul is already free, floating on a sea of light.'¹⁹

These anecdotal reports on hidden motives that underlie our spontaneous actions, totally undermines our existential bid for being the best version of ourselves. If Carl Rogers laid down spontaneity as a significant trait of self-actualized human persons,

¹⁶This was later used and developed by followers of Freud and practitioners of psychoanalysis like Jung, Bleuler, Gross, Wertheimer and Klein. Cf note made by A. Brill in the Basic Writings of Freud, 162.

¹⁷Cf. Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud: Years of Maturity 1901-1919* (New York: Basic books, 1953), 335.

¹⁸Freud, *Basic Writings*, 155.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 153, 157-161.

then Freud is here saying that such spontaneity is but a factor of hidden dynamics of the unconscious or forgotten feelings that play upon oneself.²⁰

II. Analysis of the Freudian Concept of Freedom

The analysis proceeds by first making clear the connection between Freud and Descartes' thoughts on freedom. The second part of this section will then characterize the Cartesian/Freudian concept of freedom as inherently freedom of indifference. The conclusion of the analysis is a critique of Freud/Descartes via Servais Pinckaers' notion of freedom for excellence.

The Freudian Debt to the Cartesian Cogito

The Freudian concept of freedom as undermined by the emergence of the unconscious that reduces pure self-governing and self-determining to futility is dependent on the conception of consciousness as purified from passions and compelling circumstances. The Freudian ideal of freedom is to act as one wants, distanced from all compelling circumstances, and relates to the world in the terms set by the self who decides, commits and chooses. Freud's genius and novelty perhaps is in suggesting the unconscious as continually challenging and playing with this freedom.

Given such a description of freedom, however, the relevance of Rene Descartes' Cogito come to the fore.²¹ The cogito is the bedrock of human existence and certitude. "I am, I exist," is the center from which extends forth all the other terms of my relatedness and realities. The philosophical foundation of Freudian thought is apparently Cartesian,²² that is, "the subject of psychoanalysis is none other than the Cartesian cogito." Whether one agrees or not, what is relevant to our discussion at this point is the fact that given

²⁰ Cf. Carl Rogers, "A Current Formulation Of Client-Centered Therapy" *Social Service Review* 24 (1950): 442-150 (esp. 443) and Rogers, "A Therapist's View Of The Good Life: The Fully Functioning Person" *On Becoming A Person: A Therapist's View Of Psychotherapy* (pp.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 184-196.

²¹ Renaud Barbaras, "Psychoanalysis and Phenomenology," *The Being of the Phenomenon* trans. Ted Toadvine & Leonard Lawlor (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 273. (272-279)

²² Slavoj Zizek, *Cogito and the Unconscious* (London: Duke University Press, 1998), 4. Cf. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* trans. A. Sheridan (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1977).

the close affinity or even identity between the Freudian subject and the Cartesian cogito, what is true of the Cartesian Freedom is also true of Freud. The weakness and strengths of such a discourse on freedom will be detailed in the following pages.

An Inherently Freedom of Indifference

Freedom took on a new meaning in the writings of Rene Descartes. Freedom as breaking loose from any hindrances “in order to be governed solely by one’s own reasoning procedures” can be traced back to Cartesian writings like *Meditations* and *Le Traité des Passions*.²³ Descartes makes clear that a person’s coming to understand the self as one truly is, a thinking being, involves disengaging from the usual stance wherein one perceives through the body – hearing the sound of typing, for instance, or feeling the ache in one’s gut. The Cartesian Cogito is basically a stance from which one recognizes that both sound and ache are really occurrences in the mind, though we have reason to believe that these are caused by factors in the typewriter and gut respectively. This viewing stance from a distance regards the body as a machine, mediating causal interconnections between the world or external realities and the mind.²⁴

Though not explicitly thematized in Descartes,²⁵ such a disengaged freedom of the cogito on the realities of the self, rereads moral traditions under “this ideal of disengaged rational control.”²⁶ Passions are no longer analyzed as options that have to be explored (stoics) or aligned with a person’s wholeness and reflective understanding of the good as in Aristotle and Aquinas.²⁷ As an alternative, Descartes speaks of passions by giving a functional theory that both maintains the distance of the self from the impurities of such strong sentiments and at the same time shows us how to use them.

A straightforward description of freedom precisely as

²³Charles Taylor, “Justice After Virtue” After Macintyre eds. J. Horton & S. Mendes (Indiana: University of Notre dame Press, 1994), 16-43.

²⁴Cf. Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* In Focus ed. & trans. Stanley Tweyman (New York: Routledge, 1993), 45-50.

²⁵“Descartes does not in fact make a big thing of freedom, but it is clear how the later notion is implicit in his philosophy” Taylor, “Justice After Virtue,” 19.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷ Cf. John J Blom., *Descartes: His Moral Philosophy and Psychology* (Hassocks, 1978). This is a translation of *The Correspondence with Elizabeth and Others on the Passions*.

indifference is found also in the Meditations: We are aware of freedom of indifference within us to such a point that nothing is more obvious or more perfect.²⁸

Such a freedom, disengaged from all necessity, including natural instinct and all determinations, is ever vigilant against anything that would cancel the power to choose between contraries. It is the freedom to will or not to will; that is, even to will this or that. It is called freedom of indifference because it is applied to contraries and can engender any of the following either-or tensions: either freedom or law; either freedom or reason; either freedom or nature; either freedom or grace; either man is free, or God (exists); either subject or object; either freedom or sensibility; either my freedom or the freedom of others; either the individual or society.²⁹

A Provisional Appraisal of Freedom of Indifference

The Dominican thinker, Servais Pinckaers, made an evaluation of the Cartesian/Freudian concept of freedom by suggesting “a rediscovery of freedom... to shake off the notion of freedom of indifference.”³⁰ His research began with concrete experiences like piano playing and learning a language to drive home a definition of freedom as “the power to act freely with excellence and perfection.”³¹ According to Pinckaers, one does not only choose freely whatever key to strike to come up with music. In truth, while nobody hinders the person to strike any key as he pleases, it takes a great degree of learning to equip one to choose better and hence come up with sounds that can be truly called music. The same is true in learning a foreign language, Pinckaers’ other example, in which one trains oneself in choosing words and keeping with the rules of grammar and hence learns a new language and if successful is deemed to speak well.

Such a notion of freedom should not to be confused with the

²⁸“Libertatis autem et indifferentiae, quae in nobis est, nos ita conscios esse, ut nihil sit quod evidentius et perfectius comprehendamus.” Cf. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy In Focus*, 77.

²⁹Servais Pinckaers, “Freedom of Indifference,” *The sources of Christian Ethics* trans. Sr Mary Thomas Noble (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 350-51.

³⁰Servais Pinckaers, “Freedom For Excellence,” *Ibid.*, 354-78.

³¹*Ibid.*, 375.

freedom to commit mistakes, which is still necessarily within the ambit of the choice of contraries. Pinckaers' notion of freedom lies rather in the very ability to avoid the mistakes without conscious effort. Freedom for Excellence, as the Dominican coined it, actually grows out of the crude notion of freedom as choice between contraries and enables us to act with perfection (play the piano well or speak a foreign language correctly). It is different from Freedom of indifference for instead of maintaining a safe distance, it actually roots itself in natural inclinations, drives or passions to develop through education and exercise a degree of maturity or perfection of freedom. It thus evades the either/or tensions as enumerated in the preceding section and instead presupposes as aids in the development of self in growing in excellence: law, reason, nature, grace, God, object, sensibility, the freedom of others, and society.

Given the formidable points laid out by Servais Pinckaers, it is tempting to stop at this provisional appraisal or evaluation of freedom in the writings of Freud and Descartes. We can easily say that their conception of freedom is incomplete or far from humanizing. That is, it simply rings smack of individualism and modernism that is clear and distinct in their writings. At this point the pairing of the thoughts of Freud and Descartes proved to be helpful, however an alternative framing of Freud is still possible. This has to do with reading Freud in the light of his practice of therapy. This will be dealt with in the following chapter we gradually turn to Paul Ricoeur's writings on freedom.

III. Freedom as Consent: Paul Ricoeur on Freudian Writings and Freedom

Paul Ricoeur's writing on freedom is not to be taken as totally antagonistic with the conception of Freud. In the same way that freedom for excellence goes beyond freedom of indifference but nevertheless presupposes it, as the latter freedom (excellence) grows from the other (indifference), so does Paul Ricoeur's thesis on freedom engages Sigmund Freud in dialogue and is ready to elicit what is hidden, refute what is mistaken and give fruition to what is potentially there.³² Perhaps the point is not to get caught

³² Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (New Haven and London: Yale University

up in choosing from the contraries and look at two elements as simply contradictory in their relationship with each other. Maybe, Ricoeur challenges us to see that the relationship between two elements as opposites is only one possibility; we can also end up seeing complementarity as another possible configuration between these same elements.

Freedom for Excellence in Sigmund Freud

Paul Ricoeur's approach in reading Freud is to frame his thought in the very global implications that is inherent in the discourse of psychoanalysis.³³ That is, to engage Freud and the implication of his writings in the very realities of human persons as intersubjective, culturally and relationally situated, symbolically and religiously adept. Given such a global perspective we might easily get lost if we fail to follow through our study in particular simply concerns human freedom in the very angst of the human person to be the very best of himself. Is it true that Freud's contribution to our search is simply to borrow Rene Descartes' concept of the cogito along with its implication on the ideals of freedom and then to undermine them (self as subject and freedom) by introducing to us the unconscious? Let us frame the question in another way: given the writings of Freud specified above (1885-1936 Letters and Psychopathology of Everyday Life) are we left to conclude that Freud's freedom is none other than what Pinckaers' call as freedom of indifference?

Paul Ricoeur in giving us access to the global implications of Freudian thought also alerts us in considering the totality of the works of Freud, that is, including not only his written opus but also his practice of therapy.³⁴ It is a pity that Freud did not bother to systematize his practice of therapy.³⁵ However, given these, will we not be called naïve if we fail to see that the very objective of the therapy is for the improvement and general well being of the human person? If we help ourselves get unstuck to what is formally written and turn our reflection to consider the

Press, 1970). Italian Translation: Della Interpretazione. Essai sur Freud (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1967), 16.

³³Cf. Giovanni Cucci, Ricoeur Oltre Freud (Asisi: Cittadella Editrice, 2007), 96.

³⁴Ibid., 95.

³⁵This point was discussed by Professor Giovanni Cucci in class Psicanalisi e Filisofia nella Riflessione di Paul Ricoeur, 10 May 2007.

very practice of Freud as a return to sanity and the expansion of the subject then we get a glimpse of a Freudian approximation of what we call Freedom for excellence. The very reason for his clinical practice is none other than for the client's learning from himself and gain healing. This point is further complemented given Freud's later writings that give a tripartite relation between the ego the id and the superego.³⁶ The very point of Freud's latter tripartite schematization of human personality is for us to have a system to gain freedom through growth, that is to expand the function of the ego while balancing the influences of the id and the superego. On top of his clinical practice, if we turn to Sigmund Freud's manner of conducting his life, is it not in itself a tribute to consciousness? His fidelity to his wife and his upright conduct enabled Freud to say about God: "If we were ever to meet I should have more reproaches to make to Him than He could to me"³⁷

The Freudian approach to thematize dreams and interpret them, to learn from forgetfulness and expansion of understanding through word associations, are all these not aimed to help the human person recover himself, gain insight and thus in the process be the better person that he wants to be?³⁸

Freedom as Consent

Given our surprise rediscovery of Freedom for Excellence even in Freud, it is then in order to complete this reflection by turning to Ricoeur in his properly philosophical conception of freedom, i.e. freedom as consent.

Consent as profoundly expounded by Paul Ricoeur in his book *Freedom and Nature*, "is a metaphysical choice which does not fall within the competence of Psychology."³⁹ According to him it is a choice that has to do with transcendence.⁴⁰ Though not itself transcendence, it nevertheless grasps beyond whatever negativity the world has to offer;⁴¹ and is thus clearly linked with hope that

³⁶Cf. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 62. See also Cucci, *Ricoeur Oltre Freud*, 128.

³⁷Freud's upright living and conscious adherence to righteousness is apparent in his letter to James Putnam written in Vienna IX, Berggasse, dated 19 July 8, 1915. Cf *Letters of Freud*, 308-9.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 130.

³⁹Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 466.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 467.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 479.

also escapes the negativity of a refusal inherent in the freedom of indifference as espoused by Descartes and the stoics.⁴² Consent is “wrested from the refusal and transcends it.”⁴³ Faithful to Ricoeur’s poetic and personal tone consent can be described in simple words thus as the joy of a yes in the sadness of a no.⁴⁴

To give further light to this yes to the negativity of life and the self while at the same time attempting to summarize Ricoeur’s notion of consent, Joseph Bien has this to say:

*The topic of life is spread out by Ricoeur under the titles of structure, growth, and birth. Behind each of these points of view on life is the idea that the life to which I consent is the background for deciding and acting without which deciding and acting would not even be possible.*⁴⁵

The topic of life that Bien is talking about under the headings of structure, growth and birth can also be named as the very condition of possibility of being human. These realities also have to do with our character, unconsciousness and contingency. Paul Ricoeur discusses each of these realities as the sorrow of limiting us to ourselves, that is, the unbearable lightness of being who we are(!);⁴⁶ the sorrow of formlessness or the unconscious that inflicts and wounds myself and my freedom;⁴⁷ and the sorrow of the reality that I cannot freely give life to myself and hence one day will surely die.⁴⁸ Consistent with the vocabulary we have chosen above, each of these limits my self and my volition. Each of them wounds me and threatens me; with the very last confronting me even with annihilation. Each of these “nos” demands an answer; will it be the raw refusal to the refusal given by the freedom of indifference like Descartes and the Stoics? Or will the answer be the way of consent that gives itself to the perfection or excellence

⁴²Ibid., 464, 469-473.

⁴³Ibid., 466.

⁴⁴Ibid., 480.

⁴⁵ Joseph Bien, “Ricoeur as Social Philosopher,” *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago; Open Court, 1995), 294 (287-305).

⁴⁶Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, 447-448.

⁴⁷Ibid., 448-450. Paul Ricoeur in talking about the unconscious made use of the terms of classical metaphysics and got to the point of describing the unconscious as having a quasi-ontological status of formless matter. It is quasi-ontological for classical metaphysics does not permit us of talking about matter without form other than the prime matter or protehyle in the thought of Aristotle. However, in his discussion Ricoeur assigns to the unconscious matter whose form had been lost or forgotten. That is due to neglect, forgetfulness or even trauma, there is in the personality of man, the unconscious as the formless matter ever expressing itself but nevertheless given forms by the self. See fuller discussion by Ricoeur in pages 387-415.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 450-456.

of freedom by way of growth?

The aspect of growth which brings on the [...] "the way of consent" is aging. In a way I am carried along by this organic time, and thus my growth is a resolved problem; growth and aging simply continue to reveal me bit by bit. But on the other hand, my growth is also a task: I am continuously forming projects which propel me into the future, I am performing actions at the present, and I consent to my character and unconscious as they have been revealed in the past.⁴⁹

Though the limits of my freedom by way of character, unconscious and finitude are indeed each one a no to the reality of who I am, these are nevertheless there precisely for me!⁵⁰ This means that each and every one of these limits acquire their meaning from the subject of myself who wrestles with them as conditions precisely of the self!⁵¹ They are indeed limits but are experienced limits, the reality of who I am as given shape precisely by who I am, my daily willing and decisions. The realities of my unconscious dynamics as given meaning by my conscious form giving, willing and choosing. Finally the reality of my finitude as meaningful precisely because it is my death!

IV. Conclusion: All too Human Consciousness and Freedom

An analysis of Freedom in the writings of Sigmund Freud has been the sustaining effort of this study. At first, his theory of the unconscious seemingly challenges human freedom that strives for self-perfection. While Freud's conception of the ego is identical to the Cartesian cogito and therefore takes on the very same weaknesses, Ricoeur's view of Freud's "healing project for human freedom" that moves towards flourishing and excellence somehow recovers his thought about freedom for us. Ricoeur in the quote below ends this paper's reflection on freedom:

It is I who think, give meaning, weigh my motives, wish, and move my body. This assurance, infected with the suspicion that I am acting out a comedy on the stage of a mythical opera and am a dupe of a conjuration of hidden forces in some mysterious wings of existence -- this assurance, that "I" which I was tempted to sacrifice into the

⁴⁹Joseph Bien, "Ricoeur as Social Philosopher," 295.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 289.

⁵¹Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, 468.

*hands of the decipherers of enigmas, must be won back constantly in the sursum of freedom.*⁵²

It is neither a return to the hubris of the Cartesian Cogito that is indifferent to everything else, transparent, empty and no-thing;⁵³ nor it is a dreaming naïve realism of freedom that does not come in real contact with the existential fact of finitude, formlessness and contingency. Ricoeur's freedom here is even beyond the points given by Pinckaers above who lack the patience of tarrying with the negativity of the unconscious and death. Freedom as consent for Ricoeur is an existential effort to always salvage the self in the midst of the very realities of finitude, formlessness and contingency. A glimpse of this freedom as excellence and perfection can be had in the spontaneity and gracious freedom of the athlete and the dancer. The perfection and excellence that is spoken here is an all too human freedom, excellence and perfection:

This freedom emerges ceaselessly from indecision.... To be sure, inasmuch as we carry on the process, this mastery is not an imperfection but actually a perfection or an image of perfection.... It comes from a risk.... A risk is a perfection only if we consider it as independent termination of an attention coming to a resolution, [that is, of growth, aging and maturity.

⁵²Ibid., 403

⁵³Ricoeur accomplishes the undermining of the transparency of the Cartesian ego with most explicit words: "In Kantian language, an apperception of the Ego may accompany all my representations, but this apperception is not knowledge of oneself, it cannot be transformed into an intuition of a substantial soul; the decisive critique Kant directs against any 'rational psychology' has definitively dissociated reflection from any so-called knowledge of self." Furthermore he adds in a note, below the same page: the Ego Cogito is apodictic, but not necessarily adequate, Cf. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 44.

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