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SOME ASPECTS OF TERRY EAGLETON'S USE OF FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS

ALGUNOS ASPECTOS SOBRE EL USO DEL PSICOANÁLISIS FREUDIANO POR TERRY EAGLETON

Jorge Sacido Romero
Universidade de Santiago de Compostela
jorge.sacido@usc.es

José María Díaz Lage
Universidad Internacional de La Rioja
josem.diaz@unir.net

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Abstract: This paper looks at Terry Eagleton's engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis. We start by looking at Eagleton's increasing interest in psychoanalysis in the late 1970s, particularly in "Marx, Freud and Morality" (1977). We then move on to three crucial topics that Eagleton tackles by resorting to psychoanalysis: work, love and reason. In each of these three cases we present the ways in which Eagleton posits psychoanalysis as a plausible complement to Marxism, even where their compatibility is not immediately evident. Our reading is intended to be descriptive; however, it does not shy away from pointing out the inconsistencies that we have found in Eagleton's use and assessment of psychoanalysis. In the case of work, we address the relevance of Freud's view of it as inherently unpleasant in connection with the Marxian concept of alienated labour. Regarding love, we discuss Eagleton's focus on love understood as *agape* rather than

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on the Freudian conception of love as *eros*. As far as reason is concerned, we deal with Freud's faith in the intellect and in science as the sole safeguards of humankind against the assaults of the superego.

Keywords: Terry Eagleton; Sigmund Freud; Karl Marx; psychoanalysis; work; love; reason.

Resumen: El presente artículo examina el uso que Terry Eagleton hace del psicoanálisis freudiano. Comenzamos analizando el interés creciente de Eagleton en el psicoanálisis a finales de la década de 1970, particularmente en "Marx, Freud and Morality" (1977). Desplazamos a continuación nuestra atención a tres temas fundamentales en relación con los cuales Eagleton recurre al psicoanálisis: el trabajo, el amor y la razón. En cada uno de estos tres casos presentamos las maneras en las que Eagleton postula al psicoanálisis como un posible complemento al marxismo, incluso cuando esta compatibilidad no es inmediatamente evidente. Nuestra lectura pretende ser descriptiva, pero no deja de señalar las inconsistencias que hemos encontrado en el uso y la valoración que del psicoanálisis hace Eagleton. En el caso del trabajo, invocamos la relevancia de la visión que Freud tiene del trabajo como inherentemente desagradable en conexión con el concepto marxiano de trabajo alienado. En cuanto al amor, presentamos el modo en que Eagleton se centra en el amor *agape* más que en la concepción freudiana del amor como *eros.* Por lo que respecta a la razón, nos centramos en la fe de Freud en el intelecto y la ciencia como únicas salvaguardas de la humanidad contra los asedios del superego.

Palabras clave: Terry Eagleton; Sigmund Freud; Karl Marx; psicoanálisis; trabajo; amor; razón.

1. Introduction

Anyone thoroughly acquainted with Terry Eagleton's work, including the author himself, will immediately detect in the title of the present article a deliberate echo of one of Eagleton's favourite titles ever: "Some Aspects of the Vaginal System of the Flea" (*The Meaning of Life* xiii; "El sentido de la vida"). Eagleton recalls with relish hitting upon this funny title when browsing through a thick volume containing the complete list of PhD dissertations in progress at Cambridge, an amusing habit of his student days: "I liked that 'some aspects'", he says, "nothing too ambitious, you know, very modest English kind of understatement" ("El sentido de la vida"). The scope of this article is in line with the spirit of "appealing modesty" of this doctoral thesis (*The Meaning of Life* xiii). Thus,

we will be limited to just some aspects of Eagleton's use of Freudian theory, a recurrent frame of reference in his work since the publication of *Criticism and Ideology* (1976). Incidentally, psychoanalysis has in common with the amusingly humble doctoral project its attention to the body, and shares with those other, less humble literary and artistic renditions of the flea motif in the English tradition its focus on erotic relations (John Donne's poem "The Flea") and the exploration of the uncanny, dark, bloody, monstrous and phantasmatic underworld (William Blake's miniature "The Ghost of a Flea").

In the space available, we will explore some of the uses that Eagleton makes of the work of Sigmund Freud. Eagleton's recourse to Freudian psychoanalysis to expand and enrich his discussion of different topics is for the most part successful, although it incurs in some contradictions and exhibits some limitations that we would also like to bring to the fore. In this sense, ours is both a descriptive and a critical approach, and needs be selective not only due to space restrictions, but also because Eagleton's *oeuvre* is so large and references to psychoanalysis so frequent that we must pass on to posterity the task of producing a full account of the topic in a book-length study or, perhaps, in a more ambitious doctoral dissertation with the phrase "some aspects of" cut off from the title. This article explores Eagleton's account and use of central Freudian notions, the valuable insights it offers and the contradictions in which it incurs[1]. Even if, as David Alderson argued in 2004, "Eagleton's sense of the value of psychoanalysis is suggestive and provisional rather than fully theorised" (82), it deserves to be examined further, brought up to date, and reassessed in terms of its insights and limitations.

2. Enter Freud

When *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* was published in 1976, it was a landmark in the field of ideological criticism in English. As Eagleton recalls in the "Introduction" to the new edition of the book (2006), it "was first published on the crest of a profound historical change", a moment in which the Left was still strong and optimistic, not yet fully aware that the course of history "was already taking a decisive turn to the right" (n.p.). Apart from the circumstances of its publication and the significant contribution that the book made to Marxist literary theory, *Criticism and Ideology* is also

1 Space limitations make it impossible for us to examine the relevance of Jacques Lacan in Eagleton's work, as we had initially planned. We will refer to Lacan in the ensuing pages but as a source to comment on Eagleton's use of Freud. Eagleton devotes a full ten pages to Lacan in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (164-174), whilst the previous year, in a *tour de force* engagement with Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, the version of psychoanalysis he draws on is more Lacanian than Freudian as his focus is the symbolic nature of unconscious desire (*The Rape of Clarissa*). The Lacanian order of the Real is a key term to analyze the Irish Famine in *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (12-15), and his 2009 study on ethics, *The Trouble with Strangers*, is divided into parts that correspond to Lacan's three registers (the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real).

exceptional in a humbler yet transcendental way: it marks the entry of Freud's ideas into Eagleton's work. Whilst discussing Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966), Eagleton opens a brief excursus into Freud's theory of dream-work with a critical remark addressed to his fellow Marxist critics and, implicitly, to himself: "It is worth noting here that these formulations of Macherey suggest the possibility of an encounter between Marxist criticism and the great scientist who has so often figured within such criticism merely as an eloquent silence: Freud" (*Criticism and Ideology* 90). In a short space (90-92), Eagleton establishes an analogy between dream narratives and literary texts, their complex production and their demanding interpretation, based on the fact that, in both, the psychic and political unconscious is consciously and ideologically repressed yet manifests itself in the formal gaps and contradictions that psychoanalytical practice and "scientific criticism" should tackle and unravel (*Criticism and Ideology* 90; see also *Literary Theory* 180-182). Neither (human) subjects, nor (oneiric or literary) texts should be spontaneously taken as entities endowed with plenitude and self-coherence, as totalized givens, as "bourgeois ideology" maintains but rather as riven by gaps and conflicts (*Criticism and Ideology* 92). Like the subject discovered and theorized by psychoanalysis, the literary text is traversed by unconscious desire that stands in tension with the assumptions and prescriptions of dominant ideology. Thus, Eagleton concludes that the "significations" of literary discourse "remain multiple and partly 'open' in a way which enables those displacements and elisions of meaning occasioned by its relation to ideology" (*Criticism and Ideology* 92).

3. "Marx, Freud and Morality" (1977): Psychoanalysis Outlined

In the 1987 "Introduction to the Second Edition" of *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (1975), Eagleton criticized himself in retrospect for having upheld an idealized conception of the literary text, informed as the book was by Lucien Goldmann's "covertly organicist impulse towards totalised unities" (xxiii). He declared himself guilty of unfairness towards Charlotte Brontë's works for his disapproval of their contradictions and lack of unity, features of her novels that he now reassessed in a positive light (xxvi). He accepted feminist critics' reproach for his blunt exclusion of gender concerns to the same extent that he laments that psychoanalysis was "another palpable silence in this book" (xxviii). His reading of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Eagleton confessed, was besmirched by his uncritical use of "such essentially Romantic concepts as 'the imagination', 'authenticity' and 'liberation', without submitting these notions to Freud's sceptical rigorously materialist reading" (xxviii). *Myths of Power* is, thus, surrounded by "an aura of idealism . . . which a judicious dose of Freudianism might well have tem-

pered", so much so that "[t]he disruptive force of the unconscious", so intensely at work at both the formal and characterological level in Emily's novel, went unheeded (xxviii).

So, according to the author himself, Freud and psychoanalysis should have been present in *Myths of Power*, but, unfortunately, they were not. In *Criticism and Ideology*, Freud makes a brief appearance after being praised for his scientific stature and for the value of his theories for Marxist criticism. The following year, 1977, saw the publication of Eagleton's article "Marx, Freud and Morality", a piece which, though short, contains a lot of what Eagleton would have to say about psychoanalysis in the years to come (including the contrast with Christian love) and which constitutes an unequivocal index of the great growth in importance of Freudian and also Lacanian ideas for Eagleton's future theoretical and critical work–something more than the zeal of the convert is at work in young Eagleton's words of high praise for the father of psychoanalysis. For instance, anyone familiar with the chapter on psychoanalysis in Eagleton's best-selling book, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), can find that most of what he says there is already sketched in "Marx, Freud and Morality". In the latter, Freud is not considered merely a "great scientist", as he had been in *Criticism and Ideology* (90), but praised as "the greatest of 20th century scientists" (22). Psychoanalysis is firmly placed on a par with historical materialism as the only two theories capable of bringing to the surface the hidden determinants of the subjects' experience. More than that, it is psychoanalysis that provides historical materialism with the theory of human subjectivity that the latter lacks: "Only one such theory will do for historical materialism, and that is the other classical materialism we call psychoanalysis" ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 22). In introducing Freud's theory of the subject, Eagleton refers to the Oedipus complex as the process through which we are socialized, become *subjected* to the norm, after being forced to repress into the unconscious our libidinal tie to our mothers under the threat of castration, to identify with the parent of our own sex, and to search for substitute objects of erotic attachment ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 25). Eagleton aptly, albeit reductively[2], moves swiftly from Freud to Lacan by reformulating this process in terms of the transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic Order. It is a movement from centredness, plenitude and identity to decentredness, absence and difference. In the symbiotic relationship with the mother characteristic of the Imaginary, "it, the baby, is *centred*, lodged, positioned secure", yet, once the father shatters that perfect union, the baby is forced to recognize "*difference*", beginning with the fact that it is sexed (*it* becomes *he*

2 This has consequences for Eagleton's understanding of Lacan's Imaginary register. There is a darker, more tormenting side in Lacan's Imaginary that Eagleton (almost) obviates to concentrate on the sense of unity and coherence that it confers on the subject. There is more going on in the order of the Imaginary than Eagleton would make us think here or, more recently, in *The Trouble with Strangers* (2009).

or *she*) and trapped ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 25; emphases in the original). Instead of plenitude, the irruption of the father and his law of the prohibition of incest instals "a *lack* . . ., and this lack sets in motion *desire*" ("Marx, Freud and morality" 25, emphases in the original). The human animal becomes a subject once he or she enters the realm of language in which meaning, as structuralism discovered, derives from difference between signifiers, and the subject is caught in an interplay of absences, incapable of saying all that he/she desires to say, most of which is repressed in the unconscious: "My words are always haunted, creased, inscribed by other possible words which can't be present to my consciousness as I speak, and it is this, precisely, which is the structure of the unconscious" ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 26).

We have devoted some space here to condensing Eagleton's views on Lacan's theory–which, being numerous and far-reaching, would deserve another article–in order to clarify what Eagleton says at the beginning of "Marx, Freud and Morality". Eagleton closes his introduction to the 1977 article by arguing that the psychoanalytical account of the constitution of the subject, though necessary for a radical discourse that lacks one, has a dark underside: it is tragic. Psychoanalysis, Eagleton rightly states, opposes the conception of the individual as the autonomous centre of thought, decision and action endorsed by bourgeois ideology by exposing the terrible consequences suffered by the human body once it is inserted into language and never feeling at home in it ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 22). This discontent (*discomfort* or *queasiness* are closer to the German *Unbehagen* in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* [1930]) impels the subject into "a process of infinite regress or flight from language to some more secure home outside it – a home which is finally death" ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 22). Beginning with this article, Eagleton will struggle repeatedly throughout his work up to the present to supplement psychoanalysis' insightful, yet utterly pessimistic view about humanity, by adhering to the Christian commandment to "'love your neighbour as yourself'", which for Freud was unacceptable, unfeasible and absurd–whilst he does not forget here and elsewhere to criticize Marxism for something even worse, for being "silent on the question of love" ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 29).

4. Eagleton's Freud and Its Contradictions

Eagleton is a strong dialectical thinker who courageously rejects the easy way out of sticking to categorial closures or conceptual totalisations. He could have rejected Freudianism at one stroke by saying that it is individualist, as some on the Left do, but, instead, he criticizes the latter by saying that theirs is an utter distortion of psychoanalytical theory

(*Literary Theory* 163). He decidedly takes psychoanalysis on board, yet, in the course of his work, psychoanalysis figures, at once, as a much-needed theoretical companion and a troubling fellow-traveller who has little by way of good news concerning human destiny. This tension pervades Eagleton's works and is the source of both valuable insights (on culture, literature, society, ethics and politics) and contradictory judgements concerning psychoanalysis and its founder, Sigmund Freud; contradictions which are impossible to reconcile as they fall outside a legitimately dialectical *modus operandi*.

Oscillations in Eagleton's assessment of psychoanalysis begin with what he says about Freud himself as a subject inserted in a particular ideological formation. In "Marx, Freud and Morality", he states confidently that "Freud had some approving things to say about abolishing private property, and about the Bolshevik revolution, which negate any notion that he was just another old Viennese petty-bourgeois" (23). How are we to reconcile this with what he says later about Freud in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*? In this work, Eagleton castigates Freud for being "politically speaking a pessimistic conservative authoritarian, full of petty-bourgeois banalities about the insensate hysteria of the masses, the chronic indolence and stupidity of the working class and the need of a strong charismatic leadership" (283). Eagleton supports this assessment of Freud's ideologically-determined position of enunciation by referring to *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), a work in which Freud does, indeed, provide an analysis of the constitution of charismatic leadership and how the masses submit to its mandates, but where neither a criticism of the working class *per se* nor a defence of the necessity of strong charismatic authority are to be found. The source of this contradiction is not the object of the utterance (Freud, the historical figure), but, rather, the subject who utters it (Eagleton). It seems that young Eagleton, in defending that Freud was valuable for Marxism, had to offer a more palatable version of Freud's historical figure, whereas, in 1990, after he had made substantial use of psychoanalytical discourse and submitted it to a dialectical scrutiny in the intervening works, felt more confident to expose Freud's petty-bourgeois alignments[3].

Another ambiguity worth pondering is Eagleton's contradictory view concerning Freudianism's proximity to and value for radical politics. In his 1977 article, Eagleton's praise for psychoanalysis as a valuable theoretical tool for historical materialism was *already* sobered by his definition of Freud as "a deeply *tragic* thinker, despite [his] ra-

3 This should not be taken as an attempt on our side to psychoanalyze Eagleton. Our intention is, rather, to come up with some explanation (a change in Eagleton's position of enunciation) for what is otherwise a striking contradiction. That being said, we are nevertheless surprised by the disproportionate amount of space given to Harold Bloom's concept of "anxiety of influence" and Eagleton's weighed approval of the value of this concept in the chapter on psychoanalysis in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983, 183-185).

tionalism" ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 28)[4]. The large audience that *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983) has deservedly enjoyed can read the following towards the end of Eagleton's chapter on psychoanalysis: "Freudianism . . . is a science committed to the emancipation of human beings from what frustrates their fulfilment. It is a theory at the service of transformative practice, and to that extent has parallels with radical politics" (192). Readers of this book are, perhaps, struck by this affirmation as, earlier in this chapter, Eagleton had attacked Freud's conservatism and pessimism concerning subjects' capacity to liberate themselves from internal and internalized forces that hold sway over the course of their lives (160-161). Among the latter, the overpowering death-drive (the truly primary regulating principle *beyond the pleasure principle* theorized by Freud in a 1920 book with this title) and its corresponding mental agency, the omniscient superego, which unremittingly torments the vulnerable ego (our conscious self, the site of pleasure and pain), drawing its energy from the id (that part of the subject in which repressed desires and drives are repressed but never stop exerting their pressure) (160-161). Thus, in view of his own discoveries, Freud, though not completely refractory to the possibility of social change, could not but be "scornful of all utopian proposals" (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 161). This darker side of Freudianism is brought to the fore in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, where, according to Eagleton, Freud's theories oppose the Marxist conviction of the possibility of social transformation and human liberation: "Freud's bleak Hobbesian view of human society forbids him from envisaging it as a potentially nourishing space, or from imagining morality as emancipatory rather than oppressive" (268; see also *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* 16-17). But, as in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Eagleton is impelled to find affinities between Freud and radical politics, when he points out later, in the chapter titled *à la* Lacan "The Name of the Father: Sigmund Freud" of *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, that psychoanalytic practice, if successful, allows the subject to liberate herself from disabling attachments to the past and orient that free energy to other ends. "Of those ends themselves," Eagleton writes, "Freudianism, like Marxism, has little prescriptive to say; Freud joins Marx in attempting to shift us . . . from prehistory to history proper, resolving those conflicts that lock us in the past" (281).

5. Foundations for a Future Society

In the construction of a future society of emancipated individuals, liberated forces which had previously been repressed should be oriented to appropriate ends so as to make

4 Eagleton's oscillation in labelling Freud a *rationalist* and an *irrationalist* is another source of ambiguity on which we will elaborate.

human happiness and fulfilment a reality. Freudianism and Marxism may not have anything *prescriptive* to say about those ends (in the sense of 'do this' or 'don't do that'), but *they do say something*, offer something by way of guidelines, no matter how indirectly or implicitly. We will begin by discussing the theme of *work*, move onto the topic of *love* next, and finally tackle the question of *reason*, three problematic areas in Eagleton's interpretation and use of Freudian theory.

5.1. Eagleton on Freud on Work

With the clarity and precision that constitute a trademark of his style, Eagleton explains that the Freudian superego is the agency in charge of guaranteeing that we obey the social law, a law which forces us to renounce our erotic or aggressive instinctual gratification either through repression (into the unconscious) or sublimation (inhibiting it in its primary aim and directing it to a different end or object). The superego thus "is the source of all idealism, but also of all our guilt" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 270). In "On Narcissism: An Introduction" (1914), Freud had argued how "conscience", the predecessor of the superego in Freudian theory, delivers love to the ego whenever the subject is equal to the ideal that he/she has internalized and identified with (the so-called *ego-ideal*, the ideal invested with the features of the law), whilst punishing the subject whenever he/she fails to do so by instilling in him/her a sense of guilt (92-102). However, this balance between love and guilt, pleasure and pain mediated by the reality principle, is upset in later Freudian theory, in which the intrapsychic moral agency (now renamed the superego) comes across as a basically aggressive, punishing, sadistic agency, with little or no love in stock for the ego, after Freud formulated his thesis on the death-drive as the primordial regulating principle of mental life in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and delineated the second topic of human subjectivity in *The Ego and the Id* (1923). Hence, Eagleton's version of the Freudian superego as the purely aggressive, violent, sadistic agency related to the death-drive, which draws its energies from the id to inflict more and more pain on the increasingly vulnerable and increasingly civilized ego, is correct, as it finds clear support in Freud's own theorizations–and in Lacan's, for that matter, who insists that the superego is obscene and violent (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 269-271; *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* 45-46; *Holy Terror* 44, 49-50 and 115; *On Evil* 65, 107-109 and 127). As Freud writes in *Civilization and Its Discontents*,

> the prize we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt. . . . [T]he sense of guilt produced by civilization is not perceived as such either, and remains to a large extent unconscious, or appears as a sort of

> *malaise* [*Unbehagen*, translated in a more palatable manner as 'discontents' in the title], a dissatisfaction, for which people seek other motivations (134-136).

In the society of Freud's time and of our time, *work* is for the most part and *de facto* regulated by *Thanatos*, another name for the death-drive and its companion agency, the increasingly aggressive superego. In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Eagleton comments on how, for Freud, society should be held together by sublimated *Eros*, the sexual instinct or libidinal energy inhibited in its aim and employed in work. To function properly, the working activity should be gratifying, but it seldom is for the vast majority of the people, for whom work is the source of pain (*Unlust*, 'unpleasure') and frustration, so that people feel an aversion to it[5]. In sum, *Eros* triggers *Thanatos* and is overpowered by it. Eagleton writes: "Only a minority of men and women will be capable of effective sublimation; the masses, for Freud as for Burke, must do with the coerced sublimation of manual work, which is never very effective" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 277). Granted: in a long footnote in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud speaks about a "natural human aversion to work" and points out the fact that it is gratifying only for a small number of people (80n1). However, Freud insists that work can and should be gratifying, as "by means of sublimation, it makes possible the use of existing inclinations, of persisting or constitutionally reinforced instinctual impulses" (80n1). Eagleton refers to this, but he is not completely fair to Freud in this connection as, reading Eagleton, one is left with the impression that Freud is describing an immutable state of affairs, as if Freud were not speaking in the present tense and referring to the present historical context. But Freud *does hint* at the possibility of freedom and happiness to be found in work–hence the need for the attentive reader to qualify his idea of a *natural* human aversion to work. In affirming the path that work opens for individual and collective happiness, Freud comes closest to Marx and Engels. In the chapter on "Ideology" of his great little book *Discerning the Subject* (1988), Paul Smith draws on Lucien Sève's sketch in *Man in Marxist Theory* (1978) of the two human types derived from Marx's texts: "concrete individual" and "real man." According to Sève, Marx's radical distinction between these two types rests on his belief in the existence in each human being of particular potentialities, of an individual "essence" which could be realized in a free society. The social space for fulfilled individuality, for the "concrete individual," is located in a future after the advent of communism or socialism. In capitalist society, people, "real men", are estranged

5 It is surely no coincidence that the prevailing term for work in Romance languages such as Spanish (*trabajo*), Portuguese (*travalho*) or French (*travail*) comes from the Latin *tripalium*, an instrument of torture similar to a pillory. The English *travail* preserves a nuance of suffering and oppression.

from their own essence: that is, they are alienated[6]. They cannot realize their individual potentialities in active life due to the unjust organisation of social relations. Men are just "the actual bearers of the effects produced at particular conjunctions of social relations" (Smith 6). People are kept in this alienated state because they are barred from becoming conscious of their real conditions of existence, which are conditions of oppression. Marxism aimed at producing an undistorted representation of the real social relations that would erase false consciousness enforced by ideology and contribute to the proletarian revolution and so to men's eventual emancipation. Future communist society would thus be for traditional Marxism a post-ideological stage. In it, "real men" become "concrete individuals" at last, each according to their essence. As Marx and Engels write in *The German Ideology*: "Only at this stage does self-activity coincide with material life, which corresponds to the development of individuals into complete individuals" (97)[7]. Further in the same work, whilst refuting Stirner's *The Ego and its Own*, Marx and Engels formulate a well-known apophthegm that suggests that a post-revolutionary society would not be as dependent on the category *work* as a capitalist one or, at least, not in the same way: "in a communist society there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities" (418).

It must be stressed that, for Marx, the question is not just the quality of work but also, crucially, its quantity; or, rather, that shift in quality which will allow human beings to be concrete individuals cannot be achieved without a change in quantity. In a crucial section in the *Grundrisse*, Marx points out that with the employ of machinery, capital reduces the amount of labour necessary for production, "but only in order to realize a maximum of labour" (701), i.e., to augment production. However, this reduction of labour "will redound to the benefit of emancipated labour, and is the condition of its emancipation" (701). It is precisely this reduction of the amount of time devoted to work that will enable the full development of human beings once time is liberated from the demands of profit and put in the service of workers themselves: "the measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time" (708). This disposable time, perceived as unproductive under capitalism, is actually anything but unproductive: "the saving of labour time [is] equal to an increase of free time, i.e. time for the full development of the individual, which in turn reacts back upon the productive

6 Regarding the Marxian view of alienation, see Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, particularly, in connection with work, 'Estranged labour', 106-119. The most important development of the notion of alienation, predating the publication of Marx's *Manuscripts* in 1932, is Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), particularly "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", 83-222.

7 Smith quotes from a passage from Volume II of Marx's *Capital* where he describes post-revolutionary society as the one that would promote the "development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom" (6).

power of labour as itself the greatest productive power" (711). In other words, less time devoted to work implies more time devoted to personal development, which in turn implies an improvement in production, not through an increase in effort but through a growth in accomplishments: "free time–which is both idle time and time for higher activity–has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and he then enters into the direct production process as this different subject" (712).

Freud's idea that human "existing inclinations" and "persisting or constitutionally reinforced instinctual impulses" could be "a source of special satisfaction" when materialized in professional activity (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 80n1) is quite close to Marx's ideal of the free and satisfied "concrete individual" who realizes his/her potentialities, his/her individual "essence", that part of his/her "species being" in work–Eagleton endorses this notion of the "species being", quoting from Marx himself (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 411-412) and from Sebastiano Timpanaro (*Sweet Violence* xiii-xiv). A humanist vein runs through Freud and Marx that is nowhere more visible than in their similar ideal conception of work, in spite of the former's meagre treatment of the topic and of the latter's conviction that it requires a revolutionary process about which Freud has little or nothing to say.

5.2. Eagleton on Freud on Love

Early in his engagement with psychoanalysis ("Marx, Freud and Morality"), Eagleton already affirmed that the only possible way to turn around Freud's tragic and pessimistic view concerning individual and social improvement was endorsing the Judaeo-Christian mandate of *love* (28-29). Eagleton is the Marxist author who, consistently throughout his career, has more insistently and loudly broken Marxism's "silen[ce] on the question of love" (29). He does not mince his words when he affirms "if Freud is right, as I think he is, then nothing short of the gospel will save us" (29). By the phrase "if Freud is right", Eagleton means not only if, in the present state of affairs, the death-drive and the tormenting superego have gained the upper hand, but also if the commandment "love your neighbour as yourself" is "absurd" and "foolish" (28-29). "It's only by being committed to the utter foolishness of Jesus", Eagleton writes, "that any sort of constructive response to the scientific findings of Freud is going to be possible" (29). What are we to make of this apparent absurdity? Is Eagleton encouraging us to take foolishness instead of enlightenment as the solution for the discontents of civilization? Although it would take too long to elaborate, late Lacan said something quite similar, but in the negative: "*les non-dupes errant*" ('the non-fools err'), playing with the homophony of *les noms du*

père, one of Lacan's synonyms for the Law (Žižek 206). Lacan's target here is the cynic: discovering that the Law is a fiction, the cynic "denounce[s] 'genuine authority' as a pose, whose sole effective content is raw coercion or submission for the sake of some material gain", or "[i]n matters of [erotic] love, the cynic excels in denigrating exalted declarations of deep spiritual affinity to exploit the partner sexually or otherwise" (Žižek 205). The cynic, surely one of the dominant modalities of subjectivity in our age (if not the dominant one), proclaims that the virtues, ideals and models explicitly consecrated in the Law are a set of lies to sugar-coat the hidden, implicit dynamics of exploitation, violence, greed and self-interest in which he thrives (all of them features of *evil* in Eagleton's 2010 monographic study on this topic). Where he errs is precisely in declaring his independence from the Law, in maintaining that he would achieve his self-seeking ends even if there was no Law. This disavowal is, on the contrary, a sign of his absolute attachment to the Law, of his complete dependence on it, of how deeply he is "caught in the symbolic ritual he publicly mocks" (Žižek 206). Without the Law, there is no sin, as St. Paul wrote with unsurpassable clarity: "I had not known sin, but by the law. . . . For without the law sin *was* dead" (*NIV* Rom 7:7-8)–we will return to St. Paul, Eagleton's main reference in relation to Christian love. At this point, we would like to push Lacan's *dictum* to the extreme so as to turn it upside down and say: *fools do not err*, which means they take the Law literally and try to fulfil its mandates, abolishing in the process its obscene, cynical, destructive underside. This is precisely what Jesus, in his "utter foolishness" did: "The scandal of Jesus is not that he breaks the Mosaic law (which by and large he does not), but that he seems to lay claim to authorship of it. If he obeys it himself, then, it is not because he has to, but because he believes it to be life-giving once its real meaning is manifest. That manifestation is his own life and death." (Eagleton, *Holy Terror* 38-39). Indeed, Jesus took Mosaic law literally and even reproduced it, most importantly that part concerning the mandate of Love. The God in the Old Testament issued the commandment "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev 19:18), which Christ repeated verbatim in the Gospel of St. Matthew (22:39) when asked by a lawyer what the great commandment in the law was. "For St Paul," Eagleton writes in *Holy Terror*, "it is not that love liquidates the law, but that it replaces its ideological misreading [and, we may add, malpractice] of it with an authentic one" (34). Eagleton argues that Freud "can see nothing in the Christian commandment to love all one's neighbour than yet another overweening imperative of the superego" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 283; see also *The Trouble with Strangers* 53). Furthermore, Freud dismissed Christian love as absurd and unrealisable because "[t]here just wasn't that much libido to go around. And of course he was right: there isn't" (Eagleton, "Marx, Freud and Morality" 28; see also

The Ideology of the Aesthetic 283). Freud was right, but, according to Eagleton, he was also wrong because Judaeo-Christian love is not libidinal, erotic, sexual, sensual: it is, like the Kantian imperative, an apathetic mandate, "'lawful' rather than affective", "more like an edict than an instinct" (*The Trouble with Strangers* 58), somewhat "inhuman" and "traumatic", "commanded . . . indiscriminately" (*Holy Terror* 30), love not in the sense of *Eros* (as Freud understands it), but "love in the sense of caritas or agape […, whose] paradigm is the love of strangers and enemies, not friends or family members" (*Humour* 117)[8]. As Eagleton writes in *On Evil*, "the Law which punishes our transgressions also provokes them", so that, according to St Paul, "this vicious circle can be broken only by transforming the Law of censure and condemnation into the Law of love and forgiveness" (110). So, instead of "obtain[ing] relief from the inner torment . . . by inflicting that torment on others"–Eagleton's very definition of *evil* (*On Evil* 107; see also *Holy Terror* 120-121)–, instead of sadistically punishing the ego for its frailties, flaws, vulnerability and imperfection as the law of the superego demands, we must accept them as we accept ours, and this is what love as *agape* actually is (*Holy Terror* 49).

Eagleton does try, however, to align Freud with *agape*, in spite of Freud's dismissal of Christian love. Hence, he repeatedly remarks how Freud constantly showed "compassion", "pity for the plight of the ego" ("Marx, Freud and Morality" 28; *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 282). In *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (1995), Eagleton elaborates this redeeming aspect of Freudian theory:

> There is no doubt that for Freud the law is out of control, a ragingly malicious superego which exacts the impossible from the *fragile* ego and issues its imperious edicts with scant regard for whether or not they can be obeyed . . . Freud's compassion for the *poor, harassed* ego, buffeted between id, superego and external world, is strong and persistent; and he regarded the law, which drives men and women to guilt and self-loathing as one of its oldest enemies (45-46; emphases added).

So, unbeknownst to himself, Freud was following the commandment of love in caring for the underdog, the ego, who, as a theoretical category that conceptualizes real human beings, refers to no one in particular, does not discriminate among individuals–we refer to Freud's general view on the pervasive human suffering in modern society, not so much to clinical cases, but, even in this context, patients are, more often than not, complete strangers. Furthermore, Eagleton, contradictorily, perhaps, in view of what he says about Freud's disregard for *caritas* or *agape*, tries to redeem the latter by discovering in him a version of the foundations of civilization that is radically different from the domi-

8 See also Eagleton's references in this connection to both Oliver Goldsmith and Kwame A. Appiah in *The Trouble with Strangers* (26-27, 58-60).

nant one based on repression and guilt. Thus, at the end of his chapter on Freud in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Eagleton remarks: "Whatever his strictures on the Christian injunction, Freud certainly believes love to travel right back to the beginnings of subjective life, and sees in it one of the foundations of human civilization" (284). In support of his thesis here and elsewhere (*Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* 112n21), Eagleton unearths a passage from Freud's early work *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) in which the stress is placed on the primordial experience of love derived from our prematurity and vulnerability: "the original helplessness of human beings is thus the primal source of all moral motives" (Freud qtd. in Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 285). Although it involves care for the helpless, this type of love that founds morality does not really qualify as *agape*, universal love for our fellow human beings in their weakness and frailty, but as affection dispensed within the close realm of the family, something Christian ethics transcends. Another problematic aspect of Eagleton's reasoning is that, by implication, he comes very close to conferring on the baby the status of an ethical subject before it actually becomes one: "*Before* we have come to internalize the parental function, *before* the voice of conscience begins to whisper disapprovingly in our ear, the seeds of morality have already been planted . . . Morality has its origins . . . in the small infant's affectionate gratitude for the care of its elders" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 285; emphases added; see also *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* 112n21 and *Holy Terror* 37).

Furthermore, even if we accepted Eagleton's reading, we would stumble against the radical ambiguity of Freud's affirmation, an ambiguity that cannot be solved by attributing, as Eagleton does, the moral import of primordial helplessness to the baby alone. As Adam Phillips asks: "is the original helplessness of human beings the primal source of all moral motives in the infant as helpless subject, or does the infant's helplessness . . . call up moral motives in the recipient?" (121)[9]. Based on this partial reading of the baby's original experience of love, Eagleton closes his assessment of Freud's legacy by establishing an affinity between psychoanalysis and Marxism: "To acquire a more reciprocal, egalitarian style of loving is thus one of the goals of psychoanalysis, as it is of revolutionary politics" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 285). Actually, what Eagleton affirms *apropos* Freud may be true, but the reasons he gives are, in our view, insufficient. We have to look elsewhere in Freud for an endorsement of the view that human happiness is a possible goal, that we can liberate ourselves from the tormenting, destructive effects of the coalition superego/death-drive and achieve self-fulfilment in

9 Phillips rephrases the question thus: "Does our original helplessness make us moral, or is morality prompted in us by the way we respond to dependent others?" (121).

work and come to love others as ourselves. For Freud, the human faculty that can bring this about is none other than *reason*, his "God, λόγος", as he says towards the end of his 1927 work *The Future of an Illusion* (54).

5.3. Freud on Reason … and on Love and Work

In "Marx, Freud and Morality", Eagleton dubs Freud a "pessimistic rationalist" (23; see also *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* 268-269), whilst elsewhere he considers the father of psychoanalysis as part of the "'irrationalist' heritage" along with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (*Ideology* 16). In our opinion, Freud's final view concerning the future of society and of humankind is neither that of a pessimistic rationalist nor that of an irrationalist, but that of a *soberly optimistic rationalist*. In this way, he bears some resemblance to Eagleton's own position in defence of "sober realism" as "the only sure foundation of an effective ethics or politics" (*Sweet Violence* xvi; see also *On Evil* 150). According to Freud, individuals and societies are presently beset by conflicts and discontents due to the increasing power of the superego and the influence of the death-drive. In view of this, Eagleton quotes approvingly Freud's chastising statement in chapter II of *The Future of an Illusion*: "It goes without saying that a civilization which leaves so large a number of its participants unsatisfied and drives them into revolt neither has nor deserves the prospect of a lasting existence" (12; see also Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 193). But this view, here expressed in the negative, is not Freud's final word regarding the desirable society of the future. Freud's hopes are explicitly placed on the power–actually, he calls it the "voice"–of reason or the intellect in the final chapter of *The Future of an Illusion*, which Eagleton does not mention. It is a common practice to illustrate Freud's confidence on reason by quoting his famous *dictum* in "The Dissection of the Psychical Personality" (1933), "*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*" ["Where id was, there ego shall be"] (80). But there, Freud is exclusively concerned with the ego and the cure in the therapeutic context. In final chapter of *The Future of an Illusion*, however, Freud's widens his perspective to comment on civilization as a whole and on the chances it may have of correcting its present imbalance. As he does elsewhere, Freud uses the discursive device of a fictional voice that expresses those views he opposes; in this case someone who defends the superiority of religion over science in putting an end to individual and collective conflicts and discontents. Freud retorts:

> We may insist as often as we like that man's intellect is powerless in comparison with his instinctual life, and we may be right in this. Nevertheless, there is something peculiar about this weakness. *The voice of the intellect is a soft one, but it does not rest till it has gained a hearing*. *Finally, after a countless succession of rebuffs, it succeeds*. This is one

> of the few points on which one may be *optimistic* about the future of mankind, but it is in itself a point of no small importance. And from it one can derive yet other hopes. The primacy of the intellect lies, it is true, in a distant, distant future, but probably not in an *infinitely* distant one. It will presumably set itself *the same aims* as those whose realization you expect from your God . . . , namely *the love of man and the decrease of suffering* (53; emphases added except for "*infinitely*").

Judeo-Christian *agape* is, then, *also* considered the final aim of the workings of the intellect: love's labour and reason's labour eventually coincide, according to Freud. Thus, he tells his interlocutor: "We desire the same things, but you are more impatient, more exacting" (54). Reason, the intellect or science are still in their youth, Freud admits, but there are no short-cuts for them to reach their maturity and bring about the desirable transformation of individuals and societies. Reason or science works slowly and patiently, hence the accusations of uselessness raised by religion against science. In "The Question of the *Weltanschauung*" (part of *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*), around the time in which Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany (30 January 1933), Freud pushed his confidence in reason to its extremes by stating: "Our best hope for the future is that intellect–the scientific spirit, reason–may in process of time establish a dictatorship in the mental life of man" (171). He goes on to emphasize the harmonizing effect reason *will* have when it rises to power and becomes the ruling force, allowing for the self-fulfilment of individual instincts (in non-alienated *work*, for instance) and binding individuals to each other through no other force but *love*:

> The nature of reason is a guarantee that afterwards *it will not fail to give man's emotional impulses and what is determined by them the position they deserve*. But the common compulsion exercised by such a dominance of reason will prove to be *the strongest uniting bond among men and lead the way to further unions* (171; emphases added).

With the help of Jacques Lacan and, more recently, Mladen Dolar, we may develop the implications of what Freud says about reason or the intellect in a way that a striking parallel may be established with the unconscious and the id, which the father of psychoanalysis hinted at but never made explicit. This will also allow us to bring into sharper psychoanalytical technical focus what Eagleton, on the one hand, affirms is the abstract quality of the Judaeo-Christian commandment of love and its affinity with the formalism of Kant's categorical imperative, yet, on the other, stresses as the irrational aspect of the injunction to love one's neighbour: "unreason is not simply a question of violence and monstrosity;" Eagleton argues in *Holy Terror*, "it is also . . . a matter of love, which is neither reducible to rationality nor independent of it. It is only when *reason is nurtured by the 'unreason' of love that it has the power to confront that more malign form of unreason which is the lust for destruction*" (9; emphasis added). Like the destructive

superego, reason also draws its power, its energy from unreason, from the id. Thus far Eagleton goes, and his insight is right, but it entails a short cut towards a solution for the discontents of civilization that Freud did not accept, the imposition of the commandment of love enforced by religion in its impatience.

Harmonizing love and satisfying work are, indeed, the aims Freud sets up for reason. Lacan and Dolar tread the ground Freud left untrodden yet hinted at, so that a technical development is rehearsed by the former which brings along with it some surprising results. In *Seminar XI* on "the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis", Lacan revisits Freud's comments on the soft, yet indestructible voice of the intellect in *The Future of an Illusion*: "*The voice of reason is low*, Freud says somewhere, *but it always says the same thing*. The parallel hasn't been drawn to the effect that Freud says exactly the same thing about unconscious desire. Its voice, too, is low, but its insistence is indestructible. Perhaps there is a relation between the two" (qtd. in Dolar 92)[10].

Freud places all his trust on the voice of reason, which, like David against Goliath, is soft and seemingly powerless in relation to the obscene clamour of the superego–we may think of Hitler's mesmerizing shouting voice at Nazi rallies as a historical correlate in this context. Rather than considering it "in terms of the agency of repression"–as is commonly done–the voice of reason in Freud's account must be understood "in terms of the repressed", and "it will get heard under the harshest of censorships, just like unconscious desire" (Dolar 92). Moreover, desire for Lacan is, like the law and like reason, purified of all pathological elements, which allows Lacan to identify desire with Kant's categorical imperative: Kant's "moral law . . ., looked at more closely, is simply desire in its pure state" (*Seminar XI* 275)[11]. So, all in all, informed by this detour through later psychoanalytical elaborations, Freud's hopes for the possibility of a happy future–where "the love of man and the decrease of suffering" are at last materialized (*The Future of an Illusion* 53)–are placed on the soft voice of reason which, in its persistent indestructibility, will grow in pitch and volume drawing an increasing amount of energy from the id, so as to eventually silence the loud voice of the superego, the agency in service of the death-drive. Science will develop little by little until it provides a solid ground for a future better society to stand on. Perhaps, after all, Freud is more of a scientific critic than Eagleton himself.

10 Dolar modifies the extant English translation (*Seminar XI* 255).

11 See also Lacan (*Seminar VII* 315-316; "Kant with Sade" 660). We owe these references to Lacan's works to Dolar (199n9).

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