The Freudian Subject in Neoplatonic Thought

Chapter 1: Introduction

Psychoanalysis has always had a complicated relationship with philosophy. From the beginning, Freud can be seen as wavering between two positions: on the one hand, he tried to distance himself from philosophy, and at the same time, he used it to illustrate some of his most important ideas. The first tendency can be seen in writings such as in *On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement* (1914), where he compares philosophical systems to paranoia. The second tendency can be seen especially in his later writings, such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) or *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), where the philosophy of people like Empedocles and Shiller are used as a basis for his entire system of thought. One could say that Freud's relationship to philosophy was one of ambivalence or even repression; explicitly, the connection between philosophy was rejected, but at the same time, Freud's thought grew out of philosophical traditions just as much as anyone else's (he was put in the world at a certain point in time which took certain philosophical forms as the basis for thought), and Freud's ideas were massively influential to the history of philosophy after his death.

There has been much study on Freud and his connection to different philosophical movements. Of course, it is easy to put him in the context of schools like existentialism or post-structuralist thought, both of which studied and debated his ideas intensely (see Sartre's *Existential Psychoanalysis* (1953) or Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966)). However, more distant schools have not been thoroughly examined.

In particular, it is interesting that there has been relatively little work done on Freud's thought in connection to the Neoplatonic movement, given that many of the concepts which Freud is said to have discovered can be seen in the writings of people like Plotinus and Iamblichus. The distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness, a place for irrationality in the human subject, a notion of a drive, a subjectivity based on desire, etc., all of these concepts can be found in the Neoplatonic corpus.

Some people have attempted to do research in this area. In 1960, the classicist Hans Rudolf Schwyzer, in his paper *Consciousness and Unconsciousness in Plotinus* called Plotinus the "discoverer of the unconscious", and there has been echoes of this sentiment, such as in John Shannon Hendrix's *Unconscious Thought in Philosophy* (2015). Other scholars have made connections between Freud and similar contemporaneous movements, such as Gnosticism and Hermeticism. There has also been some research comparing Marsilio Ficino, one of the Renaissance Neoplatonists, with Freud because of his *Three Books on Life* (1998/Original work written 1489), a book that deals with melancholia, a subject Freud himself was interested in. This will be dealt with in more detail in the literature review.

Though there have been these connections, there has been no work comparing the Neoplatonic tradition in general with Freudian thought. Given the trails that already exist in scholarship, it seems like this would be the next logical step. I would like to argue that the Freudian subject exists throughout the Neoplatonic tradition as a whole (or at least, through the texts I will be examining). By this, I mean that the main components of Freud's concept of subjectivity (the division between conscious and unconsciousness, the drive, etc.) already exist in some form throughout multiple Neoplatonic sources.

Given these similarities, there is also a question about the *historical* connection between these two schools. A full analysis of the historical relationship between the two will not be given, as it is tangential to the question at hand (whether there is a Freudian subject in Neoplatonic thought); still, it is an important question, so it must be dealt with to some extent.

While there is no direct historical connection between Neoplatonism and psychoanalysis (Freud never seriously studied any Neoplatonist), it is interesting to note that they did appear in similar historical conditions. Freud's revolutionary contribution to philosophy was positing an irrational subject (a subject which had irrationality as constitutive of itself, instead of a subject which was irrational only to the extent that it *failed* to be rational); Plotinus, for his part, did the exact same thing. In ancient philosophy, it was common to posit a rational subject, and this can be seen in the works of both Aristotle and Plato, such as in *Nicomachean Ethics* (1926/Original work written ca. 340 BCE) and in Plato's *Republic* (2013/Original work written ca. 375 BCE). Plotinus, throughout the Enneads, posits a form of subjectivity *beyond* rationality, and explicitly states that rationality is only the normative form of subjectivity in the lower levels of existence (see *On the Primary Hypostases*, Ennead V.1). When dealing with higher levels such as the Intellect or the One, standard logical assumptions (the distinction between object and subject, the law of contradiction, etc.) do not apply.

This type of "non-rationality" is something which is common in esoteric thought; it is common in scholarship to argue that rationalist forms of thought (thought which posits rationality as the constitutive factor in the human subject) are always met with mysticism as a response. The idea is that rationalist thought does not fulfill a primordial need (the need to think in symbolic forms, in mythological language, etc.), and so mysticism comes to fulfill what rationalism can not. In psychoanalytic terms, one could describe it as a shift from secondary to primary process functioning. For examples of this line of thought, see Helen Farvey's *A Cultural History of Tarot* (2009), which holds this line of reasoning for the 19th century occult revival, or Gerschom Scholem's *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (1991), which holds the same for the rise of Kabbalah.

Psychoanalysis could be seen as a similar type of response to the rationality posited by people like Descartes or Kant. This position would categorize psychoanalysis as analogous to Western Esotericism, which is not as far-fetched as it sounds. Maria Pierri (2022) has already noted the connection between the origins of psychoanalysis and 19th century occultism (much of which itself had a direct Neoplatonic influence (see Levi, 1854; Mathers, 1926)), and Freud certainly had interests in the occult (as can be seen in his paper *Dreams and Occultism* (1932)).

Psychoanalysis, in this context, would be a response to the *failure* of rationalist thinking posited by Enlightenment philosophers, and this response historically could be seen as a type of "repetition compulsion". The historical connection between the two could be seen as "analogous", as both of them arising from similar circumstances, and both fulfill a similar need.

In any event, in order to understand the connection between Neoplatonic thought and psychoanalysis, Neoplatonic thought itself must be explained. The first section of this paper will be dedicated to a brief history of Neoplatonism and explaining some of the main concepts. After, Freud's notion of the subject will be discussed, paying particular attention to his metapsychological papers and his later writings. Then, a Freudian reading of the Neoplatonic sources will be drawn through this analysis. At the end, there will be some response to objections, conclusions drawn, and elaborations on places for further thought.

Chapter 2: An outline of Neoplatonic Thought

From Plato to Plotinus: A Brief History

Plato is generally considered to be the foundation of Western philosophy. In the Socratic dialogues, such as *Republic*, *Parmenides, Euthyphro*, etc. there is a new method of thought that is not seen in Greek sources beforehand, known as the "Socratic method". This method consists of examining a belief in increasing detail in order to reveal its contradictions. The early Socratic dialogues are defined by this method; for example, in *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks Euthyprho what piety is, to which Euthyphro responds that "piety" is whatever is pleasing to the gods. Socrates then exposes an impasse in this belief, showing that piety cannot be defined in these terms. He notes that the gods themselves love different things, and therefore, what they love can not be a measure of piety (Jones & Preddy, 2017/original work published ca. 399 BCE). This is the method of the early dialogues.

The later dialogues show different interests. Writings like the *Timaeus* and *Laws* show an interest in cosmology. *Timaeus*, for example, talks about the construction of the universe by the demiurge with relatively little input from Socrates himself (Lee, 1965/Original work published ca. 360 BC). In connection with this trend, there is evidence that there was an oral tradition in the Platonic Academy which was not recorded in any of the dialogues. This tradition is attested in multiple ancient sources, including Aristotle and Albinus (Dillon, 1977).

It seems, during the later years of Plato's life, he became more and more influenced by Pythagorean thought (a philosophy which took numbers as metaphysical principles) and gave numbers a similar metaphysical status. In particular, Aristotle says that he gave a privilege to "One" and "Two", from which all further numbers could be deduced (Tredennick, 1993/original work published ca. 350 BC). In this same passage, Aristotle says that Plato held that these numbers were principles, being "Limit" and the "Indefinite Dyad". The Indefinite Dyad is a principle under which concepts like excess,defect, etc. exist and Limit imposes a mean upon

them (Dillon, 1977). The tension between limit and indefiniteness continued even in late Neoplatonic sources. Proclus, for example, has this tension at multiple points in his *Elements of Theology*, as can be seen in Proposition 89: “All true Being is composed of limit and infinitude” (Dodds, 1963/Original work written ca. 5th century CE).

The Pythagorean focus continued in the Platonic traditions even after Plato’s death in 347 B.C.E. The doctrine of the One and the Indefinite Dyad was continued by Speussipus (408 - 339 BCE) and Xenocrates (395 - 315 BCE), the immediate successors known as “Middle Platonists”. As a matter of fact, Numenius, another Middle Platonist from the 2nd Century A.D., is called both a “Pythagorean " and a “Platonist” in different sources (Karamanolis, 2013).

Other philosophical developments occurred as well. In the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge is seen as the supreme principle; later, The One was taken to be above the Demiurge and the Demiurge “came to be seen as a second God, Intellect (*nous*), the agent of the Supreme God” (Dillon, 1977 p. 7). This move left a question as to the status of Soul, also described in the *Timaeus*, which initially took the position of the Intellect (the Soul was a product of the Demiurge and imprinted order onto the earth; now, the Intellect imprints the Forms that were implicit in the One). The Soul became a passive principle and received things implicit in The Intellect (p. 10).

These concepts are clearly seen in Plotinus’ philosophy, the father of the Neoplatonic movement who wrote in the 3rd century A.D. In Plotinus’ philosophy, “The One” (τὸ Ἕν) is taken as a supreme principle, transcending all things, and having the highest degree of unity within itself. It contains all things implicitly within itself and yet, because of its transcendent character, has no divisions between them. The world is seen as emanating from successively less “unified” stages from the One. After the One comes the Intellect, the Divine Mind which contains and at the same time *is* itself all of the Platonic Forms (it can be both at the same time because of its high transcendent degree of unity). After the Intellect comes Soul, sometimes translated as “World-Soul”, which takes the Forms and imprints them onto the cosmos. After Soul comes matter, and after matter comes *hyle*, that which has no definition and is the “last breath” of the One (Armstrong, 1984/Original work written ca. 253 CE) .

Neoplatonic Thought After Plotinus

Plotinus’ metaphysical system was further elaborated after his death. From multiple authors, there were ever-increasing divisions between The One and The Intellect, between The Intellect and the Soul, between The Soul and matter. Proclus, for example, put his concept of the “henads” in between The One and Intellect and held that it was the place of the gods. This can be seen in Proposition 114, “Every god is a self-complete henad or unit” (Dodds, 1963/Original work written ca. 5th century CE). Iamblichus, on the other hand, expanded the realm between Soul and the World and held that there were “daemons”, “gods”, and “heroes”, all with a particular function (Clarke & Dillon, 1993/Original work written ca. Fourth century CE).

Though the Neoplatonic tradition was initially a pagan tradition and initially in opposition to Christianity (as can be seen in Porphyry's polemical work *Against the Christians* (Hoffman, 1994)), Neoplatonism eventually had a Christian strand. This is due to the Christian emperors of Rome, such as Constatine, who would persecute or at least not actively support pagan Neoplatonist teachings. The prime example of Christian Neoplatonism are the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius which often revolve around commentaries of the Bible (Chulp, 2012).

It should be noted that, from the beginning of the Neoplatonic tradition, there were multiple esoteric writings which showed a huge influence. These included the Chaledean Oracles, the Orphic Hymns, the Hermetic Corpus, and various Gnostic writings. These writings all show a similar metaphysics where the world emanates from a simple First Principle in various stages (in the Chaldean Oracles, the "Father" brings forth the Intellect (Majercik, 1989); in Gnostic texts like *The Apocryphon of John*, The Ineffable One brings forth the Aeons (Wisse, et. al, 1995), etc.). Many Neoplatonists wrote dialogues on these sources, though they were lost. Scholars often consider these writings Neoplatonic as well due to their deep connection to the tradition, and this paper will follow suit.

As time progressed, the mystical elements of Neopaltonist thought became more pronounced. Already in Iamblichus' writings theurgy was given credence over dialectic and rational thought; furthermore, during the Middle Ages, authors like Marsilio Ficiono and Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola advocated for the use of magic (see Farmer, 2016). One could say that the irrational, unconscious element of the human subject was given more importance in later thought.

The Christian Neoplatonist trend had its peak in the Renaissance due to the translations of Plato that Marsilio Ficino made at the request of the Italian politician Cosimo de' Medici. This form of Neoplatonist thought was highly syncretic and held that all philosophical traditions throughout history expressed the same doctrine in different terms; their writings consisted mainly of attempts to synthesize all philosophical doctrines and read them through a shared symbolic language (for an example, see Giovanni Pico Dela Mirandola's *900 Theses*) (ibid.). It seems that, after the Renaissance, Neoplatonic influence waned.

Chapter 3: The Freudian Subject

The subject in Freud is defined by a few key components; these are the psyche-soma (the connection between the mind and the body), the drive, the unconscious, and desire. All of these are interconnected and can not be understood outside of each other; for example, Freud explicitly states in *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (1915a) that the drive is a consequence of the fact that the mind is, in some way, connected to the body (p. 122). Furthermore, drives can not be understood in a Freudian context without understanding the notion of the unconscious (because the mechanisms by which the drives are affected (sublimation, repression, etc.) are unconscious mechanisms). This chapter will define the basic concepts surrounding the Freudian subject:

The Drive:

The drive is a concept Freud first develops in *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (1915a); there, he states that the human subject consists of drives which compel it towards certain ends (sexual satisfaction and self-preservation). The drives come from within the subject, and their momentary satisfaction does not get rid of them. This means that the drives are a constant pressure pushing the subject in certain directions (p. 118).

For Freud, drives have four components: a pressure, an object, a source, and an aim. "Pressure" refers to the pushing aspect of the drive; in Freud's theory, the subject has some quantitative amount of energy within them which they must release. This is because human beings try to increase pleasure, and Freud believed at this time that the reduction of tension was pleasurable (this was later questioned in his paper on masochism (Freud, 1924)). Without this theory (which is called the "economic theory"), the drive as a concept is not coherent. Pressure is the central component of the drive and comes from the need to release tension within the organism.

Aside from pressure, the drives have an aim, the "goal" of the drive. Freud states that the aim of all drives is satisfaction, which (at this time in his writing at least) could only be achieved by a decrease in tension. One could say that the aim of the drive is the closest thing to a "telos" (a well-known concept in philosophy), though this would ignore the flexible nature of the aim. This flexibility can be clearly seen in the case of repression, where a drive is *inhibited* in fully reaching its aim, though it partially reaches it through compromise. Freud gives the example of sadism turning into masochism, making the aim passive.

At this point in Freud's career, there are two drives: drives towards sexual satisfaction and drives towards self-preservation. Later, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud talks about life and death drives, and says that there is a drive which takes unification as its aim, and a drive which takes dissolution as its aim. In his later works, the drive seems much closer to a telos than in his metapsychological papers.

Drives also have objects, a thing which they "land" on. This can be another person, oneself, a concept, an "object" in the normal sense of the word, etc. A sexual drive might have a tree as its object (in Ohio, there was a man known for putting his penis into holes in a tree). One interesting dynamic seen through Freud's writings is that most sexual objects are often fetish objects, insofar as they stand in as a substitute for the "real object", which is the mother. For example, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud states that thumb-sucking in early childhood has this function. The idea of an object coming to replace a primordial fantasied object is something which Freud further develops in his 1927 paper on fetishism and will be discussed later. It is normal for objects to change (a break-up can usher in a change of object), but some people are more or less tied to their objects than others.

Last, the drive has a “source”, its point of origin. For Freud, the point of origin was a somatic process (since the drive is ultimately due to the body's needs and their effect upon the mind), but anything more detailed was considered to be unknown.

At this point in time (1915), there were libidinal drives and self-preservative drives. Later, Freud changed his theory and said that drives were not something relating to the mind and body but instead that they were tendencies inherent in all living organisms. In this account, there was the life drive and the death drive. The life-drive was a drive for all living beings which led towards ever increasing unification (sexual union, unification through social bonds, etc.) and death-drive was a drive towards undoing all bonds and going back to an inorganic state (how these two concepts relate is not clear) (Frued, 1920). The drive here does not have a biological basis.

The Unconscious

The unconscious is the most important concept in all of Freud’s work and in all of psychoanalysis. It is the concept which makes psychoanalysis revolutionary, as the unconscious not only was the foundation for a new clinical technique but also for a new form of subjectivity and a crucial concept for all subsequent philosophy. It is an aspect of mental life which we are unaware of and which we refuse to become aware of. The unconscious contains repressed material, i.e. material which is actively pushed outside of conscious recognition. It works by a different logic than consciousness, being timeless, allowing contradiction, and having no form of negation. It is the form of mental life in which we start off, and we only develop the system of consciousness through contact with the external world (Freud, 1911).

Since the unconscious is timeless, it makes no distinction between past, present, and future. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud compared the unconscious to a hypothetical ancient city in which one could see all periods of it at the same time (p. 69). The unconscious takes early aspects of life (relationships between parents) and imposes them onto the present. Technically speaking, this is not “timeless” in the truest sense of the word since it still relies on the categories of past and present. However, there are truly timeless elements within the unconscious, such as the sentiment that one is/was/will always be a failure in life (Lear, 2017).

Contradiction is also a key part of the unconscious, as the unconscious can take contradictory positions. This is most clearly seen in the notion of “ambivalence”, the idea that one can have contradictory feelings towards another. In the Oedipus Complex, the complicated relationship between a child and its parents, the child has ambivalent feelings towards both parents, as it wants to be their object of love but at the same time feels that its position as an object of love is threatened by the other of the two parents (Freud, 1905).

It is not clear what the contents are in the unconscious. In *The Unconscious* (1915c), Freud clearly states that there are no emotions within the unconscious; however, in every case study Freud wrote, there is reference to emotions within the unconscious. Freud says, for example, the Rat-Man has an unconscious desire to kill his father. Freud states that what is in the

unconscious are “images" which then become attached to certain affects. Since the image and the affect are separable, an unconscious image can become detached from its original affect and become attached to a new affect. However, Freud also says in the same paper that there are “affective structures” which are properly unconscious. How these distinctions work is not clear.

One thing that is clear from Freud statements is that the unconscious is a visual enterprise. Freud often compared the unconscious to writing systems/tools used for writing (a rebus, hieroglyphs, a writing-pad, etc.) (see Freud, 1925). The unconscious “thinks” through visual imagery, as can be seen in dreams. This aspect of the unconscious will become important later.

Psyche-Soma

Freud never used the term psyche-soma explicitly, but this idea is implicit in all of Freud’s thoughts. Freud was not a Cartesian; he did not hold that the mind and the body were completely separable. Instead, he held that the body has a definitive impact on the mind. We can see this from his comments on the instincts (particularly, the comment on the instinct being “on the border between the mental and the somatic”) as well as many of his other comments. For example, he thought that the unconscious would one day be located in a part of the brain, one of his main principles for the mind was the “reflex arc” (a physiological notion), and so on (Freud, 1900).

Still, it’s not correct to say that Freud thought the mind was completely reducible to the body. There are many comments in his writings supporting this position as well; Freud will often say that figuring out the physical origin of something (such as anxiety, for example) is the task of physiology and then continue with what he considers to be psychoanalysis, as distinct from physiology (see his comments at the beginning of *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926)). Furthermore, the body is not reducible to the mind because the mind also impacts the body; this is clearly seen in the case of conversion hysteria. For Freud, hysteria was the somatic expression of mental anguish. The most accurate description for Freud’s positions may be that the mind and the body have a mutual influence on each other.

Desire

Much can be said on the notion of “desire” in Freudian thought; it is a dynamic that can be seen throughout his writings (especially his earlier writings) though he never wrote a paper on the subject. Laplanche, in *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (1967), identities three characteristics of Freudian desire: 1) it is formed through memory traces (memories of previous satisfaction), 2) the search for the object in the real world (“desire” in the common sense of the term) is bound up with these memory traces, and 3) “desire” in Freudian thought primarily refers to something unconscious (p. 482). It would be good to elaborate on these points.

In Chapter VII of *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud talks about the idea of a “perceptual identity” and relates this to the notion of a wish. Freud states that the infant initially has psychic

tension within itself that it seeks to relieve; for example, an infant might feel hungry and start kicking and screaming as a result of it. The infant receives satisfaction, and this creates a perception within the infant which becomes associated with the experience of satisfaction, a "perceptual identity" in the infant's psychic system. As a result of this connection, the next time tension emerges, there will be a tendency to re-cathect the original perception. This is how desire is created within the subject for Freud; it comes through an established connection with an object and an attempt to refind that object (p.565 - 567).

From this passage alone, it is important to note a couple of things. First, the *perception* is what is important and *not* the real object; as a matter of fact, the real object makes desire cease to exist. Continuing the example with hunger, Freud states the only time we have a perceptual identity with an object in the real world is in the case of psychotic delusions. This is because a perceptual identity is something which is sustained (similar to the way in which a drive is sustained), and therefore, must never be truly fulfilled. Freud says that initially the wish was fulfilled through hallucination and that dreams are only a remnant of that initial period of life.

The second thing to note in this passage in particular is that Freud connects desire with thinking. He says, "Thought is after all nothing but a substitute for a hallucinatory wish" (p. 566). The idea that thought only works through desire is seen throughout Freud's writings; for example, one can find the idea in *The Unconscious* as well, where he says that one's cathexis to word-presentations is what makes secondary processes possible (p. 202).

The idea of an initial memory which the subject attempts to refind is seen throughout Freud's works; a clear instance of it is his 1912 paper *On The Universal Tendency to Debasement*. Here, he argues that sexual desire initially starts with the subject's caretakers, and later in life, we attempt to find substitutes, "none of which however bring full satisfaction" (p. 189). It can be also seen in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), especially in the second essay, where Freud often refers to the "need for repetition"; Freud states that the initial satisfaction of a certain erotogenic zone (usually by the mother) "creates a need for its repetition" (p. 183). Of course, the substitutes can never achieve the initial satisfaction experienced because the organization of the drives has been fundamentally changed at that point. Freud says, "the finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it" (p. 222), but this "re-finding" is always bound to fail. That is a crucial aspect of Freudian desire.

From these comments, one can see the unconscious nature of desire. None of the aspects Freud mentions in these papers are conscious; one is not conscious of one's desire for their mother, for example. This is reminiscent of a comment Freud made in his paper on repression (1915b) that the repressed instinct, due to its repression, can develop uninhibited (p. 149). This quote is interesting when thinking about desire as such.

A desire is a relation to fantasy, and as such, cannot be satisfied. If the repressed material which sustains desire were to become conscious, it would seem that its satisfaction would be possible since the subject would then go toward the original object. In the case of the sexual drive, it seems its prohibition also reinforces and even strengthens desire. In the paper on

debasement (1912), Freud notes how sexual desire often strengthens in cases where it is prohibited (having an affair, for example) and compares it with an alcoholic. He asks whether an alcoholic has to move to a city where there is a shortage of alcohol in order to remain an alcoholic (p. 188). It seems there is something specific within sexual desire itself which strengthens it when it is prohibited. Why sexual desire functions in this way is not clear. However, if one notes that sexuality is the central component for subjectivity for Freud, it is easy to see how important desire is by extension.

Chapter 4: Literature Review

There has been some discussion on the connections between Neoplatonic thought and psychoanalysis, though there is no cohesive "field" of literature. The main scholar in this area is, arguably, John Shannon Hendrix, who has written multiple pieces on the connection between Freud's unconscious and Plotinus' philosophy as well as its connection to philosophy in general. In 2015, he published *Unconscious Thought in Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, a book which historically spanned from Plotinus to Lacan, tracing the concept of the "unconscious" in a variety of authors.

The first chapter, *Plotinus, The First Philosopher of the Unconscious*, argues that Plotinus' discussion of unconsciousness in Ennead IV is remarkably similar to Freud's unconscious. It argues this by making various analogies; for example, Plotinus thought that "discursive thinking", the activity of soul (as opposed to the activity of Intellect, the higher principle of Soul and its "foundation") is defined through the mechanics of combination and substitution. Of course, Lacan (1956) would use Roman Jakobson's famous paper on aphasia to connect these two concepts to the unconscious, but Hendrix makes the analogy solely using Freud's own terms, "condensation" and "displacement", and only references *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Hendrix also notes that desire and imagination are fundamental to the Plotinian unconscious and that subjectivity for Plotinus only works through desire (something which will be explored in more detail later). He makes many similar analogies and mentions Lacan occasionally. At the end of the chapter he gives an unsatisfactory conclusion; the last sentences of the chapter read as follows:

Psychoanalysts have turned the unconscious into a storehouse of memories and experiences, and the unconscious is no longer seen as a purer form of thought that can be accessed by each individual in order to grow and develop in thought and action, as Plotinus clearly intended it to be. Perhaps a return to the concept of the unconscious in Plotinus could add a great deal to the practice of psychoanalysis (p. 62).

To say that psychoanalysis does not see the unconscious as something that "can be accessed by each individual in order to grow and develop in thought and action" is clearly false. The goal of psychoanalysis is clinical in nature; what are patients doing if they are not growing in thought and action? Throughout Freud's clinical papers, patients are limited in thought and action, and it

is their treatment which expands their capacity for both; Little-Hans (1909), for example, can not cross the street and has a fear of horses. It is only through the resolution of his unconscious conflicts that he can overcome his fear, and so develop a new capacity to act. It is not clear what specific changes Hendrix would want to the psychoanalytic enterprise.

In the beginning of this chapter, Hendrix mentions some of the early scholarship on this topic. In particular, he mentions a paper by E.R. Dodds, a famous translator of Ancient Greek sources. He also mentions a German paper by Hans Rudolf Schwyzer which was the first to deal with this subject. These papers did talk about consciousness and unconsciousness in Plotinus' thought though they did not do any systematic analysis with Freudian thought.

As far as the Neoplatonic tradition goes, Hendrix has only ever written on Plotinus. Plotinus, as a matter of fact, is the most discussed philosopher in the Neoplatonic tradition when comparing it to psychoanalysis. This is not surprising; he was certainly the most prolific and does have the most explicit discussions of consciousness within his writings. Still, there are other authors doing work on other Neoplatonists, though the work is much more scant.

Gregory Shaw has written on Iamblichus, in particular comparing it to archetypal psychology. He argues that Iamblichus' ideas on possession and dreamwork are fundamentally similar (and even a predecessor) to how archetypal psychology (such as that of James Hillman and Henry Corbin) understands dreamwork (Shaw, 2003) . In his work on this subject, he goes against the idea that Iamblichus has a Freudian notion of the unconscious because he sees Iamblichus' unconscious as coming from an ideal realm (p. 80).

Some Neoplatonists, such as Porphyry and Proclus, are not discussed on account of them not explicitly dealing with psychology. According to Marinus, Proclus did write a treatise on possession and one on the Orphic hymns, both of which would mention psychology, but they have been lost (Dods, 1956). Porphyry does have some writings on psychology, such as *On Abstinence* and *To Gauraus* which have been preserved in fragments. They essentially follow Plotinus (Emillson, 2024).

There has not been any work doing a systematic study of Neoplatonic thought and psychoanalysis. This fact needs an explanation. The first thing to note is that there are not many Neoplatonic scholars in general; compared to the scholarship on Freud, it is striking how little is actually written on the Neoplatonists. Furthermore, it is important to note the status of Neoplatonic thought in the English speaking world. Thomas Taylor, in the early 19th century, translated almost the entirety of the Neoplatonic corpus. He was an occultist and had translated them because he saw them as a source of ancient wisdom. Today, scholars do not see Taylor's translations as reliable; however, this leaves English scholars in a bad position, as there have been very few recent translations of Neoplatonic works. There have been some critical editions to come out in the past few decades, such as the Society of Biblical Literature's translation of Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries* (2003) or E.R. Dodds translation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* (1956). However, only the most well-known works have been translated, and there is not a

single Neoplatonist (besides Plotinus) whose entire corpus has been translated (at least, not by a scholar).

One last thing to note is the status of the *Christian* Neoplatonists and their relevance to this topic. I have decided to focus on the pagan Neoplatonists, as they are the first bearers of the Neoplatonic tradition. They form a kind of lineage and build upon each other: Iamblichus comments on Plotinus, Proclus comments on Iamblichus, etc. They were all in conversation with each other, and therefore, constitute a coherent body in my view.

Later, under the emperor Constantine, the pagan tradition of Neoplatonism was severely limited, and the Platonic schools were forced to dress up their philosophy in Christian garb. The prime example is Pseudo-Dionysius whose writings are clearly influenced from pagan sources, even though most of his works are commentaries on the Bible (Chulp, 2012). Much could be said about the early Christian Neoplatonists, especially Pseudo-Dionysius, but space is limited here.

However, during the Renaissance, things became a bit more complicated, as the Christian and pagan traditions merged. Neoplatonism became popular in Italy because of Ficino's translations of Neoplatonic sources; there was also an interest in the Greek myths and mystery religions, and these were taken as a legitimate source of truth by the Florentine Neoplatonists. I will examine a bit of the Renaissance tradition, using Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, as I see them in continuity with the early pagan Neoplatonists.

We do find some comments on psychology in this tradition, as Ficino wrote an entire book on melancholia. There are also many relevant discussions of psychology in his magnum opus, *Platonic Theology* (2001/Original work written 1474). Some, such as Nicolaj De Mattos Frisvold, have argued that these writings are what allowed for the advent of "psychology" proper and in that way are connected to psychoanalysis (Frisvold, 2013).

The current literature examining Neoplatonism and psychoanalysis is generally only focused on one philosopher and only on some particular aspects comparing the two traditions. Since there is no literature examining the entire Neoplatonic tradition, this paper will attempt to fill that gap. I will expand on Hendrix's analyses of Ennead IV, as it is the most explicit discussion of psychology in Plotinus' writings. I will also look at Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries* as well as Proclus' *Elements of* Theology and Ficino's *Three Books on Life* and *Platonic Theology*. These writings in particular were picked because they all directly deal with psychology, at least in some parts (the least "psychological" is the *Elements of Theology*, but still has an entire section dedicated to the soul at the end of the book). I will argue that, for every aspect of the Freudian subject outlined above, we can find something similar in Neoplatonic thought.

Chapter 5: Consciousness and Unconsciousness in Neoplatonic Thought

Plotinus

The topics of consciousness and unconsciousness form a central part of Plotinus' thought. Plotinus can be seen discussing these topics throughout the Enneads, particularly in *On the Difficulties of the Soul*, the main treatise of Ennead IV (though we do see discussions elsewhere, such as the discussion on the guardian spirit in Ennead III). Plotinus holds unconsciousness to be ethically superior and logically prior to consciousness, insofar as he puts unconsciousness in the Intelligible realm and posits it as the foundation of conscious thought (what he calls "discursive reasoning"). This can be seen at multiple points; for example, in *On The Difficulties of the Soul I*, he says that the Intellect's mode of thinking is like the steersman of a ship during a storm who "becomes lost" in maneuvering the ship and forgets that he himself is in danger (p.89 - 91). In this case, the steersman loses self-awareness and acts on an unconscious level.

Posting a form of unconsciousness which is logically prior to that of consciousness is a Freudian move; Freud himself does the same thing throughout his career. A clear instance is in *The Unconscious* (1915c), where he explicitly states, "mental processes are *in themselves* [emphasis added] unconscious" and compares consciousness to sense-perception of the external world (p. 170). If Freud is to be taken seriously here, then consciousness is only a form of "perception" and unconsciousness must be taken as prior to consciousness. Furthermore, it is clear from his discussion on primary and secondary processes that he takes the operations of the unconscious as prior to those of consciousness, as he says things like "negation (something that can only happen in consciousness) is a *higher form* [emphasis added] of repression" (p. 185). Other papers corroborate this interpretation, such as *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning* (1911), where he takes the functioning of pleasure-principle (something which has the same characteristics as primary processes) as prior to the reality principle. Though there are traditions which take an opposing interpretation (such as Laplanche in his *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (1970)), it seems positing the priority of the unconscious is the most reasonable interpretation of Freud's work.

Plotinus also has similar comments comparing the Intellect to a craftsworker who only does conscious reasoning when he is unable to perform his craft (p. 91). We can see that Plotinus, in these passages, thinks of unconsciousness as something like "intuition" and does think that there is a trace of unconsciousness within the conscious world (he says that we can see this trace when we can "sense" someone's state of mind by looking at their eyes without them saying anything (p. 93)).

This distinction becomes interesting when Plotinus talks about the idea of memory which happens in the later part of the chapter. Plotinus asks how the soul can "remember" if it is indivisible, impassible, and not affected by time (when one remembers something, it comes to their memory and then goes away with time); Plotinus holds that the soul is "divided" into two parts; it has an upper part which does not remember but "thinks" continuously of the Intellect and a "lower" part which becomes embodied in the material world (p. 119). The soul's embodiment causes it to "forget" and furthermore makes its thought subject to the divisions of space and time (later, he calls the soul's thinking the "this after that", showing its embodiment in time (p. 177)). Here, we see a Freudian division: the unconscious, that which is timeless, admits

of no negation, and maintains contradiction, comes to oppose Soul's "discursive reasoning", which is defined by secondary processes.

The Freudian unconscious is more than a mere "split" within the subject though; the unconscious in Freud's thought is unique because it can *disrupt* conscious functioning. This element is in Plotinus as well; for example, conscious functioning can be disrupted when one sees a work of art or has a religious experience (Hendrix, 2015, p. 61). Furthermore, the visual nature of the unconscious is attested as well, insofar as the higher part of Soul can only think in terms of *images* which are received through sense-perception; these images are also the foundation of dreams and imagination, just as in Freud (ibid, p. 59).

Later Authors

Later Neoplatonic authors work in similar directions. In Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries*, there is an implicit focus on this topic, though the subject of the book is explicitly about theurgy. Iamblichus goes to great lengths to hold that the divine is in no way affected by the practices of theurgy (the Gods are not affected by sacrifices, for example); this makes an interesting division between the divine forces (which do have *some* relation to the material world) and the earthly souls they interact with. The divine can serve to interrupt conscious experience, as they do in the case of possession. In this instance, the possessed works through completely primary processes, hallucinating, jumbling words, and speaking in tongues (Chapter 3). Here, the separation between "consciousness" and "unconsciousness" is even more stark than it is in Plotinus, as the unconscious mode of subjectivity is diametrically opposed to consciousness, and certainly has more possibility for the notion of rupture that is seen within Freudian thought.

With Proclus, it is a bit more difficult to establish his thoughts. He did not write much on consciousness and was much more concerned with ontology than with psychology. Still, Proclus does seem to have similar sentiments to Plotinus, as he talks about self-consciousness in the same way; he is similarly concerned with the soul's ability to know itself, as can be seen in Propositions 39 - 51 of his *Elements of Theology*, where he talks about the soul's "self constitution" and its "reversion upon itself" (pp. 39 - 51), phrases reminiscent of the "mirror" analogy Plotinus uses in *On The Difficulties of the Soul*. Furthermore, it does seem like Proclus admits of a "split" within the subject similar to Iamblichus' thought in Proposition 195: "Every soul is all things, the things of sense after the manner of an exemplar *and* [emphasis added] the intelligible things after the manner of an image" (p. 171). Still, though it is possible to make connections, Proclus does not explicitly discuss these matters.

Ficino provides an interesting case. Throughout his *Platonic Theology*, Ficino does recognize a form of "unconsciousness", especially in the first volume. One can find analogues to many Freudian concepts, such as the concept of "fantasy" in the fourth volume. Furthermore, examining Ficino's *Three Books on Life,* Frisvold argues that Ficino's astrological system, where the planets represent forces within one's body, provides for an unconscious type of logic (2013, p. 120). His comments will be discussed in full in the section on desire.

The Guardian Spirit

Something that must be discussed before moving on is the notion of the "guardian spirit" which is seen in many contemporaneous traditions (Hermeticism, Christian Gnosticism, etc.). In many of these traditions, the self is divided into a part which inhabits the terrestrial world and a part which inhabits an upper world and guides the lower part; in early Hermetic thought, for example, it is seen in *The Shepherd of Hermas* (Karlow, 1987). Plotinus does hold to a "guardian spirit", as can be seen in the chapter dedicated to the subject (Ennead III.4), though it is not clear whether he sees it as another conscious being; he may see it, instead, as a rational principle guiding the soul on earth. Later authors, such as Iamblichus, did personify the guardian spirit and saw it as an "other self" (see *On the Mysteries,* p. 159).

This idea is also seen in one of the analogies Plotinus uses: the shadow of Heracles. In Book 11 of *The Odyssey,* Odysseus states that Heracles resides in heaven while his shadow resides in Hades (Butler). Plotinus says that there is a similar distinction within the soul (between an individual soul and the soul of the All) and asks what would happen if the soul was liberated from its "shadow" (its ensouled nature in body). He states that the soul would think about its past lives and would remember its past desires (p. 121). It's important to note that Plotinus connects all thoughts directly with desire in this passage (he says that memory is always memory of a past satisfaction) and comes very close how Freud thought of satisfaction in his earlier works (the infant hallucinates an experience from which is received earlier satisfaction just as the soul brings up images which were connected to past desires).

Conclusion

The unconscious is attested throughout the Neoplatonic corpus; it exists most clearly in the works of Plotinus, where it follows the Freudian unconscious insofar as the "unconscious" of Plotinus is timeless, has no negation, and can withhold contradiction; it is the earliest form of mental activity, is connected to imagination and dreamwork, and can serve to disrupt the functions of conscious thought (which is also defined in similar Freudian terms). These are further attested in later sources though they are less explicit.

Chapter 6: The Drive Within Neoplatonic Thought

As has already been stated, there is a distinction to be made between the drive of *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (1915a) and the drive of later Freudian thought. Both find attestation in the Neoplatonic corpus. We will start with the earlier notion of the drive.

The Early Drive

To start, we should return to Iamblichus' account of possession, as we do see here that there are contradictory "drives" towards different objects; as embodied, the soul has a "drive" toward

materiality and demonic spirits, which show up in madness, illness, hallucinatory visions, and so on. At the same time, it is precisely *through* these spirits that we can *remove* this very attachment, using them as intermediaries to make contact with higher powers. Iamblichus notes that there are two "directions" which one moves towards simultaneously in ritual: the direction towards materiality, which is the impulse of the individual soul, and the direction away from it, which is the impulse of higher powers (this relates again to the "divided self" discussed earlier). It's important to note, though, that Iamblichus holds that these can merge into each other. Even pathological receptions of the forms are still taken to be valid receptions of them; it is in these pathological receptions that we learn to properly establish dark aspects of the soul and to recover the soul's totality (which is dispersed through embodiment, according to Iamblichus) (Shaw, 2003). There is a quote in Shaws' paper that explains this dynamic well:

These pathological receptions of the gods are traces of the soul's universal λόγοι filtered through the flux of matter, the distorted reflections of an embodied soul attempting to receive wholes using the receptive capacity of a part. Yet, Iamblichus says, this is where we must begin: in the ecstatic encounters of imagination we learn to accept and to honor the disturbing, dark, even terrifying daimonic images that form part of the soul's itinerary to recover its wholeness (p. 74).

This idea could be compared to the discussion of the sexual instincts found in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), as a similar dynamic works there. In the same way that a diverse set of Iamblichean "drives" coalesce towards a single object, so it is with the infant and the sexual drives. Freud states in the first essay that the infant has a wide range of sexual drives which only take on their "cohesive" form during adolescence. Many of the dynamics we see in Freud's, the changing of the object, the reversal into the opposite, etc. we see here in Iamblichus as well.

Ficino seems to be the culmination of Iamblichus' thought and represents the most clear notion of a drive within the Neoplatonic tradition. In the third of his *Three Books on Life*, he states that the world is created through the Soul's use of "seminal reasons" which it imposes on matter. Ficino says that the Soul is "allured", and it is this desire which causes her to "dwell in them" (p. 245). In his *Apology*, he uses similar language, saying that the lower material bodies can bring down the influence of higher "celestial bodies" (p. 399). Soul (and by extension, our individual souls), then, has a tendency towards materiality. The tendency towards, however, displays a reversal into its opposite, and it is precisely *through* engaging with the lower influences that one becomes closer to the Intellectual realm.

Repression

There is one passage of Iamblichus in particular that is interesting when put in connection with Freud's concept of repression. It is a paragraph in Chapter I, Section 11 of *On the Mysteries*. The entire book, *On the Mysteries,* is a response to Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*, a letter to an Egyptian priest asking him to explain his conception of the Gods. At one point, Porphyry asks why obscenities are used in rituals, as he saw it as degrading to the gods (the use of

“obscenities”, such as sexual imagery/language, during ritual is a well-documented phenomenon in Late Antiquity (Matterson, 2014)). Iamblichus responds:

“The powers of the human passions that are within us, when they are repressed, become correspondingly stronger; but if one exercises them in brief bursts and within reasonable limits, they enjoy moderate relief and find satisfaction, and hence, being “purified”, are laid to rest through persuasion, and not by violence. That is why, when we behold the passions of others both in comedy and in tragedy, we stabilise our own passions, and render them more moderate, and purify them; and similarly in the sacred rites, by viewing and listening to obscenities we are freed from the harm that would befall us if we practised them” (p. 51)

It is striking how similar this is to the “talking cure” of psychoanalysis. Further, the idea that the repression of the instincts leads to their strengthening is one that can be found in Freud’s writings. In his paper on repression (1915b), he says that repression of an instinct leads to its “uninhibited development” (p. 149). In psychoanalytic language, the “passions” which Iamblichus talked about could be seen as being integrated into the ego through the use of ritual; the idea that id impulses are integrated into the ego is one that can be found late in Freud’s life, particularly in his paper *Analysis, Terminable and Interminable* (1937).

The Death Drive

Proclus provides the best starting point for talking about a notion of a “death drive” within Neoplatonism. Freud had seen the death drive as the tendency for living matter to return to its origin; in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he uses the example of certain fishes that swim to different streams where they originally resided (p. 38). This idea is evident throughout the Neoplatonic tradition, especially in the *Elements of Theology*.

Throughout the work, Proclus uses two terms: “procession” (πρόοδος) and “reversion” (επιστρεπτικον); “procession” is the outward turning of a cause towards its effect, and reversion is the effect “reverting” or returning to its cause. Proclus argues that all things proceed from and revert to the One (p. 13), or at least, reverts to The One insofar as the effect reverts to its immediate cause, which is symbolic of the One (p. 39). The soul reverts upon the Intellect, the Intellect reverts upon the henads, etc. It is clear that Proclus is not only talking about a logical dependency but an actual cyclical process that happens in the universe, since he explicitly says as much towards the end of the book. Proposition 206 states, “Every particular soul can descend into temporal process and ascend from process to Being an *infinite number of times”* [emphasis added] (p. 181).

In Neoplatonic circles, this idea was often interpreted as a form of death. For example, Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, called it the “plentitude of life which is called death” (Caponigri, 1956, p. 23). Here is the same paradox that Freud elaborated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; death is constitutive of life, and all life actively moves towards its own death (however, it is important to note that the death *drive* is a telos in Freud’s thought, and in this way, goes against the original notion of a drive, which was *not* a telos).

In this way, the reversion towards the One can be seen as a kind of “death drive” (and similarly, the death drive in Freud can be seen as a kind of “reversion”), as it is a similar tendency to return to one’s origin. This idea is in every Neoplatonic author within the corpus; Iamblichus talks about it in chapter I Section 8 of *On the Mysteries*, “secondary entities always revert towards their primals” (Clarke, Dillon, & Hershbell, 2003, p. 33)), and there are multiple points in the Enneads where Plotinus talks about reversion (see Ennead V.III). However, Ficino seems to be the most marked example of this type of reversion, as he says even the plants which rise toward the sun as they grow are an example of a subject’s reversion (Kaske & Clarke, 1998).

However, some nuance should be added here, especially when dealing with human subjects. There was disagreement as to whether one’s individuality was lost when coming into full contact with the One. Iamblichus seemed to think that one’s individuality is preserved while Plotinus held that it was not (Shaw, 2003). Similarly, there was disagreement over whether the soul fully descended in the first place; Plotinus held that a part of our soul remained in the Intellectual realm, while both Iamblichus and Proclus held that our souls fully descended (Dodds, 1963). Still, even in the cases where one’s individuality is preserved, it is lost *temporarily* at the moment when it comes into contact with higher causes.

When thinking about things in this way, it is important to examine Ficino’s system of the body in general; Ficino held to the notion man was a “microcosm”, a symbolic representation of all the forces in the universe. This idea was common in mystical trends of thinking, and can be seen as originating in the Hermetic tradition; its most explicit expression is in the phrase of the *Emerald Tablet*, “That which is above is like that which is below” (Steel & Singer, 1927, p. 42). For Ficino, the planets and the stars all contribute to specific influences in us and represent different parts of human nature. Saturn, for example, represents excess or a quality which “sets one apart from others, divine or brutish” (Kaske and Clarke, 1998, p. 251). On the other hand, Jupiter represents the principle of vitality. Ficino states that our nature is mainly composed of Solar and Jovial elements (p. 259), but it can be brought under the say of under elements; for example, if one is in a state of depression, this shows the influence of Saturn. These forces were not conceived as outside of ourselves, but instead, because man is a microcosm, as contained within our own body (in Ficino’s system, they are split between different organs and humours as well). The subject, then, becomes split into a variety of forces, in connection with the body, just as it had been for the majority in Freud’s career. Because of the bifurcation of the subject, the “instincts” in Ficino can go through the same vicissitudes that they do in Freud.

Chapter 7: Psyche-Soma in Neoplatonism

Neoplatonism is often thought of as an ascetic philosophy which rejected the body and the material world at large. This is not the case. Radek Chulp (2012) mentions how some Neoplatonic schools were deeply involved in political affairs, sometimes even participating in revolts, and there is much to be said about the body and its connection to the psyche in

Neoplatonism.

Plotinus holds that consciousness can only happen in relation to a body, which provides images for the Intellect to become conscious *of*. Plotinus holds that there is a “material intellect” which brings the images of sensation to the *active* intellect (Hendrix, 2015, p. 34); the material intellect is on the border of the mental (active intellect) and the somatic (body), just as the instinct is for Freud. When we also consider that the imagination, for Plotinus, is stimulated by desire, there seems to be a striking resemblance to the drive in Freud’s thought.

The concept of a “border” between the mental and the somatic is carried throughout Neoplatonic tradition; the Neoplatonists held that in order for the Intellect to have any relation to matter, there must be a mediating force, often called “Soul”. Similarly, in later Neoplatonic systems, between Soul and matter, there is “spirit”. The language these authors uses attests to this contradiction”; for example, Proclus says “every soul is all things, the things of sense after the manner of an exemplar and the intelligible things after the manner of image” (p. 171), and Ficino calls it “a body not a body” (Kaske & Clarke, 1998 p. 257).

Chapter 8: Desire in Neoplatonism

Plotinus

In the Neoplatonic tradition, there is a notion of desire; as a matter of fact, it is a central part of Neoplatonic thought. It seems to stem from Plato himself who held that human subjects have some memory of the Forms. At multiple levels, desire, i.e. an unconscious attempt to re-find an initially lost object, can be seen throughout the Neoplatonic corpus.

Of course, the first thing that comes to mind when talking about desire is the subject’s relation to the One; given the theory of procession and reversion, it does seem like the One provides something similar to a Freudian desire, since it is based on a memory-trace and is unconscious (or at least, is initially unconscious). However, there is a distinction to be made here: the Neoplatonists held that one *could* and *does* reunite with the higher realms. It seems then that there is some disparity between the two concepts. One could argue that one’s individuality is lost at the moment when this occurs, and therefore, it is in some sense true that we ourselves can not re-find the lost object (in this case, it would be very similar to the function of the mother in Lacanian thought), but this seems to be a bit of shaky ground if only for the reason that whether one’s individuality was lost was a matter of contention within the tradition.

Still, throughout the texts, especially the text of Plotinus, there is clearly a dynamic of Freudian desire operating within them. In the fourth chapter in *On the Difficulties of the Soul*, Plotinus goes into a discussion of memory; he asks what the nature of memory is and which level of reality it belongs to (for example, he asks whether the Gods can have memory or not). In section 15, he starts to talk about individual souls and holds that our souls are dragged into materiality; our souls, as such, do not have memory because they are not, in themselves, within

time (they are eternal). However, the soul comes to *experience* time by being in the material world with bodies that undergo change. With this, comes memory, and more importantly, desire.

Plotinus holds that desire happens on account of one's capacity for memory; one remembers, in succession, what one knew all at once in the intelligible realm, and tends towards it in the material world. This desire comes to the individual soul through imagination and language; the soul, in attempting to restore and emulate the Intellect, moves towards the object of its desire. Plotinus states, "For when the desiring part of the soul is moved, the mental image of its object comes like a perception announcing and informing us of the experience, and demanding that we should follow along with it and obtain the desired object for it" (p. 179). Of course, this type of desire can not be fulfilled because, being embodied, we can never possess things the way the Intellect does. We can give further support for this interpretation if we look at Plotinus' *on Sense Perception and Memory*, where he states that a memory is that soul being "charmed" by "an apprehension of what it does not have" (p. 327).

Here, we can see the resemblance to Freudian desire: the soul's movement is based on a "memory", the memory of the Intellect within itself or the Intellect that it once was (depending on one's interpretation of the passage). We attempt to re-find this lost object, but we can only ever find substitutes. Plotinus seems to hold to what Freud said in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) that thought (or at least, *embodied* thought) can only happen because of a wish.

Ficino

Ficino provides a similar discussion in Book IV of his *Platonic Theology* (2001, Original work written 1474). The first sentence explicitly states that our souls move our body "through desire" (p. 297). In this section, he discusses the souls of the celestial spheres and argues that the planets in fact move because of the soul within them. He furthermore develops his concept of "seeds" or "seminal reasons", earlier discussed when dealing with his *Three Books on Life*.

Ficino argues that the celestial spheres move because of their desire for the "prime goodness" (p. 279), of which they retain an initial memory (Chapter I). He holds that the planets attempt to grasp all of the seminal reasons at once; however, since the planets are limited by corporeal nature (they are bodies), this is not possible, and so they are in perpetual motion. Circular motion, for Ficino, represents eternity and never-ending desire. This is why the stars also "trace figures in the sky"; it is them grasping a *particular* in time seminal reason in an attempt to grasp them *all* at once.

It is striking how close this is to a psychoanalytic conception of desire; all of the dynamics discussed earlier are present. There is an initial perception (the comprehensive unity of the seminal reasons, which is experienced by The Intellect) which is eternally lost. The planets attempt to substitute the lost object but never achieve full satisfaction. It is almost analogous to how Freud describes desire in his earlier writings.

The most striking thing, however, is how Ficino relates “conception” (the forming of an idea) to desire at the end of Chapter II. Here, he explicitly states that conception must precede desire, and gives an example of Euclid wanting to travel to hear Socrates speak. He says that Euclid must form a “general conception” of the journey first and only after can he desire to take a step in the intended direction (p. 305).

Ficino says that desire “chooses” conceptions (p. 306); in psychoanalytic language, one might say that desire attaches itself to an object. The general idea that conception precedes desire is also what was noted in the comments on “perceptual identity”; in Freud’s earlier works, it is the exact same. Desire only functions only on the basis of the perceptual identity (the “conception”) which first established it. The only thing to note is that, for Ficino, the celestial spheres are subjects (because they are ensouled) just as humans are; the spheres are only a more perfect form of human subjectivity. Ficino, in fact, states that humans “wander” in desire even more on account of this (p. 289).

Chapter 9: Objections

In writing this, it is important to note that an “objection” in the truest sense of the word can not be given, as it is impossible to consciously object to oneself. Because of this, it would be best to go through objections that were given by those who read the earlier drafts of the dissertation. There were many objections comparing Freudian thought to Neoplatonic thought, and there was a general sentiment that the connections made were only superficial.

First, the idea that there is a drive within Neoplatonic thought did raise some objection. This is because the drive, in Freud’s thought, is a very specific thing which is different from other related concepts in philosophy, such as impetus or conatus. The drive is marked by an flexibility which makes it capable of detaching from its original object. On a certain reading of Neoplatonism, this would contradict the Freudian drive, if one takes the subject in Neoplatonism to have simple conatus towards the One or anything similar.

However, some comments should be made here .First, it is important to distinguish between the drive of Freud’s *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (1915a) and the drive of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Though they take the same name, they are distinguished precisely by this difference. The *earlier* drive is capable of detaching from its object, while the life and death drives do not exhibit the same behavior. With this distinction in mind, we can find *both* drives within the Neoplatonic subject.

As has been shown, there is an early Freudian drive in many authors. There is no simple relationship between the Intellect and the subject which moves towards it, and often, moving towards simultaneously means moving away from it (as in the case of Iamblichus’ rituals). The comments on Plotinus, Ficino, and desire must be remembered here as well; the drive is met with constant frustration, and it is this frustration which sustains its existence. It is furthermore a drive which often is set up for its own failure. As far as the later type of drive in Freud’s thought,

this does seem to be a death drive within Neoplatonic thought as well, particularly in later authors. The tendency for all living matter to go towards its origin is also shown in the tradition as well.

Another objection that was given was the idea that a split subject was not enough to show the Freudian subject existed in Neoplatonic thought, as many split subjects exist in philosophical systems (for example, the split between potentiality and actuality). With this, I fully agree. I hope to have shown that there is more than just the subject being split; the *kind* of split that exists in Neoplatonic thought is analogous to the split that exists in Freudian thought. This split is a split between primary and secondary processes, conscious and unconscious, etc. It seems that the Neoplatonic subject also works on this split.

Most important was the objection to the statement that there is a Fruedian subject in Neoplatonic thought, the entire thesis of the dissertation. This objection was given on account of the fact that the Freudian tradition posited *phenomenological* realities while the Neoplatonic tradition only deals with ontology; the only explicit discussions in Neoplatonic writings are on the One, the Intellect, the Soul, etc. Though there are formal similarities between the Freudian subject and these ontological realities, the fact remains that the Neoplatonists were never concerned with phenomenological matters, and therefore, there can be no Freudian subject in Neoplatonic thought, so the objection goes.

To respond, it must be noted that all of the ontological levels are posited *within* the subject as well as outside of it.There is, for example, the Soul of the world, but there is also the individual soul which itself is a part of Soul as such (Ficino holds to this position in *Platonic Theology*). Similarly, there is a “One” and an “Intellect” within the subject. Because of this, there *is* a phenomenological dimension to Neoplatonism, though it is not explicitly discussed. Of course, this dimension is not explicitly discussed, but that is the point. The Freudian subject functions in an *unconscious* way within the Neoplatonic tradition.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

There is a Freudian subject within Neoplatonic thought. This subject can be seen throughout multiple authors within the corpus, including Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, and Marsilio Ficino. It can also be seen in adjacent texts, such as the Orphic Hymns, the Chaldean Oracles, and the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

Within the Neoplatonic corpus, we see the defining features of the Freudian subject: the unconscious as a site of irrationality which can disrupt conscious functioning, the mind’s connection with the body, the drive and its vicissitudes, and the centrality of desire.

We see the unconscious most clearly in Plorintus’ *On the Difficulties of the Soul*, which holds the active Intellect as an unconscious principle functioning within the conscious subject. Plotinus is the most clear example of this concept, but we do find traces of it in later works, such as Iamblichus’ *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*. The mind’s connection with the body is attested

in the same source in Plotinus and also in Ficino's *Three Books on Life* where it shows up due to Ficino's magical inclinations. The drive shows up in Ficino, Iamblichus, and Proclus. The centrality of desire can be seen throughout all Neoplatonic works. These concepts can also be seen in the esoteric texts as well.

This raises the question of why these similarities exist; historically, there have been arguments that Neoplatonic thinkers set up new paradigms which influenced discourse after them, and which argue Neoplatonism is a kind of ancient precursor to psychoanalysis. Both John Shannon Hendrix and Nicolai de Matthew share this view. Arguably, Frances Yates (1964) shares a similar view, though she is writing from the perspective of the Scientific Revolution in general and not on psychoanalysis in particular. There is legitimacy to this view, given the primacy of the unconscious to Neoplatonic thought, something we do not see in other forms of ancient philosophy. However, this viewpoint seems to overlook something important.

Instead of putting Neoplatonic thought in a line of descent with psychoanalysis, it may be better to look at them and their position to related fields side by side. Psychoanalysis was a response to a certain conception of the subject which could be traced back to Descartes. The subject, as fully conscious of itself, fully rational, and in control of itself, was the subject which Freud attempted to subvert. In the same way, Neoplatonic tradition made a similar subversion; through its association to the mystical tradition, it seems to have served as a similar response to a type of ancient rationalism. The response to rationalism seems to operate at multiple points in the history of thought; for example, Gerschom Scholem (1991) holds it was the decisive factor in the formation of Kabbalah within Jewish thought.

This may be why the Freudian subject operates within Neoplatonic thought: because they were ultimately responses to the same thing. In both cases, the unconscious was the idea that allowed each school of thought to provide something different. The unconscious is what subverts rationality in Freudian thought, and it is what provides the possibility for mystical experience in Neoplatonic thought.

There are some limitations to this study that must be acknowledged. The most important is that there is a limitation in scope. The texts examined only account for a small portion of Neoplatonism, which existed for well over a thousand years in various forms. Even with the authors examined, there is still much to be discussed. Plotinus wrote numerous treatises, and many of them could have deserved their own chapters. Similarly, the entirety of Proclus' 14 volume *Platonic Theology* could not be discussed, though there are many passages in it which would be relevant for discussion. Furthermore, because of the size of this paper, there is a necessary conflation between the Neoplatonism of Late Antiquity and the Neoplatonism of the Renaissance; though they do form part of one tradition, and they do both have a Freudian subject, there are many differences, and a systematic inquiry into these differences and how they affect the central thesis is needed.

This paper only examined the pagan Neoplatonic tradition. Even Ficino, who was a "Christian" Neoplatonist, was accused of the heresy of pantheism multiple times throughout his life and was

more indebted to Plotinus and Proclus than he was to any Chrisitan author. The likes of Pseudo-Dionysius, Boethius, Bonaventure, etc. must be explored as well. In the same vein, the religious texts which constitute part of the Neoplatonic tradition deserve further examination; in particular, the *Corpus Hermeticum* shows remarkably Freudian ideals. Also, the historical influence must be examined more; much could be said about how Neoplatonism's status during Late Antiquity, its transmission into history, and the way in which its concepts, or at least analogues of them, show up in psychoanalysis.

That is on the side of Neoplatonism; of course, on the side of psychoanalysis, there is a question of how other psychoanalytic systems fit into this picture. There has been some research done on this; for example, there is a bit of research comparing Neoplatonic thought with Lacan, and Lacan is often used to analyze esoteric religions. Still, the likes of Bion, Klein, Winnicott, etc. have not really been examined and could provide an area for further research.

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