RICOEUR'S INTERPRETATION OF THE RELATION BETWEEN PHENOMENOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

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Philosophy's Interest in Psychoanalysis

I have taken the title of this section from an article (1958) written by a professor of mine, Antoine Vergote, who taught at the University of Louvain when I was a student there fifteen years ago. The title expresses the main intent I have in writing this article, even though my reflections deal specifically with Paul Ricoeur's philosophical interpretation of Freud (Ricoeur, 1965).

It was especially at the University of Louvain during the late fifties and early sixties that philosophers like Alphonse de Waelhens, an expert in the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger, began to show an intense interest specifically in Freud and the unconscious and more generally in the whole spectrum of questions regarding our understanding of human existence that seemed to be situated within psychoanalysis—both its theoretical and practical side.

To my mind no one has carried forward the philosophical work started in those days better than Paul Ricoeur. It is for that reason that I have tried to reflect with Ricoeur on all those problems that would seem to demand a dialogue between philosophers and psychologists.

Not without reason this dialogue would seem to have as its common ground, from the philosophical point of view, phenomenology. It is the relationship between phenomenology and psychoanalysis that is directing our main intention here. There is a reason for this. It is that phe-
nomenology, beginning first with Franz Brentano (who taught both Freud and Husserl), gave expression to a host of new problems regarding human existence that parallel in a remarkable way many problems contained, implicitly if not explicitly, in the unique problematic presupposed in Freud's work and subsequently in the work of psychoanalysis and psychology itself.

But all this is not new. In the twenty or so years that followed, any number of writings on the subject have come forth. Yet, it seems to me, much of this work has lacked the solid basis on which to build a dialogue. Some philosophers, like Sartre (1939), seemed to critique Freud and psychoanalysis without a sympathetic reading of the Freudian texts or without a sufficient understanding of clinical experience. The same might be said of some writers, such as Binswanger, in the area of clinical psychology itself.

On the other hand, the tradition which comes down from Merleau-Ponty through writers like de Waelhens and Ricoeur has tried to go back to Freud, believing that the answers to the questions evoked by the psychoanalytic experience would be found there, not unlike the way, for example, in which Heidegger has returned to Plato and Kant. Many have criticized Heidegger for his reflections on Plato and Kant in the light of phenomenology, as if the problems of earlier writers could not be enlivened by the insights of a later age. It is our conviction that just the opposite is true, namely, that great human works not only allow but even demand being understood in different ways. So it is with Freud and phenomenology.

Merleau-Ponty, the French phenomenologist, had already declared as much in his well-known preface to A. Hesnard's work *L'Oeuvre de Freud et son importance pour le Monde Moderne* (1960). Merleau-Ponty admits that it is not for philosophers to judge Freud. Yet as a worldview psychoanalysis converges with the insights of other disciplines, including phenomenology. This is especially true for those who refuse to limit their considerations of psychoanalysis to its empirical side. In fact, Merleau-Ponty insisted, phenomenology permits psychoanalysis to posit "psychic reality" without any equivocation, that is, as something beyond the limits of any mere physiological process, as something grounded in "the human," that is, lived meanings that are dynamic and historical (Husserl's *Lebenswelt*). And then he adds:

Freudian thought, in turn, confirms phenomenology in its description of a consciousness that is not so much knowledge or representation as investment; it brings to phenomenology a wealth of concrete examples that add weight to what it has been able to say in general of the relations of man with the world and of the