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The Kantian Teleology in the Freudian Concept of Death Drive

Abstract: The aim of this research is to investigate the potential relationships between Freud's theoretical constructs in psychoanalysis and the heuristic teleology proposed by Kant. An element of the death drive in Freud, its regressive character, identified through repetition, can be observed as a force that directs life and nature in a regressive movement with the aim of returning to the inorganic state, a hypothesis set out especially in *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920). Based on considerations about the apparent purpose of this movement in nature, we propose to investigate the possibilities of relationships between the death drive and the teleology present in Kant's works. Furthermore, we develop a discussion on the ultimate finality of nature, apparently divergent between Freud and Kant.

Keywords: Death Drive, Freud, Kant, Psychoanalysis, Teleology

Introduction: A Kantian project in Freud

Freud can be comprehended as an author inevitably influenced by Kantian ideas. Loparic situates Freud as part of the “Helmholtz School”, recognized as a school of the Kantian tradition. Preceding Freud, researchers such as Meynert, Griesinger, and Jackson – contemporaries of the Helmholtz School – were already engaged in speculative physiology of the brain, as well as in developing speculations about the functioning of the psyche. This research tradition traces back to Herbart, Kant's replacement at the University of Königsberg.¹ It is also worth mentioning that Krafft-Ebing – contemporary of Freud and sometimes critical of his work – who was responsible for popularizing psychiatric concepts, is likewise situated in this sphere of Kantian influence.

¹ Loparic, Z., 2003. De Kant a Freud: um roteiro. *Natureza Humana*, 5(1), pp. 231–245. doi: <https://doi.org/10.59539/2175-2834-v5n1-778>.

Fulgencio explores the impact that Kant had on Mach and, consequently, the effect that the post-Kantian philosophers had on Freudian psychoanalysis. The author notes that Paul-Laurent Assoun identifies a *Machian vocabulary* in Freud's proposal of the drives, and that Borch-Jacobsen & Shamdasani consider that Freud adopts an epistemological stance similar to Mach's. Notably, Mach recognizes certain *scientific concepts* as *provisional fictions*, and Freud, in turn, uses *metapsychological concepts* as *heuristic fictions*.²

The Kantian metaphysics of nature, according to Fulgencio, is located at the ground of the *speculations* of Freudian psychoanalysis.³ The author also describes psychoanalysis as the heir to the Kantian *a priori* research program for the natural sciences, as well as noting that psychoanalysis "was built on this ground of Kantian metaphysics of nature".⁴ This influence is observable in the speculative fundamentals of the auxiliary constructs developed by Freud in his methodological groundwork for the construction of psychoanalysis. Fulgencio emphasizes that concepts of Freudian metapsychology, such as the psychic apparatus, are described as *theoretical fictions*; just as libido is characterized as an *auxiliary construct*, and the concept of *drive* itself is indicated as a *convention*. He summarizes this position thus:

[...] the Freudian metapsychology – with its concepts of drive, libido, and apparatus – consists of heuristic fictions that make it possible for Freud to treat psychic life as an object like any other foreign to man, making psychoanalysis a proposal for empirical psychology within the framework of the natural sciences, which, in turn, has the same type of causality presented by Kant in his *a priori* research program or, in other terms, in his metaphysics of nature, causality that is one of the categories of understanding.⁵

The speculative fundamentals do not appear to be something concealed by Freud. He himself suggests in 1925 that parts of his speculative psychoanalytic superstructure can be sacrificed if an insufficiency is found.⁶ Indeed, Freud shows no hesitation in revising, modifying, altering, or pointing out errors in his theoretical assumptions. One of his most consistent revisions took place

² Fulgencio, L., 2014. Ernst Mach & Sigmund Freud. *Clínica & Cultura*, 3(2), pp. 58–89.

Fulgencio, L., 2016. *Mach e Freud: influências e paráfrases*. São Paulo: Fapesp.

³ Fulgencio, L., 2008. *O método especulativo em Freud*. São Paulo: Fapesp.

⁴ Fulgencio, L., 2007. Fundamentos kantianos da psicanálise freudiana e o lugar da metapsicologia no desenvolvimento da psicanálise. *Psicologia USP*, 18(1), p. 47. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0103-65642007000100003> (our translation).

⁵ Ibid., p. 48 (our translation).

⁶ Freud, S., 1959. An autobiographical study In: Freud, S. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud – Volume XX*. London: Hogarth, pp. 7–74.

at the moment known as the “turn of 1920”. At this point, in addition to presenting the second topography (structural model) – which, it is noteworthy, overlaps with but does not replace the first topography (topographic model) in *The Ego and the Id* (1923)⁷ – he develops a concept that changes the considerations about the finality of the actions of the unconscious in the psychoanalytic tradition. The key to the turning point seems to be concentrated in a fundamental concept of Freud’s suggestion of an *unconscious system* that would drive human actions *beyond the pleasure principle*: the death drive.⁸

This introduction has outlined how we can observe a Kantian influence in Freud’s works based on considerations regarding the Kantian tradition in the Helmholtz School; the presence of a *Machian vocabulary* in Freud; and psychoanalysis as an heir to Kant’s *a priori* research program for the natural sciences. Having established the Kantian ground in Freudian metapsychology, we now turn to an investigation of potential relationships between the characteristics of the concept of *drive* in Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and the Kantian *teleology*. To this end, an analysis of Kantian teleological judgment within the scope of Freud’s drive theory will be presented, followed by a discussion about the ultimate finality of nature, apparently divergent between Freud and Kant.

Kantian heuristic teleology and its application in Freud’s theory⁹

Within the scope of Kantian transcendental philosophy, the teleological judgment appears as a part of the third *Critique*, the *Critique of the power of judgment* (1790), which is the book where Kant finalizes his critical project. The main objective of the book is to mediate the two scopes of reason, the theoretical and the practical:

⁷ In the text published in 1924, *The economic problem of masochism*, Freud states that “Kant’s Categorical Imperative is thus the direct heir of the Oedipus complex” (1961, p. 167). In the preface to *Totem and taboo* (1912-1913), Freud had already developed a relationship between the *taboo* and the *categorical imperative*.

Freud, S., 1955. The Ego and the Id. In: Freud, S. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud – Volume XIX*. London: Hogarth, pp. 3–66.

Freud, S., 1961. The economic problem of masochism. In: Freud, S. *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud – Volume XIX*. London: Hogarth, pp. 159–170.

Freud, S., 1955. Totem and taboo In: Freud, S. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud – Volume XIII*. London: Hogarth, pp. 1–162.

⁸ Freud, S., 1955. Beyond the pleasure principle In: Freud, S. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud – Volume XVIII*. London: Hogarth, pp. 7–64.

⁹ We will use the Cambridge translations of Kant for English, but the quotation will follow the classic version of the German Academia, indicating the edition and the page in the first *Critique* and the volume and the page in the third *Critique*.

[...] the power of judgment, provides the mediating concept between the concepts of nature and the concept of freedom, which makes possible the transition from the purely theoretical to the purely practical, from lawfulness in accordance with the former to the final end in accordance with the latter.¹⁰

To this end, Kant must find a transcendental principle – the principle of finality – for the judgment faculty and analyze this principle in all its possible uses and limitations. For this to be accomplished, the third *Critique* had to be separated into two parts: the part of the Aesthetic Judgment and the part of the Teleological Judgment. Firstly, we will introduce the broad discussion of the book, the general use of the faculty of judgment, its transcendental principle, and the separation between the aesthetic judgment and the teleological one. Then we will investigate some peculiarities of the teleological judgment and argue for the compatibility of the Kantian teleological judgment with Freud's theory of drives as presented in *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920).

The faculty of judgment appears in the *Critique of pure reason* (1787) as the mind's faculty of subsuming the particular under a universal rule: "the power of judgment is the faculty of subsuming under rules, i.e., of determining whether something stands under a given rule (*casus datae legis*) or not".¹¹ In the scope of the first *Critique*, the faculty of judgment merely applies the determination power of the understanding – i.e., the universal *a priori* categories to specific objects (sensible data) – making, by this operation, the experience possible. This operation is named, in the first *Critique*, the *transcendental schematism*, in which the rules that are given each time by the pure categories of understanding order what is being received by the pure sensibility, determining fully the experience in a transcendental way – i.e. in general form, in its conditions of possibility – and enabling it to be given to the subject. That same operation is named in the third *Critique* as *determinative judgment*. The "determinative" characteristic is because it is by this schematism that the subject determines the objective appearances for himself. But there is a part of the experience that is not determined – and cannot be – by the power of the understanding, i.e., the *empirical experience*. That is, the experience that is given *a posteriori* to the subject, i.e., its content; that has vast particularities that the finite subject can only receive and has no determinative power in this regard.

¹⁰ Kant, I., 2002. *Critique of the power of judgment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 5:196.

¹¹ Kant, I., 1998. *Critique of pure reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, B 171.

Since the finite subject can only know things as they appear to him, i.e., as phenomenon, the empirical experience remains accessible only through the investigation of nature. But, for the subject to investigate the vastly different scopes and layers of empirical nature, it must have some universal concept through which the empirical realm is organized. However, since the finite intellect (*intellectus archetypus*) can only find concepts to determine nature as phenomenon, its power within the empirical world is limited. This means that the concept by which the subjects can organize how nature presents itself to them is not a determinative one – a category of the understanding – but a subjective one; that is, a concept that is only valid for the subjective experience; i.e., that does not form the objective appearance of nature for us (as phenomena) but organizes the way nature relates to us and to itself. That concept is the transcendental principle of the judgment faculty, the *finality of nature*. If we analyze it, this principle is just the natural operation of the judgment faculty, but without any determinative concept that rules its operation. Following its definition already given in the first *Critique*¹² as the faculty that mediates the others, the faculty of judgment, by applying one universal concept to the particular, puts this particular in some universal ordination of the relation of the parts (particular) with the whole (universal); that means it puts the parts in a final organization that orders all parts, a finality that overcomes the parts towards the whole. By thinking the faculty of judgment as an operation that also works free of the determinative power of the understanding, Kant finds its transcendental power in the third *Critique*.

The reflexive judgment is the specific judgment that the faculty of judgment operates transcendently; that means it operates as a condition of possibility for empirical nature to be related to us. But in opposition to the determinative judgment, which determines how pure nature is objectively *given* to us, the reflexive judgment has no determinative power; its competence is only subjective, and it refers to how empirical nature *relates* to us. The reflexive judgment can only operate in what has already been given as phenomena to us by the determinative judgment. Since there is no universal determinative concept (category) given by the understanding for the judgment faculty to operate the reflexive judgment, the concept of the universal must be found in the reflection itself, in the pure act of mediating that characterizes the judgment faculty: “To reflect (to consider), however, is to compare and to hold together given representations either with others or with

¹² Ibid., B 171.

one's faculty of cognition, *in relation to a concept thereby made possible*.¹³ This pure mediation of the faculties, which is the faculty of judgment and characterizes its finality principle, since it cannot be done with the understanding – otherwise it would be a determinative judgment – must be done with the other faculties for the finality to be established: the faculty of imagination and the faculty of reason. These two faculties are not faculties of concepts as the understanding, so they cannot establish a universal concept that is satisfactory in a determinative way. They can only give the faculty of judgment a subjective form through which the finality of nature in the reflexive judgment relates to our subjectivity – in the case of mediating with the imagination – or can give a *regulative idea* through which the faculty of judgment subjectively organizes how empirical nature relates to itself – in the case of mediating with reason.

Thus, there are two possible uses of reflexive judgment, i.e., two ways of establishing a finality in nature: a) as subjective finality in the aesthetic judgment¹⁴ and b) as internal (or real) finality in the teleological judgment. Since our question refers only to the possibility of finding a Kantian root in the way Freud speculates about a teleological finality of nature in *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920), the aesthetic judgment will not be further explained.

The teleological judgment is the reflexive way of the subject to organize empirical nature for himself in order to investigate its empirical laws; it is a possibility of organization of its laws by an idea of finality that grounds the investigation and can be confirmed or denied by it. This idea is merely regulative; it is a supersensible concept given by the faculty of reason that expresses a totality that can never be experienced but only thought. Therefore, for us to not exceed the limits of knowledge, we cannot think of this idea as determinative concept but as a regulative one that guides the investigation of nature.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., 20:211 (*our emphasis*).

¹⁴ As already mentioned, both uses of the reflexive judgment are only subjective uses – since they do not have the power to logically determine nature in itself. But what Kant calls “subjective finality” is a finality that appears to have us, our subjectivity, as the final point to which nature is created; i.e., nature seems to have been created for our subjective faculties, for our appreciation and contemplation, giving us pleasure in this act. That is the core of the aesthetic judgment; this subjective finality can match our subjectivity in the judgment of something as beautiful or appear as inadequate to our faculties in the judgment of something as sublime.

¹⁵ “The reflecting power of judgment must serve as a principle itself, which, since it is not objective, and cannot be presupposed as a sufficient ground for cognition of the intention of the object, can serve as a merely subjective principle for the purposive use of the cognitive faculties, namely for reflecting on one kind of objects” (Ibid., 5:385).

In the first *Critique* the transcendental dialectics is the part that deals with the illusions that reason falls into when trying to exceed its limits and understand the unconditional totality, the thing-in-itself; the result is that it has to deal with unsolvable antinomies. Reason tends to fall for these illusions because it has the will to go beyond its finite limits and try to know everything, so it extends its concepts and develops concepts of totalities, which are called ideas. Ideas are concepts that cannot have their counterpart, the intuitions that are adequate for them,¹⁶ since it is impossible to experience the whole reality being a finite mind. The way to resolve these antinomies is not to try to find a definitive answer for them – that is impossible – but to see the ideas of totality as regulative ideas that guide us to develop a hypothesis for the totality: “in order to guide itself in the contemplation of nature in accordance with a principle of a completeness to which it can never attain, and thereby to further the final aim of all cognition”.¹⁷ There are three ideas that correspond to the three possible ways of thinking totalities:

Consequently, all transcendental ideas will be brought under *three classes*, of which the *first* contains the absolute (unconditioned) *unity* of the *thinking subject*, the *second* the absolute *unity* of the *series of conditions of appearance*, the *third* the absolute *unity* of the *condition of all objects of thought* in general. The thinking subject is the object of *psychology*, the sum total of all appearances (the world) is the object of *cosmology*, and the thing that contains the supreme condition of the possibility of everything that can be thought (the being of all beings) is the object of *theology*.¹⁸

Following the classical doctrine of the *metaphysica specialis*, Kant is grounding its disciplines – *psychologia rationalis*, *cosmologia rationalis* and *theologia transcendentalis* – in his critical project. In these doctrines, no ultimately secure knowledge is possible, but the ideas can regulate and guide the scientist to research the empirical world;¹⁹ *that*

¹⁶ “Ideas, however, are still more remote from objective reality than *categories*; for no appearance can be found in which they may be represented *in concreto*. They contain a certain completeness that no possible empirical cognition ever achieves, and with them reason has a systematic unity only in the sense that the empirically possible unity seeks to approach it without ever completely reaching it.” Ibid., B 595-596.

¹⁷ Ibid., 5:168.

¹⁸ Ibid., B391.

¹⁹ “The power of judgment’s concept of a purposiveness of nature still belongs among the concepts of nature, but only as a regulative principle of the faculty of cognition.” (Ibid., 5:197).

is *Kantian heuristics*.²⁰ Freud's main concept, the unconscious, is a hypothesis; psychoanalysis cannot know the unconscious as such but only research its effects and symptoms guided by the hypothesis of how the unconscious works, and, by confirming the hypothesis or denying it, the results of the research can alter the hypothesis that guided the work – that explains the turns of Freudian theoretical scope, the topographical changes. From what was discussed, we can see that Freud's theory is based on an idea of the unconditional totality of the subject – its psyche, or, as Kant names the totality of the subject, the soul – named as unconscious. In *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920), Freud proposes another speculation of totality to complement psychoanalysis, one that involves not only the subject but the totality of life; when he speaks of the death drive as a finality of nature, he is using an idea of the unconditional nature (world) to guide his speculation – also based on some biological research that was done by that time to support his speculation.²¹

The way that the speculation regulated by the idea of nature works in the Kantian critical apparatus – the way he explains how natural scientists operate in their theoretical craft even without knowing the proper manner in which it works – is by the teleological judgment presented in the third *Critique*. With the supersensible idea of nature as a whole, there is another one that is necessary for us to understand the finality of nature as a transcendental principle of the judgment faculty, that is, the *idea of liberty* – or the idea of an end in itself. This idea is the only idea that is determined because it is the way reason determines itself in the second *Critique* as a free agent. In summary: in this book Kant defines human liberty as a capacity of the faculty of reason to put forth for itself a law that governs its own will – the categorical imperative – so that the will is not determined by external causes. Reason has a capacity of doing this because its own nature is a formal one, and it is this very nature that determines the form of the will – the will has a form that is filled with content (the external object of desire) when the will is determined externally – but it can determine itself by having its own form as its content, i.e., putting a law for itself as a duty. This form, as all concepts that come from the faculty of reason, represents a totality; the idea of a totality of all causality, a supersensible and unconditional causality,

²⁰ We here indicate, as a detailed investigation of Kantian heuristic, as well as precise examples of how this works in physics, the great book of Zeljko Loparic: Loparic, Z., 2024. *Kant's transcendental semantics*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

²¹ The peculiarities of the death drive as a finality of nature will be explained further in the next topic.

which is the idea of liberty that the categorical imperative fills.²²

So, the antinomy of liberty – i.e., if humans are determined by causes external to them or if they can initiate by themselves another causality order – of the first *Critique* is resolved in the second *Critique* by admitting that the two causalities are parallel; the conditional causality of the sensible realm of the world (nature and physics) and the unconditional causality of its supersensible realm of freedom and morals. That leads us to two ways of thinking and acquiring knowledge of nature: as a mechanism or an organism. A mechanical nature is the way we experience nature in the determinative judgment, having the phenomenon determined by the faculty of understanding's category of causality, i.e., as an efficient causality. On the other hand, an organic nature is the way we experience nature through the reflexive judgment of the faculty of judgment in its teleological use, by thinking nature as a totality that has a finality within itself, that is, as a final causality – analogous to our liberty.

Kantian teleological judgment and the finality of nature in the scope of Freud's drive theory

We will now further explain the mediation that the faculty of judgment does with the faculty of reason in the teleological judgment. To revise what we already explained: the teleological judgment is used to organize empirical nature for us as a coherent system of empirical laws by the idea of nature as a totality that has a finality that relates it to itself – having a status of hypothesis; a subjective value only for organizational means that have to be confirmed by research, not a secure knowledge of it – which makes possible the investigation and research of nature as an organism. The faculty of judgment is the faculty of finding and subsuming the universal under the particular; in the case of its reflexive judgment, the universal is not given by the faculty of understanding determinative power, so in its teleological use it has to fill this gap caused by the lack of the universal concept by borrowing from the fac-

²² This does not mean that – by showing the nature of liberty within reason – we can have any knowledge of what liberty is, liberty remains as a practical scope; it is the *ratio essendi* of any speculation or even the possibility of thinking (*ratio cognoscendi*) something as liberty. In the theoretical scope, reason cannot conclude the antinomy of liberty because it cannot have a sensible experience of a totality of causality adequate to the idea of liberty that can give us theoretical and secure knowledge of liberty – liberty remains, as the other ideas, as a regulative idea in the theoretical world.

That was a summary of the first part of the *Critique of practical reason*. For following this investigation and problematic in a detailed way, we recommend the reader to check the original source: Kant, I., 1997. *Critique of practical reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ulty of reason its supersensible regulative ideas of nature as a totality and of liberty.²³ Using these two ideas, the teleological judgment allows us to investigate nature as a totality that has an end within itself (organism) rather than a machine (mechanism) – and by applying them in its use of organizing the particular by a universal, it gives a teleological finality to the particular that is being investigated:

Through the possibility of its *a priori* laws for nature the understanding gives a proof that nature is cognized by us only as appearance, and hence at the same time an indication of its supersensible substratum; but it leaves this entirely undetermined. The power of judgment, through its *a priori* principle for judging nature in accordance with possible particular laws for it, provides for its supersensible substratum (in us as well as outside us) determinability through the intellectual faculty. But reason provides determination for the same substratum through its practical law *a priori*; and thus the power of judgment makes possible the transition from the domain of the concept of nature to that of the concept of freedom.²⁴

Thus, the teleological judgment is the true mediator of the two scopes of reason, because it borrows from the practical scope the supersensible concept of a causality by freedom and from the theoretical scope the regulative idea of nature as a totality and applies these concepts in an analogous way²⁵ – a heuristic way²⁶ – to the theoretical scope for investigating and explaining nature

²³ The teleological judgment does not teach us “how things are judged, but rather how they ought to be judged” (ibid., 5:182 *our emphasis*) in nature. This, as well as the liberty in us, is also a *duty* for the researcher, that is, he knows that this judgment is a way he *must* judge nature if he wants to have a complete theory of it – so the teleological judgment, as well as the categorical imperative, is a duty of judgment precisely because it is the same supersensible idea that was operating in the practical realm that now is used in the theoretical realm – but is not the way of *how* the finite mind *usually* judges nature, i.e., the determinative judgment: “By contrast, the teleologically employed power of judgment provides the determinate *conditions under which something (e.g., an organized body), is to be judged* in accordance with the idea of an end of nature” (Ibid., 5:194, *our emphasis*).

²⁴ Ibid., 5:196.

²⁵ “Nevertheless, teleological judging is rightly drawn into our research into nature, at least problematically, but only in order to bring it under principles of observation and research in *analogy* with causality according to ends, without presuming thereby to *explain* it.” Ibid., 5:360.

²⁶ “On the other hand, it is an equally necessary maxim of reason not to bypass the principle of ends in the products of nature, because even though this principle does not make the way in which these products have originated more comprehensible, it is still a *heuristic principle for researching the particular laws of nature*, even granted that we would want to make no use of it for explaining nature itself, since although nature obviously displays an intentional unity of purpose we still always call that a merely natural end, i.e., we do not seek the ground of its possibility beyond nature.” (Ibid., 5:411, *our emphasis*).

as an organism. As Kant puts it, the finality of nature is another way of judging nature when the research conducted through the traditional way – the determinative judgment – is not sufficient: “The concept of the combinations and forms of nature in accordance with ends is still at least *one more principle* for bringing its appearances under rules where the laws of causality about the mere mechanism of nature do not suffice”.²⁷ But what does it mean to say that the traditional way is not sufficient? The traditional way is the only way to gain secure knowledge of nature without risking the research on some unstable hypothesis, but it has some limitations that prevent the scientist from analyzing some of nature’s empirical products that are given to us in the empirical experience. These are organic beings, and the mechanical way of researching those beings does not advance the research or do them justice because they operate in a universal finality that is different from the universal concept of mechanical causality grounded by the faculty of understanding.

I would say provisionally that a thing exists as a natural end *if it is cause and effect of itself* (although in a twofold sense); for in this there lies a causality the likes of which cannot be connected with the mere concept of a nature without ascribing an end to it, but which in that case also can be conceived without contradiction but cannot be comprehended.²⁸

Some natural beings appear to have a form that is an end within itself, and that form is contingent to the normal use of our determinative judgment – that judges by efficient causes – and that contingency of this form, which comes from its empirical complexity, is the ground that allows our reason to admit the causality of this being as only possible in an analogous way to our causality as an end in itself – judging it as possible only by a final cause.²⁹ Kant gives us examples and requirements of these beings in the §64 of the *Critique of the power of judgment* (1790):

²⁷ Ibid., 5:360.

²⁸ Ibid., 5:371.

²⁹ “But now since the particular, as such, contains something contingent with regard to the universal, but reason nevertheless still requires unity, hence lawfulness, in the connection of particular laws of nature (which lawfulness of the contingent is called purposiveness), and the *a priori* derivation of the particular laws from the universal, as far as what is contingent in the former is concerned, is impossible through the determination of the concept of the object, thus the concept of the purposiveness of nature in its products is a concept that is necessary for the human power of judgment in regard to nature but does not pertain to the determination of the objects themselves, thus a subjective principle of reason for the power of judgment which, as regulative (not constitutive), is just as necessarily valid for our *human power of judgment* as if it were an objective principle” (Ibid., 5:404).

First, a tree generates another tree in accordance with a known natural law. [...] Second, a tree also generates itself as an *individual*. [...] *Third*, one part of this creature also generates itself in such a way that the preservation of the one is reciprocally dependent on the preservation of the other.³⁰

We can see that the main factor in these examples is a concept of the whole that interconnects its parts finalistically, that is, as the end and cause of the parts – and that each part is also seen as contributing to the balance and production of one another with the whole as the end – in which nothing is in vain. These beings, which we can summarize as having a life, we find in nature and we cannot fully understand them without the concept of the finality of nature; *they give reality to the idea of nature as an organic totality*.³¹ And this finality is one that is internal to them; that is, it is not a finality that comes from an external creator of nature – the regulative idea that is used in the teleological judgment is the idea of nature, not the idea of god – that prevents and separates the natural sciences from theological speculations. To summarize:

For a body, therefore, which is to be judged as a natural end in itself and in accordance with its internal possibility, it is required that its parts reciprocally produce each other, as far as both their form and their combination is concerned, and thus produce a whole out of their own causality, the concept of which, conversely, is in turn the cause (in a being that would possess the causality according to concepts appropriate for such a product) of it in accordance with a principle; consequently the connection of *efficient causes* could at the same time be judged as an *effect through final causes*. In such a product of nature each part is conceived as if it exists only *through* all the others, thus as if existing *for the sake of the others* and *on account of* the whole, i.e., as an instrument (organ), which is, however, not sufficient [...] rather it must be thought of as an organ that *produces* the other parts (consequently each produces the others reciprocally), [...] only then and on that account can such a product, as an *organized* and *self-organizing* being, be

³⁰ Ibid., 5:371.

³¹ “Organized beings are thus the only ones in nature which, even if considered in themselves and without a relation to other things, *must nevertheless be thought of as possible only as its ends, and which thus first provide objective reality for the concept of an end that is not a practical end but an end of nature, and thereby provide natural science with the basis for a teleology*, i.e., a way of judging its objects in accordance with a particular principle the likes of which one would otherwise be absolutely unjustified in introducing at all (since one cannot at all understand the possibility of such a kind of causality *a priori*)” (Ibid., 5:376, *our emphasis*).

called a *natural end*. [...] One says far too little about nature and its capacity in organized products if one calls this an *analogue of art*: for in that case one conceives of the artist (a rational being) outside of it. Rather, it organizes itself, and in every species of its organized products, of course in accordance with some example in the whole, but also with appropriate deviations, which are required in the circumstances for self-preservation.³²

We can now reach the principle that Kant gives us to judge teleologically the organized beings: “This principle, or its definition, states: *An organized product of nature is that in which everything is an end and reciprocally a means*. Nothing in it is in vain, purposeless, or to be ascribed to a blind mechanism of nature.”³³ In other words, we can say that in an organized being, the efficient cause is a final cause, i.e., all its parts are means to sustain the whole being, as well as this totality is also what creates the parts and what pulls the parts together to the same destination, which is the sustainability and development of the being itself; its totality – that is, its internal finality, that makes the whole being a relationship with itself, an end within itself. We already explained that these beings are products of nature given in experience for us, that for their comprehension and investigation we must judge them teleologically. But if these beings are given for us by nature, then does this not open a possibility of thinking the totality of nature as a final cause system that ends within itself? That is precisely what Kant says – this also gives some credibility to these investigations of nature as a totality, because although we can never be sure of nature as a totality because we cannot experience it, we can experience some organic beings within nature that give us some data that could confirm or deny our heuristic idea of nature as a whole:

In this section we have meant to say nothing except that once we have discovered in nature a capacity for bringing forth products that can only be conceived by us in accordance with the concept of final causes, we may go further and also judge to belong to a system of ends even those things (or their relation, however purposive) which do not make it necessary to seek another principle of their possibility beyond the mechanism of blindly acting causes; because the former idea already, as far as its ground is concerned, leads us beyond the sensible world, and the unity of the supersen-

³² Ibid., 5:373-374.

³³ Ibid., 5:376.

sible principle must then be considered as valid in the same way not merely for certain species of natural beings but for the whole of nature as a system.³⁴

The only possibility natural sciences have, if they aim for completeness of their theory, is by completing the gap that we cannot experience with the regulative idea in the teleological judgment – this idea also leads the experiments that scientists conduct in the laboratory. Only by having a supersensible hypothesis can the system of nature be thought of as a coherent totality, thereby also grounding the mechanical way of seeing nature in conjunction with the organic way: “Now, however, the common principle of the mechanical derivation on the one side and the teleological on the other is the supersensible, on which we must base nature as phenomenon”³⁵

Freud, in his investigations into the nature of the human psyche, always deals with these speculations; as we already said, we see that the first topographical model is one that is based on a speculation about the idea of the subject as a totality; the name that Freud gives to this idea is “unconscious”. Reading his works, it is easy to see that the unconscious commands the totality of the subject, in which desire – or the pleasure principle – functions as the final cause that the subject responds to, and all the psychic structures, symptoms, and effects – like dreams³⁶ – are related to how we deal with the unconscious desires. In *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920) the speculation is expanded; this leads, in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), to the proposal of

³⁴ Ibid., 5:381. Also: “It is in fact indispensable for us to subject nature to the concept of an intention if we would even merely conduct research among its organized products by means of continued observation; and this concept is thus already an absolutely necessary maxim for the use of our reason in experience. It is obvious that once we have adopted such a guideline for studying nature and found it to be reliable we must also at least attempt to apply this maxim of the power of judgment to the whole of nature, since by means of it we have been able to discover many laws of nature which, given the limitation of our insights into the inner mechanisms of nature, would otherwise remain hidden from us.” (Ibid., 5:398).

³⁵ Ibid., 5:412.

³⁶ It is interesting to notice that Kant also made a speculation about how dreams are also something that responds to a final causality of nature – and some of the speculation is relatable to psychoanalysis when he says that dreams by affection relieve some of our stress: “I would ask whether dreams (from which our sleep is never free, although we rarely remember them) might not be a purposive arrangement in nature, since, when all the motive forces in the body have relaxed, they serve to move the vital organs internally by means of the imagination and its great activity (which in this condition often amount to an affect); and in the case of an overfilled stomach, where this movement during nocturnal sleep is all the more necessary, they commonly play themselves out with all the more liveliness; consequently, without this internal motive force and exhausting unrest, on account of which we often complain about dreams (which nevertheless are in fact perhaps a remedy), sleep, even in a healthy condition, might well amount to a complete extinction of life” (Ibid., 5:380).

a second topographical model – that subsumes the first – which opens up to a speculation about the finality of nature as a whole, that the unconscious subject, being a part of nature, is also contained. The finality that Freud proposes as a speculation is the *death drive*, i.e., the hypothesis that all organic life tends and wills to return to the inorganic state³⁷ – so all the unconscious effects are restructured as expressions of the drives that command the life of the subject. He tries to prove this heuristic thesis using the biological literature of his time, but he knows that he cannot prove it with certainty and doubts the capacity of science to ever find secure answers for these questions; thus, thinking as a Kantian.³⁸ We showed the Kantian background of Freudian speculation. Now, the death drive, as well as the return to the inorganic as its finality, will be discussed below.

Final Considerations: A teleology in the death drive

In this essay we identified some elements of teleology in Kant's work, as well as observed how the Kantian project reverberates in Freud's way of thinking. Kant's influence on Freud appears in the author's way of thinking, which, as previously noted, passes through the inheritance of his own academic formation.³⁹ We show how Freud, in his frequent movements of substitution and alteration of his theory, presents the *death drive* as a concept at the turn of the 1920s.⁴⁰ This turn showed even more clearly the Kantian roots in the speculative method of psychoanalysis, as now Freud deals with speculations about not only the totality of the subject as unconscious but also with the totality of nature, i.e., life, as death drive. Subsequently, we will present some broad articulations on the observation of a teleology in the death drive, as well as discuss related elements, such as

³⁷ Freud speaks of a double finality in *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920), life drive (*Eros*) is also a finality that reaffirms itself in nature, but we can read the death drive as the primary finality since the inorganic was here before the organic life.

³⁸ As he says in the final passages of *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920): "This turn raises a host of other questions to which we can at present find no answer. We must be patient and await fresh methods and occasions of research. We must be ready, too, to abandon a path that we have followed for a time, if it seems to be leading to no good end. Only believers, who demand that science shall be substitute for the catechism they have given up, will blame an investigator for developing or even transforming his views. We may take comfort, too, for the slow advances of our scientific knowledge" (Ibid., pp. 63–64).

³⁹ Loparic, Z., 2003. De Kant a Freud: um roteiro. *Natureza Humana*, 5(1), pp. 231–245. doi: <https://doi.org/10.59539/2175-2834-v5n1-778>.

⁴⁰ We do not overlook the fact that the concept of death drive – and concepts with certain similarities – had already been used by other psychoanalysts prior to its use in *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920).

the idea of progress, in Kant and Freud.

In *Critique of the power of judgment* (1790), Kant suggests that there are good reasons to believe that nature, based on particular laws, has certain subjective purposiveness.⁴¹ For the author, when we observe nature, it seems to have some organization. The perception of an organization in nature can lead us to see that nature does not act contingently, but that elements of nature seem to have a certain relationship with each other. This organization of nature appears to have a finality, which Kant understands as *teleology*: a purpose inherent in nature and the beings that make it up. Nature has an apparent reason for being.

As argued, Freud is influenced by some speculative positions of Kant, and we point out that Freud does not hide the speculative character when exploring a finality of the death drive in nature. The first sentences of part IV of *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920) are regarding this speculative consideration: “What follows is *speculation*, often far-fetched *speculation*, which the reader will consider or dismiss according to his individual predilection. It is further an attempt to follow out an idea consistently, out of curiosity to see where it will lead”.⁴² The referenced passage is located precisely in the pages that precede Freud’s proposal about the return to the inorganic as a finality of nature.

Alongside Freud, we can observe life as a contingency of nature that initially appears bereft of an intrinsic developmental intention. In its primitive form, its primary intentionality – the first drive – would be to return to its previous state – the inanimate – in a process analogous to the psychic apparatus’s search for stability, a proposal influenced by Fechner. These suggestions contrast with elements that we identify as aligned with Freud’s idea of progress, as we will present further.

An element of the death drive in Freud, its regressive character, identified through repetition, can be observed as a force that directs life and nature in a regressive movement with the aim of returning to the inorganic state, a hypothesis set out especially in *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920). Repetition offers a direction to the death drive, and we analyze how Freud explores, from a speculative point of view, a purpose for the death drive. By evaluating the suggestions of a finality of nature from Freudian thought, especially in relation to the phenomenon of the death drive, we are able to perceive a certain movement that we propose can be revealed as a Freudian teleology: a continuous tendency in nature to return to a state of stability, avoiding unpleas-

⁴¹ Kant, I., 2002. *Critique of the power of judgment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴² Freud, S., 1955. Beyond the pleasure principle. In: Freud, S. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud – Volume XVIII*. London: Hogarth, p. 24 (*our emphasis*).

ant excitations. Based on considerations about the apparent purpose of this movement in nature, we identify a possible Kantian influence on teleological thinking in Freud's concept of death drive.

Nevertheless, we intend to highlight an apparent divergence within this teleological framework. When Kant looks at animals and tries to identify a purpose of nature,⁴³ this purpose seems to be progressive, directed towards the development and adaptation of species in the world. Freud, on the other hand, by projecting his gaze beyond the pleasure principle onto species, suggests that when the first forms of life appeared, they immediately returned to their previous state, the pre-life state. The author establishes this relationship from his evolutionary perspective, wherein the initial life forms had a very short life expectancy, which expands with the development of the species. However, even in subsequent species in an evolutionary chain, the movement to get back to the previous state remains.⁴⁴

We do not ignore the fact that Freud is affected by an idea of progress, which brings some of his considerations about the development of nature closer to Kant's perspectives. We can see that Freud is influenced by a positivist tradition when he considers stages in the development of worldviews (*Weltanschauung*). The author suggests that the civilizing process would be composed of three worldviews: animistic, religious, and scientific, a conceptualization very similar – or even analogous – to Comte's law of the three states, in which human conceptions pass through the states: theological (or fictional), metaphysical (or abstract), and scientific (or positive). One difference lies in the fact that, for Freud, later worldviews preserve characteristics of previous stages, and it is possible, for example, to observe the persistence of manifestations of animism in the scientific worldview. This aspect of the preservation of previous characteristics can also be recognized in the suggestion that nature possesses a force that directs it to return to the simplest state of matter, and that this force would also manifest itself in the beings that followed – as well as descended from – primitive life forms.

The influence of evolutionism on Freud goes further. The author puts forward the hypothesis of the recapitulation of ontogeny in phylogeny, profoundly inspired by Haeckel. We consider that the proposal of the recapitulation theory may have influenced Freud's way of thinking about the action of the death drive in nature, and not just in the subject. The death drive in nature would have the same finality as its expression in the subject: the search for

⁴³ Kant, I., 2002. *Critique of the power of judgment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁴ Freud, S., 1955. Beyond the pleasure principle. In: Freud, S. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud – Volume XVIII*. London: Hogarth, pp. 7–64.

maximum stability, with a yearning towards a state prior to the animate.

The teleology in Kant and in Freud seems to share the same format, but in divergent or even opposite directions. The death drive makes Freud reconsider his ponderations regarding progress in civilization, but a structure of the finality of nature seems to be conserved in Freud's writings. This turning point is not so clear or definite, and it is not possible to locate it in a single and precise moment such as "the turn of the 1920s". However, the proposal of the death drive represents a sufficient milestone allowing Freud to reinterpret important claims from the past.

While in *Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan aim* (1784), Kant seems to bet on an advancement of the human species based on the idea of progress, in which civilization seems to evolve with a moral finality – even through conflicts –⁴⁵ in Freud, on the other hand, the hypothesis of a development seems to be jeopardized. From Freud's perspective, *civilization* precisely consists in distancing itself from nature. In *The future of an illusion* (1927), he underlines that he intentionally does not make a distinction between culture (*Kultur*) and civilization (*Zivilisation*).⁴⁶ Starting from the *primal myth*, the so-called "scientific myth" present in *Totem and taboo* (1913), Freud explores a hypothesis regarding the emergence of civilization, and consequently we can explore the emergence of morality, law, social structures, religion, exogamy, monogamy, prohibition of incest, family, and other elements of the culture.⁴⁷ Culture here is seen as the moment when man distances himself from nature through repression, carried out in an internal direction (the repression that the subject exerts on his own wills) and an external direction (the repression that the subject imposes on others, preventing them from carrying out their wills arbitrarily and consequently damaging the civilizing structure). In 1930, the development of culture – synonymous with distancing itself from nature – was found to be one of the causes of the discontents in civilization, in an almost homonymous work. For Freud, the more culture advances, the greater the neurosis – and consequently, the greater the discontents.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Kant, I., 2007. *Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan aim*. In: Zöllner G.; Loudon, R. B. *Anthropology, History, and Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 107–120.

⁴⁶ Freud, S., 1961. *The future of an illusion*. In: Freud, S. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud – Volume XXI*. London: Hogarth, pp. 1–58.

⁴⁷ Freud, S., 1955. *Totem and taboo*. In: Freud, S. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud – Volume XIII*. London: Hogarth, pp. 1–162.

⁴⁸ Freud, S., 1961. *Civilization and its discontents*. In: Freud, S. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud – Volume XXI*. London: Hogarth, pp. 64–145.

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