



A New Perspective on Anxiety: Anxiety Regarding the Theory of Drives in Freud

Kaygı Üzerine Yeni bir Bakış Açısı: Freud'un Dürtü Kuramı Bağlamında Kaygı

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Abstract

The phenomenon of anxiety is taken into account by a myriad of philosophical approaches and it is shown that this phenomenon has a crucial role in providing insights into the human being. Although lots of thinkers have their own contributions to the discussion on anxiety, very few have been able to change the course of the history of this discussion with such a ground-breaking thought as Freud's. He offers a novel approach to central questions concerning the role of anxiety in the construal of the human being. Freud's account on anxiety has been examined by many scholars but very few of them takes anxiety into account regarding his theory of drives, because the death drive theory seemingly stands out from his understanding of anxiety. This paper claims that there is a connection between anxiety and Freud's theory of drives. In doing so, I will provide a different perspective on anxiety regards the death drive (qua Thanatos) and the life drive (qua Eros) in order to enrich our understanding of Freud's account and try to respond some criticism of his understanding by showing how Freud's understanding of anxiety goes beyond the relation between mother and a child, or the Oedipus complex.

Key Words: Anxiety, the death drive (qua Thanatos), the life drive (qua Eros), the Oedipus complex.

Öz

Kaygı olgusu pek çok felsefi yaklaşım tarafından ele alınmış ve gösterilmiştir ki bu olgu insanı anlama üzerine fikirler sağlamıştır. Gerçi pek çok düşünür kaygı tartışmasında kendi katkılarını verseler de ancak birkaçı Freud'unki gibi çığır açan bir fikirle bu tartışmanın seyrini değiştirebilmiştir. Freud insanın yorumlanmasında kaygının rolüyle ilgili esas sorulara yenilikçi bir yaklaşım sunmuştur. Freud'un kaygı anlayışı pek çok uzman tarafından incelenmiştir fakat çok azı kaygıyı onun dürtü teorisiyle birlikte ele almıştır çünkü ölüm dürtüsü teorisi görünürde kaygı anlayışının dışında durmaktadır. Bu makalede ise Freud'un dürtü teorisi ile kaygı anlayışı arasında bir bağ olduğu iddia edilecektir. Bunu yaparak, yaşam (Eros) ve ölüm (Thanatos) dürtüleriyle ilişkili olarak kaygı üzerine farklı bir bakış açısı sunulacak ve böylece Freud'un anlayışı zenginleştirilecek ve kaygı anlayışının nasıl anne ve çocuk ilişkisinin ya da Oedipus kompleksinin ötesine geçtiğini göstererek Freud üzerine genel bazı eleştirilere cevap verilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kaygı, ölüm dürtüsü (Thanatos), yaşam dürtüsü (Eros), Oedipus kompleks.

Freud claims that an analysis of anxiety could throw a flood of light on the human being's mental existence. He focuses on his theory of anxiety in a detailed manner as so many other theories and approaches in his books *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1922) and *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1925-1926) then extended it in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1932-3). In this regard, I will try to deepen our understanding about the concept of anxiety in Freud's understanding. In this investigation, I will first introduce Freud's understanding of anxiety in reference to the above-mentioned texts of Freud. Then, in the second part of the paper, I will present Freud's theory of drives. After the presentation of two seemingly disparate mechanisms, I will point out the closer relation between his understanding of Anxiety and his theory of drives and discuss possible outcomes of this approach. In doing so, I will try to delineate our understanding of anxiety in his account by elaborating the struggle between the life drive and the death drive that underlies this mechanism.

According to his understanding, there are two kinds of anxiety: realistic and neurotic anxieties. The first one is about our reaction to the perception of an external danger when something rational and intelligible strikes us – such as, an injury that is expected and foreseen (Freud, 1981: 394). In the case of the latter, there is no rational and intelligible thing. Here it is important to note that according to Freud, the realistic anxiety may be regarded as a manifestation of self-preservation. However, the degree of anxiety affects this defence reaction. If it is excessively great, it paralyzes all actions and



manifestations of the self-preservative drives¹ as well. In detail, the self-preservative drives manifest themselves in increased sensory attention and motor tension. This sensory attention leads to a higher level of active defence. For this reason, Freud calls this preservative element, or *preparedness*, in anxiety as the expedient in contrast to the inexpedient element in the generation of anxiety.

In connection with this, he distinguishes anxiety from fright (*Frucht*) by emphasizing its self-preservative character, expedient element or its preparedness. While distinguishing anxiety from fear, Freud describes anxiety as a state in which the object is disregarded. In other words, it has a quality of indefiniteness and lack of object. On the other hand, fear draws our attention to object (Freud, 1981: 395).

Freud details his understanding on anxiety by stating that there is a kind of freely floating anxiety which is ready to attach itself to any idea that is in any way suitable. Freud calls this state 'expectant anxiety' in which one waits for the most frightful of all possibilities to happen. He claims that there is a relation between the expectant anxiety and the certain employments of libido – i.e., without sufficient discharge of sexual excitation. When the libidinal excitation vanishes, the anxiety appears in the form of expectant anxiety (Freud, 1981: 398). In short, Sexual restriction, the restriction of the life drives, goes together with some kind of anxiousness. These introductory remarks about the relation between kinds of anxiety and the life drive is sufficient now and in part 3, this issue will be dealt with in a detailed manner.

Freud also distinguishes anxiety from phobias, hysterias and obsessions although they accompany or appear in relation to anxiety. Phobias appears as a result of situation when there is more chance of accident, dreaded objects – e.g., snakes, tarantulas etc., and situations, which have something uncanny about them even for normal people, but some of phobias are beyond comprehension – e.g., agoraphobia, the phobias of harmless animas etc (Freud, 1981: 400). In phobias, the same thing appears as in a child's anxiety: unemployed libido is being constantly transformed into an apparently realistic anxiety and thus an external danger is introduced to represent the internal one – i.e., claims of the libido. For the cases of hysteria, Freud states that anxiety may appear as an accompaniment to hysterical symptoms or in some conditions of excitement. In his analysis of hysteria, the patient does not know what s/he is afraid of and s/he can only know what it is by the help of an unmistakable secondary revision. For obsessions as well, Freud claims that anxiety is "screened by the obsessional action and that the latter was only performed in order to avoid anxiety" (Freud, 1981: 400). In this connection, obsessional actions, phobias and hysterias are formed to escape from an unavoidable generating of anxiety. For this reason, "anxiety is in the very centre of our interest in the problems of neurosis" (Freud, 1981: 404).

Up to this point, we understand from Freud's approach that the deflection of libido or the abnormal employment of libido leads to the development of anxiety. Anxiety is a subjective state in which the human being is put by perceiving the generation of anxiety and we call this an affect which includes discharges and certain feelings related to pleasure and displeasure. However, in the essence of the affect, there are repetitions of some particular significant experiences because an affective state would be constructed in the same way as a hysterical attack and like it would be the precipitate/cause

¹ The term '*der Trieb*' is used as 'drive' in this work so it must be distinguished from the term '*der Instinkt*'. *Der Instinkt* is used by Freud to designate rigid, innate behaviour, while drives express themselves in a variety of ways. In the following sections, I elucidate the vicissitude of drives, while an *Instinct* could not have a vicissitude. In other words, it has a fixed pattern of behaviour. On the other hand, Freud uses the term 'drive' in such a way that it refers to a physiological force that creates pressure on an organism to behave in a way that will relieve the pressure, but the way it relieves is not prescribed by the drive and depends on cultural, social and environmental constraints. The Freudian conception of *Trieb* – a pressure that is relatively indeterminate as regards both the behaviour it induces and the satisfying object – differs quite clearly from theories of instinct (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973: 214).



of reminiscence. Therefore, it is crucial to point out that in the core of anxiety, there is *the repetition compulsion*. For Freud, this earliest impression is the *act of birth* which has repeated as a state of anxiety, because "in this act there comes about the combination of unpleasurable feelings, impulses of discharge and bodily sensations which has become the prototype of a mortal danger" (Freud, 1981: 396). Since it is repeated continuously, it has been incorporated into the organism and single individual cannot escape from the state of anxiety.

The Ego and Libido in Relation to Anxiety

After the generation of anxiety, the ego's reaction to a danger and the signal for taking flight take place. As in the hysterias and phobias, the patient treats the internal danger (unsatisfied demand of libido) as though it were an external one. The generation of neurotic anxiety gives place to the formation of symptoms, which results in the anxiety being bound.

But how is "a flight of the ego from its libido after all supposed to be derived from that libido itself?" (Freud, 1981: 405). To answer this question, Freud turns to the genesis of anxiety in children and the source of the neurotic anxiety which is attached to phobias. Children by being frightened of all strangers or of new situations and things due to their weakness and ignorance repeat the behaviour of prehistoric human beings who are also helpless and ignorant. A child is frightened of a strange thing or a stranger because he is adjusted to the sight of a familiar and beloved figure - i.e., his mother. In this case, what is transformed into anxiety is his unemployable and discharged libido - in other words anxiety appears as a result of the inhibition of his life drives. In fact, this transformation is only a repetition of the first state of anxiety during the act of birth - namely the separation from the mother. In these moments, in the act of birth and repetition of it, the pleasure principle does not take place. Consequently, there are two origins of anxiety: a consequence of a traumatic moment and a sign that stigmatizes a repetition of that moment.

What is fundamental at birth, as in every situation of danger, is that it prints to the mental experience an extremely intense state of excitement, which is felt as displeasure, and that is not possible to dominate by discharge. A state such as that, in face of which the efforts of the pleasure principle fail, we shall call "traumatic moment" . . . What is feared Ö is invariably the emergence of a traumatic moment which cannot be confronted by the regular rules of the pleasure principle (Freud, 1973: 126).

The case, where for child "if someone speaks, it gets lighter" (Freud, 1981: 407), shows us that this situation seems to be a realistic anxiety but it stems from a neurotic one. "Every hysterical phobia goes back to an infantile anxiety and is a continuation of it. If, however, the libido belongs to psychical impulse which has been subjected to repression, then circumstances are re-established similar to those in the case of a child in whom there is no distinction between conscious and unconscious (Freud, 1981: 409).

The idea can be repressed but what happens to the affect that is attached to the repressed idea? When the vicissitudes of libido is subjected to repression, the affect is transformed into an anxiety or discharges as an anxiety according to Freud. "An affect is a process of discharge and must be judged quite differently from an idea" (Freud, 1981: 410). Although Freud here do not clarify what the affect is in a detailed manner; there is a link between anxiety and the system of unconscious, since the generation of anxiety is related to the affect that is attached to the repressed.

Theory of Drives

In order to examine the human being's mental existence, Freud's theory of drives will be examined and clarified, because Freud endeavours to give an account of the organic life by presenting his theory of drives. For Freud, the vicissitudes of the drives are historical vicissitudes so that the dynamics of



these drives builds and constructs the human being. At the earliest stage, Freud constructs his theory of drives around the antagonism between the sexual drives and the ego drives which are respectively about the libidinal/sexual and self-preservation. As Marcuse points out the sexual drive is first only one specific drive (or, rather, a group of drives) which is restricted and defined by its specific aim, object (Marcuse, 1974: 22). However, psychoanalysts observed that libido is regularly withdrawn from the object and directed onto the ego; and in the studies on the early phases of libido development in children, in the case of first narcissism, they found out that the ego is the reservoir of the libido. In this connection, the ego took place among the sexual objects and, thus, the narcissistic libido – the libido which is directed onto and resided in the ego – is a manifestation of energy on the part of sexual drives which is identified with the self-preservation drives (Freud, 1984: 325). Therefore, the original opposition of the ego drives and the sexual drives is no longer acceptable.

By focusing on a crucial concept, “the compulsion to repeat”, which is a concealed tendency in living organisms and which we also observe in the case of anxiety, Freud modifies his theory and recognizes that although it gives unpleasure to the organism, the organism has propensity to re-experience what is unpleasurable. Freud realizes that there seems to be no way to explain the clinical phenomenon of traumatic neurosis of war in terms of the functioning of the pleasure principle and this leads him to postulate a new principle in order to explain the propensity for the unpleasurable. As Ricoeur points out, the compulsion to repeat is one of those processes prior to other principles such as the pleasure principle, the reality principle etc., because repetitions of the same act are actually attempts to master the stimulus which gives unpleasure to the organism (Ricoeur, 1970: 285) and it re-establishes the earlier state of the psychical apparatus in order to make it ready for the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Freud realizes that the aim of this process is to change the state of the mental apparatus from free-flowing state into a quiescent one. For instance, in traumatic neurosis Freud realizes that there are abnormal activities that attack the mental apparatus directly. He sees that the repetition of this experience is the mind’s attempt to heal itself and to return its initial state. Although Freud observes this tendency in the mental lives of individuals at first, he arrives at a theory according to which it is a feature of all organic life. For Freud, this universal tendency indicates a universal attribute of drives according to which a drive “is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things” (Freud, 1984: 308). Therefore, Freud recognizes “an expression of the conservative nature of living substance” (Freud, 1984: 309) in drives. They are toward repetition, conservation rather than change and development.

In connection with this perspective, “the living entity would from its very beginning have had no wish to change; if conditions remained the same, it would do no more than constantly repeat the same course of life... Those [drives] are therefore bound to give a deceptive appearance of being forces tending towards change and progress, whilst in fact they are merely seeking to reach an ancient goal of life” (Freud, 1984: 310) which is the oldest state of things, an initial state, death which is the most quiescent state. In this regard, life itself is, rather than the will to develop or to change, will to death and/or will to conserve (Ricoeur, 1970: 290). Since changes are external to life and the phenomena of life itself arises out of the original course of things by external influences, the first drives – so called the death drives, emerge to return life to the inanimate state (Freud, 1984: 311). In order to resist the perpetual influence of the external, the secondary drives – so called the life drives or *Eros* – endeavour to conserve the present state of life. In connection with this, as Marcuse points out, the findings of infantile sexuality and unlimited erotogenic zones of the body anticipated the recognition of the libidinal parts of the self-preservation drives and prepares the ground for the final interpretation of sexuality in terms of *Eros*, the life drive (Marcuse, 1974: 23). Therefore, life, which is comprised of these drives – i.e., *Eros* and the death drive, is the only way which makes possible the deferment of



the return to an inorganic state (Assoun,2000: 88). In other words, Freud modifies his theory in such a way that the monism of sexuality seems to turn into a monism of death.

According to Freud's drive theory, on one hand the death drive, *Thanatos*², strives to return to the initial state, on the other the life drive, *Eros*, tries to preserve life for a period of time. Therefore, an antagonism between *Eros* and the death drive inevitably arises. On the level of organisms, *Thanatos* leads organisms to death but by its life-preserving and rejuvenating effect *Eros* endeavours to neutralize the effects of the death drive (Freud, 1984: 323). "If death is the aim of life, all of life's organic developments are but detours toward death, and so called [the life drives] are but the organism's attempts to defend its own fashion of dying, it is particular path to death" (Ricoeur, 1970: 290). For this reason, wherever the death drive is at work, the life drive is at work. In short, "life goes toward death, but sexuality is a great exception in life's march toward death" (Ricoeur, 1970: 291). Therefore, the meaning of the life drive, *Eros*, as a factor that resists the death drive is revealed by the death drive. In accordance with their purpose, the death drive, seeks "to dissolve large units and to bring them back to their primeval, inorganic state. That is to say, as well as *Eros* there was [a drive] of death. The phenomena of life could be explained from the concurrent or mutually opposing action of these two [drives]" (Freud,1991: 310). Instead of destroying itself, under the restriction of *Eros*, *Thanatos* is diverted towards the external world as a drive of aggressiveness and destructiveness. In addition to the discovery of their antagonistic structure and of the common conservative nature, Freud also assumes a displaceable energy, which is itself neutral, but is able to join forces either with an erotic or with a destructive impulse. For this reason, "the two kinds of [drives] seldom – perhaps never – appear in isolation from each other, but are alloyed with each other in varying and very different proportions" (Freud,1991: 310).

Anxiety in Relation to the Theory of Drives

As discussed in the first part, Freud considers the act of birth as a model for anxiety which is based on the unordered situation which leads to suffering in an organism. As discussed in the previous part of the paper the death drive tries to return the organism into a previous state and, for this reason, to dismantle everything. The chaos that is associated with the death drive, in this regard, directly related to the primordial anxiety that leads to the libidinal haemorrhage. Thus, Freud claims that the birth anxiety is the model for the traumatic fact which is *a priori* factor as a feeling of *phylogenetic anxiety* and the origin of the anxiety is a traumatic physical experience which precedes the pleasure principle.

What is fundamental at birth, as in every situation of danger, is that it prints to the mental experience an extremely intense state of excitement, which is felt as displeasure, and that is not possible to dominate by discharge. A state such as that, in face of which the efforts of the pleasure principle fail, we shall call "traumatic moment" . . . What is feared Ö is invariably the emergence of a traumatic moment which cannot be confronted by the regular rules of the pleasure principle (Freud, 1981:117-8).

In this sense, there are two origins of anxiety: the first one that occurs during the moment of a trauma and the second one as an indication or an evidence of the repetition of the first is thereby preceded by the first. As Luciane Falcão details, the first one which is involuntary, automatic, appears in a situation of danger resembling the act of birth and the other one is produced by the ego, in order to point out the dangerous situation and to avoid it, in a situation where there is a possibility of the arise of a traumatic moment. The second one is called the signal anxiety (Falcão, 2013: 148).

² The term *Thanatos* was never used in any Freud's writing, but he used the term occasionally in conversation according to Freud's colleagues (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973: 447).



In the act of birth, or in the situation where this initial or original anxiety occurs, the ego is not developed so that infants cannot create concepts or representations of its experience in order to avoid this traumatic moment. In other words, infant do not have a conceptual thinking that helps it to deal with the traumatic moment. Normally when the ego is developed enough to deal with the traumatic situations,

The ego thereupon helps itself by a technique which is at bottom identical with normal thinking. Thinking is an experimental function carried out with small amounts of energy, in the same way as a general shifts small figures about on a map before setting his large bodies of troops in motion. Thus, the ego anticipates the satisfaction of the questionable instinctual impulse and permits it to bring about the reproduction of the unpleasurable feelings at the beginning of the feared situation of danger. With this, the automatism of the pleasure-unpleasure principle is brought into operation and now carries out the repression of the dangerous instinctual impulse (Freud, 1981: 121-2).

In this connection, when external things that cause a traumatic moment that the ego cannot overcome, the death drive tries to return the previous state and in this motor helplessness the death drive disentangle the libido. The libido expects linking without ever achieving it and then it leaves the ego at the mercy of the death drive. In other words, after catastrophic experiences, if the ego is immature and not capable of taking care of this traumatic event – e.g., at the time of birth, it cannot control the mechanism of drive either. At this moment, the death drive tries to return the previous state, at the time that the external intervention, e.g., the act of birth, has not taken place, and it thereby causes irregularity in the organism. Therefore, there is a strict relation between anxiety and helplessness, or unpreparedness, of an organism, or an infant in this case.

Anxiety is seen to be a product of the infant's mental helplessness which is a natural counterpart of its biological helplessness... just as the mother originally satisfied all the needs of the foetus through the apparatus of her own body, so now, after its birth, she continues to do so, although partly by other means. There is much more continuity between intra-uterine life and the earliest infancy than the impressive caesura of the act of birth would have us believe. What happens is that the child's biological situation as a foetus is replaced for it by a psychical object-relation to its mother. But we must not forget that during its intra-uterine life the mother was not an object for the foetus, and that at that time there were no objects at all (Freud, 1977: 138).

In this connection, although both leads to anxiety in an infant, there is an obvious difference in the issue of the loss of an object or the loss of love from object – e.g., in a situation where a child misses her mother – and the issue of the birth.

The traumatic situation of missing the mother differs in one important respect from the traumatic situation of birth. At birth no object existed and so no object could be missed. Anxiety was the only reaction that occurred. Since then repeated situations of satisfaction have created an object out of the mother; and this object, whenever the child infant feels a need, receives an intense cathexis which might be described as a 'longing' one.... Pain is thus the actual reaction to loss of object, while anxiety is the reaction to the danger which that loss entails and, by a further displacement, a reaction to the danger of the loss of object itself (Freud, 1977: 170).

The Expression of Eros as a Specific Action Saving Organism from the Repetition of Traumas

After the traumatic experiences that cannot be overcome by the ego at the time they occur, repetitions of these moments take place, as discussed previously, as a result of the urges of the death drive. However, repetitions of this presence-absence situation create possibilities of the mental apparatus to create representations of the object or the situation. In other words, a specific action can occur and create a meaning for the mental apparatus. The specific action that is stemmed from this possibility is the expression of *Eros*. During the experience of repetition of a trauma – for instance when every time child feels the absence of the mother – the haemorrhage of the libido takes place and the death drive tries to return to the previous situation, but the life drive tries to preserve the current situation in a more stable way. In other words, a specific action, the creation of a representation of an object, is stemmed from the body in order for it to exist or to continue to live in



its own way. Therefore, an element of psychic apparatus works to create representations. However, according to Freud's account, the primordial anxiety is not transformed into a signal anxiety and it will always remain an experience related to *helplessness* or suffering caused by the actions of death drive, because the death drive will block the preservative movement of the mental apparatus and the intervention of the related partitions of psychic apparatus, especially consciousness. In addition to that, the inhibition of this aggressive drive makes its movement turn into inwards as a threat of mental destruction with its *de-objectalising function*. Therefore, the death drive leaves no free room for erotic libidinal demand, as Falcão states, "by means of guilty conscience, masochism, and the negative therapeutic reaction – states that are created by the effects of arresting the erotic life drive, implying a change of the references to pleasure in favour of another function to be satisfied: pain" (Falcão, 2013: 150). In other words, the primordial anxiety as the interruption of the death drive prevents subjects' psychic development. Since primordial anxiety in terms of the regressiveness serving or tending to extinguish the organism, as stated in the previous part of this paper, is the drive trend towards the previous state; it is the original traumatic source. In this connection, the mental apparatus that cannot overcome the shock, in other words cannot transform the shock into a perceptive meaningful data in the psyche would be trapped in a state of anxiety beyond the pleasure principle related to the primordial anxiety. However, when psychic apparatus is developed enough to control these traumas, it transforms the traumatic quality into a detectable anxiety, the so-called signal anxiety.

In conclusion, the antagonistic structure in Freud's understanding which comprises the antagonism between the life drive (*Eros*) and the death drive (*Thanatos*) – the regressive the preservative – is also preserved in his understanding of anxiety. In other words, the antagonistic relation between these drives – which are also never shown isolated from each other (as discussed in part 2) – underlies the mechanism of anxiety. If we further his understanding of this mechanism to the traumatic experience of the development of the organic from the inorganic, we realize that the external intervention to the inorganic creates the organic and at that moment the tension between them, in other words drives, which seeks to return to initial state emerge. In other words, the emergence of the organic from the inorganic is a traumatic moment, which has the same structure as the act of birth, for all organic living things. In this regard, although Freud never mentions, anxiety is the primordial experience all living creatures have. Since it repeats itself in every act of birth, it is attached to deep parts of unconsciousness. Therefore, Freud's understanding of anxiety goes beyond the relation between mother and a child, or the Oedipus complex. On one hand, anxiety, as a primordial experience of all living creatures, can be considered a link between human beings with other living creatures. On the other hand, human beings' relations or associations with traumatic experiences of anxiety enable them to transform situations, where there are possibilities of traumatic experiences – i.e., anxieties apart from the primordial ones which take place when the ego is not developed, into signals of danger. Therefore, human beings as distinct from other living creatures can conceptualize their anxieties so that they become prepared for them.

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