



Psicologia em Estudo

ISSN: 1413-7372

ISSN: 1807-0329

Universidade Estadual de Maringá

Caropreso, Fátima  
O CONHECIMENTO E O SENTIDO DE REALIDADE NO PENSAMENTO DE SÁNDOR FERENCZI  
Psicologia em Estudo, vol. 24, e42588, 2019  
Universidade Estadual de Maringá

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1807-0329e42588>

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## KNOWLEDGE AND SENSE OF REALITY IN SÁNDOR FERENCZI'S THOUGHT<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** Over recent decades, the work of the Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi has been rediscovered and the importance of his ideas has been acknowledged. However, he is remembered mainly for his technical innovations and his reflections on trauma, even though his work contains many other different contributions. A sophisticated epistemological and metapsychological theory can be found in his writings, which is as yet little studied and appreciated. It is a theory that goes beyond Freud and allows for a deeper understanding of mental processes and the possibility of knowledge itself. This article aimed to analyze and discuss Ferenczi's hypotheses on the development of the sense of reality as they are elaborated in 'O desenvolvimento do sentido de realidade e seus estágios' (1913) and 'O problema da afirmação do desprazer' (1926). It is demonstrated how Ferenczi further develops Freud's hypotheses on the transition from the pleasure principle to the reality principle. He argues, in an original manner, that self-destruction is the condition for knowledge, thus enriching metapsychological views and the understanding of fundamental mental processes as well.

**Keywords:** Sandór Ferenczi; psychoanalytic theory; metapsychology.

## O CONHECIMENTO E O SENTIDO DE REALIDADE NO PENSAMENTO DE SÁNDOR FERENCZI

**RESUMO.** Nas últimas décadas, a obra do psicanalista húngaro, Sándor Ferenczi, tem sido redescoberta e a importância de suas ideias vem sendo reconhecida. No entanto, o autor é lembrado, sobretudo, por suas inovações técnicas e suas reflexões sobre o trauma, embora sua obra comporte muitas contribuições diversas. Pode-se encontrar, em seus escritos, uma sofisticada teoria epistemológica e metapsicológica, ainda pouco estudada e reconhecida. Trata-se de uma teoria que vai além da de Freud e permite um aprofundamento da compreensão dos processos psíquicos e da própria possibilidade do conhecimento. Esse artigo tem como objetivo analisar e discutir as hipóteses de Ferenczi sobre o desenvolvimento do sentido de realidade, elaboradas em 'O desenvolvimento do sentido de realidade e seus estágios', de 1913, e 'O problema da afirmação do desprazer', de 1926. Procura-se demonstrar como ele desenvolve as hipóteses freudianas sobre a transição do princípio do prazer para o princípio de realidade e argumenta, de maneira original, que a autodestruição é condição para o conhecimento, enriquecendo as concepções metapsicológicas e a compreensão dos processos psíquicos fundamentais.

<sup>1</sup> Support and funding: Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq), Research Productivity Scholarshipholder(CNPq)

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**Palavras-chave:** Sándor Ferenczi; teoria psicanalítica; metapsicologia.

## CONOCIMIENTO Y SENTIDO DE REALIDAD EN EL PENSAMIENTO DE SÁNDOR FERENCZI

**RESUMEN.** En las últimas décadas, la obra del psicoanalista húngaro Sándor Ferenczi ha sido redescubierta y la importancia de sus ideas ha sido reconocida. Sin embargo, el autor es recordado, sobre todo, por sus innovaciones técnicas y sus reflexiones sobre el trauma, aunque su obra conlleva muchas otras contribuciones diversas. Se puede encontrar, en sus escritos, una sofisticada teoría epistemológica y metapsicológica, todavía poco estudiada y reconocida. Se trata de una teoría que va más allá de la de Freud y permite una profundización de la comprensión de los procesos psíquicos y de la propia posibilidad del conocimiento. En este artículo se tiene como objetivo analizar y discutir las hipótesis de Ferenczi sobre el desarrollo del sentido de realidad, elaboradas en 'O desenvolvimento do sentido de realidade e seus estágios', de 1913, y 'O problema da afirmação do desprazer', de 1926. Se busca demostrar cómo él desarrolla las hipótesis freudianas sobre la transición del principio del placer hacia el principio de realidad y argumenta de manera original que la autodestrucción es condición para el conocimiento, enriqueciendo las concepciones metapsicológicas y también la comprensión de los procesos psíquicos fundamentales.

**Palabras clave:** Sándor Ferenczi; teoría psicanalítica; metapsicología.

### Introduction

In the last decades, the work of the Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi (1873-1933) has come out of oblivion and the importance of his ideas has been recognized in a series of events and academic publications (Peláez, 2013). Rachman (2007) comments that European and American psychoanalysts have sought to rehabilitate his reputation, damaged by Ernest Jones's claims that his dissent from Freudian psychoanalysis would have occurred because of his psychopathology. However, as Câmara and Herzog (2014) comments, Ferenczi is remembered above all for his technical innovations and his reflections on trauma, although his work includes several other contributions, which are not limited to these two lines of research and remain poorly explored. Mészáros (2014) argues that Ferenczi's legacy is important not only for psychoanalysis but for academic thinking in a broader sense, especially for those who are interested in interdisciplinary approaches. As Guasto (2011) points out, although Ferenczi is defined as the author of a 'clinical revolution' and it is generally considered that technique is his main concern, a new metapsychology can be found in his writings. In the work of the author in question, we find a sophisticated epistemological and metapsychological theorization, which has not yet been studied and recognized, which goes beyond Freud's and allows a deepening of the understanding of mind processes and the possibility of knowledge.

Questions about reality, about what we know and as we know it, have been the focus of Freud's attention since his earliest psychoanalytic writings (Kirshner, 1993). Ferenczi also turns to this question and attaches great importance to it. In the text, 'O

desenvolvimento do sentido de realidade e seus estágios' (Ferenczi, 1992) he presents some hypotheses about how would be given the acquisition of the knowledge capacity of the external world, which are resumed and deepened in the text 'O problema da afirmação do desprazer' (Ferenczi, 1993). In this, the author takes up the ideas he had elaborated in 1913 to reconsider the problem as a whole in the light of Freud's hypotheses in the 1920s. Ferenczi formulates a rich theory about the thought and development of the sense of reality in which he links his hypotheses to Freud's on negation and on the second instinctual dualism and inserts, at the heart of the process of development of the sense of reality, the idea of Spielrein (2014) that destruction is a condition for coming into being.

This article aimed to analyze and discuss Ferenczi's hypotheses about the development of the sense of reality in the two texts mentioned above. We sought to show that he formulates an original theory, in many ways, that deepens the metapsychological conceptions and the understanding of the fundamental mental processes.

### **The acquisition of the sense of reality**

In the text, published in 1913, 'O desenvolvimento do sentido de realidade e seus estágios', Ferenczi (1992) proposes the existence of different stages, in which the child would gradually acquire the capacity to differentiate between what belongs to the self and what belongs to the external world. The Hungarian psychoanalyst takes up the Freudian hypothesis, presented in 'Formulaciones sobre los dos principios del acaecer psíquico' (1998b), on the distinction between an initial stage governed by the pleasure principle and another governed by the reality principle and points out that it remains unexplained, in Freud's text, if the transition between the two stages occurs progressively or in stages. This is the question that interests him and for which he seeks a response in his text of 1913.

In 'Proyecto de psicología' (Freud, 1998d), written in 1895 and published in 1950, Freud makes a first outline of a theory of thought, which is partially taken up in 'La interpretación de los sueños' (Freud, 1998a). In this last text, the thought is conceived from the hypothesis of the 'experience of satisfaction' of the newborn. Freud speculates that when the baby feels hunger for the first time, the accumulated excitement gives rise to motor discharges such as crying and screaming, which act as a means of communication that allows the adult to recognize the child's lacking condition and provide satisfaction of the same, from the food supply. As a consequence, there would be a memory record of the object that gave satisfaction, which would be associated with the representation of hunger, so that, faced with its resurgence, there would be a tendency to occupy, in an intense way, the representation of the object capable of satisfaction of need. Such a tendency is what Freud calls 'desire'. This intense occupation would culminate in a hallucinatory activation of the desired representation and in the execution of the movements (suction) capable of providing satisfaction. Ferenczi (1992) calls this initial period of extra-uterine life a 'stage of hallucinatory omnipotence', since in the case of a well-cared child, such a hallucination would take place effectively, since caregivers would understand its desire and seek to satisfy it as soon as possible, so as to enable the child to continue to feel omnipotent. However, according to Freudian hypotheses, with development, situations in which satisfaction did not occur immediately after the hallucination of the object and the motor discharge - that is, situations in which displeasure persisted - would cause the hallucinatory investment of the representation of desire and consequent motor discharge were inhibited and the child could be able to differentiate

between remembrance and perception. Instead of hallucinating the desired object, the child would begin to occupy it less intensely, so that it would only be remembered, instead of being hallucinated. The child would then have to learn to find the object in the world that would provide satisfaction - it would have to learn to achieve the identity between external reality and the reality of thought. With this, the perception and the knowledge of the external world would begin.

This process, which would intercalate between the inhibition of the hallucination and the motor discharge and the meeting of the desired object, would be the thought for Freud. Thus thought would be a process driven by the tendency to avoid displeasure, so that learning, judgment and knowledge of the world would be prompted by the need to find an object capable of providing satisfaction and, consequently, escape from displeasure (Freud, 1998a, 1998d). Freud formulates the hypothesis that thought consisted, initially, in the activation of motion images, that is, action. With the constitution of language, the possibility of a conscious verbal thought would arise, so that thought and action would differentiate. The immediate goal of the primary form of thought, which would consist in finding the desired object, would, with the progress of mental development, give way to the wider goal of knowledge of the external world. This thought, which Freud calls 'theoretical', and which would be added to the primary 'practical' thought, would ultimately seek to know the world to facilitate the attainment of objects capable of satisfying the needs. Therefore, the assumption that every thought is driven by necessity and ultimately aimed at the avoidance of displeasure (Caropreso, 2001) is held in theory. The passage from a hallucinatory process - without inhibitions, which would ignore the external world - to an inhibited process, which would take reality into account and gradually adapt to it, would mark the transition from the 'pleasure principle' to the 'reality principle', as Freud clarifies in more detail in his text *Formulations on the two principles of psychic functioning* (Freud, 1998b).

Ferenczi (1992) seeks to describe how the substitution of the pleasure principle by the reality principle would take place and argues that this is a slow process, in which the initial omnipotence gradually gives way to recognition of reality. In this process, displeasure would gradually be tolerated, since the acquisition of the sense of reality would have as its condition the acquisition of the capacity to accept displeasure. According to the author, the initial phase of psychism, characterized by the feeling of omnipotence, could be divided into several stages.

In view of the development of the ego in relation to the self-preservation instinct, the first stage of human mental development would consist in what he calls the 'period of unconditional omnipotence'. This stage would correspond to the period of life spent in the mother's body in which it would not be necessary to make any effort to get the nutrients and oxygen necessary for survival. This intrauterine stage of mental development is not addressed in Freudian theory. Ferenczi (1992) argues that:

If, therefore, the human being possesses a mental life when in the womb, although only an unconscious one,—and it would be foolish to believe that the mind begins to function only at the moment of birth—he must get from his existence the impression that he is in fact 'omnipotent'. For what is omnipotence? The feeling that one has all that one wants, and that one has nothing left to wish for. The foetus, however, could maintain this of itself, for it always has what is necessary for the satisfaction of its instincts and so has nothing to wish for; it is without wants (Ferenczi, 1992, p. 42, author's emphasis).

Thus, in the period of unconditional omnipotence, mental life would be characterized by a desireless quietness. It would be exclusively subjected - not only in the imagination and in an approximate way, as Freud supposes, but in reality, and in an effective way - to the pleasure principle.

After birth, the child would enter the 'period of magical hallucinatory omnipotence'. Ferenczi (1992) argues that, with birth, a brutal disturbance occurs in the state of quietness that the child enjoyed in the mother's womb, and then emerges the first desire: to find oneself in the lost situation. Following the ideas presented by Freud in 'La interpretación de los sueños' (1998a), the author points out that the first consequence of such a disturbance is the hallucinatory reinvestment of the abandoned perception stage. He argues, as we mentioned earlier, that in the case of a well-cared child, caregivers instinctively understand its desire and, as soon as it expresses its displeasure, they place it in situations that are close to the intrauterine situation. In this way, from the subjective point of view, 'unconditional omnipotence' would only be modified because the child would have to invest what it wants in a hallucinatory way. There would still be no need to change anything in the external world to actually achieve the full realization of its desires. The notion of causal relationships, or the existence of caregivers, would not be present, so that the baby would feel endowed with a magical force capable of fulfilling all its desires by simply representing its satisfaction.

However, since the desire for instinctual satisfactions would arise periodically, without the external world knowing the moment when the instinct manifested itself, from a certain moment, the hallucinatory representation would no longer entail the actual realization of desire. This would have as a condition the production of certain signals by the child, so that it would be necessary to carry out a motor work so that the situation would change in the sense of its desire, that is, so that the 'identity of representation' was followed by the 'identity of perception'. The child would use motor discharges as if they were magic signs, the emission of which - with an external aid of which it would have no suspicion - would bring satisfaction. Thus, a gesture-language would emerge, which would allow the baby to express specific needs, which, most of the time, would be effectively satisfied, so that it could continue to feel omnipotent. Ferenczi (1992) thus characterizes a third stage of omnipotence: the 'period of omnipotence by the help of magical gestures'.

These three initial stages of mental development, described above, have in common the fact that they present themselves as periods where, in one way or another, omnipotence prevails - 'unconditional, hallucinatory, by the help of magic gestures'. At these stages, there would still be no need for the subject to differentiate him/herself from the external world. In this way, the entire phase of omnipotence would be linked to the predominance of introjective experiences.

As the quantity and complexity of needs increased, the once effective conditions for satisfaction would cease to be. Thus, little by little, the feeling of omnipotence would be abandoned. The human being would then be obliged to differentiate from his/her ego certain evil things that do not obey his/her will. These would constitute an 'external world', so that the differentiation between subjective content and objective content would arise. Thus, the stage of omnipotence, which would correspond to an introjection phase, would gradually give way to the 'stage of reality', which would correspond to a stage of projection (Ferenczi, 1992).

The concept of 'introjection' is defined by Ferenczi as "[...] the extension to the external world of self-erotic interest in the origin, by the introduction of outer objects into the sphere of the ego" (Ferenczi, 1991b, p. 181). According to Pinheiro (2016), such a

concept can be considered the fundamental precursor of the Freudian hypothesis of narcissism. Projection, on the other hand, is conceived as the exclusion of objects previously ego-integrated into the external world. In 'Transferência e introjeção' (Ferenczi, 1991a), he clarifies:

When the child excludes the 'objects' from the mass of her so far unitary perceptions to form with them the 'external world' and, for the first time, opposes them to the ego that belongs more straightforwardly to her; when, for the first time, she distinguishes the 'perceived' object from what is subjectively experienced, she is actually carrying out her first projective operation, the 'primordial projection' (Ferenczi, 1991a, p. 85, author's emphasis).

According to Ferenczi (1992), at the stage of reality the child would remain for a period investing the external world with qualities of itself, so that it would pass through an 'animistic period' in which all things would seem animated to it and it would seek to find, in each object, its own organ or operation. Thus, deep symbolic relations between the human body and the world of objects would be established; the diversity of the external world would be figured through its body. According to Bastos (1993), the notion of the body ego begins to emerge, which would be developed by Freud in subsequent years. Such a symbolic relation between external objects and the body will also be emphasized and developed by Melanie Klein in her theory (Petot, 1991). For Ferenczi (1992), this aptitude for symbolic figuration would enable an improvement of the gesture- language, which would allow the infant to express his/her wishes directly related to his/her body, as well as desires related to the modification of the external world.

Thus, as Alvarez (1997) comments, the fact that the child is lead to project does not mean that it fails to perform introjections. On the contrary, introjection imposes itself as a mechanism capable of establishing the subject's own symbolic universe by causing it to invest the objects of the external world from its own autoerotic form of investment. Verztman (2002) points out that the introjective process would be responsible for the child's ability to enter the world.

Slowly, gesture symbolism would be replaced by verbal symbolism and language would overlap with other modes of representation, since words would allow a much more economical and precise version of desires. Following Freud's hypotheses (1998a), Ferenczi (1992) argues that verbal associations would make conscious thinking possible by allowing associative processes to produce sensory qualities. The conscious thought through verbal signs would make possible a better adaptation to reality and would be the highest achievement of the mental apparatus, says the author.

Ferenczi (1992) maintains that with the entrance into the stage of reality, although the differentiation between the ego and the external world begins to emerge, the feeling of omnipotence would continue to be present for a period of time, and would be abandoned little by little. The author argues that at first the desires that the child would conceive in the form of thinking would be so few and complex that the medium would be able to easily guess them for the most part and seek to accomplish them quickly. In this way, the child would still believe to hold magical powers, which is why this early stage of the stage of reality is called the 'period of magical thoughts and magicwords'.

As the author explains in 'O problema da afirmação do desprazer' (Ferenczi, 1993), personal omnipotence would be gradually abandoned and transferred to other people (parents, gods ...) until, in a final stage - a 'scientific stage of recognition of the world' - the feeling of omnipotence would finally be abandoned.

It can be said, therefore, that for Ferenczi (1992), the development of the sense of reality would be a gradual process, driven by frustration and the need for adaptation. The following passage clearly synthesizes his conceptions:

In general, the development of the reality-sense is represented by a succession of repressions, to which mankind was compelled, not through spontaneous strivings towards development, but through necessity, through adjustment to a demanded renunciation. The first great repression is made necessary by the process of birth, which certainly comes about without active cooperation, without any 'intention' on the part of the child. The foetus would much rather remain undisturbed longer in the womb, but it is cruelly turned out into the world, and it has to forget (repress) the kinds of satisfaction it had got fond of, and adjust itself to new ones. The same cruel game is repeated with every new stage of development (Ferenczi, 1992, p. 51-52, author's emphasis).

These hypotheses formulated in 1913 are complemented and developed in 1926.

### **Knowledge is conditioned by ambivalence and self-destruction**

In 'O problema da afirmação do desprazer', Ferenczi (1993) acknowledges that, at the time of the formulation of the hypotheses of 1913, it was not possible to clarify which internal processes accompany the passage from the stage of omnipotence to that of reality. According to him, such enlightenment became possible with the formulation of the Freudian theory of the second drive dualism and with the ideas presented by Freud in the text 'La negación' (Freud, 1998c).

In 'La negación' (Freud, 1998c), Freud goes a step further in his theory about the passage from the pleasure principle to the reality principle by proposing the hypothesis that the denial of reality consists of an intermediate stage between ignorance and recognition thereof. After a solipsistic period, in which the external reality would simply be ignored, there would be a period of denial, in which the external world - alien to the ego and therefore hostile to it - could have access to consciousness despite displeasure, inasmuch as the latter was denied. In this case, as Ferenczi says: "[...] negative hallucinatory ignoring is no longer successful; the 'pain' is no longer ignored, but becomes the subject-matter of perception as a negation" (Ferenczi, 1993, p. 394).

In this sense, there would be an initial stage in which the displeasure outer world would be ignored, an intermediate stage in which it would be denied, until, at last, the recognition, the affirmation, of displeasure would arise. The problem of the acquisition of the reality sense would, therefore, be the problem of acceptance of displeasure. The point raised by the author is: "[...] what must take place in order that the final obstacle to acceptance may be also removed from the path, and the 'affirmation of an unpleasant' idea (i.e. the complete disappearance of the tendency to repression) made possible?" (Ferenczi, 1993, p. 394, author's emphasis).

Freud's thought indicates, he says, that the affirmation of displeasure is always a dual process, since first there is an attempt to deny displeasure as fact, and then a further effort to deny negation.

From some considerations on clinical phenomena and on the hypotheses formulated by Freud in 'La interpretación de los sueños' (Freud, 1998a), Ferenczi (1992) argues that, without renouncing the fundamental assumption of psychoanalysis that the pursuit of pleasure is the fundamental tendency of the psyche, the possibility of affirming displeasure can only be understood by taking into account the compensation and

avoidance of an even greater displeasure. This is evident in Freudian thought, as well as in the ideas presented by Ferenczi in his text of 1913. However, something else would be necessary to understand this process. He defends the need for a new element to clarify how the acquisition of the sense of reality becomes possible: the presence of the drive defusion.

To illustrate his hypotheses, the author uses the example of a child who wants to suck. If the child is appeased at the right time, it only knows itself, that is, the existence of things foreign to it, including its mother, remains unknown. Therefore, it has no feelings, neither good nor bad, about objects, which, in fact, do not exist for it. When the child suffers from the displeasure of hunger and thirst, Ferenczi (1993) argues, there is a kind of drive defusion in psychic life, which is manifested by uncoordinated motor discharge, crying and other reflex discharges. When the breast is rediscovered, it ceases to be something indifferent, that is, something always available and therefore, need not be known. The breast, then, becomes a 'representation of object' and becomes the target of love and hate.

This example, says Ferenczi (1993), illustrates the Freudian hypotheses, presented in 'La negación', according to which the primary objective of the test of reality is not to find the object corresponding to what is represented, but to 'rediscover it' and that, for such a test to occur, it is necessary that objects have been lost that once provided real satisfaction. Such an example would also illustrate the fact that 'ambivalence', resulting from drive defusion is absolutely necessary for a 'perception of object' to appear. We do not take knowledge of the things that always love us. These are simply included in our subjective ego, argues the author. On the other hand, things that are and have always been hostile to us are simply ignored. But the things that are not unconditionally at our disposal - those that we like because they satisfy us and that we detest because they do not always obey us - give rise to mnemonic traits, to which a character of objectivity is attached. Thus, only the objects that we desire and that frustrate us, that is, that are targets of ambivalent feelings, could be represented; could be known. The acquisition of the sense of reality would therefore have as a condition, the ambivalence resulting from the drive defusion and would have as objective to obtain dominion over such objects. In the words of the author:

It seems as if the two classes of instincts neutralize each other when the ego is in a state of rest, like the positive and negative currents in an electrically inactive body, and as if, in just the same way, special external influences were needed to separate the two currents and thus render them once more capable of action. The emergence of ambivalence would thus be a kind of protective device, instituting the capacity for active resistance in general, which, like the mental phenomenon accompanying it, recognition of the objective world, signifies one of the means of obtaining mastery over it (Ferenczi, 1993, p. 398).

However, although the drive defusion allowed the perception of external objects, it would not guarantee an 'objective', impartial view of them. On the contrary, such objects would alternately become the targets of an equally intense love and hate, according to Ferenczi (1993). In order for objectivity to be achieved, a new drive fusion would have to occur, that is, it would be necessary for the liberated instincts to be inhibited again and rejoined. The author speculates that perhaps this is the process that would ensure the inhibition and postponement of action until the identity between external reality and the

reality of thought is achieved. In this way, the ability to judge and act objectively would essentially be a capacity for hate and love tendencies to neutralize each other.

In the passage from the omnipotence stage to the reality stage, the first painful step would be to realize that a part of good things is not part of the ego and that it is necessary to differentiate it as an 'external world'. One should also realize that something unpleasant can be produced in one's own ego. We have to accept that some unpleasant things, which we once believed belong to the world, really belong to us, and we must also accept that good things, which we had the illusion of belonging to us, are actually part of the external world. According to Ferenczi, this recognition would have as a condition the drive defusion. The next step in the process of affirmation of unpleasure, or recognition of reality, would be from the new drive fusion, which would allow a neutralization of the drives of life and death and a more impartial perception of the object. Thus, to know the objects objectively, it would be necessary to inhibit the aggressiveness directed to them, which would be done from the connection promoted by the life drive. Therefore, the author affirms that "[...] that recognition of the surrounding world is actually a partial realization of the Christian imperative: Love your enemies" (Ferenczi, 1993, p. 400).

Ferenczi (1993) points out that the process of including hostile parts from the external world in the ego and renouncing loved parts of it, implied in recognition and adaptation to reality, involves a 'masochistic' modification of the direction of aggression. We can infer that such masochism can be understood in two senses. On the one hand, parts that once had the illusion of belonging to me must be destroyed; I have to renounce them. On the other hand, my hostile parts that were projected into the world have to be included in the ego, so aggressiveness turned to the world must turn to the ego. This self-destruction of parts of the ego, however, would result in becoming (coming into being?) it would be the impeller of the process of knowledge and adaptation to reality, since it would be from it that would arise the possibility of representation of external objects and that the sense of reality would develop. In the author's words:

The remarkable thing about this self-destruction is that here (in adaptation, in the recognition of the surrounding world, in the forming of objective judgements) destruction does in actual fact become the I 'cause of being'. A partial destruction of the ego is tolerated, but only for the purpose of constructing out of what remains an ego capable of still greater resistance [...] In the same way the Eros liberated by instinctual defusion converts destruction into growth, into a further development of the parts that have been protected (Ferenczi, 1993, p. 402, author's emphasis).

In this passage, Ferenczi refers to the hypothesis, presented by Sabina Spielrein in 'A destruição como origem do devir' (Spielrein, 2014), that destruction would necessarily result in creation. In this text, the author maintains that the destruction, impelled by the 'death instinct' (*Todesinstinkt*), would be condition for the creation; for becoming. For her, the sexual instinct (*Sexualinstinkt*) would be composed of a destructive impulse - by the instinct of death - and another reproductive and the destruction would be condition for the emergence of the new and for the preservation of life.

Spielrein's concept of death instinct departs significantly from that of Freud. Among other things, for her, the death instinct would be internal to the sexual instinct and not an independent impulse and opposed to that of preservation of life. Moreover, according to her hypotheses, the death instinct would not aim at the annihilation of life as a whole, but rather the destruction of the ego and such destruction would be a condition and necessarily result in the creation of something new, unlike Freud (Caropreso, 2016, 2017). Although Ferenczi maintains the Freudian assumption that the death drive is a class of

drives independent of the life drive, distancing in this respect from Spielrein, he links it to a constructive aspect by proposing that destruction is a condition for becoming; that the destruction of the ego is a condition for the representation and knowledge of the world. At this point, his hypotheses are close to those of the psychoanalyst. Harris (2015) argues that it is possible to find echoes of Spielrein in Ferenczi's thinking.

For Ferenczi, therefore, the destruction of parts previously incorporated in the ego would allow the constitution of mnemonic traces, so that the destruction drive would give the initial impulse in the process of acquiring the sense of reality. The next step, however, would be given by Eros:

I have no hesitation in regarding even memory-traces as scars, so to speak, of 'traumatic impressions, i.e. as products of the destructive' instinct, which, however, the unresting Eros nevertheless understands how to employ for its own ends, i.e. for the preservation of life. Out of these it shapes anew a psychical system, which enables the ego to orientate itself more correctly in its environment, and to form sounder judgements. In fact, it is only the destructive instinct that wills evil while it is Eros that creates good out of it (Ferenczi, 1993, p. 402, author's emphasis).

In this way, self-destruction would make possible the constitution of mnemonic traces, so that memory would be its product. On self-destruction would depend the possibility of recognition and judgment; would depend the possibility of differentiation between perception and remembrance, which would be the basis of thought and adaptation to the external world. Moreno and Coelho (2013), in commenting on the Ferenczi hypotheses about trauma, in the face of the impossibility of eliminating the excitation, the only escape valve of the mind is self-destruction, a kind of autoplasmic adaptation to the situation. Eros, however, can inhibit the process by giving place to a new consolidation, so that any adaptation would be preceded by an inhibited attempt at disintegration. Thus, using the words of Gondar (2013), for Ferenczi, "[...] the movements of creation and expansion are made from fragments, the remains of a destruction or an active self-destruction" (Gondar, 2013, p.32).

Ferenczi (1993) affirms that the work of thought, which is inserted between sensibility and action, consists of a work of calculation between two objects capable of provoking greater or lesser displeasure. This calculation work would be done unconsciously, so that only its product would become conscious. Thus thought, which would be driven by self-destruction and ambivalence and would allow adaptation to reality, would consist of an unconscious calculation that would aim to minimize displeasure.

In 'O desenvolvimento do sentido de realidade e seus estágios', Ferenczi (1992) defends a phylogenetic perspective linked to the development of the sense of reality. He says he believes that one day it will be possible to draw a parallel between the different evolutionary stages of the ego and the steps taken by the human species. In this way, he maintains that, as Freud proposed, the character of the species would be the precipitate of the history of the species. In the text of 1926 on the problem of the affirmation of displeasure, Ferenczi (1993) argues that organic development presents prototypes of the progressive adaptation of the living being to the reality of the external world.

Certain primitive organisms appear to have remained in the narcissistic stage, as they passively await the satisfaction of their desires and die if they are refused. These, he speculates, are so close to the point of emergence out of the inorganic that their drive for destruction has far fewer paths to go, and is therefore much more effective. At a more advanced stage, the organism is able to reject parts of itself that are sources of

displeasure and thus save its own life (autotomy). At another stage of development comes the capacity for adaptation to reality, a kind of organic recognition of the external world that is manifest in the mode of life of beings who live in symbiosis, but also in every act of adaptation. Ferenczi (1993) asserts that his 'bioanalytical' conception allows distinguishing primary and secondary processes even at the organic level, therefore, processes which in the psychic domain are considered as degrees of intellectual development. However, he says, organic adaptation is characterized by a certain rigidity manifested in reflex processes, whereas the capacity for mental adaptation involves a permanent disposition for the recognition of new realities and the ability to inhibit action until the end of the act of thinking.

## Final considerations

According to Ferenczi's hypotheses, after an initial solipsistic stage, characterized by the feeling of omnipotence, in which only the ego would exist and in which any kind of displeasure would be ignored, the child would begin to identify as part of the external world what is displeasing and as part of its own ego that is source of pleasure. At this stage, instead of being ignored, displeasure would be denied. For the displeasure to be recognized, the individual would have to become capable of perceiving that there are things in it that are sources of displeasure and that there are things that are a source of pleasure, but that do not belong to it. Such a perception would have as a condition the ambivalence resulting from instinctual defusion. This would enable the emergence of mnemonic traits and the recognition of external objects. Ferenczi argues that it is necessary to destroy what once belonged to the ego in order to recognize it as something external and that it is necessary to return to love it to know it in an objective way. Thus, a new instinctive drive would be indispensable for a more objective apprehension of the external world. He points out that this process involves a masochistic modification of the direction of aggression; involves a self-destruction of the ego, which becomes the cause of coming into being. Partial destruction of the ego is tolerated with the aim of building, from what remains, a stronger ego, capable of adapting to reality. Self-destruction would therefore be a condition for memory, for knowledge, for judgment, and for adaptation to reality.

Ferenczi's theory of the acquisition of the sense of reality is based on Freudian hypotheses, but goes beyond these, since in Freud's work there is no such detailed description of what the stages of the process are, just as there is no explicit theory about the accompanying drive processes. The Hungarian psychoanalyst proposes that the mental life begins already in the intrauterine period, period of maximum sense of omnipotence, due to the exclusive submission to the pleasure principle. With this, it recedes the beginning of the mental life in relation to the Freudian conception. Ferenczi describes the steps of the passage from the pleasure principle to the reality principle, emphasizing the gradual abandonment of omnipotence, and uses the Freudian hypotheses on the drives of life and death and on the mechanism of denial to clarify the accompanying internal processes. Thus, he draws from Freudian theory some consequences for the understanding of the acquisition of the sense of reality that were not extracted or explained by the author himself. Like Spielrein, he places the death drive as the impeller of mental development, linking it to a constructive aspect that is not explicit in

Freud's work. In this way, the author's idea that destruction is a condition for becoming is at the heart of the process of knowing and adapting to the external world.

We can say, therefore, that Ferenczi elaborates an original theory about the process involved in the acquisition of objective knowledge. His theoretical contribution remains poorly explored and recognized and deserves greater attention from those interested in psychoanalytic theory and the history of psychological ideas.

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*Received: Apr. 25, 2018*

*Approved: Sep. 26, 2018*

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