

The Need Not To Believe: Freud's Godlessness Reconsidered

In considering Sigmund Freud's identity as a Jewish man of the 19th and 20th centuries I (Richards, 2008) have argued that one must consider three distinct strands. The first of these strands, and the subject of numerous studies both within psychoanalysis and without, is Freud's commitment to cultural assimilation via a well-rounded classical education and participation in the wider world of European science and letters—to wit, the tradition of *Bildung* as an educational, moral, and assimilationist ideal, one shared by many of Freud's Jewish contemporaries (Richards, 2006). This assimilationist strand was not without its ambivalent underside for Freud and for many of his Jewish contemporaries. In terms of Freud's own biography, this strand begins quite early in Freud's life, literally in his seventh year when his father began schooling him in that great Enlightenment and assimilationist text, The Phillipson Bible, and it can be charted as a major theme in his identity throughout his adolescence and adult years. The second strand in Freud's identity derives from his response to antisemitism, which first became widespread, and virulent, in Vienna from 1881 onward. Freud's response was always one of defiance, but its particulars evolved over the course of his adult life with the development of psychoanalysis and with the subsequent evolution of the psychoanalytic movement. I cannot chart all its nuances here, but I should note that Freud's response entailed a heightened sense of himself as a Jew combined with an enduring sense that the Jewish tradition is favorable to the development of intellectuality generally, and of a scientific worldview particularly. Also to be noted is that at the end of his life, Freud finally offered his own analysis of the psychological nature of antisemitism in his book Moses and Monotheism (1939).

In this paper, I want to consider the third crucial strand in Freud's Jewish identity—his utter, militant Godlessness. Let us be clear at the outset what is at stake here. To be an unbelieving Jew, a *Gottloser Jude*, was nothing exceptional, neither in the later decades of the 19th century nor in the first decades of the 20th. Indeed, it was commonplace and had been since the *Haskalah* first spread among the Jews of Europe. Nor was godlessness anything German Gentiles considered particularly striking among their own. Freud could have been offhanded about his disbelief. As he did with his adherence to telepathy, he could have treated it as “my private affair, like my Jewishness, my passion for smoking, or other things” (Gay, 1987, p. 148). He could have worn his disbelief lightly, and treated religion with simple indifference as fellow analysts like Karl Abraham, Sandor Ferenczi, and Isidor Sadger did. He could have contented himself with indirection, with a critique of its forms, with suggestions that the father god took on the qualities of the father of childhood, and let it go at that.

Instead, he went out of his way to make religion and belief a target of the new “metapsychology” of psychoanalysis and he kept up the barrage throughout his later career, seemingly as a point of honor. The first real shot came in 1908, with the summary judgment in “Obsessive Actions and Religious Rituals” that religion was “a universal obsessional neurosis” (1908, S.E. 9: 126-127) with the chief difference between it and ordinary neuroses being that the instincts suppressed beneath religious practices are the egoistic and antisocial ones. The paper attacked ritual, which Freud was notoriously opposed to in his personal life, as well as belief. Judaism is perhaps more of a target than Christianity in this paper, though both, along with Islam, are implicated.

But that paper was as nothing compared to the salvo of *Totem and Taboo* (1913), written and published in four installments during the climax of the struggle within the psychoanalytic

movement with his Swiss followers. The themes of this text bespeaks Freud's previous encounter and engagement with them, especially Eugen Bleuler and Carl Jung, and also with the American neurologist James Jackson Putnam. Here the target is more clearly Christian conscience and the practice of communion, beneath which Freud detected a phylogenetically inherited guilt over a primal murder of a primal father, reenacted in a totemic meal. Totem and Taboo was published in book form in 1913. At the time, Freud trumpeted to Abraham that it would "serve to cut us off cleanly from all Aryan religiousness" (Abraham & Freud, 1965, p.139). In a letter to Ferenczi at the same time, Freud made the same point while arguing that the Jewish spirit was more open to science: "...[T]here should not be a particular Aryan or Jewish science.... If these differences occur in conceptualizing objective relations in science, then something is wrong. It was not our desire to interfere with their more distant worldview and religion, but we considered ours to be quite favorable for conducting science" (Brabant et al., 1993, pp. 490-491). In 1930, in a preface for a new translation of Totem and Taboo into Hebrew, Freud added a universalist disclaimer while striking the same note: "it adopts no Jewish standpoint and makes no exceptions in favour of Jewry. The author hopes, however, that he will be at one with his readers in the conviction that unprejudiced science cannot remain a stranger to the spirit of the new Jewry" (1913 [1930], S.E. 13: p. xv).

By the time of the preface for the Hebrew edition of Totem and Taboo, Freud had already had gone into print with the Future of an Illusion (1926). One has to consult this book anew, and compare it to Freud's other works stylistically, to appreciate how bald an attack it is, how lacking in the usual graces of Freud's prose, how fiercely intent it is on hammering home its point.

Robert Paul (1994, p. 836) gingerly cites an interview of perhaps questionable provenance that Freud is alleged to have given on the subject to Rene Laforgue: "This is my worst book!...It isn't

a book of Freud...It's the book of an old man!" The plaint rings true to the text. Be that as it may, thereafter, psychoanalysis itself was on the hook for Freud's irreligion. For the whole crux of the demolition is based on the premise that with the advent of the new metapsychological discipline, science is now equipped with psychological tools adequate to reveal religion as illusion once and for all by revealing its wishful sources. In this context, Freud's invocation of the primal murder of the primal father as the origin of the notion of a father god and of the psychic institution of conscience is almost besides the point, though the argument is there. What is central is the commitment to scientific reasoning, the positioning of psychoanalysis as a discipline within science, and the demolition of illusion as the consequence. Hereafter psychoanalysis itself was on the hook for Freud's irreligion. There was left only the littlest bit of wiggle room for the next generation of analysts; as Freud wrote to Eitingon at the time: "It remains to be seen whether analysis *in itself* must really lead to the giving up of religion" (cited in Gay, 1987, p. 12). I recall my own analytic training in New York City. By this time, the attempt to bleach religion out of psychoanalysis had reached its zenith. My own interest in Judaism was viewed as neurotic—by my Jewish instructors. I remember, too, the effort it took myself and my classmates to convince those in charge not to have classes on Yom Kippur. Stepping back, we see that Freud wed his own irreligion to his science and did this in the most determined, outspoken way. His stance is of a piece with his determination to ban Jewish ritual from his home, not to have his sons circumcised, to celebrate only the conventional Viennese holidays of Christmas and Easter, and to mock religious formulas mushroom hunting with his daughter Anna. If there is anything Freud did believe in, it was science; science, in his view, will go as far in alleviating man's condition as it is possible to go. But by the same token, a true scientific stance, if it is informed by the insights of psychoanalysis, dictates that religious belief

must go—an outworn and no longer needed “illusion.” This attack—again I encourage readers to take a fresh look at the text—was then reprised in Civilization and Its Discontents in 1930 and even more startlingly in Moses and Monotheism, written in 1934 but published in book form only in 1939, where shockingly Freud even sought to dispose of the idea that Moses had been Jewish.

The historian Josef Yerushalmi (1991, p. 68) has already decided that the issue is a psychological one: “Beyond any detail, the very violence of Freud’s recoil against Jewish religious belief and ritual must arouse our deepest suspicion. It displays an aggressive intensity that normally accompanies a rebellion against an equally intense former attachment, more typical of a former Yeshiva student in revolt against Judaism than of one who had received a minimal Jewish education and whose father, we are assured, had become a freethinker by the time he settled in Vienna.” The psychoanalyst and Jesuit William Meissner has decided that the issue is a deep psychological one:

Freud’s religious views perhaps more than any other aspect of his work and his psychology reflect underlying and unresolved ambivalences and conflicts stemming from the earliest psychic strata. Behind the Freudian argument about religion stands Freud the man and behind the man with his prejudices and beliefs and convictions lurks the shadow of Freud the child. A basic psychoanalytic insight says that the nature and content of any thinker’s or creative artist’s work reflects essential aspects of the dynamic configuration and conflict embedded in the individual personality structure. Freud is no exception and his religious thinking unveils these inner conflicts and unresolved ambivalences more tellingly than any other aspect of his work. (Meissner, 1984, p. vii).

But how do we decode Freud's "argument about religion" in terms of his "unresolved ambivalences"? Where do we discover the "shadow of the child" in Meissner's terms? Where do we discover the equivalent of a "former Yeshiva student in revolt against Judaism" in Yerushalmi's? Let's begin with where we don't find it—in Freud's childhood. It may be there, but in terms of the historical record, the cupboard is almost totally bare. We basically don't find God at all. True there was the Christian nurse till age 2 ½ who filled the boy with ideas of the hereafter, but efforts to pursue this early connection into Freud's adult life—such as those of Paul Vitz (1988)—must inevitably shipwreck themselves on the factual shoals that Christian themes are eternally, unalterably alien to Freud, not tantalizing, whenever he is later moved to address them. Then there is the single anecdote where his mother tells him as a child that man was made out of earth and would return to earth and then rubbed the palms of her hands together, producing blackened epidermis, to prove it. The feeling the six year old felt was one of mortality—"Thou owest Nature a death" (1900, S.E 4: p. 205)—and one could wonder if that feeling has any connection with the nameless feeling he had of being a Jew that he later wrote about in a letter to the B'nai B'rith on his seventieth birthday—"dark emotional powers all the stronger the less they could be expressed in words" (E. Freud, 1960, p. 367)—or with the inherited guilt over a primal murder in human prehistory that he posited as the heart of all religious reverence. But as seductive as this invitation to depth psychologizing might be—and great powers of analytic imagination would be needed to explicate it—it is hard to see how it would get us nearer to Freud's "godlessness" as a consciously held, organizing facet of his later years. The next specific evidence of any kind that appears in the historical record comes when Freud is 18 and at University. In his letters to Eduard Silberstein Freud recounts his encounters with the philosopher Franz Brentano, whose arguments for theism temporarily leave Freud

tempted to abandon his own atheism. But a careful reading of these letters (Boelich, 1990) show something very striking. Freud's "temptation" is not real; it is a matter of keeping a scrupulously open mind. What he really wants is to master philosophy, to take Brentano's arguments into better account so that he can more confidently rebut them. This youth does not *need* a belief in God. Nor, which is more important for my argument, does he yet *need* a disbelief in God. If Freud's passion is later for disbelief, if his attitude is one of revolt against religion, it must have sources in his life after the age of 18, after 1874. And whatever those sources, they must grow psychologically stronger as he gets older.

Let me announce forthwith where I am going if the reader has not already guessed it. I don't believe that Freud's godlessness reflected any kind of reaction against *his own belief*. Nor do I think it speaks to any kind of ambivalent reaction against *his own* self-identification as an assimilated Jew. That is to say, I do not think the godless strand in his identity reflects some personal ambivalence about his own beliefs. (Even less do I think, pace Vitz, that it has anything to do with some putative lingering Christian identification.) Rather, I think that Freud's militant godlessness is a reaction against *other peoples' belief*, specifically the beliefs of many of his co-religionists. In this respect, it *is* a manifestation of a deep ambivalence, but that ambivalence is concerned with the condition of his fellow Jews; put another way, that ambivalence has to do with social psychological factors, with social shame, and that is why it became increasingly paramount in Freud's mind in his later adult years.

To return to the suggestion I advanced at the outset, social ambivalence was indeed the underside of an assimilated identity. Even as Jews welcomed the ideal of *Bildung* as intellectual home ground, the necessary divergence from traditional Jewish society brought its own strains. In The Ordeal of Civility, John Murray Cuddihy (1974) critically examines what emancipation meant

for Jewish intellectuals. He situates Freud's creation of psychoanalysis against this backdrop, and, like many historians such as Oscar Handlin (1951) and Sara Winter (1999), he makes clear that the concept of *Bildung* had an expanded meaning for many Jews. This was especially true of the early Jewish analysts; it was their chance to achieve conformity with the cultural mores that would allow them to be integrated into a society and achieve a status that they had historically been excluded from. Yet each adoption of larger European cultural values was also a step away from the Jewish culture of their families. Cuddihy suggests that upwardly mobile urban Jews of the nineteenth century felt embarrassment toward their provincial parents, and "guilt for being thus ashamed" (p. 58).

Certainly, this kind of ambivalence can be seen clearly in the coat of Freud's identity. Though Freud emphasized his humanistic education, he persistently minimized his knowledge of Jewish subjects, including Hebrew and Yiddish. It is customary here to cite as typical his disclaimer to A. A. Roback in a letter of 1930: "My education was so unJewish that today I cannot even read your dedication, which is evidently written in Hebrew. In later life I have often regretted this lack in my education" (E. Freud, Ed., 1960, p. 395). And this kind of disclaimer can be dated back as far as the Interpretation of Dreams: In his analysis of "My Son the Myops" dream in The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud struggles out loud with the Hebrew word *geseres*:

"According to information I have received from philologists, '*Geseres*' is a genuine Hebrew word derived from a verb '*goiser*', and is best translated by 'imposed sufferings' or 'doom.' The use of the term in slang would incline one to suppose that it meant 'weeping and wailing'" (1900, S.E. 5: p. 442). As though he did not quite know what *geseres* meant on his own, either in Hebrew or in Yiddish ("slang" or, more resonantly in German, "*jargon*").

Yet, as has been argued most succinctly by Yosef Yerushalmi (1991), Freud's disclaimers are suspect. Hebrew lay on every facing page of the Phillipson Bible, and the father could read it. A boy so brilliant as Freud would not have picked up some words? And as Yerushalmi (1991, p. 67) points out, we have "firm testimony" that "Jakob Freud would impressively recite the entire text of the Passover Haggadah by heart at the annual Seder"? Moreover, whatever the attention paid or not paid to it at home, Hebrew *was* part of the Gymnasium curriculum. Von Humboldt had put it there at the beginning of the 19th century and if only minimal attention could be paid to it compared to Latin and Greek by the time Freud went to school, that is not the same as *no* attention. In truth, in Gymnasium Freud studied Hebrew, along with the Bible and Jewish history, with his beloved teacher, Samuel Hammerschlag. As for Yiddish, Yerushalmi (1991, p. 69) offhandedly counts 13 words in Freud's published correspondence, including common enough words like *Schammes*, *Schnorrer*, and *Meschugge*, but also words like *Knetcher* (wrinkles), *Stuss* (nonsense), and *Dalles* (poverty). Even more to the point, there is good warrant to believe that Yiddish was Freud's mother's only spoken language. What language, then, did father and mother converse in? As for the son, Freud must have spoken it with her as a child-- and even as an adult when he visited her every Sunday until her death in 1930. Freud may not have been as completely assimilated as he would have liked to appear. He, like many Viennese Jews at the time, was inwardly ambivalent about his Jewish roots and his connections through his father to the Jews of the Galician shtetl. Freud's attitude toward the languages of the Jews reflects this.

Mention ambivalence in connection with Freud and scholars typically hasten to the subject of his father Jakob. Marthe Robert (1976) reminded us three decades ago that psychoanalysis in many ways owes its existence to Freud's self-analysis—an analysis in which the major protagonist was

the father, a “vague father” in Robert’s phrase, who left the son suspended between two cultures. Certainly, in this context, one can review the famous anecdote in The Interpretation of Dreams, where Freud the schoolboy is ashamed at his father’s very “unheroic conduct” (1900, S.E. 4: p. 197) when a Gentile knocked his fur hat, his Shtreimal, into the gutter. In response, Freud felt fury and inwardly turned to the scene between Hannibal and his father Hamilcar Barca for sustenance, thus betraying his immersion in Classical culture. Truly, shame about the father is not hard to detect here, and elsewhere in Freud’s corpus, though it is almost always admixed with affection, something perhaps too little emphasized in the secondary literature. Marianne Krull (1986), meanwhile, took Robert’s argument much further—took it too far in fact—arguing that the central conflict in Freud’s *oeuvre* is the need to cover up the sins of the father. But arguably Krull was on to something, for in his own life Jakob had moved far from his own origins and his own originating cultural and religious beliefs; ambivalence about tradition was something the father arguably felt, no less than the son. Influenced by his grandfather, Siskind Hoffman, Jakob had become a Maskil, an enlightened Jew, more in sympathy with the German Jewish Reform movement than with traditional rabbinical Judaism (see Krull, 1979). In 1855, the year that he married Amalie Nathanson, his second or third wife, Jakob began to wear Western dress. By that time, he was already speaking and signing documents in German rather than Hebrew or Yiddish. Still, he continued to read the Talmud—if not study it—as well as the Bible. (His son Sigmund would later acquire two copies of an edition of the Talmud in German, Hebrew, and Aramaic published in 1929.) Whatever ambivalence the father felt about his own escape from *his* father’s milieu would have informed his instruction of his son. And to be noted is that sometime in the last two years of Gymnasium as he prepared to step forward to the University of Vienna, Freud altered his name, dropping “Schlomo,” which had been his

grandfather's name, and changing "Sigismund," which had lately become a favorite name in antisemitic jokes, to "Sigmund." The paradox of the free-thinking Jakob's course in life was that while he could, and did, recite the entire Seder service from memory, he had raised a son who at the age of 18 would cheerfully write his friend Silberstein that he could scarcely tell the Holidays apart were it not for their differing dinner menus! Eventually, late in the day, Jakob did something about this state of affairs. In 1891, Jakob retrieved the Phillipson Bible that he had tutored the young boy on, had it rebound in new leather, and gave it to his son on the occasion of the latter's thirty-fifth birthday. Here let us note that in 1891 we are well into Freud's adult life. By this time, Sigmund had been in practice for five years—he had opened his office on Easter Sunday, making a point of his own—and had been married for four and a half. He had married into the Jewish intellectual and religious aristocracy of the Bernays family, but had lobbied insistently with his fiancée against her religious observances. Indeed, he did not want to stand beneath the Chuppa at the wedding, enough so that he created a small tempest by insisting on a civil marriage in Germany. But the union was not legally recognized in Catholic Vienna, so a second marriage had to be performed. Freud even considered conversion just to escape the ceremony. He capitulated finally under the friendly advice of his mentor and patron, Josef Breuer, who counseled simply that it would all be "too complicated." Peter Gay (1988, p. 54) describes the denouement thus: "And so on September 14, Freud, the sworn enemy of all ritual and all religion, was compelled to recite the Hebrew responses he had quickly memorized to stamp his marriage valid." Freud promptly "got his revenge or, at least, his way," Gay adds, by not allowing Martha to light the candles on the first Friday evening after the marriage, "one of the more upsetting experiences of her life" (p. 54) Now, some four and a half years after that night, the father makes a present to the son—the Phillipson Bible, which presumably Freud had

left behind in the family home. But besides having the Bible rebound in new leather, Jakob added an inscription—written in Hebrew. And besides being written in Hebrew, the inscription is written in *melitzah*, a widely used device among Jewish writers, both enlightened *maskilim* and their rabbinical predecessors. As a kind of mosaic comprised of fragments of quotations rearranged to convey the sense of the speaker on the occasion, *melitzah* not only requires great familiarity with the Bible and sometimes also with the Talmud on the part of the writer, but it also assumes that the resonances will not be entirely lost on the reader. Consider this carefully: If Freud could not read Hebrew, as he later maintained, and if he could thus not make heads or tails of the passage, let alone at least some of the resonances, then the dedication potentially constitutes one hell of a rebuke. But that possibility would seem to be undercut by the manifest love and admiration of the father in the text. Still a reproach there, a loving one, and it has to do with not keeping to the traditions. One line specifically reads: “Since then the book has been stored like the fragments of the tablets in an ark with me.” As Yerulshami has pointed out in a delicate exegesis (1991, pp. 72-74), the line points to Talmudic sources and to the Talmudic tradition holding that after Moses broke the tablets of the Ten Commandments, the fragments were collected and stored, along with the new tablets, in the Ark of the Covenant. Thus the “Bible story” of Freud’s youth has lain there, with Jakob, like “the fragments of the tablets,” fractured and discarded though rescued and preserved by the father. If Sigmund is reaching for the pinnacles of assimilation in 1891, he is in danger of leaving his originating traditions too far below and behind. Or so the father seems to be implying. This is the kind of voice one hears calling from beyond the grave. In the event, Jakob had five more years to live and when he finally did pass his son would remember him fondly. Even so there was conflict in the family

over the funeral arrangements, with Freud pressing for a simpler ceremony. Let us leave it that ritual occasions seem to have been the occasion of difficulties for Freud personally...

Yerulshami hears an important late echo of the birthday inscription—"the fragments of the tablet in an ark"—in Freud's account of visiting Michelangelo's statue of Moses in St. Pietro, which he first did in 1901, ten years after the birthday gift: "How often have I mounted the steep steps from the unlovely Corso Cavour to the lonely piazza where the deserted church stands, and have essayed to support the angry scorn of the hero's glance! Sometimes I have crept cautiously out of the half-gloom of the interior as though I myself belonged to the mob upon whom his eye is turned—the mob which can hold fast no conviction, which has neither faith nor patience, and which rejoices when it has regained its illusory idols" (1914, S.E. 13: p. 213)." Do we not hear the reproach of the father's *Melitzah* in this? Later, of course, in 1913 when the alliance with the Swiss within the psychoanalytic movement was falling apart, Freud would see someone else in the statue during repeated visits to St. Pietro, namely himself preserving the laws of science against the new psychoanalytic heretics.

Freud's predicament vis-à-vis his father's ambivalence and his father's milieu was reinforced by his own milieu. The Leopoldstadt, the district where Jakob had created the new homestead and where Sigmund grew up, living there till 1883, was one of three districts in Vienna in which Jews typically settled. The historian Marsha Rozenblit (2006, pp. 14-15) has described the resulting concentration:

Jews were 9% of the total population of the city, but they formed about 19% of the population of the first district (the inner city), 36% of the population of the second district (the Leopoldstadt), known affectionately as "Die Mazzesinsel," the island of Mazzah), and 18% of the ninth district (the Alsergrund), where Freud lived his adult life on

Berggasse 19, around the corner from Theodor Herzl). Within these districts, which were adjacent to each other, Jews also concentrated in certain areas, so that some parts of the city were—or at least seemed—almost wholly Jewish. While there were some distinctions based on wealth within this Jewish concentration, in general rich and poor Jews lived together in the same neighborhoods, with the richer Jews in nicer apartment houses on the main thoroughfares, and poorer Jews in shabbier buildings on the smaller side streets.

[pp. 14-15]

Freud lived in both kinds of buildings, nice and shabby, during the course of his growing up. Moreover, even when he had finally settled in Berggasse 19, he was still in the ninth district around the corner, figuratively and literally, from his co-religionists. And let us bear in mind that the Jews of Vienna, despite the success of some, were still in the main poor; some two thirds could not afford to pay the synagogue tax in the year 1900 according to Rozenblit; these Jews would have been closer than not to where the Freud family resided regardless of Jakob's fortunes year to year, or how his son's career progressed in the years following his marriage.

Shame about the father may have been difficult to separate from shame about the milieu. We have several anecdotes pertaining to the latter. When Freud was twenty-seven, he was sufficiently chagrined at the behavior of his friend Nathan Weiss that he spoke of him to his important new acquaintance and fellow Jew, Josef Breuer. Weiss's subsequent suicide following a disastrous marriage, which Weiss had forced against all friendly advice including Freud's own, then led to an ugly scene at the funeral as the presiding lecturer blamed the girl and her family for the death. "And all this he spoke with the powerful voice of the fanatic, with the ardor of the savage, merciless Jew," Freud wrote at the time to his fiancée Martha Bernays, "We were all petrified with horror and shame in the presence of the Christians who were among us" (E.

Freud, 1960, p. 65). The milieu, and his father, continued to haunt Freud. In 1904, he had a disturbance in his sense of reality during a visit to the Acropolis with his brother Alexander. Much later in life he analyzed it (1936, S.E. 22: pp. 246-247) in terms of a feeling that “We really have gone a long way!” which he contrasted with the “the poverty of our conditions of life in my youth,” while adding: “It seems as though the essence of success was to have got further than one’s father, and as though to excel one’s father was still something forbidden.”

As to where Freud’s own sense of identity stood roughly at the time of the visit to the Acropolis, we have a telling version of the same theme of social shame from the account of a Dr. M. Grinwald. Grinwald was a religious Jew who hailed from Buzhocz, the birthplace of Freud’s paternal grandfather, Schelomo. In 1941 Grinwald contributed an article to Ha’aretz, the oldest Jewish periodical in Palestine, describing an encounter with Freud in Vienna in the early years of the twentieth century. Grinwald had just given a lecture on a controversial popular drama, Yohanan the Prophet, that many thought disparaging of Orthodox Jews. After the talk, while Grinwald and his audience were having a friendly luncheon, Freud made several jokes related to religion, and pointed out how many Jews resembled Yohanan, the protagonist of the play, with his shaggy coat, unkempt hair, and mysterious face. Then Freud commented that he himself preferred to be the Jewish man in an elegant tuxedo rather than the one dressed like a prophet. Grinwald (1941) recalled thinking to himself, “How far this man has drifted from Jewish life.” But for all his social ambivalence, Freud did not inwardly feel free to leave his coreligionists behind. The specter of antisemitism, which became increasingly virulent in Vienna from his adolescence and early adulthood onward, pushed him in the opposite, countervailing direction, evoking in him a defiant commitment to retain his identity as a Jew. His writings and public statements are explicit on this. In *Gymnasium*: “In the higher classes I began to understand for

the first time what it meant to belong to an alien race, and anti-Semitic feelings among the other boys warned me that I must take up a definite position” (1900, S.E. 4: p. 229). In University: “When, in 1873, I first joined the University, I experienced some appreciable disappointments. Above all, I found that I was expected to feel myself inferior and an alien because I was a Jew. I refused absolutely to do the first of these things. I have never been able to see why I should feel ashamed of my descent or, as people were beginning to say, of my ‘race’. I put up, without much regret, with my non-acceptance into the community” (1900, S.E. 4: p. 9). In 1896, when he joined the B’nai B’rith:

“I felt as though outlawed, shunned by all. This isolation aroused in me the longing for a circle of excellent men with high ideals who would accept me in friendship despite my temerity.... Whenever I have experienced feelings of national exaltation, I have tried to suppress them as disastrous and unfair, frightened by the warning example of those nations among which we Jews live. But there remained enough to make the attraction of Judaism and the Jews irresistible, many dark emotional powers all the stronger the less they could be expressed in words, as well as the clear consciousness of an inner identity, the familiarity of the same psychological structure.... Because I was a Jew I found myself free of many prejudices that restrict others in the use of the intellect; as a Jew I was prepared to be in the opposition and to renounce agreement with the ‘compact majority’” (E. Freud, 1960, pp. 366-367).

At the age of 70 to an interviewer: “My language is German. My culture, my attainments, are German. I considered myself German intellectually, until I noticed the growth of anti-Semitic prejudice in Germany and German Austria. Since that time, I prefer to call myself a *Jew*” (cited in Gay, 1987, p. 139).

These are all the sentiments of an adult, an adult whose conflicts have been decided for him by events, whose ambivalence has been reshaped as to its target. In short, I think that the root source of the intensity of his contempt for religion is not to be found in his childhood and not in his personal-psychological history, but after adolescence in his social-psychological history. That is, I think buried within Freud's attitude is his selective sense of shame, humiliation, and sheer frustration with his co-religionists *insofar as they maintain the old religion, the old rituals, the old ways*. That is their madness, that is what keeps them still tied to their Shtetl backgrounds and keeps them as the obvious targets of antisemitic prejudice. But all this is going unsaid. As against this root, the more obvious motive of undercutting Christian belief, which motive can be and is shared with psychoanalytic colleagues, is altogether less important, though it is there. In this vein, let us look again at the psychological structure that Freud finds at the heart of conscience and at the heart of a belief in a father god: inherited guilt over an inherited murder. Personally, I do not doubt that when Freud examined his own self inwardly that this is what he found. Or perhaps better, we can say that the formula expresses what he found, which in itself is beyond words. What makes a man decide that parricide is in him, that he is not only capable of the deed but that in some sense he knows he has committed it, that he feels he has a conscience because he knows it hurts? In Totem and Taboo, Freud argued that this sense is universal: the structures of conscience, which enable man to monitor his egoistic and antisocial instincts, are in place because of phylogenetic memory of a murder gone wrong. In Moses and Monotheism, he went further and argued that beyond being universal, this memory was archetypally Jewish, the Jews having committed a second murder, of Moses, their religious leader, the man who gave them the father-religion and the custom of circumcision—thus repeating the first murder and further fixing the motif phylogenetically in their very blood and bones. Many have speculated

about the depth psychological meanings of this transposition to the Jews of the universal heritage and Freud's further claim that herein lies the essence of the Jewish people. But as most analytic commentators have conceded, Jakob, whom Freud remembers with a manifest and unthreatened fondness at the time of his death, makes a very unlikely antagonist for any putatively Oedipal drama. Might we not more simply see the motif of parricide as the expression of a two generation social motif in the Freud family where in each generation the son abandons the religion of the father, and stakes his own claim to life, with an unfathomable combination of determination, shame, regret and perhaps sheer fury at having to do this to survive?

In Moses and Monotheism, I contend, we come to Freud's final statement—on religion and on Judaism, on godlessness and on the “many dark powers all the stronger the less they could be expressed in words” (E. Freud, 1960, p. 367). We come to the place where the three trends in Freud's Jewish identity intertwine at last—and, arguably, we also get his final socio-cultural view of his own science. His acceptance of being a Jew is embedded in the whole notion that the Jews have a special shared phylogenetic heritage. It is a racial view. His own identity as a cosmopolitan assimilated Jew is spoken for in the claim that the Jews have inherited a special intellectuality. Godlessness is here, too, of course. The belief in the father god is an inherited truth only in the sense that it recalls the primeval event of parricide, which it otherwise misinterprets. Science, the rhetorical lynchpin of his godlessness, is obviously spoken for in the very endeavor, for it is the application of the new branch of science, psychoanalysis, which enables Freud to justify his “historical novel,” and see it as superior to traditional biblical commentary, rabbinical or otherwise. As for antisemitism, it is the very provocation for writing the book. As Freud put it to Arnold Zweig: “Faced with new persecutions, one asks oneself again how the Jews have come to be what they are and why they have attracted this undying

hatred” (E. Freud, 1960, p. 421). Moreover, Freud’s answer to this question culminates in a psychoanalytic explanation of Christian hatred of the Jews; finally the anti-Semite is on the couch.

Even such small details as Freud’s own antipathy to ritual is here, for what is important in his account of the essence of Judaism are not the rituals, but the monotheism, important as an advance over older superstitions, and the intellectuality. Perhaps most important, Freud’s examination of his own conscience against the backdrop of his relation to Jakob and to the world of Viennese Jews is there. One finds it gleaming through between the lines of the text in the fundamental irony that parricide is the aboriginal source of the psychic institution of conscience. It is all there. In fact, in *Moses and Monotheism*, I contend that we also have Freud’s final testament to the Jewishness of his own creation, not simply a “confession Judaica” but also a “confession analytica.” For if what distinguishes the Jew racially are inherited intellectuality and the equally inherited fact that he is closer psychologically to the forgotten truth of the primal murder, then it should not surprise us, and it did not surprise Freud, that the man who would finally uncover the truth of the primal murder should have been himself a Jew. In Freud, and for Freud, the Jewish tradition is at last becoming fully self conscious, via psychoanalysis, and through it so is mankind. The will not to believe, I think, stems from the same psychological sources as the will to believe—not so much from personal roots deep in childhood, though these may be important, but from feelings of social solidarity that need to find expression in a worldview that offers a positive program, a sense of meaning and forward direction, a vision of purposefulness in a terminally uncertain world.

Where does this leave psychoanalysis, finally, and where does it leave us? Religion is based on fear. Psychoanalysis helps mankind overcome fear. The rest is commentary.

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