Psychoanalysis was started by a Jew, Sigmund Freud. How do we make sense of that fact. Many writers have tackled this question, both Jewish and non-Jewish, with varied results. In this paper, I pose a slightly different question, namely how did *Freud* make sense of that fact? That is, as a Jew, how did Freud position his Jewish identity vis-à-vis his creation of psychoanalysis?
Freud’s Jewish Identity had three sources:

1) Bildung
2) Anti-Semitism
3) Godlessness
Fleck was a Jew born in Lemberg, (Austro-Hungary), next Lvov, (Poland), and now Lviv, (Ukraine)
Karl Mannheim
(1893-1947)

Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge.
One can trace a line from Karl Mannheim’s *Ideology of Utopia* (1929) the foundational work on the sociology of Knowledge Fleck’s *The Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (1936) to Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962).
It should be noted that just as the founder of psychoanalysis and many of his followers were Hapsburg Jews, sociology was a Hapsburg Jewish creation.
Ludwik Gumplowicz
(1838-1909)

Outlines of Sociology
Denkkollektiv

- “A community of persons mutually exchanging ideas for maintaining intellectual interactions”
- “provides the special carrier for the historical development of any field of thought as well as for the given stock of knowledge and level of culture”
“Shared attitudes or background assumptions that characterize a thought collective.”
The sociology of Scientific Knowledge:

- Fleck’s seminal contribution was the idea that scientific discovery is impacted by social, cultural, historical, personal, and psychological facts.
Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture:
The concept of thought collective and thought styles can help us understand the bifurcation between psychoanalysis and academic neurology in Freud’s era and we can look at the difference between Freud and Jung in terms of thought styles.
An observant friend of mine once observed to me, “Instead of studying the Talmud, you study Freud. Psychoanalysis is your religion and your substitute for religion.”
Sigmund Freud’s House in Freiberg

Sigmund Freud’s House in Freiberg, Moravia
To conclude this part of my presentation I would offer the thought that my interest in the subject of Freud’s Jewish identity has to do with my conflicts about my own. But I will have succeeded in the purpose of this personal excursus if I begin to suggest that a Jewish identity, whether in America in the 20th and 21st century or in Austria-Hungary in the 19th and 20th, is likely to have multiple strands and diverse hues—a coat of many colors in one sense, a collection of thought collectivities and perhaps a style of having many thought styles in another. No simple rubric is likely to capture what we are after. And indeed, we can expect that this, too, will part of our story when we consider Freud: How, after all, did he knit the diverse strands of his identity together? How did that identity grow and change as Freud matured—and as the events of another half century rolled over him? Ultimately, as he might have pondered the fact that psychoanalysis was founded by a Jew, what did “Jew” finally mean to him, about him?
“I have reason to believe that my father’s family were for a long time in Rhineland (later Cologne) that in the fourteenth or fifteenth century they fled east from anti-Semitic persecution and in the course of the nineteenth century they retraced their steps from Lithuania through Galicia to German Austria.”

— Sigmund Freud
Let us turn to consider what I have proposed as the three sources of Jewish Identity, Bildung, Antisemitism and Godlessness.
Amalia Freud
1835-1930

Jakob Freud
(1815-1896)
When I was a young man” he [Jakob Freud] said, I went for a walk one Saturday in the streets of your birthplace, I was well-dressed, and had a new fur cap on my head. A Christian came up to me and with a single blow knocked off my cap into the mud and shouted: “Jew! Get off the pavement!” And what did you do?” I asked. “I went into roadway and picked up my cap” was his quiet reply. This struck me as unheroic conduct on the part of the big strong man who was holding the little boy by the hand.

Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams (1900).
Hannibal
247?-183? B.C.
General Massena
(5th S. i. 245)
“By that by that time a gymnasium education had become a crucial element of upper-class and professional status in Germany and the German-speaking countries. And for those who did not come from economically and socially privileged backgrounds, the ideal of Bildung had the special benefit that it enabled them to claim their good taste as the basis for membership in a moral elite.”

Sarah Winter: *Freud and the Institution of Psychoanalytic Knowledge: Cultural Memory in the Present*
“The virtue of learning was not as important as the learning of virtue.”
— Carl Schorske
A.A. Brill  
(1874–1948)
Bildung

- The word means *Formation*
- The “making” of a man
- The process of inner development that was held to produce a mature and cultured sensibility, intellect, and character
- The way experience was sought and used in the service of one’s ideals
“The virtue of learning was not as important as the learning of virtue.”
— Carl Schorske
Freud remembered the occasion of the Goethe Prize together with Thomas Mann’s published encomium a year earlier in 1929 in tones of a bittersweet nostalgia, writing of “the short-lived illusion that I was among the writers to whom a great nation like Germany was ready to listen”. He added with subdued irony: “This was the climax of my life as a citizen.”
M. Rozenblitt: “Freud, like most Jews in Vienna, was completely at home in German-Austrian culture, utterly loyal to the Habsburg Monarchy and its emperor, Franz Joseph, and above all, totally convinced that his primary identity was as a Jew, a German-Austrian Jew. It is this interesting mix that makes Freud a representative Viennese Jew. He was Austrian through and through; he was Viennese; he was German by culture, but not by any sense of belonging to the German Volk, the German people, defined in terms of descent, in terms of biology, in terms of ethnicity, in terms of race; and he was a Jew, a part of the Jewish people, with whom he shared descent, history, culture, fate, and in his own words, also, “the clear consciousness of an inner identity, the familiarity of the same psychological structures.”
“Aren’t you homesick?” he replied, “No, I am not Jewish.”
Similarly, in his analysis of “My Son the Myops” dream in The Interpretation of Dreams, he struggles 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’” (S. Freud, 1900, p. 442).
In the original, this passage is even more dismissive for the word “slang” here not only refers to Yiddish, but is Strachey’s translation for the far more resonant German word “Jargon.” As the Jewish historian Yosef Yuerulshami comments: “…Jargon to cultivated German-speaking Jews was also the common deprecatory synonym for Yiddish.
Freud reminisced: My deep engrossment in the Bible story (almost as soon as I had learnt the art of reading) had, as recognized much later, an enduring effect upon the direction of my interest” (p. 8).
As a Maskil, a follower of the Haskalah, Jakob had taken up German, and left Yiddish behind, decisive first steps toward assimilation; as Yerushalmi notes: “The Galician Maskilim were opposed to using Yiddish except as an instrument for popularizing their ideas, but they remained loyal throughout to the Hebrew language and to historical and national values” (p. 62).
Freud’s 1904 obituary of Hammershlag

“A spark from the same fire which animated the spirit of the great Jewish seers and prophets burned in him and was not extinguished until old age weakened his powers. But the passionate side of his nature was happily tempered by the ideal of humanism of our German classical period which governed him, and his method of education was based on the classical studies to which he had devoted his own youth. Religious instruction served him as a way of educating towards love of the humanities, and from the material of Jewish history he was able to find means of tapping the sources of enthusiasm hidden in the hearts of young people and of making it flow out far beyond the limitations of nationalism or dogma” (S.E. 9: p. 225).
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).
Freud’s Letter to A. A. Roback: “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 as Yerushalmi 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”?
Lacking the proper educational background, lacking financial backing, lacking the innate feel for German culture, these Jews, according to Billroth, were “absolutely unfit to become physicians” (Klein, 1981, p. 51)
Theodor Billroth
(1829-1894)
Ernst Brucke
(1819-1892)
“The exercise of collecting and retelling Jewish jokes, of removing them from the daily world in which Freud must live to the higher plane of the new scientific discourse, that of psychoanalysis, enables Freud to purge himself of the insecurity felt in his role of a Jew in fin de siecle Vienna. He exorcizes his anxiety by placing it in the closed world of the book and placing himself in the privileged position of an author employing the new language of psychoanalysis for an audience newly taught this discourse. It is no wonder that when Freud comes to remember his discovery of the sexual etiology of neurosis, the wellspring of this new language of psychoanalysis, his memory casts the source of this discovery in the structure of Jewish jokes” (S. Gilman, Jewish Self-Hatred).
Thus should we make sense of Freud’s account: “he told me a story to show me how much better things were now than they had been in his days.”
“These were the days of the ‘Burger’ Ministry. Shortly before, my father had brought home portraits of these middle-class professional men—Herbst, Giskra, Unger, Berger and the rest—and we had illuminated the house in their honour. There has even been some Jews among them. So henceforth every industrious Jewish schoolboy carried a Cabinet Minister’s portfolio in his satchel.” (Interpretation of Dreamsp. 193).
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 recounts, by not allowing Martha to light the candles on the first Friday after the marriage, “one of the more upsetting experiences of her life.”
Besides having the Bible rebound in new leather, Jakob added an inscription—written in Hebrew. In Yerulshami’s translation, the dedication reads:

Son who is dear to me, Shelomoh. In the seventh in the days of the years of your life the Spirit of the Lord began to move you and spoke within you: Go, read in my book that I have written and there will burst open for you the wellsprings of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom. Behold, it is the Book of Books, from which sages have excavated and lawmakers learned knowledge and judgment. A vision of the Almighty did you see; you heard and strove to do, and you soared on the wings of the Spirit. Since the book has been stored like the fragments of the tablets in an ark with me. For the day on which your years were filled to five and thirty I have put upon it a cover of new skin and have called it: “Spring up, O well, sing ye unto it!” And I have presented it to you as a memorial and as a reminder of love from your father, who loves you with everlasting love.
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 saw ten years later: “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, p. 213].”
Freud to his brother “Do you still remember how, when we were young, we used day after day to walk along the same streets on our way to school, and how every Sunday we used to go to the Prate or on some other excursion we knew so well. And now, here we are in Athens, and standing on the Acropolis! We really have gone a long way!’ (1936, pp. 246-247).
On the voyage to Athens in 1904, the shame had evolved into guilt. Freud’s analysis is explicit on the latter if not the former:

It must have been a sense of guilt was attached to the satisfaction in having gone such a long way: there was something about it that was wrong, that from earliest times had been forbidden. It was something to do with a child’s criticism of his father, with the undervaluation which took the place of the overvaluation of earlier childhood. 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 an addition to this generally valid motive there was a special factor present in our particular case. The very theme of Athens and the Arcopolis in itself contained evidence of the son’s superiority. Our father had been in business, he had had no secondary education, and Athens could not have meant much to him. Thus what interfered with our enjoyment of the journey was a feeling of filial piety. [257-248]
Robert writes of the father: “It seems reasonable to suppose that this Jew so well able to combine religious indifference with fervent piety toward the Holy Scriptures had taken only the timidest of steps toward Western culture”.
The historian Marsha Rozenblit 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.
M. Rozenblitt: That Jews formed a separate group in Vienna was literally visible, but not because Jews dressed differently or looked different than other Viennese (which they did not) or because they practiced (or did not practice) a different religion (which they did). Jews were noticeable because they occupied a different niche in the economy than everyone else. Jews may have abandoned traditional Jewish occupations, but they did not “assimilate” economically. They did not become industrial workers, who formed half of the working population in Vienna. Because of de facto discrimination, they also did not work for the imperial, state, or city governments, which employed another large percentage of Viennese. Jews remained concentrated in commerce, they had become professionals, and they worked as employees in the business world, which became a kind of new “Jewish” occupation.
Solomon Ehrman, whom Freud befriended in medical school in the Fall of 1874, later remembered the general atmosphere among the sons: “We abandoned the altars upon which our fathers served and offered ourselves—in common with our fellow man of a different confession—to what was allegedly new, because we were told that now a new ideal, the ideal of humanity, the fraternization of mankind, was to be worshiped” (cited in Klein, 1981, 48).
Grinwold recalled thinking to himself, “How far this man has drifted from Jewish life.”
Anti-Semitism
S. Freud to Silberstein: “It is remarkable how certain holidays are distinguished by a very special religious effect on the abdominal organs. Thus the Passover has a constipating effect due to unleavened bread and hardboiled eggs. Yom Kippur is so lugubrious a day not so much through God’s wrath as through the plum jam and the evacuation it stimulates. Nonetheless such characteristics do not suffice for distinguishing all holidays, and an empiricist like myself will on many future occasions continue, as he has done this year, to confuse the New Year with Purim, since nothing specific is consumed on either occasion. Today, however, the death rattle of two fishes and a goose out in the kitchen informs me that the Day of Atonement is at hand” (p. 63).
The writer Ludwig Borne captured the predicament of the Jew in polite society in the politest terms: “It is a kind of miracle! I’ve experienced it a thousand times and yet it still seems new to me. Some find fault with me for being a Jew; others forgive me; still others go so far as to compliment me for it; but every last one of them thinks of it. They seem caught in this magic circle of Jewishness; not of them can get out of it.”
Antisemitism dogged Freud at each step of the way. 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, 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” (S. Freud, 1900, p. 9).
His letter to Martha of 16 December captures the human predicament of having faced such a challenge: “I do think I held my own quite well, and used the means at my disposal courageously; in any case I didn’t fall to their level. After all, I am no giant, haven’t got any hackles to show, no lion’s teeth to flash, no stentorian roar, my appearance is not even distinguished; all this would have had a lightning effect on that mob, but they must have noticed that I wasn’t afraid and I didn’t allow this experience to dampen my spirits.” And after this, sheepishness: “So much time and space has been spent on this silly story. Now I must order another sheet of paper.”
There is still just a hint of sheepishness in the following letter from Paris, written a year after Koller’s duel, as Freud recounts to Martha “a political conversation with Gilles de la Tourette” during an evening at the Charcots, “during which he predicted the most ferocious war with Germany: I promptly explained that I am a Jew, adhering neither to Germany nor Austria. But such conversations are always very embarrassing to me, for I feel stirring with me something German which I long ago decided to suppress.”
Yet the same letter also contains what will subsequently form the core of Freud’s response to antisemitism: “You know what Breuer told me one evening? I was so moved by what he said that in return I disclosed to him the secret of our engagement. He told he had discovered that hidden under the surface of timidity there lay in me an extremely daring and fearless human being. I had always thought so, but never dared tell anyone. I have often felt as though I had inherited all the defiance and all the passions with which or ancestors defended their Temple and could gladly sacrifice my life one great moment in history” (February 2, 1886).
Kafka: “The Russian Jews have multiplied in Germany like frogs. They serve as cantors, functionaries, but they do not know the language of the state and therefore evoke the justified German hatred for the Jews. The first and true cause of German anti-Semitism is known to all, but no dares to reveal it. It is the coming of foreigners to Germany.”
The name, literally “Sons of the Covenant,” had been chosen to keep the German initials of the original organization begun in America, the Bundes-Bruder or “Brothers of the Union.” The organization had once helped new Jewish immigrants; in Vienna it had added to its agenda the struggle against antisemitism. Freud had turned down an initial invitation two years earlier. Now his circumstances were different:

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. Your Lodge was described to me as the place where I could find such men.

That you are Jews could be welcome to me, for I was myself a Jew, and it has always appeared not only undignified, but outright foolish to deny it. What tied me to Jewry was—I have to admit it—not the faith, not even the national pride, for I was always an unbeliever, have been brought up without religion, but not without respect for the so-called “ethical” demands of human civilization. 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 power 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.
And, at the end of it all, as the alliance with the Swiss was finally falling apart, there is the advice to Ferenczi on polemics, with its redemptive call to science as a congenially Jewish enterprise:

On the matter of Semitism: there are certainly great differences from the Aryan spirit. We can become convinced of that every day. Hence, there will surely be different world views and art here and there. But there should not be a particular Ayran or Jewish. The results must be identical, and only their presentation may vary…. 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. You had heard that Jung declared in America that PsyA was not a science but a religion. That would certainly illuminated the whole difference. But there the Jewish spirit regretted not being able to join in.

It couldn’t hurt to be somewhat derisive. [pp. 490-491]
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Sander Gilman calls the letter his “confession Judaica” and it goes on to the famous definition of “the two qualities that have become indispensable to me throughout my difficult life. 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.’”
There are the repeated invocations cited by Gay of a shared “racial kinship” in Freud’s letters to Karl Abraham together with warnings about alienating the Gentiles and especially Jung—“Only his appearance has saved psychoanalysis from becoming a Jewish national affair”—and the wonderful summary plaint, “Be assured, if my name were Oberhuber, my innovations would have found, despite it all, far less resistance.”
here is the scolding of his fellow Viennese on the eve of founding the International Association: “Most of you are Jews, and therefore incompetent to win friends for the new teaching. Jews must be content with the modest role of preparing the ground… The Swiss will save us—will save me, and all of you as well.”
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It couldn’t hurt to be somewhat derisive. [Freud, pp. 490-491]
When he was giving Ferenczi advice on polemics, it is still in the name of science, not Jewish science, but science. The bitterness of the break appears differently in different letters: Freud wrote of “Jews and Goyim” separating like “oil and water” in another letter to Ferenczi (p. 231) while to Rank he wrote of having tried to unite “Jews and anti-Semites on the soil of Psy-A (cited in Gay, p. 231).
It was in this exact context that Freud wrote his essay on the Moses of Michelangelo—“no piece of statuary has ever made a stronger impression on me than this”—which he had first visited in 1903.
In fact, as an interpretive essay it shows Freud at his literary best, truly the European man of letters, while in its conclusion it speaks to an obvious identification with Moses and his restraint in the heat of the moment: “a concrete expression of the highest mental achievement that is possible in a man, that of struggling against an inward passion for the sake of a cause to which he has devoted himself.”
“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” (S. Freud, cited in Gay, p. 139).
In 1930, in a preface for a new translation into Hebrew, Freud added a universalist disclaimer: “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.”
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!”
That 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” (Freud, cited in Gay, 1987, p. 12).
The historian Josef Yerushalmi 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 that 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 basis 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.”
The following Winter he published the piece in *Imago* anonymously, leaving the editors, Rank and Hanns Sachs to justify it on the basis that the author’s “mode of thought has in point of fact a certain resemblance to the methodology of psycho-analysis.” In fact, as an interpretive essay it shows Freud at his literary best, truly the European man of letters, while in its conclusion it speaks to an obvious identification with Moses and his restraint in the heat of the moment: “a concrete expression of the highest mental achievement that is possible in a man, that of struggling against an inward passion for the sake of a cause to which he has devoted himself.”