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Conscious inhibitions: Freud, anti-Semitism, and Hobbesian imagination

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ABSTRACT
This work aims to portray the effects of Freud’s anxiety about anti-Semitic violence on his political theory and metapsychology. Taking as its entry point Freud’s reorientation of anti-Semitism as aggressive action, I argue that Freud’s fear of the violent mob can be located in three interconnected dimensions of his work, all deeply informed by Hobbesian imagination. First, Freud accepted a Hobbesian vision of social antagonism into his political theory; second, he formulated a deeper, more efficient defence mechanism against mob violence with his notion of psychical guilt; third, Freud’s fears penetrated his metapsychology. Suffering from anti-Semitism, Freud was not only quick to accept a Hobbesian perspective – he also reconstructed it to a degree that radically changed its meaning. Freud’s third and most pervasive manoeuvre destabilized one of Hobbes’s fundamental theoretical tenets by suggesting that the Hobbesian State of Nature is inherently a non-human reality.

KEYWORDS
Freud; Hobbes; anti-Semitism; political theory

1. Freud and anti-semitism

In a short letter to Arnold Zweig of December 1927, thanking the German-Jewish writer for sending his voluminous study on anti-Semitism, Caliban oder Politik und Leidenschaft (1927), Freud was almost forced to admit that anti-Semitism had an undefined “irrational effect” on him. Clearly very emotional, the usually composed scientist announced that

in the question of anti-Semitism, I don’t really want to search for explanation; I feel a strong inclination to surrender to my affects in this matter and find myself confirmed in my wholly nonscientific belief that mankind on the average and taken by and large is a wretched lot.

(Freud and Zweig 1970, 3)

The last few decades of psychoanalytic literature are informed by a growing corpus of works that aim to uncover the latent influence of Freud’s biography, specially his complex relationship with his Jewish identity, on his psychoanalytic project. This debate that was partly sparked by Haim Yosef Yerushalmi’s canonical Freud’s Moses (1991), generated a renewed interest in Freud’s ambivalent reaction to anti-Semitism and the manifold ways it was reflected in his theory and praxis. In line with the attempt to decode Freud’s psychoanalysis according to the fault line of anti-Semitism,
this paper seeks to illustrate the intricate ways in which Freud’s reaction to the anti-Semitic mob informed his political theory and his metapsychology.

Noted previously only in passing, anti-Semitism presumably found a pivotal role in Freud’s political theory in his last great work, Moses and Monotheism (1939), where he decided to tackle “the deeper motives for hatred of the Jews … [that were] rooted in the remotest past ages” (1939, 91). Only nearing the end of his life and facing anti-Semitic danger was Freud arguably inclined to take the journey back to his Jewish identity. Yerushalmi thus suggested that Judaism could have remained in the background of Freud’s intellectual work, “but had it not been for the advent of Hitler and the Nazis” (Yerushalmi 1991, 15). Judaism, the argument goes, was a sort of unfathomed essence for Freud that could have remained unexplored if he had not been forced, like so many others, to face the horrors of twentieth-century anti-Semitism. In any other scenario, Judaism and anti-Semitism would have remained unnoticed, unimportant to Freud’s life project.

I argue, in contrast, that it would be misleading to ascribe marginal importance to anti-Semitism in Freud’s work. Regardless of his interest in Judaism, anti-Semitism was prominent in Freud’s life and informed his political theory and theory of the mind. In the words of Sander Gilman, “Freud’s sense of reality of anti-Semitism cannot be doubted; that he … internalized a racialist model of the Jew is also evident” (Gilman 1993, 13). This paper builds on several works that detail the subliminal yet wide impact of anti-Semitic ideology on Freud’s theoretical and therapeutic work. I refer specifically to Daniel Boyarin’s reconstruction of Freud’s “colonial mimicry” in Unheroic Conduct (Boyarin 1997, 248) in which Freud, the bourgeois Austrian Jew, identified with the perverted anti-Semitic discourse of the Jew as “feminized, pathetic, queer” (Boyarin 1997, 209), and to Sander Gilman’s detailed description in Freud, Race and Gender (1993) of the intricate ways “the powerful association between Jews and disease in the fin de siècle racial biology” (Gilman 1993, 3) were imprinted on Freud’s position as a scientist and on his conceptualization of race and gender. Indebted to these works, I claim that anti-Semitic terror persisted throughout Freud’s life, and was not a motivating factor only in his last decade, as Yerushalmi has argued. Violence was manifested in Freud’s life not only when the windows of a Jewish-owned shop were broken in the 1930s, but also with the incident of his father’s cap years before that, which deeply influenced Freud’s entire corpus and not only his last work on monotheism. This work aims to pursue these readings further and to chart the effects of the immediate, almost physical, presence of anti-Semitic violence on Freud’s psychoanalytic thought.

Freud’s reaction to anti-Semitism is tainted with a typical aversion of the modern bourgeoisie to the masses. For example, in a response to Oskar Pfister’s insistence on a “love of humanity,” Freud snapped: “I have found little that is ‘good’ about human beings on the whole. In my experience most of them are trash…” (Freud and Pfister 1963, 61). However, despite the attempts to belittle these “relatively harmless verbal outlets” as “not necessarily significant ethically” (Wallwork 1991, 273), Freud indeed continually formed a connection between the mob, violence, and anti-Semitism, and coloured his
psychoanalytic theory with various formulations that were aimed to fend off that danger.\footnote{The mob was never an abstract or distant reality for Freud. Freud was a Jew, and the mob signalled a concrete form of danger, anti-Semitic danger, from which Freud suffered throughout his life. To be clear, this paper is not claiming that spontaneous mob aggression was the only, or even the primary, form of anti-Semitism in modern Europe. In Freud’s time, anti-Semitism was a prevalent and normalized phenomenon that was manifest in scientific racism, in state-sponsored nationalism and capitalism, and so on. This study, however, aims to focus on the imaginary response of Freud to anti-Semitism. Freud had a narrow conception of anti-Semitism: he understood anti-Semitism in terms of mob aggression and reacted consciously and unconsciously to anti-Semitism as someone under constant danger of violent attack.} Freud has a complicated political theory that seems to involve many contradictory positions. This work focuses on one particular aspect – the role of anti-Semitic violence in the development of Freud’s political theory – in order to detail the ways anti-Semitism complicated the basic ambivalence Freud showed about the meaning of the intersubjective realm. Freud, for example, was clear already in his \textit{The Ego and the Id} about the positive meaning of the superego, the representative of “the higher, moral, supra-personal side of human nature” (Freud 1923, 35) and notably advocated for inner harmony of the psychic agencies. I, however, aim to focus on possible incentives for the characterization of the superego as repressive, violent, and sadistic. The fact that Freud conceptualized social turmoil in terms of mob – anti-Semitic – behaviour, and assigned the superego with the task of aggressively guarding against that danger of the mob, complicated his basic dilemma regarding the proper meaning of inner psychic mechanisms, and encouraged the adaptation of the Hobbesian imagination to psychoanalysis. This is not to reduce psychoanalysis to an empty series of reactions to anti-Semitism and racism. Instead, this paper seeks to explain how “the form … and the rhetoric used, were shaped by number of factors” (Gilman 1993, 4), including, but not limited to, the discourse on anti-Semitism and mob violence.

In the following, Hobbes’s political theory will serve as a litmus test for Freud’s anxious reaction to anti-Semitic violence. I argue that Freud translated his fear of the mob into a theoretical construct via the famous Hobbesian pessimistic vision of humanity. In practical terms, I argue that Freud built into his psychoanalysis layers of defences against the mob that significantly correspond to Hobbes’s political theory. This is not to claim that Freud consciously read Hobbes or was directly influenced by him, but to illustrate how the basic Hobbesian paradigm that deeply structured the modern fear of social chaos informed Freud’s work.\footnote{Freud suffered like most of the Jews in \textit{fin-de-siècle} Europe from substantive, ongoing threats that pushed him into “a situation of solitary opposition” (Freud 1925a, 222, emphasis mine) and significantly moulded his psychoanalysis. I am not referring only to his well-known encounters with racism.\footnote{Granted, Freud remained \textit{Privatdozent} for years due to the unspoken anti-Semitic standards of the Austrian Ministry of Education and was denied formal entrance to the council of the medical faculty, watching “others of [his] vintage steadily rising in the professional hierarchy” (Gay 1988, 136).} Not long after,
Freud also suffered from the betrayal of Jung, that was coloured by “lies, brutality, and anti-Semitic condescension” (quoted in Goldstein 1992, 80), as Freud reported to James Putnam in a letter in 1915. However a constant and powerful influence of anti-Semitism was persistently felt as violent mob aggression. In Freud’s most intimate work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), for example, one finds detailed descriptions of his early encounters with anti-Semitism. In his “infantile material” section, Freud openly admitted his attraction in his schooldays to the image of Hannibal as a young Jewish child who suffered from “anti-Semitic feelings among the other boys” (196). While others sympathized with Rome in the stories of the Punic Wars, Freud gravitated toward the image of the Semitic hero, signalling his wish to engage in war against anti-Semitism and to conquer, even annihilate, Rome.

Freud’s Rome complex, as it is often called, kept appearing, as he remembered an incident that his father had told him about, in which someone casually shouted at his father “Jew! Get off the pavement,” and pulled off his cap. This action, while easily dismissed by his father, deeply humiliated the young Freud, who despised his father’s “unheroic conduct” (Freud 1990, 197). Years later, Sigmund’s son, Martin Freud, remembered a similar incident during a family vacation, in which an anti-Semitic mob blocked the way of the family back into a hotel (Freud 1958, 70). However, in contrast to the shameful behaviour of his father Jacob, Sigmund scared the mob off with his stick. The connection between the mob and anti-Semitic aggression, as well as the difference in reaction between father and son, are already located in a relatively early letter of Freud from 1883 in which he reported to Martha about an adventure on a train journey that was “unpleasant at the time, pleasant in retrospect.” Apparently, at one point Freud opened a window for a breath of fresh air, after which there were demands to shut it, reinforced with anti-Semitic cries from some of the passengers (“he is a dirty Jew!”). Freud, however, was evidently not afraid anymore. As he was proud to tell his future wife, “Even a year ago I would have been speechless with agitation, but now I am different; I was not in the least frightened of that mob ... I was quite prepared to kill [one of them]” (Freud 1960, 78). Freud, very early in his life, took for granted the inherent connection between anti-Semitism and mob violence. He even formulated the proper response to anti-Semitic attacks in the same terms. Freud almost “killed” one of them (just as he wished to annihilate Rome). This violent counterattack would manifest itself later in Freud’s formulation of the psyche as a chaotic sphere that needs constant inhibition. On another level, Freud is reflecting on his previous behaviour and assuming a different attitude towards anti-Semitism. As a young man, he had probably “been speechless with agitation,” but now he is brave enough to confront his attackers. What changed him so much? What made him so different from his father? Was he really immunized to anti-Semitic violence, as he so happily reports to Martha? I argue that something did happen that changed him; he was changed by his science. At that point in his life, when he joined the General Hospital in Vienna, psychoanalysis was still on the horizon, but science, and the position he assumed as a scientist, offered Freud a new dimension in the battle against anti-Semitism.

While Freud is commonly perceived as a resolute scientist, a “lonely physician” who, “guided by sincerity,” founded a new science, as Stefan Zweig commented in his biography of Freud (Zweig 1962, 260), my claim is that, alongside his determination, Freud was also anxious about anti-Semitism and that this deeply influenced his theoretical work. Freud is not fighting anti-Semitism as a powerful son, but as a worried father. He would write
psychoanalysis to fight anti-Semitism the way an artist pictures an unattainable muse: it is first a representation of weakness, and only later an achievement of greatness.

In her book on the place of Moses in modern Jewish thought, *Reinscribing Moses* (1992), Goldstein also focused on Freud’s reaction to perceived violence. Concentrating on his lifelong interest in the figure of Moses, Goldstein argued that “anti-Semitism and the response to it are motivating forces behind the necessity [of Freud] of the hero” (1992, 74). Suffering from anti-Semitic violence, Freud, according to Goldstein, projected onto Moses his wishes to defend Judaism from annihilation. Freud’s hero was structured differently as anti-Semitic danger evolved over the years. At first, Freud still hoped to reconstruct the Jewish religion according to the universal ethics of Protestant Christianity and found in his *Moses of Michelangelo* (1914) an inhibiting, repressive Moses that matched the ideals of the European bourgeoisie. Later, as anti-Semitic violence worsened, Freud needed a different, aggressive image of Moses to fight the mob, and he was therefore concerned with areas of Moses’s personality that captured “his superiority, his individuality and uniqueness and his power to lure, coerce, and subjugate the masses” (Goldstein 1992, 111). At that late stage, Moses represented Freud’s wish for a strong father who would save him from the masses marching in the streets.

Freud indeed understood anti-Semitism as a constant danger of violence. Nonetheless, his need for a hero informed much more than his Moses “obsession.” The restructuring of Moses as a violent leader was only the culmination of a fundamental move in Freud’s work: anti-Semitism framed his basic political paradigm, and, more fundamentally, contributed to his differentiation of conscious and unconscious mental activities. The bedrock for this theoretical perspective is in his Hobbesian imagination.

3. Hobbes’s vision of humanity

Hobbes’s State of Nature theory was a fundamental theoretical construct in early modern thought, in which the individual’s asocial nature was prioritized over social and political realities as the explanatory factor of the establishment of the commonwealth. In a description that has troubled political philosophers for centuries, Hobbes formulated the State of Nature as both a dystopian vision and dreadful warning: it encapsulated the horrors of complete, radical freedom outside religious or social controls and, at the same time, the measures society employs in consequence of such a reality.

In Hobbes’s monumental work, *Leviathan* ([1651] 1960), the State of Nature was constructed as a state of normative freedom, or as the possibility for “a full and absolute liberty in every particular man” (47). In his negative theory of freedom, the eradication of all boundaries to one’s behaviour in the State of Nature promised potential freedom, since liberty, as Hobbes argued, was “properly, the absence of opposition” (136). In Chapter 21 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes used a spatial metaphor to detail the essence of his ideal of freedom. Anything restrained or enclosed, Hobbes claimed, be it an animal in a cage or even water in a closed vessel, has its movement impeded and is therefore not free. In contrast, “a free man is he that, in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to” (137).

However, the possibility of freedom materialized, as Hobbes warned, in a state of constant terror and chaos. Freedom promised “perpetual war of every man against his neighbour; no inheritance to transmit to the son, nor to expect from the father; no propriety of
goods or lands; no security” (140). While all men and women enjoyed absolute natural rights in a normative sense, in practice humanity suffered from the repercussions of life without order. Life was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (82).

A survivor of the English Civil War (1642–1651), Hobbes was known not only for his description of the State of Nature, but for the political solution to the danger of chaos the State of Nature imposed. According to his social contract theory, free men and women established a political community, facing danger and searching for peace. By transferring their freedom to the sovereign, they succeeded in protecting themselves. However, in contrast to Locke, the royalist Hobbes argued that establishing a social order would have guaranteed safety and peace only if the new monarch, the “mortal God” (112), had ruled with unrestrained power over his citizens. The violent mob had to be crushed. Humanity had to subject itself to the law and to the terror of the “public sword” (114) as the sole means of survival. The horrible situation of pre-civilized humanity convinced Hobbes that almost any political order, even repressive and ruthless autocracy, would be better than the nightmare of uncontrolled society.

Hobbes’s contemporaries immediately recognized the nature of his magnum opus and harshly condemned it. As Hobbes himself acknowledged, even in comparison to his earlier work De Cive (1642), the Leviathan was criticized for allowing a glimpse into an anarchic humanity devoid of any form of control, outside political or ethical order. Over the years, the liberal tradition even hesitated to accept his radical position that essentially deprived individuals of their rights and personal freedom.

This vision of humanity was fertile soil for Freud’s reaction to anti-Semitism. The grave outlook of one of the forefathers of liberal thought was echoed in Freud’s growing distress about the mob. Faced with the dangers of anti-Semitism, Freud integrated into his psychoanalysis both Hobbes’s horrible description of the danger of the uncontrolled mob and his tyrannical solution. The brutal Hobbesian vision offered a safe haven, an imaginary solution in which the mob was finally and ultimately under control. Jean Roy’s Hobbes and Freud (1984), the most extensive work to date on the relationship between Freud’s psychoanalysis and Hobbes’s political theory, points to the same idea. According to Roy, both thinkers shared “common inspiration:” they aimed to broaden the scope of rationality, and, more importantly, “their rational boldness emerge[d] all the better tested from their direct confrontation with the powers of chaos” (Roy 1984, vii). Chaos, specifically the need to control chaos, was at the heart of their philosophy.

4. Freud and the Hobbesian paradigm

Freud’s first explicit reference to political themes, “Civilized” Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness appeared in 1908, in an article that took issue with the influence of culture and morality on human sexuality. Focusing on the negative influence of the ever-growing social repression in the middle and upper classes in fin-de-siècle Vienna, Freud recognized the pain that moral restrictions inflicted on the gratification of the libidinal drive, claiming that “anyone who is able to penetrate the determinants of nervous illness will soon become convinced that its increase in our society arises from the intensification of sexual restrictions” (Freud 1908, 194). This short paper is taken at times to express Freud’s early unease with the repressive function of civilization. The argument usually points to a shift in Freud’s conceptualization of civilization, in which he first concentrated on the evils that
the unnatural repression of society created, while later, with the growing influence of Nazism, he was more inclined to structure intersubjective reality as menacing and dangerous.18

However, I argue that too much is read into this short presentation. Freud was not aiming to offer a theory of ethics or politics, but only wished to bring into discussion the consequences of the idea that “only legitimate reproduction is allowed as a sexual aim” (Freud 1908, 189). Freud was fighting the hypocrisy of nineteenth-century morality, refusing to accept that the fact that “we pay, and pay heavily, through the loss of other pleasures” (Zweig 1962, 352). In Civilized Sexual Morality Freud was concerned with “disturbances of development” (189), like “perversions and of homosexuality” (190) and “the harmful results which the strict demand for abstinence” (197) caused. Even if Freud always thought politically, Civilized Sexual Morality showed only a small part of his sophisticated and much more a complicated outlook on humanity, as he limited himself only to a case study of repression, and not to a full-blown political philosophy.

Freud was deeply ambivalent about the repressive character of society and the sadistic nature of the superego. He denounced unnecessary repression at the same time that he was willing to consider Hobbesian percepts into his theory. He recognized the horrors of social alienation, but he was also very clear about the need to repress the dangerous instincts of the mob. The effects of anti-Semitism exacerbated his conflicted perception of social reality. Thus, instead of the “historical shift” argument, according to which young, optimistic Freud gave way in the 1920s to a pessimistic, anxious Freud in the face of growing anti-Semitism, I propose that Freud always had intricate opinions on social repression. Against a clear-cut description in which Freud radically changed his basic political position, I argue that one can locate growing concerns with anti-Semitism in his life and work, and that those only changed his emphasis on the need to control the masses, but not his overall political position. Anti-Semitism informed Freud’s work from the beginning, not only in the final decade of his life.

Freud’s The Resistances to Psychoanalysis (1925a) illustrated this complex position well. At first glance, he clearly sympathized with society’s protective role, as he insisted that human civilization rested upon “the restriction of our instincts.” Warning against the danger of sexual drives, Freud even claimed them to be “conspicuous for their strength and savagery” (Freud 1925a, 219). However, this work also showed Freud’s position to be much more complicated. Despite his attraction to the Hobbesian fear of the mob, induced by anti-Semitism, Freud confessed that his therapy aimed mainly to cure the maladies of overwhelming repression, and defined social reform as a reduction of social inhibition. “Certain instinctual impulses … should be permitted a greater amount of satisfaction,” Freud announced, and “in the case of certain others the inefficient method of suppressing them by means of repression should be replaced by a better and secure procedure.” At that point, Freud’s self-image was still that of an avant-garde hero battling the unwarranted repressions of the Victorian ideology. He even complained that as long as psychoanalysis was a proponent of drive freedom, it was regarded as “‘inimical to culture’ and has been put under a ban as a ‘social danger’” (220).

Moving a few years forward, even the apparently moderate vision of humanity in The Future of an Illusion (1927) still pointed to the dangers of the mob. Future, Freud’s last attempt to forge a utopian vision of enlightened humanity, tackled the questions of human nature and the conflict between the individual and society from a fairly balanced
position. Leaning more toward the Lockean liberal paradigm, civilization was an achievement, the result of progress and development and not only a violent repressing, or even castrating, organization. Civilization yielded substantive, and – more importantly for Freud – mainly material benefits that transformed socially induced suffering into meaningful sacrifice. Nevertheless, even here, the fear of raging instincts impoverished the inherent repressive function of civilization: “every civilization must be built up on coercion and renunciation of instinct” (Freud 1927, 7). Despite his optimism, Freud still asserted his anxiety about the violent nature of the uneducated and expressed his constant wish to forcibly inhibit them, claiming that “masses are lazy and unintelligent; they have no love for instincual renunciation, and they are not to be convinced by argument of its inevitability; and the individuals composing them support one another in giving free rein to their indiscipline” (7–8, emphasis mine).

Freud’s momentous Civilization and its Discontents (1930) manifested a full conversion to Hobbesian reality. Its title notwithstanding, the book did not attempt to revolutionize social repression, but offered a troubled view of the dangers of the instinctive behaviour of the masses. Integrating his earlier work on the death drive, Freud painted in blacks and greys the destructive potential of humanity, equating mankind to dangerous beasts. Not coincidently, exactly where Freud found humanity to be populated by impulsive creatures ruled by the tyranny of instinct and sexuality, he also repeated Hobbes’s description of the human condition Homo homini lupus est (Freud 1930, 111). As a result, in Civilization the restraining function of society was foregrounded. Social institutions had to curb the raging instinct, mould and change it, even at the cost of the individual’s happiness and freedom. “It almost seems as if the creation of a great human community would be most successful if no attention had to be paid to the happiness of the individual,” Freud confessed (Freud 1930, 140).

The basic theme of Civilization also allowed Freud at last to direct attention openly – in his published work – to the link between aggression and anti-Semitism. In a discussion on human “inclination to aggression,” specifically on wars between neighbouring countries, Freud almost incidentally alluded to the “massacres of the Jews in the Middle Ages” (114) as an example of this irrational human behaviour. Evidently, for Freud irrational aggressive human violence was associated with anti-Semitism. Here, one could not only easily see how Freud registered the murderous mob hunting the helpless Jews in the far corners of Galicia as the paradigm of modern anti-Semitism, but, how anti-Semitism, was conceptualized as a prime example of violence in general.19

Three years later, in Freud’s reply to Albert Einstein’s inquiry about the psychological essence of war, he adopted a new solution to current events: “Wars will only be prevented with certainty if mankind unites in setting up a central authority to which the right of giving judgment upon all conflicts of interest shall be handed over” (Freud 1933, 207, emphasis mine). Evidently, revolution in social repression was now out of the picture. Freud was convinced that only a centralized political organization, holding a “public sword” over the raging masses could secure global safety. Mirroring Hobbes’s description of the constitution of Leviathan, Freud was at last convinced that survival was determined by effective inhibition of human drives. While Freud referred specifically to the League of Nations in his response to Einstein, a few years later, in Moses, he hinted that this mission, that is, the governing of brutal society, was to be handed to the Jewish minority which, according to Freud, excelled in self-control and the renunciation of instincts (see Goldstein
In his last work, the solution to anti-Semitism reflected back on the core of his fears: racism and anti-Semitism, not just random violence, populated his concerns about the mob.

5. Guilt and punishment

The reaction to anti-Semitic violence circumscribed Freud to much more than a petrifying Hobbesian vision of society. The continual encounter with anti-Semitism had more radical manifestations. Hobbes, in short, was not enough. The seventeenth-century social defence system was to be replaced with a modern psychological theory in which the individual was to be controlled from within. If Hobbes wished to subjugate the mob with his prince, Freud described an efficient system that would rule from within, with his inner prince – the superego.

The move inward took shape in Freud’s introjection of the liberal political paradigm into the psyche. Still in the 1910s, Freud’s Totem and Taboo (1913) allowed him to develop a new formulation of classical liberalism. While he would later concentrate on the effectiveness of social institutions in controlling the masses, Freud’s emphasis in Totem was on the internal coercion of the primitive instinctual action through guilt. The narrative of Totem is well known and needs no introduction, and so I will concentrate on Freud’s insight regarding the constitutive meaning of guilt. This will serve as a leading thread for rethinking Freud’s political philosophy in light of his fears of anti-Semitic violence.

Totem revealed Freud’s aversion to the primitive murderous mob and his wish to subjugate his “brothers.” The retelling of Hobbes’s State of Nature theory from a psychological perspective painted the logical action of the mob in darker colours. In Totem, it was not only a rational decision to form a commonwealth; it was the result of a murder that demonstrated the aggressive nature of the “tumultuous mob of brothers” (143). Indeed Freud admitted that the establishment of society was grounded in the sons’ appraisal of the chaos that would erupt as a result of their father’s death. In the logic of Hobbes’s social contract, the sons in Freud’s narrative first decided rationally to rewrite the law of the father as the taboo of incest. There was, however, another prominent ground for civilization. The sons “revoked their deed … [by] renouncing … [the] fruits” of freedom, under the overwhelming weight of “their filial sense of guilt” (Freud 1913, 143). The sons did not only hate their father, but loved him, and, guilty about their deed, they aimed to resurrect the dead father in the Totem animal. Guilty, they promised never to do it again, and accepted the rule of law.

Guilt turned out to be Freud’s fundamental addition to the Hobbesian theory. His rereading of Hobbes’s State of Nature theory added a second line of defence against the drives. In the basic Hobbesian paradigm, the commonwealth only tied the hand of the citizens but never changed their hearts. Society was foreign to human nature. For that reason, the continuity of the social contract is almost a mystery to liberal theory. Nothing guarantees that the next generation would comply with the fathers’ laws. In that respect, Hobbes’s unrestrained prince with his constant appeal to power was a brutal attempt to respond to that problem.

Freud’s insistence on the emotional component in the political narrative allowed him to restructure the relationship between the individual and society. With guilt, society held on much more firmly to the individual. Hobbes’s external repression was doubled in the
psyche. The guilty brothers who willingly imposed society on themselves changed an essential factor in the emotional constitution of the next generations. All of humanity will suffer from their guilt: every child has to go through the same “experience of earlier generations” and, as a result, to conform to externally transmitted values. As stated in *The Ego and the Id*, “by giving permanent expression to the influence of the parents … it perpetuates the existence of the factors to which it owes its origin” (Freud 1923, 35). The superego was given the role of inner control, commanding the ego in vengeance. Now they were all forced to obey their internal fathers at all times. If Hobbes destined society to be a continual struggle against the mob, Freud manufactured an internal and external mechanism that effectively rescued society from chaotic eruption. In some sense, outside law was almost redundant since the individual repressed the drives independently from actual social organization. The superego kept all in line, even when political institutions were to collapse. The danger of apocalypse was removed, now that social institutions had an internal agent that always inhibited the drive. Hobbes’s questionable system was perfected: Jews were saved now that the mob was eternally self-restrained.

On another level, *Totem* articulated Freud’s position as a victim. He was the father whom Jung had killed and he wrote *Totem* pleading for recognition. He wanted violence to be acknowledged. Freud asked humanity to regret its behaviour: he forced civilization to shackle itself not only for rational reasons but also as a “form of remorse” (143). They had to regret what they had done. Freud wished civilization to renounce mob violence, to accept the responsibility for centuries of “massacres of the Jews.” But the gentiles also had to be punished. Guilt was not only a means of recognition, or coercion, but a weapon in the hands of the skilled therapist. In *Civilization*, Freud’s resentment emerged as the ultimate *suffering*:

> My intention is to represent the sense of guilt as the most important problem in the development of civilization and to show that the price we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt. (Freud 1930, 134)²⁰

Civilization is solution and punishment: it ended the danger of killing and punished the violent mob for their actions. Freud, familiar with the pain of social repression, now unleashed it on his enemies. Fluctuating between descriptive and normative arguments, he both described social repression and installed it.

The superego marked Freud’s victory over the mob. In Freud’s political theory, individuals not only self-restrained their drives, but were also punished for their “evil thoughts.” Ironically, Freud’s solution was Christian in essence: the Protestant dream of self-subjugation was turned against anti-Semitism, as the violent anti-Semites were to suffer from their own aggression.²¹ “[The] super-ego … is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals” (Freud 1930, 123). The frightened Jew convinced the superego to harm his enemies: they would suffer not only for their actions (Hobbes made sure of that) but also for their evil fantasies.

6. **Metapsychology and the overcoming of the mob**

The unconscious wish to insulate society from the violence of the mob found a fundamental expression in Freud’s metapsychology. If the psychoanalytic political theory
transcended the Hobbesian conundrum by coercing the individual from within, Freud’s theory of conscious and unconscious processes would radically rethink the possibility of mob behaviour.

By and large, Freud always encouraged others to think of the unconscious and conscious processes in terms of order and disorder, pleasure and reality. The unconscious is usually equated with the irrational, chaotic, and conflictual, and the conscious with rational, adaptive, and ordered behaviour. However, Freud engraved his anxieties on that basic metaphor with. He used “freedom as uncontrolled behaviour” to describe the unconscious, and inhibition, the code for repression, to explain the conscious. Strictly speaking, the mind played out the eternal political drama between the violent freedoms of the anti-Semitic mob against the defending forces of social repression. The freedom of the unconscious was to be negated by the repression of conscious life.

In his essay on the unconscious, Freud offers a unique description of those basic mental activities.

The processes of the system Pcs. Display an inhibition of the tendency of cathected ideas towards discharge. When a process passes from one idea to another, the first idea retains a part of its cathexis and only a small portion undergoes displacement. Displacements and condensations such as happen in the primary process are excluded or very much restricted. [There are] two different states of cathectic energy in mental life: one in which the energy is tonically ‘bound’ and the other in which it is freely mobile and presses towards discharge. In my opinion this distinction represents the deepest insight we have gained up to the present into the nature of nervous energy. (Freud 1915, 188, emphasis mine)

Freud’s language is embedded in the political. Usually, consciousness is regarded as mechanical and as a simple connector between wish and reality. Here, however, consciousness is the act of “inhibition.” It is defined by replacing the immediate discharge with a delayed expression. The unconscious is “excluded” and “restricted.”

Thinking of conscious processes, Freud applied a set of associations that disturbed the descriptive difference between consciousness and repression. While readers of Freud usually think of inhibition as the direct result of (internal) agency – explained from the 1920s as the action of the ego – Freud conspicuously employed the language of renunciation to far greater realms of psychic activity. Indeed, Freud is careful not to claim that consciousness is repressing or sublimating the wish. But consciousness is holding the drive, postponing it, and displacing it.

In a letter to Josef Popper-Lynkeus, Freud admits to that reading. “Our mind … is no peacefully self-contained unity. It is rather to be compared with a modern State, in which a mob, eager for enjoyment and destruction, has to be held down forcibly by a prudent superior class” (Freud 1932, 221). The language, the metaphors, his detailed description of the mechanics of the mind – all point to the political drama. Thinking with the mob metaphor, consciousness was not only a vehicle to reality, but a border mechanism. It was another, deeper line of defence.

Freud was never overly enthusiastic about working on rationality or consciousness and gravitated in his work towards the unconscious, the libido and the id. Only with ego-
psychologists and their overt interest in the ego and its adaptive character was there a serious attempt to write a psychoanalytic theory of consciousness and thinking. In the context of this work, the fact that the formative days of ego-psychology were also coloured by anti-Semitism is more than indicative. Ego-psychology was created by Jews, such as Heintz Hartman, David Rapaport, Rudolf Loewenstein, who escaped from the horrors of Europe. It was a theory of those who suffered from a reality Freud could only imagine. It was only natural that this group of survivors aimed to finish Freud’s work on consciousness as a limit mechanism to mob behaviour.25

7. Freud and the inhuman character of the state of nature

Rereading Freud’s metapsychology in light of his political position as a Jew, the battle against the mob is much larger than previously assumed. Freud instilled deeper forms of protection into the mind. It was not only the superego that was enlisted to help him fight anti-Semitism. Consciousness helped him as well. Processes that hold the drive and inhibit the wish were prevalent: Inner limits were not tentative, but essential, and interwoven into the basic characteristics of human beings. Inhibition – a metaphor for mental defences – was a defining feature of consciousness, the thing that defines our identity.26

Reverting to Hobbes, Freud’s political metaphor suggests a reappraisal of State of Nature theories. In Freud’s metapsychology, chaotic uncontrolled behaviour is forbidden not only for external or political reasons. The suppression of human drives occurs not only due to social or cultural demands. Natural internal limitations are located in the mental infrastructure: even outside civilization, even before compliance to the superego, there are crucial mental processes based on the inhibition of one’s drives. In short, restrictions are not only cultural, but ontological. At this point, Freud adds an important new meaning to liberal theory. Human drives are naturally inhibited by the achievement of consciousness. And if State of Nature theory posits unlimited, uninhibited action as its normative condition (despite the descriptive impossibility of such a reality) then, in a deep sense, in order to comply with such a condition (that Hobbes advocated), people must surrender their humanity. If the full manifestation of the drive is a possibility that structures the State of Nature, then in order to obey that condition, the individual has to forego all limits, including, most importantly, his consciousness. To put it differently, a completely uninhibited manifestation of human drives will not return one to a pre-political stage, but to a pre-human reality, and such reality would amount to the eradication of the reality principle, and, as a result, of consciousness. While Hobbes, the survivor of the English civil wars, allowed for uninhibited action to direct his vision, but at the same time imagined the unending pain this possibility might cause, Freud refused to do even that. For the suffering Freud, anti-Semitism had to be radically revoked. This meant only one thing: anti-Semites were now not only “diseased,” as Gilman argues (Gilman 1993, 81), or uncivilized, but truly unhuman – plain beasts27

Freud formed his psychoanalysis as a battleground against the anti-Semitic mob. This is not to ascribe to him the position of saviour of Judaism, indeed a modern Moses, who emancipated his people from the dangers of anti-Semitism. Psychoanalysis was a means of survival, not the counterattack of a Hannibal. Indeed, Freud’s reaction to anti-Semitism almost cost him his life’s project. His need to protect himself changed his basic
appreciation of the unconscious. On the one hand, he insisted on the unconscious as “the general basis of psychical life” (1900, 612). It was undoubtedly “the core of our being” (1900, 603). However, he also fought with the id, the unconscious mob. In his mind, the unconscious fluctuated between the essence of humanity and its danger. This complicated, even contradictory formulation was not a result of old age. Freud worried about the mob not only when Nazism reigned over Europe, but already at the beginning of his journey, when he conceived of consciousness as state institutions that subjugate the violent masses. As Stephan Zweig noted, this was the basic contradiction that always disturbed Freud and his theory. This was the price he paid:

As a doctrine, Psychoanalysis insists upon the supremacy of the impulses and the unconscious, and yet, as a practical method of cure, it declares that reason offers the only salvation … Herein is a hidden contradiction which has long troubled psychoanalysts, and from the outlook we are now considering it is magnified by the scale of our contemplation until it reaches alarming proportions. (Zweig 1962, 355)

Notes

1. For introductory reading on Freud and Judaism, beyond the materials discussed in detail in this paper, see Bakan (1958), Frieden (1990), Klein (1981), Oring (1984), and Rice (1990). For an extensive bibliography on the subject see Gilman (1993, 3, fn. 3).

2. Anti-Semitism in discussed in passing in several different places in Freud’s large corpus. In a few of his dreams in The Interpretation of Dreams (1900), in The Psychopathology of Everyday Life (1901), in reference to Jung betrayal in On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement (1914), in his Little Hans case study, Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy (1909), in relation to castration anxiety, in one of Freud’s rare attempts to openly fight the accusation of psychoanalysis as a Jewish science in The Resistances to Psychoanalysis (1925a), in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), thinking on the history of the movement, and when Freud discusses his first disappointments with the Austrian discriminatory system, in An Autobiographical Study. Most of them will be explored in the text.

3. As Freud wrote in a letter following the death of David Eder: “We both are Jews and knew each of other that we carried that miraculous thing in common, which – inaccessible to any analysis so far – makes the Jew” (as quoted in Gay 1987, 132–133).

4. As stated in his 1934 introduction to the Hebrew translation of Totem and Taboo: “if the question were to put to me: ‘Since you have abandoned all these common characteristics of your countrymen, what is there left to you that is Jewish?’ I would reply: ‘A very great deal, and probably its very essence’” (Freud 1913, xv).

5. “For Freud, as for so many others, the shock of the anti-Jewish barbarism brought the question of what is means to be a Jew to a new pitch of existential urgency” (Yerushalmi 1991, 15).

6. A typical example of this line of reasoning is Peter Gay’s A Godless Jew that ascribed only social importance to the Jewish identity of Freud and found anti-Semitism to be completely unimportant to his work.

7. For more on the deconstruction of Freud’s psychoanalytic project according to the fault line of anti-Semitism, see Santner (1996), Geller (1999), and more recently Slavet (2009).

8. His fear of revolution is clearly manifested throughout The Future of an Illusion. See also in McClelland (1989).

9. For a discussion on Freud’s prejudice against the masses as part of the larger liberal elitist perspective, see Carey (1992). For a historical introduction to the impact of the mob on early twentieth-century anti-Semitism see Arendt (2004).

10. The similarities between Freud and the Hobbesian political paradigm was recognized over the years, as noted by the American Sociologist Phillip Rieff: “On the whole, Freud stands
with Hobbes, as opposed to Rousseau; not that man is good and society corrupts him, but that man is anarchic and society constrains him” (Reiff 1959, 221).

11. For an introductory reading on the subject, see Wistrich (1989), and Menachem Rosenshaft’s description of the Jewish responses to anti-Semitism (1976), Wistrich (1989), and Rosenshaft (1976).

12. See also in a rare remark in Freud (1925b, 8–9).

13. For more on Freud’s formal retraction of the event, see Freud (1914, 43).

14. See also in Assmann (1997, 147).

15. Goldstein found anti-Semitism to have a major impact on Freud’s theory of religion, as she claimed (almost in passing) that superiority is fundamental to the image of God (Goldstein 1992, 112). However, I find anti-Semitism to have a profound effect on Freud’s work, more in line with the aforementioned claims of Boyarin and Gilman, and with Marthe Robert’s radical reconstruction of the Oedipus complex as an attempt to universalize Freud’s ambivalence towards his father, in a way that allowed Freud’s “pathological accident” to become “a universally human fatality” (Robert 1976, 133).


17. Starting with Hume’s known claim in The History of England ([1754–1761] 1983) that “Hobbes’s politics are fitted only to promote tyranny” (6, 153) many were prompted to attribute a totalitarian agenda to Hobbes.

18. See for the historical shift in Zweig (1962, 355–356). Boyarin has presented a version of this argument, suggesting that the alleged difference in Freud’s evaluation of the repressive function of society is imbedded in Freud’s self-contradictory position towards anti-Semitic ideology. According to Boyarin, Freud was first the “object of racism,” as he identified with the position of women and thus also suffered from social repression. Later, in the 1930s, adopting the colonial meta-position of the white male – and turning to the “subject of racism” – Freud openly endorsed the repressive and alienating function of society (Boyarin 1997, 261).

19. Freud even admits this (limited) conceptualization of anti-Semitism, as he claims that he cannot understand why “Germanic world-dominion called for anti-Semitism as its complement” (Freud 1930, 114).

20. On the face of it, Freud’s 1921 Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego meant to establish the theory of the mob that Totem suggested. Following the works of Le Bon on group mind, Freud constructed the social dimension around the image of the (primal) father, the subjugating hero, and offered “a view of leadership which fits the Hitler case remarkably well” (McClelland 1989, 185). One might even argue that the underlying interest of Freud was grounded in his attempt to formulate the psychological causes not only of the formation a group, but in the rejection of nonmembers, that is, Jews, from the group, and as a consequence in the eternal “cruelty and intolerance towards those who do not belong … [that] are natural to every religion” (Freud 1921, 98). But in my reading, the construction of the social sphere on libidinal structure showed a different emphasis than the usual liberal theory. The father was not only repressing, but loved, and the love of the leader was projected to, and reinforced by, libidinal feelings for fellow members of the group. Freud thus attempted to formulate an anti-liberal political theory that rejected the basic rupture in society in the name of positive emotional ties. If anything, by addressing brotherly love, the anxious Freud was still hoping to find a constructive psychoanalytic solution to social danger.

21. I thank Karen Feldman for suggesting this point.

22. Rationality and thinking obey the same logic of dynamic displacement as Freud tells us that “If thought-processes in the wider sense are to be included among these displacements, then the activity of thinking is also supplied from the sublimation of erotic motive forces” (1923, 45).

23. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) when Freud had to rethink his metapsychology outside the paradigm of pleasure that held him back, the similarities between the reality principle and repression were out in the open. He did not hesitate and blurred the difference between the two: “this latter principle [reality principle] … demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining
satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure” (10). One can find explicit references to the relationship between consciousness, reality principle and the unpleasant inhibition of the drive in Heinz Hartman’s classic work on the reality principle: “The reality principle includes postponement of gratification and a temporary toleration of unpleasure” (Hartmann 1956, 36).

24. For political metaphors in Freud’s metapsychology, see Brunner (1995).
25. I thank Daniel Boyarin for suggesting this point.
26. In Freud’s metapsychology, rationality and thinking obey the same logic of dynamic management: “If thought-processes in the wider sense are to be included among these displacements, then the activity of thinking is also supplied from the sublimation of erotic motive forces” (Freud 1923, 45).
27. At this point, Lacan’s almost anecdotal reference to the prehistoric tribe as “orangautangs” should be understood as a deep insight into the heart of the Freudian argument (Lacan 2007, 113).

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