

PSYCHOANALYSIS, MONOTHEISM  
AND MORALITY

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## Introduction

*Wolfgang Müller-Funk and Herman Westerink*

This book works out and connects the results of two ambitious international conferences held between 2009 and 2011 organised by the Sigmund Freud Foundation in Vienna: ‘The Force of Monotheism’ and ‘Does Psychoanalysis Set Limits? Authority, Norms, Law, ...and Perversion’. The first refers to the relationship between psychoanalysis and religion, especially ‘Monotheism’, the other is focused on the question of whether Freud’s theory entails a normative framework and therefore at least an implicit value system, something like a modern ethics. What the two research issues have in common is that both quite clearly have a cultural frame. Culture in a broader sense – ‘culture’ in small letters – cannot be analysed properly without reference to religion and ethics. As one can see in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud preferred a wide concept of culture, one based on an anthropological understanding. And it is also quite evident that religion as culture has an ethical dimension. So one may put the question; can psychoanalysis be interpreted as the modern heir of religious tradition, as an ethic for the individual in times of modernity? This question goes hand in hand with late-antique scepticism, but also has similarities with Montaigne. Discussing psychoanalysis as a form of post-religious phenomenon and not only as a form of cultural analysis also implies an understanding of secularisation that differs from the main stream, suggesting an end of religion in the name of the long-term project of enlightenment. As in *The Future of an Illusion* Freud is generally ambivalent with regard to religion, because it seems to be that human beings need that kind of illusion.

The first topic of the book concerns the relation between religion and psychoanalysis, and focuses on the question if, and to what extent, monotheism in the strong sense (Judaism and Islam) or in a weaker version (Christianity) fits semantically and structurally together with psychoanalysis. One has to point out that in contemporary discourses on religion it is not so clear what ‘monotheism’ really means and if the binary opposition between ‘monotheism’ and ‘polytheism’, which often goes hand in hand with a colonial discrimination between European civilised and less civilised non-European people, works well. In Post-modernism (for example in Odo Marquardt but to some extent also in Jan Assmann) there is also a tendency to praise the

pluralism of polytheism by bashing monotheism as the dictatorship of one God with capital letters. It would be a challenging project to deconstruct this kind of binary with the instrument of Derrida's deconstruction.

Freud's relation to religion as such is deeply ambivalent. Appropriately, the different contributions to that theme entail all the different conclusions in the book. So there is by the end a Catholic, a Jewish, a Protestant and even an Islamic Freud. As an heir of historical Enlightenment, religion is for him at first glance an illusion. But it is not opium as in Marx or Heine; or if it is opium, it is something human beings need. The same is true with 'monotheism'. On the one hand Judaism, when seen as the pre-runner of modern rationality has, as its critics argue, a dictatorial tendency, but on the other hand it makes an enormous amount of human progress possible. There is only one reason, as there is only one God in monotheistic religions. Both modern ratio and the God of the monotheistic religions have a strong force. As two different forms of superego (*Über-Ich*), they exercise power on human beings while at the same time bringing them forwards. This is the reason why Freud to some extent identifies with Moses. They represent a message that asks too much of their people, who feel discomforted because they are overburdened; therefore prophets such as Moses and Freud – this is a basic narrative in Freud – live under permanent threat of being killed, really or at least symbolically. Under these circumstances, the weak monotheism of the Catholic Church can be seen as a bearable compromise.

Thus, one could argue, 'monotheism' is the historical precondition of the possibility of enlightenment in small and in capital letters. Psychoanalysis is seen here as a secondary form of Enlightenment and as a secular "religion", as a reflexive and intellectual modern and individualistic way of life. To some extent, psychoanalysis is no longer only a therapy or a method of cultural analysis, but has become an integrative part of modern life. Even people in Western contexts who have never read one single sentence from Freud live in a world in which psychoanalysis is implicit. This is not only because terms such as projection (*Projektion*) or repression (*Verdrängung*) have become common sense in, for example, political discourse. It is also quite clear that the old binary between good and evil has been replaced by psychological terms (perversion, neurosis, etc.). Last but not least, psychoanalysis has changed the self-reference of modern human beings with regard to their bodies, and especially to sexuality. Using an argument from the French-Greek philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis one might argue that not only the Ten Commandments or *The Communist Manifesto* have changed Western Culture in a way similar

to the steam-engine. Also psychoanalysis has modified our cultural system, as is the case with the computer.

In contrast to the tradition of German Idealism, Freud has described culture as the practical aspect of the *Über-Ich*, as a restrictive regime, which sets limits especially to the strong 'sexual' drive and all its manifestations. But this is not the only ethical aspect to Freud. Quite clearly, Freud has not developed an ethics as such, but the esteem for the individual as for the other, the concentration on recollecting and the appreciation for self-knowledge imply attitudes that have an ethical dimension and are very powerful in Western societies, in everyday life as in political discourses.

The book chapters on 'The Force of Monotheism' (2009) discuss Freud's relationship to religion in a general way, presenting two very different if not controversial interpretations (Moshe Zuckerman, Julia Kristeva), along with contributions that concentrate on Freud's concept of monotheism (Wolfgang Müller-Funk), and the monotheistic religions of Islam and Judaism (Fethi Brenslama, Felix de Mendelssohn). The articles of Joel Whitebook and Siamak Movahedi/Gohar Homapounpour discuss the consequences of Freud's monotheism for the understanding and construction of femininity.

What interests Freud in religion basically concerns moral issues. In his first major study on religion, *Totem and Taboo*, we already find evidence for this. In the preface he writes that theories on (primitive) totemism are largely uncertain, not the least since totemism only left minor traces in later and contemporary forms of religion and civilisation. The taboo, however, is the prototype of the categorical imperative, that is to say, of every moral prohibition and inhibition operative in modern societies. Freud states that he is basically only interested in totemism as far as it is related to taboos. From *Totem and Taboo*, but also his other writings on religion, we can also infer what Freud is not interested in when he deals with religion, what remains difficult to understand or what continues to be a blind spot for him. He is not interested in belief and the process of conceptualising faith – he is not interested in religious language and symbols. He doesn't address some of the religious phenomena that are at the centre of the psychological and anthropological literature of his lifetime – there are no comments on William James' theories on religious experience, no thoughts on Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's influential theory of primitive mystic participation in a divine cosmic order, no critical remarks on Evelyn Underhill's ground-breaking study on the emotions, desires and conations involved in mysticism. When confronted with such aspects of religion, for example when Romain Rolland challenges

Freud to reflect on religious sentiment ('oceanic feeling'), Freud simply has to acknowledge that the source of such feeling remained obscure and difficult to fathom for him. One thing, however, Freud was sure of: religion and religiosity could not be viewed as innate or inherited.

From his first studies on hysteria and especially also obsessional neurosis onwards – both pathologies characterised by severe self-reproaches (sense of guilt) that indicate inner conflicts between certain unacceptable ideas and what he called the 'moral character' of his patients – Freud is puzzled by the question of the source of both individual and cultural morality. The drives are repressed, yes, but what is the source of this repression? Could it simply be that his bourgeois, elite and mostly female patients had internalised cultural moral codes and norms, for example, through some innate or 'normal' feminine psychic reflex of unconditional obedience to authority? No, he points in a completely different direction. The problem of the origin of the neurotic conflict can be solved when we take the nature of perversion into account, says Freud. Perversions – like neuroses characterised by strong libidinal impulses – show that morality can be easily overridden when the libido reaches sufficient strength. It is exactly in this strength of the libido that one must search for the source of morality, that is, not of morality's specific contents (for these depend on cultural/societal conventions), but of its force. And it is the (excessive) force of morality that marks the difference between normality and pathology. In other words, as early as the late 1890s Freud is convinced that the individual's moral household does not simply reflect the morality of a certain societal group and cultural context, but that the individual's inner moral conflicts originate from an inner dynamics that give morality its strength: the strength of the psychic 'dams' is derived from the libidinal impulse – an idea that is later pursued in his thoughts on how the superego (and the cultural superego) uses drive energy to contain the drive. It is clear for Freud that the obsessional neurotic's sense of guilt and hyper-morality presents the best material for the further analysis of man's inner moral conflicts and its sources, while never losing sight of the question of the origin of cultural morality. It is from the perspective of pathological formations that Freud not only wants to study human nature (see below) but also cultural phenomena that are produced by human beings. It is here that Freud's interest in religion comes into play – that is, religion as far as it can be understood analogous to (mainly) obsessional neurosis and as a product of human psychic dynamics.

Without going into too much detail, we can indeed fairly say that Freud's analyses of (aspects of) religion strongly draws upon his clinical knowledge of obsessional neurosis, and that the moral components of this

specific pathology determine the agenda of most of his writings on religion and cultural morality: The sense of guilt over the primal parricide as the key to understanding the origin of religion, moral ideas, legislation and social structures; the extraordinary character of Moses as the great man who sets internal limits to his aggressive impulses; the intolerance of 'others' in religions as internally organised by libidinal structures; the excessiveness of religious commandments such as the commandment to love ones neighbour; the advancement of intellectuality and morality relative to the emergence of monotheism in Judaism.

It is from the perspective of pathology that Freud's studies explain and understand cultural phenomena such as religion. It is the key problematic of certain pathologies and pathological formations that set the agenda for the analyses of the moral aspects of religion (and other cultural phenomena). It is therefore no surprise that the contributions in this volume that focus on religion and monotheism, often also address issues directly related to morality (paternity, authority, law, prohibition) and aspects of man's moral affectivity and sensitivity (drive, defence, belief, pleasure, enjoyment, helplessness, identification). Vice versa, in the book chapters that focus on moral issues such as the relation between law and perversion, values, responsibility and courage, the influence of religious thought and tradition often resonates.

The international conference and workshop 'Does Psychoanalysis set Limits? Authority, Norms, Law, ...and Perversion' (2011), organised by the *Sigmund Freud Foundation* in cooperation with the *European Freud Research Group* of the *International Association for Psychoanalysis and Philosophy*, explored the relation between psychopathology and 'normal' moral capacities and behaviour from the following Freudian premise: the relation between psychopathology and philosophical anthropology should be thought of as positive and structural. That is, psychopathology shows in an excessive way aspects or mechanisms of the human psyche that constitute our subjectivity, and as such also our moral capacities and behaviour. This point of view is decisive for Freud's critique of classical views on human nature. It permits him to rethink the human condition and man's cultural creations – taboos and imperatives, religious worldviews and social institutions. Gilles Ribault, Herman Westerink, Céline Surprenant, Sergio Benvenuto and Andreas de Block/Lode Lauwaert focus their attention on Freudian psychoanalysis as a psychopathology of the moral sense. Since Freud man's moral sense can be thought of as characterised by ambivalence and conflict, oscillating between libidinal impulses and reaction formations, between perversion and cultural morality, between – what Lacan reformulated as – desire and law. In a post-



secular society of which it is said that authority is in crisis, and yet in which conformity to shared norms and values, and regulation of moral conduct in a globalised world are strongly put to the fore, a psychoanalytic perspective on the moral sense and its meaning for moral theory are highly relevant.

# Moses' Heritage. Psychoanalysis between Anthropology, History and Enlightenment<sup>1</sup>

Wolfgang Müller-Funk

Freud's essay *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion* is out on a limb, not only because it is a late work and not only because there is, as is often observed, a mirroring effect in the text that confronts us with Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, as the double and the counterpart of Moses, the founder of Jewish monotheism. Prolonging Freud's story on Moses, Freud could be seen as the third Moses, the Moses after his second – symbolic – death.

But Freud's highly speculative text is also prominent, because it is a summary of his oeuvre that is a permanent travelling, a movement of seeking. It confirms Freud's attempt to give his ideas a more anthropological base instead of a purely scientific and biological one (as is the case at least since *Totem und Tabu*). But at the same time it reformulates ideas of enlightenment, especially its critique of religion; and last but not least it entails – in contrast to the great narratives of enlightenment – a sceptical and to some extent tragic macro-narrative. In its kernel one finds the central message of psychoanalysis, the plot that the past has an overwhelming power over people's present life, on an individual as well as a collective level. Insofar as Freud's last prominent text contains a more or less pessimistic philosophy of history, demonstrating that human beings have always been and become the victims of their past. Under certain circumstances, it becomes possible to overcome the burden of the past and psychoanalysis is seen as an exemplary intervention on both levels.

Religion is a field that brings together three keystones of psychoanalysis; anthropology, history and the philosophy of enlightenment. But the point is that, as Alfred North Whitehead has shown, religion as a compound phenomenon embraces at least four elements: 1) feeling and experience, the existential side, 2) rite, the aspect of performance, 3) myth, the narrative complex, and 4) dogma, the explicit discourse. I would add; 5) institution and power. In his occupation with Moses and the historical drama of monotheism, Freud is especially concerned with element 3 (myth) and element 4 (dogma),

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is an extended version of 'Murder and Monotheism. A Detective Story in Close Reading', in W. Müller-Funk, *The Architecture of Modern Culture. Towards a Narrative Cultural Theory*. New York: de Gruyter, 2012.

but in some parts in element 5 (power relation). Quite clearly, Freud is interested in the phenomenon of rite, as the essay *Zwangshandlungen und Religionsübungen* (1907) shows; in the essay on Moses, the tradition of circumcision plays a certain role, but it is not central. What Freud does not discuss in this text is the first element, the mystical element of religion, which since the early Schleiermacher seems to be the common bond between all religions and the elementary offspring of religion as such. Freud has discussed this topic in *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* and in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* as a certain form of regression to the state of the absolute unconscious, to the *Es*. In this sense, religion, the oceanic feeling, is not seen as a phenomenon *eo ipso* but an illusionary reaction, a denial to become an adult person. In a preliminary remark from June 1938, Freud says with a short glance at his book *Totem und Tabu* (1912):

“Since that time I have no longer been in any doubt that the only way to understand religious phenomena is by using the model of neurotic symptoms of the individual with which we are so familiar to see such phenomena as recurrences of long forgotten, meaningful events in the prehistory of the human family; I am convinced that in fact they owe their compulsive nature to that source, so that it is by virtue of their content of historical truth that they effect human beings.”<sup>2</sup>

The narrative structures of the individual human being and those of human communities are principally identical. But in the late essay on Moses it is quite clear that Freud also reflects on a completely different aspect, namely on the contribution of monotheism to establishing a stable symbolic order of the father, or to speak in a Freudian terminology, of the *Über-Ich*. One might say that religion in a Freudian sense is in the tension between two poles, the *Es* and the *Über-Ich*, the imaginary and the symbolic order of the father. Freud's text on Moses and monotheism is not religious itself. Moreover, it does not belong to the discourse on religion in an internal sense. It is a story about a tricky hidden murder that implies a difficult burden and leaves a problematic heritage for modern culture.

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<sup>2</sup> S. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Translated by K. Jones. New York: Vintage Books, 1955, p. 221. “Ich habe seit damals nicht mehr bezweifelt, daß die religiösen Phänomene nur nach dem Muster der uns vertrauten neurotischen Symptome des Individuums zu verstehen sind, als Wiederkehren von längst vergessenen, bedeutsamen Vorgängen in der Urgeschichte der menschlichen Familie, daß sie ihren zwanghaften Charakter eben diesem Ursprung verdanken und also kraft ihres Gehalts an historischer Wahrheit auf die Menschen wirken.” S. Freud, *Der Moses des Michelangelo* (1914). Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1993, p. 68.

Freud's essay is also interesting with regard to narrative analysis. Freud is a storyteller but also a critical analyst at the same time, who deconstructs – to make use of a term from Jacques Derrida – other texts and narratives. As Carlo Ginzburg and later Jacques Rancière have shown, Freud has developed a certain type of textual analysis that is similar to the method of a detective, who, by following traces, tries to find out what really happened and who was the murderer.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the mainstream psychology of his but also of our time, many of his articles make use of literature and the arts to develop and work out his own theory.

Already his first occupation with Moses (1914) is mediated by a famous piece of art, Michelangelo's sculpture of Moses. Also here, he makes use of his detective method to find out that Michelangelo represents Moses just before springing up and smashing the slabs of the Ten Commandments, but after he has overcome his violent temper and controlled his rage. In contrast to other interpretations, Freud is convinced that it was Michelangelo who revised the original biblical narrative, in which Moses is really outraged and acts angrily. Michelangelo is seen as an artist who has created a new Moses, one who may coincide with Freud's idea of rationalisation and sublimation. There can be no doubt that Michelangelo's Moses is seen as a positive figure.

Modern literature in particular has dealt with what Rancière calls the aesthetic unconscious. Freud's methodology works in that way, that he reads literary documents (or sculpture as is the case in his early analysis of Michelangelo's Moses) in the position of a secondary author, who, in contrast to the primary writer or artists, is able to link the aesthetic surface with the psychoanalytical unconscious. So, two elements are central, first that Freud is operating on a meta-level, and second that his procedure is based on a close re-reading of a given text, which anticipates to some extent deconstructive hermeneutic practices. It is

“(…) a method such as ours – taking from material what strikes us as useful, rejecting what does not suite us, and assembling the elements in accordance with their psychological plausibility.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See; R. Ginzburg and I. Pardo (eds), *New Perspectives on Freud's "Moses and Monotheism"*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006 and J. Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*. Translated by D. Keates. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> S. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 268; “(…) ein Verfahren, wie das unsrige, vom überlieferten Stoff anzunehmen, was uns brauchbar scheint, zu verwerfen, was uns nicht taugt, und die einzelnen Stücke nach der psychologischen Wahrscheinlichkeit zusammenzusetzen.” S. Freud, *Der Moses des Michelangelo*, p. 107.

There is an interesting ambivalence with regard to the texts that undergo Freud's specific close reading. On the one hand, it seems, that only literature and the arts are capable of representing the unconscious, the hidden, the repressed, but on the other hand there is a deep distrust of the authors of the texts, and especially in their own interpretations. They resemble those people in a criminal discourse who try to deny what 'really' happened. Freud's textual analysis follows the logical structure of a cross-examination in a trial, in which circumstantial evidence is decisive. There is, however, a difference. In contrast to the suspect in legal proceedings, the suspected author of a certain text or an art-work does not deny deliberately. He or she may work out the unconscious in a narrative or other form, but is not able to read his or her own text in a proper way. From this perspective, he needs the psychoanalyst as the adequate reader and secondary author, as a symbolic assistance. Thus, psychoanalysis needs myth, literature and the arts and all these symbolic forms need psychoanalysis for its detective method. Quite clearly, Freud is an heir of enlightenment, the representative of a second and secondary enlightenment. The figure of the private investigator is a good metaphor for this theoretical energy. But it refers also to the experiences of modern literature since Romanticism, which constructs in a very paradoxical way phenomena that can be called 'unconscious' and 'uncanny'. In contrast to Rancière, I would argue that Freud's detective method is not restricted to modern literature (Hoffmann's 'Sandmann', Jensen's 'Gradiva') or Renaissance art (da Vinci, Michelangelo), but is also at work in the field of myth and mythology.

For the detective reading, the category of *Ent-Stellung* is central. As the *Unheimliche*, the German word *Entstellung* has potentially a paradoxical double meaning: disfiguration, displacement, distortion, unconscious falsification but also restitution of the original. It is, as Freud writes in the essay, a form of dislocation:

"The corruption of a text is not unlike a murder. The problem lies not in doing the deed but in removing the traces of it. It would be good to give the *Entstellung* the double meaning to which it is entitled, although nowadays it makes no use of the alternative. The word should mean not only 'to alter the appearance' but also 'to move to a different place, to shift elsewhere'. It follows that in many cases of textual corruption we can expect to find that what has been suppressed and what has been

denied is still there, hidden somewhere, albeit altered in appearance and wrenched out of context.”<sup>5</sup>

The distrust of psychoanalysis has to do with its discontent in fantasy. It is fantasy that makes things come to light, but it is the same fantasy that distorts them. Therefore fantasy and *Entstellung* refer to each other. So the goal of the reader, who is at the same time a writer, is to find the true story behind the wrong one. But the wrong one is not wrong in a simple way, but entails hidden signs, which refer to the ‘true’ story. And when Freud compares himself with an investigator in a detective story, then this may be understood as a metaphor. But, in contrast, the psychoanalytic narrative can be characterised by the fact that there is always a murder in the hidden true story, which is disfigured by the literary text or the myth. What Freud’s reading program creates is a new narrative, a translation from the unconscious to the conscious. In the centre, there is a real or symbolic murder, trauma and shame. In contrast to the narratives of the first enlightenment with its vector into the future, in psychoanalysis, there is a tragic narrative that always refers all contemporary occurrences to the past. All relevant events have taken place in the past and we are in the uncomfortable position of having to deal with them. The present is seen as the shadow of the past. The reader of the psychoanalytic narrative behind the literary narrative is to some extent the heir of the collective murder and of the shame and guilt that are included in those events. There is no future in this narrative besides the idea of levelling the burden of the individual and collective history and its traumata.

Freud’s examination, which by the way has forgotten the first occupation of Moses by analysing Michelangelo’s famous sculpture, starts with the idea that the protagonist in the biblical story has the wrong name. That means that his name is not Hebraic, but Egyptian. There must be a symbolic problem that meant this Egyptian element was deleted.

In a next step, which anticipates structuralism, the story about Moses is interpreted as part of a general heroic, mythical narrative-matrix. His former

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<sup>5</sup> S. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 202. “Es ist bei der Entstellung eines Textes ähnlich wie bei einem Mord. Die Schwierigkeit liegt nicht in der Ausführung der Tat, sondern in der Beseitigung ihrer Spuren. Man möchte dem Worte ‘Entstellung’ den Doppelsinn verleihen, auf den es Anspruch hat, obwohl es heute keinen Gebrauch davon macht. Es sollte nicht nur bedeuten: in seiner Erscheinung verändern, sondern auch: an eine andere Stelle bringen, anderswohin verschieben. Somit dürfen wir in vielen Fällen von Textentstellung darauf rechnen, das Unterdrückte und Verleugnerte doch irgendwo versteckt zu finden, wenn auch abgeändert und aus dem Zusammenhang gerissen (...)” S. Freud, *Der Moses des Michelangelo*, p. 55ff.

pupil Otto Rank, in those times still under the influence of the master, worked this matrix out in his book *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden* (*The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, 1909).<sup>6</sup>

Starting with Sargon of Agade, Rank analyses a group of heroes that have more or less the same birth story, which is at the same time a family-narrative. They should be murdered after being born, but they survive in a displaced situation (mostly with a poor family), and then come from the bottom up to gain the status of a hero. Rank mentions as examples Karna, Paris, Heracles, Gilgamesh, and Oedipus. Quite clearly, Moses is this kind of hero. A hero is, as Freud comments on Rank's early book, someone who has revolted against his father successfully and triumphantly overcomes him at the end.

The two families, the royal one, from which the hero originally comes, and the subaltern one, in which he grows up, is interpreted as the fantastic narrative version of the drama of (male) childhood. In the mythical narration, there are two families, a difference between the lower and the upper one. In the psychoanalytical re-narration, the two families are identical.

But especially with regard to this narrative element, there is – this is the next hypothesis of the psychoanalytical investigator – a deviation from the norm of the narrative-matrix of the hero's birth. Usually the 'heroic' narrative (in Rank's sense) follows the scheme that the hero is displaced at the beginning of his earthly life and is given to a poor family. But in the case of Moses, an Egyptian princess finds the infant. Thus, he starts his career as a royal son and ends as the leader of a new people. So for the investigating reader it becomes quite clear that Moses was an Egyptian aristocrat who has been disfigured as a Jew. And by disfiguring the disfigured, Freud starts with the first part of his own narrative. In contrast to the hero, who, step by step, places himself above his low beginnings during his life, Freud's Moses starts his heroic life by descending from a height and lowering himself to the level of the children of Israel.

Starting with the wrong name of the hero, the story of monotheism has to be told in a new narration, as a transfer from Egypt to Israel. Following the Egyptology of his time, Freud identifies this early monotheism with the religion of Ikhnaton. But this attempt to establish the beginnings of monotheism fails; in this deconstructive reading, Moses is seen as one of the nobleman from the monotheistic camp who flees after the restitution of the old Egyptian polytheism. In this situation, he chooses a new people for the monotheistic religion of Aton, the people of Israel, which has a regional volcanic God

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<sup>6</sup> O. Rank, *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden. Versuch einer Mythendeutung* (1909). Wien: Turia & Kant, 2000.

Jahweh. But as in every free storytelling, Freud's narrating process becomes self-dynamic. This is not the end of the new narrative on Moses. By also dislocating scientific texts, Freud, a fascinating narrator, suggests that Moses has been murdered by the Jews, and that centuries later, the Jewish people have reinstalled Moses' monotheism in an act of painful shame.

I do not intervene in the discourse on that subject (it would also be interesting to refer for example to Jan Assmann's interpretation<sup>7</sup>) and I do not intent to discuss the plausibility of Freud's narrative construction, his detective story, which finds the probable version behind all the disfigurations and mythical manipulation of the narrative. I am only interested in Freud's ambivalent perspective on monotheism. It is quite evident that Freud is never interested in religion, monotheism or polytheism, as such. There are three aspects in his essay that come from cultural anthropology, psychoanalysis and political theology. One could argue that psychoanalysis is much more than a therapy but a cardinal discipline, which connects cultural theory with political theology (this is what I called the fifth aspect of the religious 'complex').

Freud describes the religion of king Amenhotep as an episode in the long history of Old Egypt, but emphasises the fact that this monotheism was strict and severe. It is a system that is constructed by orders and control. The king gave himself the name Ikhnaton, as the representative of the new God and his ideal (*maat* = justice). Freud also mentions another political function of this kind of monotheism; expanding Egyptian imperialism was not symbolically formatted in and legitimated by universalism and monotheism. Monotheism is unbearable, and this was the reason why the Egyptians smashed the new religion of Aton and the people of Israel killed Moses:

“Moses' Jewish people were no more capable of tolerating so cerebral a religion, of finding in what it had to offer any satisfaction of their needs, than the eighteenth-dynasty Egyptians had been. The same thing happened in both instances. Those who were being treated like children and placed under constraint rebelled and threw off the burden of the religion that had been forced on them. But whereas the docile Egyptians waited until fate had removed the divine figure of the pharaoh, the wild Semites took fate into their own hands and got rid of the tyrant themselves.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See; J. Assman: *Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge/Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> S. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 205. “Das Judenvolk des Moses war ebensowenig imstande, eine so hoch vergeistigte Religion zu ertragen, in ihren Darbietungen eine Befrie-



As with many other stories in the biblical narrative, the story about the golden calf, which is at the centre of Schönberg's opera, is wrong and true at once, a de-figuring narrative, which hides the true killing story but includes a trace, an index to the true story. It was not Moses who was angry, but his new people, because he has created a form of religion that is too much for them. So, it is not only the despotic exclusiveness but also the demanding aspect that lead to the abolition of monotheism in history. In Hayden White's terminology, a tragic plot comes into play, and monotheism is interpreted as an historical effort to bring mankind forwards by challenging its capability of abstract thinking, sublimation and overcoming the terror of the regional context (tribalism). Freud mentions the refusal of magic and mysticism, the stimulation of progress in the mind, the requests for sublimation, the respect for the intellectual and the focus on ethics. Monotheism is regarded by Freud, the representative of a second form of enlightenment, as an impressive project in the long run, and the restitution of the Great Father, which goes hand in hand with monotheism, is seen as a huge step forward in human history.

But to some extent this progress is unbearable, it entails too many reductions and unrealisable demands with regard to the structure of our drives and desires. So the murder of Moses' heirs might also be possible in the future. The eternal return of the same, a cyclic moment is written into the narrative matrix of psychoanalysis.

Why is Freud's method of detective re-reading so successful, at least from the perspective of the de-figuring active reader? Because there are some basic narratives in psychoanalysis, to which all narratives in texts, sculptures (or films) can be referred to. The Freudian secondary author, the de-figuring reader has got a clear understanding of the motive behind the murder and a lot of experiences with the logic of unconscious denial, which produces falsifications that he is nevertheless able to correct.

The murder of Moses by a people, which was in Freud's words accustomed to a regional and unimportant volcanic God, is not the end of Freud's own story. There still remains a latent reminder of this crime and this collective memory leads, centuries later, in the reconstruction of Jewish monotheism. The difference in time and also between the protagonists has been deleted in

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digung ihrer Bedürfnisse zu finden, wie die Ägypter der 18. Dynastie. In beiden Fällen geschah dasselbe, die Bevormundeten und Verkürzten erhoben sich und warfen die Last der ihnen auferlegten Religion ab. Aber während die zaghaften Ägypter damit warteten, bis das Schicksal die geheiligte Person des Pharao beseitigt hatten, nahmen die wilden Semiten das Schicksal in ihre Hand und räumten den Tyrannen aus dem Wege." S. Freud, *Der Moses des Michelangelo*, p. 59.

the biblical narrative along with the feeling of guilt. In this disfiguration, the murder has disappeared. But this is only true on the rational level. It is written into the 'unconscious' collective memory.

Thus, the events that are narrated in the biblical text version are based on another narrative, which follows the logic of one central psychoanalytic narrative; the traumatic narrative. It starts with a collective crime, which leads to a trauma that remains unconscious (here the Jewish people is traumatised because it is the culprit). The next and last narrative element is the urge for repetition, which has here a positive aspect, the re-introduction of monotheism in an act of shame.

The malicious and racist statement that psychoanalysis is a Jewish invention becomes here a positive element, and insofar as monotheism is interpreted as a remarkable effort and a positive tradition, psychoanalysis is part of it. Psychoanalysis can also be seen as a return of the repressed. If there is any positive reference to Judaism, then it is the secular confession of monotheism that is historically centred in Judaism.

Psychoanalysis is based on stable and limited narrative matrices, which produces endless variations and representations. To illustrate this, I would like to present the scheme once again in a more abstract version – it is a more or less linear narrative with a strong determinist element and a weak teleology that entails a moment of redemption, the redemption from the compulsion of repetition.

Freud depicts the following narrative scheme; 1) Early trauma – defence – latency – outbreak of neurotic disorder – partial recurrence of what has been repressed.<sup>9</sup> But there is also another great narrative matrix in Freud's theory, the murder narrative of *Totem und Tabu* (1912), to which he comes back in the last central essay of his work. It is the story of the great father of the horde, who is the owner of all its female members and who is killed by his sons. As Freud points out, he hesitates in pronouncing that humans have always known "(...) that they once had a first father and that they struck him dead".<sup>10</sup>

Explicitly, the author of *Moses and Monotheism* is in favour of regarding monotheism as the return of the murdered father. So he establishes a direct connection between the two narratives; Moses was the man who re-installed the symbolic order of the father and circumcision is the visible trace of that act. In this way, the most progressive and the most archaic elements fit together in the figure of the father. Reason and progress, intellectuality and abstraction appear in the dark light of a dictatorial regime. "Moses met

<sup>9</sup> S. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 243.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

the fate that awaits enlightened despots<sup>11</sup> The question is, to what extent despotism and enlightenment fit together. Quite evidently, all forms of enlightenment go hand in hand with a certain attitude of ruling power, although it has a 'democratic' origin. This is true for the first enlightenment, Jewish monotheism, and for the second historical enlightenment and for the third enlightenment of psychoanalysis.

Christianity is seen in an interesting way first as the return of the Ammon priests, who smashed the religion of Aton, the first monotheism in Freud's view. But there is also a remark in Freud that interprets Jesus as the second (or third) Moses, but a Moses, who – in contrast to the first one – has dislocated and substituted God the father. Later, it is seen as progress, because of the universalistic impulse and, moreover, because it is a milder regime that has reduced the enormous price of monotheism. But this is a double-edged compliment. For Freud, Catholicism in particular as a synthesis between monotheism and polytheism is far away from being a progressive power. It is the relentless enemy of freethinking, of progress and of the realisation of truth. This is the very reason why Christians and Jews became the object of hatred in what Freud calls "Germany's National Socialist revolution".<sup>12</sup>

At least in his last years, Freud is not in favour of monotheism for religious reasons, he, the heir of historical enlightenment, has not changed his suspicion that religion is a childish and stupid illusion. He is not critical of it because of its dictatorial gesture – there is only one God – which has been criticised by liberal-conservative post-modern philosophers such as Odo Marquardt.<sup>13</sup> There is a paradox; undoubtedly psychoanalysis has proved to be a subversive project against the symbolic command of the fathers (including the Jewish ones), but on the other hand its founder remains always anxious about the future of the symbolic order and its representative of the real and metaphorical father, who represents values that are not for discussion as is the case with the Ten Commandments. What is in the background is a tragic history of an imaginary subject called reason, which acts as a dictator of the people.

But there is something special in this text, namely that Freud relates his deconstruction of the story of Moses to the contemporary political context. He also reflects on the political function of his own thinking and his school with regard to the dramatic political situation in 1938.

There are two interesting preliminary remarks in the third part of the essay, which Freud published later, one remark is from March, the other from June

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>13</sup> O. Marquardt, *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981.

1938. Both short texts are remarkable, because they make clear that Freud was a political thinker *sui generis*. Freud is reflecting on whether he is disloyal to his people by publishing a text that denies its hero was a stranger, accuses him of being its murderer, and claims that Christianity implies to some extent historical progress. But one cannot accuse Freud of being a hidden Jewish anti-Semite. He is critical of the Jewish religion as he is critical of all forms of religion, he is also critical of them because he is sceptical of human beings, individuals and collectives, as such. He meditates on the phantasm of the chosen people, which has been adapted by the deadly enemy of the Jewish people, the German Nazis. He is astonished about the fact that the conservatives, including the Catholics, have seemed to become, as he says, the guardians of progress (a statement he has to revise after the *Anschluss*).

The preliminary remarks operate within the liberal and leftist binary opposition barbarity-progress, but it is not quite clear to what extent this binary opposition fits together with another one, the opposition between monotheism and polytheism. Freud does not make this connection to his essay explicit, but it is quite clear that monotheism represents the progressive and civil aspect. But what do the new dictatorships in Russia, Italy and Germany (and now also in annexed Austria) represent? Not a traditional pre-modern system, especially not in Italy and Soviet Russia. Freud is politically and intellectually irritated by Stalin and Mussolini:

“We are living in particularly remarkable times. We find to our surprise that progress has forged an alliance with barbarism. Soviet Russia has embarked on an attempt to raise some hundred million oppressed people to superior forms of existence. In a bold move they have been deprived of the ‘opiate’ of religion and in a wise one given a sensible measure of sexual freedom, but in the process they have been subjected to the cruellest coercion and robbed of any chance of freedom of thought. With similar violence the Italians are being trained up to orderliness and a sense of duty. It comes as something of a relief from an oppressive anxiety to see that in the case of the German people the relapse into almost prehistoric barbarism is able to proceed even without recourse to any forward-looking idea.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> S. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 217. “Wir leben in einer besonders merkwürdigen Zeit. Wir finden mit Erstaunen, dass der Fortschritt ein Bündnis mit der Barbarei geschlossen hat. In Sowjetrussland hat man es unternommen, etwa 100 Millionen in der Unterdrückung festgehaltener Menschen zu besseren Lebensformen zu erheben. Man war verwegen, ihnen das ‘Rauschgift’ der Religion zu entziehen, und so weise, ihnen ein verständiges Maß von sexueller Freiheit zu geben, aber dabei unterwarf man sie dem grausamsten Zwang und

I think that Freud is wrong with regard to German National Socialism, which also fitted 'progressive' and archaic elements together. But what is more relevant, is the fact that Freud does not judge Soviet Russia or Italy with reference to their democratic standard (which does not exist), but inasmuch as they contribute to the secondary enlightenment by which psychoanalysis can be understood.

Here we have to end our close reading, but it is necessary to formulate the suspicion that those binary oppositions such as barbarity and progress, polytheism and monotheism are no longer sufficient instruments for cultural and historical analysis. For various reasons, we have to give up these simple alternatives. The still actual aspect in Horkheimer/Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* can be expressed in the plot, that barbarity and progress can change their places and mingle. And the opposition between rational monotheism and non-rational polytheism is also to some extent crucial. Polytheism can be understood as a hetero-stereotype of so called monotheism. And it is not sure – I am not an expert in this field – that polytheism is such a stable phenomenon. As the *catholic* example demonstrates, there are transitions, third spaces and syncretisms. There are angels in monotheistic religions and there is a clear hierarchy of Gods in ancient Egypt and Greece (so that one God is on the top), and the divinities in the religion of the Vedanta can be seen as allegories representing different aspects of the divine.

Behind the binary opposition between monotheism and polytheism, there lurks another opposition, the conflict between myth and logos. It was already Schelling, who in his philosophy of mythology identified the triumph of Judaism and later Christianity with the decline of the myth. Monotheism, as the triumph of an abstract reason that no longer needs either visual images nor narratives, is also understood as a principle break in the cultural history of mankind. In contrast, some, but not all critics of 'logocentrism' tend to rehabilitate polytheism as a polyphonic symbolic space, which enables pluralism and political liberty (*pars pro toto* I mentioned the German philosopher Odo Marquard). But this praise for diversity misses the fact that 'polytheism' does not represent different beliefs and divinities on the same political, social and economic level, but expresses, as Klaus Heinrich has

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raubte ihnen jedwede Möglichkeit der Denkfreiheit. Mit ähnlicher Gewalttätigkeit wird das italienische Volk zu Ordnung und Pflichtgefühl erzogen. Man empfindet es als Erleichterung von der bedrückenden Sorge, wenn man im Fall des deutschen Volkes sieht, dass der Rückfall in nahezu vorgeschichtliche Barbarei auch ohne Anlehnung an irgendeine fortschrittliche Idee vor sich gehen kann."

shown, social and cultural hierarchy.<sup>15</sup> Not all myths, narratives and divinities are equal, some are more equal.

With regard to the monotheism of the psychoanalytic movement, I would like to resist the temptation to refer to psychoanalysis as a secular monotheistic religion, Freud to Moses, the authoritarian structures of the psychoanalytical institution with monotheistic despotism, which Freud himself mentions. But it is quite evident, that the monotheism of Freud needs an element that is constitutive for any so called polytheism: narratives, narrating, and narration.

When Freud interprets Michelangelo's Moses, the man who gave the people of Israel God's Ten Commandments, as a man who is able to calm down his rage, he could have had the idea of a monotheism without rage, a monotheism of or with calmness, an auto-image of psychoanalysis. Following Hayden White's rhetorical narratology, one could, however, argue that the basic narrative of psychoanalysis in Freud has a tragic plot; monotheism goes hand in hand with the murder of its key figures – Moses, Jesus and still as a thread in 1938 the Jewish people – a mechanistic and deep structure of argumentation. Metonymy is here the key rhetorical figure, but, in contrast to White's terminology, the radical ideology that usually goes hand in hand with that type of narrative is broken in a strange way, as is the case with Moses' rage in Michelangelo.

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<sup>15</sup> K. Heinrich, *Dahlemer Vorlesungen: anthromorpé. Zum Problem des Anthropomorphismus in der Religionsphilosophie*. Frankfurt/Main: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1986.