

FREUD, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND ANTI-SEMITISM¹

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Sigmund Freud was a proudly assertive adherent of the Western cultural tradition, specifically that of the German tradition associated with Goethe. However, from the first rude shock of the anti-Semitism he experienced at university until the moment of exile after the Anschluss, Freud was always aware of the profound discrepancy between this ‘Germany of the mind’ and the reality of the Germanic society in which he actually lived. Yerushalmi (1991: 40) notes,

Certainly a vital part of him lived in a Germanic universe of thought, but this Germany of the mind and the imagination that he, like so many Central European Jews, cherished was that of the German Enlightenment... of literature and philosophy, of nineteenth-century German science. Unlike so many of his contemporaries, Freud rarely confused this with the real Germany or Austria, even if part of him may have strongly wanted to do so. And this long before Nazism and Hitler.

It may be that Freud’s allegiance to his Jewish identity helped him maintain the acerbic and somewhat distant attitude towards the reality of German culture that went along with his admiration for its highest values; that is, not being fully part of it, he could love it without being infatuated by it. Such an approach is arguably a psychoanalytic value in itself: one can admire beauty without being taken in by it; there must always be some space left over for analysis. The Jew outside the beckoning culture might, if he or she is to remain sober and realistically cautious, do well also to retain this ironic stance.

In any case, Freud’s Jewish identity seems without doubt to have had a massive influence on the form and content of his psychoanalytic discoveries and on the formation of the movement itself. The energy devoted towards intellectual searching and ethical practice which Freud channelled into the B’nai Brith at the turn of the twentieth century (Diller 1991), were very soon afterwards taken over wholesale into the psychoanalytic movement itself, a movement which was entirely Jewish for its first few years and predominantly Jewish almost everywhere until well after the Second World War. These Jewish origins had a very substantial effect on the content of psychoanalysis, particularly in respect of the rationalist values to which it committed itself, as well as on its social relations –the intense, family-like bonds with which its adherents have always been characterised, in turn leading to schisms and passionate advocacy of belief structures, sometimes irrespective of anything that might resemble evidence. The energy derived from the impulse to make something new and better –to redeploy what were fantasised as traditional Jewish intellectual skills previously committed to taxing religious study- was poured into various cultural projects of the time, including if not especially psychoanalysis. This energy, it might even be argued, was used up in a flame that burnt so strongly that it left later generations of analysts enervated, unable to match anything that had

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come before –not necessarily a healthy state of affairs, but somewhat characteristic of a variety of modernist movements, including contemporary Judaism itself.

Freud's investment of psychoanalysis with his Jewish consciousness had several sources, including a rather mystical sense of some hidden power drawing Freud towards identification with Jews and Judaism (despite his consistent and principled atheism), an explicit recognition of the value of being an 'outsider' to the host Western culture, and an assertive and angry response to anti-Semitism. Freud made a nod towards analysing the first of these, for instance in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) with its famous opening repudiating the 'oceanic feeling' at the root of many religious experiences; and the second was more or less conscious anyway: it does not take much analysis to see how being a marginal can help you see clearly, and perhaps inure you to criticism. But the third source, anti-Semitism, to which Freud stood up all through his life, was also subjected to a provocative analysis to which he returned in his last major work, as an old man trying to make sense of the intense investment in hatred of Jews and, by extension if not explicitly, of the 'other' in general. This article examines the nature and implications of this analysis.

Psychoanalysis as a response to anti-Semitism

At the simplest sociological level, anti-Semitism constructed psychoanalysis through enforcing a collective consciousness amongst the set of Jewish intellectuals and doctors surrounding Freud, pushing them together as a 'movement' rather than allowing them to dissipate their affiliations amongst a number of welcoming groups. There were, it seems, few such welcomes available: if Jews were to work on something new, they would have to do so together. 'The irony of the impact of incipient racial anti-Semitism on Freud, and on German Jews like him,' writes Klein (1985: 55), 'was the influence it had on their discovery of a new basis of emotional and ideological support,' this being other Jews. The sense of comfort given by Jewish companionship in the face of a hostile world was undoubtedly translated into the psychoanalytic movement, which has always had more than its fair share of paranoid fantasies as well as always being the object of fascination and abuse –very much like the Jews. As Klein notes, the other side of this is a very positive sense of self-worth, coded amongst Jews as a deep-seated idea of 'chosenness', however this might be interpreted under modern conditions (for example, as there being something special about Jewish ethical responsibility, or as an idea about Jewish 'genius' or the 'Jewish mind'). Psychoanalysis too, in direct proportion to the criticism heaped upon it, has always taken pride in its special knowledge, its access to truth: the unconscious exists, it was discovered by Freud, and it can only become available to scientific scrutiny through the methods of psychoanalysis. Everyone who does not understand this is either ignorant or insufficiently analysed; the psychoanalytic ark is the one chosen to carry Freud's tablets of stone.

As well as this relatively straightforward connection between the anti-Semitism of the surrounding society and the clustering together of Jews, either (at the time) as intellectuals or as Zionists or as psychoanalysts, there is a more specific response to anti-Semitic perceptions to be found in the content of the psychoanalytic world view. This has to do with its focus on sex. Gilman (1993) has documented this most exhaustively, arguing that, throughout the nineteenth century, there was a fascination both in popular and in medical culture with the body and 'difference' of the Jew, and that this particular manifestation of 'othering' focused on sexuality. The Jew was seen as having a kind of rabid yet damaged sexuality, manifested in the male Jew's circumcised state (and, though Gilman discusses this less, the female Jewess' oriental-like sultry sexuality) and through modes of insanity which were basically hysterical in form and were caused by incest and early seduction. The Jew thus becomes the embodiment

of feminised masculinity, which turns into madness. ‘For at the close of the nineteenth century,’ writes Gilman (1991: 333), ‘the idea of seeing the hysteric was closely bound to the idea of seeing the Jew -but very specifically the male Jew... The Jew is the hysteric; the Jew is the feminised Other; the Jew is seen as different, as diseased.’ In the popular and medical fantasy, circumcision was equivalent to castration, provoking fear and abhorrence, and not a little fascination. Gilman suggests that if this was the mirror held up to the Jew by the outside world, then Jews on the way to emancipation, anxiously scanning the faces around them for traces of acceptance and rejection, would internalise the racist equivalence: Jew equals emasculated man. One response, one might guess, would be repudiation of Jewish identity, and this was certainly the route taken by many Jews, including some who converted to Christianity. Another response, the one adopted by Freud, was to take this supposedly peculiar Jewish condition and argue that it was not specific to the Jews, but universal.

According to Freud, feminisation through castration is the key anxiety shared by all men, and the core distress of the female state: the ‘bedrock’ condition of human psychology is repudiation of femininity (Freud 1937: 252). However, what marks the human subject as specifically human is precisely the imposition of castration: the Oedipus complex, which forces on the young child the reality of limitations on desire (the boy *must not* sexually possess his mother; the girl *must not* have the father’s baby) has its effect because of castration anxiety. It is not, therefore, only the Jew who is marked as castrated, even though it is the Jew’s body that displays that mark; rather, all humans, men and women alike (but particularly men in this context) are psychologically organised through castration. Gilman (1991: 336) makes the link with anti-Semitism explicit in his reading of this, claiming that,

for Freud every move concerning the articulation of the nature of human sexuality responds to his desire to resist the charges of his own Jewish specificity by either projecting the sense of his own sexual difference on to other groups such as women or by universalizing the attack on Jewish particularism, mirrored in the particularism of the Jew’s body.

That is, one of the central claims of Freudian psychoanalysis –that human subjectivity is constructed amidst and through castration- can be understood as a universalisation of an anti-Semitic claim. The Jew consequently can no longer be pilloried as deviant; he or she is rather the flag-bearer for the whole of humankind. Only, as Lacan (1972-3) would later say about women, humankind in general does not know this, but is caught up in its fears and neurotic obsessions; only Jews and psychoanalysts know what is what. Perhaps this captures the kernel of truth in Derrida’s (1995: 46) seemingly bizarre statement that, ‘At issue here is nothing less than taking seriously the question whether a science can depend on something like a circumcision.’

Protecting psychoanalysis: anti-Semitism amongst the analysts

The deep roots of psychoanalysis in Jewish identity and culture had a powerful impact on the development and content of psychoanalysis itself. The effects of this have been very profound, both positively, in giving psychoanalysis an identity and cultural legacy of its own, and negatively, in fostering a sense of siege and an over-reliance on loyalty over the pursuit of critical engagement with differing points of view. However, the prime ‘negative’ effect of psychoanalysis’ Jewish origins lies in the way in which anti-Semitism comes to bear on it, both internally and externally. Freud himself was very aware of what he regarded as the danger that psychoanalysis would be seen merely as a ‘Jewish national affair’, stirring up anti-Semitic resistance as well as the unavoidable resistance due to psychoanalysis’ own unpalatable truths.

It was for this reason that he was especially enthusiastic about the presence of Jung in the movement, and optimistic that through Jung the future of psychoanalysis would be preserved in the outside world. Here, he was out of step with some of his Jewish colleagues from the start: Abraham, for instance, who had studied and suffered with the Swiss as a young doctor, was never much enamoured with Jung, nor taken in by him. In this, Abraham was more prescient than Freud, who was so wishful in his relation to Jung that he could either not see, or decided to overlook, the latter's transparent grandiosity and anti-Semitism. Drawing on one of his favourite Biblical allusions, Freud saw Jung as Joshua to his Moses, the one who would take the movement into the Promised Land when it was his, Freud's, fate only to glimpse this place from afar (Diller 1991: 179). Irritated by Abraham's and others' opposition to Jung's appointment in 1910 as President of the International Psychoanalytic Association, Freud phrased his views in melodramatically apocalyptic terms:

Most of you are Jews and therefore incompetent to win friends for the new teaching. Jews must be content with the modest role of preparing the ground... I am getting on in years and am weary of being perpetually attacked. We are in danger. They won't leave me a coat on my back. This Swiss will save us -will save me and will save you as well.

Diller 1991: 172

'They won't leave me a coat on my back': this is the classic complaint of the old Jew threatened either by anti-Semites or by the grasping and internecine quarrelling of his ungrateful children. Even when Freud was forced to recognise Abraham's acuity in identifying Jung's anti-Semitism, he thought he should overlook it: 'But my opinion is that we must as Jews if we want to cooperate with other people, develop a little masochism and be prepared to endure a little injustice' (Abraham and Freud 1965: 46). Freud was staunch in standing up to anti-Semitism where he encountered it, but the idea that the outside world would always be full of anti-Semites and if one wants to get on with life one has to put up with this was a consistent strain in his thinking. In the case of Jung, however, he was desperate not on his own account, but out of anxiety over the survival of psychoanalysis itself: if a non-Jewish home for psychoanalysis could not be found, in order to demonstrate its universalism but also simply to protect it from abuse, then the chances of its survival were slim. 'Our Aryan comrades are quite indispensable to us,' Freud wrote to Abraham, 'otherwise psychoanalysis would fall a victim to anti-Semitism' (Diller 1991: 183). Jung himself clearly also saw things in racial terms, complaining to Ernest Jones, for example, when Jones failed to support him against Freud, that 'I thought you were a Christian' (Diller 1991: 185). The effects of this racialised dispute on later relationships between Jungians and Freudians, and indeed on the history of the psychodynamic movements (including in Germany under the Nazis), was profound, leaving a bitter taste nearly a hundred years after their split.

The other central non-Jew in the establishment of the psychoanalytic movement was Ernest Jones. Unlike Jung, Jones retained a very strong loyalty to Freud throughout his life, yet also showed an independence of mind and spirit and an organisational capacity that was of immense value to the movement as a whole, however ambiguous and ambivalent some of his activities might have been. Whilst these ambiguities were to a considerable extent produced by the complex exigencies of the age, particularly in relation to the policy of appeasement of the Nazis, Jones' mixed attitude towards the Jewish domination of psychoanalysis also played its part. On the one hand, there was something about the intellectual alertness and quickness of mind of the European Jewish intelligentsia that attracted Jones and helped him feel less 'English' and more Welsh –and hence more critical and less stuffy. He identified himself as having the position of '*Shabbes-goy* among the Viennese' (Yerushalmi 1991: 53), this being

quite a good joke as it conveys the idea that the Jewish analysts needed a non-Jew to carry out tasks which, because of their identity (albeit not their religious beliefs) they found hard to do. Jones certainly seems to have been better at *organisation* than his squabbling comrades, and the usefulness to the movement of this sympathetic non-Jew in a position of institutional power was immense during the dark Nazi night. For Jones, it seems as though his links with Freud and the Jewish Viennese in particular gave him a sense of his own exoticism, as well as a setting in which his qualities of imaginative service could shine and be appreciated.

The negative side of Jones' ambivalence was also strong, however, and was matched in some measure by the ambivalence surrounding him. Klein (1985: 143) comments that,

Jones was especially unhappy about the manifestation of Jewish pride within the circle. He felt that despite the warm welcome Freud extended to Jung and to himself in 1907-8, and despite his genuine interest in attracting non-Jewish followers, Freud maintained a 'certain mistrust' for non-Jews.

There is independent evidence that Freud did indeed express a feeling of 'racial strangeness' towards Jones at this time (Klein 1985: 142), so Jones was not being particularly paranoid in thinking that there was some holding back in the warmth of the welcome. Later on, in the wake of the disappointment over Jung, this feeling became even more pronounced. Diller (1991: 198) notes that,

Unfortunately, this episode had only reinforced Freud's basic mistrust of non-Jews, which in turn made him more susceptible to those amongst the Viennese who continued to be suspicious of Jones, both personally and racially. ... Jones did feel that the Jews on the committee, Freud least of all, showed a rather heightened sensitivity to anti-Semitism and mistrust of non-Jews.

Whilst this suggests that Jones' sense of the Jews sticking together and regarding him with some unease might have been well-founded, it is also apparent that he failed to appreciate the extent to which Jewish identity and pride was important not only in motivating Freud himself, but also in energising the entire fledgling movement in the early years of its existence. For Jones, it seems that this Jewish foundation, which he saw as a vestige of a racial sense of Jewish superiority, was not only a nuisance in relation to his own position but also interfered with the establishment of psychoanalysis as a science. At times, his failure to distinguish between the Jewish analysts' nervous response to anti-Semitism and a sense of personal injury or antagonism, either led him to, or drew out in him, anti-Semitic attitudes at odds with most of his actions and beliefs. Yerushalmi (1991: 53) gives the clearest example.

[T]oward the end of World War II, the amiable disciple delivered himself of a disquisition entitled 'The Psychology of the Jewish Question' which advises total assimilation as the solution to anti-Semitism and contains some astonishing passages, including the broad implication that most German-Jewish refugees in England were ungrateful draft-dodgers. Turning to the physical features of the Jews that contribute to unconscious hostility against them, Jones identifies one as circumcision which, according to Freud himself, arouses castration anxieties. The other is Jones' original contribution: 'The second physical feature alluded to is the Hittite nose, so suggestive of deformity, which the Jews unfortunately picked up in their wanderings and which by an unlucky chance, is associated with a dominant gene.'

Some stray comments, and more stray actions, of Jones in the 1930s suggest that the attitude expressed in this ‘disquisition’ were not isolated aberrations, nor did they lack effects, although this is not to claim that Jones was anti-Semitic in the way that Jung was. Rather, the origins of psychoanalysis lie in a complex network of identity and social processes, within which Jewish identity was a key player, and which thus necessarily evoked the immensely powerful forces of anti-Semitism. This had some profound effects in mobilising the activities of the Jewish analysts, first and foremost Freud himself, but it also drew along in its wake tempestuous ambivalence towards psychoanalysis by non-Jews, even those who became central to the psychoanalytic movement. Not all non-Jews fell into this trap, of course, but the exceptions certainly surprised Freud, as he noted when getting generous greetings from Thomas Mann on his eightieth birthday: ‘A noble Goy! It’s nice to know that these, too, exist. One is apt to doubt it sometimes’ (Diller 1991: 128). Given the circumstances at the time (this was 1936), Freud’s comment is not as ungracious as it sounds; more to the point, he was well aware that there were ‘noble’ non-Jews (he admired many of them and benefited directly from some), but by the end of his life he had ceased to doubt the pervasiveness and deep-rootedness of anti-Semitism as a psychological and socio-political phenomenon. The question that arises from this, for a mind as alert and unforgiving as Freud’s, is how to explain it: what is it that makes anti-Semitism so virulent, what irrationality fixes it so firmly in place, and why, amongst all the possible victims of racist hatred, do the Jews figure so large?

Theorising anti-Semitism

In the 1930s, faced with inescapable evidence of the virulence and pervasiveness of the anti-Semitic ‘repressed’ returning, Freud produced his most sustained and provocative reading of the phenomenon, in the context of his epic meditation on Jewish identity, *Moses and Monotheism*. This book is set up as a scholarly exploration of the pre-history of monotheistic Judaism, advancing the radical claim that Moses was an Egyptian who sought out the Hebrew slaves in order to create a monotheistic cult, and whose personality can be glimpsed behind the version of God created in this cult. Exploration of the meaning and madness of these claims has taken up much of the critical commentary on the book from the time it was published. However, one powerful way of reading *Moses and Monotheism*, which leaves behind questions of accuracy concerning the assertions Freud makes about the origins of Judaism, is as Freud’s search for some resolution of the lifelong tensions in relation to his Jewish identity, occurring in the context of the rise of Nazism. Thus, Diller (1991: 137) argues that Freud’s

great hesitancy and agitation over the work, his return to biblical themes of his childhood, his resurrection of the Oedipal drama and instinct theory, and the fact that although he was gravely ill, near death, and deeply disturbed by the outside world, he could still harness the energy to write such a book –all point to *Moses and Monotheism* as a last and final reckoning for him, a parting opportunity to find emotional peace and quietude, especially in relation to his Jewish identity.

Jacqueline Rose (2003: 77), in partial contrast with this, argues that *Moses and Monotheism* reveals Freud’s continued state of being torn ‘between belonging and not belonging as a Jew’; she thus emphasises not so much the *resolution* of Freud’s Jewish identity as its continuing openness. Both these positions, and many others, imply that the main thrust of the book is a quest to deal with personally insistent identity issues.

Readings of *Moses and Monotheism* as an expression of Freud’s personal identity crisis, or at least quandary over his Jewish identity, in the 1930s are legitimised in part by his own successive ‘prefaces’ to the book, as he worried away about the propriety of publishing it. At

the beginning, famously, Freud sets this context of anxiety as relating to the Jewish people and his possible betrayal of them at a time of trouble; significantly, he does not hesitate to remind the reader of his own membership of this disparaged group:

To deprive a people of a man whom they take pride in as the greatest of their sons is not a thing to be gladly or carelessly undertaken, least of all by someone who is himself one of them.

Freud 1939: 7

Freud's defence of his actions, as ever, is in the name of scientific truth, reflecting his deep-rooted if increasingly pessimistic belief that the only viable route to human progress is through the dispelling of illusions and the exercise of rationality.

But we cannot allow any such reflection to induce us to put the truth aside in favour of what are supposed to be national interests; and, moreover, the clarification of a set of facts may be expected to bring us a gain in knowledge.

ibid.

Nothing in Freud's universe is more important than a 'gain in knowledge', even the maintenance of Jewish self-esteem –an attitude on his part that is linked at least to some Talmudic traditions, in which everything bows to the power of truth.

However, Freud's main cautions about publication were not caused by worry over its effect on the Jews, but for fear that it would call down the wrath of external authorities on psychoanalysis itself. This is clearest in his 'Prefatory Note' to the third part of the book, written in Vienna before the Anschluss of March 1938. Here, Freud expresses anxiety about alienating the Catholic authorities when they might be the only protection against the 'prehistoric barbarism' of Nazism –a hope demonstrating that Freud's reading of political events was not as perspicacious as his reading of psychology. Even whilst holding onto this hope, however, Freud is characteristically ironic and negative in his framing: the old power is to be invested in only because it is less destructive than the new. 'The new enemy,' he notes acerbically, 'to whom we want to avoid being of service, is more dangerous than the old one with which we have already learnt to come to terms' (Freud 1939: 55). Psychoanalysis, Freud rather proudly claims, will always draw 'the resentment of our ruling powers down upon us' because it 'reduces religion to a neurosis of humanity', so there is not really much chance of finding protection in the Church. However, where there is little hope to be had, that which there is must be preserved, so Freud, uncertain of the impact of his book, chose to withhold it from publication, and clung on to the idea that in so doing he might be helping psychoanalysis retain its home. 'Psychoanalysis,' he wrote, in terms resonant of his state of mind, 'which in the course of my long life has gone everywhere, still possesses no home that could be more valuable for it than the city in which it was born and grew up' (Freud 1939: 55).

A few months later, however, the Viennese situation and that of Freud had changed: the former was in Nazi hands, the latter in England. Freud wrote, as part of a further 'Prefatory Note', 'In the certainty that I should now be persecuted not only for my line of thought but also for my "race" –accompanied by many of my friends, I left the city which, from my early childhood, had been my home for seventy-eight years' (Freud 1939: 57). External causes for delaying publication have now gone: England has proved friendly, if rather prone to be a source of Christian attempts to save Freud's poor soul, and there is nothing any more to be hoped for by way of protection for psychoanalysis from the 'broken reed' of Catholicism. The uncertainties

now are only internal, Freud's 'lack of the consciousness of unity and belonging together which should exist between an author and his work', his 'critical sense' that 'this book, which takes its start from the man Moses, appears like a dancer balancing on the tip of one toe' (Freud 1939: 58). But time and energy have run out, and the deep investment Freud has in this final great work is such that he cannot hold it back from its readership. Indeed, thinking psychoanalytically as one must about Freud's work, the very existence of all the uncertainties and anxieties, the breaches with logic and narrative sense, the 'lack of balance' and anxiety that this generates, all suggest that there are powerful emotional identifications and wishes at work. It is not hard to see what these might be: the identification is clearly with Moses, the one who –like Freud- brought a benighted people out into the light of order and law; the wish is that psychoanalysis, like Judaism, might survive its dispersion.

Thus, at the very end of his life, Freud let loose on the world his meditation on the origins of Judaism, and on the perseverance of Jewish identity. Edward Said (2003) comments on how *Moses and Monotheism* cannot be seen as the summation of Freud's thinking, but rather is another creative departure on his part, a lurch further into the unknown, in which the problematics of identity and belonging, and correspondingly of otherness and marginality, are revolved and left hanging. Said codes this, by virtue of a comparison with Beethoven, as a particular kind of 'late style' in which 'the intellectual trajectory conveyed by the late work is intransigence and a sort of irascible transgressiveness,' and 'Freud wishes us to understand that there are other issues at stake here -other, more pressing problems to expose than ones whose solution might be comforting, or provide a sort of resting-place' (Said 2003: 29-30). For Said, the 'other issues at stake' are those of a theory of identity, especially the opposition to be found in Freud's writing to a notion that identity might be formed once and for all, coherent and complete, at either the individual or cultural level. Making Moses an Egyptian has the effect of asserting a brokenness within Jewish communal identity: at its source is an outsider, so claims for national or racial purity must always break down, in the specific case of Jews (and Israel), and in the general case of all cultures.

Yerushalmi (1991: 2) offers a more comprehensive account of what *Moses and Monotheism* might be about.

If the book can be read as the final chapter in Freud's lifelong case history it is also a public statement about matters of considerably wider consequence -the nature of Jewish history, religion and peoplehood, Christianity and anti-Semitism- written at a tragic historical juncture.

In particular, Yerushalmi argues that 'the true axis of the book' is 'the problem of tradition' (Yerushalmi 1991: 29), the question of what perpetuates the past, what, specifically, gives Judaism its continued hold over Jews, even those who, like Freud, have not a trace of religious belief in them. Yerushalmi points to the pervasive Lamarckian assumptions in the book –the idea that specific 'learned' characteristics can be passed down through the generations, so that all Jews share not just a sense of a past history, but have embodied and internalised the actual memory trace of that history, linking them with one another through a mysterious yet material bond and producing 'the powerful feeling that, for better or worse, one cannot really cease being Jewish' (Yerushalmi 1991: .31). Freud's appeal to 'dark emotional powers' (Freud 1961: 367) inexplicably tying him into his Jewish identity, fits well with this idea: it is as if what was learnt and experienced by the Jews throughout history becomes the emotional as well as the intellectual heritage of each new generation. In particular here, as Freud asserted throughout *Moses and Monotheism*, the reliance of the Jews on intellectual understanding, their

appropriation of ideas and words as the domain of their portable material heritage, and the accompanying emphasis on reason rather than emotion or mysticism –these characteristics are both the heritage of all Jews and a sign of cultural or even racial superiority. The ‘chosen people’ takes a new form in Freud’s account of Judaism’s origins, even though he makes the original instigator of the religion an Egyptian; and once again it is by no means surprising that these same attributes are those valued within the psychoanalytic movement itself.

Moses and Monotheism is a record of Freud’s emotional response to Nazism and his attempt to work out his relationship with his own Jewish identity in that context. It is also an exploration of the conditions that have allowed for the survival and reproduction of Judaism in a hostile environment, and hence it does indeed deal, as Yerushalmi claims, with questions of tradition and inheritance, as well as opening out domains of speculation on national and political identity, the aspect of the book that Said draws out. It is thus a moving and complex document at numerous personal and intellectual levels. In the midst of all this, however Freud gives a startling account of anti-Semitism that embodies some of the recurrent themes of psychoanalysis’ encounter with otherness. Freud’s theory of anti-Semitism, whatever its shortcomings, also offers a way into another area of considerable importance: how psychoanalytic insights might be turned on the phenomenon of racialised hatred.

A good deal of *Moses and Monotheism* is devoted to considering ways in which Judaism offers an intellectually satisfying and rather superior way of engaging with the world, psychologically at least. Much of this is given as a kind of sublimation: that in preferring an invisible, abstract God to a set of idols or images, monotheistic Judaism promotes intellectuality over sensuality, with vast gains for the Jews specifically and human culture in general. Freud’s final comment on this at the end of the book is also his most egregious, showing a fine sensibility for polemic in the context of a historical juncture in which Jews and Judaism were being castigated and deplored.

The pre-eminence given to intellectual labours throughout some two thousand years in the life of the Jewish people has, of course, had its effect. It has helped to check the brutality and the tendency to violence which are apt to appear where the development of muscular strength is the popular ideal. Harmony in the cultivation of intellectual and physical activity, such as was achieved by the Greek people, was denied to the Jews. In this dichotomy their decision was at least in favour of the worthier alternative.

Freud 1939: 115

This beautiful amalgamation of Freud’s admiration for the Greeks and his acceptance of at least some aspects of the claim of Jewish superiority must be read, again, in the context of the apparent historical triumph of ‘brutality and the tendency to violence’ in his own lifetime. For Freud, ‘the idea of a single god, as well as the rejection of magically effective ceremonial and the stress upon ethical demands made in his name’ (Freud 1939: 66) was the originating force behind this skew towards intellectuality, and a great achievement it was too. The Jews themselves have always known this, hence their pride in their culture and their refusal to apologise for holding tightly to what is supposed (by Christians as well as atheists) to be an outmoded way of being. Freud, who always sought intellectual superiority and achievement, could see this in his Jewish compatriots, and could not restrain his own approbation of them.

The Mosaic prohibition [on representation] elevated God to a higher degree of intellectuality... All such advances in intellectuality have as their consequence that the individual’s self-esteem is increased, that he is made proud -so that he feels superior to

other people who have remained under the spell of sensuality.

Freud 1939: 14-15

Not only is Judaism superior as a religion because it values intellectual life over sensuality, but the Jews *feel* themselves to be superior because of their advances in intellectuality. They look down on the brutishness of ordinary life and regard themselves as special, not so much because of their supposed peculiar relationship with God, but more because of their power of thought, their capacity to reason and to appreciate the significance of ideas and ethical values. Again, if one wanted to draw a simple parallel between Freud's ideas on the virtues of Judaism and his advocacy of psychoanalytic values, it would be very easy to do so.

It is from here that the analysis of anti-Semitism begins. Anti-Semitism has numerous sources:

A phenomenon of such intensity and permanence as the people's hatred of the Jews must of course have more than one ground. It is possible to find a whole number of grounds, some of them clearly derived from reality, which call for no interpretation, and others, lying deeper and derived from hidden sources, which might be regarded as the specific reasons.

Freud 1939: 90

One of these sources is the claim to superiority of the Jews, the fact that 'they have a particularly high opinion of themselves, that they regard themselves as more distinguished, of higher standing, as superior to other peoples -from whom they are also distinguished by many of their customs' (Freud 1939: 105). This kind of superiority sense, built out of the deeply-rooted belief that the Jews really are the 'chosen people' of God, is bound to produce envy in others: 'If one is the declared favourite of the dreaded father, one need not be surprised at the jealousy of one's brothers and sisters, and the Jewish legend of Joseph and his brothers shows very well where this jealousy can lead' (Freud 1939: 106). For the Christians at least, this abhorrent claim might even have seemed confirmed by their own religious history; why else, if not because they were already chosen as special, would the Christian Messiah, Jesus, come from that obscure people? This fact intensified hatred of the Jews; somehow, it is always they who are selected for the starring role. 'I venture to assert,' writes Freud pointedly and perhaps with childish relish, 'that jealousy of the people which declared itself the first born, favourite child of God the Father, has not yet been surmounted among other peoples even today: it is as though they had thought there was truth in the claim' (Freud 1939: 91).

Other sources of anti-Semitism have less to do with the behaviour of the Jews and more to do with their circumstances. Freud notes that the fact that Jews live as minorities amongst others and that they are different 'often in an indefinable way' from the people amongst whom they find themselves, is enough to generate continued hostility, especially as despite centuries of persecution they show no signs of being 'exterminated'; 'on the contrary, they show a capacity for holding their own in commercial life and, where they are admitted, for making valuable contributions for every form of cultural activity' (Freud 1939: 91).

More psychologically, building on Freud's speculative account of the origins of culture both in *Moses and Monotheism* and the earlier *Totem and Taboo* (1914), the Jews are held to be responsible for the murder of the primal father and not to have been willing to acknowledge this. The argument here is complex, and –as Freud himself acknowledged when he referred to his anthropological account in *Totem and Taboo* as a 'just-so story' (Freud 1921: 122)- far-fetched. Paralleling the prehistory of all peoples, the Jews are held by Freud to have murdered

their own paternal founder, Moses. However, the historical truth of this was repressed, resurfacing as remorse and an increasing sense of guilt, which in turn ‘provided the stimulus for the wishful fantasy of the Messiah, who was to return and lead his people to redemption and the promised world-dominion’ (Freud 1939: 89). Jesus thus represents the return of the murdered primeval father, the return of Moses-the-founder; he also *re-enacts* the murder itself, both in an act of expiation (Jesus on the cross) and as retribution: the son-religion (Christianity) conquers and destroys the father-religion (Judaism). ‘Ostensibly aimed at propitiating the father god,’ writes Freud (Freud 1939: 87-8), ‘it ended in his being dethroned and got rid of.’ Judaism, both in its refusal to acknowledge and deal with the father-murder and in its *specificity*, its insistence on the mark of difference, becomes the recalcitrance of a past wished away. Christianity, by contrast, celebrates and ritually atones for the murder of the father and extends its wings to all people who choose to participate in it –and, historically, to many whose choice is forced. The Jews, however, are a thorn in Christianity’s side, denying not only its truth but also reminding the world that there was once a father and that his shadow looms large, albeit mainly in the unconscious. This unadmitted ‘guilt’ of the Jewish people, stubbornly holding onto the idea that they are preferred amongst all people, acts as a continual provocation, and in so doing appeases the guilt of other peoples, specifically the Christians, who themselves have primal murder on their hands.

Freud was not much impressed with Christianity, seeing it as a regression barely able to hold onto the monotheistic achievements of Judaism. *Christians* were even less convincing, and Freud turned his ironic vision scathingly on the behaviour and attributes of those who claimed allegiance to the Christian religion, only to show –in Nazism particularly- that barbarous violence was closer to their souls. This is another source of profound anti-Semitism, according to Freud; that is, Christians are themselves ambivalent, and project their hatred of their own religion onto the Jews.

[W]e must not forget that all those people who excel today in their hatred of Jews became Christians only in late historic times, often driven to it by bloody coercion. It might be said that they are all ‘misbaptised’. They have been left, under a thin veneer of Christianity, what their ancestors were, who worshipped a barbarous polytheism. They have not got over a grudge against the new religion which was imposed upon them; but they have displaced the grudge on to the source from which Christianity reached them. Their hatred of Jews is at bottom a hatred of Christians, and we need not be surprised that in the German National Socialist revolution this intimate relation between the two monotheist religions finds such a clear expression in the hostile treatment of both of them.

Freud 1939: 91-2

There is an interesting uncertainty here about whether hatred of Judaism is fuelled by its refusal to participate in the conscience-cleansing rituals of Christianity, or whether it masks a deeper hatred of Christianity itself held by those who are at heart pagan; but the astute Freudian point is that, whatever their unconscious origins, poisonous feelings are directed at the Jews. The Jews channel, collect and carry hostile projections; anti-Semitism allows all who hate to combine together in their antagonism towards one specific enemy.

Finally, the anxiety-producing mark of bodily difference so important in nineteenth century racial thinking, is a key element in the generation of anti-Semitic feelings.

Further, among the customs by which the Jews made themselves separate, that of

circumcision has made a disagreeable, uncanny impression, which is to be explained, no doubt, by its recalling the dreaded castration and along with it a portion of the *primaeval* past which is gladly forgotten.

Freud 1939: 91

This castration is at the hands of the primal father, who was then murdered by the band of brothers whose subsequent guilt and atonement became the founding act of civilisation. Circumcision therefore not only links with the fear of femininity, but also raises the spectre of murder and guilt, reminding the non-Jew of the violence at the root of civilisation. The Jew becomes the recipient of hatred because he literally embodies the mark of castration, visibly presenting to the other nations the great vulnerability of the human condition and how it is subject to the exercise of power and the enforcement of the law of culture. Perhaps it is understandable that this produces a furious response: while Jews themselves claim that circumcision ‘perfects’ them, to outsiders it looks like an act of subjugation, hence demanding renunciation of any omnipotent fantasy.

What is one to make of all this? Freud’s text is full of telling ambiguities: he debunks religion and, in making the founder of Jewish nationhood, its great redeemer, an Egyptian, he exposes the fragility of Jewish claims to purity and originality. The appropriation of the position of being the ‘chosen people’ of God is obviously a wish fulfilment, almost certainly born out of the actual powerlessness of the Jews, alongside their stunning assertion of intellectual superiority over others. All this punctures the case for a secure and strong Jewish identity. On the other hand, and much more forcefully, Freud allows domains of *actual* superiority. Whatever the source of monotheistic Judaism, its creation and perpetuation is a great achievement of the Jews, promoting real intellectual advances and steering them away from the brutal sensuality so evident in Nazism and more generally amongst many other nations. The so-called civilisation of the others, particularly Christianity, which claims to have surpassed Judaism, is mostly a thinly-laid veneer over deep-rooted barbarism, and the hatred of the Jews that results is as much a hatred of all culture and order as it is a specific anti-Semitism.

On the other hand again, if a people claims a special place in the eyes of its ‘father’ God, and indeed seems to have one, it is not surprising that it draws hatred upon itself. Jealousy of this kind will always be produced amongst siblings, whether they be individuals or entire nations. Then there is the mere provocative act of survival itself: how *dare* the Jews outlive their oppressors? And finally there is circumcision, a mark of fascination and fear; anti-Semitism sees in it the display of the power of castration, the mark of violence, the allure of sexuality, and the enthralling inescapability of coercive power. All this generates hate: hate of the Jew’s religious priority, of the Jew’s special position, of the Jew’s claim to intellectual and ethical superiority, of the Jew’s sexuality, of the Jew’s difference, his or her ‘otherness’.

Freud’s account of anti-Semitism thus revolves a number of themes that recur in considerations of racialised hatred, despite its apparent speculativeness and specificity, and its rather troubling implication that there is a sense in which the Jews themselves, with their excessive confidence in their own superiority, are implicated in the production of anti-Semitism. First, Freud suggests that *jealousy* is a key element, arising from a fantasy that there really is something special about the Jew. This idea has entered into the common armoury of explanations of racism in general: the other group is seen as having some privilege, something special about them, and this envied thing fuels the hostility. Linked to this is the notion that the hated other is an object of fascination as well as hostility: the anti-Semite cannot leave the Jew alone, is stirred and

excited by the Jew, and is made real and alive only through this fascination. Likewise, explorations of anti-black racism have also noted that the racist *needs* the hated other, that the racialised opponent holds, in fantasy, repudiated but essential parts of the racist –in the case of colour racism, this often being the white person’s repressed sensuality (Frosh 2002; Kovel 1995). Indeed, the white non-Jew may class the circumcised Jew and the black together as a sexual threat that is also a seduction and an excitement; Jung himself, as one of millions of examples, seems to have been sexually attracted to Jewish women (for instance Sabina Spielrein) as a product of, rather than in opposition to, his anti-Semitic tendencies. The ‘exoticism’ of the racialised other is thus both a source of attraction and of fear; the one emotion fuels the other in a powder keg of explosive ambivalence.

Freud did not lay out a systematic theory of racism, nor even of anti-Semitism. However, arising from his personal experience as much as, or perhaps more than, from his clinical judgement, he articulated the various sides of the Jewish experience that are related to anti-Semitic phenomena. The Jews are hated partly because they survive, they are forced into difference and this in turn provokes hatred, they are excluded and then seen as holding themselves separate. They are objects of fascination, seen as a kind of yeast for culture in general, but this creates envy; they are allowed only the currency of intellectuality and then their fantasised ‘cleverness’ is feared. Above all, if psychoanalysis as well as popular culture is to be believed, they are sexualised, with their ‘castrated’ state provoking anxiety as well as desire. Jews like Freud, as well as psychoanalysts, might think that they are on the side of reason and hence of the advancement of human culture, but they very easily become the bearers of ‘unreasonable’, irrational projections; that is, they become the carriers and recipients of culture’s repressed underside.

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