FREUD, JEWS, AND IDENTITY POLITICS: READING *MOSES AND MONOTHEISM* IN 2024

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A divided subject

Written during the time of the rise of the National Socialists in Germany, Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* can be read today as an effective critique of both conservative ideology and contemporary identity politics (Milfull 2002). Even though Freud knew that his 'race' was under attack, and he was forced to go into exile, he still insisted in producing a text that de-idealizes his own identity group (Bernstein 2008). Ultimately, what this misunderstood book demonstrates is the need to affirm ambivalence and ambiguity as the foundations of our cultural relationships; instead of trying to idealize the history and leaders of the Jewish people, Freud locates a primary doubling in relation to Moses (Paul 1996). In an act of intellectual bravery, he splits Moses into two different people: An Egyptian Moses and a Jewish one (Yerushalmi 1993). This splitting places at the heart of the Jewish tradition a divided subject, and this division reflects how every identity is ambivalent and ambiguous (Friedman 1998).

At the start of his book, Freud states that he is aware that he is undermining the idealization of Moses by the Jewish people, but he argues that no consideration of 'national interests' will push him to set aside the truth (Freud 1964 [1939] SE XXIII: 5; Confino 2012). As an Enlightenment rationalist, the founder of psychoanalysis affirms a commitment to both reason and universalism; in other words, he separates psychoanalytic practice and theory from a defence of specific national and religious identities and idealization (Milfull 2002). From this perspective, we can affirm that at the heart of psychoanalysis, one finds a calling into question of all cultural identities and investments. In fact, the very act of writing this book during the time that it was composed represents a desire for truth and a rejection of identity (Friedman 1998).

One of Freud's main sociological claims, borrowed from Otto Rank, is that almost every nation builds up its identity through the production of myths that glorify a national hero (Rank 2015). Thus, the idealization of the great individual leads to the idealization of the nation, and in the case of Moses, the Jewish people sought to idealize themselves by repressing the true history of Moses himself (Goldwert 1994). Therefore, by de-idealizing Moses, Freud is also de-idealizing his own 'race'. Freud adds that the original source for this idealizing tendency revolves around the child's idealization of the father (Paul 1996). From his perspective, the idealization of nations relies on the idealization of leaders, and the idealization of leaders is derived from the idealization of the father (Armstrong 2005).

In combining individual psychology with cultural history, Freud shows why psychoanalysis does not privilege the individual over society or society over the individual: there is an inherent dialectic between individual development and cultural history, and so it is unfair to attack psychoanalysis for only caring about the isolated individual (Fromm 2023). Moreover, Freud affirms that the

original idealization of the parents by the child is followed by a critical attitude towards the father, and so the basic relation to the parent and the nation is one of ambivalence since two opposing perspectives are always at play (Finlayson 1998).

Moses doubled

The doubled relation to parents and the nation is reflected in the idea that there were two different people named Moses: one is Jew from a humble family, and the other is an Egyptian from a royal family (Assmann 2018). However, in an act of audacity, Freud claims that the Jewish Moses is actually a fictious one: In other words, the great Jewish leader did not exist, and he was created in order to hide the true origins of this mythologized national hero (Gillman 2010). By claiming that this essential Jew is not really a Jew, Freud places the Other in the heart of Jewish identity (de Oliveira Moreira 2008).

Freud uses the example of the doubled Moses to not only call into question all idealized nationalism and identity but also to define the foundations of monotheism. Since the real Moses was Egyptian, he practiced a polytheistic religion, and so the question is how did the Jewish people become committed to a 'unique, omnipotent, unapproachable' singular God? (Schäfer 2002: 385). While the Egyptians believed in many local gods with magical powers, the Jews replaced this 'primitive' spirituality with 'sublime abstraction' (Freud 1964 [1939] SE XXIII:19; Bergmann 2018). Moreover, in contrast to the Egyptian belief in life after death, the Jews gave up on immortality (Lifton 1973).

Freud attempts to explain the transition to monotheism by arguing that the Egyptian Moses was a king who attempted to consolidate his power by imposing a new monotheistic belief system (Hyatt 1940). Acting as a vanishing mediator, the Egyptian Moses, then, serves as a transition from primitive animism to religious monotheism (Žižek 1991). This transitional figure also reveals how religion is often used to consolidate political power. Since this leader wanted to be the only one that people listen to and obey, he presented a religion based on a singular higher power (Wallace 1977). We see here how to this day, religion is often a political tool connected to nationalism and conservative ideology (Aktürk 2022).

In tracing the linguistics connections among the Egyptian sun god Aton and the Hebrew word for lord, Adonai, Freud posits that the buried truth of Moses can be found in the primeval unity of language (Freud SE XXIII 1964 [1939]; SE XI 1957 [1910]). Thus, very little of the Jewish tradition is original since it is derived from re-written sources (Zahn 2011). Of course, this theory of cultural history echoes Freud's understanding of how the primary processes in individual minds rely on the rewriting of the past often through linguistic substitutions, associations, and displacements (Solms 2013).

De-idealizing history

While some believe that it was the Jewish tradition that introduced the ritual of circumcision, Freud relates that it was already practiced for a long time in Egypt (Bankirer 2024). In order to defend this point, Freud adds a footnote where he declares that it may look like his is using history in an arbitrary, self-serving manner, but in reality, it is religious history that is shaped by motivated distortions, and he intends to discover the repressed truth determined by secret motives (Freud SE XXIII 1964 [1939]: 27, n. 2; Eissler 1963). The over-all effect of his method is to reveal how

behind every stable identity and identification, we find multiple, conflicting sources and misrepresentations.

In the face of the Nazi demonization of the Jews, Freud does not seek to idealize his own people and history; instead, he de-idealizes religion and nationalism in order to provide an unbiased universal perspective dedicated to discovering the truth of reality (Eissler 1963). In terms of the Jews claiming that they have been chosen by God as a special people, and this relationship is demonstrated through the ritual of circumcision, Freud claims that the people who practice this act always feel superior to the 'unclean' people who do not follow this proud custom (Veren 2015). For example, Turks will attack a Christian for being 'an uncircumcised dog' (Freud SE XXIII 1964 [1939]: 30; Hamamra 2022). This reference to Shakespeare's *Othello* is intended to show that this ritual does not belong only to the Jewish people, and it can be used as a way of putting down people who are not part of the same identity group (Barin 2010). As a marker of difference, Freud believes that the Egyptian leader Moses used circumcision as a way of making a new group of people a 'holy nation' separate from all of the other cultural groups around them (Freud SE XXIII 1964 [1939]: 30; Geller 1993). Once again, we see here the shared roots of religion and nationalism: in order for a people to feel superior and different, they have to engage in symbolic acts that separate them from other groups deemed inferior and unholy (Figlio 2018).

One of Freud's central insights is that every nation and religion relies on re-writing history and texts in order to fit the purposes of the leaders (Morden 2016). In fact, Freud argues that the only way to approach the truth of a people's past is to examine the contradictions and omissions circulating in their texts (Finlayson 1998). Freud goes as far as saying that the distortion of a text is similar to a murder, and while it may be easy to commit the crime, there are always traces left behind. It is then the task of the historian to read past writings in order to determine the truth of what really happened. Here, Freud compares the method of psychoanalysis to that of the historian since in both cases, the goal is to interpret the defensive distortions in order to attain the truth of past reality (Loewenberg 1988).

Progress and barbarism

In part three of his text, Freud turns his attention to the period just before 1938, and he posits that Europe was experiencing a strange combination of Enlightenment progress and barbarism (Chasseguet-Smirgel 2018). By referring to both the rise of the Nazis and the Communism of the Soviet Union, he locates the same contradictory coalescing of modern values and anti-modern tendencies (Horkheimer et al. 2002). Thus, in relation to the Soviet Union, he applauds the elimination of religion and the liberation of sexuality, but he critiques 'the most cruel coercion' robbing people of the 'freedom of thought' (Freud SE XXIII 1964 [1939]: 54; Miller 1998). Freud therefore accurately points to the way that the great effort to create a more equal and just society turned into its opposite. He adds that the Germans and Italians also experienced a similar regression to prehistoric barbarism, and only the Catholic Church provided any resistance (Freud SE XXIII 1964 [1939]: 55; Krieg 2004). Yet, he still posits that the Church is the 'implacable enemy of all freedom of thought' (Freud SE XXIII 1964 [1939]: 55; Miri 2024). For Freud, it is the freedom to think, which is the most important value to protect: Similar to his use of free association in analytic practice, Freud privileges free thought as the ultimate ideal to protect against the return to barbarism, nationalism, and religion (Lavin 2011).

As a mode of the return of the repressed, the regression back to an earlier stage of civilization is reliant on Freud's fundamental belief that old desires, thoughts, and memories can never be fully erased (Freud SE XVIII 1955 [1920]). Just as infantile impulses can return in the present, societies that have progressed beyond pure violence and control can always return to their original state (McLaughlin 1996). This dialectical theory entails that we should never take freedom or progress for granted since 'prehistoric' impulses are always ready to re-surface. Freud adds that between an initial historical event and its return, there is a period of latency or repression where the initial state has been forgotten (Etchegoyen 1993). According to this theory, a key aspect to the return of past barbarism is the forgetting of the past, which paves the wave for national and religious idealization.

To further illustrate his theory of the return of the past prehistoric period of barbarism, Freud goes back to his analysis of Darwin's theory of the primal horde (Smith 2016). His main point is that in this initial form of social organization, small groups were dominated by a single, powerful male (Freud SE XIII 1955 [1913]). This leader, who was also considered to be a father, ruled with unlimited power in a brutal fashion, and all of the women were considered to be his property (Becker 1961). Whether we consider this a myth or the actual reality, the main point is that social organization starts in a violent way as a singular entity has all of the power and access to the objects of desire.

After the establishment of the primal horde, the next stage concerns the way the oppressed brothers banded together in order to take power by killing and consuming the primal father-leader (Bocock 1976). Freud uses this myth/history in order to reveal the universality of the Oedipus complex since the brothers who desired to kill the father were driven in part by their desire to access the women he controls (Lorne 2009). However, after this act of murder and cannibalism is enacted, the brothers feel guilt for their actions, and so they decide to create a social contract built around the renunciation of instinctual gratification and the need for mutual obligation (Lepoutre 2016). We can therefore trace the roots of modern law and democracy back to this combination of guilt and renunciation; in other words, at the heart of modern subjectivity, we find the dual need to repress violent tendencies and to share scarce resources while delaying the immediate gratification of the drives (Ferenczi 1923).

Instead of reading Freud's story of prehistoric civilization as a recounting of a historical reality, it is more effective to see that he is using the past in order to define the development of the present (Doran 1990). Thus, his effort to explain the return to barbarism in modern Europe relies on his theory of what barbarism means and how it can be overcome both on an individual and collective manner (Rensmann 2017). On the most basic level, what Freud sees in religions, nationalism, communism, and rising fascism is the same hording of power and resources by a strong masculine authority, and the only way out of this primal structure is for people to bond together and overthrow the master, but this act of revolt has to be followed by a period of guilt and renunciation (Weiss 2020).

In the context of current geopolitics, we can use Freud's theory to see how Putin's attack on Ukraine represents a return to barbarism countering the union of brothers who have renounced violence and the hording of resources (Samuels 2023). Institutions, then, like the European Union embody a social contract based on guilt and shared renunciation; however, in order for this new social union to be achieved, it is first necessary to kill off the primal violent father-leader

(Wasserstein 2009). From this perspective, post-modern social movements are founded on reversing the primal order of masculine barbarism in order to break the master's monopoly on violence and resources, and yet this needed violent revolution has to also be renounced once the master has been removed (Grinin 2022). We learn from Freud's model that at the foundations of social order, we find violence and the idealization of this violence (Kernberg 1998). Moreover, Freud ties this history to a gendered narrative where it is men and fathers who represent the essence of barbarism, but the ultimate goal is to constitute a universal union transcending gender and violence (Chodorow 2002). Since morality and law require an act of instinctual renunciation, it is vital to place at the centre of modern democracy, the need to delay sexual and violent impulses (Dick 2020). Freud is therefore not a libertarian who seeks to endorse the liberation of the drives; instead, he affirms the need to acknowledge the constant social mediation of the drives through guilt and morality (Zaretsky 2015). Freud adds that after a period of matriarchy, the fathers returned, but now they realized that their own drives had to be regulated by social institutions in order to prevent another war between powerful fathers (Welsh 2020).

The importance of social institutions regulating the drives and the distribution of resources and power should not be under-estimated: It is the development and maintenance of these mediating structures that enables any lasting peace or system of democratic rights (Brunner 2018). Furthermore, these institutions transcend the minds and psychology of isolated individuals, and this means that we have to combine our understanding of psychopathology with a comprehension of social mediation.

The return of religion

For Freud, history and individual development are shaped by reoccurring cycles, and in the case of barbarism, he posits that after the fathers of the primal prehistoric horde were killed off and replaced by other social formations, they continue to return throughout history (Sandner 2022). For instance, in looking at the Catholic practice of communion, Freud finds traces of the original act of cannibalizing the father-leader by the band of brothers (Shuter 2006). He adds that like a psychotic delusion, religious beliefs are often based on a kernel of historic truth, but this truth has been combined with a series of fictions.

Returning to the issue of Jewish identity, Freud argues that the influence of a monotheistic religion borrowed from the Egyptians helped the Jewish people to denigrate magic and mysticism and enabled them the ability to privilege intellectual and ethical achievements over other values (Rieff 2008). In believing that they were the chosen people of a higher power, the suffering and oppression they would endure would only strengthen their resolve. While they did restore the primal father in an idealized, spiritual form, they had been seized by a general sense of guilt (Chernilo 2024). Freud adds that what happened next was that the Roman Jew, Paul, took the Jewish sense of guilt and reconnected it to the primal crime of killing the father-leader (Paul 1994). Through the new doctrine of original sin, the murder of the prehistoric father was now seen as a crime against God, but the original murder still remained repressed and was replaced by the fantasy of expiation (Sabourin 1974). In equating Jesus with an innocent being who sacrificed himself, the belief was born that the son of God had taken over the guilt of the world (Rice 2018). For Freud, Jesus represents the leader of the band of brothers who killed the primal father-leader, and even if none of these events actually happened, Freud insists that Christ was the result of an unfulfilled wish-phantasy (Oehlschlegel 1943).

From Freud's perspective, while it does matter if the story he is telling is real or a fiction: what matters the most is that the development makes psychological sense (Blum 1991). In this case, he wants to account for the universal heroic desire to eliminate and take the place of the father, and he also needs to affirm a sense of 'tragic guilt' (Sharvit 2019:144). At the heart of this universal dynamic is the fundamental ambivalence felt towards all leaders and parents (Riesman 2016). Thus, instead of idealizing our leaders and higher powers, we must learn to see them in an ambivalent manner since their motives and our motives combine both positive and negative attributes (Rothman 1974). Interestingly, in his critique of Freud's work, Paul Ricoeur does not accept Freud's replacement of religious experience with the psychoanalysis of individual and collective psychopathology; however, I am arguing that Freud's method of interpretation offers a more productive comprehension of the roots of religion itself (Weingärtner 2022).

While Freud posits that the Jewish religion is focused on the father and the Christian one on the son, what he seeks to establish is the way that Christianity was developed out of a desire to denigrate the Jewish tradition (Dor-Shav 1977). According to this story, Paul, a Jew, sought revenge on the people who did not accept his innovation of replacing circumcision with baptism (Assmann 2018). Since circumcision was supposed to set the Jewish people apart as the chosen ones, the practice of baptism was meant to usher people into a universal order, and it is this universality that will later represent one of the foundations of modern democratic secular law (Williams 2002).

Even though Christianity undermined the Jewish tradition, Freud affirms that the Jews stuck with monotheism because the murder of Moses represented a repetition of the murder of the primal father (Stanislawski 2018). Freud adds that like neurotics, the Jews did not remember the original act, and so they repeated it instead (Black 2002). Since they had become fixated on repressing their sin by idealizing the father, they never moved onto the son-based tradition of Christianity. In fact, Freud points out that the figure of Christ echoes the history of Moses, and so the murder of God's son is another repetition of the past (Bergmann 2018). As Freud highlights, we should not forget that Christ and his apostles were Jews, and so at the foundation of Christian identity, we find another form of self-division and self-hatred (Lerman 2008).

Explaining antisemitism

Since the Jews have refused to accept Christ as the Messiah, they have been attacked for being the ones who killed Christ (Boys 2013). Freud responds to this dangerous criticism by asserting that the Jews did kill Moses and our ancestors did kill the primal father, and so the accusation is partially true. He then adds that a lot of the other criticism of the Jewish people have less validity (Frosh 2004). For instance, he examines the notion that Jews are always foreigners and never try to assimilate (Jacobs 2018). In response to this form of antisemitism, Freud argues that the Jews were often among the oldest inhabitants of certain regions, and so it is absurd to view them as recent immigrants (Frosh 2004). Freud also adds that since the majority always needs an out-group to hate, the Jews often make a good target; moreover, Freud claims that racism is often based on small differences and not large ones, and so even if the Jews are very similar in their practices to the dominant culture, they are still attacked for being different (Geller 2020). However, Freud adds that what people really do not like about the Jews is that they defy oppression and 'even the most cruel persecutions have not succeeded in exterminating them' (Freud SE XXIII 1964 [1939]:

93). This last line written around 1938 is haunting since it anticipates the attempted extermination of Jews by the Nazis.

Ultimately, Freud traces the roots of antisemitism to a jealous reaction against the favoured child; in other words, since the Jews saw themselves as the chosen people of God, they generated hostility from the unchosen (Fenichel 1940). Freud adds that this unconscious jealousy is coupled with the fear of castration, which is itself derived from the continued practice of circumcision by the Jews (Glenn 1960). The final part of this explanation is perhaps the most vexing: Freud asserts that Christians blame Jews for imposing Christianity, which represses their underlying barbarism, drives, and polytheistic beliefs. After all, as Freud demonstrates, the Gospels tell a story about Jews affecting other Jews (Jonge 2001). Freud goes as far as arguing that the hatred of Jews is really a hatred of Christianity, and that what the Nazis have done is combine the hatred for both of these religions together.

After idealization and identity politics

Freud is clearly at his most audacious and speculative here, but there is a method to his madness: behind every identity and identification, he locates ambivalence and self-division. The Other is always inside of the self, and a dialectic shapes history and individual development. Against the current culture of polarization and splitting, he locates a twisted foundation where opposites affect each other. In this structure, every identity becomes problematized, and every effort at idealization becomes de-idealized. We, thus, never fully escape our barbarism on a collective or individual level, and the only hope is to find better ways to delay our gratification by investing in shared social institutions, but these institutions cannot be dependent on repressing the truth or stopping critical thinking and reality testing.

One would think that at a time when Jews were constantly being threatened based on their identity, Freud would seek to defend their heritage and support his own race, but instead, he sought to call into question the traditions and beliefs of the Jewish people (Brunner 1991). Refusing to engage in idealization and identification, Freud presents an early critique of identity politics. In fact, his representation of his own Jewish identity is coupled with a criticism of what he sees as particular Jewish traits. For instance, he claims that Jews tend to have a high opinion of themselves and that this arrogance keeps them separate from other groups, which often leads to them being hated by others (Watzman and Rolnik 2018). This Jewish mode of national and racial narcissism is related to the belief that they are really the chosen people of the idealized father-God. Here, we see that in the structure of narcissism, the ideal ego is recognized by the ego ideal (Moncayo 2006). It is thus ironic that later critics like Emmanuel Rice and Josef Yerushalmi try to argue that Freud's book on Moses was a testament to his return to Judaism (Shäfer 2002).

In the case of Jewish tradition and belief, Freud sees Moses as the idealized master who helps to provide a single cause to the complex question of how this group was able to become so unified (Homans 2015). Employing the 'great man of history' theory, the Jewish people have repressed the divided and complicated nature of Moses and his followers so that they could idealize the past and their own identities (Son 2015). Freud adds that people have a strong need for an authority who they can admire and to whom they can submit (Freud SE XVIII 1955 [1920]). Here, transference is tied to the authoritarian personality, which helps to explain why people suspend their own interests and reality testing in order to subject themselves to an idealized master (Fromm

2014). Due to an infantile desire for a strong protective father, there is a common fantasy of being saved and protected by a hero (Berman 1993). In all of these idealized masters, Freud finds the same combination of decisive thought, strength of will, forcefulness of deeds, and self-reliance. In other words, the submissive subjects need a sociopathic leader who must be trusted even when he acts in a ruthless manner.

While Freud's focus on the father and masculine traits may appear to be a sexist idealization of men, his main point it to show how this type of gender identification is highly destructive (Figlio 2023). It is the violence of the borderline father who is then idealized by the submissive masses who seek to find protection from loss and harm (Richards 2024). Idealization and violence then are linked together as Freud uses his theory of the two Moseses to combine together the law and paternal violence. Since the Jews believed in a God who was unique, omnipotent, and eternal, they established an idealized father who was prone to lay down incomprehensible, irrational demands (Gay 1987). Moreover, the Jewish prohibition against making a representation of God subordinated sense perception to an abstract idea (Halpern 1999). In fact, Freud sees in this restriction, an instinctual renunciation coupled with an investment in pure spirituality. In this triumph of culture over sensation, the Jewish people were able to produce certain intellectual skills, and yet this commitment to a spiritual ideal left them prone to abuse and hatred (Bakan 2012).

Since the Jews favoured ideas over perceptions, they also privileged the father over the mother since there are visible signs of maternity, but the role of the father is a mental supposition. Likewise, since God is invisible, the investment in him relies on privileging thought over perception (Shäfer 2002). From this perspective, the development of religion relies on a substitution of sensation with thought. Freud adds that the narcissism of the religious person may be heightened by a sense that they have mastered their own impulses by submitting to a higher order of belief (Friedman 1998). Yet, at the heart of Freud's analysis of religion is the notion that it is the leaders who decide what is sacred, and these father-figures determine what is morally good and bad in order to protect their own self-interest. In other words, morality is determined by the desire of the powerful to protect their power and privilege (Oehlschlegel 1943). Furthermore, when subjects idealize these leaders and their morality, they are buying into a system that can only oppress them. In this context, Freud understands circumcision as a mode of castration and punishment that signals a submission to the father's violent will (Bonomi 1998).

Freud adds that people, like himself, who have no belief in a higher power must feel envious towards those who do not have to question anything because God provides an answer to every inquiry (Freud SE XXI 1961 [1927]). As an Enlightenment thinker, Freud exclaims that religious belief overwhelms reason and science, and so it is his task to determine where this type of idealization comes from. On one level, Freud traces the foundations of belief back to the infantile desire for protection against a dangerous world, but he also argues that what really drives belief is the satisfaction of our wishes and illusions that meet truth half-way (Kovel 1990). From this perspective, there really was a great leader who unified a people, but this leader was really a series of people who were neither divine nor ideal. In fact, Freud traces masculine power and privilege to the willingness to exploit and use other people coupled with the idealization of leaders and fathers by the people who are being used (Freud SE XXI 1961 [1930]).

Mixed with idealization, Freud highlights how feelings of guilt often function to help people endure hard times and misfortune (Freud SE XIV 1957 [1917]). Since no one can live up to all of the religious laws and prohibitions, they only have themselves to blame when things go wrong. So even if the chosen people constantly have to deal with oppression and abuse, they turn blame inward as they continue to idealize a higher power: The flip-side of the idealization of the father-God is thus internalized self-hatred (Yao 2022). Moreover, God's severity is therefore rationalized by the need to be punished for sinful thoughts and feelings. In this masochistic dynamic, the more severe the prohibitions and punishments coming from God tend to be, the more people feel they are being treated justly due to their inability to follow impossible moral demands (Freud SE XIX 1961 [1924]). For Freud, the repressed memory of the original murder of the primal father triggers a mode of guilt that is insatiable, but we do not have to believe in this primal inheritance since it is clear that most religions control their adherents through the generation of guilt internalized in the super-ego (Ghisalberti 2023). Freud adds that the stricter the religious dictates become, the more people harbour a secret hostility towards God, which only adds to their guilt and desire for punishment.

By equating religion with obsessional neurosis, Freud focuses on the generation of compulsive guilt coupled with a desire to transgress all moral dictates (Kristner 2021). Religious ceremonies and rituals in this dynamic become protective mechanisms seeking to repress a sense of guilt and shame by enacting a symbolic performance of purification and moral conformity. In what we now call virtue-signalling, the obsessional subject desires to prove to himself and others that he is a good person by getting recognized for his good acts and intentions.

Psychoanalytic politics and ethics

In reading *Moses and Monotheism* in 2024, we discover that we can never escape the threat of a return to pre-modern barbarism. We also learn that psychoanalysis offers a critical perspective on identity, identification, idealization, nationalism, and religion. Although some therapists and analysts would like to transform treatment into a form of identity affirmation or empathic identification, it should be clear that Freud locates an essential ambivalence and ambiguity at the heart of every identity (Samuels 2019). Freud also makes the curious claim that the best way for Jewish people to defend their race is to be open and honest about the past, and part of this process relies on giving up the idealization of the self and the Other.

As we see in current culture, when people idealize their nation, identity, or religion, they no longer are committed to reason and the reality principle. While some argue that a time of crisis is no time to take on a critical perspective, Freud's text reveals that it is precisely during the aftermath of a trauma that people have to repress their immediate drives for revenge and self-pity. For Freud, the ultimate value remains the freedom to think, and it is this freedom that is often threatened by war, nationalism, and religion.

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