Matt Peterson
Qualifying Paper

Freud’s Paul: Pathogenesis and the Question of Historical Truth

1. INTRODUCTION

2018 saw the publication of another edited volume reckoning with the legacy of *Moses and Monotheism*, Sigmund Freud’s final work.¹ *Freud and Monotheism: Moses and the Violent Origins of Religion* aims to highlight “the broad impact of *Moses and Monotheism* across the humanities, drawing on the disciplines of philosophy, comparative literature, cultural studies, German literature, religious and Jewish studies, history, and psychoanalysis.”² The broad nature of the volume serves to crystallize what are considered to be the most important topics of debate in the book’s reception history, while also advancing these debates: Freud’s theory of tradition, psychoanalytic interpretations of anti-Semitism, exile and the fate of psychoanalysis as a “Jewish science,” trauma theory, political theology, and the status of Freud’s work in the face of modern science, to name but a few of the fruitful discussions to which it has given rise. At the same time, this work of highlighting the main debates tends to make the blind spots in the literature a little more glaring.

Given the title of the volume, for instance, it is somewhat surprising that neither its editors nor its contributors come from the field of religious studies. This is understandable considering that contemporary religious studies tends to treat Freud as little more than an exemplar, following Marx and Nietzsche, of a hermeneutics of suspicion. It becomes an issue, however, when work on

¹ Freud’s planned title for the work was originally *Der Mann Moses, ein historischer Roman*, but it was eventually published as *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion*. The last collection to consider its legacy was *New Perspectives on Freud’s Moses and Monotheism*, ed. Ruth Ginsburg (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006).
Freud wants to treat psychoanalysis vis-à-vis religion. For example, it is this disconnect that allows Gabriele Schwab to report that Freud knew psychoanalysis had been compared by his adversaries to a “new secular religion” without pausing to reflect on what exactly this might mean, and allows Richard J. Bernstein to unproblematically claim that psychoanalysis “is the secular successor of this pure monotheistic tradition [Judaism].” ³ These are incredible formulations to leave unquestioned, especially in view of the fact that within religious studies it has become almost a truism to point out the Christian roots, presuppositions, and principles of what we call secularism.⁴ Yet rather than using this body of scholarship to discount claims to psychoanalysis’ status as a “secular religion,” it can do the much more interesting work of both clarifying and complicating our understanding of psychoanalysis as a discursive formation with respect to both Judaism and Christianity, and thus help us to better historicize its emergence.

The other lacuna concerns the figures from Moses who get discussed. In title and in content, *Freud and Monotheism* foregrounds what it calls “the Freud/Moses debates,”⁵ sparked by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi’s 1991 *Freud’s Moses* and taken up in various ways by Jacques Derrida, Jan Assmann, Richard Bernstein, and Edward Said.⁶ These debates turn around Freud’s attempt to

---


⁴ There is a large body of work in support of this point, but for two recent and particularly effective examples see Mayanthi L. Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), and Talal Asad, “Secular Equality and Religious Language” in *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 13-54. On a related note, it is interesting to observe that work that defines itself as “postsecular” tends to draw on Freudian psychoanalysis, which suggests that it may bear a greater theological inheritance than is often presumed. See for example Eric L. Santner, “Miracles Happen: Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Freud, and the Matter of the Neighbor,” in *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 133.


articulate an “essence” of Judaism, but are only one aspect of an enormous body of literature, especially within Jewish studies, dedicated to Freud’s interest, obsession, and what has even been called his “transferrential identification” with the figure of Moses. What seems thoroughly underdeveloped is an account of Freud’s Paul, who is almost entirely absent from both this volume and the literature at large. This is surprising given the crucial role Paul plays for Freud in concluding the arguments of *Moses and Monotheism*, and doubly surprising given the so-called return to Paul in contemporary philosophy, inaugurated by Jacob Taubes’ 1987 lectures on the political theology of Paul, which in fact conclude with a brief reading of Freud. Thus taking into account the conditions of psychoanalysis’ historical emergence and the untapped potential in the figure of Freud’s Paul, we are equipped to follow the path opened by Gil Anidjar’s suggestion that Freud’s “quest” has yet to be interpreted “for what it tells us about Christianity specifically.”


To do so, however, requires starting at the beginning of his quest inasmuch as the Paul of Moses and Monotheism serves to consolidate and extend certain themes that troubled Freud from the beginning. I want to argue that what Freud in his late work calls “historical truth” actually emerges out of a problem he first describes in pathogenic terms concerning the development of rational thinking. From his clinical work with hysterics I suggest Freud elaborates a model of what I am calling the pathogenesis of reason. I then provide a conceptual genealogy to illustrate how this model evolves throughout his corpus to eventually be located under the question of historical truth. Finally, I draw attention to the stakes of what it means that Freud works out this question of rationality in and through religion, and Christianity in particular. Insofar as Freud links the question of historical truth to that of religion, I conclude that pathogenesis and historical truth are valuable concepts for the philosophy of religion, and that Freud’s Paul allows psychoanalysis to be seen as a site where religious tensions between Judaism and Christianity play out.

II. THE HYSTERICAL ORIGINS OF PATHOGENESIS

Between 1889 and 1895, Freud worked with a number of mostly Jewish women from the bourgeois circles of Central Europe, whose treatment proved invaluable not only for developing his psychoanalytic method, but also for laying the groundwork for many of the problems that would occupy him for the rest of his career. Because his later work will transpose the questions of his clinical work into a different context using different language, it is necessary to first grasp the

---

11 Shoshana Felman perfectly captures the contingency of psychoanalysis’ development through the lens of the concept of testimony: “In the symptomatic and yet theoretical illumination of this radically new kind of intelligibility, psychoanalysis can be viewed as a momentously felicitous, and a momentously creative, testimony to an accident,” in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (New York: Routledge, 1992), 17.
stakes of his case studies and clinical writings in order to appreciate the continuities and breaks that mark his later cultural writings.

In the cases that make up the Studies, Freud is concerned with articulating the mechanism that explains the relationship between the “phenomenon in question,” namely the forms and symptoms of hysteria, and their “precipitating” causes. According to Freud, hysterical symptoms arise through a process of “conversion,” which he defines as the process whereby “a sum of excitation impinging on the nervous system is transformed into chronic symptoms.” Conversion is a defense mechanism that functions to repress an intolerable idea. When an idea arises that is incompatible with one’s worldview it is repressed into the unconscious, but because the psychical excitation cannot be discharged, the excess energy is converted into a degree of physical excitation. The case of Elisabeth von R. provides a good example of this process: to spare herself the painful (and unacceptable) certainty that she is in love with her brother-in-law, she converts this thought into physical pains that replace it and act up whenever this thought threatens to force itself on her. What is striking about this formulation is that the precipitating cause of the symptom is not necessarily an event, but rather a thought. Indeed, he writes that hysterical symptoms “did not occur while the patient was experiencing the impressions of the first period, but only after the event [nachträglich], that is, in the second period, while she was reproducing those impressions in her thoughts. That is to say, the conversion did not take place in connection with her impressions when they were fresh, but in connection with her memories of them.”

---

memory of the impression of an event may constitute a precipitating cause allows Freud to formulate the maxim, “hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences.”

Freud’s interrelated analyses of memory, suffering, and embodiment begin to lay the groundwork for a psychoanalytic account of the development of rationality. Conversion appears as mode of embodied thinking, especially in the case of Frau Cäcilie M., who is remembered for her conversions through symbolization. For example, the inability to “find herself on a right footing” in unfamiliar company would manifest as a severe pain in her right heel, or the feeling of being slighted, of feeling a “stab in the heart” would be accompanied by a stabbing pain in her chest. Freud draws a provocative ambiguity from these instances:

She had a whole quantity of sensations and ideas [Sensationen und Vorstellungen] running parallel with each other. Sometimes the sensation would call up the idea as an interpretation [Deutung] of it, sometimes the idea would create the sensation by means of symbolization [Symbolisierung], and not infrequently it had to be left an open question which of the two elements had been the primary one.

On the one hand, there is the possibility that a sensation awakens an idea as an interpretation of it; on the other hand is the possibility that an idea creates a sensation by means of symbolization. Freud rejects the latter possibility, leaving the possibility that a sensation, or hysterical symptom, could arouse the idea that would explain it. His conclusion reads like a psychoanalytic transposition of the argument of Kant’s third critique, which “suggested that our capacity for aesthetic judgment provided a spontaneously sensuous foundation for human reason.” Freud thus

offers a formulation of what could be called, heard with its etymological registers of disease, pain, and suffering, the *pathetic* preconditions of human reason.  

The analytic process of bringing these pathetic preconditions to language presents something of a pathological investigation, given the logical structure of the symptom that Freud details in the 1895 essay “On the Psychotherapy of Hysteria.” First, an idea that the individual finds intolerable is repressed out of defense. The repressed idea then persists as a low-intensity memory trace [*Erinnerungsspur*], and the affect that is torn from it is converted into a physical excitation, the somatic innervation or symptom: “it is precisely through its repression that the idea becomes the cause of pathological symptoms—that is to say, becomes pathogenic.” The repressed idea does not merely go away but, to the contrary, develops a highly organized body of pathogenic material around it.

Freud writes that this pathogenic material is a multidimensional construct with at least three strata, first present as “a nucleus [*Kern*] consisting in memories of events or trains of thought in which the traumatic factor has culminated or the pathogenic idea has found its purest manifestation.” The material surrounding the nucleus is arranged in three parts. First there are “themes” that contain ideas arranged chronologically, each of which is an “archive” that contains a “file of documents” or a “packet.” Freud's language is strikingly bureaucratic: “The freshest and newest experience in the file appears first, as a ‘cover sheet,’ and last of all comes the experience

---

20 Ibid., SE 2:288 [GW 1:291-292].
with which the series in fact began.” Next, there are concentric strata around the pathogenic nucleus which Freud describes as “zones” across which the individual themes extend and within which there is an equal change in consciousness. Finally, there are paths of thought arranged according to content, connected along “a logical thread [logische Faden] which reaches as far as the nucleus and tends to take an irregular and twisting path, different in every case.” Freud notes that these thought-paths have a “dynamic” character, as opposed to the “morphological” character of the themes and zones. This complex organization leads Freud to remark how often a symptom is “overdetermined” [Überbestimmt]. The pathological investigation that follows the various logical threads across zones and themes back to the pathogenic nucleus in order to bring it to light can be understood as a pathogenic process.

To speak of the pathogenesis of reason is then not to say that reason is a disease (pathogenic), but rather that to suggest that it develops like one (pathogenetic). Although Freud mainly refers to pathogenesis descriptively and in diagnostic contexts, there is some precedent in the literature for using it in a more operative way. In her study Early Freud and Late Freud, Ilse Grubrich-Simitis distinguishes between the pathogenesis of the comparatively small number of people who experience trauma in childhood and the psychogenesis of everyone affected by the

---

21 Ibid., SE 2:288-289 [GW 1:292]. I have adopted Luckhurst’s translations of “archive” for Archiv and “cover sheet” for Deckblatt (Studies in Hysteria, 290). Beyond the obvious archival language of which Derrida makes so much in his reading of Freud, Freud’s own bureaucratic language for the structure of the pathogenic material could be read productively alongside Kafka’s obsession with all things office-related as symptomatic of the condition of modernity. In terms of reading Freud philosophically, it bears mentioning that Heidegger saw “bureaucratization” as one aspect of the modern technology that characterizes “the metaphysics of the atomic age.” Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 50-51.
22 Ibid., SE 2:289 [GW 1:293]. The development from the morphological character of the mental archive to the dynamic character of the thoughts that cross might productively be compared with Foucault’s transition from archeology to genealogy.
23 Ibid., SE 2:290 [GW 1:294].
revolutionary drive model. As I will argue, however, Freud applies his notion of pathogenesis not only to those who suffer from the trauma of sexual violence in childhood but also to those whose conscious and unconscious phantasies result in various neuroses. Moreover, Grubrich-Simitis adds that in the third essay of *Moses and Monotheism* where Freud tries to explain the genesis and effect of the monotheistic idea, he is “applying to pathogenesis an earlier general finding concerning the formation of the ego.” I take this more general usage of pathogenesis to supplant the supposedly universal psychogenesis supported by the drive model, and indeed, both the *Studies in Hysteria* and *Moses* are concerned with the return of the repressed, while there is also no mention of the drives in the latter work. For these reasons I treat the model of pathogenesis as operative across Freud’s corpus.

To speak of the pathogenesis of reason is also to respond to recent conversations in continental philosophy coming out of Kant studies that address the *epigenesis* of reason. Epigenesis refers to the biological theory that an embryo develops progressively from an undifferentiated egg cell. This view gained traction in the late-eighteenth century over against preformationism, the theory that organisms develop from miniature versions of themselves (the homunculus being a prominent example). According to Catherine Malabou, Kant employed the analogy of epigenesis in the *Critique of Pure Reason* in order to explain the work of the spontaneity of the understanding as a “generative production.” That is, it served to address the relationship

---

25 Ibid., 64n4. My emphasis.
between reason and the pure concepts of the understanding, the apparent paradox that the *a priori* or transcendental itself has no foundation. For Malabou, transcendental epigenesis is “epigenesis of the transcendental itself,”\(^{28}\) or in other words, “the *adventure of subjectivity*.”\(^{29}\) However, pathogenesis is equally capable of explaining the spontaneity of the understanding through the pathetic preconditions of reason, as well as attending to the development of the transcendental. By dilating on the process whereby the affect converted into a somatic innervation is led back to the repressed idea or concept that produced it, pathogenesis is capable of restoring the transcendental to its rightful place.

Thinking about rationality in terms of pathogenesis rather than epigenesis has at least two striking consequences. First, insofar as epigenesis is conceptually linked to the process by which an animal, plant, or fungi develops from an egg, seed, or spore, it is still tied to the idea of substance and thus to a metaphysics of presence. Pathogenesis on the other hand, insofar as it describes the movement or development of a disease, has no such conceptual, and hence metaphysical, debt. This can be seen in the case of Elisabeth von R., where Freud records that “her love for brother-in-law was present in her consciousness like a foreign body [*Fremdkörper*], without having entered into relationship with the rest of her ideational life.”\(^{30}\) Yet only a few years later he writes that “we are now in a position to see where this comparison fails”:

> A foreign body does not enter into any relation with the layers of tissue that surround it, although it modifies them and necessitates a reactive inflammation in them. […] In fact the pathogenic organization does not behave like a foreign body, but far more like an infiltrate [*Infiltrat*]. In this simile the resistance must be regarded as what is infiltrating.\(^{31}\)

---

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 158.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 94.

\(^{30}\) “*Fräulein Elisabeth von R.,”* SE 2:165 [GW 1:232].

If before the pathogenic idea was understood as a foreign body disconnected from the rest of the patient’s ideational life, here it is understood as an infiltration, where the resistance, the “psychical force in the patients which was opposed to the pathogenic ideas,” does the infiltrating. Freud’s use of “infiltrate” here is as a specific medical term that describes the diffusion of pathogenic material in a tissue or cells. The transition from foreign body to infiltration, from substance to diffusion or force, contests a psychotherapy beholden to a metaphysics of presence by rejecting a model concerned with “extirpating something” in favor of one that consists in “causing the resistance to melt and in thus enabling the circulation to make its way into a region that has hitherto been cut off.”

Second, insofar as pathogenesis rejects the presence of foreign bodies, it also destabilizes any easy distinction between health and disease, between the normal and pathological self:

Our pathogenic psychical group, on the other hand, does not admit of being cleanly extirpated from the ego. Its external strata pass over in every direction into portions of the normal ego; and, indeed, they belong to the latter just as much as to the pathogenic organization. In analysis the boundary [Grenze] between the two is fixed purely conventionally, now at one point, now at another, and in some places it cannot be laid down at all.

To say that the border between the normal and pathological self is placed in a purely conventional fashion and sometimes cannot be indicated at all is to completely call into question the functional distinction between the two, and to suggest that the difference between normal and pathological ideas is not one of order but merely one of kind. It also reminds us that the Greek pathos


Ibid., SE 2:291.

Ibid., SE 2:290 [GW 1:294].

Arnold Davidson makes an analogous argument in his reading of Freud’s Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, which he sees as dismantling the “conceptual preconditions” for the employment of perversion as a legitimate concept. See Arnold I. Davidson, “How to Do the History of Psychoanalysis: A Reading of
originally meant both disease and suffering. Freud's notion of pathogenesis thus offers two distinct possibilities. First is the possibility that disease is a species of suffering endemic to, and perhaps even constitutive of, the development of thought itself.  

Indeed, Freud states explicitly that there is an “uninterrupted series” from affect-laden experiences and acts of thought [affektvoller Erlebnisse und Denkakte] to their memory-residues [Erinnerungsresten], through to the hysterical symptoms that are their memory-symbols. The task of analysis thus consists in providing an interpretation that allows the repressed experience or thought to be assimilated into consciousness. The second possibility offered by pathogenesis is a more capacious concept of disease that includes all suffering as such. This would condemn not only any stigmatization of disease, but also any valorization of suffering.

Freud does not conclude this exposition without a final twist. In working with patients to follow the logical thread from the outermost strata of their pathogenic organization back to the nucleus, he remarks that those ideas which form the nucleus and originate from the greatest depth are often the most difficult for the patient to actually acknowledge as recollections:

Even when everything is finished and the patients have been overborne by the force of logic and have been convinced by the therapeutic effect accompanying the emergence [Auftauchen] of precisely these ideas—when, I say, the patients themselves accept the fact that they thought this or that, they often add: ‘But I can't remember having thought it.’ It is easy to come to terms with them by telling them that the thoughts were unconscious.

---


36 The latent notion of suffering endemic to the development of thought found in the *Studies* anticipates Freud’s discussion in *Moses and Monotheism* of Judaism’s *Fortschritt in der Geistigkeit,* the advance in intellectuality which is met with reactionary violence.


38 Ibid., SE 2:300 [GW 1:306]. Taking Freud seriously as a philosopher and inheritor of the Enlightenment could perhaps turn on the different topologies of two species of emergence, Kant’s *Ausgang* and Freud’s *Auftauchen.* For Kant, Enlightenment is the human being’s emergence (*Ausgang*) from his self-imposed immaturity. *Ausgang* involves crossing a threshold from an age of Enlightenment to an enlightened age. *Auftauchen,* in contrast, means to emerge, appear, or surface, as if rising up from the depths.
At first glance, the notion of an unconscious thought seems like an oxymoron, and deserves due suspicion. Even Freud admits he is being speculative, cautioning that he cannot say more until his fundamental psychological views are further clarified. Still, because he has no reason to believe that the patient is lying about her inability to remember now that the treatment is over, he is led to ask, “are we to suppose that we are really dealing with thoughts which never came about [die nicht zustande gekommen sind], which merely had a possibility of existing, so that the treatment would lie in the accomplishment of a psychical act which did not take place at the time?” On this view, an unconscious thought is one that never materialized or came to consciousness, whose existence was only ever potential, but one that nevertheless had an effect by making an appearance in the phenomenal world through the symptom. Psychoanalysis would thus consists in helping the analysand to think an un-thought thought.

III. FROM PATHOGENESIS TO HISTORICAL TRUTH

Freud will spend the rest of his career reckoning with the implications raised by the problems of the Studies, although this is not immediately apparent. Indeed, many of his key terms are replaced by new ones, while those that are retained are imbued with new significations, to the point that it can be hard to determine where he is traveling old paths and where he is breaking new ground. Only by tracking the development of the terms put to work at this early stage can the question of historical truth be seen as the site where the problems of pathogenesis get worked out.

The problem inaugurated by the Studies in Hysteria, namely that of understanding the relationship between the patient’s “mental life” and the “circumstances and the events of [her]

39 Ibid., SE 2:300 [GW 1:306].
life,” is thematized, or more properly speaking neurologized, in the 1895 *Project for a Scientific Psychology*. Written as series of correspondences to his friend Wilhelm Fliess, the *Project* is Freud’s attempt to explain defense that evolves into the groundwork for many of the theories of psychoanalysis.  

In the second section of the third part of the *Project*, Freud aims to give a mechanical representation of the excitations involved in psychical processes, especially those which “abreact” the process of conversion by allowing the trapped affect to “find a way out” through speech:

Indications of discharge through speech are also in a certain sense indications of reality [Realitätszeichen]—but of thought-reality [Denkrealität] not of external reality [der externen], and in their case a rule of this kind has not by any means come into effect, because no constant threat of unpleasure would be attached to a breach of it. The unpleasure through neglecting cognition is not so glaring as that from ignoring the external world, though at bottom they are one in the same.

While Freud formalizes the distinction between thought-reality and external-reality, making the obvious claim that the unpleasure or pain caused through ignoring mental life is not as glaring as that risked by ignoring the very real dangers of the external world, he makes the more surprising claim that the unpleasures of thought-reality and external-reality are ultimately the same. Yet to

40 Freud’s final words to his patient are highly ambiguous: “‘No doubt fate would find it easier than I do to relieve you of your illness. But you will be able to convince yourself that much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness. With a mental life that has been restored to health you will be better armed [zur Wehre setzen] against that unhappiness.’” (Ibid., SE 2:305 [GW 1:312]). Whether this means to arm oneself defensively or offensively, with a shield or with a sword, seems to determine the political stakes of psychoanalysis: whether it is a discourse that works within a given social and historical situation to make it bearable or rather creates the conditions of possibility for changing it. The latter “strong” reading could be seen to reinscribe Foucault’s exhortation to self-experimentation within a Freudian project of self-appropriation. For another Freudian Foucault, see Eric Santner’s reading of Foucault’s investigation into the birth of biopolitics as “a crucial contribution to the original Freudian research paradigm concerning the relation between representations and nerves,” in Eric L. Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), xiii.

41 My reading could be described as very loosely Lacanian insofar as Lacan reads Freud’s development, as glossed by Eric Santner, as “so many attempts to return to and elaborate the intuitions of that early project” (*The Royal Remains*, xiii).


equate the unpleasures of these two forms of reality is simultaneously to call into question the value of their difference.

This tension repeats itself in Freud’s first major cultural work, *Totem and Taboo* (1913), where he first relates his myth of the primal murder as a psychoanalytic contribution to anthropological debates about the origins of society. The famous story goes as follows: the leader of the patriarchal horde expels his sons to have full control over the women in the group. One day the brothers who had been driven out band together in a fraternal clan to kill and devour their hated father. By eating him, they complete their identification with him and take on a portion of his strength. However, because the sons stood in a relation of emotional ambivalence towards the father, their affection now makes itself felt in the form of remorse for their action. According to the law of “deferred obedience,” the dead father becomes stronger than the living one when the sons internalize his authority. To repent, they forbid the killing of the totem and resign their claim to the women of the clan, thus inaugurating the two fundamental taboos of totemism.44

Yet insofar as Freud develops his account of the primal murder from his work with neurotics, his clinical experience calls into question the veracity of the myth just elaborated. At this point the distinction between thought-reality and external-reality is transposed into that between psychical and factual reality: “What lie behind the sense of guilt of neurotics are always psychical [psychische] realities and never factual [faktische] ones. What characterizes neurotics is that they prefer psychical to factual reality and react just as seriously to thoughts as normal people do to realities. May not the same have been true of primitive men?”45 While this thesis would exonerate us from such violent origins of civilization, Freud immediately concedes that it does not

actually make a difference whether or not the primal murder took place: “it must be confessed that the distinction [between intentions and their execution], which may seem fundamental to other people, does not in our judgement affect the heart of the matter.”\footnote{Ibid., SE 13:160.} That is, if wishes have the full value of facts for neurotics, and by analogy for primitive men, then Freud wants to take those wishes seriously. Finally, he adds a third term to the conceptual landscape when he says that “historical reality has a share in the matter as well \(es\ ist\ auch\ ein\ Stück\ historischer\ Realität\ dabei\),”\footnote{Ibid., SE 13:161 [GW 9:193].} referring to the fact that as children, neurotics had evil impulses that they really did try to act out as far as they were capable. Historical reality is thus of the same order as factual reality but refers to events in the past, and Freud uses this notion to shore up his analogy between neurotics and primitive men in order to assert, “without laying claim to any finality of judgement,” that “in the beginning was the Deed.”\footnote{Ibid.}

These terms shift once again in the \textit{Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis} from 1916-17. Lecture XXIII, “The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms,” is particularly illuminating in tracking these changes. Freud presents his discussion of the etiological proximity of phantasy and reality as something “surprising and perplexing:”

By means of analysis, as you know, starting from the symptoms, we arrive at a knowledge of the infantile experiences to which the libido is fixated and out of which the symptoms are made. Well, the surprise lies in the fact that these scenes from infancy are not always true. Indeed, they are not true in the majority of cases, and in a few of them they are the direct opposite of the historical truth [\textit{historischen Wahrheit}].\footnote{Freud, \textit{Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis}, SE 16:367 [GW 11:381].}

At this stage, “historical truth” replaces the usage of “historical reality” above to index events that actually occurred in the world. What is so shocking about this discovery is the implication that phantasies can give rise to symptoms just as much as real past experiences. Such a novel claim

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid., SE 13:160.]
\item[Ibid., SE 13:161 [GW 9:193].]
\item[Ibid.]
\item[Freud, \textit{Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis}, SE 16:367 [GW 11:381].]
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
troubles Freud because it threatens to discredit not only psychoanalysis, a science that contravenes all recognizable truth by acknowledging the effects of events that never took place, but also the patients whose testimonies could lead to such an incredible theory.

Freud remarks that if the infantile experiences brought to light by analysis were either invariably real or categorically falsified as inventions, he could either confidently feel he were standing on firm ground or otherwise look elsewhere for an explanation of the neuroses. However, “neither of these things is the case:”

[T]he position can be shown to be that the childhood experiences constructed or remembered in analysis are sometimes indisputably false and sometimes equally certainly correct, and in most cases compounded of truth and falsehood. Sometimes, then, symptoms represent events which really took place and to which we may attribute an influence on the fixation of the libido, and sometimes they represent phantasies of the patient’s which are not, of course, suited to playing an aetiological role. It is difficult to find one's way about in this.  

Freud is reckoning with the fact that while phantasies obviously should not play any etiological role in the development of symptoms, they nevertheless appear to have real effects. What he finds particularly troubling is “the low valuation of reality, the neglect of the distinction between it and phantasy,” or we might say conversely, the high valuation of phantasy. From this point on, phantasy will be included in Freud’s understanding of psychical reality, and its new opposite, “material reality,” which consolidates factual reality and historical reality:

It remains a fact that the patient has created these phantasies for himself, and this fact is of scarcely less importance for his neurosis than if he had really experienced what the phantasies contain. The phantasies possess psychical [psychische] as contrasted with material [materiellen] reality, and we gradually learn to understand that in the world of the neuroses it is psychical reality which is the decisive kind.

---

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., SE 16:368.
52 Ibid [GW 11:383].
For therapeutic purposes, Freud must equate phantasy and reality insofar as both have the capacity to generates symptoms. Yet by granting facticity to psychical reality in this way, he renames factual reality *material* reality to refer to that which occurs or occurred in the material world.\(^{53}\) It is important to note that at this stage, “material reality” and “historical truth” are used interchangeably.

The distinction between psychical and material reality and the elision of material reality with historical truth obtains until precisely 1935, when Freud is beginning to conceive the project that will become *Moses and Monotheism*. In the literature on *Moses*, it has become almost convention to cite Freud’s letter to Arnold Zweig from September 30, 1934 to explain the impetus for the project: “Faced with the renewed persecutions, one asks oneself again how the Jew came to be what he is and why he has drawn upon himself this undying hatred. I soon found the formula: Moses created the Jew.”\(^{54}\) It is remarkable, then, that in a letter to his colleague, friend, and confidante Lou Andreas-Salomé less than four months later, Freud provides an *entirely different formula*: “Religions owe their compulsive power to the *return of the repressed*; they are reawakened memories of very ancient, forgotten, highly emotional episodes of human history. I have already said this in *Totem and Taboo*; I express it now in the formula: the strength of religion

---

\(^{53}\) This shift can be read against some of the contentious debates about how Freud received his patients’ narratives. While many cite Freud’s notorious letter to Wilhelm Fliess from September 21, 1897 as evidence that Freud no longer believed the veracity of his patient’s accounts, I tend to agree with Eliza Slavet that he was not abandoning the reality of his patient’s reports, but rather abandoning the idea that “external definitions of reality can be maintained internally,” and that “he did not accept them as lies; instead, he accepted them as proof of the existence of an unconscious region of the mind where fact and fiction cannot necessarily be distinguished.” In Eliza Slavet, *Racial Fever: Freud and the Jewish Question* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 47. Although she is referring to an exchange from 1897, I think Freud’s discussion from 1917 can be read as clarifying this more nuanced understanding of truth and fiction.

lies not in its \textit{material}, but in its \textit{historical} truth.”\textsuperscript{55} The key to understanding the meaning of historical truth in the later Freud rests in its pairing with the newly-minted term “material truth,” which henceforth will replace the former equation of material reality and historical truth. Yet insofar as material truth now does the work of those two terms by condensing them, we are forced to recognize that, by the very fact of its being retained, the term historical truth has been \textit{displaced} such that whatever it now refers to stands outside the bounds of truth conventionally understood as the correspondence between something in the word and the mind that thinks it. Indeed, we can say with Michel de Certeau that, at least from this point forward, “Freud is a stranger to the issues of ‘revealing’ or the Greek (‘Egyptian’) conception of truth, which presupposes the adequate relation between a \textit{Wesen} and a \textit{Name}.”\textsuperscript{56} If Freud rejects the adequation of \textit{Wesen} and \textit{Name}, essence and name, or stated otherwise, being and word, his enigmatic concept of historical truth can be read as a critique of onto-logical truth.

There are indications throughout Freud’s corpus that can be used to help determine how historical truth operates on the model of pathogenesis, and what exactly it names and means when, in \textit{Moses and Monotheism}, Freud describes “the kernel of historical truth [\textit{den Kern von historischer Wahrheit}]”\textsuperscript{57} behind religious legends. As early as \textit{The Psychopathology of Everyday Life} (1901), Freud claims that paranoiac actions are somewhat justified because “\textit{there is in fact some truth in them} [Es ist eben etwas Wahres daran].”\textsuperscript{58} In his study of Leonardo da Vinci (1910),

\textsuperscript{55} Letter from Freud to Lou Andreas-Salomé, January 6, 1935. \textit{Int. Psycho-Anal. Lib.}, 89:205. Indeed, three weeks earlier Freud had already written to Zweig with a caveat: “The fact that I wrote at length to you in an earlier letter about Moses being an Egyptian is \textit{not the essential point}, though it is the starting point.” Letter from Sigmund Freud to Arnold Zweig, December 16, 1934. \textit{Int. Psycho-Anal. Lib.}, 84:98 (my emphasis).


\textsuperscript{57} Freud, \textit{Moses and Monotheism}, SE 23:16 [GW 16:112].

\textsuperscript{58} Freud, \textit{The Psychopathology of Everyday Life}, SE 6:256 [GW 4:285].
Freud argues that the great man’s story of the vulture that visited him in his cradle as a baby can be compared to the “distortions [Entstellungen]” that characterize national legends: “What someone thinks he remembers from his childhood is not a matter of indifference; as a rule the residual memories [Erinnerungsresten]—which he himself does not understand—cloak priceless pieces of evidence [Zeugnisse] about the most important features in his mental development.”

A residual memory is what one thinks one remembers that nevertheless refers to important pieces of development. In this sense, it is analogous to the material truth that shows itself, and the cloaked evidence anticipates the final formulation of historical truth as its ahistorical referent. Indeed, while Zeugnis may mean evidence in an archeological sense, it also means “testimony.” In this sense, residual memories testify to the inaccessible but crucial features of one’s mental development.

The individual’s residual memories [Erinnerungsresten] can be compared to the historical residues [historischen Reste] that Freud describes in The Future of an Illusion (1927) that also do the work of what will eventually be called material truth:

> Our knowledge of the historical worth of certain religious doctrines increases our respect for them, but does not invalidate our proposal that they should cease to be put forward as the reasons for the precepts of civilization. On the contrary! Those historical residues [historischen Reste] have helped us to view religious teachings, as it were, as neurotic relics, and we may now argue that the time has probably come, as it does in an analytic treatment, for replacing the effects of repression by the results of the rational operation of the intellect.

---


60 We can again turn to Shoshana Felman’s work on testimony to see how this situation anticipates Freud’s novel understanding of truth: “Psychoanalysis, in this way, profoundly rethinks and radically renews the very concept of the testimony, by submitting, and by recognizing for the first time in the history of culture, that one does not have to possess or own the truth, in order to effectively bear witness to it; that speech as such is unwittingly testimonial; and that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, not available to its own speaker,” in Testimony, 15.

Just as an individual’s residual memories refer to a-historical or virtual but nonetheless formative phantasies, thoughts, or events, so too can religious teachings be read as historical residues that refer to a tradition that was constituted otherwise. And just as in analytic treatment the time eventually comes to replace the effects of repression—in this case, the neurotic relics—with the results of the rational operation of the intellect, which is to say the intolerable idea that was repressed in the first place, Freud suggests that the time has come to view religious teachings as the effects of repression and to replace them with a knowledge of the ideas that gave rise to them. In both cases, it is a question of the pathogenesis of reason, of ideas being repressed because they do not fit within an accepted worldview, giving rise to distortions or residues that cloak them, and then eventually being retrieved, forcing the present worldview to accommodate them.

It is very curious, then, that the first time Freud deploys the concept of historical truth after it has been opposed to material truth in the context of religion is in the 1937 clinical essay “Constructions in Analysis,” where he uses it to describe individual delusions: “The essence of it is that there is not only method in madness, as the poet has already perceived, but also a fragment of historical truth [ein Stück historischer Wahrheit],”62 which several lines later he also calls a “kernel of truth [Wahrheitskerns].” 63 Freud continues, “it is plausible to suppose that the compulsive, belief attaching to delusions derives its strength precisely from infantile sources of this kind.”64 In the clinical setting, the compulsive strength of delusional belief derives its force from what Freud now calls a kernel of historical truth, which echos his description of a delusional woman from 1922 that presents the same phenomenon in very different terms: “She would be

63 Ibid., SE 23:268 [GW 16:55].
64 Ibid., SE 23:267.
bound to believe in the reality of the pathological effect so long as the reality of its unconscious premises were unknown to her. Every such delusion derives its strength and its unassailable character from having a source in unconscious psychical reality. The unconscious psychical reality that drives delusion operates exactly like the unconscious thoughts that Freud hypothesized in the Studies in Hysteria, and in the very next paragraph of the “Constructions” essay Freud forges an unexpected link with hysteria:

> Just as our construction is only effective because it recovers a fragment of lost experience, so the delusion owes its convincing power to the element of historical truth which it inserts in the place of the rejected reality. In this way a proposition which I originally asserted only of hysteria would apply also to delusions—namely, that those who are subject to them are suffering from their own reminiscences.

Thus in 1937, Freud explicitly links the problematic of the Studies in Hysteria to that of delusion, which grounds his ultimate understanding of historical truth. Yet this sudden linkage belies a deeper continuity eclipsed by the English translations of Freud’s work: the “nucleus” of the pathogenic idea in hysterics, the historical “core” of myths, and the “kernel” of historical truth all render the German Kern that Freud uses to name the referent of symptoms, myths, and religions. The notion of the Kern is the logical thread that ties the unconscious thought behind a symptom, delusion, or neurosis to the historical truth that subtends religion.

This is the notion of historical truth that disrupts ontological truth and will be set to work, albeit on a bigger stage, in Moses and Monotheism. Thus we can say that historical truth is the collective and intergenerational form of an unconscious thought or psychical reality whose distortions give rise to religion. Yet this essential connection between historical truth and religion remains to be interrogated. Indeed, Freud goes so far as to say that historical truth is “of the same

---

order of magnitude as what has come out of it, as religion itself.” On these grounds, we might respond to Derrida’s observation that historical truth is a concept that “scholarship, historiography, and perhaps philosophy have some difficulty thinking through” by suggesting that this is because it is most properly a problem for the philosophy of religion. In what follows, I will develop this account through a reading of Freud’s analysis of the Passion.

IV. CHRIST THE SYMPTOM

In the letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé where he first formulates the distinction between material and historical truth, Freud frames the motive behind what would become his final project as having “started out from the question as to what has really created the particular character of the Jew,” just as in his letter to Zweig. Given this setup, however, the reservations that prevent him from publishing his thoughts express a seemingly unrelated concern. Immediately after introducing the formula about material and historical truth, he adds:

> And now you see, Lou, this formula, which holds so great a fascination for me, cannot be publicly expressed in Austria today, without bringing down upon us a state prohibition of analysis on the part of the ruling Catholic authority. And it is only this Catholicism which protects us from the Nazis.

Despite the enormous body of work dedicated to Freud’s Moses and the status of Judaism in his final work, Freud’s fear of offending the Catholic authority that protects psychoanalysis from Nazism suggests that at the heart of this project lies a critique of Christianity that remains to be exploited. Indeed, in the second prefatory note to the third part of Moses and Monotheism, written from the safety of London in June 1938, Freud affirms: “Here I now live, a welcome guest; I can

---

68 Freud, Moses and Monotheism, SE 23:128.
69 Derrida, Archive Fever, 41.
71 Ibid.
breathe a sigh of relief now that the weight has been taken off me and that I am once more able to speak and write—I had almost said ‘and think’—as I wish or as I must. I venture to bring the last portion of my work before the public.\footnote{72} This last portion of the work is the one in which he extends his study of Moses the Egyptian to a discussion of historical truth, Jesus, and Paul. For this reason I read his discussion of Christianity as not only central to the project of Moses and Monotheism, but furthermore, insofar as it builds upon the problem of historical truth, as intimately related to the question of the pathogenesis of reason.

Between Totem and Taboo and Moses and Monotheism, Freud’s account of Christianity becomes much more complex. In the former, Christianity appears as the final example in a discussion of totemic sacrifice and the relation of son to father, in conversation with the work of William Robertson Smith, James George Frazer, and Salomon Reinach. In other words, it is the latest instantiation of a more ancient structure:

There can be no doubt that in the Christian myth the original sin was one against God the Father. If, however, Christ redeemed mankind from the burden of original sin by the sacrifice of his own life, we are driven to conclude that the sin was a murder. The law of talion, which is so deeply rooted in human feelings, lays it down that a murder can only be expiated by the sacrifice of another life: self-sacrifice points back to blood-guilt. And if this sacrifice of a life brought about atonement with God the Father, the crime to be expiated can only have been the murder of the father.\footnote{73} If, according to the law of talion, Christ’s self-sacrifice grants redemption from sin and atonement with God the Father, it can only be because the sin was a murder and the father was the victim.

\footnote{72} Freud, Moses and Monotheism, SE 23:57. The slip of the pen that Freud treats as a slip of the tongue wherein he nearly replaces “writing” with “thinking” brings to mind Derrida’s suggestion that a psychopathology of everyday life should include a “study of writing [which] would not be limited to the interpretation of the lapsus calami, and, moreover, would be more attentive to this latter and to its originality than Freud himself ever was” (Jacques Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” in Writing and Difference, 230). What does it mean that Freud is tempted to treat writing as thinking, and that he refers to his writing as speech itself?

\footnote{73} Freud, Totem and Taboo, SE 13:154.
A quarter-century later, however, the figure of Christ becomes, like the hysterical symptom, “overdetermined,” and it is no longer Christ himself but Paul, “a Roman Jew from Tarsus,” who is credited with the redemptive work. In Freud’s account, there was a growing sense of guilt that had taken hold of the Jewish people, and perhaps all of civilization at the time, as a precursor to the return of the repressed material. It was Paul who seized upon this sense of guilt and correctly traced it back to its original source. Indeed, with respect to the Christian narrative of an innocent son of God who allowed himself to be killed and thus took on the guilt of all humanity, Freud writes that “what was essential in it seems to have been Paul’s own contribution.” As a man with a gift for religion, “the dark traces of the past lurked in his mind, ready to break through into its more conscious regions.” For Freud, the innocent redeemer is a distortion, and he holds to the logic of the law of talion that the one whose sacrifice expiates guilt could only have been the most guilty person, namely the chief rebel among the group of brothers who killed the father. Yet Freud maintains that it must remain “undecided [unentschieden]” whether or not there was in fact such a chief rebel:

If there was no such ringleader, then Christ was the heir [Erbe] to a wishful phantasy which remained unfulfilled; if there was one, then he was his successor and his reincarnation [sein Nachfolger und seine Reinkarnation]. But no matter whether what we have here is a phantasy or the return of a forgotten reality, in any case the origin of the concept of a hero is to be found at this point—the hero who always rebels against his father and kills him in some shape or other.

74 Freud, Moses and Monotheism, SE 23:86.
75 Recall how, with hysterics, the symptom is most forceful just before it is abreacted. Perhaps guilt is then the symptom whose precipitating cause was the primal murder, whether or not it in fact took place.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., SE 23:87.
78 Ibid. [GW 16:193]. The question whether Christ is the heir of an unfulfilled wishful phantasy or the successor and reincarnation of an actual hero repeats and transposes another undecidability in the philosophy of religion concerning Christ’s status, namely Kant’s in the first part of the second section of Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason [AK 6:60-78], where it is a question of whether Christ is the archetype (Urbild) who provides the template for the moral exemplar, or merely the model (Vorbild) that incarnates an archetype already accessible to practical reason. Thus Kant’s metaphysical question of revelation versus revealability becomes, with Freud, a metapsychological question that collapses the
What is decisive for Freud is that regardless of whether there was a chief rebel in the brother horde, Christ provides the origin of the concept of the hero who rebels against his father and kills him, insofar as he repeats and makes explicit unconscious repressed material. If in *Totem and Taboo* Freud reluctantly determined “in the beginning was the Deed” despite much wavering, he is now resolute in the undecidability of the chief rebel because an unfulfilled wish-phantasy and a repressed action are granted equal psychical force.

Yet the Christ who repeats and calls to memory the chief rebel, the innocent murderer, does not exhaust the figure that Freud’s Paul constructs. The novelty of *Moses and Monotheism’s* intervention is the transitive relation it forges between Christ and the primal father via the murdered Egyptian Moses:

> It is plausible to conjecture that remorse for the murder of Moses provided the stimulus for the wishful phantasy of the Messiah, who was to return and lead his people to redemption and the promised world-dominion. If Moses was this first Messiah, Christ became his substitute and successor, and Paul could exclaim to the peoples with some historical justification: ‘Look! the Messiah has really come: he has been murdered before your eyes!’ Then, too, there is a piece of historical truth in Christ’s resurrection, for he was the resurrected Moses and behind him the returned primal father of the primitive horde, transfigured and, as the son, put in the place of the father.

The figure of Christ forged by Freud’s Paul represents a remarkably dense “dream-work,” to borrow Gil Anidjar’s felicitous formulation. For while at one level of repetition Christ is the successor of the chief rebel, he is also, as Messiah, the direct successor of the murdered Moses, who was himself the successor of the primal father. This exposes the confounding situation that

---

difference between an origin that is nevertheless the repetition of an unconscious psychical reality and the repetition of a material reality. Perhaps rather than transposing the question of revelation versus revealability, Freud calls it into question by challenging the very idea of the origin that maintains it.

79 Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23:89-90. This is a fraught passage, for if Moses was the first Messiah who inaugurated the possibility of messianism, it was the *guilt* attached to his murder that stimulated the wishful phantasy of the Messiah, the messianic*icity* that opens toward hope and possibility. This puts guilt in an intractable position: while it is the archiving structure that holds out hope for expiation, it simultaneously conditions the very repression that forecloses possibility and novelty by destining the repetition of the repressed event.
Christ simultaneously embodies, at different levels of repetition, both the murderer and the victim of his crime. While most commentators tend to focus on Christ’s status as a repetition of Moses and the primal father, Anidjar has emphasized the aspect of Christ as a repetition of the chief rebel in order to make the bold claim that “the resurrection is the ultimate institutionalization of the future of murder as innocence.” Here I am attempting to hold these contradictory repetitions together and make productive use of their tension.

Read in this light, Freud’s conclusion in Moses that Christianity “has not escaped the fate of having to get rid of the father” paints Paul as the harbinger of a failed—because impossible—universalism. To say that Christianity has not escaped the fate of having to get rid of the father is not to say that it has not yet escaped it, but rather to imply that it cannot escape it, because Christianity in fact depends on a fraught relationship with Judaism. As Freud conceives it, insofar as Christ’s self-sacrifice continually repeats the murder of the father, Christ bears within himself the trace of the father’s transfiguration into the son, making the figure of the father both inescapable and indestructible. To borrow a concept from Lacan, we could say that Freud leaves us with the possibility that Judaism is the “extimate” core of Christianity that constitutes it as its very condition of possibility, but is also the condition of impossibility that prohibits it from ever achieving full self-presence. On these terms, Judaism after Paul is much more than just a fossil. If Christianity were to ultimately get rid of the father in the guise of Judaism, it would mark something like Christianity’s own suicide.

80 Anidjar, Blood, 418n102.
81 Ibid., SE 23:136.
82 David Nirenberg has developed this argument at length in Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition (W.W. Norton & Company, 2013).
83 And as Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi rightly notes, “for Freud Pauline Christianity was an advance, and Judaism thereafter a fossil, only with regard to the return of the repressed,” in Freud’s Moses, 50.
While this may seem like a provocative claim, it is in connection with his discussion of self-sacrifice and blood-guilt in *Totem and Taboo* that, in a footnote, Freud first mentions suicide with respect to the Christian myth: “We find that impulses to suicide in a neurotic turn out regularly to be self-punishments for wishes for someone else’s death.” Compare this to what Freud says in *Moses* about Christian anti-Semites: “Their hatred of Jews is at bottom a hatred of Christians.” If the neurotic impulse to suicide is the introjected self-punishment for wanting to kill another, then Christian anti-Semitism is suicide projected.

This psychoanalytic critique is corroborated by Robert Paul’s textual-historical interpretation of Christianity’s unhappy dependence on Judaism. Insofar as its core myths and rituals are centered around the life and death of Jesus, Christianity “makes sense only in the context of the myths and rituals of Moses.” That is, because Christianity is a salvation religion, “it defines what people need to be saved from as a fault inherent in Judaism.” This involves reconfiguring the meaning of Jewish guilt: “What for the Jews has been the support for an ongoing social system has been reinterpreted through the lens of the Christian myth as an intolerable condition, one from which a person self-evidently needs to be rescued.” On this reading, “the key move of Christian ideology has been to recast this guilt as a state of intolerable anxiety rather than creative instigation.”

---

87 Ibid., 195.
Torah narrative” and upholding “the legitimacy of the Mosaic Law and covenant.”\textsuperscript{88} Without the Law, the “good news” just doesn’t make any sense.\textsuperscript{89}

Finally, if the essential aspects of the Christian narrative are, as Freud writes, Paul’s own contribution, we are left to ask about the significance and legacy of Freud’s Paul, for both the philosophy of religion and psychoanalysis. On the one hand, Freud ends a long career that began with describing the pathogenesis of hysterical symptoms by speculating on the genesis of the Passion that began with the primal murder. Inasmuch as Paul “exorcised humanity’s sense of guilt”\textsuperscript{90} through the idea of the redeemer, Christianity is said to mark the telos of a long history of guilt by inaugurating a new humanity with respect to the return of the repressed. However, it is just at the moment Freud sees himself demystifying this tradition that he risks inscribing the very project of psychoanalysis as one of its minor inheritors or afterlives. If the Christian myth tells the story of a Word that appears but, because people cannot bear the message that it brings is killed and buried in a dark cave, only to be resurrected and return with more force than before, Freud’s model of pathogenesis appears already thoroughly Christianized.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 216.
\textsuperscript{89} Robert Paul’s account is tremendously helpful, but I have two main disagreements. First, he begins his book by claiming that for Freud, “Christianity had the potential of becoming a universal religion” (3), and it is precisely the opposite claim that I am arguing is justified by Freud’s work. Second, Paul also speaks of the practices of a combined “Judeo-Christian religion” (219) as the symptoms of an obsessional neurosis from which society at large suffers. My aim is to point to the uneasy tension, the almost non-relationship between the two traditions rather than elide them with a hyphen.
\textsuperscript{90} Freud, Moses and Monotheism, SE 23:88.
\textsuperscript{91} On this view Freudian psychoanalysis appears as one aspect of a secularization that, as Talal Asad glosses the work of Santiago Zabala, “is not merely produced by a Christian past but is also a testament to the enduring presence of Christianity in its post-Christian mode (European civilization).” Talal Asad, “Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism,” in Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood, Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 17.
This reading pushes back against interpretations of psychoanalysis as properly atheological such as Jean-Luc Nancy’s, who writes that “Freud’s invention is one of the most clearly and most resolutely non-religious of modern inventions”92 insofar as its rule is to defer its own identity. Yet insofar as it is “the least disposed to give itself over to any sort of belief whatsoever, even a belief in science,”93 one could just as well argue that this deferral of identity and wholeness that preserves the infinite reserve of meaning is precisely what sustains belief, both generating and constituting what Nancy calls the “religious.”94 Indeed, the avowed “audacity” required by Freud to “assume the survival of these memory-traces in the archaic heritage,”95 the survival of “the kernel of historical truth,”96 risks association with another famous kernel, the “will to truth” that Nietzsche takes to be the “kernel” of the Christian ascetic ideal.97 Freud’s own Kern risks appearing as “only one of the latest phases of its evolution,”98 as the will to historical truth. Derrida gestures towards this problem in different terms in his early discussion of the archaic heritage, which he refers to as the archi-trace: “An unerasable trace is not a trace, it is a full presence, an immobile and uncorruptible substance, a son of God, a sign of parousia and not a seed [semence], that is, a mortal

93 Ibid., 100.
94 Indeed, this is the function that Michel de Certeau ascribes to the name “God” in “Surin’s Melancholy,” in Heterologies, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 111.
95 Freud, Moses and Monotheism, SE 23:100.
96 Ibid., SE 23:16.
97 Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 160. In fact, Nietzsche says of the will to truth that “this will, this remnant [Rest] of an ideal, is, if you will believe me, this ideal itself in its strictest, most spiritual formation, esoteric through and through, with all external additions abolished, and thus not so much its remnant as its kernel [Kern]” [KSA 5:409]. Nietzsche anticipates Freud’s own careful distinction between remainders and kernels, which seem to get aligned with traces.
98 Ibid.
germ [germe].” 99 In Freud’s effort to escape the Christian inheritance by trying to name the archaic heritage that precedes it, he is unable to find the language that would exceed its conceptual reach. 100

On the other hand, however, by saying that the murder of Moses “was a case of ‘acting out’ instead of remembering,” 101 one that Paul helped Christians to remember and thus admit with respect to Christ, Freud describes Paul with the exact language he uses in his clinical writings for the role of the analyst. 102 In this sense, Paul carries out something like a collective transference on the early Christian community. On this view, far from Jacob Taubes’ modest claim that Freud is a “direct descendent of Paul” in that he “is involved with the basic experience of guilt,” 103 by putting Paul in the role of the analyst we are left with the implicit but much bolder suggestion by Freud himself that it is Paul who, by implementing the techniques of the analyst avant la lettre, is a proto-Freudian. From this perspective, the historical emergence of psychoanalysis would mark the terminal event in the nineteen-hundred-year pathogenesis of what Freud once called an illusion,

99 Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” 230 [L’écriture et la différence, 339]. And insofar as the archaic heritage is an “immobile and uncorruptible substance” that is “not a seed” or “a mortal germ,” this suggests that epigenesis is not an adequate model to address the host of problems to which the question of historical truth gives rise.
100 If I were to call attention to one more theological debt, I would point out that Freud’s gesture to make Christ recapitulate the entire history of humanity by embodying the return of two repressed and fundamental murders is an entirely Pauline move, who said that Christ was able “to recapitulate all things” (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα: Eph 1:10). This Pauline thought of recapitulation was developed and thematized in the second century by Irenaeus of Lyons, who specified that “the Lord is He who has recapitulated in Himself all nations dispersed from Adam downwards, and all languages and generations of men […] He recapitulated in Himself the long line of human beings.” In Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D. and James Donaldson, LL.D. (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 1:455 and 446 (translation slightly altered). It is well known that Freud relied on Ernst Haeckel’s theory that “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny,” the idea that an individual being develops in stages resembling the development of the species. While Haeckel’s work was based on that of the embryologist Étienne Serres and the zoologist Johann Friedrich Meckel from the early 1800s, in this light it seems worth asking whether recapitulation theory itself bears an unexamined debt to Christian theology.
101 Freud, Moses and Monotheism, SE 23:89.
103 Taubes, The Political Theology of Paul, 89.
and later a delusion, but as the tradition of the suffering Word could properly be called, both more generally and specifically, a patho-logy.

To diagnose Christianity as a pathology would be to recognize that if Pauline Christianity marks an advance with respect to the return of the repressed primal murder, as Freud admits, the Passion must also be regarded as a founding trauma that generates its own unique and complex symptomatology.\textsuperscript{104} Freud’s model of pathogenesis and the construction of his myth then allow the particularity of a Christian logic to come into view, even as his model is still beholden to that logic in various ways. Such a diagnosis would involve specifying the nature of the “cultural regression”\textsuperscript{105} that followed from relinquishing the “ethical heights”\textsuperscript{106} of Judaism for the sake of an innocence sustained by the logic of a suffering God. The striking conclusion offered by Freud’s analysis is that although Christianity is an advance with respect to the return of the repressed, Christ is the symptom of an innocence that has not been thought through as such. This diagnosis also calls attention to the possibility that what has in many ways propelled modern philosophy, at least from Kant to Nietzsche, is the question of a specifically Christian sense of guilt that is always already organized around the end of expiation. It is the construction of Freud’s myth that exposes this aspect of Christianity and presents the church as the pathogenic “body” organized around this kernel of historical truth, the body that was unable to protect psychoanalysis from the German invasion.

V: CONCLUSION


\textsuperscript{105} Freud, \textit{Moses and Monotheism}, SE 23:88.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., SE 23:134.
Read in view of the clinical and cultural writings across Freud’s corpus, the question of historical truth can be seen to index the problem of the relation between mental life and worldly life that troubled Freud from the beginning. In his early work, pathogenesis describes the process whereby unconscious thoughts come to be appropriated by consciousness. An idea that is unassimilable is repressed, its affect is stripped away and converted into a somatic innervation, and this symptom is the phenomenon that leads to the unthought thought and allows it to be abreacted through speech.

What is remarkable about Freud’s trajectory is that this model of the development of rationality is worked out in and through religion, the only phenomenon to which the force of historical truth is commensurate. As such, the material truth of religions indicates historical truth while simultaneously concealing it. It is all the more surprising that Freud concludes a book ostensibly about Moses and the Jews with a discussion of Paul and Christianity in order to draw out the implications of historical truth for an understanding of history. Freud betrays psychoanalysis’s supposed secularity in his dependence on Christian language and conceptual patterns, even as he uses this very language to delimit and articulate the specific symptomatology of the Christian inheritance in which he is embedded.

A model of pathogenesis that attends to the complications of historical truth stands to offer a more nuanced account of history. If, as Malabou contends, epigenesis “takes place at the moving contact point between origin and the present state of affairs,” thus “giving history the dimension of a process of growth here and transcending the simple paradigm of events,” pathogenesis takes place between the present and the absent origin which only ever shows itself in the distorted repetition of the symptom. Beyond the simple paradigm of events and a process of growth, pathogenesis accounts for the reactionary violence endemic to any sort of progress, raising the

---

question of what it means to think of progress and violence not as two poles of history but as actually intertwined.
Bibliography


———. (1901). The Psychopathology of Everyday Life. Vol. 6 of SE.
———. (1914)“Remembering, Repeating and Working Through.” In SE, 12:145-156.


