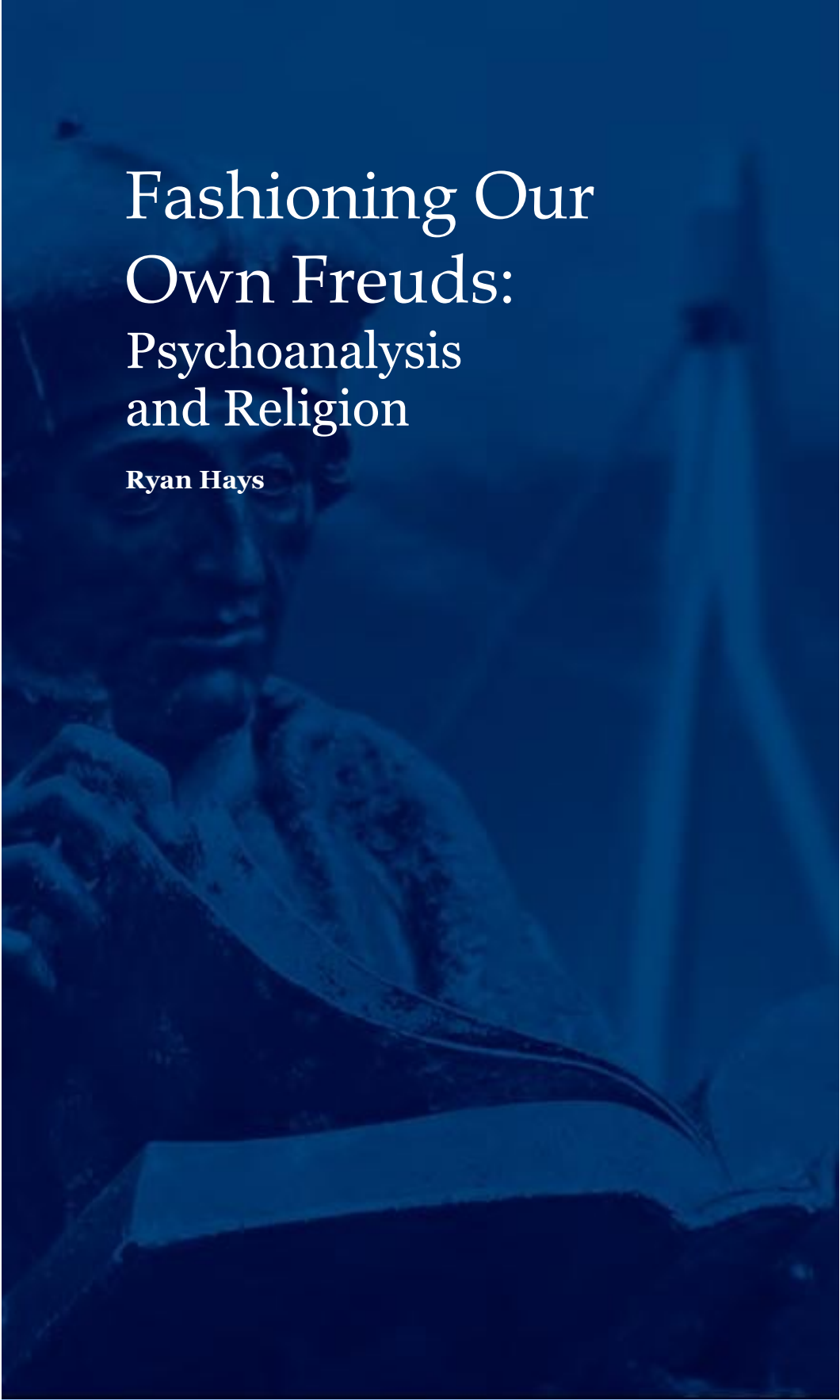


# Fashioning Our Own Freuds: Psychoanalysis and Religion

Ryan Hays



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Psychoanalysis  
and  
Religion

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Was Sigmund Freud a militant atheist or an unconscious Christian or something in between? This study calls into the question the very idea that Sigmund Freud has a 'true' position on religion. It illustrates the extent to which different assumptions, strategies and formations lead to strikingly different historical representations of Freud: 1) Freud as neither enemy nor ally of religion (Erich Fromm); 2) Freud as Jewish mystic (David Bakan); 3) Freud as reconciler of psychoanalysis and religion (Ana-Maria Rizzuto); 4) Freud as militant atheist (Peter Gay); and 5) Freud as unconscious Christian (Paul Vitz). My thesis is that we do not find Freud *in* history as much as we fashion a Freud *with* history. What is more, the Freuds we fashion inevitably bear the impress of our own beliefs and biases. In the end, I seek to expose these types of historical representations of Freud and religion for the Rorschach test they are: they tell us more about our selves and our interpretive communities than they ever will about Sigmund Freud's 'position' on religion.

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## INTRODUCTION

On July 24, 1931, a young sculptor by the name of Oscar Nemon had two notable guests in his garden. The first was standing with the stillness of a statue and would know a life only eight more years in the making. The second was being fashioned on the fly and would long outlast both its famous model and its young maker. The first guest was Sigmund Freud and the second guest was a double of the first—a clay bust of Freud that Nemon was sculpting in the professor’s presence. In the days that followed, Freud informed a friend that Nemon’s visual representation was “an astonishingly lifelike impression” of him.<sup>1</sup> But Freud’s housekeeper, Paula Fichtl, respectfully disagreed, stating that Nemon had crafted a Freud who looked much angrier than the man she knew.<sup>2</sup> Freud responded by insisting that he was “angry with humanity,” and to this day the sculpture is known by that very description.<sup>3</sup> My thesis takes its cue from this image: what Oscar Nemon did with clay and a scalpel, writers do with history and narrative—we fashion our own Freuds.

I will argue that we do not find Freud in history as much as we make a Freud with history. And nowhere is this Freud-fashioning more apparent than in the field of psychoanalysis and religion, whereby multiple authors examine the same Sigmund Freud and render strikingly different representations—from David Bakan’s ‘Freud as Jewish mystic’ to Peter Gay’s ‘Freud as militant atheist’ to Paul Vitz’s ‘Freud as unconscious Christian,’ to name but a few. My goal is to expose these types of historical representations of Freud and religion for the Rorschach test they are: they tell us more about our selves and our interpretive communities than they ever will about Sigmund Freud’s ‘position’ on religion. To engage some of the broader issues at stake in this study, and to keep my reflections from morphing into the type of neatly packaged story that constitutes most discussions of Freud, a pattern that I seek to interrogate at the end of this study, the remainder of this section is structured around a series of questions.

## **Is this study worth reading?**

It is not unwise to wonder if the world really needs another study of Sigmund Freud. After all, the documentation devoted to him is said to surpass the extant material on any other human in history.<sup>4</sup> What makes this study not only useful but also unique is its approach to Freud. Since his death in 1939, scholars of various stripes have approached the subject of Freud and religion in much the same way: no matter how idiosyncratic the argument, it almost always includes a historical representation of Freud's position on religion. The problem is that too few of these studies ever stop to ask: why do we assume that Freud has a clear, consistent, continuous position on religion in the first place—especially when his encounters with religion were often ambiguous, contradictory and discontinuous? To ask this question is to realize that Freud cannot get from a singular statement, act or experience to an essential position without help from us.

When we narrate Freud's position on religion we impose, rather than expose, things like coherency, continuity, order, meaning, intention, structure and significance. Thus envisaged, the question of whether Freud 'really' is, for example, a militant atheist or an unconscious Christian misses the mark entirely. Since a Freud is as much made as found, the more pointed question to ask is: how does one go about fashioning a Freud as militant atheist as opposed to a Freud as unconscious Christian? Perhaps it is obvious then that here I am concerned less with what Freud said or sensed about religion and more with what others represent him as saying or sensing about religion.

This study lays bare the assumptions, strategies and formations that animate five narrative historical representations of Freud and religion. It also speaks to some of the environmental conditions that helped to shape these five representations, and considers how each representation plays within various interpretive circles. By tracking the multiple Freuds that exist in and for various communities, this study doubles as a thumbnail history of how psychoanalysis and religion have interfaced over the years.

Such a contribution proves especially important because this is a field of study (the psychoanalytic study of religion and the religious-based study of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytically-oriented thinking) that boasts thousands of books and articles to its name, not one of which constitutes a thorough history of its development.<sup>5</sup> How is it that a field devoted to the interface of psychoanalysis and religion—two disciplines that espouse the examined life—can live such an unexamined existence? I will argue that this field has been so preoccupied with fixing Freud's place in history that it has failed to adequately articulate, much less analyze, its own historical development.

### **Why these five representations of Freud?**

This study focuses on five narrative historical representations of Freud and religion:

- Freud as neither enemy nor ally of religion (Erich Fromm)
- Freud as Jewish mystic (David Bakan)
- Freud as reconciler of psychoanalysis and religion (Ana-Maria Rizzuto)
- Freud as militant atheist (Peter Gay)
- Freud as unconscious Christian (Paul Vitz).

Each representation corresponds to the theories of a single author, but all have an almost archetypal character to them. Indeed, most discussions of Freud and religion fall somewhere within this spectrum of five. An exception to this pattern might be the literature on Buddhism, which tends to focus less on the figure of Freud and more on the tenets of psychoanalysis. But it is worth remembering that one of the first psychoanalysts to publish a book on psychoanalysis and Buddhism was Erich Fromm, a convert to Zen Buddhism and the first author featured in this study.<sup>6</sup> Fromm's treatment of Freud in his 1950 book *Psychoanalysis and Religion* helped pave the way for a subsequent generation of thinkers, such as Mark Epstein and Jeffrey Rubin, to write about psychoanalysis and Buddhism and pay little or no attention to Freud.<sup>7</sup>



Another representation worth mentioning is the idea of Freud as the high priest of the psychoanalytic gospel. Several writers from Paul Roazen to Richard Webster have remarked on the extent to which psychoanalysis resembles a substitute religion—with Freud as the high priest, his colleagues as his disciples, Jung and Adler as apostates, Freudian theory as articles of faith, the couch as the confessional, and so on.<sup>8</sup> But beyond the few lines that it takes to draw these parallels, no one has developed this line of thinking into a book-length argument on par with the five representations of Freud and religion featured in this study.

### **How are the chapters structured?**

Each of the five representations of Freud and religion constitutes an individual chapter in this study. And all five chapters are structured in much the same way. I start by providing a snapshot of the author's argument. Here I deliberately rely on the author's own words as much as possible. I then identify and analyze the assumptions, strategies and formations that underlie and animate the particular representation of Freud and religion. I consider, among other things, how the author selects sources, structures the narrative and negotiates discontinuities. For instance, to what extent does the author privilege some sources over others: do Freud's scholarly writings trump his private correspondence or vice-versa? How much significance does the author ascribe to biographical information? In terms of structure, what kind of story is the author trying to tell about Freud and religion? Does the author think that Freud has a 'position' on religion? Is it a clearly defined position in need of amplification or a largely ambivalent, open-ended stance in need of interpolation? Was he knowingly unsympathetic or unknowingly sympathetic to religion? In terms of discontinuities, how does the author handle the contingencies and contradictions associated with Freud's life and work? For instance, how does Peter Gay, who champions the militant atheist representation, negotiate Freud's relationship with Oskar Pfister, a Protestant pastor and lay psychoanalyst? Or how does Paul Vitz, the author of the unconscious Christian representation, explain Freud's self-definition as an "out-and-out unbeliever?"<sup>9</sup>

Next I place the work within a broader context. First, I explore the various environmental conditions—ranging from social forces and cultural developments to institutional politics and intellectual antecedents—that help shape the author’s representation of Freud and religion. In particular, I am attentive to patterns, shifts or ruptures taking place within American psychoanalysis and religion. Second, I interpret how the author’s representation of Freud is received both within and beyond religious and psychoanalytic circles. In this light, I speculate on whether the author’s work helped to trigger any notable changes within the field or the two communities. Finally, at the conclusion to each of the first five chapters, I speculate on how each author’s argument converges or diverges with the work of the other authors featured in this study.

The sixth and final chapter offers a decidedly postmodern perspective on the challenges and limitations associated with historical representation. With the help of a handful of postmodern theorists, I articulate re-descriptions of key concepts such as the past, history, narrative, truth and representation. I conclude by exploring what these re-descriptions may mean for our understanding of Freud-fashioning and the field of psychoanalysis and religion.

### **Which is the real Freud?**

I begin and end with the assumption that a single, unified, knowable Freud cannot be captured by historical representation. First of all, Freud allowed multiple, even contradictory versions of himself to co-exist during his lifetime: he would refer to religion as the enemy, yet he allowed Oskar Pfister, a Protestant pastor and lay psychoanalyst, to become one of his closest friends and followers; he would disparage religion in his public statements, yet he complimented Pfister’s work on synthesizing psychoanalysis and religion in their private correspondence; he would talk of the need for society to get beyond religion, yet he returned to write about it time and again; and he would encourage his devotees to leave no stone unturned when

analyzing a patient's past, yet he left buried the details and impact of his own childhood encounters with religion.

Furthermore, Freud related to religion in different ways at different points in his life, undermining the notion of a stabilized subject unified across time with a clear, coherent position on religion.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the Freud we know from history is, as many commentators have noted, largely politicized.<sup>11</sup> Much of what we know about him amounts to what his defenders and detractors want us to know. In the end, I agree with Todd Dufresne's assessment that Freud is a radically self-deconstructive figure incapable of biographical closure:

The very figure of Sigmund Freud defies capture and cannot be tamed or unified into a singular method, concept, word or name. And thus we are never encountering Freud, the subject (or victim) of some unobtainable gossipy biography, but always 'Freud' or a multiplicity of little 'Freuds'; a differentiated and deferred X, a liminal something *sous rature*. Or again, between the original subject and studied object of Sigmund Freud lies a 'Freud' as *difference*, which is to say, a 'Freud' that is radically self-deconstructive.<sup>12</sup>

Since I do not subscribe to the idea of a fixed or finalized Freud capable of biographical closure, I do not view any of the historical representations in this study as necessarily right or wrong. To be clear: I am more concerned with deconstructing a process than with judging a product. This is not to suggest that some representations of Freud are not more or less compelling than others, because they are, but they are so in different ways, depending on how we organize and prioritize our understanding of "compelling." For instance, David Bakan's representation of Freud as Jewish mystic is the most interpretively creative of the group; however, it is also the one most in need of more and better evidence. Similarly, Peter Gay's representation of Freud as militant atheist is the most rhetorically savvy; yet, it is also the most rigid and self-assured. In the end, my focus remains primarily on the production and reception of these five historical representations of Freud and religion.

## **Will the field ever get beyond Freud?**

It is no doubt difficult to write within this field, at least according to its current configuration, and not feel Freud's presence. David Bakan, Peter Gay and Paul Vitz build their entire arguments around the figure of Freud. His name appears on practically every page of each author's respective work. Both Erich Fromm and Ana-Maria Rizzuto, on the other hand, have considerably more to say about the field itself. However, that does not stop either of them from privileging Freud's perspective within their considerations. Truth be told, Rizzuto's clinical study of the origin, evolution and significance of the individual's private representation of God is far more theoretically sophisticated and methodologically sound than anything Freud ever did. Yet, she still finds it necessary to re-focus and, eventually, re-cast Freud's views on religion.

To look beyond the five authors featured in this study is to find a common thread running through the bulk of the literature on psychoanalysis and religion: in the course of developing their own ideas, most writers find it necessary to divulge when and where they agree or disagree with Freud and why. Even those writers who try to ignore Freud end up working with ideas and assumptions that have been shaped by his defenders and detractors and thus carry his imprint. Whether it amounts to an active or absent presence, Freud seems a prefigured part of most conversations on psychoanalysis and religion. That is why it is initially thought-provoking but ultimately short-sighted to think the field will get beyond Freud anytime soon. The more measured question worth asking is: must Freud's part always remain the same? I think the field must get to the point where the development of one's own ideas on psychoanalysis and religion do not require a corresponding representation of Freud for actualization, mediation or justification.

## **Is this study not a representation itself?**

Indeed. This study is a representation of a series of representations. As a result, it is neither above nor beyond many of the same trappings that it describes. For instance, I criticize

certain uses of narrative and history by utilizing both narrative and history myself. Furthermore, I underscore the highly selective, self-referential nature of representation, while making plenty of idiosyncratic choices in the course of producing my own representation. For instance, I reference the work and writings of Carl Jung and Erik Erikson in either indirect or limited ways.<sup>13</sup> Also, I situate this study within a decidedly American context. Thus when I speak of psychoanalysis and religion, I am typically speaking of American psychoanalysis and American religion. More specifically, with the exception of Chapter Two's discussion of Judaism, the bulk of this study focuses on twentieth century liberal American Protestantism. And though I discuss religion throughout, my point of view is definitely slanted toward psychoanalysis—and thus toward the psychoanalytic study of religion. It is worth noting that some of these same developments, patterns, shifts and sources have been discussed from a religious oriented, primarily American Protestant perspective by Allison Stokes in *Ministry After Freud* and by E. Brooks Holifield in *A History of Pastoral Care In America: From Salvation to Self-Realization*.

Finally, in the process of studying other people's Freuds, I have more or less fashioned one of my own—a Freud that is all and none of these five representations at the same time. Indeed, my Freud mirrors my own biases toward postmodern theory—with its emphasis on contingency, multiplicity and malleability. It also bears my belief that the field of psychoanalysis and religion must come to grips with its own historical development, including the contingencies and contradictions associated not only with Freud's life but also with the representation of that life. To be clear: I have not unearthed the 'real' Freud with this study. Nor have I freed the field of psychoanalysis and religion from the lingering effect of his long shadow. At bottom, I have sought to inscribe within my representation the pressing need to go beyond this representation.

## What is this study's intended effect?

I want this study to force the field of psychoanalysis and religion to come to grips with the idea that a Freud is as much fashioned (invented or imagined) as found. In turn, I want the field's participants to abandon the whole notion of getting Freud 'right,' of recreating 'who Freud *truly* was' or 'what Freud *really* believed' or 'what Freud *actually* meant.' I want the very idea of getting Freud 'right' or of finding the 'real' Freud to be regarded as totally suspect. I want us to own up to and analyze the subtle, though highly significant, role that we play, individually and collectively, in producing historical representations. I want talk of the objective, the authoritative and the real to be subverted by that of the malleable, the multiple and the contingent. I want us to stop using Freud's work as a pseudo-bible, proof texting or parroting our way to hardened positions on this or that, and instead make fresh, effective, highly reflective arguments on how *we* think psychoanalysis and religion should interface on the basis of what we do know and do not know. Above all, I want this study to get us markedly closer to Michel Foucault's pursuit of trying to "free thought from what it silently thinks."<sup>14</sup>

## NOTES

1 Sigmund Freud, *The Diary of Sigmund Freud 1929-1939*, trans. Michael Molnar (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), 100.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ernst Falzeder, "Freud, Freudians, Anti-Freudians: Whose Freud Is It?," in *The Psychoanalytic Century: Freud's Legacy for the Future*, ed. David Scharff (New York: Other Press, 2001), 22.

5 See Benjamin Beit-Hallahmie, *Psychoanalytic Studies of Religion: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996). Beit-Hallahmie's work, which is essentially an annotated bibliography of the field, is perhaps the closest thing to a broad historical overview. See also Ann Elizabeth Rosenberg, *Freudian Theory and American Religious Journals 1900-1965* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980). Rosenberg provides a rather straightforward historical approach to reporting the theoretical developments of this sixty-five year span.

6 See Erich Fromm, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, and Richard De Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

7 See Anthony Molino, ed., *The Couch and the Tree: Dialogues in Psychoanalysis and Buddhism* (New York: North Point Press, 1998).

8 See Richard Webster, *Why Freud Was Wrong* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 300. See also Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

9 Ernst Freud and Heinrich Meng, eds., *Psychoanalysis and Faith: The Letters of Sigmund Freud & Oskar Pfister* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 63.

10 More than one Foucauldian reminds us that the subject cannot run in its empty sameness throughout history. See David Couzens Hoy, ed., *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 37. See also Michael Roth, *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 91. According to Roth, "There is clearly no good reason for supposing the unity (even the intelligibility) of a life."

11 See Falzeder, 31. See also John Forrester, *Dispatches from the Freud Wars: Psychoanalysis and Its Passions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 194-195; 197. See also Paul Roazen, *Encountering Freud: The Politics and Histories of Psychoanalysis* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 192. See also Paul Roazen, *The Trauma of Freud: Controversies in Psychoanalysis* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 133-134. See also Todd Dufresne, *Killing Freud: Twentieth-Century Culture and the Death of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 169.

12 Dufresne, 68.

13 In my mind, Carl Jung's depth psychology and Erik Erikson's developmental psychology have only a nominal connection to the ways in which psychoanalysis has been both popularly and historically defined. Nonetheless, I do discuss Jung's work in the context of Erich Fromm's work in Chapter One.

14 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 9.

# CHAPTER 1

## Freud as Neither Enemy Nor Ally of Religion

Erich Fromm opens his 1950 publication *Psychoanalysis and Religion* with what he considers to be a telling parallel between the psychoanalyst and the priest: both function as physicians of the soul.<sup>1</sup> The problem, according to Fromm, is that one group of interpreters underestimates this likeness while another group overestimates it. For example, those who view psychoanalysis and religion in oppositional terms speak of strict boundaries and irreconcilable differences; they deem both realities to be essential and unassailable. Meanwhile, those who want to reconcile the two systems of thought point to common language and shared aims; they believe the two can be successfully blended without compromising the integrity of either.<sup>2</sup> Fromm believes both positions are highly reductionistic: “A thorough and dispassionate discussion can demonstrate that the relation between religion and psychoanalysis is too complex to be forced into either one of these simple and convenient attitudes.”<sup>3</sup> In short, Fromm seeks a middle passage—between fixed opposition and facile reconciliation—for psychoanalysis and religion with Sigmund Freud as his guide.

### Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud

Fromm’s first order of business amounts to a problematization of the debate surrounding Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud. For Fromm, the popular idea that the former is a friend of religion and the latter a foe smacks of oversimplification.<sup>4</sup> He finds Jung’s concept of truth to be at odds with religions like Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism, because it suggests that truth is strictly a psychological phenomenon: “Speaking for instance of the motive of the virgin birth, [Jung’s] psychology is only concerned with the fact that there is such an idea, but it is not concerned with the question of whether such an idea is true or false in any other sense. *It is psychologically true in as much as*



*it exists.*"<sup>5</sup> Jung's attempt to clarify the difference between subjective (established by the individual) and objective (established by society) truth only worsens matters, according to Fromm, as it "makes social acceptance of an idea the criterion of its validity, truth, or objectivity."<sup>6</sup> Fromm thinks Jung's relativism flies in the face of those religious traditions which "consider the striving for truth as one of man's cardinal virtues and obligations and insist that their doctrines whether arrived at by revelation or only by the power of reason are subject to the criterion of truth."<sup>7</sup> Fromm then turns to Jung's definition of religion and summarizes it as follows: "The essence of religious experience is the submission to powers higher than ourselves."<sup>8</sup> Jung sees the unconscious as one such higher power that seizes the individual: it exists within us, yet its power and influence is beyond us.<sup>9</sup> Fromm believes that by pursuing this line of thinking Jung "reduces religion to a psychological phenomenon and at the same time elevates the unconscious to a religious phenomenon."<sup>10</sup>

Fromm wants to emphasize that Freud's view of religion differs dramatically from Jung's. He begins by outlining what he considers to be Freud's "position" on religion in *The Future of an Illusion*:

For Freud, religion has its origin in man's helplessness in confronting the forces of nature outside and the instinctive forces within himself....he remembers, as it were, and regresses to an experience he had as a child, when he felt protected by a father whom he thought to be of superior wisdom and strength, and whose love and protection he could win by obeying his commands and avoiding transgression of his prohibitions.<sup>11</sup>

Fromm continues: "Thus religion, according to Freud, is a repetition of the experience of the child...a collective neurosis, caused by conditions similar to those producing childhood neurosis."<sup>12</sup> According to Fromm, Freud considers belief in theistic supernatural religion to be more than an infantilized wish wrapped in a lingering illusion; it is a danger to self and society, because it curbs critical thinking and makes morality more abstract belief than concrete action.<sup>13</sup> Fromm readily admits that

Freud harbors a deep antipathy toward theistic-supernatural religion. However, what Fromm refuses to accept is the notion that Freud is somehow indifferent to or antagonistic of the ethical core of religion. On the contrary, argues Fromm, Freud speaks for a set of higher aims and ideals for humanity: for knowledge (reason, truth, *logos*), brotherly love, reduction of suffering, independence, and responsibility.<sup>14</sup> “These constitute the ethical core of all great religions on which Eastern and Western cultures are based, the teachings of Confucius and Lao-tse, Buddha, the Prophets and Jesus,” maintains Fromm.<sup>15</sup> Fromm ends this section with a plea for more nuance when discussing the subject of Freud and religion: “The statement that Freud is ‘against’ religion therefore is misleading unless we define sharply *what* religion or what aspects of religion he is critical of and what aspects of religion he speaks for.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Authoritarian vs. Humanistic Religion**

Fromm seeks to further distance religion’s theistic-supernatural aspects from its ethical core by contrasting authoritarian religion with humanistic religion. “The essential element in authoritarian religion and in the authoritarian religious experience is the surrender to a power transcending man. The main virtue of this type of religion is obedience, its cardinal sin is disobedience.”<sup>17</sup> What Fromm finds deplorable about authoritarian religion is the necessary powerlessness, insignificance and self-depletion of its adherents: they must surrender self-reliance, submit to an all-powerful deity and ultimately forfeit their independence and integrity as individuals.<sup>18</sup> In Fromm’s view, John Calvin’s theology represents a prime example of authoritarian religion.<sup>19</sup> Humanistic religion, in stark contrast, centers on human freedom and independence and therein makes love and reason its essential core: Religious experience in this kind of religion is the experience of oneness with the

All, based on one’s relatedness to the world as it is grasped with thought and with love. Man’s aim in humanistic religion is to achieve the greatest strength, not the greatest powerlessness; virtue is self-realization, not obedience...The prevailing mood is that of joy, while

the prevailing mood in authoritarian religion is that of sorrow and of guilt.<sup>20</sup>

For Fromm, instantiations of humanistic religion include: “early Buddhism, Taoism, the teachings of Isaiah, Jesus, Socrates, Spinoza, certain trends in the Jewish and Christian religions (particularly mysticism), the religion of Reason of the French Revolution.”<sup>21</sup> Again, Fromm conceives the ethical core of humanistic religion and the higher ideals of Freud’s teachings to be one and the same. And while Fromm stops short of calling Freud an ally of religion, or an ally of how this term gets traditionally defined and deployed, he seems committed to dispelling what he considers to be the popular perception at that time: that Freud and religion are or must be enemies.<sup>22</sup>

### **Re-thinking Religion**

Does establishing a link between religion’s ethical core and Freud’s teachings allow us then to classify him as religious? Fromm thinks so. If, that is, we subscribe to his definition of religion as “any system of thought and action shared by a group which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion.”<sup>23</sup> Thus envisaged, Fromm thinks every individual possesses a religious need: “a need to have a frame of orientation and an object of devotion.”<sup>24</sup> He is sure to emphasize, however, the general quality of this phenomenon and the deliberate expansiveness of his definition:

Man may worship animals, trees, idols of gold or stone, an invisible god, a saintly man or diabolic leaders; he may worship his ancestors, his nation, his class or party, money or success; his religion may be conducive to the development of destructiveness or of love, of domination or of brotherliness; it may further his power of reason or paralyze it; he may be aware of his system as being a religious one, different from those of the secular realm, or he may think that he has no religion and interpret his devotion to certain allegedly secular aims like power, money or success as nothing but his concern for the practical and expedient.<sup>25</sup>

In this way, Fromm sees religion as inescapable: “The question is not *religion or not* but *which kind of religion*, whether it is one furthering man’s development, the unfolding of his specifically human powers, or one paralyzing them.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Re-thinking Psychoanalysis**

In addition to re-thinking traditional views of religion, Fromm wants us to rethink traditional conceptions of psychoanalysis too. First, he wants to re-think the idea of the unconscious, and he wants to start by challenging its patron saints: Jung and Freud. According to Fromm, the former looks at the unconscious and sees a religious phenomenon, while the latter sees a repressive force that impedes the full realization of human development.<sup>27</sup> Fromm believes that both conclusions, however famed, miss the mark insofar as they force the unconscious to interpretive extremes: “We must approach the unconscious not as if it were a God whom we must worship or a dragon we must slay but in humility...in which we see that other part of ourselves as it is, neither with horror nor with awe.”<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting that this is not the only time Fromm parts ways with other psychoanalysts. He also claims that “some” psychoanalysts are prone to view “all kinds of religious or philosophical statements” as “obsessional thinking” and therefore these analysts “must not be taken seriously.”<sup>29</sup> He elaborates on this last point: “We must call this attitude an error not only from a philosophical standpoint but from the standpoint of psychoanalysis itself, because psychoanalysis while debunking rationalizations has made reason the tool with which we achieve such critical analyses of rationalization.”<sup>30</sup>

In other words, Fromm suggests that a predetermined skepticism toward or rejection of any thought system, religious or nonreligious, is rationalization masquerading as reason. Not only is that analytically unsound, in Fromm’s view, but also patently unethical. Second, Fromm wants us to re-think the wholesale classification of religious rituals as neurotic compulsions. For Fromm, to classify all religious rituals as neurotic compulsions is

to lose sight of the differentiation between the rational and the irrational:

“Religious rituals are by no means always irrational... rituals such as fasting, religious marriage ceremonies, concentration and meditation practices can be entirely rational rituals, in need of no analysis except for the one which leads to an understanding of their intended meaning.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Living Love and Thinking Truth**

In the end, Fromm endorses something akin to a blend of iconoclasm and negative theology: “While it is not possible for man to make valid statements about the positive, about God, it is possible to make such statements about the negative, about idols. Is it not time to cease to argue about God and instead to unite in the unmasking of contemporary forms of idolatry?”<sup>32</sup> What is more, he envisions the psychoanalyst to be uniquely suited for such an endeavor:

The psychoanalyst is in a position to study the human reality behind religion as well as behind nonreligious symbol systems. He finds that the question is not whether man returns to religion and believes in God but whether he lives love and thinks truth. If he does so the symbol systems he uses are of secondary importance. If he does not they are of no importance.<sup>33</sup>

For Fromm, the psychoanalyst who lives love and thinks truth is simply following in the footsteps of Freud: “He [Freud] demonstrated the power as well as the weaknesses of human reason and made ‘the truth shall make you free’ the guiding principle of a new therapy.”<sup>34</sup> In sum, Fromm’s presents his representation of Freud as neither enemy nor ally of religion as unlocking a middle passage between fixed opposition and facile reconciliation—a neutral space for psychoanalysis and religion to interact.

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## Fromm's Freud

What are the assumptions, strategies and formations that underlie and animate Fromm's representation of Freud as neither enemy nor ally of religion? Fromm's introductory question "What is Freud's position in regard to religion as expressed in *The Future of an Illusion*?" pivots on two assumptions: 1) that Freud has a 'position' on religion; and 2) that *The Future of an Illusion* embodies that 'position.'<sup>35</sup> In the introduction as well as throughout this study, I call into question the very idea that Freud has a definite, discernible 'position' on religion. But even if we bracket this suspicion and accept Fromm's assumption we are left wondering why he uses only one source to convey Freud's 'position.' In doing so, Fromm passes over Freud's biography and many of the complexities and contradictions associated therein, including: his relationship with his Roman Catholic nanny; his student days studying under Franz Brentano, a Christian philosopher; and his interactions with Oskar Pfister, a Protestant pastor and lay psychoanalyst; his self-definitions as a "godless Jew" and an "out-an-out unbeliever." In addition, Fromm ignores Freud's private correspondence with Pfister as well as Pfister's text *The Illusion of a Future*, a direct response to Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*. In short, for someone who decries the lack of nuance surrounding discussions of Freud and religion, Fromm offers a fairly one-dimensional rendering of Freud's 'position' on religion.

Equally noteworthy is how Fromm uses *The Future of an Illusion*. He never quotes Freud directly; he delivers the gist of Freud's arguments in his own words without citations; and, as intimated above, he fails to relate this text to any of Freud's other writings. By contrast, when Fromm presents Jung's work he opts for lengthy quotations and multiple citations, saying in an unmistakably self-conscious way at one point: "But we had better quote Jung directly."<sup>36</sup> Why does Freud get informally paraphrased and Jung meticulously quoted? This could be a sign of Fromm's assumption that establishing what Freud 'really' said or sensed about religion is relatively easy to do—so much so that

neither quotations nor citations are needed for him or for his readers.

Now let us turn directly to Fromm's text. Why does Fromm open with this idea that psychoanalysts and priests are both physicians of the soul? By leading with soul language and by associating Freud with the likes of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, Fromm hints to a more holistic view of Freud.<sup>37</sup> In this light, Freud comes across less as the stoic scientist, dead set on callously diagnosing the world and more as the humane healer of the mind, deeply committed to the higher ideals of truth, justice and love. Fromm no doubt knows that if he hopes to convince his readers that Freud is not religion's enemy, he will need to substitute the former image with the latter one.

Fromm's next move, a comparative analysis of Jung and Freud, is clever from a strategy standpoint. Suggesting that our perceptions of Freud and religion are based, at least in part, on our misperceptions of Jung and religion turns this binary logic of foe (Freud) versus friend (Jung) on its head. For instance, since the two figures are often viewed as enemies or opponents, the tendency might be to assume that if Jung is for something then Freud must be against it. Thus envisaged, if we start from the assumption that Jung is an ally of religion, how can Freud be perceived as anything but its enemy? But what makes Jung an ally of religion in the first place? What does it mean for a psychoanalyst to be 'for' or 'against' religion? Who gets to decide and what are the criteria for that decision? How would our view of Freud and religion differ if Jung were not in the picture as either an implicit or explicit comparison? In sum, by introducing Carl Jung into the conversation, Fromm complicates the friend (Jung) versus foe (Freud) distinction and, in so doing, underscores the idea that Freud does not necessarily have to be one or the other.

If Fromm's definition of religion seems too generic, we have essentially made his point for him. In Fromm's view, Westerners are so at home with monotheism that we disparage any definition that lacks a specific reference to God or supernatural forces.<sup>38</sup> Even worse, according to Fromm, we use monotheism as *the*

paradigmatic lens through which to view and judge all other religions: “We simply have no word to denote religion as a general human phenomenon in such a way that some association with a specific type of religion does not creep in and color the concept.”<sup>39</sup> Fromm’s re-casting of religion as “a frame of orientation and an object of devotion” not only dethrones monotheism from its privileged position in Western consciousness but also shifts the focus away from God’s supernatural nature and toward one’s personal ethics.<sup>40</sup> Again, Fromm practically poses the questions for his readers. If monotheism frames the conversation, and therein Freud’s critical statements about God get immortalized and his ethics virtually ignored, how can he be viewed as anything but religion’s foe? And if we subtract theistic supernatural forces from the equation, does the “enemy of religion” label still stick to Freud?

On the surface, this particular line of argumentation seems to be clear and convincing. But a closer look suggests some serious cracks in Fromm’s case. For instance, if Freud is ‘for’ some aspects of religion and ‘against’ others, as Fromm suggests, then why did Freud never make this clear distinction himself? Moreover, Fromm repeatedly insists that Freud speaks in the name of the ethical core of religion; however, he never fully explains how or when this happens.<sup>41</sup> In other words, Fromm never describes in concrete terms how Freud lives love or thinks truth or how Freud fights for justice or promotes freedom and independence. This is not to suggest that a compelling case cannot be made on Freud’s behalf, but that a lack of supporting evidence or of concrete examples requires us simply to take Fromm’s word for it.

Finally, Fromm’s critique of “some” psychoanalysts’ hyper-critical view of religion deserves further attention. The two ideas Fromm seeks to invalidate—that all religious thinking is obsessional thinking and that all religious rituals are neurotic compulsions—are typically associated with Freud’s 1907 paper “Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices.” Both ideas have been branded, accurately or inaccurately, as Freudian principles. That Fromm discusses each of them without so much as



mentioning Freud's name is intriguing. Disputing Freudian tenets without attributing them to Freud directly could be Fromm's way of insinuating a slippage between Freud and Freudianism: namely, that in moving from original thought to received theory we somehow turn Freud's ideas into a vehicle for our own interpretations. Then again, it may be as simple as Fromm assuming that he cannot disagree explicitly with Freud or with these Freudian principles without undermining his broader argument that Freud is not against all aspects of religion. Either way, the nondescript nature of Fromm's critique seems to suggest a definite subtext to this particular section.

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### **Environmental Conditions: Pre-1950**

What are the environmental conditions that likely influenced Fromm's work? From the time of Freud's death in 1939 to the publication of Fromm's text in 1950, much had happened within and between psychoanalysis and religion. In *Psychoanalysis and Religion* Fromm starts with the debate surrounding fixed opposition versus facile reconciliation, but he never discusses the back-story—a sense of the social forces, cultural developments, institutional politics and intellectual antecedents that impinged upon these two communities, their shared interactions and his text.

World War II brought psychoanalytic communities and the religious communities face-to-face as never before. Notwithstanding, we can be sure that various forces, acting in varying ways, and dating back to the turn of the twentieth century, contributed to the convergences and divergences between the two communities. In terms of convergences, especially noteworthy is the formation of the New York Psychology Group (NYPG), a diverse collection of religious and psychoanalytic thinkers that met monthly between 1942 and 1945 to exchange ideas. The group's most notable members included Seward Hiltner and Paul Tillich, two intellectual giants in American Protestantism, as well as a psychoanalyst by the name of Erich Fromm.<sup>42</sup>

## Psychoanalysis's Response to Religion

Several of Freud's disciples championed a highly critical view of religion, both before and after his death. Recall the title of Theodor Reik's 1919 study, *The Psychological Problems of Religion*, and it is clear that Reik considers psychoanalysis to have the upper hand in this relationship.<sup>43</sup> Reik even classifies his work as a continuation of Freud's own, tracing the origin and essence of religion back to primitive impulses and unresolved conflicts fueled by the unconscious.<sup>44</sup> Ernest Jones, meanwhile, denounces religion as "the greatest impediment to scientific progress."<sup>45</sup> Nor does Jones miss a chance to document the non-religious character of Freud and his followers in the founder's biography and his own autobiography.<sup>46</sup> But whereas Peter Gay deems Freud a militant atheist, Ernest Jones, writing some thirty years earlier than Gay, opts for a less combative characterization, calling Freud a natural atheist: "one who saw no reason for believing in the existence of any supernatural Being and who felt no emotional need for such a belief."<sup>47</sup> In fact, Jones hints to neither irreverence nor hostility on Freud's part:

Freud was of course in no position, nor is anyone else, to assert that religious beliefs have no correspondence with any supernatural reality. However much a belief in God may be influenced by the child's attitude toward its father, there may still happen to be a God as well. All he asserted was that such beliefs could be fully accounted for by the psychological and historical factors he had investigated, so that he personally could see no reason for adding to them an external supernatural one.<sup>48</sup>

Nonetheless, as Jones rightly suggests, with the exception of Oskar Pfister, the Protestant pastor and lay psychoanalyst, the first generation of analysts (i.e., Otto Rank, Sandor Ferenczi, Karl Abraham and Theodor Reik) never questioned Freud's atheism.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the certainty of Freud's atheism extended beyond his inner circle, as evidenced by Franklin Day's 1944 article in *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* in which he upholds Freud's atheism and declares that "reconciliation [between psychoanalysis and religion] is impossible."<sup>50</sup> Perhaps even further removed from the collective mind of analysts from this

era is the idea that religion might have something worthwhile to say or offer to psychoanalysis—a sentiment that a later generation of psychoanalysts, such as Ana-Maria Rizzuto and William Meissner, are willing to endorse and embrace.

### **Religion's Response to Psychoanalysis**

In the years leading up to Fromm's publication in 1950, religion's interface with psychoanalysis is, by contrast, more a moving target. First and foremost, we know that multiple religious traditions interacted with psychoanalysis in a myriad of ways. American Liberal Protestantism, for example, embraced Freudian and neo-Freudian ideas to a greater extent than did Catholicism, Reform and Orthodox Judaism, not to mention Conservative Protestantism.<sup>51</sup> Within the traditions themselves, meanwhile, chaplains and seminary professors gravitated more toward Freud's thoughts than did ministers and theologians.<sup>52</sup> Finally, this interaction was intensified, if not made inescapable, by a host of changes taking place within America, ranging from Freud's popularization and the rise of the Religion and Health Movement to the formation of the New York Psychology Group and the psychological fallout from World War II.

### **The Popularization of Freud in America**

Nathan Hale, a leading historian of psychoanalysis, describes the inroads Freud first made in America as follows: "Freud's theories provided a timely instrument for dealing with two concurrent crises that were occurring in the first decade of this [twentieth] century—crises in sexual morality and in the treatment of nervous and mental disorder."<sup>53</sup> His 1909 visit to Clark University for a series of lectures only confirmed Freud's high standing within the American medical community. It also coincided with a burgeoning interest in therapy among other institutions: the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, for instance, formed that same year to convince American foundations, corporations, universities and government agencies of the indispensable role of psychologists, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts.<sup>54</sup> "Within ten years of Freud's visit," Hale

observes, “psychoanalysis outstripped every other variety of psychotherapy in the popular press.”<sup>55</sup> Freudian ideas struck a chord not only with the American medical community but also with young intellectuals, writers and artists, who used mass magazines and popular books to popularize psychoanalysis between 1915 and the early 1920’s.<sup>56</sup>

Psychoanalysis’s stock continued to rise throughout the 1930’s as “cultural cleavages and social demands” led scores of anxiety-ridden Americans “to consult the new experts in personality—the psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts.”<sup>57</sup> Social change and psychological conflict was coming from almost every direction: 1) the economic upheaval and widespread trauma associated with the Great Depression; 2) the growing complexity of gender roles and family life quickened by an increase in divorce rates, birth control debates, single parents and dual-income households; and 3) reinterpretations of the self occasioned by the effects of modernization, mass production and America’s deepening devotion to individualism.<sup>58</sup> In short, psychoanalysis was enjoying a perfect storm of surging influence and converging power. “By 1940 the center of world psychoanalysis had shifted to the United States with the influx of distinguished refugee analysts.”<sup>59</sup> To be clear: psychoanalysis’s rise by no means foretold religion’s fall. Only among select audiences was religion feeling the effect: “For many members of the educated middle and upper middle classes, the groups most deeply involved in the changes in cultural styles, the physician, rather than the clergyman, became the adjudicator of personal and social problems.”<sup>60</sup>

### **The Rise of the Religion and Health Movement**

In *Ministry After Freud*, Allison Stokes tracks the development of the Religion and Health Movement from 1906 to 1945 and defines it as: “Freud’s impact on American Protestant ministry.”<sup>61</sup> Calling this a movement, Stokes admits, is more a modern invention: “Only in retrospect do we see its *coherence* as a movement...Religion and Health advocates acted spontaneously and independently with no real sense of common

cause. They seem to have been unaware of the magnitude and significance of the movement that they led, oblivious of its essential unity: it had no identifying name.”<sup>62</sup> Our focus centers on three developments: 1) the Emmanuel Movement; 2) the Council for the Clinical Training of Theological Students; and 3) the Religio-Psychiatric Clinic. In 1904, Elwood Worcester became head pastor at Emmanuel Church, the largest Episcopal church in Boston.<sup>63</sup> “Responsive as he was to new conditions, Worcester was one of the first of many twentieth-century liberal pastors to lament that the church had retained Christ’s ministry to the soul but had rejected his ministry to the body.”<sup>64</sup> Worcester was specifically concerned with “the insistent contemporary need for health and wholeness,” and believed psychology to be an able partner in the healing process.<sup>65</sup> Worcester enlisted the support of his assistant pastor, Samuel McComb, and together they teamed with “prominent Boston physicians James Jackson Putnam, Richard Cabot, and Isador Coriat in the first American venture between clergy and doctors in the cure of souls.”<sup>66</sup> Stokes summarizes the partnership as follows:

On a November evening in 1906 Worcester announced at a lecture in the Emmanuel Church that he, McComb, and two psychiatrists would be available for consultation the next day in the parish house. To their astonishment, 198 people appeared. From the beginning, psychotherapeutic work was restricted to those who suffered from functional nervous disorders....Carried on in health classes as well as in private conferences, the work flourished over the next few years. Six hundred persons were present in 1909 for opening health class in October and 5,000 applicants requested treatment.<sup>67</sup>

Worcester and McComb co-wrote a book in 1908, *Religion and Medicine*, and even toured the country promoting the work of the Emmanuel Clinic.<sup>68</sup> By 1909 similar operations were reported in “Brooklyn, Buffalo, Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Seattle, as well as internationally,” quickly transforming their local model into a national movement.<sup>69</sup> Emmanuel Church continued to host the clinic until Worcester resigned in 1929. He

then moved the clinic to a building nearby, receiving patients and Emmanuel parishioners until his death in 1940.<sup>70</sup>

Two dimensions of the Emmanuel Movement are worth emphasizing. First, it was inclusive: “Emmanuel was intended as an agent of mainline Christian renewal,” insists Stokes, and thus appealed not only to Episcopalians but also to Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Unitarians and Universalists.<sup>71</sup> Second, it was intentional: “From the beginning, the cooperation and advice of physicians were sought.”<sup>72</sup> Stokes elaborates: “No treatment was begun without careful medical diagnosis and without assurances that the treatment was likely to be beneficial...Record keeping was modeled after that at Massachusetts General Hospital, the teaching hospital of Harvard Medical School.”<sup>73</sup> The former helped in terms of popularity, while the latter helped with legitimacy.

The Council for the Clinical Training of Theological Students was founded in 1930. Its beginnings, however, date back to Anton Boisen’s mental breakdown in 1920. Boisen, a Presbyterian minister, “had suffered an acute psychotic disturbance while working intensively on a statement of religious belief.”<sup>74</sup> He was admitted to Boston Psychopathic Hospital and later transferred to Westboro State Hospital.<sup>75</sup> Soon Boisen “snapped out of the delirium much as if he had wakened from a bad dream,” and was then moved to a convalescent ward.<sup>76</sup> By his release in 1922, Boisen had spent several months observing his own mental processes and what was happening around him. He subsequently decided to devote the remainder of his life’s work to the interrelationship of religious experience and mental illness. Over the next two years, Boisen studied at Andover Theological Seminary and Boston Psychopathic Hospital.<sup>77</sup> But it was a course with Richard Cabot, founding member and former backer of the Emmanuel Movement, at Harvard that led Boisen “to develop the case method in theological education.”<sup>78</sup> In 1924, at Cabot’s urging, Boisen became Chaplain at Worcester State Hospital.<sup>79</sup> The clinical training of theological students started the next summer:

Four students enrolled in a summer of study with Chaplain Boisen at Worcester State Hospital, an institution for 2,200 patients. During the day they worked on the wards as attendants, conducting recreational and social programs, writing letters for patients, walking and singing with them, observing them, and keeping records. During the evening they read books on psychology, psychiatry, and religion and held seminars with Boisen and the medical staff.<sup>80</sup>

Boisen's program soon became a rite of passage: "Later all the early leaders in the field of CPE [Clinical Pastoral Education] could claim some direct or indirect relationship with the beginnings under Boisen."<sup>81</sup> At a donor's behest, and in much need of financial backing, Boisen agreed to formalize the process with the establishment of the Council for Clinical Training of Theological Students in 1930.<sup>82</sup> Cabot was still involved, agreeing to list his house as the Council's headquarters. Eventually, however, Boisen and Cabot's relationship fell beyond repair, both men moved on and the Council split into warring factions, the New York-based Council for Clinical Training and the Boston-based Institute for Pastoral Care.<sup>83</sup> The two merged into one in 1967, forming the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE).

Stokes considers Anton Boisen the founding father of clinical pastoral education. His work and writings, especially his 1936 book *The Exploration of the Inner World*, helped popularize a psychodynamic (i.e., Freudian) view of life for the Religion and Health Movement.<sup>84</sup> Stokes admits that some historians believe Boisen and other early leaders of clinical pastoral education were detached from, if not disenchanted with, psychoanalysis in general and Freud in particular.<sup>85</sup> She proves the shortsightedness of this view by contextualizing Boisen's criticisms of CPE and demonstrating that his objections were aimed not at psychoanalysis or Freud per se but at those who subscribed to a dogmatic, uncritical Freudianism. <sup>86</sup>

The Religio-Psychiatric Clinic was born in the basement of New York's Marble Collegiate Church in 1937. Norman Vincent Peale, head pastor of this Dutch Reformed church on Fifth

Avenue, developed a partnership with Smiley Blanton, a psychoanalyst “who had been analyzed in Vienna by Freud himself.”<sup>87</sup> As Stokes explains: “Peale devoted his energies to counseling and sent parishioners he could not help to Blanton. The two men were in complete agreement that the purpose of their work was to clear psychological obstacles to faith.”<sup>88</sup> The clinic was nothing short of a success:

The Religio-Psychiatric Clinic grew phenomenally as the world learned about it...In 1948 *Newsweek* reported that more than 10,000 persons had come for help. By then Blanton headed a staff of six psychiatrists and psychologists, all of whom served without fee, and the clinic expanded into five consultation rooms in the Marble Church parish house.<sup>89</sup>

Especially impressive was the collegiality: “Whom a visitor saw first, minister or psychiatrist, depended on chance...Blanton observed that more than half the people who came in to consult a minister had problems that could be solved only through the cooperation of *both* a minister and a psychiatrist.”<sup>90</sup> Peale and Blanton embodied this ethic of mutual cooperation, co-authoring *Faith Is the Answer* in 1940 and *The Art of Real Happiness* in 1950. In 1951, the Religio-Psychiatric Clinic was incorporated into the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry—and boasted “a staff of seventy Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish clergy, psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric social workers.”<sup>91</sup> When Blanton died in 1966, the Foundation “ran the second largest outpatient mental health clinic in Manhattan and occupied two floors of an office building.”<sup>92</sup> The Peale-Blanton partnership was not the first of its kind—the Emmanuel Movement owned that distinction—but it was perhaps the most fruitful in popularizing and legitimizing the Religion and Health Movement.<sup>93</sup>

All three of these early developments within the Religion and Health Movement (i.e., the Emmanuel Movement, the Council for the Clinical Training of Theological Students and the Religio-Psychiatric Clinic) underscore the extent to which religion had already interfaced with psychoanalysis prior to World War II. What changed in the war’s wake was a shift in breadth and depth



as this interaction spread from metropolitan areas to mainstream America.

### **The New York Psychology Group**

From 1942 to 1945 a diverse collection of religious and psychoanalytic thinkers met monthly in New York to exchange ideas. The New York Psychology Group (NYPG) was an invitation-only gathering, and though the meetings were not convened in secret, members agreed not to discuss their work outside the group.<sup>94</sup> Incidentally, were it not for Allison Stokes tracking down members, sifting through firsthand accounts and securing notes and minutes from the meetings, nearly four decades later, NYPG's history would still remain obscure at best.<sup>95</sup> This discussion relies solely on her research.<sup>96</sup>

Although as many as forty individuals participated in NYPG over the years, the core group consisted of two dozen individuals. Seward Hiltner, Paul Tillich and Erich Fromm, as intimated above, proved to be NYPG's most notable members. As NYPG's chairman, Hiltner handled organizational affairs. He also oversaw a committee devoted to planning and membership. It was a logical fit given his administrative experience as former executive secretary of the Council for Clinical Training for Theological Students and as current executive secretary of the Commission on Religion and Health of the Federal Council of Churches. Later Hiltner would take up a permanent home in academia as a professor of pastoral theology. His scholarly reputation in the field of pastoral care was second to none—with several books and more than four hundred journal articles to his name. In Stokes's estimate, Seward Hiltner "was more instrumental than any other person in the growth and development of the Religion and Health Movement."<sup>97</sup>

In addition to regularly attending NYPG meetings, Paul Tillich delivered three papers. Tillich, one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century, was teaching at Union Theological Seminary at the time. His interest in Freud's work was not so much new, according to Stokes, as it was becoming more nuanced:

Long before making the acquaintance of NYPG therapists, Tillich had acquired a sophisticated understanding of psychoanalysis and had drawn some brilliant conclusions about Freud's contributions to theology, as a close reading of *The Religious Situation* (1925) and the autobiographical *On the Boundary* (1936) clearly indicates. However, an intensified interest, knowledge, sensitivity, and commitment to issues of religion and health, pastoral psychology, and theology and counseling can be discerned in Tillich's post-NYPG publications.<sup>98</sup>

Tillich and Fromm were old friends from Frankfurt. Both detested the Nazi party and both fled for America as a result, Fromm in 1933 and Tillich in 1934. Did their time together in NYPG solidify a strong devotion to each other's work? Stokes does not say and we cannot be sure. What we do know is that Tillich's 1951 review of Fromm's *Psychoanalysis and Religion* in a religion and psychology journal—a highly favorable review at that—is not without a pre-history of personal and professional interaction.<sup>99</sup> Erich Fromm is perhaps NYPG's most notable member. For starters, he cofounded the group. As Stokes recounts:

The idea for the NYPG originated with Seward Hiltner and Erich Fromm. The two met on the campus of Keuka College, Keuka, New York, in late August 1941. The occasion was the annual Week of Work of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education (NCRHE). Fromm was a consultant for a group studying unconscious motivations of group behavior...Discussions of these subjects proved so interesting that Hiltner and Fromm proposed that they be continued in Manhattan during the coming year.<sup>100</sup>

Nor did his influence end there: "Fromm and Tillich are remembered today by NYPG members as having been the natural leaders of the group."<sup>101</sup> Finally, as Stokes recounts, "Fromm addressed the seminar more often than anyone else."<sup>102</sup> How did the content of NYPG conversations shape Fromm's thoughts on psychoanalysis and religion? How did his working relationship with NYPG members, religious leaders especially,

influence the reception of his work? Admittedly, it seems just as easy to underestimate the significance of this connection between NYPG and Fromm as it does to overestimate it. At the very least, given his role in founding NYPG and his continued and substantial level of involvement, Fromm must have truly believed in the importance of dialogue between the two communities.

Before moving on to discuss how World War II shaped religion's interaction with psychoanalysis, it is worth noting how NYPG influenced Freud's popularization and the Religion and Health Movement. Stokes sums it up nicely:

NYPG helped to establish the Religion and Health Movement on the foundation of dynamic, psychoanalytic principles. At a time when the secular intelligentsia was bringing Freudian ideas before the public in the cause of mental health, the religious intelligentsia was relating these ideas to Christian theology in the cause of Religion and Health.<sup>103</sup>

She adds: "What had been a small movement before the war blossomed beyond expectation in the postwar era, partly as a result of their [NYPG] intellectual effort and influence."<sup>104</sup>

## **World War II**

"[D]eeply frustrated by their inability to abate battle-related neuroses and psychoses through traditional means," American military chaplains turned to psychoanalytic theory and technique for help and found it.<sup>105</sup> This war-tested alliance followed many of them back home from battle, as did the urgent need to rethink traditional formulations of human nature based on the horrors of the Holocaust, the appearance of nuclear weaponry, the consolidation of Communist power and the aftermath of yet another world war.<sup>106</sup> Making sense of death and destruction on an unfathomable scale became the lot of religion at large, and many American Protestants (i.e., chaplains, liberal clergy and daring theologians) found in Freudian and neo-Freudian ideas a way to deepen their understanding of human anxiety and aggression.<sup>107</sup> Soon this wave of interest swept through the

infrastructure of American Liberal Protestantism, spreading from the minds of select leaders to the lives of the community at large. Beginning in the 1950's, seminaries offered substantially more courses on psychology; the clinical training of pastors gained a new sense of import and urgency; pastoral counseling techniques assumed a more therapeutic mien; religious education moved away from authoritarian paradigms; and some denominations began to administer psychological tests to ordination candidates to determine if their "call to the ministry" was valid.<sup>108</sup> Meanwhile, three newly founded journals devoted to religion and psychology—*Journal of Pastoral Care* (1947), *Journal of Clinical Pastoral Work* (1950) and *Pastoral Psychology* (1950)—were prospering with contributions from a variety of religious leaders as well as from prominent neo-Freudians such as Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Carl Rogers and the Menninger brothers (William and Karl). But undoubtedly what moved this interaction so thoroughly into mainstream America was the way in which the average minister was now thrown into the mix: "[M]any ministers assumed a mental health role, utilizing the time which was formerly spent visiting congregants for therapeutic sessions at the church, the mental health center, or even at the counselee's home."<sup>109</sup>

### **Religion's Response Continued: Reconciliation versus Resistance**

Calls for reconciliation between psychoanalysis and religion only intensified after World War II, especially among American Liberal Protestants.<sup>110</sup> At a 1948 conference on religion and psychiatry, Seward Hiltner declares psychoanalysis to be essential to the advancement of religion:

Religion deals with the whole of life, and sees it in a serious and ultimate dimension. Psychoanalysis has already made enormous contributions to our understanding of those powers and processes upon which the creativity and productivity of human life are dependent. It can discover and teach much more, and it can save souls in the process.<sup>111</sup>

Nor does he believe the benefits run only one way: “And just as psychoanalysis can contribute to religious practitioners, so a proper understanding and practice in the religious dimension can contribute to psychoanalytic practitioners.”<sup>112</sup> Reconciliation was central to David Roberts’s writings, too.<sup>113</sup> Roberts, a professor of the philosophy of religion, argued that America’s mentally ill were alarmingly underserved due to a shortage of adequately trained individuals and that clergy could successfully fill the gap.<sup>114</sup> He envisions a practical, highly productive partnership between psychoanalysis and religion—one that recognizes and respects disagreement, while at the same working collaboratively, above all, to heal the sick.<sup>115</sup> Echoing this call for cooperation was a chorus of prominent religious thinkers, including Rollin Fairbanks, A. Philip Guiles, Robert Brinkman, Albert Outler, Wayne Oates, Paul Johnson and Carroll Wise. Notably, in no case did popularizing Freud’s thought lead to blindly accepting his theories. Instead, as this chapter’s last section shows, these individuals subscribed to a selective integration of psychoanalytic theory and technique.

Reconciliation seemed sensible, if not inevitable, to many American Protestants. Nonetheless, resistance still remained. Some ministers assumed morality was bound to suffer as a result of therapeutic success—that a by-product of removing repression associated with sexual instincts would be an increase in sexual promiscuity.<sup>116</sup> Others feared the prospect of religion’s retreat at the expense of psychoanalysis’s expansion—that the latter would somehow make the former seem naïve or obsolete as a system of thought.<sup>117</sup> Perhaps most members of the anti-reconciliation crowd simply resented the ridicule and hostility that they perceived in Freud’s writings on religion. By the end of the 1950’s, however, organized religion was so invested in Freudian and neo-Freudian thought that resistance was, as Rosenberg rightly observes, futile.<sup>118</sup>

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### **The Reception of Fromm’s Text**

Clearly, Fromm’s representation of Freud as neither an enemy nor ally of religion was shaped by various forces and factors

occurring both within and beyond these two communities: the psychoanalytic and the religious. And yet Fromm's work helped to reshape these communities too. Within psychoanalysis, for instance, Fromm's text encountered a schism already underway. One side of the divide consisted of a small band of neo-Freudians who were sympathetic to religion: Karen Horney, Carl Rogers and William and Karl Menninger. Their frequent contributions to religion and psychology journals confirmed their growing interest in a meaningful dialogue between the two communities.<sup>119</sup> Fromm's text re-affirmed their vision as well as re-energized their work. The other side of the divide encompassed a vast majority of psychoanalysts. Most of them were indifferent to religion, but some were outright offended by anything that resembled a sympathetic stance. And though they clearly disagreed with Fromm's representation of Freud, they did not find it necessary to discuss or debate Fromm's argument in mainstream psychoanalytic journals. Within religious circles, meanwhile, Fromm's book was a boon to American Protestantism. His tone, his temperament and his thinking all pointed in the direction of mutual exchange between the two communities—a sentiment some prominent Protestant leaders had already embraced and were now trying to popularize. Let us now take a closer look at how Fromm's text played within and beyond these communities.

### **Psychoanalytic Circles**

Anxiety and alienation were primary concerns for neo-Freudians like Horney, Rogers and the Menninger brothers. This was welcome news to American Protestants interested in Freud's thought but uneasy with his emphasis on the sexual instinct in determining human behavior. That these neo-Freudians stressed the role of the environment, the importance of interpersonal relations and the potential for selfimprovement made believers feel more like the solution and less like the problem.<sup>120</sup> As Rosenberg explains:

The neo-Freudians were optimistic that, through retraining, patients could fulfill their potentials. Theirs

was a philosophy which was easily compatible with traditional American optimism about the ability of people and conditions to improve. Protestant churches, with their numerous voluntary fellowship organizations, had vehicles which were well suited to encouraging supportive and loving retraining.<sup>121</sup>

More pointedly, these neo-Freudians “recognized that irrespective of its absolute veracity, religion could be an integrating and supportive force in the life of the individual.”<sup>122</sup> American Protestantism responded in kind: *Pastoral Psychology* and the Horney and William Menninger. Nonetheless, Fromm’s book was just that—an expansive study of psychoanalysis and religion published by a highly reputable academic press (Yale University). This is not to mention that it was the first and most influential of its kind among neo-Freudians.<sup>126</sup> In short, Fromm’s *Psychoanalysis and Religion* elevated the conversation from upstart journals to established academic presses and, in so doing, imbued it with a certain gravitas.

The other side of the psychoanalytic divide had its own fault lines. During this period most psychoanalysts simply avoided the subject of religion.<sup>127</sup> Why the general disinterest? Ana-Maria Rizzuto traces it back to Freud and the biases of analytic training:

Intentionally or unintentionally, he gave the world several generations of psychoanalyst who, coming to him from all walks of life, dropped whatever religion they had at the doors of their institutes. If they refused to do so, they managed to dissociate their beliefs from their analytic training and practice, with the sad effect of having an important area of their own lives untouched by their training. If they dealt with religion during their own analyses, that was the beginning and the end of it.<sup>128</sup>

Whatever the cause, the effect was apparent even in Fromm’s era: a survey of the major psychoanalytic journals published between 1950 and 1960 shows only one entry pertaining to Fromm’s *Psychoanalysis and Religion*.<sup>129</sup> And it amounts to a twelve line book review, only one of which hints of interpretation: “But this book is by no means academic in character.”<sup>130</sup> By contrast, some analysts were considerably

more vocal and vitriolic, taking aim not only at Fromm but also at what his argument represented to them: namely, a sympathetic view of religion. In a 1955 article for the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, B.A. Farrell ridicules the idea of reconciling psychoanalysis and religion.<sup>131</sup> Doing so, according to Farrell, would require psychoanalysis to surrender application of the scientific method—the very essence of its enterprise.<sup>132</sup> *Journal of Pastoral Care* recommended neo-Freudian books and articles to their readers, in addition to publishing neo-Freudian studies in their own pages;<sup>123</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, a leading neo-orthodox theologian, praised Karen Horney as a “creative psychologist;”<sup>124</sup> and Paul Tillich endorsed Fromm’s “self-transcending humanism” in a favorable book review.<sup>125</sup> To be clear: Fromm’s *Psychoanalysis and Religion* was not the first sign of neo-Freudian interest in religion. Carl Rogers, for example, was a NYPG member.

Meanwhile, 1950 marked the same year *Pastoral Psychology* published articles by Karen Writing from the Theodor Reik Mental Hygiene Clinic in 1955, Murray H. Sherman contends “the kind of psychoanalysis acceptable to religion is not Freud’s psychoanalysis.”<sup>133</sup> More than being non-Freudian, Sherman argues, Fromm’s theories “are akin to religious doctrines.”<sup>134</sup> Finally, in a 1960 piece for the *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Association for Psychoanalysis*, Blasie Pasquarelli denounces any attempt at reconciling psychoanalysis and religion and, more vehemently, recommends a strict separation between the church and psychological theory and therapy.<sup>135</sup>

### **Religious Circles**

Fromm’s text helped level the playing field for religion. Here was a widely recognized and respected neo-Freudian analyst talking positively about religion, leaving behind the language of warfare and contagion that had previously undermined opportunities for dialogue. What is more, his conceptual link between humanistic religion and Freud’s teachings, as well as his hope for a united effort in unmasking contemporary forms of idolatry, presupposed common ground between the two



communities. Both threads made the idea of mutual exchange seem possible, if not necessary. Moreover, his recognition of the reductionistic thinking operative among some analysts implied that religion had rarely, if ever, been represented accurately vis-à-vis psychoanalysis.

Second, Fromm's *Psychoanalysis and Religion* helped take some of the bite out of Freud's anti-religious bark. Figuring out how to handle Freud's more contentious remarks and controversial concepts was a pressing concern for American Protestantism. In the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Pastoral Care*, David Roberts recommended a rather utilitarian approach for ministers: utilize the parts of Freud's system that you find helpful and disregard those that conflict with your core convictions.<sup>136</sup> A year later, in 1948, Albert Outler would call for a selective integration of psychoanalytic theory and technique.<sup>137</sup> By 1952, Seward Hiltner seemed to speak for American Protestantism at large when he asserted that one could embrace Freud's ideas without endorsing Freud's beliefs.<sup>138</sup> Fromm's approach must have emboldened this type of logic—after all, he did plenty of separating, selecting and Freud-fashioning himself. For example, he insists on parsing the difference between those aspects of religion Freud speaks for and those Freud speaks against. Furthermore, he discriminately focuses on a single publication, *The Future of an Illusion*, leaving the rest of Freud's writings untouched and his personal and professional life unexamined. Finally, in order to bolster his representation of Freud as neither enemy nor ally of religion, Fromm fashions a Freud whose atheism appears more conditional than categorical. Each of these tactics would become increasingly popular among Protestants who wanted to employ Freud's thoughts on their own terms. In the end, Fromm's text also amplified and ameliorated the work of American Liberal Protestantism. Fromm maintains that the world will always need the higher ideals of love, truth and justice. And when it came to the rhetoric and rituals of humanism, especially within religious circles at that time, American Liberal Protestantism had the market cornered. Fromm's message re-affirmed Liberal Protestantism's appeal and importance. In addition, Fromm's valorization of freedom and

self-realization dovetailed nicely with the introspective piety that Paul Tillich, Liberal Protestantism's most famous son, was promoting to the wider world. Nor can we neglect the extent to which Liberal Protestants used Fromm's work—both as an intellectual sparring partner and as a Rorschach test of the changing complexion of American consciousness and culture—to polish and position their own ideas.<sup>139</sup>

### **Other Circles**

Fromm's book received favorable reviews from mainstream sources such as *The New York Herald Tribune*, *The New York Times* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. The first of these calls it a "timely and provocative book for our confused world."<sup>140</sup> The second says "a daring book to have cast into the midst of the world's excitements, for it will itself breed new excitements."<sup>141</sup> The last deems Fromm's argument a "model of conciseness and lucidity."<sup>142</sup> Fromm's *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, like many of his other writings before and after, struck a chord with the intellectual public at large.

\* \* \*

### **Conclusion**

Of the five representations featured in this study, Fromm's seems to be the safest and least objectionable. Instead of trying to establish who or what Freud is, as David Bakan, Peter Gay and Paul Vitz attempt to do, Fromm argues for who or what Freud is not. By situating Freud on this third rail, as neither an enemy nor an ally of religion, Fromm seeks to elevate his argument and his Freud above and beyond the whole debate surrounding fixed opposition versus facile reconciliation. In this way, Fromm's work comes closest to the type of 'thinking otherwise' that I call for in Chapter 6.<sup>143</sup> On the other hand, what elevation Fromm achieves comes by way of denying or downplaying many of the contingencies and contradictions that make this subject so richly layered, complex and confounding. For instance, if Peter Gay and Paul Vitz oversell the importance of Freud's biography, as I argue elsewhere, then Erich Fromm seems guilty of the opposite

offense. By ignoring his personal and professional experiences altogether, Fromm provides a fairly one-dimensional portrait of Freud's life. Furthermore, by relying solely on a single scholarly source to convey Freud's 'position' on religion, Fromm provides a very circumscribed view of the range of Freud's thinking. Finally, unlike Gay, Fromm does not do a very good job of detailing the environmental conditions that shape his particular representation of Freud and religion.

#### NOTES

1 Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 6-9.

2 Ibid., 7-9.

3 Ibid., 9.

4 Ibid., 10-20.

5 Ibid., 15. Fromm alludes to his opposition in a later footnote: "The criterion of validity does not lie in the psychological analysis of motivation but in the examination of evidence for or against a hypothesis within the logical framework of the hypothesis" (12).

6 Ibid., 16-17.

7 Ibid., 16.

8 Ibid., 17.

9 Ibid., 17-18.

10 Ibid., 20.

11 Ibid., 11.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 12-13.

14 Ibid., 18.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 19.

17 Ibid., 35.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 35-36.

20 Ibid., 37.

21 Ibid.

22 Peter Gay, *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism and the Making of Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 104-5. Gay insists that his view of the perpetual animosity between psychoanalysis and religion is one that dates back to Freud's earliest disciples.

23 Fromm, 21.

24 Ibid., 25.

25 Ibid., 25-26.

26 Ibid., 26.

- 27 Ibid., 96.
- 28 Ibid., 97.
- 29 Ibid., 56.
- 30 Ibid., 56-57.
- 31 Ibid., 109.
- 32 Ibid., 118.
- 33 Ibid., 9.
- 34 Ibid., 6-7.
- 35 Ibid., 10.
- 36 Ibid., 17.
- 37 Ibid., 4-5.
- 38 Ibid., 21
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid., 21.
- 41 Ibid., 76-98. Fromm indeed discusses Freud's ethical commitment to truth. When talk turns to other ethical aims, however, to justice, love, independence, freedom and responsibility, Fromm's descriptions are as vague as they are unconvincing. In fact, he even shifts the main subject in his story from Freud to psychoanalysis.
- 42 Allison Stokes, *Ministry After Freud* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985), 109-41.
- 43 Theodor Reik, *The Psychological Problems of Religion* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., 1946).
- 44 Ibid., 13-25. See also Theodor Reik, *From Thirty Years With Freud* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1940), 140-57.
- 45 Ernest Jones, *Free Associations: Memories of a Psycho-Analyst* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 206.
- 46 Ibid., 210. Jones states: "It has never been my fortune to know a Jew possessing any religious belief, let alone an orthodox one." See also Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 3 (New York: Basic Books, 1957), 349-74. Both of these books clearly come after the publication of Fromm's text; however, the point is that Jones endorsed this oppositional view of religion throughout his professional life. See also Ernest Jones, "Freud and Religious Belief," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 38 (1957): 125-26.
- 47 Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 3, 351.
- 48 Ibid., 361.
- 49 Gay, 104-5.
- 50 Franklin Day, "The Future of Psychoanalysis and Religion," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 13 (1944): 84.
- 51 Ann Elizabeth Rosenberg, *Freudian Theory and American Religious Journals 1900-1965* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 156.
- 52 Ibid., 151-162.
- 53 Nathan Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis, 1917-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 4.

54 Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care In America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 214.  
55 Hale., 6.  
56 Ibid., 74.  
57 Ibid.  
58 Hale, 74-101. See also Eli Zaretsky, *The Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Random House, 2004), 138-245.  
59 Stokes, 139.  
60 Hale, 75.  
61 Stokes, 144.  
62 Ibid., 146.  
63 Ibid., 21.  
64 Ibid., 24-25.  
65 Ibid., 25.  
66 Ibid. According to Stokes, Putnam would later criticize the Emmanuel Movement for allowing the boundaries between religion and medicine, clergy and physician, to become far too porous (33-35). Cabot, who was also disenchanted with the movement, defected and in 1925 helped to launch “a revolutionary program in professional education for ministry: clinical pastoral education” (35).  
67 Ibid., 26.  
68 Ibid.  
69 Ibid.  
70 Ibid., 27.  
71 Ibid.  
72 Ibid., 29.  
73 Ibid.  
74 Ibid., 39.  
75 Ibid.  
76 Ibid.  
77 Ibid., 48.  
78 Ibid., 49.  
79 Ibid.  
80 Ibid., 52.  
81 Ibid.  
82 Ibid.  
83 Ibid., 52-67.  
84 Ibid., 45-46.  
85 Ibid., 54.  
86 Ibid., 54-67.  
87 Ibid., 94.  
88 Ibid., 101.  
89 Ibid., 103.  
90 Ibid., 104.  
91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid. In 1972, the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry merged with the Academy of Religion and Mental Health to form the Institutes of Religion and Health, “an interfaith network of clinical service, educational and research programs supporting churches, synagogues and communities in New York and across the United States” (104). Stokes continues: “Its training arm is the Blanton-Peale Graduate Institute. A grant of more than half a million dollars from the National Institute of Mental Health in 1975 guaranteed the mainstream legitimacy of the Institutes of Religion and Health” (104-5).

94 Ibid., 113.

95 Ibid., 112.

96 Ibid., 111-41.

97 Ibid., 116.

98 Ibid., 118.

99 Paul Tillich, review of *Psychoanalysis and Religion* by Erich Fromm, *Pastoral Psychology* 2 (1951): 62.

100 Stokes, 114.

101 Ibid., 120.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid., 115.

105 Rosenberg, 37.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid., 117-49.

109 Ibid., 127.

110 Ibid., 41.

111 Seward Hiltner, “Religion and Psychoanalysis,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 3 (Spring- Summer 1950): 42.

112 Ibid.

113 David Roberts, “Theological and Psychiatric Interpretations of Human Nature,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 1 (Winter 1947): 33. See also David Roberts, *Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950).

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.

116 Lloyd Foster, “Religion and Psychiatry,” *Pastoral Psychology* 1 (February 1950): 11.

117 See Theodor Reik, “The Science of Religion,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 2 (1921): 89. Reik practically admits as much when he says: “Psycho-Analysis is destined at some future date to take the place to a considerable extent of ministerial activity.”

118 Rosenberg, 155.

119 Here is a brief survey: Karen Horney, “The Search for Glory,” *Pastoral Psychology* 1 (September 1950): 13-20. Carl Rogers, “Divergent Trends in

Methods of Improving Adjustment,” *Pastoral Psychology* 1 (September 1950): 11-18. Erich Fromm, “Freud and Jung,” *Pastoral Psychology* 1 (July 1950): 11-15. William Menninger, “Psychiatry and Religion,” *Pastoral Psychology* 1 (February 1950): 14-16. Karl Menninger, “Religion and Psychiatry,” *Pastoral Psychology* 2 (September 1951) 10-18. Karl Menninger, “Kinsey’s Study of Sexual Behavior in the Human Male and Female,” *Pastoral Psychology* 5 (February 1954): 43-85. Karl Menninger, “The Character of the Therapist,” *Pastoral Psychology* 9 (November 1958): 14-18. Erich Fromm, “The Philosophy Basic to Freud’s Psychoanalysis,” *Pastoral Psychology* 13 (February 1962): 26-32.

120 Rosenberg, 48.

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid., 31.

123 Ibid., 54.

124 Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Christian Moral Witness & Some Disciplines of Modern Culture,” *Pastoral Psychology* 11 (February 1960): 45-54.

125 Tillich, 62.

126 Only one other neo-Freudian (of the ones mentioned here) ever published a book on religion. Karl Menninger, *What Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973).

127 Nathaniel Ross, “Psychoanalysis and Religion,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 6 (1958): 520.

128 Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 4.

129 See PEP.

130 Marjorie Brierly, review of *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, by Erich Fromm, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 34 (1953): 338.

131 B. A. Farrell, “Psychological Theory and the Belief in God,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 36 (1955): 187-204.

132 Ibid., 200-4.

133 Murray H. Sherman, “Values, Religion, and the Psychoanalyst,” *Journal of Social Psychology* 45 (1957): 261. The article was submitted to the journal in 1955 from the Theodor Reik Mental Hygiene Clinic but not published until 1957.

134 Ibid., 268.

135 Blaise Pasquarelli, “Psychoanalysis and Religion—A Postulated Autonomy in Function,” *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Association for Psychoanalysis* 10 (1960): 10-17.

136 David Roberts, “Theological and Psychiatric Interpretations of Human Nature,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 1 (Winter 1947): 11-18.

137 Albert Outler, “Christian Context for Counseling,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 2 (Spring 1948): 1-12.

138 Seward Hiltner, “Pastoral Psychology and Pastoral Counseling,” *Pastoral Psychology* 3 (November 1952): 46-55.

- 139 Mark Ebersole, *Christian Faith and Man's Religion: Erich Fromm, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1961). See also Guyton Hammond, *Man In Estrangement: A Comparison of the Thought of Paul Tillich and Erich Fromm* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1965). See also J. Stanley Glen, *Erich Fromm: A Protestant Critique* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966). See also Yugo Suzuki, "An Examination of the Doctrine of Man of Erich Fromm and Reinhold Niebuhr" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1971). See also Oliver Curtis, "The Role of Religion in Selfhood: An Examination of Humanistic Psychoanalysis in Erich Fromm and Christian Selfhood in Wayne Oates" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1972).
- 140 C.J. Kew, review of *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, by Erich Fromm, *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 November 1950, 10.
- 141 H.A. Overstreet, review of *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, by Erich Fromm, *The New York Times*, 29 October 1950, 5.
- 142 C.J. Rolo, review of *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, by Erich Fromm, *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1950, 186; 95.
- 143 See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 9. Foucault underscores the need to "think differently" about our unthinking participation in particular discursive regimes.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Freud as Jewish Mystic**

David Bakan's 1958 book *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition* explores the intellectual antecedents of Freudian psychoanalysis.<sup>1</sup> Bakan believes that so much attention has been given to the Western intellectual traditions running through Freud's thinking that the influence of Jewish history—particularly the history of Jewish mystical thought—has been all but lost.<sup>2</sup> Bakan wants to set the record straight regarding the subtle, though highly significant, impact Jewish mysticism had not only on Freud's identity but also on his creation, psychoanalysis.<sup>3</sup>

#### **The Development of Psychoanalysis**

Bakan begins by discussing the countless ways in which Freudian psychoanalysis has shaped modern thought.<sup>4</sup> And while psychoanalysis's effect on the modern world is fairly obvious, its origins are rather obscure: "It is one of the major paradoxes of contemporary psychoanalytic thought," observes Bakan, "that whereas it places so much of its emphasis upon the analysis of 'origins,' it itself seems to be without origins."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the idea that Freud's scientific training in his twenties somehow triggered the founding of psychoanalysis in his early thirties seems highly suspect in Bakan's view. After all, observes Bakan, Freud displayed "only bare hints of an interest in psychology" during his pre-psychoanalytic years.<sup>6</sup> Plus, the tradition of severe materialism that enveloped his scientific mentors finds no substantive expression in Freud's own psychoanalytic writings.<sup>7</sup> How does one then explain the origins of psychoanalysis?

Bakan thinks most explanations fall into one or other of five categories. One explanation traces the origins of psychoanalysis back to the idiosyncrasies of Freud's life and mind. Bakan faults this line of argumentation for diverting attention away from the role that history (of ideas and events) plays in intellectual

production— especially in a production as complex and far-reaching as psychoanalysis.<sup>8</sup> A second explanation, which relates to this first notion of the uniqueness of Freud's person, claims that the idea and insights of psychoanalysis simply "came" to Freud.<sup>9</sup> For Bakan, this "revelation" hypothesis mirrors the "genius" hypothesis, a third explanation of psychoanalysis's origins; in his view, both have the ability to stop investigation "by substituting reverence for analysis."<sup>10</sup> A fourth explanation presumes that Freud had unusual psychological insight into human nature.<sup>11</sup> According to Bakan, however, "it is a far cry from psychological insight to, for example, the method of free association, the detailed techniques of the interpretation of dreams, and the theory of bisexuality."<sup>12</sup> The final explanation considers psychoanalysis to be a germinal idea "dropped on the soil of an extremely rich mind."<sup>13</sup> Not only was Freud comfortable with this last explanation, he reinforced it every time he failed to account for the sources behind his ideas—which was more the rule than the exception in Bakan's estimate.<sup>14</sup> For Bakan, all five explanations deny or downplay the essential role culture played in the production of Freudian psychoanalysis: "A system of thought such as was developed by Freud, made up of so many different propositions, so consistent in its mood, containing so many far-reaching implications, and with subject matter so diverse, could only be the result of a culture."<sup>15</sup>

How does Bakan define culture? In a broad sense, he understands culture to be "the achievement of at least several generations, involving relatively large numbers of people, whose life experiences pool themselves into a characteristic entity, a socially carried and organized personality."<sup>16</sup> In concrete terms, he thinks the culture of Jewish mysticism fundamentally shaped Freud's life and work. In sum, Bakan believes it would be "a violation of all that we know of cultural development to characterize the work of Freud as the *de novo* work of a single individual, especially in view of the fact that the work comes late in his life."<sup>17</sup>

## **Freud's Positive Identification as a Jew**

If Jewish mysticism played such a pivotal role in the production of Freudian psychoanalysis, why is it that Freud never admitted as much? For Bakan, the answer is simple: “Anti-Semitism... was so widespread and so intense at the time that to indicate the Jewish sources of his [Freud's] ideas would have dangerously exposed an intrinsically controversial theory to an unnecessary and possibly fatal opposition.”<sup>18</sup> But just because Freud did not discuss his Jewish influences does not mean that he denied his Jewish identity. Quite the contrary, contends Bakan: Freud spoke frequently, publicly and mostly in positive terms about his Jewish identity.<sup>19</sup> For an insider's perspective, Bakan turns to Ernest Jones's observation that Freud “felt himself to be Jewish to the core.”<sup>20</sup> Bakan elaborates on this notion, noting that “Freud spent his whole life in a virtual ghetto, a world made up almost exclusively of Jews.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, in the few instances in which Freud attributes conceptual or technical help to others, according to Bakan, they invariably turn out to be Jews—from Joseph Breuer (the originator of psychoanalysis) and Wilhelm Fliess (theory of bisexuality) to Ludwig Börne (method of free association) and Josef Popper-Lynkeus (theory of dream interpretation).<sup>22</sup> Even Freud's most famous non-Jewish disciple, Carl Jung, came from “a clearly mystical tradition within Christianity,” asserts Bakan.<sup>23</sup> Finally, Bakan finds it revealing that both of Freud's parents hailed from Galicia, “a region whose atmosphere was saturated with Chassidism, a late and socially widespread form of Jewish mysticism.”<sup>24</sup> All in all, Bakan thinks Freud's Jewish identity—and the mystical culture in which it was cultivated—had a dramatic effect on the development of psychoanalysis.<sup>25</sup>

## **Freud and Jewish Mysticism**

Two cultural traditions run through Jewish history: the rabbinic and the mystical. The former is associated with the Torah, the Talmud and legalistic interpretations, whereas the latter is associated with the Kabbalistic tradition and its emphasis on secret wisdom, esoteric interpretations and oral transmission.

According to Bakan, the *Zohar* is the most important document in the Kabbalistic tradition.<sup>26</sup> More specifically, Bakan views the *Zohar* as sharing several defining characteristics with Freud's psychoanalytic writings, including "views on anti-Semitism, the conception of man as bisexual, a theory of sexual-social development, and, perhaps most important, a set of techniques for the interpretation of linguistic productions."<sup>27</sup>

Nor do the affinities end there in Bakan's mind. For instance, Freud had strong heretical tendencies in the face of Jewish orthodoxy, yet he never renounced his Jewish identity.<sup>28</sup> Early and modern Kabbalists practiced the same balancing act between undermining orthodoxy and honoring their Jewish identity.<sup>29</sup> Another parallel relates to evil: Kabbalistic doctrine deemed evil not to be a punishment from God for disregarding the Law but instead as a realistic part of how the world actually works; in a similar vein, Freud viewed evil as a distortion of human love, not some cosmic curse emanating from a displeased God.<sup>30</sup> There is also the fact that the Sabbatians, followers of Sabbatai Zevi, a false Jewish Messiah from the seventeenth century, violated the commandment against 'having no other gods' by worshiping a wooden image of Sabbatai Zevi.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, Freud, like the Sabbatians, was equally defiant of this commandment because of his preoccupation with collecting idols.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the Kabbalistic tradition stressed the need for adherents to enlist the support of associates to help unlock the hidden truths within the Scriptures.<sup>33</sup> Bakan charges that Freud utilized Wilhelm Fliess (and other Jews after him) in much the same way—namely, as an associate who registered Freud's raw reflections and helped to unmask as well as to mold psychoanalytic insights.<sup>34</sup> Also, the secret teachings of Kabbala were typically transmitted orally to one person at a time, "and even then only to selected minds and by hints."<sup>35</sup> Bakan compares this practice to the training of modern psychoanalysts, who are also selected to receive oral instruction from a single individual, such as a training analyst or a supervising analyst, based on teachings that cannot be learned solely from a book.<sup>36</sup> Finally, the Kabbalistic tradition was particularly susceptible to messianic movements, starting with Sabbatai Zevi, the "false Messiah," in the seventeenth century

and surfacing again in the eighteenth century with Jacob Frank.<sup>37</sup> According to Bakan, it was followers of Sabbatai who advocated for “reform, liberalism, and the enlightenment” and thus helped Jews move into the mainstream of Western civilization.<sup>38</sup> Plus, Sabbatianism “encouraged concern with the forbidden areas of human experience.”<sup>39</sup> All of which leads Bakan to suggest that Sabbatianism helped pave the way for Freudian psychoanalysis, both in its conception and in its reception.

### **Freud and Moses**

Bakan believes the key to understanding Freud resides in his recurring interest in the biblical figure Moses.<sup>40</sup> For Bakan, Freud’s essay “The Moses of Michelangelo” is most significant for its focus on Moses, the figure represented in the statue, instead of on the mind of the creator, Michelangelo.<sup>41</sup> In fact, Bakan thinks Freud provides a superficial analysis of Michelangelo’s motives because what he really wants to talk about is Moses—specifically, about what Moses must have been thinking and feeling and repressing at the time that he descended from Mount Sinai with the Commandments in hand and his faithless people in sight.<sup>42</sup> In doing so, argues Bakan, Freud “simply uses the statue as an occasion for the clarification of his own problem with respect to Moses.”<sup>43</sup> So, what problem does Freud have with Moses? Bakan explains it as follows: If, as Bakan suggests, Freud conceives of himself as the new Lawgiver of the Jews, consciously or unconsciously, then he must not only identify with the old Lawgiver, Moses, but also render him inadequate or misguided.<sup>44</sup> Freud does this by asserting that Moses’s wrath is nothing more than a personification of the superego, and as such, he can only promise punishment but never actually deliver on it.<sup>45</sup> “In this new view of Moses,” asserts Bakan, “Freud has turned him into a stone image, one which will not kill those who dance around the golden calf, those who do not accept, but violate the commandments upheld by the rabbinic tradition.”<sup>46</sup> In sum, Bakan reads Freud’s essay as “a symbolic Sabbatian assertion of freedom against the severe restrictions of

thought and action which had been the life strategy of the Eastern European Jews.”<sup>47</sup>

But it is Freud’s book *Moses and Monotheism* that Bakan finds most revealing.<sup>48</sup> That the book is so “incredibly bad” from a scholarly standpoint should give us a hint that something more is going on here, insists Bakan.<sup>49</sup> For starters, Bakan believes the book is deliberately obscure—which mirrors the tendency in Kabbalistic literature to shield deeper truths from the uninitiated.<sup>50</sup> Then there is Freud’s decision to trace Moses’s national origin back to the Gentiles instead of the Jews. “It is actually quite conceivable,” contends Bakan, “that the whole book, as an essay on the psychology of the Jews, could have been written without imputing genetic Gentilism to Moses.”<sup>51</sup> In fact, Bakan maintains that Freud’s theory that “Moses was an Egyptian whom a people needed to make into a Jew” conceals a deeper, contradictory truth; namely, that “Moses was a Jew whom Freud needed to make into a Gentile.”<sup>52</sup> What motivated Freud to turn Moses into a Gentile? Bakan offers two rationales. First, in keeping with the aggressive unorthodoxy of Sabbatianism, Freud cements his heretical status by committing a “psychological act of apostasy” against Moses.<sup>53</sup> Second, by making Moses a Gentile, Freud psychologically becomes one himself.<sup>54</sup> Bakan elaborates on this last point, saying Freud “felt very sensitive about the low social position to which his Jewishness held him. Freud’s myth that the Jews were *adopted* by a Gentile of high nobility overcomes the sense of degradation associated with his feelings of being a Jew.”<sup>55</sup> Beyond the benefits to Freud’s psyche, *Moses and Monotheism* was, in Bakan’s estimate, “a desperate and brilliant attempt to ward off anti-Semitism.”<sup>56</sup> In short, Freud considered anti-Semitism to be rooted in the idea that the Jews are the chosen people of God. However, by countering that the Jews were instead the chosen people of Moses, Freud “makes the Jews the butt of the greatest joke in history; and thereby achieves for them also the greatest gain in history, freedom from persecution. It converts them from threatening to comical and stupid characters.”<sup>57</sup> But far from trying to demean the Jews, explains Bakan, Freud seeks to

liberate them by separating the image of the Jew from the suffering and persecution associated with the Mosaic code.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to turning Moses into a Gentile, Freud theorizes his murder at the collective hand of the Jews. Clearly, Bakan considers Freud's argument to be weak: "*Moses and Monotheism* is indeed one of the grossest distortions of the Biblical text committed in modern times by a reputable scholar... The actual evidence for the murder of Moses is very tenuous."<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, Bakan is convinced that Freud is up to something more: "Freud saw the murder of Moses by the Jews as a necessary explanation of their genetic burden of guilt, which he as a Jew consciously felt."<sup>60</sup> Bakan continues: "By making Moses an Egyptian, Freud absolves himself and the Jews of the guilt associated with the murder-thought. Killing Moses-as-an-Egyptian is simply killing a member of the group which first persecuted the Jews."<sup>61</sup> And herein Freud becomes not only a Jewish hero but also the new Moses who introduces a new Law based on personal freedom, independent thought and psychological insights.<sup>62</sup>

### **Freud and the Devil**

In his 1923 essay "A Neurosis of Demoniactal Possession in the Seventeenth Century," Freud analyzes a painter from the seventeenth century, Christoph Haitzmann, who supposedly made a pact with the Devil. Freud surmises that Haitzmann's pact was rooted in three psychological factors: 1) he was depressed; 2) his father's recent death was fueling that depression; and 3) he was concerned with his earning potential.<sup>63</sup> Bakan claims that throughout the 1890s Freud was haunted by the same three concerns.<sup>64</sup> And though Freud understood the Devil to be a metaphor, as opposed to a real personage, it did not stop him from pushing this metaphor to its limits.<sup>65</sup> In short, Freud identified God with the superego, which made the Devil, the antithesis of God, the suspension of the superego. If Freud hoped to probe the depths of the unconscious, the hellish underside of the mind, he needed to disarm his superego and allow his id impulses to reign free.<sup>66</sup> Bakan

believes that Freud did just that by entering into a psychological pact with the Devil—a pact that helped Freud discover profound psychological truths that eventually became the backbone of psychoanalysis.<sup>67</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Bakan ends the book in much the same way as he begins it—namely, by drawing parallels between Freudian psychoanalysis and the history of Jewish mysticism. Here he concentrates on the significance both systems of thought ascribe to dream theory and sexuality.<sup>68</sup> In the end, Bakan is clearly convinced that Freud not only channeled several defining characteristics of Jewish mystical thought into his own writings, whether he knew it or not, but also that his creation, psychoanalysis, is best understood as an expression of Jewish mysticism.<sup>69</sup>

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## **Bakan's Freud**

What are the assumptions, strategies and formations that underlie and animate Bakan's representation of Freud as Jewish mystic? To make his case, Bakan relies heavily on hints, hunches, parallels and inferences. Perhaps his highest hurdle to overcome is the fact that Freud himself never acknowledged a clear connection to Jewish mysticism. Bakan's assumption that Freud failed to do so out of fear of anti-Semitism makes sense until we ask: if fear of anti-Semitism was Freud's motive, why was he so unafraid to publicize his Jewish identity? Moreover, if Freud was aware of his Jewish influences, and he really wanted to strike a blow against Jewish orthodoxy, as Bakan suggests, why would he hold back from speaking frequently or favorably about Jewish mysticism, that is, orthodoxy's enemy? Another interpretation that Bakan allows to linger is the notion that Freud participated "in the struggles and the issues of Jewish mysticism," drawing on Jewish mystical ideas and sources, without ever knowing it.<sup>70</sup> This seems to be a stretch for the father of self-analysis, who was clearly not averse to analyzing the history of psychoanalysis or his own intellectual development.<sup>71</sup> In short, on a macro level,



Bakan's argument has some serious shortcomings. Now let us consider his work on a smaller scale.

In his discussion of the origins of psychoanalysis, Bakan rightly observes the extent to which biographers and historians have overdramatized Freud's personal genius in the matter. His insistence that Jewish history and culture, in addition to Freud's own aptitude and personal psychology, were contributing factors to the founding of psychoanalysis seems indisputable. Equally convincing is his theory that Freud was, in the words of Ernest Jones, "Jewish to the core."<sup>72</sup> But Bakan runs into trouble at precisely the point that he introduces mysticism into the equation.

First and foremost, Bakan fails to parse the difference between being an unorthodox Jew and being a mystical Jew. As a result, he leads his readers to assume that the only alternative to being an orthodox Jew at that time was to be a mystical Jew. Furthermore, by ignoring this distinction altogether, Bakan sidesteps the whole question of what Freud meant when he identified himself as a "godless Jew." Could Freud have been a godless Jew or a secular Jew and not necessarily a mystical Jew? Bakan never asks or answers this question. Nor does he offer concrete examples of how, when or where Freud actually engaged the Jewish mystical culture that supposedly pervaded Vienna. Instead he simply insists that Jewish mysticism was "in the air" and "embodied in the common oral expressions of the Jews."<sup>73</sup> True, almost all of Freud's friends and followers were Jews, but Bakan fails to link any of them to Jewish mysticism directly.<sup>74</sup>

True, Freud was an avid player of taroc, a popular card game based on Kabbala, but that hardly suggests the type of intellectual engagement or osmosis that is on par with Bakan's thesis. At this point, it is worth noting that two years after the book's publication, Bakan learned that Freud's library reportedly contained Kabbalistic literature, including a French translation of the *Zohar*.<sup>75</sup> This report definitely bolsters Bakan's argument. But if there is any doubt that Bakan's claims consistently outpace his evidence, we need only turn to his own words for

corroboration. In a 1960 article for *Commentary* magazine, Bakan admits that *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition* provides “little or no *direct* evidence of any such connections” between the development of psychoanalysis and the Jewish mystical tradition.<sup>76</sup>

In sum, the notion that the Jewish mystical tradition somehow influenced Freud’s life and work certainly seems plausible. But let us be clear about the scope of Bakan’s thesis: he goes well beyond the idea of influence, arguing that psychoanalysis is an “expression of Jewish mysticism” and a “fulfillment of the Sabbatian ethos.”<sup>77</sup> To that end, Bakan fails to marshal enough direct evidence, interpretive insights or rhetorical gains to support such far-reaching claims. The same critique holds true for his theory regarding Freud’s psychological pact with the Devil—it is intriguing, to be sure, but hardly persuasive, much less convincing. A telling contrast is Bakan’s conception of Freud as the new Moses. This theory is, too, highly original. Though, in this case, Bakan manages to back up his bold assertions with solid textual analysis and savvy rhetorical constructions. In the final analysis, it is worth noting that the hints, hunches, parallels and inferences that surround Freud’s life and work do not *necessarily* add up to him being a Jewish mystic. Paul Vitz, as we shall see in Chapter 4, relies on similar methods and materials to arrive at a Christian Freud.

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### **Environmental Conditions: Pre-1958**

What are the environmental conditions that likely influenced Bakan’s work? Chapter 1 details many of the psychological forces, social trends and cultural developments that shaped both psychoanalysis and religion throughout the 1940s and 1950s. For the most part, the discussion there focused primarily on American Christianity. Below the emphasis will be on the interaction of psychoanalysis and American Judaism.

In the nearly two decades between Freud’s death and Bakan’s publication, the Jewish community, like the Christian community, responded in varying ways to Sigmund Freud and

his writings on religion. Throughout the 1940s most rabbis paid scant attention to psychoanalysis.<sup>78</sup> This proved possible, in large part, because Judaism was not preoccupied with the burgeoning pastoral care and counseling movement—at least not in the same way or degree to which Christianity was invested. As Ann Elizabeth Rosenberg explains: “Jewish social service institutions had in general developed outside of the synagogue... A rabbi would more typically refer people with problems to the appropriate agency, rather than give pastoral care and counseling himself.”<sup>79</sup> Robert Katz thinks socialization played a critical role as well: Jewish history and tradition conditioned Jews of this era to view the rabbi as teacher, scholar and leader of the community rather than as a psychological counselor of individuals.<sup>80</sup> Finally, as Rosenberg reminds us, most Jews in 1940s and 1950s America “still lived in large cities, where mental health facilities were readily available.”<sup>81</sup> Notwithstanding, some rabbis had plenty to say about Freud and his writings on religion.<sup>82</sup>

In his 1946 best-selling book *Peace of Mind*, Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman attempts to synthesize Freudian insights and religious faith. In Liebman’s view, Freudian psychology represents “the newest and sharpest tools that God has given men for the examination of the human mind and its complex motives.”<sup>83</sup> He considers the idea of reconciling religion and psychiatry to be “impressive, comforting, and not too difficult for well-disposed persons to understand.”<sup>84</sup> At bottom, Liebman believes religion and psychiatry to be “mutually supplementary” and thus “capable of supporting man at points where the other is weakest or has failed.”<sup>85</sup> Far more than a pragmatic partnership, Liebman envisions a real and lasting synthesis between religion and psychiatry, arguing that “only in the mighty confluence of these two tides shall we find peace of mind.”<sup>86</sup> How does Rabbi Liebman handle Freud’s negative comments on religion? At the book’s beginning, Liebman claims that Freud “really had a spiritual purpose, even though he may not have been aware of it.”<sup>87</sup> By the book’s end, he insists that Freud’s personal prejudice against religion is not all that significant in the grand scheme of things: “Freud and some of his disciples have been biased, but that spiritual bias is merely an accident of their

personal biographies and does not in any way invalidate the spiritual helpfulness of their discoveries about human nature.”<sup>88</sup>

Two years later, in 1948, Rabbi Liebman was invited to speak at the annual convention of the American Psychiatric Association. The next month marked Liebman’s untimely death as well as the publication of his edited book *Psychiatry and Religion*.<sup>89</sup> The book was the product of a two-day conference of religious leaders and mental health professionals held at Liebman’s Institute on Religion and Psychiatry at his temple in Boston. The range of contributors—from priests and rabbis to distinguished professors and medical directors to a journalist—hints to just how sweeping Liebman’s message had become. He opens the book by avowing that “there is no essential difference between the basic anxieties, phobias, hopes, and hungers of a Christian, a Buddhist, a Jew.”<sup>90</sup>

By the early 1950s, modern psychology was gaining a definite foothold in mainstream Judaism. In 1953, for example, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the academic center of Conservative Judaism, established a Department of Psychiatry—with the purpose of training rabbinical students in psychological counseling. During this same period the New York Board of Rabbis, which represented all wings of Judaism, sponsored an Institute of Pastoral Psychiatry.<sup>91</sup> From Abraham Franzblau, a psychiatrist at Mt. Sinai Hospital and professor of pastoral psychiatry at Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, we learn that the latter had a program under which psychoanalysts screened all candidates for the rabbinate and tried to eliminate any who were not regarded as emotionally fit.<sup>92</sup> Franzblau also describes a lecture series at Mt. Sinai Hospital in which leading psychiatrists presented to groups of 50-100 rabbis who came to the hospital every other Wednesday throughout the year.<sup>93</sup> Meanwhile, Robert Katz, a rabbi and colleague of Franzblau at the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, observed that it was common for Jewish preaching of this era to rely on “technical terms borrowed from the fields of psychiatry and psychoanalysis.”<sup>94</sup> Looking to the future from

the vantage point of 1954, Katz offers the following predictions regarding the changing role of the rabbi:

- *First:* A greater understanding and closer cooperation between the synagogue and the Jewish social work agency seems indicated.
- *Second:* It is likely that the modern rabbi will engage in more face-to-face counseling of individuals.
- *Third:* Pastoral psychology will prove useful in planning the total program of the modern synagogue.
- *Fourth:* Rabbis and rabbinical students will engage in the clinical study of theological concepts and religious practices.
- *Fifth:* The rabbi and the synagogue will become more actively identified with the mental hygiene movement.
- *Sixth:* Progress in social and psychological science may serve to enhance the permanent value of Judaism and make religious values and truths more relevant to individual and group needs.<sup>95</sup>

Katz's predictions are notable not only for what they say but also for what they omit. Notice that his vision of the future makes no mention of Freud. In fact, earlier in the article, Katz downplays Freud's role in helping Judaism adapt to modern psychology, saying that "Freud's own studies in religion and his book on Moses in particular have had little creative influence on Judaism and have, in fact, evoked no little resistance to psychoanalytic speculation in problems of Jewish history and theology."<sup>96</sup> Katz, like Liebman before him, manages to praise Freudian theory and technique without divinizing Freud himself. Such a focus on the product instead of the person dovetails nicely with Bakan's discussion of the origins of psychoanalysis, whereby he de-emphasizes Freud's personal genius and underscores the role culture—Jewish mystical culture according to Bakan—played in the production of psychoanalysis.

In the years that followed, discussions were becoming considerably more nuanced, as evidenced in *Judaism and Psychiatry*, a collection of essays by rabbis, psychiatrists and

psychoanalysts published in 1956.<sup>97</sup> Liebman's notion of a convergence between religion and psychiatry was giving way to calls for cooperation—that is, less a marriage and more a partnership. Rabbi Alexander Alan Steinbach, writing in *Judaism and Psychiatry*, is adamant about the need for collaboration: “As a rabbi, I know we cannot hope to discover God until we rediscover man. And I fully realize we cannot rediscover man without recourse to the contributions psychiatry has made available for our search.”<sup>98</sup> “Conversely,” he adds, “psychiatry cannot adequately perceive the whole man without taking into account the contributions religion has made available for the search.”<sup>99</sup> Yet Steinbach is equally adamant about the need for separation: “Psychiatry and religion are, and must remain, each sovereign in its own field.”<sup>100</sup> Franzblau echoes a similar sentiment in his contribution to *Judaism and Psychiatry*, insisting that a mutuality of interest “hardly makes every minister a psychiatrist or every psychiatrist a minister.”<sup>101</sup> In 1958, Leo Schwarz, a rabbi, and Louis Linn, a psychiatrist, make a joint plea for greater clarity concerning the “vital differences” between religion and psychiatry: “The motive behind this effort to bring religious leaders and psychiatrists into a cooperative relationship is commendable, but to speak of identical aims or techniques is a mistake that can have unfortunate consequences.”<sup>102</sup> That same year Rabbi Jacob Weinstein, presenting to the Central Conference of American Rabbis, proved that while discussions were becoming more nuanced, the desire for mutual engagement was hardly dissipating:

Surely, such institutes as these are most helpful. I see that they are growing in number. We need more of them....We need departments of pastoral psychiatry in the seminaries. More ministers should take advantage of the opportunities to spend a year or two interning in our mental hospitals and should follow up this technical training with an apprentice check-up arrangement with some competent psychiatrist....Just as ministers should know psychiatry, I believe more psychiatrists should know religion.<sup>103</sup>

In the final analysis, by the time David Bakan published *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition* in 1958, he was inheriting a Jewish audience that was not only hungry to hear more about Freudian psychoanalysis but was also disinclined to accept thoughtlessly Freud's characterization of himself or religion.

\* \* \*

### **The Reception of Bakan's Text**

Bakan's *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition* received a relatively flat reception. It was not until 1967—nearly a decade after the book's publication—that a review appeared in *The Journal of Religion*. Nor was the book widely debated in Jewish scholarly journals.<sup>104</sup> And with the exception of the two mostly positive reviews cited below—each of which engaged Bakan's work in detail—most members of the psychoanalytic community simply dismissed his argument with no more than a few sentences. Let us now take a closer look at how Bakan's text played within each of these communities.

#### **Religious Circles**

Richard Rubenstein, writing in *The Journal of Religion* in 1967, doubtlessly provides the most glowing review of Bakan's book. According to Rubenstein: "Bakan has written one of the truly creative and imaginative studies of both Jewish theology and its problems as well as the origins of psychoanalysis in our time."<sup>105</sup> Rubenstein's only regret is that Bakan does not incorporate Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* into his larger thesis because, in Rubenstein's estimate, "it is that work in which Freud's image of [the] human condition most completely resembles the image of man in Kabbalah."<sup>106</sup>

#### **Psychoanalytic Circles**

Irving Alexander, writing in a 1960 review for *The American Journal of Psychology*, considers Bakan's book to be "distinguished for the original position it presents and the ingenuity with which the evidence is marshaled."<sup>107</sup> Yet

Alexander readily admits that the evidence is “mainly interpretive in nature” and is not likely to be accepted by the psychoanalytic community.<sup>108</sup> He ends by saying that “it is a highly provocative speculation which invites equally speculative rebuttal.”<sup>109</sup> Marjorie Brierley, a British psychoanalyst who was not only sympathetic to religion but also very supportive of the idea of reconciliation, authored the only review in a mainstream psychoanalytic journal. Her 1967 review in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* describes Bakan’s inferences and parallels as “interesting and often persuasive.”<sup>110</sup> She concludes that “it is not necessary to agree with every detail of his [Bakan’s] arguments and interpretations to conclude that his main assumption is not unwarranted and that the Jewish mystical tradition did provide a soil in which Freud’s creative thoughts could germinate.”<sup>111</sup> Peter Gay could not disagree more: “Bakan’s claim that the spirit of the Kabbala is alive in Freud contradicts everything we know of Freud’s mind: his reading, his style of scientific inquiry, his whole way of thinking.”<sup>112</sup> Worse yet, according to Gay, Bakan’s thesis is not even original, as A.A. Roback had argued the same in 1929.<sup>113</sup>

Nor do the criticisms end there. Henri Ellenberger, for example, maintains that Bakan “considerably exaggerated the intensity of anti-Semitism in Vienna in Freud’s youth and mature years.”<sup>114</sup> Ellenberger also believes that in his quest to establish analogies between psychoanalytic concepts and Kabbalistic teachings Bakan disregards the complexity inherent in each system.<sup>115</sup> Meanwhile, Mortimer Ostow argues that “whatever mystical element contributed to the creation of psychoanalysis, cannot be distinguished from the mysticism of many other scientists, including some of the greatest (e.g. Newton and Einstein) who...sought to elucidate what they considered to be the ultimate unity of the universe.”<sup>116</sup> Moreover, “there is nothing in whatever mysticism inheres in psychoanalysis to warrant associating it more closely with Jewish mysticism than with Christian or secular mysticism.”<sup>117</sup>

Even those psychoanalytically minded authors who seem open to Bakan’s originality and iconoclasm go out of their way to



discredit his main thesis regarding Freud's connection to Jewish mysticism. For example, Paul Vitz, as we shall see further in Chapter 4, is willing to take Bakan's idea of Freud's pact with the devil to its absolute extreme, arguing not for a metaphoric pact, as Bakan suggests, but for an actual blood sealed pact.<sup>118</sup> Yet Vitz finds Bakan's main thesis to be a real stretch, pointing out that "there is not a single explicit reference by Freud to any of the writings of the Jewish mystical tradition."<sup>119</sup> Similarly, in his 1990 book *Freud and Moses: The Long Journey Home*, Emanuel Rice, like Bakan before him, thinks that Freud's Jewish identity was far more religious than he, his family or his followers would dare to admit.<sup>120</sup> Even so, Rice maintains that Freud "was certainly not part of, nor influenced by, the Jewish mystical tradition," and that Bakan's argument, though attractive, is simply not persuasive.<sup>121</sup>

\* \* \*

## Conclusion

David Bakan's representation of Freud as Jewish mystic is highly original and provocative. When compared to the other four representations featured in this study, however, Bakan's argument seems most in need of more and better evidence. His claims are intriguing, to be sure, but too many of them are strictly inferential—a fact that Bakan himself readily admits in a follow-up article that appeared two years after the book's original publication.<sup>122</sup> But it is worth noting that none of the other four authors pay nearly as much attention to the Jewish dimensions of Freud's life and work as Bakan does. Nor do any of them seem all that convinced that Jewish history and culture played a pivotal role in the creation of psychoanalysis. In fact, Peter Gay makes a point to say that Freud "was a Jew but not a Jewish scientist...his Judaism was inessential, not to Freud, but to his creation, psychoanalysis."<sup>123</sup> The shortcomings of Bakan's argument aside, it is hard to imagine how someone could write on the subject of Freud and Judaism and not engage David Bakan's book, either positively or negatively. In this way, his contribution to the field of psychoanalysis and religion remains significant.

## NOTES

1 David Bakan, *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1958), vii.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., vii-xi.

4 Ibid., 3-4.

5 Ibid., 7.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 10.

8 Ibid., 10-11.

9 Ibid., 11.

10 Ibid., 12.

11 Ibid., 12-13.

12 Ibid., 13.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 13-19.

15 Ibid., 22.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 23.

18 Ibid., 26.

19 Ibid., 45-53.

20 Ibid., 52.

21 Ibid., 55.

22 Ibid., 55-65.

23 Ibid., 58.

24 Ibid., 55.

25 Ibid., ix.

26 Ibid., 83.

27 Ibid., 84.

28 Ibid., 115-16.

29 Ibid., 69-82.

30 Ibid., 91; 105.

31 Ibid., 134.

32 Ibid., 134-36.

33 Ibid., 71.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 35.

36 Ibid., 35-36.

37 Ibid., 95-109.

38 Ibid., 101; 147.

39 Ibid., 102.

40 Ibid., 121.

41 Ibid., 124.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 125.

44 Ibid., 127.

- 45 Ibid., 128.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid., 128.
- 49 Ibid., 137.
- 50 Ibid., 142-43.
- 51 Ibid., 146.
- 52 Ibid., 146-47.
- 53 Ibid., 148.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid., 151.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Ibid., 156.
- 58 Ibid., 158-60.
- 59 Ibid., 164.
- 60 Ibid., 167.
- 61 Ibid., 168.
- 62 Ibid., 160; 166-68.
- 63 Ibid., 215.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid., 187-90.
- 66 Ibid., 210-13.
- 67 Ibid., 187-237.
- 68 Ibid., 246-99.
- 69 Ibid., ix; 311-18; 158-60.
- 70 Ibid., vii-viii.
- 71 Consider the countless opportunities Freud had to acknowledge a direct or indirect connection with Jewish mysticism: “Autobiographical Note” (1901); “On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement” (1914); “A Note on the Prehistory of the Technique of Analysis” (1920); “A Short Account of Psycho-Analysis” (1924); *An Autobiographical Study* (1925).
- 72 Bakan, 52.
- 73 Ibid., viii.
- 74 Bakan claims that Wilhelm Fliess, one Freud’s earliest disciples, combined three important Kabbalistic elements: bisexuality, numerology and predestination. Soon thereafter, however, Bakan admits that he has no evidence to prove Fliess’s immersion in the Kabbalistic tradition.
- 75 See David Bakan, “On the Horizon: Freud and the Zohar,” *Commentary* (January 1960): 66. I say “reportedly” because the information comes from an eyewitness as opposed to an actual historical record of the content of Freud’s library.
- 76 Ibid., 65.
- 77 Bakan, *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*, ix; 159.
- 78 Robert Katz, “Aspects of Pastoral Psychology and the Rabbinate,” *Pastoral Psychology* 5 (October 1954): 35-42. See also Ann Elizabeth Rosenberg, *Freudian Theory and American Religious Journals 1900-1965*

(Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 71. See also Peter Gay, *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism and the Making of Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 95.

79 Rosenberg, 71.

80 Katz, 38.

81 Ibid.

82 For a thorough sense of the growing size and scope of books and articles devoted to Judaism and Freud during this period, see Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi's, *Psychoanalytic Studies of Religion: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 35-41; 119-29.

83 Joshua Loth Liebman, *Peace of Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946), 14.

84 Ibid., 15.

85 Ibid., 19.

86 Ibid., 20.

87 Ibid., 19.

88 Ibid., 179.

89 Joshua Loth Liebman, ed., *Psychiatry and Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948).

90 Ibid., xi.

91 Simon Noveck, ed. *Judaism and Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1956), 165.

92 Abraham Franzblau, "Psychiatry and Religion," in *Judaism and Psychiatry*, ed. Simon Noveck (New York: Basic Books, 1956), 186.

93 Ibid.

94 Katz, 36.

95 Ibid., 42.

96 Ibid., 36.

97 See Noveck.

98 Alexander Alan Steinback, "Can Psychiatry and Religion Meet?," in *Judaism and Psychiatry*, ed. Simon Noveck (New York: Basic Books, 1956), 174.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid., 173.

101 Franzblau, 190.

102 Louis Linn and Leo Schwarz, "The Domains of Psychiatry and Religion," *Pastoral Psychology* 9 (October 1958): 42.

103 Jacob Weinstein, "Religion Looks at Psychiatry," *Pastoral Psychology* 9 (November 1958): 28.

104 Richard Rubenstein, "Freud and Judaism," *Journal of Religion* 47 (January 1967): 39. Rubenstein rightly observes the relative silence and inattention the Jewish scholarly journals paid to Bakan's book.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid., 44.

- 107 Irving Alexander, review of *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*, by David Bakan, *American Journal of Psychology* 73 (March 1960): 171.
- 108 Ibid.
- 109 Ibid.
- 110 Marjorie Brierley, review of *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*, by David Bakan, *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 48 (1967): 470.
- 111 Ibid., 471.
- 112 Gay, 130.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 544.
- 115 Ibid.
- 116 Mortimor Ostow, ed. *Judaism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1982), 6.
- 117 Ibid.
- 118 Paul C. Vitz, *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious* (New York: Guilford Press, 1988), 155-57.
- 119 Ibid., 102.
- 120 Emanuel Rice, *Freud and Moses: The Long Journey Home* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).
- 121 Ibid., 119.
- 122 See Bakan, "On the Horizon: Freud and the Zohar," 66.
- 123 Gay, 148.

### CHAPTER 3

## Freud as Reconciler of Psychoanalysis and Religion

Ana-Maria Rizzuto begins her 1979 publication *The Birth of the Living God* with a declaration: “This is not a book on religion. It is a clinical study of the possible origins of the individual’s private representation of God and its subsequent elaborations.”<sup>1</sup> A clinical approach, in her view, requires that she set aside philosophical or theological questions regarding God’s existence and focus instead on the psychic reality behind one’s belief or unbelief in God.<sup>2</sup> “My only obligation,” Rizzuto maintains, “is to respect the phenomenon and its pristine manifestations.”<sup>3</sup>

The clinically-based, research-oriented nature of Rizzuto’s study cannot be denied. To arrive at her conclusions, she mined the life histories of twenty patients (ten women and ten men from varying backgrounds) using a complex, multi-faceted methodology.<sup>4</sup> Each patient first completed eighteen hours of intensive psychodynamic evaluation. They then narrated their life histories “from birth on through the different stages of their life, their physical health, their most traumatic experience, their most positive experience, their object losses (including pets and toys), their self-images,...[ their] most intensely felt unfulfilled emotional needs, as well as their religious experiences, in each developmental period.”<sup>5</sup> Next, “a chronological, developmental, comprehensive life history was written in the form of a biography.”<sup>6</sup> Here attention was given to the patient’s “identification with and representation of his parents and siblings, as well as his self-representation.”<sup>7</sup> Parallel to this biography, which was based on object relations, Rizzuto formulated a religious profile for each patient, which was based on changes over time in their relation to and representation of God.<sup>8</sup> The supposition was that comparing and contrasting the two histories would reveal the object sources patients used to form their God image. Rizzuto then supplemented this written data with pictorial evidence. On the first day of the experiment, she asked the patient to draw a picture of his or her family and of

themselves. On the last day, she asked the patient to draw a picture of God.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Rizzuto brought these various materials to bear on a complex diagnosis that included:

The nature of the patient's object relations, the quality of conflicts, and a psychodynamic formulation of both the patient's system of defenses and the critical predicaments in his life. This formulation was compared with the patient's problems with his God and his relation with him, as well as with the object-related nature of the patient's dealings with his God and the type of conflicts and predicaments he had with the Divinity.<sup>10</sup>

In the end, Rizzuto's stated goal was to "confirm, complement, or correct Freud's statements about the formation of the God representation."<sup>11</sup>

## **Freud**

In *The Birth of the Living God*, Rizzuto devotes two chapters to Sigmund Freud. In the first chapter, she describes Freud's theory of how the God image emerges. According to Rizzuto, Freud considers God to be nothing more than an exalted image of a non-supernatural father—an amalgamation of the primeval father from the primal horde and one's actual father from childhood.<sup>12</sup> Here Freud deserves both credit and criticism in Rizzuto's view. On the one hand, Freud was first to recognize the role early objects play in forming the God representation.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, by concentrating on "the father-son relationship alone," Freud "excludes other possible early object relations: sonmother, daughter-father, daughter-mother," argues Rizzuto.<sup>14</sup> Nor do Rizzuto's objections to Freud's methodology end there:

- 1) "Freud does not concern himself with religion or God in women."<sup>15</sup>
- 2) "He never accounted for the fact that there must be a critical psychological difference between religious believers and nonbelievers."<sup>16</sup>
- 3) "He pays scant attention to the intrapsychic function of the 'revived' and 'restored' ideas of the parents in later life. He is satisfied with the thought that these revivals

have to do with man's helplessness in facing life and fate. He neglects to explore further the persistence of belief and its many functions in everyday life."<sup>17</sup>

Rizzuto examines Freud's theory of object representation at length before concluding: "In arriving at my destination after this long journey with Freud, I find myself enriched with a complex theory of object representation. Nevertheless, I find, also, that I have not reached the goal of explaining 'the belief in a Divine Being.'"<sup>18</sup> She continues: "I have learned from Freud how a person may acquire both God and Devil representations. What escapes finding out are the varied and complex forces that make these representations a source of belief."<sup>19</sup> Rizzuto ends this chapter with a very brief history of the psychoanalytic study of religion. She discusses how far Carl Jung and Alfred Adler diverged from Freud's view of religion; how Freud's early followers—Karl Abraham, Otto Rank, Ernest Jones and Theodor Reik—never made "any major contributions which changed the impact of Freud's original insight"; how neither Anna Freud nor Melanie Klein concerned themselves with religion; and how Erik Erikson, D.W. Winnicott and Harry Guntrip offer useful but limited insight on the subject.<sup>20</sup> In her estimate, "[t]his brief review shows that Freud's commitment to the understanding of man's belief in Divinity found no lasting echo in the work of his followers."<sup>21</sup>

"Beyond Freud" is the title of Rizzuto's next chapter. She begins by reiterating her expertise as well as her aim: "My area of competence is the formation of the God representation during childhood and its modifications and uses during the entire course of life. It is that process that I call the 'birth of the living God.'"<sup>22</sup> She adds: "Here, following in Freud's footsteps I shall attempt to complete his answer to his own question about how people come to possess actual belief in the existence of God."<sup>23</sup> In rehearsing Freud's 'position' on religion, Rizzuto highlights another critical omission: "Freud does not deal with the fact that the nonbeliever needs an explanation for his lack of belief in his God representation as much as the believer does for belief. Freud takes for granted that all nonbelievers are mature people who have renounced their infantile wishes."<sup>24</sup> Rizzuto then describes



how her theory of the God representation differs from Freud's own. For Freud, formation of the God representation happens in relation to the boy's experience of the father (primeval father and actual father) and via the resolution of the oedipal conflict.<sup>25</sup> For Rizzuto, the formation of the God representation occurs in relation to a diverse collection of sources and experiences:

The type of God each individual produces as a first representation is the compounded image resulting from all these contributing factors—the pre-oedipal psychic situation, the beginning stage of the oedipal complex, the characteristics of the parents, the predicaments of the child with each of his parents and siblings, the general religious, social, and intellectual background of the household.<sup>26</sup>

Nor does this happen only once according to Rizzuto: “The God representation changes along with us and our primary objects in the lifelong metamorphosis of becoming ourselves in a context of other relevant beings.”<sup>27</sup> She continues: “Our description of a God representation entitles us to say only that this is the way God is seen at this particular moment of a person's psychic equilibrium.”<sup>28</sup> In addition, Rizzuto takes exception to Freud's notion that belief is born of immaturity: “If one is willing to accept that a mature relation with one's parents is possible, then a mature relation with the God representation should also be possible.”<sup>29</sup> Rizzuto ends this chapter with a response to Freud's wish that more among us would “do away with the illusion of religion.”<sup>30</sup> She replies:

As long as men can follow their notion of causality to its very end and have their questions answered by their parents, every human child will have some precarious God representation made out of his parental representations...as long as the capacity to symbolize, fantasize, and create superhuman beings remains in men (and child analysts know to what extent all children do these things) God will remain, at least in the unconscious.<sup>31</sup>

Rizzuto's last line bears repeating: "Freud's ideal man without illusions will have to wait for a new breed of human beings, perhaps a new civilization."<sup>32</sup>

### **God as Transitional Object**

Following a thorough explanation of the history and theory of object relations, and a detailed analysis of four case studies, Rizzuto provides a synthesis of her theoretical reflections and clinical research. Her central thesis is that God is a special transitional object.<sup>33</sup> A brief summary of D.W. Winnicott's work will help to contextualize Rizzuto's claim. Winnicott, co-founder of the British Object Relations School, believes that between the internal reality of the individual and the external reality of the environment there exists a psychic area, or transitional space, to which internal and external reality both contribute.<sup>34</sup> Within this transitional space reside transitional objects (e.g., teddy bears, toys, blankets, imaginary friends, etc.) that enable infants to cope with stimuli, integrate life experiences and develop a cohesive self.<sup>35</sup> The same dynamic holds true for adults. Only in later life do we graduate to more sophisticated transitional objects such as art, music, culture, religion and science.<sup>36</sup> For Winnicott, this transitional space is the substance of illusion. But the term illusion has a paradigmatically different meaning for Winnicott than for Freud. Freud depicts illusion as contrary to reality.

Winnicott argues, and Rizzuto emphatically agrees, that illusion is a necessary developmental force; that it can be playful and positive; that it is real inasmuch as it exists as a powerfully real mental representation; and, most notably, that it need not be negatively judged by Freud's concept of reality testing, which concretely fixes 'reality,' 'objectivity' and 'truth' in the physical world.<sup>37</sup> In this Winnicottian light, just because illusion is betwixt and between the internal and the external does not place it at odds with reality; the physical and the psychological are different, not hierarchically ordered so as to make the former superior to the latter.<sup>38</sup> And while Winnicott does little more than situate God's existence within this transitional space,

Rizzuto develops a comprehensive framework to explain what this theory means for self and society.

To say that God is a transitional object is to say, according to Rizzuto, that God is a developmental necessity for most individuals in the Western world:

It is a central thesis of this book that no child in the Western world brought up in ordinary circumstances completes the oedipal cycle without forming at least a rudimentary God representation, which he may use for belief or not. The rest of developmental life may leave that representation untouched as the individual continues to revise parent and self-representations during the life cycle.<sup>39</sup>

To say that God is special in this regard is to say, in Rizzuto's view, that God, unlike toys or teddy bears, does not disappear in the transition from childhood to adulthood: "The psychic process of creating and finding God—this personalized representational transitional object—never ceases in the course of human life."<sup>40</sup> Rizzuto continues: "Once formed, that complex [God] representation cannot be made to disappear; it can only be repressed, transformed, or used."<sup>41</sup> To say that God is part and parcel of our mental life is to say, *pace* Rizzuto, that God can contribute to psychic balance: "It is this characteristic of being always there for love, cold disdain, mistreatment, fear, hatred, or any other human emotion that lends the object God its psychic usefulness...God remains a transitional object at the service of gaining leverage with oneself, with others, and with life itself."<sup>42</sup> To say, finally, that "reality and illusion are not contradictory terms" is to say that belief is not necessarily pathological:

Belief in God or absence of belief are no indicators of any type of pathology. They are indicators only of the particular private balance each individual has achieved at a given moment in his relations with primary objects and all other relevant people, whether or not he uses the mediatory services of a transitional object for this process.<sup>43</sup>

The book concludes with Rizzuto situating her work vis-à-vis Freud's own: "The result of my study indicates that Freud was basically correct in suggesting that God has his origins in parental imagos and that God comes to the child at the time of resolution of the oedipal crisis."<sup>44</sup> Even so, Rizzuto refuses to follow Freud's argument any further:

I have arrived at the point where my departure from Freud is inevitable. Freud considers God and religion a wishful childish illusion...I must disagree. Reality and illusion are not contradictory terms. Psychic reality... cannot occur without that specifically human transitional space for play and illusions. To ask a man to renounce a God he believes in may be as cruel and as meaningless as wrenching a child from his teddy bear so that he can grow up. We know nowadays that teddy bears are not toys for spoiled children but part of the illusory substance of growing up.<sup>45</sup>

She continues: "Asking a mature, functioning individual to renounce his God would be like asking Freud to renounce his own creation, psychoanalysis, and the 'illusory' promise of what scientific knowledge can do."<sup>46</sup> No individual, according to Rizzuto, can live without illusions: "The type of illusion we select—science, religion, or something else—reveals our personal history and the transitional space each of us has created between his objects and himself to find 'a resting place' to live in."<sup>47</sup> Finally, Rizzuto has a message for contemporary psychoanalysis:

The cultural stance of contemporary psychoanalysis is that of Freud: religion is a neurosis based on wishes. Freud has been quoted over and over again without considering his statements in a critical light. In their training our generation of analysts have not received the detailed understanding I think is necessary to appreciate the specific contribution of the God representation to psychic balance.<sup>48</sup>

Notably, Rizzuto includes a brief epilogue in which she quotes what she considers to be two Freuds: a Freud who, in his words, "*believes* that man lives on the bread of knowledge alone"; and a

Freud who writes that “the idea of a single great god...*must* be believed.”<sup>49</sup> Rizzuto says she identifies with the latter Freud.

\* \* \*

### **Rizzuto’s Freud**

What are the assumptions, strategies and formations that underlie and animate Rizzuto’s representation of Freud as reconciler of psychoanalysis and religion? To be clear: Rizzuto never utters the term reconciler herself. I rely on “reconciler” as a shorthand way to describe how Rizzuto uses Freud as her perpetual frame of reference: she not only compares and contrasts her theories to his time and again but she also corrects his statements and clarifies his legacy in pursuit of her conciliatory vision for psychoanalysis and religion. Perhaps Rizzuto’s biggest assumption is that she cannot sell her conciliatory vision without first transforming Freud from barrier to bridge. To do so, Rizzuto routinely commends Freud’s contributions to the field of psychoanalysis and religion. What is more, she often situates herself as standing on his shoulders for a better view of these complex phenomena: she talks of taking a long journey *with* him, of following *in* his footsteps and of answering his *own* questions. The message is subtle but simple. Her study is an extension of Freud’s work, not an inquisition into it. Because the psychoanalytic community has historically viewed religion through Freud’s eyes, the last thing Rizzuto wants to do is shatter their most identifiable lens. Instead she aims to re focus their attention by re-casting the idea that Freud has religion already figured out. Consider the following reflections from her introduction:

No single study could be either so comprehensive or so painstaking that major mistakes would not lie side by side with useful insights...Making theory is always a task too big for us...only with modesty and humility that one dares to talk in theoretical terms...theory exists to assist in the understanding of complex reality: it is not reality itself...Therefore theoretical considerations must be taken with a grain of salt: insofar as they help us understand the phenomena, they may be accepted, not as truth but as the best explanation so far of what we see.<sup>50</sup>

By demonstrating the contingencies embedded in her own theories on religion, Rizzuto challenges us to see Freud's work in much the same way: as neither unquestionably true nor timeless, but as historically bound, culturally specific and always in need of better explanation. And notice how Freud's name never appears in this passage. Rizzuto conveys Freud's fatal methodological flaw—of overestimating the value of theory and underestimating the need for clinical data—without broadcasting it as such. Here, as in numerous other instances, she gets her point across without sounding pedantic or iconoclastic to the psychoanalytic community. She disagrees with Freud, to be sure, but she never ridicules or renounces his contributions. Hers is a delicate balance between affirming his foresight and revising his rigidity. In this way, Rizzuto takes a page out of her own theoretical playbook, which maintains that in order for the God representation to remain relevant and effective for the individual it must be revised to keep pace with developmental changes.<sup>51</sup> Rizzuto is more or less doing the same to Freud: she revises his most rigid claims in order to keep pace with her conciliatory vision for psychoanalysis and religion.

As for sources, Rizzuto draws from a range of Freud's scholarly writings. And she is scholarly in her approach to these writings. She quotes Freud directly, systematically and with citations; she provides a developmental history of his theories; and she situates the impact of his work and her own within an, albeit brief, historical framework. Like Erich Fromm before her, however, Ana-Maria Rizzuto opts not to engage Freud's biography. This omission may seem trivial for those who view her study as devoted to Freud's theory of religion as opposed to his relationship to religion; or for those who know of Rizzuto's 1998 book *Why Did Freud Reject God?*, which deals almost entirely with Freud's biography. It is in that 1998 book devoted to Freud's biography, however, that Rizzuto makes an interesting point:

What Freud did not reveal to his biographers in personal detail about his religious evolution appeared in his theoretical conceptions of the formation and transformations of religious belief. Freud's religious

theories can be read as an unintended psychobiography of his private and unwitting transformation in a 'godless Jew.'<sup>52</sup>

Here Rizzuto confirms a core analytic truth at least as old as psychoanalysis itself: that the line between theory and theorist cannot be so easily or neatly drawn. If this truth is central to a proper understanding of Freud's understanding of religion, and if this truth is as self-evident as Rizzuto claims in *Why Did Freud Reject God?*, then why does she fail to address it in *The Birth of the Living God?*

Now let us turn directly to Rizzuto's text. Why does Rizzuto devote such detail to her methodology? In a word, it is precisely what sets her study apart from all the rest. Rizzuto rightly observes that no one since Freud has published an in-depth study of the God representation.<sup>53</sup> And I would argue that even his work pales in comparison, not least because Freud's theories are so far removed from his clinical practice—a detail Jonathan Lear seizes on to classify Freud's views on religion as the least valuable aspect of his life's work.<sup>54</sup> That Rizzuto's study is different, complex and comprehensive, not to mention unrivaled in its clinical sophistication, is made obvious by this meticulous march through her methodology. More pointedly, this particular exercise models the difference she hopes to see develop within psychoanalysis: namely, a shift toward a clinically-based engagement with religion and away from superficial responses of rejection or indifference.<sup>55</sup> In effect, her change in method points to a change in mindset, as she seeks to convince her readers that clinicians can no longer afford to deny or downgrade the role the God representation plays in their own lives or in the lives of their patients; that a serious engagement with religion can yield real and lasting benefits for both analytic training and clinical practice; and that simply parroting back Freud's statements on religion, without considering them in a critical light, is no longer a viable option for psychoanalysts.<sup>56</sup>

To prepare the way for her conciliatory vision for psychoanalysis and religion, Rizzuto seeks to revise two of Freud's most rigid claims: 1) that religion is an infantile wish that must be

outgrown; and 2) that religion is a collective neurosis. Rizzuto tackles this first notion by relying on her clinical experience to show how one's maturity level does not dictate or necessarily determine one's propensity for belief or unbelief.<sup>57</sup> She then argues that religion, far from being an infantile wish, is actually a developmental necessity; that every person reared in the West possesses a God representation to praise or punish, to obey or ignore.<sup>58</sup> In doing so, Rizzuto makes atheism (i.e., denial of God's existence) an untenable position from a psychodynamic perspective, because God exists, according to her schema, as an inextinguishable part of every person's psychic life— independent of belief or unbelief. Thus envisaged, one can deny the importance of God's existence, but one cannot deny its permanence. Again, Rizzuto is sure to circle back around to Freud, arguing that he too believed that “there is no such thing as a person without a God representation.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, Rizzuto seeks to revise Freud's notion that religion is a collective neurosis by maintaining that belief may serve neurotic ends some of the time, but certainly not all of the time. For Rizzuto, neither belief nor unbelief is born of pathology, though both can be exploited for neurotic ends.<sup>60</sup> By setting his sights solely on belief, insists Rizzuto, Freud paints religion into a corner: after all, when unbelief is taken for granted as normal and mature, belief is bound to be seen in opposite terms as abnormal and immature.<sup>61</sup> Rizzuto aims to right Freud's wrongs by revealing the extent to which belief can contribute to positive ego functions, such as psychic balance, the integration of life experiences, both major and minor, and the development of a cohesive self.<sup>62</sup>

At the beginning of her book, Rizzuto readily admits that Freud has done much to curb psychoanalysis's interest in religion:

Intentionally or unintentionally, he [Freud] gave the world several generations of psychoanalysts who, coming to him from all walks of life, dropped whatever religion they had at the doors of their institutes. If they refused to do so, they managed to dissociate their beliefs from their analytic training and practice, with the sad effect of having an important area of their own lives untouched by



their training. If they dealt with religion during their own analyses, that was the beginning and the end of it.<sup>63</sup>

By the book's end, Rizzuto deems this type of mindless, wholesale rejection of or indifference to religious belief as more than a theoretical tragedy; it can lead to real clinical lapses based on unchecked countertransference.<sup>64</sup> She envisions her study as helping to reverse this trend within the psychoanalytic community: "I hope that my work contributes to a deeper awareness of the significance of belief, so that in the future training of analysts areas of countertransference in work with patients can be minimized."<sup>65</sup> In this way, Rizzuto's work serves as a course correction for psychoanalysis's interface with religion. But, again, it is how she goes about her task that is especially telling. Rizzuto seeks to revise rather than renounce Freud's thinking and Freud's legacy.

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### **Environmental Conditions: Pre-1979**

The golden age of American psychoanalysis spanned the period from 1945 to 1965. One observer of this era writes: "The way of life of Americans in the fifties was, by and large, a psychoanalytic one."<sup>66</sup> By the late 1950s, meanwhile, psychoanalysis's interest in religion was waxing and waning. A 1958 article in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* surveys eight books from the decade devoted to "reconciling psychiatry (and psychoanalysis) with religion."<sup>67</sup> The author describes the backdrop for these books as follows:

[T]here can exist no doubt that the relationships between psychiatrists and clergymen have become increasingly cordial, that organizations for their active cooperation have been growing in number and size, and that official sanction for such mutual professional relationships is more than willingly given.<sup>68</sup>

Yet the author also admits that the prevailing tendency among modern psychoanalysts is simply to avoid or dismiss religion.<sup>69</sup> This last observation may explain why only a few analysts were actually writing on religion between the 1950s and the 1970s.

Their contributions, although marginalized by mainstream psychoanalysis, helped set the stage for the broader success of Ana-Maria Rizzuto's clinical study.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, religion was negotiating major change too. American culture and consciousness was moving away from notions of self-mastery to ideals of self-realization, from the image of a sacred canopy to the realities of social construction and secularization.<sup>70</sup> Much of the change, according to Brooks Holifield, can be traced back to America's deepening devotion to psychology:

Psychology, like God, seemed omnipresent, if not omnipotent. Parents sought psychological counsel from best-sellers on child care; teachers learned to recognize the covert meaning of drawings, essays, and polite exchanges; popular magazines—*Journal of Living*, *Your Personality*, *Your Life*—offered psychological wisdom for twenty-five cents; nine out of ten major American newspapers carried at least one column of psychological advice; and some apartment complexes on the West Coast included psychological assistance for tenants in their rental fee. <sup>71</sup>

As a result, religion's relevance and responsiveness were being tested like never before. American Protestantism was ahead of the curve in developing a language of the mind. Its reinvention as "God's psychiatry" was nearly complete by the time most other religious communities were ready to fully accept the scope of Freud's influence.<sup>72</sup> But even Protestantism had its protesters who, on the one hand, interpreted the change to American culture and consciousness as fundamental and lasting and, on the other, believed that religion was nevertheless more than the sum of its psychological parts—and that theology, in particular, had a higher calling to lead rather than follow the times.

### **Psychoanalysis in America—From Crest to Crisis**

"The 'mushroom growth' of psychoanalysis in America...as well as Freud's status as a modern Socrates, the 'most famous psychiatrist of all time,' were clear by 1947," notes Nathan

Hale.<sup>73</sup> Also evident was the wedding of psychoanalysis and psychiatry “celebrated in the cure of the war neuroses and the triumphs of early psychosomatic medicine.”<sup>74</sup> Soon a medical degree became standard fare for passage into the practicing ranks of American psychoanalysis.<sup>75</sup> Upon immigrating to America, some of psychoanalysis’s most notable names, including Otto Fenichel, Theodor Reik and Paul Federn (all endorsed by Freud himself at one point), were told, ironically enough, to complete medical training before continuing their practices in the States.<sup>76</sup> The union eventually ruptured in dramatic fashion, as detailed below, but not before psychoanalysis shared in the success of psychiatry’s increased exposure and expansion.<sup>77</sup>

In the 1950s, meanwhile, Freud and psychoanalysis were seamlessly woven into American culture. References cropped up everywhere from mass magazines like *Time* and *Life* to news sources like *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*, from the *Saturday Review* to *Scientific America*, from books to novels to poems.<sup>78</sup> Hollywood embraced the ardor as well. The Motion Picture Association reported that during this decade at least 10 percent of annual releases were films with a “psychological” story line.<sup>79</sup> “After years of showing psychiatrists as absurd or sinister, for a short period, from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, coinciding precisely with the high point of psychoanalytic influence, psychiatrists were presented as humane and effective.”<sup>80</sup> Broadway soon followed suit too. In 1957, for instance, psychiatrists were represented in at least five successful Broadway plays.<sup>81</sup> Even the President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, weighed in by penning a congratulatory word to American psychoanalysts on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Freud’s birth in 1956.<sup>82</sup> Less obvious, but no less important, was the way in which Freudian ideas and therapeutic parlance pervaded the everyday expressions of Americans.<sup>83</sup>

Popularization’s most critical engine was perhaps the era’s unprecedented access to Freud’s life and work. The 1950s saw the publishing of Ernest Jones’s three-volume biography of Freud to worldwide acclaim, not to mention James Strachey’s highly anticipated release of the first volumes of *The Standard*

*Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* By 1966, all twenty-four volumes of Strachey's translation of Freud's work were in mass circulation. As Eli Zaretsky rightly observes,

“[t]here is no comparable edition in English for any other major modern European thinker, not even Marx, Weber, or Nietzsche.”<sup>84</sup> Finally, 1966 marked the same year Philip Rieff so aptly captured the collective effervescence of this period in the turn of a phrase—“the triumph of the therapeutic.”<sup>85</sup>

Even so, by the mid-1960s, the tables were already turning, as the popularization that had fast-tracked psychoanalysis's rise was now propelling its decline. As Hale explains:

[N]early all the factors that had contributed to the rise of psychoanalytic psychiatry were in part reversed: doubts grew about the scientific validity and effectiveness of psychoanalysis; alternatives to the psychoanalytic psychodynamic style arose; psychoanalysis lost its identification with psychiatric reform; social conditions for psychoanalytic practice changed; partly because of a lack of demonstrable results, government and private funding for psychoanalytic training and research dwindled; some psychoanalysts retreated from the new therapeutic fields they had staked out, among them, psychosomatic medicine and the treatment of schizophrenia.<sup>86</sup>

Zaretsky would undoubtedly add two more variables to this list. First, psychoanalysis lost its non-conformist edge: “If postwar U.S. analysis was not uniformly antifeminist, it tended nevertheless to enforce gender and sexual normalization...it had become an agent of rationalization, a virtual emblem of the ‘organized man’ conformism and cookie-cutter domesticity the age so dreaded.”<sup>87</sup> Indeed, as Russell Jacoby reminds us: “It is news to American students that a radical, bohemian, and political ethos commonly pervaded European psychoanalysis. Few hints of the culture that prevailed in Vienna and Berlin remain in American psychoanalysis.”<sup>88</sup> Second, psychoanalysts became too complacent with themselves and their surroundings:

[A] scientific culture sanctioned analysts in not reflecting upon themselves, individually or collectively. Nothing could be less analytic, yet analysis was a far less efficacious treatment than its practitioners claimed. As a result, psychoanalysis was often a community in bad faith, boasting of success and ignoring failures, distorting classroom presentations, and denying itself the means for self-correction.<sup>89</sup>

Also driving this downward spiral was psychoanalysis's split with psychiatry. By the mid-1960s, psychiatry considered psychoanalysis more a burden than boon: "A movement began within psychiatry calling for the mass delivery of community mental health services, and in some quarters questioning the entire medical model of psychiatry, with which American psychoanalysis had become identified...For such critics psychoanalysis was an unproven luxury, limited to the minor distresses of the well-to-do."<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, psychiatry was banking its future on the robust growth of pharmacology and on major advancements in mind and brain research as well as in the burgeoning field of genetics.<sup>91</sup> Psychoanalysis, and its "talking cure," was on a noticeably different page than somatic medicine. By the 1970s, psychiatrists strongly reasserted their medical identity over and against a psychoanalysis that was being increasingly stereotyped as too subjective and unscientific.<sup>92</sup> As Hale makes plain: "One of the unintended consequences of the American medicalization of psychoanalysis was that it became subject to the changing medical interpretations of what was both scientific and pragmatically effective."<sup>93</sup>

Division between psychoanalysis and psychiatry gave way to divorce in 1980, when the American Psychiatric Association, upon adopting its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III* (DSM III), failed to include psychoanalytic categories or explanations in its diagnostic bible for clinicians.<sup>94</sup> That same year Janet Malcolm, a seasoned staff writer at *The New Yorker*, published a behind-the-scenes look at the limitations and laments associated with psychoanalysis, branding it "the impossible profession."<sup>95</sup> By the mid 1980s, meanwhile, revisionist scholarship and critical Freud studies were on the rise; other therapies were selling themselves as more affordable and effective; and conflict between the various psychoanalytic schools continued to brew

over differences in theory, technique and training—all of which added up to a veritable crisis, leading both insiders and outsiders to wonder aloud if psychoanalysis's days were numbered.<sup>96</sup>

### **Psychoanalysis's Response to Religion**

From the 1950s to the 1970s, as noted above, only a handful of psychoanalytic writers were publishing regularly on the topic of religion. Chief among them were Gregory Zilboorg, Mortimer Ostow, Gordon Allport, Harry Guntrip, Paul Pruyser and W.W. Meissner. Meissner's study of religion dates back to the early sixties, but since his most notable publication appears in 1984, we will discuss his work in this chapter's last section. Let us briefly consider the contributions of the remaining analysts.

“Provided Freud's personal views and emotions about religion are not taken as a dogmatic part of the theory and practice of psychoanalysis,” according to Zilboorg, “there is nothing in the structure and the dynamics of the psychic apparatus as described by Freud that a true believer and religious thinker cannot accept...and that in accepting these he would not have to violate his theology or do any injury to his faith.”<sup>97</sup> In addition, Zilboorg places religious truth on par with the scientific truth often associated with psychoanalysis: “Science and theology [the science of the knowledge of God] have a great deal in common... neither has a right to seek exclusive dominion over man's knowledge, since fundamentally they are one and spring from one source and mystery.”<sup>98</sup>

For Ostow, “Believing is almost as necessary to humans as eating.”<sup>99</sup> But that does not mean all religion merits belief. On the contrary, Ostow thinks it essential to “distinguish between good and bad religions on the grounds of their social usefulness.”<sup>100</sup> Gregory Zilboorg and Mortimer Ostow were psychoanalytic psychiatrists. Both were unafraid of being branded believers. And both absorbed the initial backlash reserved for any analyst bold enough to break rank and speak of religion in mostly sympathetic terms.

Harry Guntrip and Paul Pruyser were psychoanalytic psychologists. More than self-described believers, both were active leaders in their religious communities. Guntrip, an analysand of W.R.D. Fairbairn and D.W. Winnicott, was a widely recognized, well-respected voice within the British Object Relations School. He was also a Methodist minister. Pruyser worked at the Menninger Foundation, in addition to serving as president of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, on the editorial boards of *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* and *Pastoral Psychology* and as adjunct lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas.<sup>101</sup> He was also a member and elder of the Presbyterian Church.<sup>102</sup>

In *Personality Structure and Human Interaction*, Guntrip summarizes Freud's position as follows: "For Freud, as scientist and rationalist, religion was at worst nothing but superstition, and at best infantile phantasy. He was not only biased but hostile to both religion and philosophy."<sup>103</sup> Guntrip instead prefers the contributions of Fairbairn, cofounder of the British Object Relations School, who views religion as:

an impressive activity and experience of human beings throughout the centuries, and is to be approached not with hostility as a mere nuisance, irrelevance and brake on progress, but with sympathetic insight...religion provides a more illuminating analogy to the aims and processes of psychotherapy than either science or education do...religion is *about* the human being's innate need to find good object-relationships in which to live his life.<sup>104</sup>

At minimum, Guntrip helps lay the groundwork for object relations becoming *the* theoretical orientation of choice for analysts determined to engage religion in new or different ways than those prescribed by Freud.

Pruyser proclaims "religion is here to stay" because it is a psychodynamic reality "so manifest, so concretized, so omnipresent, so patently real in its works and its trappings that anyone wishing to discard it or evade it or escape from it will have a hard time doing so...efforts at stepping out of it are likely to result only in finding relocations within it."<sup>105</sup> Even so, like Ostow, Pruyser takes exception to the idea that religion is all

good all the time: “Historically, and in the life histories of individuals, religion shows excesses and shortages, progressions and regressions, infantile and mature forms.”<sup>106</sup>

Specifically, Pruyser maintains that “religion of the evangelical, conservative, and dogmatic kind is dysfunctional.”<sup>107</sup> Bad religion aside, Pruyser provides the most eloquent defense of good religion’s benefits when he says:

Religion as a way in which man’s ‘talent for the numinous’ is exercised for making existential discoveries, for the melioration not of man’s lot but of his heart and mind, for giving form and content to our sense of wonder and our capacity for admiration, for broadening our view of reality so that we are open to the immense universe in which we have our being. Is there any hope that the religious quest may bring forth new answers to old problems, give new vistas to curious seekers, or approximate more closely the transformation of man from a sad into a happy creature? Yes, I think there is hope.<sup>108</sup>

In *Between Belief and Unbelief*, Pruyser describes the vicissitudes of belief and disbelief as follows:

We tend to believe only what is momentous for us and to disbelieve the things for which we have no use. This makes belief and disbelief situational: much depends on where we are in life, what we are experiencing, where we feel we are going, and what we feel we need at this moment...Beliefs have inevitable relativity...We are all involved in growth processes, and growth means change. Our beliefs need to grow with us, and we must grow with our growing beliefs.<sup>109</sup>

The parallel between Pruyser’s discussion of belief/disbelief and Rizzuto’s idea of the God representation is striking. Both constructs are developmentally significant, self-serving, relative and referential, malleable and inescapable. Moreover, both are grounded in Winnicott’s idea of transitional space. According to Pruyser:

The transitional sphere and transitional object are in my view, and I think in Winnicott’s, the first testing ground of belief. Belief stems neither from the isolated id nor from an isolated external world. It arises when the id and the outer world are brought judiciously together by the contrivance of



play in which the old and the young, the serious and the light-hearted, the dependent and the autonomous, the braggarts and the timorous, the fantasists and the realists, come together to practice that greatest gift of all gifts: to play and to make beliefs.<sup>110</sup>

Although Rizzuto does not quote Pruyser directly, his work serves as a helpful, plainspoken precursor to her more complex, clinically-based treatment of a common set of themes, including the general pervasiveness of religion, the necessary distinction between mature and immature manifestations, the relative and referential nature of religion and the significance of developing a theoretical framework that does not pit reality versus illusion or science versus religion.

The aforementioned analysts were the most frequent and (in)famous contributors to the field of psychoanalysis and religion, but certainly not the only ones. In his 1961 Presidential Address to the American Psychoanalytic Association, Jacob Arlow argues that “[p]revious studies of religion and rituals emphasized the similarity to the structure of the obsessional neurosis. This is too narrow a framework within which to view the richness of religious experience.”<sup>111</sup> In a 1963 article for the *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Association for Psychoanalysis*, Abraham Kaplan distinguishes between mature and immature religion, maintaining that neurosis is no more frequent in religion than it is in art, politics or love.<sup>112</sup> In a 1970 article for the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Arnaldo Apolito commends religion for helping individuals make sense of their existence and for providing a bigger purpose for their lives.<sup>113</sup>

Nor was sympathy the only message being sent during this period. Chapter One detailed the blend of indifference and ire that Fromm’s text evoked within the psychoanalytic community in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1976, William Saffady conducted a review of new developments in the psychoanalytic study of religion and concludes:

The psychodynamics of religion have been delineated, examined, and accepted. Notably absent is the view, previously found so frequently in religious and some psychoanalytic literature, that in religion psychoanalysis

confronts a mystery beyond human comprehension. Religion must now demonstrate that it can be healthy. The burden of proof has passed to the other side.<sup>114</sup>

### **Religion's Response to Psychoanalysis**

As Ann Rosenberg rightly observes: "Protestant writers showed new sophistication in dealing with psychology in the 1960s. Obviously the battle for acceptance of psychoanalytic concepts in pastoral work had been won."<sup>115</sup> Rosenberg explains this sophistication as follows:

many Protestants viewed aspects of the human condition in terms which had been first suggested by psychoanalysis... ministers generally acknowledged the importance of good object relations in the life of the individual, and that they preceded a healthy religiosity. Speaking of sinners as sick rather than evil people, who suffered from neuroses which were generally rooted in childhood experiences, ministers sought clinical training to learn to make pastoral counseling therapeutic.<sup>116</sup>

By 1963, the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) was established. With more than 150 pastoral counseling centers across the United States, the AAPC provided a formal network for counselors as well as professional guidance for centers.

By 1967, the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) was training scores of ministers in clinical theory and technique. Both the AAPC and the ACPE reflected the rise of a new population of Protestant professionals: pastoral psychologists. On a practical level, pastoral psychologists "trained seminarians and ordained ministers in this new discipline [pastoral psychology], and they tried to professionalize the pastoral counselors by developing standards for accreditation of individuals and training programs."<sup>117</sup> On a conceptual level, meanwhile, pastoral psychologists worked to integrate psychological insights into pastoral theology.<sup>118</sup>

That American Protestantism was reading the times was good; that it was responding to major shifts in culture and consciousness—with a redoubled emphasis on pastoral care,

counseling and psychology—was even better. But at what point does integration slide into submission? Holifield, a contemporary historian of the pastoral care movement, looks back on this era and its effects with lament:

The problem is that our era has evidenced a singular preoccupation with psychological modes of thinking—modes which have tended to refashion the entire religious life of Protestants in the image of the therapeutic. When Harry Emerson Fosdick referred to the sermon as counseling on a large scale, he forgot that Protestant sermons, at their best, have interpreted an ancient text that resists reduction to the psychological. When religious educators transformed the church school in accord with the canons of psychological relevance, they often forgot that education in the church should sometimes invite Christians to encounter a body of knowledge that satisfies no immediate or utilitarian needs. When theologians translated traditional categories into psychological terms, they often inadvertently consigned religious discourse to the sphere of the inward and private.<sup>119</sup>

Holifield believes American Protestantism would have been better off if pastoral counseling were “not exalted as the paradigm of clerical activity.”<sup>120</sup> Holifield was writing in 1983; however, his wariness about psychology’s ever-expanding influence was hardly new—especially among theologians. In his 1968 edited volume *The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology*, Peter Homans observes that some theologians “have employed Freud extensively to implement their constructive work; some use psychoanalysis in a partial and limited way; and some have sought to define their normative position in a rather thorough criticism of Freud.”<sup>121</sup> The strategies are different, to be sure, but the thread connecting them all is a steadfast belief that “theological reality in the person transcends psychological reality.”<sup>122</sup> Two years later, in *Theology after Freud*, Homans admits Freud’s work (i.e., “a psychology of secularization”) has so thoroughly infiltrated American Protestantism, via pastoral psychology and existential theology, that “there is no simple return” to the theology of old.<sup>123</sup> Homans’s solution is a new dialectical theology that engages Freud, psychology and secularization but does not lose its soul in the process: “Freud

moves against theology; but theology points the way for a higher psychology.”<sup>124</sup>

\* \* \*

### **The Reception of Rizzuto’s Text**

Ana-Maria Rizzuto is one of the most recognized figures in the field of psychoanalysis and religion. In the words of one clinical psychologist: “If the symbol of Freud as ‘father’ of psychoanalysis has been used to explain his historical position, certainly Rizzuto is the ‘mother’ of all attempts to explicate a developmental and clinical psychoanalytic theory of religious experience.”<sup>125</sup> Within a decade of its 1979 publication, her book *The Birth of the Living God* was widely considered a classic within the field of psychoanalysis and religion.<sup>126</sup> For John McDargh, a professor of religion and psychology, it was as much about what Rizzuto symbolized as what she said:

The impact of Rizzuto’s work cannot be attributed solely to her development of a particular research methodology, however. It must also be related to what the publication of her study represents in the history of the psychoanalytic movement’s waxing and waning culture war with Western religion. Here, for the first time, was a fully credentialed psychoanalyst demonstrating in a careful, rigorous fashion the *clinical* utility of taking an individual’s idiosyncratic religious beliefs with great seriousness *both* as another ‘royal road to the unconscious’ for the clinical *and* as a resource for the psychic well-being of the patient (and not simply an index of personal pathology).<sup>127</sup>

And while Rizzuto’s work was creating a buzz within religious circles at that time, it “was greeted either with silence or with critical polemic from within the psychoanalytic establishment.”<sup>128</sup> Let us now take a closer look at how Rizzuto’s text played within and beyond these communities.

### **Psychoanalytic Circles**

Only one of the major psychoanalytic journals, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, reviewed Rizzuto’s book at length. And it amounts to a thinly veiled upbraiding: “hers *is* a brief for religion...Object relations theory is thus used as a crypto-Jungian basis for a

psychoanalytic theology.”<sup>129</sup> The reviewer deems religion “a persistent group fetish” and insists, “[t]here can be no compromise between the preoedipal and oedipal authoritarian character and the postoedipal human chary of all belief. Any psychoanalysis which admits such a compromise reveals a lacunar resistance, an incompleteness of analysis in the analyst.”<sup>130</sup> I think it is safe to say that at the time of this review in 1981 most psychoanalysts were generally unsympathetic (i.e., opposed, uninterested, indifferent, etc.) to religion. If we fast-forward two decades later, however, we begin to see just how much the tide had turned within the psychoanalytic community. Otto Kernberg, one of the most recognized and revered clinicians of the past half-century, has spent nearly four decades writing on a stunningly wide range of analytic issues.<sup>131</sup> That religion piqued his interest for the first time in the year 2000 is neither accidental nor inconsequential.<sup>132</sup> By making a case for the social and psychological benefits of mature religious belief, Kernberg’s argument both reflects and reinforces the extent to which the study of religion moved from the margins to the mainstream within the psychoanalytic community.<sup>133</sup> For instance, compare the difference in tone and temperament between Kernberg’s words in 2000 and those of the aforementioned reviewer in 1981:

In contrast to Freud, I would conclude that science and reason cannot replace religion, that religiosity as a fundamental human capability and function has to be integrated in our understanding of normality and pathology, and that a universal system of morality is an unavoidable precondition for the survival of humanity. Psychoanalysis has given us fundamental information regarding the origin of religiosity, but not a world conception or an arbitration of the philosophical and theological discussion regarding God.<sup>134</sup>

Kernberg gives credit to Zilboorg, Ostow, Meissner and Rizzuto for advancing the field of psychoanalysis and religion.<sup>135</sup> By the late 1980s, truth be told, a whole new generation was contributing significantly to the study of religion, including: Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, Paul Vitz, Peter Gay, Stanley Leavy, Julia Kristeva, Edwin Wallace, David Black, Robert Paul, Neville Symington, James Jones, and Jeffrey Rubin. To be clear: by no means does this latter generation display the same type of unity (i.e., shared sympathy, conceptual continuity, conciliatory

vision, etc.) the former possessed. That absence of unity speaks to the presence of difference, which reveals just how far the field of psychoanalysis and religion had come: namely, from the business of a select few to the concern of a good many.

### **Religious Circles**

“The generally appreciative scholarly reception that *The Birth of the Living God* received from psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapists, pastoral counselors, and research psychologists studying religion suggests that it was a work that was,” as McDargh rightly observes, “particularly timely and responsive to the intellectual needs of that sector.”<sup>136</sup> Reviews of Rizzuto’s book appeared in over a half dozen national journals devoted to the study of religion, pastoral care, pastoral counseling or theology.<sup>137</sup>

One reviewer from the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* questions her originality, among other things, before concluding: “Rizzuto’s book is nevertheless most valuable—above all because she seeks to remedy rather than, as is the fashion, reject Freud’s theory and because she bases her views on empirical case studies rather than, as is the fashion, theological speculation.”<sup>138</sup> Paul Pruyser, writing in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, registers his concerns with Rizzuto’s method and mechanics before saying the book “greatly deserves to be read and studied.”<sup>139</sup> And though Peter Homans finds Rizzuto’s “psychotheological” approach (i.e., “the attempt to ground traditional religious claims in psychological theory”) highly problematic, he nonetheless recommends the book to both “psychologists and theologians” in *The Journal of Religion*.<sup>140</sup>

By the late 1980s, the field’s most prolific contributors were psychoanalytically oriented academicians teaching in religion departments, interdisciplinary programs and theology schools. Donald Capps, James Jones, Judith Van Herik, Ralph Hood, Janet Liebman Jacobs, Diane Jonte-Pace, Carl Raschke and John McDargh are the first leaders that come to mind. McDargh rightly points out that he, his colleagues and the field in general owe Rizzuto a great deal of gratitude for the pioneering effect of her work.<sup>141</sup> I would modify McDargh’s observation in one

important way: it was Rizzuto's *The Birth of the Living God* from 1979, coupled with W.W. Meissner's *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* from 1984, that helped launch the field of psychoanalysis and religion to unprecedented heights. Before we discuss the field's transformation, let us briefly review Meissner's publication.

Meissner's *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* reads like a companion piece to Rizzuto's study. Meissner, a practicing psychoanalyst and Roman Catholic priest, believes analysts must be willing and able to "address, rethink, and reshape this adversarial dialectic" between psychoanalysis and religion.<sup>142</sup> His history of this antagonism echoes Rizzuto's theory that Freud's hostility toward religion has haunted the clinical community for decades:

Psychoanalysts are not comfortable with religion. They tend to regard religious thinking and conviction as suspect, even to hold them in contempt at times. There is a latent persuasion, not often expressed or even articulated with the inner voice, that religious ideas are inherently neurotic, self-deceptive, and illusive. These are the residues within the psychoanalytic tradition of Freud's own idiosyncratic attitudes. Psychoanalysis lives on the inheritance of his fundamental insights; even though the science has moved well beyond the limited perspective he provided, his basic positions remain a powerful force in the thinking of many psychoanalysts. The prejudices are rarely expressed and remain more or less implicit, but at times they can be heard with striking impact.<sup>143</sup>

Meissner, like Rizzuto, takes issue with Freud's method, arguing that: 1) Freud neither identifies nor interrogates the inner conflicts and unresolved ambivalences that color his responses to religion;<sup>144</sup> 2) Freud focuses on a limited range of religious phenomena, depicting infantile and neurotic manifestations as the whole of religious experience rather than as a distinct part;<sup>145</sup> and 3) Freud fails to provide a language and thus a legacy that accounts for the "sensitivity, depth, and elusiveness of the subject."<sup>146</sup> In short, Meissner thinks the time has come to move beyond Freud: "Psychoanalytic theory today is considerably more nuanced and sophisticated and allows us to approach the understanding of religious phenomena without

necessarily being reductive or being forced to deal with religious experience in the limited terms of psychopathology.”<sup>147</sup>

And just as Rizzuto uses Freud as a perpetual frame of reference, and just as she chooses to correct rather than condemn his theories, Meissner does much the same. His goal is “to refocus and recast the Freudian argument in the interests of preserving and extending the ensuing dialectic” between psychoanalysis and religion.<sup>148</sup> He believes it both possible and necessary to parse Freud’s insights from Freud’s biases.<sup>149</sup> The strategy corresponds to how Meissner plans to approach Freud:

One of Freud’s unique gifts was that even when he was mistaken about a particular concept or proposition he was able to approach it in a way that provided important psychological insight. Consequently, in my approach to the understanding of the Freudian argument about religion, I have been wary of adopting the adversarial logic that all too often ends by throwing the baby out with the bathwater.<sup>150</sup>

To better understand Freud’s hostility toward religion, Meissner excavates Freud’s early exposure to religion, including the influence of his father, family and Roman Catholic nanny; his later fascination with superstition, the occult and death; his mystical leanings; his ambivalence toward Judaism; his antipathy toward Catholicism; and his identification with Hannibal and Moses. If Freud can locate the origin of *belief* in unconscious conflict, Meissner wants to show that Freud’s *unbelief* evolves from similar beginnings:

As we have seen, Freud’s interweaving of these complex [religious] themes rides on a powerful undercurrent that stems from unresolved infantile conflicts, particularly his ambivalence to his father. Deep in the recesses of his mind, Freud seems to have resolved that his truculent spirit would never yield to the demands of religion for submission and resignation. He would be a Hannibal, a conquistador—and a Moses, a prophet who would find a new religion that would enable him to lead his people to the Promised Land of psychological freedom. But the only way for him to achieve this goal required that he overcome the religion of his fathers and annihilate the very image of the father himself, and in doing so risk the threat of paternal retaliation and the stigma of guilt.<sup>151</sup>



This is precisely why Freud's writings, in Meissner's mind, cannot be divorced from the details of Freud's life: "Freud was never able to free himself from these deep-seated entanglements and their associated conflicts, and ultimately what he taught us about religion, religious experience, and faith must be taken in the context of these unconscious conflicts and the role his thinking played in his attempts to deal with them."<sup>152</sup> In taking aim at Freud's atheism, Meissner gives life to Rizzuto's notion that "the nonbeliever needs an explanation for his lack of belief in his God representation as much as the believer does for belief."<sup>153</sup> He proposes that neurotic patterns can lead just as easily to unbelief as to belief.

Finally, Meissner makes explicit two convictions Rizzuto mostly implies. Whereas Rizzuto talks broadly about the positive psychic role religion can play, Meissner spells it out in specific terms, saying that religion positively contributes to "the integration and preservation of the individual's sense of integrity and identity."<sup>154</sup> He adds: "The religious concern may serve as a vital psychological force that supports the individual in his attempts at self-definition and realization."<sup>155</sup> Second, Rizzuto hints at the need for dialogue and reconciliation, while Meissner delivers a charge to both communities in no uncertain terms: "Ignorance and prejudices aside, the two disciplines desperately need each other."<sup>156</sup> He elaborates:

[T]he operating assumption that psychoanalysis and religion have common interests and goals and at least reconcilable conceptions of man's nature and psychic life provides a meaningful and fruitful starting point from which the project of mutual understanding and exploration can be advanced. Earlier positions, which tended to polarize and dichotomize these two points of view, led only to acrimony and sterility.<sup>157</sup>

Meissner speaks of a middle ground between psychoanalysis and religion "characterized by a tolerance for ambiguity, by a capacity to reduce the tension between the subjective and the objective, logic and meaning, objective science and inner psychic life."<sup>158</sup> He believes: "The future potentialities of the continuing dialectic lie in the hands of those who can find and hold this

middle ground and thus fashion intellectual tools adequate for...a gradual transformation that allows them to converge upon a common ground of understanding with no loss or dilution of their unique and proper conceptualizations.”<sup>159</sup> He even explicitly states that his message is meant to reach out to both communities.<sup>160</sup>

Rizzuto and Meissner’s work, taken together, sparked the field’s transformation. How did they achieve this end? In his 1976 review of new developments in the psychoanalytic study of religion, Saffady provides a brief history of the field from an analyst’s perspective. During Freud’s lifetime “the study of religion was the most promising of the nonmedical applications of psychoanalysis”; by the 1950s, however, there was a “research lag relative to other fields of applied psychoanalysis”; “signs of renewed vitality” characterized the 1960s, although many analysts still hold “a less than optimistic view of the future of the discipline.”<sup>161</sup> Two obstacles stunted research in the 1950s, according to Saffady, and continued to haunt the field in the 1970s: 1) “the failure to develop beyond the basic theoretical formulations found in Freud’s own work on the subject”; and 2) “the lack of reliable empirical data offered in support of brilliantly conceived theories.”<sup>162</sup> In addition to employing Freud’s own conceptual categories to expand and enhance his basic theoretical formulations on religion, Rizzuto both broadens and deepens the discussion by integrating insights from the pre-oedipal period and from object relations theory. Meissner, meanwhile, widens the field’s conceptual base even further by drawing on theoretical developments in ego psychology. As for developing reliable empirical data, Rizzuto’s clinical study is clearly a model with very few rivals. In sum, Rizzuto and Meissner’s work turned these obstacles into opportunities and, in so doing, forced a growing number of psychoanalysts to register where they stood given these and other changes to the field’s landscape. Proponents, like Mortimer Ostow, were energized by the future such studies foretold: “More and more members of the scientific community, no less dedicated to objective truth than psychoanalysts, are becoming engaged in their respective religious communities, without feeling that their scientific

Weltanschauung is thereby threatened.”<sup>163</sup> Opponents, like Peter Gay, were realizing that silence was no longer a viable strategy.<sup>164</sup> And those in the middle must have been impelled at least to ponder, if not discuss, the pragmatism inherent in Rizzuto and Meissner’s message: namely, that their involvement in the field would have a real and lasting impact on their everyday lives as clinicians.

That Rizzuto and Meissner’s work remain standard citations for the field’s religious writers is hardly a surprise. Few psychoanalysts before or since have been so sincere or sophisticated in reaching out to the religious community—especially in a way that smacks of neither facile reconciliation nor forced accommodation. Their way expressed a genuine need and desire for mutual exchange instead—the idea that psychoanalysis can contribute to religious self-understanding and that religion can contribute to psychic balance and a strong sense of self. This may explain why the field’s remarkable growth within religious circles postdates the publication of Rizzuto and Meissner’s work. Religious thinkers may have felt the conditions for dialogue were finally right.

\* \* \*

## **Conclusion**

Ana-Maria Rizzuto’s representation of Freud as reconciler of psychoanalysis and religion is noticeably different than the other four representations featured in this study. Like Fromm, Rizzuto concentrates on Freud’s theories and not on Freud’s life. Unlike Fromm, Rizzuto engages a wide variety of Freud’s scholarly writings. Of all five authors, Rizzuto is perhaps the most obvious and upfront about her intention of adapting Freud’s ideas for her own purposes. In other words, she uses Freud more than she studies Freud. Moreover, Rizzuto is the only author to draw on her clinical findings to ground her theoretical formulations. Her book is definitely ground-breaking in this regard. And while Rizzuto’s work is by far the most theoretically and methodologically sophisticated, it is also the densest due to its formalistic language and highly specialized argument. Finally, there is a fleetingly postmodern dimension to her work. In the

book's introduction, Rizzuto mindfully reflects on the challenges and limitations associated with making theory. But, unfortunately, she never circles back around to the subject. It is also worth noting that in her conclusion Rizzuto makes reference to the idea of two Freuds: the Freud of science, intellect and reality "who *believes* that man lives on the bread of knowledge alone," and the Freud of object relations, the Oedipus complex and family relations who talks of a "single great god" who "*must* be believed."<sup>165</sup> Rizzuto leads us to believe that these two Freuds are found in the past as opposed to fashioned in the present.

## NOTES

1 Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 3; 177.

2 Ibid., 4.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 10.

5 Ibid., 9.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 10.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 15; 18.

13 Ibid., 15

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 16.

18 Ibid., 36.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 38-39.

21 Ibid., 39.

22 Ibid., 41.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 42.

25 Ibid., 42-53. As Rizzuto rightly observes, Freud's only explanation for how this same process happens for girls is to say that it occurs via "cross inheritance."

26 Ibid., 45.

- 27 Ibid., 52.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid., 46.
- 30 Ibid., 52.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid., 53.
- 33 Ibid., 177-211.
- 34 Stephen Mitchell and Margaret Black, *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 112-138.
- 35 Rizzuto, 177.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid., 177-211.
- 38 Ibid., 209.
- 39 Ibid., 200.
- 40 Ibid., 179.
- 41 Ibid., 90.
- 42 Ibid., 179.
- 43 Ibid., 209; 202.
- 44 Ibid., 208.
- 45 Ibid., 209.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid., 210.
- 49 Ibid., 212.
- 50 Ibid., 11.
- 51 Ibid., 200.
- 52 Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *Why Did Freud Reject God? A Psychodynamic Interpretation*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 271.
- 53 Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God*, 4.
- 54 Jonathan Lear, *Freud* (New York: Routledge Press, 2005), 192.
- 55 Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God*, 3-11.
- 56 Ibid., 4-5; 210.
- 57 Ibid., 47.
- 58 Ibid., 47; 180; 200; 208.
- 59 Ibid., 47.
- 60 Ibid., 202.
- 61 Ibid., 42.
- 62 Ibid., 177-211.
- 63 Ibid., 4.
- 64 Ibid., 210.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Lionel Abel, *The Intellectual Follies: A Memoir of the Literary Venture in New York and Paris* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984), 222.
- 67 Nathaniel Ross, "Psychoanalysis and Religion," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 6 (1958): 519-39.
- 68 Ibid., 520.

- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care In America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 211. See also Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).
- 71 Ibid., 266.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Hale, 284.
- 74 Ibid., 277. See also Eli Zaretsky, *The Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Random House, 2004), 280-81.
- 75 Zaretsky, 287; 288.
- 76 Ibid., 288-89. See also Russell Jacoby, *The Repression of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Basic Books), 1983.
- 77 Zaretsky, 280.
- 78 Ibid., 276-99.
- 79 Holifield, 265.
- 80 Hale, 289.
- 81 Holifield, 265.
- 82 Nathan Hale, "Does Freud Have a Future in American Psychiatry?," in *The Death of Psychoanalysis: Murder? Suicide? Or Rumor Greatly Exaggerated?*, ed. Robert Prince (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1999), 58.
- 83 Ibid., 309
- 84 Zaretsky, 295.
- 85 Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966).
- 86 Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis, 1917-1985*, 300.
- 87 Zaretsky, 298.
- 88 Jacoby, 5. Jacoby tracks the lives and legacies of a generation of analysts who, in the years leading up to WWII, immigrate to America and leave behind not only their practices and professional networks but also their broad cultural and political interests (8; 12). He calls them the political Freudians, and believes "the cumulative effect of exile, professionalization, and Americanization, which prompted analysts to retreat from public issues and a public forum," caused these analysts to repress their nonconformist convictions and commitments (xii). "They fit in and succeeded by sacrificing their own identities" (9). Jacoby argues that a residual effect of this repression was that psychoanalysis became even further alienated from its founding spirit (5). In the end, Jacoby accuses modern psychoanalysis of being a narrow, insular, "decultured trade" that has surrendered the cultural and political terrain that Sigmund Freud and Otto Fenichel's generation zealously staked out (160; 33; xi).
- 89 Zaretsky, 291.
- 90 Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis, 1917-1985*, 302.
- 91 Ibid.
- 92 Ibid., 303.

- 93 Ibid., 383.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 Janet Malcolm, *Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Profession* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981).
- 96 Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis, 1917-1985*, 300-79. See also Nathan Hale, "Does Freud Have a Future in American Psychiatry?" 55-75.
- 97 Gregory Zilboorg, "A Response," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 13 (1944): 94-96.
- 98 Gregory Zilboorg, "Some Denials and Assertions of Religious Faith," in *Faith, Reason and Modern Psychiatry*, ed. Francis Braceland (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1955), 101.
- 99 Mortimer Ostow and Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *The Need to Believe: The Psychology of Religion* (New York: International Universities Press, 1954), 155.
- 100 Ibid., 154.
- 101 H. Newton Malony and Bernard Spilka, eds., *Religion In Psychodynamic Perspective: The Contributions of Paul W. Pruyser* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), preface.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 Harry Guntrip, *Personality Structure and Human Interaction* (New York: International Universities Press, 1961), 249.
- 104 Ibid., 253; 257.
- 105 Paul Pruyser, "A Psychological View of Religion in the 1970s," in *Religion In Psychodynamic Perspective: The Contributions of Paul W. Pruyser*, 24; 27.
- 106 Ibid., 27.
- 107 Ibid., 208.
- 108 Ibid., 34.
- 109 Paul Pruyser, *Between Belief and Unbelief* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 266-67.
- 110 Ibid., 269.
- 111 Jacob Arlow, "Ego Psychology and the Study of Mythology," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 9 (1961): 387.
- 112 Abraham Kaplan, "Maturity in Religion," *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Association for Psychoanalysis* 13 (1963): 101-19.
- 113 Arnaldo Apolito, "Psychoanalysis and Religion," *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 30 (1970): 115-23.
- 114 William Saffady, "New Developments in the Psychoanalytic Study of Religion: A Bibliographic Review of the Literature since 1960," *Psychoanalytic Review* 63 (1976): 297.
- 115 Ann Elizabeth Rosenberg, *Freudian Theory and American Religious Journals 1900-1965* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 48.
- 116 Ibid., 60.
- 117 Ibid., 126.
- 118 Ibid.
- 119 Holifield, 356.

- 120 Ibid.
- 121 Peter Homans, ed., *The Dialogue Between Theology and Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 8.
- 122 Ibid., 63.
- 123 Peter Homans, *Theology after Freud* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1970), 230-31.
- 124 Ibid., 223; See also 195-231.
- 125 Mary Lou Randour, ed., *Exploring Sacred Landscapes: Religious and Spiritual Experiences in Psychotherapy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 9.
- 126 John McDargh, "Creating a New Research Paradigm for the Psychoanalytic Study of Religion: The Pioneering Work of Ana-Maria Rizzuto," in Janet Liebman Jacobs and Donald Capps, eds., *Religion, Society, and Psychoanalysis: Readings in Contemporary Theory* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 182.
- 127 Ibid.
- 128 Ibid.
- 129 Howard Stein, review of *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study*, by Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 50 (1981): 126.
- 130 Ibid.
- 131 Stephen Mitchell and Margaret Black, *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psycho-analytic Thought*, 17.
- 132 Otto Kernberg, "Psychoanalytic Perspectives on the Religious Experience," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 54, no. 4 (2000): 452-77.
- 133 Ibid., 472-75.
- 134 Ibid., 474-75.
- 135 Ibid., 452.
- 136 McDargh, 182.
- 137 Ibid., 191.
- 138 Robert Segal, review of *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study*, by Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48, no.2 (June 1980): 311.
- 139 Paul Pruyser, review of *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study*, by Ana- Maria Rizzuto, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 19, no. 1 (March 1980): 76.
- 140 Peter Homans, review of *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study*, by Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *Journal of Religion* 62, no. 4 (October 1982): 446.
- 141 McDargh, 182.
- 142 W.W. Meissner, *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 4.
- 143 Ibid., 5.
- 144 Ibid., 23-56.
- 145 Ibid., x.
- 146 Ibid., 8.
- 147 Ibid., 19.



- 148 Ibid., viii.  
149 Ibid., x.  
150 Ibid., viii.  
151 Ibid., 55.  
152 Ibid., 56.  
153 Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study*, 42.  
154 Meissner, 133.  
155 Ibid.  
156 Ibid., 13.  
157 Ibid., 241.  
158 Ibid.  
159 Ibid.  
160 Ibid., xiii.  
161 Saffady, 291.  
162 Ibid., 292; 294.  
163 Mortimer Ostow, "Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 36 (1988): 209.  
164 Peter Gay, *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism and the Making of Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).  
165 Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study*, 212.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Freud as Militant Atheist**

The title of Peter Gay's 1987 publication, *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis*, reveals his two-part thesis that: 1) Freud was first and forever a "Godless Jew" and "militant atheist" and 2) It was this irrepressible atheism that proved part and parcel of psychoanalysis's making.

#### **Freud's Self-definition**

Gay begins by insisting that Freud "advertised his unbelief every time he could find, or make, an opportunity. But, tellingly enough, many have chosen to ignore this self-definition."<sup>1</sup> Gay contends that even Freud's nephew, Harry, ignores this selfdefinition when he claims that Freud was antireligious but not an atheist.<sup>2</sup> "If even someone fairly close to him can find the boldness to contradict Freud's explicit testimony and, for that matter, the overwhelming evidence," argues Gay, "it is no wonder that interpretations of Freud's Judaism and, more broadly, the relationship between psychoanalysis and religion have proliferated and diverged across the years."<sup>3</sup> In short, Gay wants to set the record straight about the essential role atheism played in Freud's life and in the origins of psychoanalysis.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Science against Religion**

Gay situates Freud's mind within a modern European culture that was becoming increasingly secularized, not to mention more sure of itself and of scientific progress.<sup>5</sup> In the decades stretching from the French Revolution to the First World War, according to Gay, religion was losing authority and gaining enemies, as evidenced by John William Draper's *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*, Andrew Dickson White's *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* and the antagonistic language of T.H. Huxley.<sup>6</sup> Gay believes that Freud

both embodied and advanced this combative spirit by visualizing “the confrontation of religion and science as one of pure and permanent animosity.”<sup>7</sup> He adds: “Freud himself flatly called religion the ‘enemy.’”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Gay also acknowledges Freud’s rigid, uncharacteristic incuriosity in this regard: “His stark vista of a historic confrontation in which educated atheists were pitted against unlettered believers lacks the subtlety he lavished on his analysis of the neuroses...Freud rarely attempted such a nuanced analysis of the warfare in which he was taking such a prominent and aggressive part.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Religious Metaphors and Mimicry**

Gay wastes little time before criticizing two oft-cited assaults on Freud’s atheism. First, he readily admits that Freud employed religious metaphors, both frequently and fluently, in his personal and professional writings. But to read deeper meaning or hidden motives into this practice would be a mistake in Gay’s estimate: “For Freud, his religious metaphors, like the metaphors he drew from travel, business, or archeology, were only metaphors... Sometimes a cigar *was* just a cigar, even for Freud.”<sup>10</sup> Secondly, Gay thinks it tempting but ultimately unwise to speak of psychoanalysis as a substitute religion: that is, to describe Freud as “The pontiff of psychoanalysis, the Committee that his intimates formed around him as the college of cardinals, the fundamental principles informing psychoanalysis as its articles of faith, Freud’s disputes with Jung and Adler as heresy trials, and the defectors themselves as apostates.”<sup>11</sup> Why? Because parallels rarely add up to demonstrable proof; after all, similar convergences subsist between psychoanalysis and pagan, secular philosophy, notes Gay.<sup>12</sup> Nor is belief by any means a strictly or inherently religious act in Gay’s view: “The grounds, the logic, the tenacity of one belief will differ markedly from those of others. The belief that God exists and the belief that the unconscious exists are not, whatever captious critics might say, identical kinds of assertions; they call on quite different evidence and produce quite different results.”<sup>13</sup>

## **William James**

Gay makes a point of emphasizing both the similarities and the differences between Sigmund Freud and William James. James, like Freud, was a celebrated explorer of the mind.<sup>14</sup> Both thinkers had a keen interest in the psychology of religious experience and thus “were willing, even eager, to make themselves at home in the shadowy and perilous border regions where science and superstition meet.”<sup>15</sup> Nor do the affinities end there in Gay’s estimate: “Like Freud, James took his witnesses to faith seriously, was open to the depositions of cranks, fanatics, and visionaries, used his own experience as testimony; he, too glorified in the astonishing, inexhaustible variety of human experience while he was, at the same time, intent on reducing it to order.”<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, Gay contends that the differences between William James and Sigmund Freud were all the more important.<sup>17</sup> “James was, in the teeth of science, a religious man: nothing divine was alien to him,” writes Gay.<sup>18</sup> In fact, James approached “religious experience as not merely interesting but in essence valid, as the bearer of the deepest truths.”<sup>19</sup> For James, science and religion were both “genuine keys for unlocking the world’s treasure house.”<sup>20</sup> Yet Gay believes that James, unlike Freud, ceded the upper hand to religion: “Freud, too, was tracking down elusive mysteries, but he thought them in need of scientific investigation rather than worshipful regard. James was distinctly not of Freud’s persuasion. A little desperately, he resolved the conflict between his regard for science and his urge toward faith by placing his bets on the will to believe.”<sup>21</sup> James and Freud not only viewed religion differently, maintains Gay, but it was this difference that made psychoanalysis: “If Freud had been a believer like James, he would not have developed psychoanalysis.”<sup>22</sup> Gay devotes the book’s remainder to establishing a causative link between Freud’s atheism and psychoanalysis’s origins, but not before he summarizes his initial insights as follows:

They [intellectual historians] cannot ignore and must not minimize Freud’s repeated assertions that he was an

atheist, an infidel Jew, all his life—even if they must refuse to take such pronouncements as gospel. All that the parallel hunters have established is that universal concerns are the business of the theologian quite as much as of the psychoanalyst. It is possible to be devout and a disciple of Freud at the same time. We have all met competent psychoanalysts who fast on Yom Kippur. But what this tells us about Freud's cast of mind and the making of psychoanalysis is anything but obvious.<sup>23</sup>

### **A Militant Atheist Through and Through**

Gay thinks it essential for readers to understand both the tenacity and the longevity of Freud's atheism. To this end, Gay insists on using warlike language and military metaphors to reinforce his description of Freud as a "militant" atheist—a subtle though highly significant departure from Ernest Jones's depiction of Freud as a "natural" atheist.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Gay takes aim at the idea that Freud's atheism was somehow untested or erratic in his early life: "True, in his early student days at the University of Vienna, he toyed with the temptations of theism. He had stumbled into the refreshing and seductive ambience of the philosopher Franz Brentano...But his flirtation with philosophical theology was fleeting and, as his letters attest, really out of character."<sup>25</sup> Gay continues: "Once he had worked his way through the barrage of plausible arguments with which Brentano had overwhelmed him, Freud returned to his atheism and remained there the rest of his days."<sup>26</sup> Gay ends this line of argumentation by asserting that he "need not demonstrate that Freud was an atheist before he became a psychoanalyst," as Hans Küng, the Catholic theologian, makes this point for him in *Freud and the Problem of God*.<sup>27</sup> What he wants to demonstrate instead "is that Freud became a psychoanalyst in large part because he was an atheist."<sup>28</sup> Here Gay reconstructs the foundation of Freud's mental universe, showing him to be both a "loyal son of the Enlightenment," a true champion of the irreligious insights of Voltaire, Diderot, Feuerbach and Darwin and a "medical materialist," who leaned on the methods, attitude and authority of his mentors Ernst Brücke, Theodor Meynert and

Hermann Nothnagel to proclaim the supremacy of science above all else.<sup>29</sup> This unique synthesis of critical Enlightenment philosophy and scientific positivism was born of Freud's atheism, according to Gay, and its by-product was the founding of psychoanalysis.<sup>30</sup>

### **Oskar Pfister**

Freud's relationship with Oskar Pfister, the Protestant pastor and lay psychoanalyst, was by no means trivial in Gay's estimate. "Of all of Freud's friendships, some tempestuous and some tranquil, it was distinctly the least expectable and among the most peaceful," observes Gay.<sup>31</sup> What is more, Freud and his family seemed to genuinely enjoy Pfister's company: "Evidently, Pfister offered a refreshing change from the intense, assiduous disciples who usually appeared at Freud's table, talking analytic shop with their host and neglecting the others. He was humane, cordial, delightful with the children."<sup>32</sup> Even so, Gay swiftly denounces any attempt to read spiritual meaning, revealed or repressed, into this unlikely association between Freud and Pfister. In fact, Gay informs his readers—in a very matter-of-fact way—that Freud "always retained a last ounce of skeptical distance from Pfister."<sup>33</sup> He quotes Freud, in a confidential letter to Max Eitingon, as saying that "with all his warmth and goodness," Pfister "skirts the ridiculous."<sup>34</sup> So why did Freud allow Pfister to remain in the psychoanalytic fold? In addition to genuinely liking Pfister as a person, Gay believes that Freud's drive to popularize psychoanalysis had plenty to do with it too: "For Freud, Pfister was a key that would unlock doors to the outside world, almost as much as Jung."<sup>35</sup>

Gay also discusses the now (in)famous letter exchange between Freud and Pfister; when the former asked the latter why the world had had to wait for a godless Jew to create psychoanalysis. To which Pfister replied: "You are no Jew... You are not godless, for whoever lives in God, and whoever battles for the liberation of love remains...in God...A better Christian never was."<sup>36</sup> On the basis of the historic record of correspondence between the two, Freud initially responded with silence; it was only several

years later—in a very roundabout way—that Freud informed Pfister that he was “far from being” a Christian.<sup>37</sup> Gay insists that the thing that “did not seem farfetched” about Pfister’s Christianization of Freud was the extent to which love linked Freud’s psychoanalysis to Pfister’s theology.<sup>38</sup> “Like Pfister,” maintains Gay, “Freud had explicitly likened the eroticism of psychoanalysis to the love at the heart of pastoral care.”<sup>39</sup> But no matter how interesting or promising the connection, argues Gay, it still does not make Freud a Christian. Gay seeks to reinforce his plea by informing his readers that Freud was less than enthusiastic about “Pfister’s campaign to conquer him for Christianity.”<sup>40</sup>

### **The Reception of Freud’s Writings**

Among the authors highlighted in this study, Gay is by far the best at mapping the reception of Freud’s writings on religion. He explains the extent to which notable Christian thinkers, including Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, Otto Piper and R. S. Lee, interfaced with psychoanalysis. In Gay’s view, “Few other theologians were quite so global or quite so supportive of Freud’s thought as Tillich.”<sup>41</sup> He adds, “In the history of attempts to rescue psychoanalysis for religion, Tillich’s speculative ecumenical effort must stand as among the most daring and most acrobatic any theologian has ever undertaken.”<sup>42</sup> Lee was equally enthusiastic about reconciling psychoanalysis and religion, which he based on a “doctrine of separate, equally, and mutually useful spheres.”<sup>43</sup> Niebuhr and Piper, by contrast, both believed that religion had more to teach psychoanalysis about human nature than the other way around; according to Gay, “this was a safe, comfortable way of domesticating psychoanalysis: to draw its fangs, trumpet its merits, and evade its subversiveness.”<sup>44</sup> Gay also discusses the Jewish response to Freud’s writings on religion, claiming “most rabbis, Jewish theologians, and learned Jewish journals assiduously ignored psychoanalysis and the problems it posed for faith.”<sup>45</sup> Gay continues: “Nor has the situation markedly changed since. Certainly, as far as the two most seminal Jewish

thinkers of our century, Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, were concerned, Freud might well not have lived.”<sup>46</sup> “There has been no Jewish R.S. Lee, let alone a Paul Tillich,” notes Gay.<sup>47</sup>

“Just as a minority among believers has sought to rescue psychoanalysis for religion,” maintains Gay, “a minority of psychoanalysts has sought to rescue religion for psychoanalysis.”<sup>48</sup> Here Gay has Erich Fromm, Gregory Zilboorg and W.W. Meissner specifically in mind. He begins by contrasting the sympathy of Fromm, Zilboorg and Meissner to the callousness of the first generation of psychoanalysts (i.e., Ernest Jones, Otto Rank, Theodor Reik, Sandor Ferenczi and Karl Abraham), who “took the irreparable tension between science and religion simply for granted.”<sup>49</sup> For Gay, Fromm was “poaching on Pfister’s territory” with his exaltation of freedom and love.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Fromm was not even a theist himself, insists Gay.<sup>51</sup> Gay sums up Fromm’s take on psychoanalysis and religion as follows: “This pacific eclecticism, this indifference to what religion one professes as long as it is not idolatrous, as long as one cares about the spirit rather than the words or the institutions, would have struck Freud as a sad retreat from the scientific spirit.”<sup>52</sup> Nor is Gay all that impressed with the work of Zilboorg or Meissner, as he believes that both analysts were unwilling to admit that “the common ground that some had discovered between psychoanalysis and faith was a swampy, treacherous bog in which both must sink.”<sup>53</sup> In the end, Gay finds all talk of reconciliation to be foolish as well as futile:

All this peacemaking, all this putting Freud in his place, whether from the theologian’s or the psychoanalyst’s vantage point, has amounted to very little...The most ingenious scholarship or most embracing pacifism could not, and should not, erase the enmity between science and theology, psychoanalysis and religion.<sup>54</sup>

## **A Jewish Science**

Gay concludes his study by attempting to settle the question of whether psychoanalysis is a Jewish science. He cites a 1977 lecture in which Anna Freud labeled psychoanalysis a Jewish



science, then goes on to claim that Freud's most loyal follower, and beloved daughter, could not have been more wrong.<sup>55</sup> As Gay rightly suggests, Freud's reputation as one of modernity's greatest minds not only solidified but also intensified in the decades following his death; hence, according to Gay, many Jews were more than willing to claim this iconic figure as one of their own. While Gay is willing to admit that Freud identified with being a Jew on a personal level, he insists that Freud would never have allowed the fruits of his professional career to be branded as a parochial creation: "For Freud, science is color-blind, indifferent to national, ethnic, racial qualities—and psychoanalysis is a science. Hence he could never have accepted the description of psychoanalysis as a Jewish science, on intellectual as much as on political grounds."<sup>56</sup> In short, Gay maintains that Freud "was a Jew but not a Jewish scientist...his Judaism was inessential, not to Freud, but to his creation, psychoanalysis."<sup>57</sup>

Equally misguided, in Gay's estimate, is the idea that the religious dimension of the Jewish tradition somehow permeated and propelled the origins of psychoanalysis. Here Gay has David Bakan—and his theory regarding the influence of the Jewish mystics on Freud's thought—primarily in mind. Not only is Bakan's argument largely unoriginal, contends Gay, as A.A. Roback had advanced this particular line of argumentation decades earlier, but it "contradicts everything we know of Freud's mind: his reading, his style of scientific inquiry, his whole way of thinking."<sup>58</sup> Gay ends by summarizing his overall argument as follows:

I have shown that a believer, whether Jew or Christian, could never have founded psychoanalysis. That founder had to be too iconoclastic to accommodate religious faith. He had to be deeply immersed in religion as a phenomenon to be studied rather than a promise to pray for or a supreme reality to worship. It is no coincidence that Darwin, too, should have been an atheist. Hence it does not follow that only a marginal man, and in particular a marginal Jew, could have done Freud's life work.<sup>59</sup>

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## Gay's Freud

What are the assumptions, strategies and formations that underlie and animate Gay's representation of Freud as a militant atheist? Gay's *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis* grew out of a set of lectures that he delivered at Hebrew Union College in 1986. In the course of converting these lectures into this book, Gay was also hard at work on a much anticipated biography, *Freud: A Life for Our Time*, which appeared in 1988. Gay's biography of Freud was widely considered to be a tour de force, and its success sealed Gay's reputation as a, if not *the*, definitive voice on Freud's life and work. For our purposes, we should note that at roughly the same time Gay was researching and writing *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis*, he was also enjoying unparalleled access to the highly secretive, intensely guarded Sigmund Freud archive. Gay seems to assume, and perhaps rightly so, that his archival work provides him with a one-of-a-kind window into Freud's world.

Throughout *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis*, Gay subtly draws on his insider knowledge and implicit authority to narrate Freud's inner thoughts and feelings, translating "what was being said in what was said."<sup>60</sup> And nowhere is this technique more apparent than when there is ambiguity, inconsistency or contradiction to explain. Take Freud's close, longstanding relationship with Pfister as a perfect example. On the one hand, Gay affirms the intimacy and importance of this friendship; on the other, he disarms further extrapolation by revealing that confidential letter in which Freud says Pfister "skirts the ridiculous."<sup>61</sup> In this case, Gay cites an actual source for his claim. But this practice is more the exception than the rule when it comes to Gay's discussion of Freud's inner life. For instance, just a few paragraphs prior to this last quote, Gay says matter-of-factly that "Freud always retained a last ounce of skeptical distance from Pfister."<sup>62</sup> Here, as in so many other instances, Gay fails to provide a citation and thus the reader has no way of qualifying his claim. Did Gay pluck it from a previously unviewed archival document in which

Freud admits as much? Or did Gay simply assume such skepticism on the basis of his unmatched biographical understanding of Freud's life? In sum, by narrating Freud's story in precisely this way, as an insider who does not need to use citations or indicate sources to account for his claims, Gay no doubt adds clarity and cogency to his message.

Notice that Gay begins his book by repudiating the only person with more insider knowledge than him: namely, a member of Freud's own family. Here Gay calls out Freud's nephew, Harry, for denying "explicit testimony" and "overwhelming evidence" regarding Freud's atheism.<sup>63</sup> To be clear: Harry was not claiming that his uncle was a closet Christian. Instead he was arguing that even though his uncle was "thoroughly antireligious" that did not mean that he was necessarily "an atheist."<sup>64</sup> "It is just that he [Sigmund Freud] did not think much of rites and dogmas," maintains Harry.<sup>65</sup> Rather than interrogate Harry's distinction between being anti-religious and being an atheist, Gay accuses the nephew of contradicting his uncle's own words. It is the same charge that Gay levels against Freud's daughter, Anna, for her suggestion that psychoanalysis is a Jewish science.<sup>66</sup>

By situating Freud within a broader historical context, stretching from the French Revolution to the First World War, in which secularization was coming of age, Gay makes Freud's unbelief seem less like a personal reaction born of repression and more like a societal movement buttressed by reason. Clever too is Gay's confession that Freud's penchant for pitting "educated atheists" against "unlettered believers" lacked "the subtlety he lavished on his analysis of the neuroses."<sup>67</sup> Gay has a knack for extending these types of sympathetic statements soon before he delivers a decidedly more contentious one. In this case, he follows up with a nod to Freud's use of religious metaphors. It is certainly a rich topic worthy of extended consideration. But Gay shuts down the discussion as soon as it starts by insisting that Freud's religious metaphors were just that—straightforward metaphors with no deeper meaning or hidden motives. In the end, Gay's only explanation for Freud's preoccupation with

religious ideas and imagery comes in the form of a cliché: “Sometimes a cigar *was* just a cigar, even for Freud.”<sup>68</sup> Gay no doubt knows that another way to declare who Freud *is* would be to demonstrate who Freud *is not*. To this end, Gay goes to considerable length to show that Sigmund Freud was not William James. Perhaps this is so. But in an effort to sell Freud’s atheism Gay oversells the certitude of James’s religiosity. Had Gay done his research he would have discovered that William James was confronted with this very subject on a questionnaire that inquired: “Is God very real to you, as real as an earthly friend, though different?”<sup>69</sup> To which James replied: “Dimly (real); not (as an earthly friend).” And when asked “Do you feel that you have experienced his [God] presence?” James responded by saying, “Never.”<sup>70</sup> If this sounds a bit too skittish for a true believer, it is because James was nowhere near as devout as Gay wants him to be.

It is worth noting that Gay spends only a few paragraphs on Freud’s childhood. In fact, he narrows his focus even more by setting his sights on Freud’s student days studying with Franz Brentano, a prominent Christian philosopher. Doing so enables Gay to sidestep Freud’s earlier interactions with religion. How did Freud’s devout Roman Catholic nanny shape both his experience and his understanding of religion? How did her abrupt, unexplained departure affect him? What role did reading the Philippon Bible as a child play in Freud’s intellectual development? Rather than address these and other complex questions regarding Freud’s childhood Gay simply defers to Hans Küng, a Catholic theologian, for proof that “Freud was an atheist before he became a psychoanalyst.”<sup>71</sup> In fact, instead of reconstructing Küng’s argument in any detail Gay simply relegates Küng’s book *Freud and the Problem of God* to a footnote. It is worth noting that this is the only instance in which Gay allows a religious sympathizer to make his point for him. Why here?

From a rhetorical standpoint, Gay’s decision to map the reception of Freud’s writings on religion is both smart and savvy. Smart because many individuals who write on psychoanalysis

and religion, like Paul Vitz in the next chapter, get so bogged down in the intricate details of Freud's biography, or in the idiosyncrasies of their own argument, that they fail to reflect on how the subject itself has evolved over time. In effect, these authors are operating within a field of scholarship without ever acknowledging it as such—which, in turn, prompts them to sidestep or shortchange meaningful engagement with the field's history and scholarly development. Gay no doubt knows the pitfalls associated with this type of self-perpetuating approach. By tracing the reception of Freud's writings through various Christian, Jewish and psychoanalytic circles, he deftly acknowledges the long history and reputable minds behind the theories of common ground and reconciliation. In the meantime, however, he also presents his theory of the irreparable tension between psychoanalysis and religion as coming from a longer history and a greater mind: namely, from Sigmund Freud himself. In the end, if this particular line of argumentation has a weak spot, it would be the absence of Ana-Maria Rizzuto from Gay's historical analysis. Recall that Gay faces off against Erich Fromm, Gregory Zilboorg and W.W. Meissner. But by excluding Rizzuto Gay manages to ignore a whole set of complex questions that Rizzuto's work raises. For instance, did Freud carry a God representation with him throughout his life as Rizzuto suggests? If so, how could he have been a true atheist? Is there a difference between atheism and unbelief? Did Freud's "militant atheism" negatively affect his ability to process religious-oriented material in the clinical setting? Why does so much of Freud's work on religion lack a clinical dimension? Was Freud's atheism born of something other than reason?

Finally, Gay's central thesis that "a believer, whether Jew or Christian, could never have founded psychoanalysis" seems to be both right and reductionistic at the same time.<sup>72</sup> In terms of the latter, Gay never so much as references Paul Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy*.<sup>73</sup> Here Ricoeur manages to affirm the necessarily iconoclastic nature of psychoanalysis without capitulating to Gay's implicit assumption that Freudian psychoanalysis is necessarily atheistic too. According to Ricoeur: psychoanalysis is necessarily iconoclastic, regardless of the faith

or nonfaith of the psychoanalyst, and that this ‘destruction’ of religion can be the counterpart of a faith purified of all idolatry. Psychoanalysis as such cannot go beyond the necessity of iconoclasm. This necessity is open to a double possibility, that of faith and that of nonfaith, but the decision about these two possibilities does not rest with psychoanalysis.<sup>74</sup>

In other words, Freud’s atheism may have predated his founding of psychoanalysis, but psychoanalysis did not necessitate his atheism moving forward. In short, Ricoeur speaks to a dialectic that Gay only half-heartedly acknowledges: namely, of being “devout and a disciple of Freud at the same time.”<sup>75</sup>

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### **Environmental Conditions: Pre-1987**

What are the environmental conditions that likely influenced Gay’s work? As Chapter 3 illustrates, and as a number of other writers have recently observed, the field of psychoanalysis and religion was gaining considerable momentum in the years between Ana-Maria Rizzuto’s *The Birth of the Living God* and Peter Gay’s *A Godless Jew*.<sup>76</sup>

Perhaps the most striking proof of this surge was the 138th Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association held in 1985. There the American Psychiatric Association partnered with the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and the American Psychoanalytic Association to host a joint session devoted to religion. A year later the American Psychiatric Press published a monograph, *Psychiatry and Religion*:

*Overlapping Concerns*, as an outgrowth of that joint session. Lillian Robinson, the psychiatrist responsible for organizing the symposium and editing the monograph, insists that the parallels between psychoanalysis and religion are too profound to ignore: Psychoanalysis and religion have restorative functions and are seen as sources of help in humanity’s quest for the good life, both are expected to provide solutions for problems in living and to help people cope with life’s vicissitudes. The ‘examined life’ of the religious individual parallels the insight and self-awareness gained through psychoanalysis.<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, Robinson agrees with another like-minded psychiatrist, Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, who maintains that many of the discoveries and techniques associated with psychotherapy had been known to generations of spiritual leaders years beforehand.<sup>78</sup> Nor do the convergences end there for Robinson: both religion and psychoanalysis utilize ritual; both remain at bottom metaphysical systems; and both are in crisis, “struggling to remain relevant and meaningful in our changing world.”<sup>79</sup> Barnhouse is right, in Robinson’s view, when she “compares the struggle between religion and psychiatry to a custody fight of divorcing parents, and recommends ‘joint custody’ as the best option, pointing out that humankind needs both salvation and healing, and arguing that the two are etymologically as well as fundamentally identical.”<sup>80</sup>

In her chapter “Therapist-Clergy Collaboration,” Robinson hammers home the point that clinical work suffers when therapists are uneasy, uninterested or incompetent in discussing religious-oriented issues.<sup>81</sup> She concludes with a plea for mutual respect and meaningful collaboration: “A holistic, integrated view of man demands consideration of the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual being. Just as clergy cannot afford to ignore the physical and psychological aspects of man, therapists should not ignore their patients’ religious selves.”<sup>82</sup> Her co-contributors, writing on a variety of topics related to religion, seem to share Robinson’s core convictions.

Taken together, the symposium, sanctioned by three of the most recognized and respected psychoanalytic organizations in the world, and the subsequent monograph, published by a psychiatric press, point to just how far the interactions between psychoanalysis and religion had come since Freud’s death—from the margins to the more mainstream, from sworn enemies to burgeoning allies. Gay no doubt realizes that the professional, conceptual and cultural boundaries between psychoanalysis and religion were blurring like never before. In this light, we can see how his work functions as the proverbial line in the sand.

\* \* \*

## The Reception of Gay's Text

Gay's *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism and the Making of Psychoanalysis* attracted considerable attention both inside and outside the psychoanalytic community. And though it did not reach the best sellers list in 1987, *The New York Times* did select it as an editors' choice.<sup>83</sup> Within religious circles, however, *A Godless Jew* received fewer reviews than one might expect—especially given the book's popular appeal and the fact that Gay practically dares religious believers and sympathizers to prove him wrong. Let us now take a closer look at how Gay's text played within and beyond these communities.

### Psychoanalytic Circles

In a 1989 review for the *Journal of American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, Nathan Ross does little more than string together countless quotes from *A Godless Jew*. But not before he opens with this glowing endorsement of Gay's work: "Any of Gay's writings about Freud have been, and continue to be, a delight to read. Scholarly, gracefully written, profoundly thoughtful, they have always approached Freud from original vantage points."<sup>84</sup> Martin Grotjahn, writing in the *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, is also particularly impressed by Gay's erudition, calling the book "marvelous, short, and pertinent."<sup>85</sup> In fact, Grotjahn goes one step further and states that "any analyst would have denied himself a great intellectual pleasure by not re-learning what Gay has to say about the place of our science [psychoanalysis] in relationship to religion, philosophy, Judaism, atheism, and alienation."<sup>86</sup> For Grotjahn, the notion that psychoanalysts should 're-learn' Gay's argument suggests that unlearning it in the first place was a mistake.

By contrast, Ana-Maria Rizzuto, Mortimer Ostow and Paul Roazen each point to significant flaws in Gay's argument. Rizzuto, for instance, takes issue with Gay's chronic assumption that psychoanalysis is a science—a science that in keeping with its steadfast commitment to reality and rigor must reject any belief system that cannot empirically prove its claims.<sup>87</sup> That is



highly ironic, according to Rizzuto, because “the same psychoanalysis that rejects religion on scientific grounds is always struggling to prove itself as a science. Psychoanalysis fails to provide the type of evidence demanded by the hard sciences.”<sup>88</sup> Moreover, in Rizzuto’s view, Gay fails to recognize just how unrealistic his goal of stringent separation has become over the years:

It is a fact of life that many analysts believe and practice their religions. Patients do exactly the same. It is an academic fact that the proponents of the psychology of religion as a discipline are increasingly interested in psychoanalysis. Almost all pastoral programs include analytically derived insights in their teachings and suggested practices. To make them renounce these insights or require that they give up their beliefs seems to be a task beyond human power. The enemies have gotten together without Freud’s permission. This is the pragmatic factual reality as we encounter it.<sup>89</sup>

Nonetheless, Rizzuto believes that Gay’s book is a force that his detractors need to engage instead of ignore: “The book is as militant as the man it portrays. It deserves to be read because of its fascinating scholarship and its defiant challenge.”<sup>90</sup> Mortimer Ostow, writing in *The International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, finds Gay’s causal link between Freud’s atheism and the founding of psychoanalysis to be “less than persuasive.”<sup>91</sup> He also disapproves of Gay’s tendency to treat “religion as a caricature of what it is.”<sup>92</sup> Ostow adds: “To dismiss religion as mere illusion is to fail to do justice to the complex role that illusion plays in everyday life....We do not consider the cultivation of art unscientific because we acknowledge art’s illusory quality.”<sup>93</sup> But neither Ostow nor Rizzuto is nearly as punishing as Paul Roazen. In his 1990 book *Encountering Freud: The Politics and Histories of Psychoanalysis*, Roazen labels Gay a loyal apologist who strains to put “the best face on everything connected to Freud.”<sup>94</sup> As a professional historian, according to Roazen, Gay should know better than to deny history its multiplicity and diversity by trying to canonize such a one-dimensional rendering of Freud: “Freud was, however, far

more open-minded than a rationalist like Gay can appreciate. As a historian, Gay should have remembered how Freud could, late at night at a coffeehouse and in the presence of horrified skeptic like Jones, speculate about the existence of God.”<sup>95</sup> Roazen also faults Gay for not including Oskar Pfister’s 1928 “The Illusion of the Future,” which was a direct response to Freud’s *Future of an Illusion*, in the body of his text or in his bibliography: “If Gay does not even report the ever-loyal Pfister’s rebuttal of Freud’s position, that tells something about how narrow a range of ideological scope Gay is willing to place Freud’s argument within.”<sup>96</sup> Finally, Roazen thinks Gay’s readers should know that Freud viewed religion’s effects on the young Wolf-Man, a former patient of Freud’s and the subject of a case history, “in wholly positive terms”—a fact that Gay conveniently downplays, according to Roazen.<sup>97</sup>

### **Religious Circles**

In a 1988 review for *The Christian Century*, Don Browning contends that “Gay is a better historian than philosopher.”<sup>98</sup> In other words, Browning believes that Gay correctly presents the historical development of “Freud’s positivistic philosophy of religion” as well as Freud’s “general view that science provides us with the only form of knowledge.”<sup>99</sup> However, Browning finds Gay’s intimation that “Freud’s view of science is the only one psychoanalysis ever can have and still be psychoanalysis” especially problematic.<sup>100</sup> Not least because contemporary discussions of the philosophy of science, according to Browning, are moving away from Freud’s rigid view of science and toward more “hermeneutical, historical and metaphysically tentative views of science.”<sup>101</sup> For Browning, Gay’s logic that ‘only a godless person could have developed psychoanalysis’ is circular at best:

His [Gay] only arguments for why psychoanalysis must be wedded to a hardened positivism are historical ones: Freud believed it was necessary, therefore it must be...Having defined psychoanalysis as inextricably wedded to philosophical positivism, he [Gay] contends that all attempts to suggest alternative views can be defined as unfaithful to psychoanalysis

as Freud conceived it. This may be good history, but it is neither good philosophy nor good logic.<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, Browning ends by saying that Gay's book is both "tremendously engaging" and well worth the read.<sup>103</sup>

### **Other Circles**

In a 1988 review for *Isis*, an academic journal published by The University of Chicago Press, Thomas Parisi commends Gay for posing some very subtle questions about Freud's atheism.<sup>104</sup> On the other hand, Parisi faults Gay for not adequately demonstrating his central thesis regarding "a necessary connection between Freud's atheism and the founding of psychoanalysis."<sup>105</sup> Parisi also takes Gay to task for his portrayal of Charles Darwin as an atheist: "Darwin, unlike Freud, had a great capacity for religious sentiment, and was, arguably, a theist."<sup>106</sup> Howard Kaye, writing a review for *Contemporary Sociology*, levels a similar criticism against Gay: "To simply describe Darwin as an 'atheist' fails to do justice to the complexity of Darwin's religious views and the important role which natural theology played in the development of his theory."<sup>107</sup> In a review for *Commentary*, Wilfred McClay expands this particular critique, arguing that Gay fails to account for "the many distinguished scientists who have openly professed their belief in God."<sup>108</sup> In addition, McClay criticizes Gay's glorification of a distinctly 19th century view of science, "a view that has become more and more problematic with each passing year."<sup>109</sup> He also wonders how Gay can deem psychoanalysis a pure science, on the one hand, and not reference—much less engage—scholars such as Henri Ellenberger, Adolf Grünbaum, Frank Sulloway and Frederick Crews, who argue just the opposite about psychoanalysis, on the other.<sup>110</sup> Finally, McClay thinks Gay's various arguments rely more on assumed authority than strong evidence: "Quite simply, the ultimate authority offered for any question involving the historical origins of psychoanalysis is always Freud himself. No one else matters."<sup>111</sup>

Although Rachel Blass never explicitly engages Peter Gay's *A Godless Jew* in her 2006 essay "Beyond illusion: psychoanalysis and the question of religious truth," her work is included here because of the way in which it both echoes and eclipses Gay's argument regarding the tension between psychoanalysis and religion.<sup>112</sup> Blass begins by observing that "among analysts today, there is a much greater openness to and acceptance of certain religious beliefs and practices than ever before."<sup>113</sup> She attributes this shift in psychoanalytic thinking—from a negative evaluation of religion in Freud's day to a more positive one today—to Ana-Maria Rizzuto, William Meissner and other like-minded authors from the 1980s and 1990s, who trumpeted the constructive role religion can play in promoting a healthy sense of self.<sup>114</sup> Blass contends that talk of common ground and conciliation between psychoanalysis and religion has prospered because these contemporary psychoanalysts have redefined the nature of psychoanalysis and the nature of religion.<sup>115</sup> For Blass, contemporary psychoanalysis has not only lost interest in Freud's preoccupation with the nature of reality and the pursuit of truth but has also elected to view religion as "more of a personal, self-determined mysticism, devoid of history, ritual, authority, obligation and mediation, a kind of westernized Buddhism."<sup>116</sup> "By focusing on religion in this new and limited sense," according to Blass, "differences and tensions between psychoanalysis and religion are concealed and the distinct nature of psychoanalysis as concerned with reality and a search for truth is blurred."<sup>117</sup>

Blass rightly observes that this more mystical, self-stylized, therapeutic view of religion does not square with the actual beliefs and practices of most Christians. For instance, Christian fundamentalists, who are more than twenty-five million strong in the United States, believe vehemently in a number of supernatural realities, ranging from the Bible as the infallible word of God to signs of the apocalypse to revelation and spirit possession.<sup>118</sup> But when Christian fundamentalism gets compared to mainstream Christian denominations, as Blass implies, the former's extremism makes the latter's ways seem mature and normal, if not positive and healthy. To be clear: Blass

does not dispute the idea that religion can foster desirable individual and cultural capacities—such as trust, intimacy, care and community.<sup>119</sup> Her point is that some contemporary psychoanalysts have become so focused on highlighting the potentially positive aspects of religion that they bracket or flat out ignore the fact that a majority of Christians, fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists alike, still subscribe to the idea of a transcendent God who is real, true and somehow beyond the world we inhabit.<sup>120</sup> As Blass makes plain, most believers sincerely believe in the *actual* reality of what they profess: “Real here does not mean real in the sense of their being expressive of real inner experience, a psychic reality that lies behind the religious stories and practices, but rather real in the sense that the assertions made about the nature of God, his existence and transcendence, his actions and his promise, his message and his demands, are actual.”<sup>121</sup> That many of these same believers are (ideally) willing to die for such a belief should tell us that religion represents considerably more to them than an organizing metaphor or transitional space.<sup>122</sup>

For Blass, herein lies the primary difference between psychoanalysis and religion. To believe in the existence of a supernatural or divine being, a transcendent God, is to believe in a reality and truth that cannot be verified or validated by something other than subjective means (i.e., no demonstrable empirical, analytical or historical evidence to support such a claim). Thus, if psychoanalysis remains true to its founding principles, it must treat this particular religious belief as a distortion of reality.<sup>123</sup> And no matter what conceptual or semantic jujitsu sympathetic psychoanalysts employ to suggest otherwise, the tension between psychoanalysis and religion will remain the same, according to Blass, as long as believers continue to believe in a transcendent God.

In sum, Rachel Blass brings stunning clarity to what she and Peter Gay consider to be the very real and fundamental tension between psychoanalysis and religion. She not only outshines Gay in this regard but she also points to a possibility that goes unrealized in his argument. Namely, if psychoanalysis and

religion are regarded as “two opposite perspectives on the nature of reality,” then both systems share not only a concern for truth but also the failure to fully grasp that of which they speak.<sup>124</sup> Put differently, psychoanalysis and religion are “two opposing attempts to truthfully grasp, through ideas that could never be proven true, a common inner reality that comes from the past in a way that leaves it always to some degree inaccessible to our minds.”<sup>125</sup> “It is in this shared failure,” insists Blass, “that a place for dialogue between psychoanalysis and religion emerges without blurring the fundamental differences between them.”<sup>126</sup> That Gay refuses to even entertain the idea of dialogue between psychoanalysis and religion only underscores the balanced nature of Blass’s thinking. In a word, Blass’s chapter in *Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century: Competitors or Collaborators?* is one of the most nuanced and sophisticated analyses to date on the complex relationship between psychoanalysis and religion.

\* \* \*

## **Conclusion**

Comparatively speaking, Peter Gay’s work is by far the most rhetorically savvy. None of the other authors in this study write with nearly as much clarity, cogency or conviction as Gay. Perhaps this is because Gay has a knack for making his scholarly work read with the ease and excitement of a well-crafted story. He seamlessly weaves together theory, history, biography, autobiography, sayings and stories so as not to make his argument seem too academic or formulaic or one-dimensional. He anticipates what his critics might say, then answers their questions for them. His tone is often inquisitive, yet his language is always surefooted. In short, he presents himself as a detached, dispassionate narrator who simply enables Freud’s past to speak itself—on ‘its own terms’ and for ‘its own sake.’ In the end, Gay’s biggest advantage doubles as his most dangerous limitation. His rhetoric, while savvy and sophisticated, is by far the most rigid and self-assured. Of all of the authors in this study, he seems most convinced that his account represents ‘what really happened.’

## NOTES

- 1 Peter Gay, *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism and the Making of Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 3.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid., 4.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid., 4-34.
- 6 Ibid., 6-7.
- 7 Ibid., 4-5.
- 8 Ibid., 6.
- 9 Ibid., 11-12.
- 10 Ibid., 18.
- 11 Ibid., 19.
- 12 Ibid., 32.
- 13 Ibid., 20-21.
- 14 Ibid., 21-22.
- 15 Ibid., 22.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid., 23.
- 18 Ibid., 24.
- 19 Ibid., 24-25.
- 20 Ibid., 26. See also William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: Study in Human Nature* (New York: Random House, 1902), 122. 122.
- 21 Gay, 30.
- 22 Ibid., 31.
- 23 Ibid., 34-35.
- 24 Ibid., 6; 37. See also Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 3 (New York: Basic Books, 1957), 351.
- 25 Ibid., 38.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid., 40-41.
- 28 Ibid., 41.
- 29 Ibid., 37-68.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid., 75.
- 32 Ibid., 76.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid., 79.
- 35 Ibid., 77.
- 36 Ernst Freud and Heinrich Meng, eds., *Psychoanalysis and Faith: The Letters of Sigmund Freud & Oskar Pfister* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 63. See also Gay, 81-82.
- 37 Freud and Meng, 128-29. Here Freud compares Pfister to the monk who deems Nathan the Wise, the Jewish sage of Lessing's famous sermon, a

Christian. To which Freud responded: "I am far from being Nathan." See also  
Gay, 82.  
38 Gay, 83.  
39 Ibid.  
40 Ibid., 85.  
41 Ibid., 91.  
42 Ibid., 90.  
43 Ibid., 93.  
44 Ibid., 92.  
45 Ibid., 95.  
46 Ibid., 96.  
47 Ibid.  
48 Ibid., 104.  
49 Ibid., 105.  
50 Ibid., 107.  
51 Ibid.  
52 Ibid.  
53 Ibid., 111.  
54 Ibid., 110; 112.  
55 Ibid., 118.  
56 Ibid., 121-22.  
57 Ibid., 148.  
58 Ibid., 130.  
59 Ibid., 146-47.  
60 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on  
Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 28.  
61 Gay, 79.  
62 Ibid., 76.  
63 Ibid., 4.  
64 Ibid.  
65 Ibid.  
66 Ibid., 118-22.  
67 Ibid., 11-12.  
68 Ibid., 18.  
69 Donald Capps, *Men, Religion, and Melancholia* (New Haven: Yale  
University Press, 1997), 26. The questionnaire that William James completed  
was part of a study conducted by Professor James B. Pratt of Williams  
College. The details come from a 1973 book entitled *Psychology and  
Religion: Selected Readings*, which was edited by L.B. Brown and published  
by Penguin Books. Clearly, Brown's book would have been available to Peter  
Gay when he wrote *A Godless Jew* in 1987.  
70 Ibid.  
71 Gay, 40-41.  
72 Ibid., 146-47.  
73 Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press,  
1970).



- 74 Ibid., 230.
- 75 Gay, 34.
- 76 See David Black, ed., *Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century: Competitors or Collaborators?* (New York: Routledge Press, 2006), 15. See also Rachel Blass, "Beyond Illusion: Psychoanalysis and the Question of Religious Truth," in *Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century: Competitors or Collaborators?*, 23-26. See also Jeffrey Rubin, "Psychoanalysis and Spirituality," in *Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century: Competitors or Collaborators?*, 132-33.
- 77 Lillian Robinson, ed., *Psychiatry and Religion: Overlapping Concerns* (Washington: American Psychiatric Press, 1986), 5.
- 78 Ibid., 7.
- 79 Ibid., 7-11.
- 80 Ibid., 6.
- 81 Ibid., 22-30.
- 82 Ibid., 30.
- 83 Book Review Desk, "Best Sellers: October 18, 1987," *New York Times*, 18 October 1987, sec. 7, p. 48.
- 84 Nathan Roth, review of *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis*, by Peter Gay, *Journal of American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 17 (1989): 682.
- 85 Martin Grotjahn, review of *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis*, by Peter Gay, *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 42, no. 4 (October 1988): 641.
- 86 Ibid., 642.
- 87 Ana-Maria Rizzuto, review of *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis*, by Peter Gay, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 58 (1989): 497.
- 88 Ibid.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Ibid., 496.
- 91 Mortimer Ostow, review of *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis*, by Peter Gay, *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 16 (1989): 119.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 Paul Roazen, *Encountering Freud: The Politics and Histories of Psychoanalysis* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 13.
- 95 Ibid., 14; 13.
- 96 Ibid., 15.
- 97 Ibid., 16.
- 98 Don Browning, review of *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis*, by Peter Gay, *Christian Century* 105, no. 32 (November 2, 1988): 990.
- 99 Ibid.
- 100 Ibid.

- 101 Ibid.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 Ibid.
- 104 Thomas Parisi, review of *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis*, by Peter Gay, *Isis* 79, no. 3 (September 1988): 520.
- 105 Ibid.
- 106 Ibid., 521.
- 107 Howard Kaye, review of *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis*, by Peter Gay, *Contemporary Sociology* 17, no. 3 (May 1988): 374.
- 108 Wilfred McClay, "Hymn to Freud," *Commentary* 85, no. 3 (March 1988): 78.
- 109 Ibid.
- 110 Ibid.
- 111 Ibid.
- 112 Blass, "Beyond Illusion: Psychoanalysis and the question of religious truth," in *Psychoanalysis and Religion in the 21st Century: Competitors or Collaborators?*, 23-43.
- 113 Ibid., 23.
- 114 Ibid.
- 115 Ibid., 23-29.
- 116 Ibid., 29; 24.
- 117 Ibid., 24.
- 118 See Charles Strozier, *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994). See also Philip Greven, *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991). See also Richard Fenn, *The End of Time: Religion, Ritual, and the Forging of the Soul* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1997).
- 119 Blass, 26
- 120 Ibid., 31.
- 121 Ibid., 33.
- 122 Ibid., 34.
- 123 Ibid., 32.
- 124 Ibid., 24; 35.
- 125 Ibid., 39.
- 126 Ibid., 24.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Freud as Unconscious Christian**

The title of Paul Vitz's 1988 publication *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious* prefigures his thesis that "Freud has a strong, life-long, positive identification with and attraction to Christianity."<sup>1</sup> Vitz considers his method to be as unique as his message: "There is at present no other systematic, biographical treatment of Freud's relationship with Christianity, in spite of its importance."<sup>2</sup> Vitz devotes six of seven chapters to the warp and woof of Freud's everyday life—from his early dependence on a devout Catholic nanny to his student days studying with a prominent Christian philosopher, Franz Brentano, to his adult relationship with Oskar Pfister, to his lifelong interest in religious ideas and imagery. In his final chapter, Vitz brings the fruits of this psychobiography to bear on Freud's atheism and argues that Freud's main "thesis"—namely, "that the psychological needs served by religious beliefs make such beliefs no longer believable"—is a sword that cuts both ways: "It cuts more deeply into the roots of atheism than it cuts in the other direction," contends Vitz.<sup>3</sup> In other words, Vitz believes that Freud's atheism, far from being a reasoned, rational choice or a resounding triumph over illusion, is best understood as "an expression of his own unconscious needs and traumatic childhood experiences."<sup>4</sup> Lastly, Vitz puts atheism on trial, arguing that it is a "more probable symptom of neurosis than theism."<sup>5</sup> But not before he advances a wholesale expansion of his theory from Freud to the wider world: "This explanation of Freud's rejection of religion is not an interpretation restricted only to him; the analysis is general enough to have applicability to the motives of many who reject God today."<sup>6</sup> Let us consider each of these threads in detail.

#### **Freud's Devout Roman Catholic Nanny**

Vitz begins by reconstructing the first three years of Freud's life.<sup>7</sup> Freud was born on May 6, 1856, in Freiberg, Moravia to Jakob and Amalia Freud. Sigmund was not quite a year and a

half when Amalia gave birth to another boy, Julius, who died only a few months later.<sup>8</sup> Julius's death was followed by the birth of a girl, Anna, seven and half months later.<sup>9</sup> "If we put all of this together," according to Vitz, "it becomes clear that Freud must have found his mother, Amalia, relatively unavailable to him from the time he was a little under a year old until he was close to three...After all, his mother was busy with two pregnancies and two births, and had a sick child who died."<sup>10</sup> Even worse, Amalia was also mourning a younger brother who died of tuberculosis a month before Julius's death.<sup>11</sup> Add to this turbulence the fact that Jakob was often away from home on business, writes Vitz, and the significance of Freud's nanny comes into focus: "There is, then, every reason to believe that the nanny filled the maternal vacuum during this important period, and that Freud experienced her as a second mother—or even (as we shall see) as his primary mother."<sup>12</sup> Vitz finds it telling that in letters to Wilhelm Fliess—and in the context of his own self-analysis—Freud traces his character development back to his nanny instead of to his mother.<sup>13</sup>

Freud's nanny was a devout Roman Catholic. By Freud's own admission, she taught him "a great deal about God and hell."<sup>14</sup> Freud recalls his mother telling him years later that "She [the nanny] was always taking you to church...When you came home you used to preach, and tell us all about how God conducted His affairs."<sup>15</sup> Vitz extrapolates: "On such church visits, Freud almost certainly received an introduction to Christianity, a sort of elementary catechesis. How else to account for his ability to come home and preach sermons to his family?"<sup>16</sup> There was no synagogue in Freiberg at that time, and no evidence that "the Freuds celebrated the Jewish holidays, had regular Friday Sabbath meals, or kept the Jewish dietary laws in the Freiberg days."<sup>17</sup> All of which leads Vitz to believe that Freud's nanny, "his first instructor in religion," endowed Freud's earliest religious experiences with "a basic Christian core" that remained with him throughout his life.<sup>18</sup>

## The Alleged Affair—Freud’s Mother and Half-brother

One of Jakob Freud’s sons from a previous marriage, Philipp, lived across the street from the Freuds in Freiberg.<sup>19</sup> Philipp was single and the same age as Jakob’s much younger wife, Amalia. Here Vitz advances an idea first introduced by Marianne Krüll: namely, that Freud’s mother, Amalia, and his half brother, Philipp, were having an affair.<sup>20</sup> Both Vitz and Krüll agree that Jakob and Amalia’s marriage was a mismatch:

Jakob was both much older than Amalia (he was...about to become a grandfather when they married) and not very wealthy. He seems to have been doing satisfactorily in Freiberg, but a one-room flat is no great luxury; in view of the later descriptions of Jakob, it is quite possible that Amalia realized shortly after the marriage that she had married what we might call today a “nice guy but a loser”—a man who would not be successful and able to support her at the level of her own family. Amalia herself is described as quite attractive and strong-willed.

In any case, if the marriage was a mismatch—if there was in it some discrepancy in expectations—Amalia may well have been disappointed in her new husband, and would hence have been vulnerable to an affair.<sup>21</sup>

Both authors reference “dreams and memories from Freud’s childhood in Freiberg in which Amalia and Philipp appear together, and from which it is clear that the precocious little Sigmund felt that the two were not indifferent to each other.”<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the most intriguing part of this story centers on the nanny’s sudden dismissal. In a letter to Fliess, Freud recalls his mother informing him several years later of what transpired: “She [the nanny] turned out to be a thief, and all the shiny Kreuzers and Zehners and toys that had been given [to] you were found among her things. Your brother Philipp went himself to fetch the policeman, and she got ten months.”<sup>23</sup> Vitz, with help from Krüll, offers three counterpoints to Amalia’s recollection. First, in regard to the stolen goods:

Why would a woman acknowledged as shrewd be so foolish as to leave stolen coins in a readily discovered place or among her possessions? Did she hide them in

the Freuds' one room? On her person? Then how account for the toys? Why not spend the coins quickly or at least hide them in a safe place? Also unusual is that Freud's mother said the nurse stole the toys, since these were also found among the coins. She might steal toys for members of her family, but why keep several of them together with stolen money?<sup>24</sup>

Second, why would Philipp have contacted the police instead of Jakob?<sup>25</sup> After all, Freud's father, who presumably was the one paying the nanny's salary, would have been the logical person to handle such an official action.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the whole idea of the nanny being jailed seems a bit suspect because: "[Small] children have no concept of money, and frequently give coins to those they like...should a nanny be found with a bunch of coins, one might suspect her of theft, but making a legal case against her would be most difficult. A strong suspicion of theft might lead to a dismissal, but not to a jail term."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, as Vitz points out, the Freuds were among only a few Jews in all of Freiberg: "To have publicly brought charges of stealing money against a local woman would have risked alienating the local population and stirring anti-Semitism. Unless there were other issues involved, why create all this trouble and risk?"<sup>28</sup>

Such inconsistencies lead Vitz to wonder if ulterior motives were not at play. For instance, feeling the nanny to be more an able mother than she, Amalia may have hastily fired her out of sheer jealousy.<sup>29</sup> Alternatively, fear and frustration that her young impressionistic son, Sigmund, was being indoctrinated in a religion that was not the family's own could have caused Amalia to react impulsively—and then fabricate the charges of theft to cover her tracks.<sup>30</sup> (Indeed, firing the Catholic nanny based on her overbearing faith would not have won the Freuds many friends in a town that was more than 90% Roman Catholic.)<sup>31</sup> Nor is Vitz willing to discard Krüll's theory that the nanny was both framed and fired for learning of a possible affair between Amalia and Philipp.<sup>32</sup> Vitz explains: "Any public notice of such an incestuous relationship would have had grave repercussions for the reputations of all involved. Getting rid of the nanny would almost have been a necessity. We may recall that in

Amalia's story, it was Philipp who was present and who went to the police."<sup>33</sup> In other words, simply dismissing the nanny would not ensure her silence, but a "charge of thievery would thus protect them from her talking, for then if she should talk, that could be discounted as motivated by revenge."<sup>34</sup>

Two facts, in Vitz's view, give credence to this last explanation. First, Jakob and Amalia moved from Freiberg soon thereafter.<sup>35</sup> They left behind not only strong family ties, including Jakob's two eldest sons, Emanuel and Philipp, and his grandchildren, who played with Sigmund and were roughly his same age, but also favorable social and economic conditions.<sup>36</sup> Krüll argues, and Vitz agrees, that Jakob must have suspected the affair between Amalia and Philipp, which would explain the abrupt and illogical nature of the family's departure. Second, there is no record of Philipp ever having visited the Freud family in Vienna, suggesting that the move from Freiberg had all the makings of a dramatic split meant to keep Amalia and Philipp permanently apart.<sup>37</sup> Vitz concludes:

Although none of Krüll's or other evidence for the Amalia—Philipp affair is conclusive, the evidence taken together is very strong that the 'affair' was at least *psychologically* real for young Freud; that is, the affair was a significant part of Freud's psychology. It certainly helps to explain Freud's persistent interest in sexuality in childhood, in great figures of ambiguous parentage, and in sexual conflict between father and son, as well as to shed light on Freud's rejection of his father.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Lingering Effect of Freud's Loss**

Whatever the cause, writes Vitz, the impact of the nanny's sudden, unexplained departure cannot be overstated: "Thus, the nanny, Freud's functional mother during his crucial first three years—this woman who provided him with his 'means of living and surviving'...who gave him his first lessons in religion; whom he loved as only a young child can love...suddenly abandoned him at a most impressionable age."<sup>39</sup> More pointedly, the Christianity that Freud knew best, the one that had become synonymous with his devout nanny, was now the source

of great ambivalence.<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, Freud could not help but be attracted to Christianity, for it symbolized his identification with her.<sup>41</sup> On the other, he was traumatized by her abrupt absence and in punishing Christianity, the very thing she stood for in his mind, Freud could unconsciously punish her for abandoning him as a helpless child.<sup>42</sup> Vitz returns to this issue of Freud's early, traumatic loss in his concluding remarks.

### **The Philippon Bible and Franz Brentano—The Early and Middle Years**

Vitz wants to emphasize that Freud's encounters with religious ideas and imagery did not end with his nanny's departure. He points to Freud's own words as evidence: "My deep engrossment in the Bible story (almost as soon as I had learnt the art of reading) had, as I recognized much later, an enduring effect upon the direction of my interest."<sup>43</sup> Vitz elaborates: "It was the Bible as literature, as psychology, as cultural history, and as religion that formed the mind of Freud. In contrast, there is little evidence that *young* Freud had any real interest in physical or biological science."<sup>44</sup> That his writings and letters include over 475 different Biblical references is, Vitz argues, proof positive that Freud carried this preoccupation into adulthood.<sup>45</sup>

During his university years, Freud developed a close bond with a prominent Christian philosopher and ex-Catholic priest, Franz Brentano. University of Vienna archives show that "Freud enrolled in *five* different philosophy courses taught by Brentano."<sup>46</sup> These courses, Vitz adds, "were, indeed, the only nonmedical courses that Freud ever took as a university student. These courses were all free electives."<sup>47</sup> Vitz describes Brentano's influence on Freud as follows:

Brentano's religious situation would most probably have struck a sympathetic chord in Freud. Brentano, in leaving the Church and in rejecting papal infallibility, had become an outsider—someone like Hannibal who had done battle with Rome and lost, and yet maintained his honor and professional stature...the fact that this defeated outsider still kept much of his faith would have



attracted Freud as well. A still further positive ingredient was the illustrious literary family from which Brentano came—a family with many close personal connections with Freud’s favorite author, Goethe.<sup>48</sup>

Vitz insists that biographers have failed to account for the fact that Brentano “remained a presence in Freud’s social and intellectual environment in the 1880s and much of the 1890s as well.”<sup>49</sup> All of which leads Vitz to believe that Ernest Jones wrongly labeled Freud a life-long natural atheist. “I think we can safely say that whatever the young Freud was,” declares Vitz, “he was far indeed from being a ‘natural atheist.’”<sup>50</sup>

### **Rome, Churches and Pfister —The Adult Years**

Vitz finds numerous examples of Freud’s adult preoccupation with religion. For starters, there was Freud’s fascination with Christian imagery: “Aside from the *Mona Lisa*, the only paintings that Freud wrote about were explicitly Christian paintings.”<sup>51</sup> Then there was Freud’s enjoyment of ambiguous Christian literature, including *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, *Faust*, *Notre Dame de Paris*, *Paradise Lost*, *Don Giovanni*, the *Malleus Maleficarum* and *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci*.<sup>52</sup> But it was Freud’s love of Rome that Vitz finds especially revealing:

He wanted to go to Rome on Easter...at the quintessentially Christian season. He referred to his visits as making him into a pilgrim. While in Rome, he spent much of his time in Christian edifices admiring Christian art. He spoke of Rome with great fondness (indeed, as this ‘divine town’); he said he never felt himself to be a stranger in Rome; he told of its constant capacity to renew his zest for life.<sup>53</sup>

Again, Vitz traces Freud’s desire back to his devout nanny: dedicated Catholics in 1850s Moravia would have longed to visit Rome at least once in their lifetime (preferably, during Easter), and if the nanny had conveyed this yearning to young Sigmund, it is possible his desire to see Rome (i.e., the locus of the Christian themes of rebirth and resurrection) symbolized his

desire to be “made whole with her.”<sup>54</sup> Either way, according to Vitz, Freud’s frequenting of sacred sites was by no means limited to Rome:

“He was always ‘going to church’: to the wonderful cathedral and chapel-like museum in Dresden; to Notre Dame de Paris, which he haunted; to the peninsula of St. Bartholomae, with its old church; to the shrine of the Virgin on the way to the mushroom hunt; to all the churches and chapels of his lovely Italy.”<sup>55</sup>

Finally, Vitz reads much into the deference that Freud shows Oskar Pfister, a Protestant pastor, lay psychoanalyst and long time friend of Freud and his family.<sup>56</sup> Freud’s letters to Pfister reveal “more than just tolerance” for the latter’s position, argues Vitz: “They indicate a real admiration for this ‘true man of God,’ and an envy, almost a longing, for Pfister’s faith.”<sup>57</sup> Pfister once replied to Freud’s self-description as a “godless Jew” by saying that “A better Christian there never was.”<sup>58</sup> To be so bold, contends Vitz, Pfister must have detected some longing or sympathy for God on Freud’s part: “I very much doubt that he [Pfister] would have dared to use such words if his psychological and, by then, psychoanalytic intuitions hadn’t given him some basis for thinking they would strike a responsive chord.”<sup>59</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Vitz does not deny Freud’s anti-religious side, including: his public persona as a self-described atheist; his obvious hostility toward religion’s shortcomings; and his keen interest in the devil, damnation and the Anti-Christ.<sup>60</sup> Vitz concentrates on Freud’s proreligious side because he believes biographers have overemphasized the anti-religious side and, in so doing, failed to account for Freud’s intense, life-long identification with and ambivalence toward Christianity.<sup>61</sup> Nor have they adequately explained the extent to which Freud’s own unconscious needs and neurotic conflicts—rooted in the traumatic loss of his devout Catholic nanny—haunt his theoretical formulations on religion.<sup>62</sup> He cites Freud’s main idea of ‘religion as illusion’ as a prime example:

In Freud's own life, the primal and only real experience of disillusionment was the loss of his nanny...His first love, and his first and only deeply painful separation—with its resultant mourning, anxiety, and anger—were attached to this woman who introduced him to basic Christian ideas...Freud's nanny's sudden disappearance would have set in motion the longing for her return (something that would never happen), and would thus have linked this woman and all she stood for with something that had failed him, with an illusion.<sup>63</sup>

Vitz continues: "In his critiques of religion he was consciously turning with bitterness and anger (tempered by resignation) on his nanny, and most especially on the ideas so deeply associated with her: salvation, Christianity, and the Catholic Church."<sup>64</sup> It makes sense, then, that Freud analyzed the masses and their simple-minded religion almost exclusively, contends Vitz: "He remained fixated at the one level of religion he had directly experienced—a three-year-old's Catholicism."<sup>65</sup>

Finally, Vitz finds it ironic that Freud's views on religion have become so pervasive given that his clinical exposure to actual believers was nearly non-existent; his only religiously observant friend was Pfister; his knowledge of classical and contemporary theological works was never demonstrated; and he appeared to avoid any chance of having a religious experience himself.<sup>66</sup> Why then, insists Vitz, has Freud "been allowed to reject, as an 'expert,' the existence of something that he studiously avoided experiencing and finding out about?"<sup>67</sup> Nor does Vitz believe that Freud deserves the final word on the normalcy of atheism: "The reader may not agree with me that the weight of the psychological evidence now makes atheism a more probable symptom of neurosis than theism. However, at the very least, it should be clear that atheism certainly may often be an expression of a psychological pathology."<sup>68</sup>

\* \* \*

### **Vitz's Freud**

What are the assumptions, strategies and formations that underlie and animate Vitz's representation of Freud as unconscious

Christian? Vitz relies heavily on biographical material to make his case. Unlike Gay, Vitz provides ample citations to support his claims. Like Gay, however, Vitz assumes there is no need to reflect on the complexities associated with biography in general and Freud's legacy in particular. This assumption allows Vitz to dodge some particularly knotty issues. For example, Freud undermines the very plausibility of biographical truth when he asserts that "[a]nyone who writes a biography is committed to lies, concealments, hypocrisy, flattery and even to hiding his own lack of understanding, for biographical truth does not exist, and if it did we could not use it."<sup>69</sup> Ernest Jones's oft-cited biography of Freud only confirms this suspicion, argues Paul Roazen: "By now Jones's partisanship on behalf of the master and his consequent bias against any disciple who dared to 'deviate' are easy to document.

Still, an extraordinary amount of what we think we know about Freud is due to Jones's work and his gifts of exposition."<sup>70</sup> Nor is it the case that other putatively historical writings on psychoanalysis remain free from partisan pursuits. As Ernst Falzeder makes plain:

Much of the historical literature [in psychoanalysis] has been partisan, has been written with an agenda, and has not escaped pseudodichotomies. Each of the parties or camps seems to have construed a 'Freud' of its own. Writing the history of psychoanalysis has become instrumentalized, and has been used as a weapon in a very contemporary fight. The field has become a battleground.<sup>71</sup>

Todd Dufresne adds yet another wrinkle to this discussion by arguing that Freud was hardly above manipulating history for his own personal and political gain:

He [Freud] expunged files of compromising details, such as original case notes and letters, carefully rewrote old texts to update and also bury the inconvenient past, deftly spread a trail of dissimulation in scores of private letters, and carefully wrote fantastically partial, sometimes baldly inaccurate, histories and overviews of his own thought and movement.<sup>72</sup>

While few historians of psychoanalysis would fully endorse Dufresne's claim, fewer still have failed to recognize the role Freud's family and loyal followers have played in denying access to certain historical documents and heavily editing others.<sup>73</sup> Not that Vitz needs to settle the debates surrounding the reliability of biographical truth or the politicization of Freud's legacy before proceeding with his argument. At the very least, however, he needs to inform his readers of the challenges and limitations associated with a biographically-based interpretation of any historical figure—especially one as complex and controversial as Freud.

Now let us turn directly to Vitz's text. Vitz's entire argument appears to collapse under the weight of Freud's straightforward statement that he has no attraction to Christianity with its "lie of salvation."<sup>74</sup> But Vitz seeks to defuse this declaration by subjecting Freud's words to his own psychoanalytic insight: "Early in his discussion of the nature of a construction, Freud made the important point that a patient's 'No' is 'not as a rule enough to make us abandon an interpretation as incorrect.'"<sup>75</sup> "Indeed, with respect to Freud and Christianity," writes Vitz, "the old saw usually applied to diplomats and politicians appears to be quite applicable: 'Nothing is officially confirmed until officially denied.'"<sup>76</sup> Vitz has a knack for positing a deeper desire buried beneath Freud's diction. If this maneuver sounds familiar, it is because Peter Gay employs a similar method of translating "what was being said in what was said," but does so in reverse form so as to wring opposite meanings out of the same material.<sup>77</sup> Gay, for example, literalizes Freud's statements on religion and wonders how anyone can be so brazen as to deny the directness of Freud's disdain or the sincerity of his self-definition as an unbeliever.<sup>78</sup> Vitz, by contrast, de-literalizes Freud's statements on religion, as evidenced above. Moreover, Gay de-literalizes Freud's frequent use of religious references by citing a popular saying (erroneously attributed to Freud) that "Sometimes a cigar *was* just a cigar, even for Freud."<sup>79</sup> Vitz, on the other hand, reads a literal yearning into Freud's repeated use of religious ideas and imagery.<sup>80</sup> Finally, Gay looks at Freud's affable tone toward Pfister and attributes it to empathy, while

Vitz views it as Freud's envy of and longing for Pfister's faith.<sup>81</sup> That Paul Vitz and Peter Gay take up many of the same topics and arrive at completely opposite conclusions only confirms my broader thesis that representations of Freud and religion are more fashioned than found, more interpretation than explanation.

In the end, Vitz's theory that Freud's rejection of religion in adulthood was fueled by unresolved conflicts from childhood (specifically, the trauma associated with his devout nanny's sudden, unexplained departure) seems plausible, if not probable. No thinker before or since has analyzed the role of Freud's nanny more thoroughly or persuasively than Vitz. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that Vitz advances two highly controversial claims. First, he argues that Freud "suffered from moderate degrees of various psychological pathologies, such as splitting and aspects of borderline personality disorder."<sup>82</sup> Second, he expands on the theory, first introduced by Immanuel Velikovsky and later made famous by David Bakan, that Freud made a pact with the devil. But whereas Bakan proposes a metaphoric pact, Vitz suggests that Freud made an actual blood sealed pact with the devil, possibly while shooting up with cocaine.<sup>83</sup> Several commentators on Vitz's work, as we shall see in the next section, save their harshest criticism for these two points. But I would argue that neither claim threatens to undermine Vitz's overall argument quite like his stated assurance that his theory is general enough to explain the motives behind unbelief in others.<sup>84</sup> After all, by relying primarily on biographical material to reconstruct Freud's religious history, Vitz underscores the historically specific, highly self-stylized nature of belief/unbelief— which, in turn, only undermines the viability of expanding his theory beyond Freud's personal experience, from the individual to the collective. And even if Vitz had managed to develop a clearly articulated, overarching analysis of atheism, which he does not, he would almost certainly be flirting with the same crime that he charges to Freud: namely, that of subjecting an individual's belief/unbelief to generalized claims and overdetermined interpretations. In sum, although Vitz insists that his theory *can* be applied more broadly

to explain unbelief in others, he never fully explains *how* or *why* this is so.<sup>85</sup>

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### **The Reception of Vitz's Text**

Only two psychoanalytic writers reviewed Paul Vitz's *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious*. And with the exception of a few fleeting references in psychoanalytic journals Vitz's argument has evoked almost no substantive commentary or criticism from the psychoanalytic community.<sup>86</sup> The next section will suggest some possible reasons for this inattention. Meanwhile, religious writers responded far more frequently, not to mention favorably, to Vitz's text. Lastly, it is worth noting that Vitz's book appealed to a broader audience too, as evidenced by a positive review in the *National Review*. Let us now take a closer look at how Vitz's text played within and beyond these communities.

### **Psychoanalytic Circles**

Thomas Acklin gives Vitz's book a mixed review in *The International Review of Psycho-Analysis*.<sup>87</sup> On the one hand, Acklin apparently agrees with Vitz's theory that Freud was both preoccupied and ambivalent about religion.<sup>88</sup> In fact, Vitz's argument could have been strengthened, in Acklin's estimate, had he delved deeper into Freud's initial fascination with, later ambivalence toward and ultimate detestation of Jung—an analyst considered by many to be thoroughly at home with the mystical side of religion.<sup>89</sup> Acklin suggests that the developmental trajectory of Freud's relationship with Jung parallels that of Freud's relationship with religion. On the other hand, Acklin also believes that Vitz's writing "often lacks the degree of reserve that should characterize psychoanalytic interpretation."<sup>90</sup> Acklin elaborates:

Every psychohistorical study suffers from the limitations that its material is anecdotal, excerpted from such sources as written correspondence, random remarks and impressions made upon others. All these lack the context of the flow and texture of discourse within the analytic

situation...Thus the speculative hypotheses generated by a study such as that of Vitz, however solidly based upon biographical data, remain but tentative formulations.<sup>91</sup>

Among the formulations that Acklin finds poorly substantiated and particularly problematic include the following: the reality of an actual incestuous relationship between Freud's mother, Amalia, and his half brother, Philipp; the diagnosis that Freud suffered from a borderline personality disorder; and the notion that Freud made a pact with the devil.<sup>92</sup> Truth be told, Acklin's reservations about reconstructing Freud's inner life mirror many of my own. He stops short, however, of interrogating the very assumption that he uses to critique Vitz's method: namely, that our talk of Freud can actually move beyond the interpretive and the provisional to the definitive and the authoritative. Nor does Acklin hint to where his assessment would stand had Vitz adequately addressed these methodological limitations. On the whole, Acklin appears more or less neutral about the book.

A year later, in a 1990 review for *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*, Nathan Roth could not hide his contempt for Vitz's work.<sup>93</sup> "What surprises this reviewer most about the book," writes Roth, "is that the author could immerse himself so deeply in the life, thought, and work of Freud and come away with seemingly so little comprehension of the man."<sup>94</sup> Roth continues: "There is nothing in Freud's make-up that makes me think he had a Christian unconscious, although he was in the fullest sense a student of humanity in all its manifestations. I find Vitz's conclusions unconvincing and unacceptable."<sup>95</sup> And yet a few lines earlier Roth describes the book as scholarly, thoroughly researched, original and well worth the read.<sup>96</sup> In the end, Roth reminds his readers that an "antidote" to Vitz's "dubious conclusions" is not only needed but already exists in the form of Peter Gay's *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism and the Making of Psychoanalysis*.<sup>97</sup>

Both Acklin and Roth readily admit that Vitz's book is, at the very least, highly provocative and worth reading. This acknowledgment further begs the question as to why more



psychoanalysts did not publicly discuss Vitz's work. Two things strike me as relevant to this line of inquiry. First, we need not presume that a lack of reaction corresponds to an absence of influence. On the contrary, I would point to Ana-Maria Rizzuto's 1998 publication, *Why Did Freud Reject God?*, as an obvious example of Vitz's unacknowledged influence.<sup>98</sup> Here Rizzuto develops many of the same leitmotifs that Vitz first synthesized, including: the nanny's role as Freud's functional mother; young Sigmund's indoctrination via his nanny's simplistic view of Christianity; the link between Freud's traumatic loss of his devout nanny and the rancorous tenor of his religious theories; and, lastly, the way in which these various threads weave together into Freud's lifelong preoccupation with and ambivalence toward religion.<sup>99</sup> Or consider Rizzuto's final conclusion that "Freud's personal suffering had become articulated in his theory about religion for all of humankind."<sup>100</sup> In both cases, the overlap with Vitz's work is obvious, and yet Rizzuto fails to cite *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious* in the bibliography of her 1998 text, much less discuss it in the body of her argument.<sup>101</sup> Second, it is likely that many psychoanalysts did not respond to Vitz's book because they presumed that Peter Gay had already done the work for them by effacing any doubt about the absoluteness of Freud's atheism. Recall that Nathan Roth recommends only one antidote to Vitz's *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious*: namely, Peter Gay's *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism and the Making of Psychoanalysis*.

### **Religious Circles**

In a 1988 review for *Christianity Today*, Mary Vander Goot cannot find a less than praiseworthy thing to say about Vitz's work.<sup>102</sup> "Only a scholar of Paul Vitz's caliber would dare suggest that Sigmund Freud had a Christian unconscious," contends Vander Goot, "And only a scholar with Vitz's breadth and independence could sort through the evidence and convincingly demonstrate that such a thesis is solid."<sup>103</sup> Later she seeks to head off any criticism regarding the audacity of Vitz's claims by clarifying his main conclusion: "Vitz, however, clearly is not suggesting that Freud became a professing

Christian, or even that he was appreciative of the Christian tradition. Rather, Vitz's evidence points only to the claim that Freud could not escape the influence of religion."<sup>104</sup> In the end, Vander Goot fails to so much as mention, much less defend, any of the controversial issues outlined above, including: the underdeveloped nature of Vitz's theory of atheism; his diagnosis that Freud suffered from a borderline personality disorder; or his rather sensationalized revision of Bakan's theory that Freud made a pact with the devil.

David Benner piles on the praise even further in the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*.<sup>105</sup> "This is one of the most stimulating books I have read in some time. The boldness of the author's thesis is stunning, his research is masterful, and the presentation is lucid and compelling."<sup>106</sup> Benner continues: "It has been a long time since I have so frequently found myself leaping up from my chair in the hopes of finding someone to whom I could read a section of a book. This book is both absolutely fascinating and very important."<sup>107</sup> Finally, Benner insists that "all students of psychoanalysis" should read *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious*.<sup>108</sup> Len Sperry, in the *Journal of Pastoral Care*, echoes this idea that Vitz's book is destined for greatness.<sup>109</sup> "This book is 'must' reading," declares Sperry, "and will find its place among the definitive biographies of Jones, Sulloway, and Roazen."<sup>110</sup>

Other reviewers take a page from Vander Goot's playbook and aim to neutralize anticipated criticism of the book. Leroy Howe, in a 1989 review for a Perkins School of Theology journal, implores his readers to grant Vitz's argument a fair and full hearing.<sup>111</sup> "Vitz presents his evidence slowly and with painstaking thoroughness, and step by step gradually overcomes the incredulity which the initial presentation of his major theses surely must arouse in every serious reader," explains Howe.<sup>112</sup> Ralph MacKenzie, in a 1990 review for *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, picks up on this idea of rigor by underscoring the scholarly nature of Vitz's work: "The book's bibliography lists 274 separate titles, 37 pages of notes, and a 13-page index; not your average cursory treatment of a subject."<sup>113</sup>

Finally, Albert Waldinger, writing for the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Interfaith Dialogue*, calls attention to Vitz's judiciousness: "Vitz's book is honest, insightful, methodological, and well-documented, even when this documentation goes against the tendency of its author."<sup>114</sup>

Eric Johnson, in the *Calvin Theological Journal*, insists on ascribing a definite Christian identity and agenda to Vitz's scholarship.<sup>115</sup> According to Johnson, Vitz "approaches his subject unequivocally and unapologetically from within a Christian interpretive framework."<sup>116</sup> In fact, Johnson goes as far as to label Vitz's project a "*Christian* psychoanalysis," maintaining that "Vitz's interpretation of Freud stands as a singular contribution to the development of a Christian psychology and a Christian interpretation of Freud."<sup>117</sup> On the one hand, Johnson finds Vitz's work to be "competent, daring, fresh, and revealing."<sup>118</sup> On the other, he wishes Vitz would devote more time and attention to ostensibly Christian themes, including the nature of Freud's existential relationship with God and how the doctrine of original sin relates to Freud's religious development.<sup>119</sup>

Meanwhile, in the *Journal of Religion and Health*, Frederick Drobin parts ways with every other religious-oriented reviewer by calling attention to Vitz's more controversial claims.<sup>120</sup> Drobin finds the whole line of argumentation concerning Freud's supposed pact with the devil, from David Bakan to Paul Vitz, to be "simply conjectural and not convincing."<sup>121</sup> Moreover, he considers Vitz's diagnosis that Freud suffered from a borderline personality disorder to be "equally unpersuasive."<sup>122</sup> Drobin adds: "This suggests clinical naïveté in the author."<sup>123</sup> But perhaps Drobin saves his most stinging remark for last, saying:

The author's agenda, then, seems to be to find a pathological and diabolical motive for Freud's criticism of religion. Reasoning thus, he effectively denies any validity to Freud's critique and predictably offers no discussion of oppressive or repressive aspects of Catholic culture in Freud's time. This, ultimately, is a disservice to faith.<sup>124</sup>

Drobin's critique aside, the religious community, by and large, seemed both to enjoy and admire Vitz's text. At the very least, *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious* served as an obvious alternative to other biographical treatments of Freud—especially those written by self-described disciples such as Ernest Jones and Peter Gay.

### **Other Circles**

Writing in the *National Review*, American conservatism's flagship publication, M.D. Aeschliman calls *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious*, "[a] great book, enormously but unpretentiously learned, immensely judicious, and concerned with issues of the utmost importance."<sup>125</sup> By the end of his review, Aeschliman moves beyond praise to consecrating what he considers to be a classic: "This book ought to take its place on the small shelf of great books treating of or inspired by Freud."<sup>126</sup> Aeschliman adds: "Modest and painstakingly judicious, his book is one of the most distinguished works of modern scholarship that I have ever read, and it deserves readers not only within but far beyond the university (and the church)."<sup>127</sup> I would agree that Vitz's book is definitely intriguing and original enough to draw readers from outside the psychoanalytic and religious communities. Nonetheless, I would add that by 1988 Vitz was something of an academic darling for the conservative audiences that the *National Review* caters to. In 1985, he conducted a study for the Department of Education in which he surveyed a cross-section of public school textbooks and concluded that America's public school curricula demonstrated a systematic bias against religion (contemporary American Protestantism in particular), traditional family values and conservative political, social and economic viewpoints.<sup>128</sup> The next year Vitz converted this report into a book entitled *Censorship: Evidence of bias in our children's textbooks*.<sup>129</sup>

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## Conclusion

None of the other authors featured in this study delve into Freud's biography as persistently or as painstakingly as Paul Vitz. And even though Vitz ends up adapting several ideas and inferences that had already been advanced by other psychoanalytic writers before him, like Marianne Krüll's theory regarding the alleged affair between Freud's mother and half-brother, this was the first time the field of psychoanalysis and religion had witnessed such a meticulous treatment of Freud's biography—especially the attention Vitz devotes to Freud's childhood. Thus, unlike Peter Gay, who spends much of his time trying to defend or discredit other contributors to the field of psychoanalysis and religion, Vitz introduces a number of new details and theories. In this way, his contribution to the field can certainly be described as original. And like Rizzuto in *The Birth of the Living God*, Vitz makes reference to the idea of two Freuds. In Vitz's case, an anti-Christian Freud whose "life and thought is now well established and documented," and an unconsciously pro-Christian Freud whom Vitz hopes to bring to life on the page.<sup>130</sup> Vitz, like Rizzuto, leads us to believe that these two Freuds are found in the past as opposed to fashioned in the present.

## NOTES

1 Paul C. Vitz, *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious* (New York: Guilford Press,

1988), 2.

2 Ibid., xi.

3 Ibid., 221.

4 Ibid., xii.

5 Ibid., 221.

6 Ibid., xii.

7 Ibid., 1-30.

8 Ibid., 6.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 7.

12 Ibid., 6-7.

13 Ibid., 8.

14 Ibid., 8. See also Anna Freud, Marie Bonaparte, and Ernest Kris, eds., *The Origins of Psycho-Analysis, Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887-1902* (New York: Basic Books, 1954), 219-20.  
15 Ibid., 221-22.  
16 Vitz, 9.  
17 Ibid., 10-11.  
18 Ibid., 11; 216.  
19 Ibid., 39.  
20 Ibid.  
21 Ibid.  
22 Ibid.  
23 Ibid., 14. See also Freud, Bonaparte, and Kris, 221-22.  
24 Vitz, 16.  
25 Ibid., 45.  
26 Ibid.  
27 Ibid., 16-17,  
28 Ibid., 17.  
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- 77 See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 28. Foucault seems particularly wary of the transference he sees as inevitably embedded in this type of interpretation.
- 78 Peter Gay, *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism and the Making of Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 4; 32; 33-34; 42-43; 47.
- 79 Ibid., 18.
- 80 Vitz, 172-206.
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- 82 Ibid., 141.
- 83 Ibid., 155-57.
- 84 Vitz, xii.
- 85 In fact, more than a decade passed before Vitz finally delivered on an overarching analysis of atheism in *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism* (Dallas: Spence Publishing, 1999).
- 86 The following articles reference *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious*, yet they never really discuss it in detail. See Thomas M. Horner and Elinor B.

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- 95 *Ibid.*
- 96 *Ibid.*, 681.
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- 98 Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *Why Did Freud Reject God?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
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- 100 *Ibid.*, 268.
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- 104 *Ibid.*, 70.
- 105 David Benner, review of *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious*, by Paul C. Vitz, *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 8 (1989): 79-80.
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- 110 Ibid., 85.
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## CHAPTER 6

### Fashioning Our Own Freuds

Chapters One through Five illustrate the extent to which different assumptions, strategies and formations lead to strikingly different historical representations of Freud: 1) Freud as neither enemy nor ally of religion (Erich Fromm); 2) Freud as Jewish mystic (David Bakan); 3) Freud as reconciler of psychoanalysis and religion (Ana-Maria Rizzuto); 4) Freud as militant atheist (Peter Gay); and 5) Freud as unconscious Christian (Paul Vitz). My thesis is that these five authors do not find Freud *in* history as much as they fashion a Freud *with* history. What is more, the Freuds they fashion inevitably bear the impress of their own beliefs and biases. Far from being reductionistic or ruinous, however, Freud-fashioning and self-referencing are undeniable, inescapable parts of producing historical representations. It is when authors fail to reflect on these processes of production that a fundamental problem arises: namely, they operate as if re-creating ‘who Freud *truly* was’ or ‘what Freud *really* believed’ or ‘what Freud *actually* meant’ is attainable—a defect all five authors featured in this study share to differing degrees.

This chapter calls for the field of psychoanalysis and religion to abandon the whole idea of getting Freud ‘right,’ of ‘finding’ a single, unified, knowable Freud. Here I seek to explain how a Freud is as much fashioned (invented or imagined) as found. In doing so, I draw a sharp distinction between those who view history as the past and those who view history as fundamentally historicized, insisting that we replace the former’s emphasis on objectivity, authority and essentialism with the latter’s focus on malleability, multiplicity and contingency. In addition, I underscore the necessarily self-referential dimension of all historical representations. In both cases, much of what I say regarding the challenges and limitations associated with producing historical representations has already been suggested by Keith Jenkins and Michael Roth, and both of them take their cues from better-known postmodern theorists such as Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Hayden White. And while

postmodern theory may seem pedestrian to those who have been working with or against it for the past forty years, it is worth pointing out that the field of psychoanalysis and religion has remained relatively immune to its influences. For the most part, this field has operated as if notions of the past, history, narrative, truth and representation are stable, uncontested markers. As a result, most authors employ these concepts but rarely interrogate them. I conclude this chapter by arguing that if the field of psychoanalysis and religion plans to mature, and therein become more savvy in its inquiries and sophisticated in its analyses, then engaging postmodern ideas and perspectives might be a good place to start.

### **History as the past**

To this day, as Keith Jenkins reminds us, many intellectuals still view history as the process of bringing the past to life.<sup>1</sup> In this light, history is understood, if only implicitly, as a literal representation of the past in the present. Encoded in this perspective is the idea that the past has an essence, and that this essence can be resuscitated by historical discourse. Historical representations are deemed right or wrong, true or false based on how accurately they channel this found essence. Objectivity is central. Presumably, the proper mental discipline and the right methodological stance enable the author to remain neutral, dispassionate, even detached. In this way, the author seeks to clear the way for the past to speak itself—on ‘its own terms’ and for ‘its own sake.’ The prevailing image of the author is one of usher, midwife, scribe or archeologist. In sum, history and the past are seen as interchangeable: history is the past, and the past is history.

Look no further than Peter Gay to see how this line of thinking works. For Gay, the facts are obvious and the history unobjectionable because they come from Freud himself: “Freud in fact advertised his unbelief every time he could find, or make, an opportunity. But, tellingly enough, many have chosen to ignore this self-definition,” contends Gay.<sup>2</sup> Inscribed in this quote, and subtly re-inscribed throughout Gay’s text, is the idea

that arriving at a historical representation other than atheism is somehow being untrue not only to Freud but to the past itself.

### **History as historicized**

Many postmodern theorists, by contrast, view history as the product of historians. They consider the past to be a happening that has no essence and thus no imperative: “nothing we *have* to be loyal to, no facts we *have* to find, no truths we *have* to respect, no problems we *have* to solve, no projects we *have* to complete.”<sup>3</sup> The past simply *was*. But now it is over. And that fact alone makes the past “unattainable in its whole and relativistic in its parts.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, whether we are trying to recreate an era, a year, a day or a discussion, the sheer bulk of what happened precludes a total history of that past—of any past for that matter.<sup>5</sup> For even if we were able to establish *all* that was said, done, thought, intended, imagined or accomplished on a certain date or time, consider all of the things that did not get remembered or recorded but happened anyway. History is always less than the past because the past only exists via traces and fragments in the present. And it is precisely this partial existence and absent presence that makes the past so relative. After all, while there is only one past, ontologically speaking, there is no single, original, objective or authoritative account of that past that governs or judges all other accounts; historical interpretations can only be checked against other historical interpretations, and thus there is nothing stopping the past from being limitlessly redescribed in the present.<sup>6</sup>

What, if anything, can we say confidently about the past? There are singular events of the past that we can claim, straightforwardly, happened as such.<sup>7</sup> We can say, for example, that Sigmund Freud was born on May 6, 1856; that he attended the University of Vienna; that he traveled to the United States in 1909; that he conversed with Oskar Pfister; that he won the Goethe prize in 1930; and so on and so forth. This is, according to Hayden White, the only thing that can be said about such events of the past: that they are singular and that they occurred at particular times and places.<sup>8</sup> But most of us are not satisfied with

a chronicle-type representation of the past. Instead we want to find a hidden meaning behind Freud's birth name; or uncover his real motives for studying under a Christian philosopher at the University of Vienna; or expose the true nature of his interactions with Pfister. In this way, history takes the singular event of the past, adds something that was not there before—such as coherency, continuity, order, meaning, intention, structure or significance—and implies it was there all along, waiting to be found, uncovered or exposed. These additives form the context, background or backdrop against which the facts supposedly make sense. And this is precisely where the invented or imagined dimensions of historical representation come into play. Jenkins describes the processes of production as follows:

In order to make sense of events or sets of events in the past, in order to make 'the facts' of the past 'significant,' such events/facts always have to be related to a context, to some sort of 'whole' or 'totality' or 'background,' or even to the notion of 'the past itself'. Here the problem is that whilst the historian can certainly 'find' the traces of past events in the historicized records/archive and thus (selectively) establish (some of) 'the facts' about them in, say, a chronicletype form, no historian can ever find the context or the totality or the background or 'the past as such' against which the facts can become truly significant and meaningful.<sup>9</sup>

Jenkins elaborates: "What this means is that any such 'context' which is constructed to contextualize the facts has to be ultimately imagined or invented; unlike facts, the contexts can never be definitively found."<sup>10</sup> Roy Schafer, a practicing psychoanalyst, recognizes similar processes at work in the clinical setting. In Schafer's view, the analyst has no ability to reconstruct the historical truth of the analysand's past because:

[T]here is no single, all-purpose psychoanalytic life history to be told, for the account of that life keeps changing during the course of analysis....The historical account also changes whenever the major questions change.... [R]emembering is so largely a function of the context established by one or another question.... [D]ifferent analytic approaches based on different

assumptions produce different sets of life histories that support these assumptions.<sup>11</sup>

White would no doubt want to remind Jenkins that while facts may indeed be found, they are found nevertheless as linguistic entities belonging to the order of discourse.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the facts we find in the record, report, archive, biography, autobiography or history are transmitted via language (facts must be recorded before they can be read) and thus they come to us as always-already interpreted. After all, facts do not organize or prioritize themselves; nor do they figure themselves out. As White rightly points out, “facts are a function of the meaning assigned to events, not some primitive data that determine what meanings an event can have.”<sup>13</sup>

Central to a historicized view of history is the realization that narrative does not constitute the natural, neutral, objective or unadulterated form that many authors presume it to be. In *The Content of the Form*, White distinguishes between a historical discourse that narrates reality and a historical discourse that narrativizes reality: the former “openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it,” while the latter “feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story.”<sup>14</sup> Most histories pursue the latter approach and, as a result, never acknowledge that “narrative, far from being merely a form of discourse that can be filled with different contents, real or imaginary as the case may be, already possesses a content prior to any given actualization of it in speech or writing.”<sup>15</sup> This already possessed content, which is inherent in and indistinguishable from narrative’s form, consists of “ontological and epistemic choices with distinct ideological and even specifically political implications.”<sup>16</sup> For example, White shows how every fully realized story, due to its allegorical dimensions, “points to a moral, or endows events, whether real or imaginary, with a significance that they do not possess as mere sequence.”<sup>17</sup> Narrativization not only moralizes its story but also moralizes the reality that the story actualizes.<sup>18</sup> In this way, according to White, narrativization writes itself into/onto ‘the real’ so as to appear indispensable to, if not identical with, reality itself:

The historical narrative, as against the chronicle, reveals to us a world that is putatively 'finished,' done with, over, and yet not dissolved, not falling part. In this world, reality wears the mask of a meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never experience. Insofar as historical stories can be completed, can be given narrative closure, can be shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality the odor of the ideal.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, we know that the past did not exist as story because "people in the past *did not actually live stories* either individually (at the level of 'real-life' stories) or collectively (at the level of, say, metanarratives...in Marxist or Whig theories of history)... the only stories the past has are those conferred on it by historians."<sup>20</sup> Put differently, we have no reason to presume that the world presents itself to perception in the form of "well made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see 'the end' in every beginning."<sup>21</sup>

To subscribe to a historicized view of history is to embrace the idea that narrative history is as much fashioned (invented or imagined) as found.<sup>22</sup> Doing so also requires a re-description of truth. Because if history is more interpretation than explanation, then the very ideal of absolute historical truth seems untenable—after all, the notion of a 'true' interpretation smacks of contradiction.<sup>23</sup> To view history as the product of historians is, first and foremost, to strip truth of any pretense of being above or beyond human creation. In Richard Rorty's words:

[W]here there are no sentences there is no truth...Truth cannot be out there— cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own— unaided by the describing activities of human beings—cannot.<sup>24</sup>

In the process, moreover, the idea of truth becomes indelibly linked with the idea of power. Jenkins relies on the work of Foucault to show how "truth is dependent on somebody having

the power to make it true.”<sup>25</sup> Finally, by re-describing truth in precisely these ways, we invariably open ourselves to charges of relativism: that if truth is not absolute, if it cannot be objectively or authoritatively established, then anything and everything must therefore count as true. Stanley Fish says it best when he argues that such relativism only exists in theory:

[W]hile relativism is a position one can entertain, it is not a position one can occupy. No one can *be* a relativist, because no one can achieve the distance from his own beliefs and assumptions which would result in their being no more authoritative *for him* than the beliefs and assumptions held by others, or, for that matter, the beliefs and assumptions he himself used to hold.<sup>26</sup>

Fish adds: “[T]here is never a moment when one believes nothing, when consciousness is innocent of any and all categories of thought.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, there is never a moment when we treat all statements as being equally true because we always-already carry with us beliefs and assumptions that trigger us to see some statements as better candidates for being true than others.

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### **Self-referencing**

In his book *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*, Stephen Prothero demonstrates the extent to which the various cultural representations of Jesus in America—everything from Jesus as Manly Redeemer to Jesus as Black Moses to Jesus as Oriental Christ—have an undeniably self-referential dimension to them.<sup>28</sup> In Prothero’s words: “What Americans have seen in him [Jesus] has been an expression of their own hopes and fears—a reflection not simply of some ‘wholly other’ divinity but also of themselves and their nation.”<sup>29</sup> Similarly, there is a self-referential dimension to historical representation that is, as Michael Roth aptly observes, both undeniable and inescapable: “Historical representations attempt to satisfy or stimulate certain desires, and it is usually impossible for them to do so without denying others... One can hope to make the workings of transference in historical representation more apparent, but one can not avoid this dynamic



through some properly hygienic stance towards the past.”<sup>30</sup> This self referencing ensures that a history of the past is, at the same time, a history of the present.<sup>31</sup> Here David Couzens Hoy’s words are illuminating: “[T]he uses we have for gathering knowledge will themselves determine what sorts of knowledge we acquire. Knowledge is not gained independently of its uses, but the facts gathered will be functionally related to the uses to which they can be put.”<sup>32</sup> Both Jenkins and White speak to this dynamic—albeit, in a slightly more provocative way—when they suggest that we go to the past to get the future we want.<sup>33</sup> In this light, historical representation is more a performative act than a mimetic account, more a tool for imagining a life than a window or mirror for exposing that life.<sup>34</sup>

For our purposes, we would say that the Freud we ‘find’ in the past is functionally related to the assumptions, methods and motives that we bring to our historical reconstructions in the present. Erich Fromm, for example, wants to see discussions of psychoanalysis and religion rise above the entrenched debate of fixed opposition versus facile reconciliation. It is hardly a surprise then that his Freud comes across as totally neutral, as neither an enemy nor ally of religion. Ana-Maria Rizzuto, meanwhile, wants to promote more dialogue and collaboration between psychoanalysis and religion. She transforms her Freud from a barrier to a bridge for the two interpretive communities. By contrast, Peter Gay thinks the enmity between psychoanalysis and religion is both right and irreconcilable. His Freud is, without question, a militant atheist through and through. For all five authors featured in this study, Freud-fashioning involves more than simply acknowledging or negotiating their indebtedness to the founder of this field. It is a matter of employing Freud, from midwife to mouthpiece, to validate their own vision of how psychoanalysis and religion should interface. In sum, our historical representations of Freud and religion have a Rorschachian quality to them, as they tell us more about our selves and our interpretive communities than they ever will about Freud’s ‘position’ on religion.

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## **Freud-fashioning**

What can these re-descriptions of the past, history, narrative, truth and representation teach us about Freud-fashioning? From the outset, we learn to recognize that different assumptions, strategies and formations lead to different Freuds. Representations of Freud that are more sympathetic to religion, for instance, tend to accentuate his childhood experiences, especially his interactions with his devout Catholic nanny; his relationship with the Protestant pastor Oskar Pfister; his private correspondence with Pfister; and his writings on love, justice and ethics. At bottom, these sympathetic representations are grounded in the belief that Freud's published writings on religion do not tell the whole story. Here Paul Vitz's work serves as a perfect example: namely, Vitz thinks it necessary to look beneath, behind and beyond Freud's words, both public and private, to discern his deeper, in this case hidden, relationship to religion. On the other hand, representations of Freud that are more unsympathetic to religion tend to accentuate his adult life; his public statements on religion; his close circle of non-religious followers; and his writings that are critical of religion. Here the Peter Gay's of the world think that Freud's published statements on religion are not only straightforwardly unsympathetic but also trump all other sources. It is worth underscoring that Vitz and Gay are entirely at odds with each other as to what counts as evidence and authority when discussing Sigmund Freud.

Herein we begin to see just how totalizing the field of psychoanalysis and religion can be. Year after year and study after study, contributors to the field seem obliged not only to fashion a Freud but also to assign their Freud to one of these two interpretive camps: either for religion or against religion. Neither is necessary. First, our own ideas on psychoanalysis and religion do not require a corresponding representation of Freud for actualization, mediation or justification. Second, we need not presume a priori that Freud has a clear or consistent 'position' on religion or that this dichotomous view of him as either enemy or ally is the only interpretive possibility on the table.

Before we turn to what these re-descriptions can teach us about the field of psychoanalysis and religion, let us take another look at Freud-fashioning. Earlier I offered an instrumentalized view of Freud-fashioning: we fashion a Freud in order to validate our own vision of how psychoanalysis and religion should interface. To be clear: I do not understand this work to be the result of a single mind or a simple psychological motivation. On the contrary, the first five chapters of this study highlight the various social forces, cultural developments and institutional politics that help shape these historical representations, suggesting that each author's conception of Freud embodies something more than merely personal beliefs and biases. Indeed, these representations are both products of and instruments for particular interpretive communities. Nor do I view Freud-fashioning as being an overly manipulative endeavor on the author's part. I imagine that each author starts, knowingly or unknowingly, with an image of Freud and works backwards from there in much the same way that David Couzens Hoy describes above. In a word, it is more prescriptive than premeditated. Moreover, there might be an existential dimension to Freud-fashioning as well.

By fixing and finalizing Freud's identity and place in history, we may be attempting to situate and stabilize our own. For if we know Freud, the father of modern subjectivity, to be X, then presumably we will know our own subject position vis-à-vis this putatively stable historical marker: namely, we will know ourselves as ardent supporter, unapologetic critic, dispassionate historian, ambivalent interlocutor, indifferent onlooker, and so on.<sup>35</sup> This revelation is, however, a false positive insofar as Freud's identity and place in history can never be fixed or finalized for precisely the reasons described above by Jenkins and White. Far from being a stable historical marker, Freud is, as Todd Dufresne rightly confirms, a radically self-deconstructive figure incapable of biographical closure:

The very figure of Sigmund Freud defies capture and cannot be tamed or unified into a singular method, concept, word or name. And thus we are never encountering Freud, the subject (or victim) of some unobtainable gossip biography, but always 'Freud' or a

multiplicity of little ‘Freuds’; a differentiated and deferred X, a liminal something *sous rature*. Or again, between the original subject and studied object of Sigmund Freud lies a ‘Freud’ as *difference*, which is to say, a ‘Freud’ that is radically self-deconstructive.<sup>36</sup>

Moving forward, Freud-fashioning is a fixation that the field of psychoanalysis and religion can frankly do without. This is not to say that we should no longer speak his name, explore his life, engage his work or discuss his influence, but that we should no longer think that in doing so we can somehow establish ‘who Freud *truly* was’ or ‘what Freud *really* believed’ or ‘what Freud *actually* meant.’ True, the field of psychoanalysis and religion will not soon, if ever, escape the lingering effect of Freud’s long shadow. Whether it amounts to an active or absent presence, Freud seems a prefigured part of this field’s discourse. That does not mean, however, that his part must always remain the same. I look forward to a future in which Freud no longer has the final word (whatever word that may be) on religion.

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### **The Field of Psychoanalysis and Religion**

To know the literature on psychoanalysis and religion is to know just how foreign postmodern perspectives have been to this field. Here a comparison to the field of psychoanalysis itself proves instructive. As early as 1954, Foucault criticized psychoanalysis for being neither willing nor able to historicize itself: that is, to grasp its own contingency and to reflect on how history has been used and abused both within and beyond the field.<sup>37</sup> I would argue that a number of postmodern thinkers—such as John Forrester, Paul Roazen, Ernst Falzeder, Eli Zaretsky, Russell Jacoby, Frederick Crews and Todd Dufresne, to name but a few—have made significant contributions in this regard. Taken together, they have unmasked contradictions embodied in Freud’s life and work; exposed widespread partisanship within psychoanalytic discourse; complicated the reliability of history and biography; questioned some of psychoanalysis’s most treasured truths; and challenged the conventional idea of a single,

unified, knowable Freud. Even so, Foucault's point is well taken: beyond the work of these and other postmodern thinkers, psychoanalysis has yet to thoroughly historicize itself. If this lack is largely true for the field of psychoanalysis, it appears wholly the case for the field of psychoanalysis and religion. After all, the former at least has several straightforward studies of the history of psychoanalysis that theorists can now go about historicizing. The field of psychoanalysis and religion does not even have that—not one recognized history of the field's development.<sup>38</sup> In short, the field of psychoanalysis and religion has yet to know the type of critical inquiries and de-centering insights that postmodern thinkers have brought to bear on the history, ideas and methods of psychoanalysis.

Thus, even though the field of psychoanalysis and religion has been around for many decades, it remains a mostly underdeveloped enterprise. The field's preoccupation with Freud-fashioning no doubt bears much of the blame. But I would not underestimate the role Melanie Klein, Anna Freud, D.W. Winnicott and Heinz Kohut had in stunting the field's development during the 1950's, 60s and 70s. Each served as the influential leader of a major psychoanalytic school of thought, but none of them ever published a single study devoted to religion or to a substantive response to Freud's writings on religion. To the extent that these thought-leaders set the intellectual agenda for their interpretive communities, it is easy to imagine how their inattention to religion could have spread throughout the psychoanalytic ranks—and perhaps even into other intellectual circles as well. But instead of trying to pinpoint the chief cause of this arrested development I will simply underscore one of its primary effects: the field of psychoanalysis and religion still has plenty of conceptual room to grow. In this way, the field's best years *may* be still to come.

To be clear: postmodern theory is hardly a cure-all. Truth be told, it can be just as limiting as it can be liberating. James DiCenso's book *The Other Freud: Religion, Culture and Psychoanalysis* serves as a telling example.<sup>39</sup> DiCenso's goal is to re-read Freud's writings on religion based on postmodern ideas and

insights derived from the works of Jacques Lacan, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva. On the one hand, DiCenso's work echoes many of the same postmodern perspectives detailed above. For instance, he emphasizes the contradictions and inconsistencies embedded in Freud's work.<sup>40</sup> He dismisses the idea of definitively establishing what Freud 'really' meant.<sup>41</sup> Referencing Ricoeur's work, DiCenso discusses the "inherent pluralization within language and symbols."<sup>42</sup> He also elaborates on Derrida's idea that the sheer proliferation of contexts and viewpoints makes meaning both uncontrollable and open-ended.<sup>43</sup> He even describes truth as a multi-dimensional construct, parsing the differences between narrative and historical, latent and manifest, literal and symbolic.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, he manages to keep his Freud-fashioning to a minimum, devoting only a few lines to his representation of Freud as an intentional atheist whose critical analysis of religion "acts like a creative catalyst as much as it forms a restrictive prejudgment."<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, DiCenso's book represents one of the biggest pitfalls of postmodern theory: inaccessibility. In DiCenso's case, his argument is dense, his language is jargonistic and many of his points are, in all likelihood, lost on those unfamiliar with the work and writings of Lacan, Ricoeur, Derrida and Kristeva. What is more, DiCenso seems so enamored with applying postmodern theory to Freud's writings on religion that he allows the stakes to remain relatively small. For instance, he hopes to reveal "Freud's analyses of religion to be more intrinsic and essential to psychoanalytic theory, and much more complicated and innovative, than has generally been considered."<sup>46</sup> In today's climate, I doubt that most individuals familiar with the field of psychoanalysis and religion, Peter Gay included, would have objected had DiCenso started with this point rather than ended with it. DiCenso could have raised the stakes considerably higher had he followed postmodernism's lead and asked the 'so what?' question. So what does DiCenso's theory mean for our understanding of psychoanalysis and religion? In the end, DiCenso says he wants to further unfold "modes of subjectivity informed by symbolic frameworks of meaning, values, and ideals."<sup>47</sup> He thinks doing so could

transform “our understanding of traditional religious forms.”<sup>48</sup> This project sounds like a far more important and original contribution to the field of psychoanalysis and religion, but unfortunately DiCenso never gets around to pursuing this possibility.<sup>49</sup>

\* \* \*

## Conclusion

To say that history is historicized, that our historical representations of Freud are more fashioned than found, is not to suggest that history and Freud studies are futile pursuits. If anything, the field of psychoanalysis and religion would benefit from more studies that approached history and Freud from postmodern perspectives. Indeed, it is only after this field abandons the mutually reinforcing ideas of ‘history as the past’ and of getting Freud ‘right’ that it will be able to know the type of critical inquiries and decentering insights that can make a field more aware of its strengths and weaknesses.

## NOTES

1 Keith Jenkins, *Refiguring History* (New York: Routledge Press, 2003), 15. See also Keith Jenkins, *On ‘What Is History?’ From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (New York: Routledge Press, 1995). See also Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (New York: Routledge Press, 1991).

2 Peter Gay, *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism and the Making of Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 3.

3 Jenkins, *Refiguring History*, 29.

4 *Ibid.*, 61.

5 Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, 11.

6 *Ibid.*, 65.

7 Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore: The Johns

Hopkins University Press, 1999), 71.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Keith Jenkins, *On ‘What is History?’*, 19.

10 *Ibid.*

11 Roy Schafer, *The Analytic Attitude* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 204-205.

12 White, 28.

13 *Ibid.*, 70.

- 14 Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 2.
- 15 Ibid., xi.
- 16 Ibid., ix. See also Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (New York: Methuen & Co., 1980), 5.
- 17 White, *The Content of the Form*, 14.
- 18 Ibid., 14; 24.
- 19 Ibid., 20-21.
- 20 Jenkins, 1995, 20. See also White, *Figural Realism*, 9. According to White, stories are not lived: "Stories are told or written, not found."
- 21 White, *The Content of the Form*, 24.
- 22 Ibid., 13.
- 23 Jenkins, *On 'What Is History?'*, 23.
- 24 Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 5.
- 25 Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, 31.
- 26 Stanley Fish, "Is There a Text in This Class?," in *The Stanley Fish Reader*, ed. H Aram Veesser (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 53.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became A National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2003).
- 29 Ibid., 9.
- 30 Michael Roth, "Falling into History: Freud's case of Frau Emmy von N.," in *The Psychoanalytic Century: Freud's Legacy for the Future*, ed. David Scharff (New York: Other Press, 2001), 20.
- 31 Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, 12. See also Paul Hamilton, *Historicism* (New York: Routledge Press, 1996), 4. See also Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. D.F. Bouchard (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1977). See also David Couzens Hoy, ed. *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 115.
- 32 David Couzens Hoy, "Foucault: Modern or Postmodern?" in *Critical Essays on Michel Foucault*, ed. Karlis Racevskis (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1999), 52.
- 33 Jenkins, *Refiguring History*, 11. See also White, *The Content of the Form*, 164.
- 34 See Louis Menand, "Lives of Others: The Biography Business," *The New Yorker*, 6 August 2007, 64-66. Menand makes the same point about biography as a form of narrative representation.
- 35 See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 53-73; 130. Here Foucault suggests that the history of the modern subject doubles as a history of psychoanalysis. In this light, I think Freud can be viewed as the father of modern subjectivity.
- 36 Todd Dufresne, *Killing Freud: Twentieth-Century Culture and the Death of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 68.



37 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 223.

38 See Benjamin Beit-Hallahmie, *Psychoanalytic Studies of Religion: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996). Beit-Hallahmie's work, which is essentially an annotated bibliography of the field, is perhaps the closest thing to a broad historical overview. See also Ann Elizabeth Rosenberg, *Freudian Theory and American Religious Journals 1900-1965* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980). Rosenberg provides a rather straightforward historical approach to reporting the theoretical developments of this sixty-five year span.

39 James DiCenso, *The Other Freud: Religion, Culture and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge Press, 1999).

40 Ibid., 7.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 8.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 10-12.

45 Ibid., 13.

46 Ibid., 15.

47 Ibid., 13.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

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