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“From Where is Psychoanalysis Possible?” (Part II of “The Jewish People Do Not Dream”)(1)

Summary:

The possibility of a theory of sociality and the question of the position of analysis are linked for Freud to the question of Jewish identity. In *Moses and Monotheism* the Jewish people are constituted through the adoption of the patronymic in an operation that is simultaneously a depropriation and an identification: the founding act of nomination comes from outside. Identity then is always dissociated and never fully completed, and any origin is divided. The origin of the Jewish people follows upon a murder repeating a latency, so that historicity is repetition. Sublimation is introduced in the Jewish prohibition of representation, equivalent to the prohibition of murder as well as to the potential for recognition of others.

At its extreme, the question of identity is, for Freud, the question of the identity of a dissociation. That means, first of all (and this will be our point of departure), that the question of identity implicates and cuts into the identity of psychoanalysis itself. It is here, at least in its theoretical identity, that psychoanalysis vacillates and overflows: as we have seen, neither the path of speculation, nor that of a presumptive “application”, permit it to overtake its fundamental presupposition, the subject or the psyche. This, in any case, is what psychoanalysis itself admits when, pressed by the question of origin, it must “bridge the gulf” recognized by Freud between the individual and the species (or between individual and group psychology) and discover or decree that “the content of the unconscious” is “in any case... collective” (the phrase is in *Moses and Monotheism*). Freud’s interest in social or cultural phenomena is, therefore, neither secondary nor derived; nor is it a youthful “curiosity” which the aging Freud, having completed his theoretical construction, would amateurishly assuage. Psychoanalysis, at its very ground-as a science of the subject-is in reality a sociology and an ethnology (and consequently, no doubt, a “politology”). But the ground itself slips away; that is why psychoanalysis vacillates.

And that is also why, at its extreme, it paralyzes and denies itself, and falls speechless. As a practice, this time, since everything should necessarily lead it to become, as Nietzsche would put it, the medicine of civilization (that is to say, “great politics”)-were it not that this gesture, which Freud conceived as that of a generalization, is struck from the outset with its own impossibility. Almost, at least. To refresh your memory, I will quote a famous declaration found near the end of *Civilization and Its Discontents*:

I want to say that an attempt of this kind to carry psychoanalysis over to the cultural community was absurd or doomed to be fruitless. But we should have to be very cautious and not forget that, after all, we are only dealing with analogies and that it is dangerous, not only with men but also with concepts, to tear them from the sphere in which they have originated and been evolved. Moreover, the diagnosis of communal neuroses is faced with a special difficulty. In an individual neurosis we take as our starting point the contrast between the individual and his environment, which is assumed to be “normal”. For a group all of whose members are affected by one and the same disorder, no such background could exist; it would have to be found elsewhere.

As regards the therapeutic application of our knowledge, what would be the use of the most correct analysis of social neurosciences, since no one possesses such authority to impose such therapy upon the group?(2)

The discontent here is that of psychoanalysis itself; and behind the double problem of the normality of reference and the authority necessary for therapeutic application can be seen the outline of a circle comparable to the one so commonly encountered in ethnology for internal use. Here, in fact, arises the limit question more daunting even than that of the inaugural “auto-analysis” of the founder of analysis—the question of the position of analysis: from where can psychoanalysis speak of society? From where can it diagnose social pathology, if not envisage its cure? Such is the question—radically political, and far anterior to any internal institutional problematic within which one might think it sufficient to contain the “politics of psychoanalysis”, such is the question which Freud himself could not avoid, and which honesty, rigor, and circumstances unfailingly compelled him to ask.

To return to the consecrated topos, it is therefore no accident if this question arises at the moment when, for the second time in the space of twenty years (but this time, with an exceptional gravity), the social ill par excellence—war and hate—begins to take hold of Europe. From whence our second hypothesis, for which I shall again have recourse to the same topos: nor is it in any way accidental that Freud’s last book should be *Moses and Monotheism*, in other words, that the question of the position of analysis should also become that of its Jewish identity, or indeed, that of Jewish identity in general.

We know the degree to which the question haunted Freud, from the beginning, throughout his life, in all possible tonalities, complaint or protest, bitterness or pride: why did it have to be a Jew who invented psychoanalysis, and what is more (an oxymoron which becomes inevitable from the moment one approaches the problem of Jewish identity), why did this Jew have to be an atheist? Now this question itself is probably nothing but an answer, or at least the glimmer of an answer to the primary question: from where is psychoanalysis possible? From where can it construct itself and carry out its functions, if not from the space of Judaism, which cannot be reduced to any given political or social domain, which, always marginal, is impossible to integrate or superpose, and which, for that very reason, authorizes analysis as such, as social analysis?

Just a moment ago we said that at its extreme the question of identity is, for Freud, the question of the identity of a dissociation. Now we must propose that at its extreme the question of identity is, for Freud, the question of the identity of a dispersal.

To put it another way, Freud’s ultimate question is the question of his difference. Behind the difference of an analysis lies the question of the Jewish difference: the specificity or property of a religion, of a culture, of a tradition, of an ethos. But Freud also says, above all: of a people. We know the directly political aim of *Moses and Monotheism*, or, if you prefer, its status—unique in Freud’s work, despite “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death” or even the letter to Einstein— as a political piece. Its aim to respond to racist ideology, that is, to Nazism, and to defuse or undermine the fundamentals of anti-Semitism. But since anti-Semitism itself is perhaps not something simple or elementary (Freud never made the mistake of underestimating it), Freud’s answer is very subtle, and the strategy he adopts is relatively complex.

Contrary to the most common reading of the book, *Moses and Monotheism* proposes not one but two answers to the question of Jewish identity. On the one hand, Jewish identity is pieced together, accidental, and artificial, the product of a determined history and, in the last instance, the creation of a man who was not Jewish. This is the first answer, in which is accomplished a depropriative gesture to which I will return: the proper of the Jewish people is not properly Jewish, which, if one condenses a very long chain of reasoning and cuts straight across the immensity of the story, is the same as saying: the proper of the Jew is not the proper of the Jew. But, on the other hand, and simultaneously, there does indeed exist what Freud most often calls a Jewish “character”, a property or body of properties of Jewish being (Freud even expressed astonishment at this apparent “enigma”). Thus, there is a double, but perfectly contradictory answer, which is not at all the same thing as the establishment, by way of reconciliation or resolution (and in view of a banal relativization), of a thesis which would be simply “culturalist” or “historicist”. As only a lengthy analysis could show, such a strategy owes little or nothing to any attempt on Freud’s part to reclaim or legitimate his heritage. It owes a great deal, however, to the peculiar nature of Nazi anti-Semitism, which does not attribute to the Jews a certain number of negative properties or qualities but rather seeks, in

conformity to a tradition in which philosophy is sadly implicated, to deny them all property of being. How is Freud's double gesture carried out, and what are its first consequences in psychoanalytic theory? Very schematically (it goes without saying that an exhaustive demonstration is impossible here; thus, I will simply mark a few points of orientation), one can at least advance the following: The depropriative gesture openly attacks the proper itself, in its essence or property, the name: the name of Moses, which is not a name and which simply signifies "Child of Egypt". First thesis: Moses is an Egyptian. The formalist reading (for example de Certeau's) makes this Egyptian Moses into the oxymoron which generates the entire book. Now, as you know, it is really a case of a Jewish Witz-so that if we must agree that psychoanalysis is indeed, in a certain sense, a "Jewish story", this can only be done on the condition that we also recognize, in Freud's assignation of the origin of Judaism and Jewishness, a similar "Jewish story".

I quote a well-known passage from the Introductory Lectures:

In myths about the birth of heroes-to which Otto Rank [1909] has devoted a study... a predominant part is played by exposure in the water and rescue from the water. Rank has perceived that these are representations of birth, analogous to those that are usually in dreams... In myths a person who rescues a baby from the water is admitting that she is the baby's true mother. There is a well-known comic anecdote according to which an intelligent Jewish boy was asked who the mother of Moses was. He replied without hesitation: "The Princess". No, he was told, "she only took him out of the water". "That's what she says", he replied, and so proved that he had found the correct interpretation of the myth.(3)

I cannot now treat the question of the name with the depth that would be appropriate, nor go through the entire network or maze of the problematic of the significance of names, of the exchange of names, of the disappearance or appearance of names, etc.; in short, I cannot reconstitute in its structure and its economy the entire onomastic system within which the fable of Moses and Monotheism is inscribed, and which also underlies the book's long preparatory text (the correspondence, the enigmatic essay on "Moses and Michelangelo"), all overdetermined, as Marthe Robert has partially shown(4), by the interplay of Freud's identifications. Without going back to the Traumdeutung nor all the way to the specifically Jewish "Freude" evoked in a letter to Martha dating the prehistory of analysis, it is necessary to indicate at least three things:

- 1) That the name, sign that one belongs to a people (Chamisso is French, just as Buonaparte is Italian and Disraeli an Italian Jew), is also the means by which a people's identity is constituted: a people is first of all a name-an old idea borrowed from Schelling's *Philosophie der Mythologie*, which explains, for example, the historical split between the Semitic Habiru tribes and the Hebrews, or the existence and permanence, since the appearance of Christianity, of a people named "the Jews".
- 2) That nomination is, in history, the founding act itself-Egyptian monotheism arises and initiates itself with the abandonment and erasure of names with the element "amon" and the adoption and inscription of names with the elements "on" and "aton"-in their turn effaced and abandoned, with the fall of the religion of Ikhnoton. Mosaic monotheism-also Egyptian because Adonai is a doublet of Aton (and of Asiatic origin because Adonai and Aton are in turn doublets of Adonia)-meets its downfall when another Moses promises another god, but reinstates itself again under that god's name, Yahweh, following the historic compromise hypothesized by Freud. (Here, of course, it would be necessary to trace the entire system, which is certainly not insignificant, of what Freud calls the "dualities": there are two Egyptian religions, the pharaoh has two names, Moses has two families-and there are two men named Moses, two Jewish religions, two kingdoms, Christ repeats Moses, etc., etc.).
- 3) That the adoption of the patronymic, which forms the sign of the recognition of the father and consequently of the possibility of logical inference, is for this reason a stage of the progress in spirituality: the third by Freud's count, the first being linked to the omnipotence of thoughts (that is to say, to the progress of language, or again to the belief in the power of names), and the second being the adoption of a single, unfigurative god, which is, as Freud writes, "neither a name nor a countenance". And it would no doubt be appropriate to relate all the above to the taboo on names, associated in Totem and Taboo with the taboo on the dead (the names of the dead are not to be pronounced, because the name is one with the person) and recalled in 1911, with reference to the taboo on divine names, in a brief note on "The Significance of Successions of Vowels", an analysis of the sacred Tetragrammaton.

The entirety of this onomastic operation, which is the operation of a depropriation and an identification, of a depropriation as an identification (thus, perhaps, the necessity of permanent doubling, and of the binary logic brought into play), results in Freud's second thesis: it is Moses who created the Jewish people. A risky, fragile thesis or hypothesis (Freud's long hesitation is well-known), all the more difficult to maintain in that it reduces itself to the declaration that the proper of Jewishness, Judaism, is not properly Jewish, even though it is exactly what the identity of the Jewish people, the sole among the Mediterranean peoples of antiquity, says Freud, "which still exists in name and also in substance".

How is this possible? How can it be affirmed without returning to the dominant thesis of Nazi anti-Semitism, according to which the Jews are not properly anything, neither a people-even less a "character" or a "type"-nor even a race.

There is an initial answer to this question, which we owe to the brilliant analysis of Jean-Joseph Goux (*Les Iconoclastes*, in particular the section "Freud et la structure du nazisme"): this answer consists in the notion that Freud's target was in reality the idea of election, a belief fostered for strategic reasons by Moses, but which has such a power that it is shared even by non-Jews and thus never ceases to excite their jealousy and to nourish anti-Semitism. Freud, in other words, wants to defuse a metaphysical and historical rivalry, one which finally produces, in Nazi ideology, the attempt (which necessarily takes the Jews as a counter example) at an auto-constitution and auto-identification of the German people.

This is an incontestably just interpretation of Moses and Monotheism. The question nonetheless remains of understanding exactly how a depropriation can equal an identification.

It is here, we believe, that the matter is complicated-but on a new level, far beyond that of the fiction to which Moses and Monotheism is usually reduced-by the problematic of the origin: the origin of the Jewish people, that is to say its essence, is not part of the Jewish people. This is in rigorous conformity with the logic of origin and essence according to which, as Heidegger reminds us, the essence of a thing, whatever it may be, is never part of that thing. If such is indeed the motif which aligns the tortuous demonstrations of Moses and Monotheism, then, by comparison with everything that has just been evoked concerning origins, both from Totem and Taboo and from Group Psychology, one can see here the sign of an excess of radicality. This, we would like to conjecture, will permit us to explain two things. The first of these is the fact that in the end Freud should have chosen-no less than he was forced-to reelaborate the analytic theory of sociality along the lines of a historical and political problematic.

This, in effect, is what allows him to spare himself, up to a certain point, a return to the naked origin, to the (empiric) origin of every origin. It is, consequently, what allows him to extricate himself, at least partially, from the circle of presupposition, which is always, as we are beginning to learn, the presupposition of the subject of identification (with the double value of the genitive), that is, the presupposition of exactly what was to be accounted for: sociality.

For this reason, although we are ready to accord a great deal to René Girard in his critique-and rethinking-of Totem and Taboo we feel equally constrained to mark the falsity of the accusation he levels against Moses and Monotheism: that it is only a doublet of Totem and Taboo and that it does nothing more than repeat the work's principal aporia.

Freud's Moses and Monotheism seems to complement Totem and Taboo in many respects. Just as in Totem and Taboo we encounter, prior to the murder, a father and son-that is, a family-so in Moses and Monotheism we encounter, prior to the murder, the story of Moses and the Mosaic religion-that is, society. Moses plays a role similar to that of the primordial father. And the Hebrew people, deprived of their prophet, by Moses' death, resemble the group of brothers deprived of their father after the murder described in Totem and Taboo. Once again, all the possible implications of the act of collective violence can be set forth in advance. If we deduct all those that pertain exclusively to Totem and Taboo on the one hand, and on the other, all those with relevance only to Moses and Monotheism (that is, the implications for the family in the former work, and for the people, the nation and the Jewish religion in the latter work), we find that we are left with a single common denominator: the metamorphosis of reciprocal violence into generative violence by means of the murder of somebody, no matter whom... (Girard 1977, pp. 217-8)

As far as common denominators go, we will soon see that there is not only murder, but also figure, the radical condition of all mimesis (and a fortiori of all identification). We will also see that if society is, in effect, presupposed (of course, one must take into account the historical character of Moses and Monotheism), a people as such, the Jewish people, is absolutely not presupposed, unlike the family in Totem and Taboo, the horde dominated by the Urvater. Nor is Mosaic relation presupposed; both of them only appear, only exist and complete themselves retroactively, at the end of a long period of latency. Moses and Monotheism does not, therefore, repeat Totem and Taboo. Much to the contrary, and the motif of “progress in spirituality”(5) specifically linked to Mosaic religion is the closest index of this: precisely because the lesson of history—the history of the formation of the Jewish people—is that recognition of the Father is belated, Freud finds himself forced to discreetly multiply his misgivings about the early version of origins and to publish certain revisions. Thus, among the murderers of... what shall we call him? still a father? the Urvater? (Moses and Monotheism only speaks, in the end, of a male übergross), only “some” of them are still said to be his “sons”. Similarly, the social tie as such, that is to say, the renunciation of rivalry with the supposed “sons” and the establishment of the first right (the properly social institution), escapes from the authority of the father, unlike alimentary prohibitions (totem) and sexual interdictions (exogamy): with it arises a “new order”, supposing the accomplishment of the murder.

Now the reason behind all this is not too difficult to understand: in reality, Freud is perfectly aware of the circle of the presupposition of the father (and of the family); and even if he lets it slip, in passing, that after the institution of patriarchy the father “once more becomes the head of the family”, the origin of the paternal right remains an enigma to him. And he says as much: since paternal authority is derived from it, what authority could have decided on and instituted such a right? (See Moses and Monotheism, the chapter on “Renunciation of the Instinct”.)

To put it another way, the historico-political re-elaboration of “group psychology” cuts into the presupposition of the primal father, the Urvater or initial Narcissus, even though Freud—through obstinacy, the will to preserve the orthodoxy, or simple fatigue—officially upholds the essentials of Totem and Taboo or renounces its deconstruction. What Freud upholds here is in fact the privilege of the figure.

But this radicalization of the problematic of the origin, which both takes history into account and discreetly questions the proper or the essence, also permits us to unfold the next element of our explanation.

The Freudian re-elaboration of the origin is not a simple narrative or chronological reworking of the “dawn of man” but actually touches on the logic of the origin itself, upsetting its schema and structure.

In conformity, for example, with the implicit, soundless necessity at work, and never ceasing to undo the reconstruction of the mechanism of identification, Freud’s entire demonstration in Moses and Monotheism is always, from whatever direction one approaches it, the position or supposition of that which no logic (at least, no logic of the origin) is capable of mastering: namely, that the origin is second. This is probably the consequence of that imperative of doubling, that extremely peculiar sort of repetition compulsion (at work everywhere, as we have constantly verified) and in which it may not be incorrect to see, at bottom, the intrusion, or the irrepressible, overwhelming impulsion of mimetic logic (of mimetologic) in a principle subordinate to the identity principle.

But what does it mean—that the origin is second?

The origin, in reality, is second twice over.

The first time because the historical origin (intrahistorical, datable if not dated: the foundation of Mosaic religion and the constitution of the Jewish people) is the repetition of the origin itself—or at least of what Freud tries to uphold, or cannot keep himself from upholding as such. The origin, here, is murder. And it is nothing but murder. This is Freud’s last major hypothesis concerning the historical personage of Moses, which he borrowed from Sellin: Moses was assassinated, and the Jews were the ones who killed him. Or, more precisely, Moses was assassinated (an anonymous, collective killing: Freud speaks of a revolt, Reik had evoked a lynching) and it was with this murder—by way, however, of a complex process and a different version of history to which I will return—that the identity of the Jewish people was instituted. The Jews themselves did not kill Moses, for the simple reason that they did not preexist him; but those who killed Moses became the Jews. Murder, here, is the founding act, and it is in murder that Freud discovers the “historical truth” of Judaism.

It stands to reason that such secondariness is attributable to the historicity of the origin. Or rather, it would

stand to reason, if it were not historicity itself that is thrown into question here: for this origin-the murder, of Moses-cannot simply be called the origin. It is affected with secondariness in its turn; it is, if you prefer, second a second time. I allude here to the thesis of "historical latency", which, as you will recall, Freud presents as an "application" of his last theory of identification (the one found in *The Ego and the Id*) and which, as you will also recognize, draws the fiction of Moses and Monotheism-this "historical novel", as Freud said to Arnold Zweig-into a narrative construction at the limits of verisimilitude, but obstinately organized around the intuition that Mosaic religion only establishes itself retroactively (and long after the murder of its founder). Obviously, I cannot go into this construction or montage right now; it is, in any case, well-known. I will do no more than emphasize the fact that the logic of retroactivity (or of latency) which doubles the historical origin is in reality the same logic which renders the origin secondary to the origin itself, the origin that is said to be "first". The murder of Moses is the repetition in action-the Agieren or acting out-of the primal murder. Or more precisely, it is the repetition of the primal murders-for ultimately the "primal" scene will veer toward carnage (as Freud said in passing, the originary murders are "repeated countless times"). We are all aware of the degree to which, from the analytic viewpoint itself, it is difficult to think the repetition of the archaic. Herein lies the whole problem of the collective unconscious, of the unconscious as collective unconscious: phylogenetic memory, the hypothetical hereditary transmission of "mnemic traces", hereditary "tradition", etc. What is certain, however, is that latency provides the Freudian concept of historicity: latency is the essence (the origin) of history, or, what is in fact the same: historicity is repetition. More clearly: because repetition is originary, the origin is repetition. As such, its postulated simplicity is always broached or cut open, it never takes place as a singular and pure event; as such it is divided or dissociated, set apart-set infinitely apart from itself, as interminable as birth (dependence). The inaugural is perhaps never anything but this incessant division, this incessant dissociation.

This in no way means that there is no origin, or, in a formalist version to which we all run the risk of succumbing at every turn, that history (individual or collective) is the repetition of an event which never took place, for example, of a "traumatic shock" which would be "retroactively fantasized". As Freud says, using a photographic metaphor, the shutter was definitely clicked, even if the development came later. Therefore, there was definitely a murder, there was always murder (and there does not cease to be murder). Real murder, as they say, which does not necessarily mean that it is simply a matter of an "empirical fact". But repeated murder, initially repeated (this is perhaps once again an affair of doubles, of primary, immediate doubling, of the immediate as doubling), such that it is never a matter of an event-except insofar as we understand the essence of the event to be repetition: nothing occurs but for the second time, and everything follows. That, precisely, is why we die, why there is time, why our lot is finitude. The Jews, says Freud, are the first to have renounced the belief in the immortality of the soul and the survival of the dead in the beyond.

This is probably the explanation of what Freud calls the unconscious-which never stops deporting analysis outside psychology, fracturing the identity of psychoanalysis.

This, in any case, is the complex structure which one must posit in order to account for what Freud designates in *Moses and Monotheism*, as the "formation of character", and which is the constitution of identity. The identity of an individual or of a people. And this, consequently, is what obliges us to think the theoretical unfulfillment of every character and every identity: of every subject.

That is why Jewish identity is not an identity. The Jewish people do not compose a subject-and there is no proper Jewish being. But this must not be understood in the way that allowed Nietzsche, in the wake of the mimetology of Plato (or Diderot), to advance the idea that the Jew-like the actor, or the woman-is the ultimate being who, insofar as he is nothing by himself, is "fit for all characters and roles" (the expression, in this case, is from Diderot). Because that is exactly what Freud combats in Nazi anti-Semitism: the imputation of impropriety as the proper. Rather, what must be understood is that because of this lack of subject, the Jews are carriers of the revelation that a social formation or political institution, whatever it may be (a people or a nation, to stay within Freud's terrain) is never capable of fulfilling itself as a subject. There is, in general, no completed political identity.

The fact remains that the depropriative gesture is accompanied and doubled-as we have already said, and one can read on every page of *Moses and Monotheism*-by the exactly opposite gesture. I suggested just a moment ago that there was a strategic intent in this "contradiction". That is certain. Let us say, to sum it up

in a phrase (and to maintain the negative reference to Nietzsche, whom Freud had undoubtedly read a great deal): Jewishness must not be reduced to a social and political mimetism. There is also a Jewish “character”, a nature and a “substance” abundantly described by Freud and all the more marked, or remarkable, because it is endurance itself and because it has been able to resist all the vicissitudes of history.

How, in the montage elaborated by Freud, is this affirmation upheld?

To go straight to the matter itself, I will answer: with the figure of Moses. It is Moses, as Freud ceaselessly repeats, who created the Jewish people; it is he who molded its character or imprinted its type, who sealed, as though upon wax, its proper being (Freud inevitably uses the verb *pr_gen* to signify the act). It is Moses, in other words-in the lexicon of figurality (*Bildung*, *Gestaltung*, etc.)-who modeled its specific traits. Like every figure, Moses, properly speaking, “fictions”. And the Jewish people, in Freud’s eyes, are the fiction of Moses.

You may recognize, in this problematic of figure and fiction, one of the most constant motifs of German thought and philosophy since at least the time of Wincklemann: the agonistic competition or mimetic combat waged against the overpowering Greek model, in view of the institution and constitution of a German people, of a German subject. That is to say, first, in view of a German art capable of fictioning, in the sense which I have just used the term, such a people-subject. You will recognize many indices, that it is necessary to refer here directly to Nietzsche, in whom, with and without Wagner, this problematic-or this haunting presence-of the figure and the fiction of the political (or, as was also said, as would again be said in Hitler’s time, of the German “myth”) comes to its culmination. One must not forget that the “novel” (or “romance”) of Moses and Monotheism is fundamentally, as Marthe Robert did not perceive, the counter-project which Freud explicitly opposes, in one of the purely agonistic episodes which never ceased to punctuate his life and his career, to Arnold Zweig’s long-held project of writing a historico-philosophical novel on Nietzsche (with reference, what is more, to the invention of psychoanalysis)(6). Just reread the chapter of Moses and Monotheism entitled “The Great Man”; it is all there, including a transparent allusion to the Untimely Mediation on history. In fact, it is not surprising that, quite a few years before the essay on Michelangelo already identifies Moses with the superman and that, in *Group Psychology*, the figure of Moses-carrier of the divine mana, his face shining with light as he descends from Mount Sinai-comes forth hardly a page after Freud evokes the superman, whom he sees, contrary to Nietzsche, at the origin of humanity. Moses, if you like, is a counter-Zarathustra: he does not presage the superman, but repeats him. Once again, the strategic motive is clear, and that is the reason why one should not be too hasty in ascribing this maintenance of the figure to Freud’s archeophilia. For beyond the notion that the figure of Moses succeeds (as perhaps all figures succeed), there are essentially two things which matter here: on the one hand that Moses, as a figure, is in principle foreign to the Jewishness which he founds. The “great man”, prince, priest, or warlord, is in any case an Egyptian religious imperialist. And the Jews, as a people-from within which the prophets, who are nothing less than figures, will secondarily appear-are in sum the consequence of an act of secession from vague “Semitic tribes” whose prior unity or ethnic identity cannot be inferred from anything in Freud’s text. Which is to say, in the clearest possible manner, that the identity of the Jewish people is in no way the product of an autoformation or an autofiguration(7).

And perhaps there is here, in Freud’s eyes, a general law: an identity is constituted from without, from the foreign-if indeed an identity can ever be fully constituted. Nor does Freud fail to apply this law to the German people “itself”; thus, the multiple allusion-to the heterogeneity of the German nation’s formation, to its partial Romanization, to its forced and ill-accepted Christianization, to the confessional division which has affected it since the Reformation, etc. But there is also the fact that the monotheism by which Moses seals the identity of the Jewish people is not his invention or his “thing”, nor is it the invention, the thing, or the property of the Ikhnoton who, Freud writes, may have received the notion, by way of his mother, from far-off Asia (Great Mother of humanity). Such that, in a process analogous to that of identification-and for good reason-the weight, if you will, of the mother (her materiality, following the equivalence of *mater* and *materia* indicated by Freud in the *New Introductory Lectures*) always interferes with the pure elevation of the figure, taking back within itself, retaining, withdrawing the trait whereby character incises. Because it is not a trait, except as retreat (*re-trait*)-even as a figure only is, insofar as it can never fully tear away from the unfigurable upon which it is etched out.

For in the end, everything is ordered around the unfigurable. That is to say, the withdrawal, the retreat. The

essence of Mosaic religion, its very law (and, consequently, the Law in general) is, for Freud, the prohibition of representation. This is the last advance in the process of spiritualization, the fundamental mark of the renunciation of instinct, the sign of a tearing free from the sensible and from materiality (from the undifferentiated mother); in short, sublimation itself, and, above all, access to the sublime, which is, in Kant's terms, "the suprasensible destination" of man. Which means ethics, or at least that part of ethics-apart from rational ethics or social law-which Freud qualifies as "mysterious", "sublime", and "mystically evident, and which, in religion, is the contribution of the father(8).

Freud gives a very explicit explanation for the prohibition of representation: it is the "return of the repressed", the return of an insupportable primary identification with the god. In what respect is this identification insupportable? Insofar as this identification is nothing other than murder. Freud emphasizes this time and again. Jewish religion is unique; it is the only case in which the founder is killed-therefore, it is the only case in which "religious development" proceeds unchecked, as in a complete neurosis and not one which is merely "rudimentary". (Freud does not fail to indicate between the lines that since the Jews, if this may be said, incarnate neurosis, and neurosis is the proper of humanity, the Jews are the most fully realized representatives of humanity; this is the reason why they are, through their existence itself, a kind of historical and collective social analyzer, something which almost all other peoples, necessarily short on identity, are far from forgiving them). But Freud also indicates time and again that this murder of the founder is in reality also the murder of the god himself. Nietzsche's "God is dead, and it is we who have killed him" is the historical truth of Judaism, and therefore of the religious as such. Christianity will bring this to light after its own fashion, in its repetition of the Mosaic episode; but in order to unburden itself of guilt, it will also veil its truth beneath the "good tidings" of redemption (by which the guilt is immediately transferred to the Jews, reelected for the occasion as scapegoats and set apart as the murderers). The primal murder (and every murder may be primal, at least every collective murder) is, therefore, always the murder of the god-in other words, murder as the impossible identification of others, if it is not as the dead Other from which a reciprocal recognition (community and sociality) afterwards proceeds. That is why, no more than the gesture of love which is its desperate obverse (or reverse), a murder is never an empirical fact. It is rather the event, as such always second, by which sociality perpetuates itself, succeeds to itself in violence. It is probably for this reason that Freud had no need to evoke the "thou shalt not kill": the prohibition of representation is the prohibition of murder, the god with "neither a name nor a countenance" is the condition of possibility for the recognition of others.

And such is Jewish truth, in whose name Freud unquestionably speaks.

But this Jewish truth has not been recognized by the Jews themselves: they have not admitted the murder of God, says the last page of Moses and Monotheism, and thus they have taken on the "the tragic load of guilt" for which "they have been made to pay heavy penance". It is, consequently, from this failure of recognition that Jewish identity proceeds, as the identity of what is, essentially, a dispersal-the half-blind testimony, never lucid and clear (we are in the space of Verleugnung), always perceptible nonetheless, of the paradoxically constitutive dis-sociality of human sociality.

The Jews, in other words, have not laid the matter to rest; they have not sufficiently carried out the dis-sociality, they have not gone to the limit of that which is commanded by the law of the unfigurable and the withdrawal: they have remained religious, and the re-ligio is the very instance of identification and of identity.

That, perhaps, is why it was left to an atheistic Jew-and one who did not let his own Jewish identity go unquestioned-to take yet another step forward in the progress of spirituality and to push to its extreme the abortive analysis of the social which an astonished reflection on his own condition made him recognize in the ethics and the thought of the people from which he knew himself to have come.

It remains, however, to ask what it means to found-a science, a practice, a school. Is foundation possible without a figure, without identification? And just why did the figure of Moses haunt Freud to such a point?

Translated from the French by Brian Holmes

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Notes:

1 See part I, Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy (1989), pp. 191-209. (All notes in the English version of the present essay were added by the translator – Ed.)

2 SE, 21, p. 144.

3 SE, 15, p. 160-61.

4 The reference is to Marthe Robert (1976), a very interesting attempt to trace the textual manifestations of fantasies composing Freud’s own “family romance” (“Familienroman” or “Roman familial”).

5 “Fortschritt in der Geistigkeit” is rendered as “advance in intellectuality” in the SE, 23, pp. 86n1; I have chosen the more literal “progress in spirituality” in order to maintain a closer equivalence with the French text.

6 The situation receives a more detailed discussion in the authors’ earlier article on Freud and sociality, “La panique politique”: “...Freud’s correspondence with Arnold Zweig permits us to discern the degree to which Moses and Monotheism was elaborated in opposition to Zweig’s plan to write a novel on Nietzsche. The Freud-Zweig rivalry, whose role in the life (histoire) of the founder of psychoanalysis was, as we know, very large... Thus there is a theoretical rivalry at stake in Moses and Monotheism, which is to say that in this book the identification of Freud himself, indissociably ‘human’ and ‘theoretical’, is at stake... With Moses, the book, Freud identifies himself, by identifying Moses, the figure—a historical figure indissociable from the artistic figure sculpted by Michelangelo—as the truth of Nietzsche’s ‘superman’” (Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy 1979).

7 It is, first of all, Freud’s own participation in the logic of self-founding national identity—clearly visible in section B of *Group Psychology’s* last chapter—that is affected by the process of identification which the authors isolate in *Moses and Monotheism*: “Also involved in the withdrawal of the mother is, no doubt, the birth of the first epic poet, described in Appendix B of *Massenpsychologie*. And no doubt the fiction of a poet who fictions himself as the hero of the origin myth (of the murder of the Father) permits Freud to write that the myth ‘is the step by which the individual emerges from the group psychology’. But the double process of the recognition of others in death and in the mother institutes itself before any such ‘emergence’. The structure of language is the structure, in the strictest sense, of general identification. But the process of that which makes language possible, the incisive process of Freudian identification is, as has elsewhere been recognized, nothing other than a process of alteration (“La panique politique”, p. 55).

8 Ethics are also at stake in the theoretical rivalry between Freud and Theodor Reik, a rivalry which takes place inside the psychoanalytic elaboration of the figure of Moses: “Freud silently reproaches Reik for treating the story of Moses as an origin myth. This reproach implies at least two correlative refusals, the first, to assimilate the story of Moses to an epic schema, and the second, to assign a primitive prehistoricity to Moses, instead of situating him in the succeeding moment, that of historical repetition. What Freud contests in Reik is the application to Moses of the sacrificial schema of religion.

All of those gestures form a system: Freud’s attempt to abstract Judaism from the common law of religion, to which Reik submitted it. Freudian Mosaim (and it matters little here if it is properly Jewish or not) stands as an exception to the religiosity of the sacrifice, to religion as mimetic or cathartic compensation for the originary murder. It abstracts itself from esthetics (from representation) and from the discharge of guilt: it is, in sum, the naked repetition of the origin (and yet does not preclude the unveiling of this nudity precisely, and only, in repetition, in history). Thus, this Judaism does not only articulate the truth of culture as a whole, the ethical truth-of social guilt” (Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy 1979, p. 50); see also Theodor Reik (1958).