

Freud's Vienna Circle, Psychoanalysis, and Antisemitism¹

PAMELA COOPER-WHITE

pcooperwhite@uts.columbia.edu

Union Theological Seminar, New York, NY 10027

The year is 1902. Five men sit in a close circle on a red velvet upholstered couch and matching square-backed chairs, around a Victorian turn-legged table bearing papers and journals, black coffee and cake. The air is thick with tobacco smoke. There is an urn that contains ballots with all the members' names, so that speakers can—and must—speak, in random order.² A meticulously dressed, bearded man sits in a chair a few inches apart from the rest of the group, drawing on his cigar, appraising them all with gimlet eyes. He is biding his time to speak until all the others have weighed in. A floor-to-ceiling ceramic coal heater chuffs somewhat ineffectually in the corner; it is the discussion that is generating the heat. The topic is religion.

The bearded man is Freud, of course, and this is his waiting room. Here and in the next room—his consulting room proper, with its carpet-draped couch—the walls are covered with pictures, and every surface is filled up with ancient archaeological figurines. With affectionate irony, he calls them “my old and dirty gods”—“*meine . . . alten und dreckigen Götter*.”³ These figures represent both an

¹ This lecture was a summary preview of the main arguments in my book *Old and Dirty Gods: Religion, Antisemitism, and the Origins of Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Routledge, 2017), and adapted from an article based on a plenary presentation to the Society for Pastoral Theology (Cooper-White, “‘Old and Dirty Gods’: Religion and Freud’s Wednesday Night Psychological Society from Habsburg Vienna to the Holocaust,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 27/1 (2017), online: DOI 10.1080/10649867.2017.1361700.)

² Freud instituted the urn as an old rabbinic tradition to prevent the teacher from monopolizing the discussion, but the obligation to speak was soon resented by the members, feeling exposed to scrutiny whether they were prepared to address a topic or not. See Charles B. Strozier and Daniel Offer, “Freud and His Followers,” in Strozier, Offer, and O. Abdyli, eds., *The Leader: Psychological Essays* (New York: Springer Verlag, 2011), p. 15. The urn was abolished by vote of the members in 1908. (Herman Nunberg & Ernst Federn, eds., *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society*, trans. M. Nunberg, New York: International Universities Press, 1962-1975, Vol. II, p. 352).

³ Letter of Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, August 1, 1889, in Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 363, as translated by J. Titherige in Lisa Marinelli, “My ‘Old and Dirty Gods’: An Exhibition on Freud’s Archaeological Collection,” *American Imago*, 66/2 (2009): 149-159 (notes online at <http://www.freudmuseum.at/online/e/inhalt/museumausstellungenGoetter.htm>) For an overview of the collection, see Lynn Gamwell and Richard Wells, *Sigmund Freud and Art: His Personal Collection of Antiquities* (Binghamton, NY: SUNY Press and London: Freud Museum, 1989). In his Introduction to this volume, Peter Gay cautions, “We have not yet penetrated the full meaning of Freud’s antiquities for him, although this assembly of objects helps us to make significant strides toward such an understanding... These small objects meant much to him.... Although sometimes, as we

intellectual interest in classical and Egyptian antiquity common among educated men and women of letters⁴ but, as well, are a metaphor for psychoanalysis itself—digging for long-buried evidence of powerful but often unacknowledged truths. Freud recognizes the compulsive nature of his collecting of these objects as an addiction second only to his cigars.⁵ That they are gods presents an even deeper mystery, never plumbed directly by Freud himself, but suggesting the simultaneous fascination and aversion characteristic of a neurotic symptom.

Freud's insistent atheism—and his somewhat contradictory, obsessional return to the topic of religion throughout his cultural writings—are both well documented. In a letter dated Oct. 9, 1918 to the Swiss pastor-analyst Oskar Pfister, he described himself as “a completely godless Jew.”⁶ This phrase was not merely a double negation (as both godless and Jew) of the dominant Roman Catholic religion of fin-de-siècle Vienna, but also served as a more complex signifier: in childhood an identity formed in a humanistic Judaism, and a growing identification with its intellectual and racial heritage against the backdrop of increasing antisemitism.⁷ Freud's cultural writings on religious themes are well known: first, the essay “Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices” in 1907,⁸ and then more famously, *Totem and Taboo* in 1913,⁹ *The Future of an Illusion* in 1927,¹⁰ and *Moses and monotheism* in 1939,¹¹ as well as a host of lesser known

dissect Freud, using his antiquities as so many surgical knives to probe his mysteries, we might remember the sheer pleasure he took in those pieces. Sometimes a statue is just a statue.” (Ibid., 19) Cf., Peter Gay: “his antiquities seemed reminders of a lost world to which he and his people, the Jews, could trace their remote roots” (in *Freud: A Life for Our Time*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2006, p. 172). Freud reportedly told the Wolf Man that they also represented to him the whole process of psychoanalysis as an archaeological excavation of each patient's psychic depths. (Ibid., 171)

⁴ Paul Roazen, *Freud and His Followers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), p. 177.

⁵ Max Schur, *Freud, Living and Dying* (New York: International Universities Press, 1972), p. 247; Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time*, pp. 170-171.

⁶ Heinrich Meng and Ernst L. Freud, Ernst L., eds., *Psychoanalysis and faith: The Letters of Sigmund Freud and Oskar Pfister*, E. Mosbacher, trans. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 63.

⁷ Following Mortimer Ostow, *Myth and madness: The Psychodynamics of Antisemitism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996), I use the spelling “antisemitism,” rather than the more conventional “anti-Semitism.” As Ostow has argued, “other terms that have been proposed, such as Jew-hatred or anti-Judaism, have not replaced it. [Here] I shall spell the term without capitals and without a hyphen, thus indicating my rejection of the racial implications of the term.” (p. 14) Ostow acknowledges, “It is a poor compromise, adopted only in order to comply with general usage.” Ostow defines antisemitism most basically as “prejudice against Jews,” (p. 13) but notes the complexity of anti- and philosemitism often co-existing as two “vectors” of the same prejudice, and the reality that many people's attitudes (citing Martin Luther and Wilhelm Marr) change over time. (p. 15) The problematics of defining Judaism and Jewishness – which can encompass religion, culture, and heritage – make a precise definition of antisemitism equally problematic. This issue of antisemitism in relation to psychoanalysis is further discussed in my book, Cooper-White, *Old and Dirty Gods*, pp. 217-246.

⁸ Sigmund Freud, “Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1959; orig. publ. 1907), Vol. 9:115-127.

⁹ Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1955; orig. publ. 1913), Vol. 13:1-162.

¹⁰ Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1961; orig. publ. 1927), Vol. 21:5-56.

essays, speeches, and correspondence mentioning both religion in general, and his own Jewish heritage in particular.¹²

Less well known, however, are the attitudes toward religion among the men—and eventually women—who joined him once a week to reflect on a wide range of implications of the new psychological science: psychoanalysis. There has been no in-depth exploration of the treatment of religion by this “Wednesday Night Psychological Society”—Freud’s immediate circle of psychoanalysts in Vienna—with the exception of Otto Rank and Theodor Reik whose work is still familiar to some specialists.¹³ In general, there has been much less scholarly interest in Freud’s Viennese circle as a whole than in Freud himself,¹⁴ and statements about the group have tended toward generalizations.¹⁵ Peter Gay in his comprehensive critical biography of Freud concluded that “Freud’s view of religion as the enemy was *wholly shared* by the first generation of psychoanalysts. The attempts of some later psychoanalysts to reconcile psychoanalysis with religion would never have found the *slightest sympathy* in Freud and his colleagues.”¹⁶

In my new book, *Old and Dirty Gods: Religion, Antisemitism, and the Origins of Psychoanalysis*,¹⁷ I investigate Gay’s premise based on my research as a senior Fulbright scholar at the Sigmund Freud Museum in Vienna in 2013-14, beginning with the research question: What religious themes appear in discussions and writings of Freud’s Wednesday Night Psychological Society? I begin with the minutes of this group recorded by Otto Rank from 1906 until Rank’s departure from Vienna in 1915 for military duty during WWI.¹⁸ In addition, rich sources include the journal *Imago*—the groups’ journal for cultural or “applied” psychoanalytic writings—followed by an examination of other published works, correspondence, and memoirs from members of Freud’s Viennese circle prior to World War II.

Freud and his circle often engaged in wide-ranging, interdisciplinary discussions during their Wednesday meetings, which then were expanded into published writings—including forays into history, biography, anthropology, archaeology, philosophy, the paranormal, and—especially of interest for this project—the study of religion across time and culture. A number of early analysts

¹¹ Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1964; orig. publ. 1939), Vol. 23:3-138.

¹² E.g., Freud, “Address to the Society of B’nai B’Rith,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1959; orig. publ. 1926), Vol. 20:271-274. For a detailed overview re: Freud and religion, see Marsha Aileen Hewitt, *Freud on religion* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹³ E.g., Dan Merkur, *Relating to God: Clinical Psychoanalysis, Spirituality, and Theism* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2013).

¹⁴ Elke Mühlleitner, and Johannes Reichmayr, “Following Freud in Vienna,” *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, 6 (1997):73-102, p. 74.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁶ Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time*, p. 533, emphasis added.

¹⁷ Pamela Cooper-White, *Old and Dirty Gods*.

¹⁸ Herman Nunberg and Ernst Federn, eds., *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society*, Vols. I-IV, trans. M. Nunberg, (New York: International Universities Press, 1962-1975), Vol. I, p. xvii.

who were either members of Freud's Vienna circle, or had a close relationship to it, published monographs and volumes of collected essays on religion. The works of Ernest Jones, Oskar Pfister, Theodor Reik, Otto Rank, Geza Roheim, Sabina Spielrein, and of course C.G. Jung (before and especially after his famous split with Freud), are prime examples of this literary productivity in the realm of psychology and religion.

Two Theses: The Expected Result and the Return of the Repressed

The First Thesis: Complexity in the Viennese Analysts' Views on Religion

So, I entered the project with one research question in mind: What religious themes appear in the discussions and writings of Freud's Wednesday Night Psychological Society? My hypothesis was that their views might be more complex and less strictly conforming to Freud's views than was assumed by previous scholars. The primary sources did, in fact, confirm a rich and often more complex view of the attitudes toward religion among Freud's early followers than has generally been recognized. I have detailed many examples of this in the book, but to summarize as briefly as possible, the members not only followed Freud's psychoanalytic-anthropological method of applying oedipal interpretations to ancient civilizations' ritual practices (as in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*), and critiquing the repressive moralistic teachings of the hegemonic Viennese Catholic Church, but at times expressed quite original ideas about a positive role of religion in advancing the sublimations and compromise formations necessary for civilization (a modification from *Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents*, and quite different from his *Future of an Illusion* by which time Freud had posited religion as an enemy). They believed that there was the *inverse proportion* of neuroses in devout believers vs. freethinking secularists, and even—in the case of the Pastor Oskar Pfister—making an argument for psychoanalysis as compatible with a liberal and non-repressive version of Protestant Christianity, freed from the constraints of moralizing dogma. Capturing well the mix of orthodoxy and creativity that characterized psychoanalysis from its beginnings with the Wednesday Night Psychological Society, Paul Federn—one of the earliest and most longstanding members of the Vienna Society—shared the following recollection in tribute to Freud at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute in 1948:

Freud...foresaw that many shades and deviations and derivations necessarily would develop...Only in this respect, are we "orthodox"; but we are open to every change which is progress without abandoning the established truth and the principles confirmed by our scientific method.¹⁹

¹⁹ Paul Federn, "Notes," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 16 (1948), 595-597.

A Second Thesis: Antisemitism and the Return of the Repressed

These first findings would have been more than enough to say “mission accomplished” based on my initial research aims. A second, unanticipated thesis emerged, however, that I believe in the long run may prove even more significant as a result of this study: that the surrounding atmosphere of antisemitism, even before the rising horror of the Nazi movement, stands at the *fons et origo* of psychoanalysis. Antisemitism shaped the first analysts’ ethical sense, and was formative in their theory as a desire to analyze (from the underside) what lay beneath every surface of the human psyche. Obviously there is no one impetus behind the development of psychoanalysis, and to claim antisemitism as a singular root cause would be reductionistic. Yet, with its curling tentacles, it is one of the most pervasive—as well as sometimes denied—social forces in 20th-century Vienna, and could not have failed to suffuse the thinking of Freud’s circle in some ways, both consciously and unconsciously.

Antisemitism constituted an ancient ocean of hatred in which the first psychoanalysts (almost all of whom were Jewish²⁰) had to swim, throughout their entire lives. It took constant vigilance to survive, much less succeed, in its dangerous waters. Above and beyond all the other themes discovered in the Wednesday Night Society’s discussions of religion, then, antisemitism stands as a “total context,”²¹ an ineradicable, overarching reality that could not have failed to influence these firsts’ analysts’ discoveries and explorations—and without which their ideas, especially concerning religion itself, cannot be fully understood.

I came to this realization in a visceral way while walking from my apartment in Leopoldstadt to the Freud Museum in the more affluent neighborhood of Alsergrund. I became aware that symbolically I was tracing Freud’s footsteps across the Danube Canal, from the eastern European Jewish ghetto to the upwardly mobile Ninth District. These two neighborhoods had contained two of the largest proportions of Jewish inhabitants in Vienna since the waves of immigration from Eastern Europe in the 19th century and before, but they were very different Jewish populations with differing cultural and spiritual lives.

Of course the Holocaust itself was the culminating event—or, more accurately process—by which longstanding religious and cultural hatred and envy toward the Jews as “Other” became systematized as a “science” of racial inferiority and ultimately extermination. Concentrated in the historically Jewish neighborhoods, one can find today—especially when looking for them—small brass plaques commemorating individuals and families who lived at a specific locale and then were deported to their deaths in the Holocaust. These plaques called “*Stolpersteine*” (“Stumbling Blocks”) were first created by German artist Gunter Demnig in 2009 as calls to remembrance. Demnig quotes from the Talmud: “a person is only forgotten when his or her name is forgotten.” The engravings gen-

²⁰ Mühlleitner & Reichmayr, “Following Freud in Vienna,” pp. 85-88.

²¹ Term from sociolinguistics and anthropology, as the encompassing surround of a culture, its practices and language(s), which may appear only partially in the subjective consciousness of individuals.

erally begin with the words “*Hier wohnte...*” (“Here lived...”) and end with “*gemordet*” (“murdered”), the place if known (usually a concentration camp) and year.²² The idea of stumbling stones is also a reminder of an old slur that if a person stumbled on the street, a Jew must be buried there. This slur has been re-appropriated to signify the importance of being stopped in our tracks, to notice, and to remember.

All over Vienna there are memorials to the victims of the Holocaust. Their sheer ubiquity is a statement of the horrific extent to which entire Viennese neighborhoods were impacted not only by the final genocidal months and years, but also by the centuries-old pervasiveness of the antisemitism that allowed the Nazis to flourish and the evil to spread like a wildfire through both Vienna and the Austrian countryside. Perhaps to walk the city as a foreigner myself allowed me to search out these many monuments with less ambivalence because my eyes were not covered by blinders of familiarity—or (as much?) denial. Or perhaps because of the endemic racism in my own North American context, combined with personal observations of antisemitism in my childhood and young adulthood, I was primed as a Christian of partial German descent to see these visible memorials, and to seek them out, either as an act of righteous remembrance, an act of penance, or both. In any case, the palpable sense of Viennese antisemitism as a climate, an atmosphere, was something that I no longer just knew from reading *about* it books, but came to *know* (both anew and again, like Freud’s “return of the repressed”²³) at a visceral level. I had seen its not-so-subtle signs with my own eyes, and I felt its miasma on my own skin.

Nor is antisemitism unique to Austria; it is likely worse today in some other central and eastern European countries.²⁴ But in keeping with my research focus on Vienna, it became clear to me (both through reading history but also reading the newspaper, the culture, and the comments of acquaintances), that the Holocaust is a memory which throughout Austria is still fraught with social denial, amid public calls for remembrance. Until as recently as 1991, when in a speech to Parliament Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky publicly called the Austrian people to responsibility for the atrocities of the Holocaust, the official and popular view tended to coincide in a concerted effort to deflect all blame onto Germany.²⁵ Images of Austria as occupied state, and Austrians as victims themselves of Nazi aggression, were repeated, mantra-like, in an effort to absolve Austria from its own violence toward the Jews and other groups slated for expatriation—and then, extermination.

²² Gunter Demnig, *Stolpersteine* [n.d.], online at <http://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/>

²³ E.g., Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1955; orig. publ. 1919), Vol. 17, p. 349.

²⁴ Personal travel 2013-14, 2015; cf., Jakob Mikanowski, *The Frightening Politics of Hungary's House of Terror*, 2012, online at <https://theawl.com/the-frightening-politics-of-hungarys-house-of-terror-a421981fa2e3#efech22x0>.

²⁵ Demokratiezentrum Wien/Vienna Democracy Center (2015). *Der “Opfermythos in Österreich: Entstehung und Entwicklung,”* online at <http://www.demokratiezentrum.org/wissen/timelines/der-opfermythos-in-oesterreich-entstehung-und-entwicklung.html>.

Today there are laws against a former Nazi party member serving in the government, and Holocaust denial speech, neo-Nazis, and hate crimes are officially banned. There have been official efforts at restitution and remembrance. However, a “soft” denial, coupled with ongoing antisemitism, persists in the general culture at large. I have met a number of older Austrians whose families were in Vienna during the war, and the usual response to any query about the Nazis or the Holocaust is an acknowledgement that yes, the Austrians were complicit, but: “Not everyone approved. My family certainly did not!” If so many families “did not,” then who were all those people in the cheering throngs on the Heldenplatz giving Hitler a triumphal entry into Vienna? One sardonic (typically Viennese) joke that circulates about this rewriting of history is the saying, “Oh no, they weren’t cheering. On that day on the Heldenplatz, they were just all waving their hands and shouting at Hitler ‘Go away!’”

A friend who moved to Vienna from Germany over 30 years ago commented that in those earlier days she sat next to an older woman on a park bench, and after exchanging polite greetings, the woman grumbled that there were too many “*Ausländer*” (“foreigners”). My friend replied, “*I’m* actually an *Ausländer*—I’m from Germany.” The woman stated flatly, “Oh, I don’t mean you. I mean the Jews.” While such comments may be made less readily to strangers these days, people I know and trust acknowledge that antisemitism and racism (mostly referred to as xenophobia) persist. There is a strong anti-immigration and anti-Islamic mood (as well as fairly small counter-protests which I saw around the university).

Since the October election in 2013, the far-right political party the “Freedom Party of Austria” (FPÖ)²⁶ led by a charismatic speech-maker who stays just this side of illegal hate speech, Heinz-Christian Strache, gained even further ground, rising to first place among Austrians from 23% to 25% in a Gallup poll with a strong anti-immigration campaign.²⁷ In 2016, the FPÖ candidate Norbert Hofer led with 36% in the first general election. In the delayed runoff election in December,²⁸ the independent candidate Alexander van der Bellen won by a margin of 350,000 votes (53% to 47%)—but the far-right still captures close to 50% of Austrians’ popular support. A slogan of this right-wing, anti-immigration movement, “*Pummerin statt Muezzin*” (“the cathedral bell, not the Islamic call to prayer”), echoes the sentiments expressed in the nationalist movement at the turn of the 20th century: keep Austria white, German-speaking, and Catholic.

Memento Mori

My morning and evening walks took me past two contrasting monuments. One, planted in a narrow park along the east side of the canal, was a soot-darkened and apparently untended but very ornate miniature chapel dedicated to

²⁶ Literally, *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*.

²⁷ Cf., Martin Ehl, “Populists in the Fast Lane,” *Vienna Review*, November 18, 2013, online at <http://www.viennareview.net/news/europe/populists-in-the-fast-lane>.

²⁸ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38202669>.

the memory of Johann Nepomok Hummel. A plaque indicates that it was placed there by the then *Bürgermeister* (mayor), Karl Lueger. Lueger was elected in 1895 by the first explicitly antisemitic political party, the Christian Socialists, and installed in 1897; Hitler regarded him as a model leader. He is considered a symbol of the rising antisemitism at the turn of the century in Vienna, and his name was (mostly) removed in 2012 from the portion of Vienna's most public street, the *Ringstrasse*. Once called the "Karl Lueger Ring," it is now the *Universitätsring*. Yet at least one subway entrance to the busy Schottentor station near the University still bore his name in January 2014, while I was living in Vienna), and the University letterhead on my teaching contract retained the older street name. His statue still stands in the Dr. Karl-Lueger Platz on the other end of the Ring.²⁹

In his desire to create a modern German city, Lueger planted over a dozen structures throughout Vienna, with his name prominently displayed. The largest monument is an enormous Baroque-style church, the *Dr.-Karl-Lueger-Gedächtniskirche* ("commemoration church") dedicated to St. Karl Borromäus, and still serving as an active Roman Catholic place of worship. It is planted squarely in the center of the *Zentralfriedhof*, or central cemetery, where numerous luminary Viennese musical, literary, and historic figures are buried. So Lueger casts a large shadow over Vienna to this day. His name and presence are still widely tolerated, without critical reflection on the antisemitism he represents. The little chapel I passed daily embodies the darkness and obscurity of this shadow. With its dingy stucco walls covered with graffiti, its interior locked behind heavy wrought iron gates and strewn with dirt and litter, it looks less like a monument to a saint or a statesman, than a haunted house: a *memento mori*.

Across the canal from Leopoldstadt, in the 9th district at the top of Berggasse, stands a very different monument in the small courtyard of a well-kept Catholic Church, the *Servitenkirche*. This monument commemorates all the victims of the Holocaust who lived on the adjoining street, Servitengasse. The memorial consists of a collection of skeleton keys, each with a name tag for one of the Servitengasse victims. The keys represent both the mundane business of daily life, and its violent disruption—as well as serving as symbols of homes inhabited and wrenched away.

Walking daily between Lueger's uncanny chapel and the Servitengasse memorial, as well as all the other Holocaust memorials throughout Vienna, it became utterly clear to me that even if the first analysts had never written a word about antisemitism, their work, their sense of identity, and their very lives, were marinated in this bitter reality, and it could not have failed to have an impact on their creative thinking. Although there is, in fact, very little actual discussion of antisemitism recorded in the minutes of their meetings, their writings and memoirs as a whole—taken together with historical accounts of Austrian political and cultural history—tell a more complete story.

²⁹ A pressure group from University for Applied Arts and the Jewish Museum, Vienna, has organized to transform the Dr. Karl-Lueger Platz into a monument against antisemitism and racism in Austria: <http://en.luegerplatz.com/impressum.php>.

My research at the Freud Museum and on the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society's early thoughts on religion, has certainly raised antisemitism and the Holocaust to the forefront of my own consciousness in new ways. Although I was raised in Episcopal and Methodist churches, and currently serve as an ordained Episcopal priest, my hometown on the north shore of Boston has a large Jewish community. I had friends whose grandparents still bore tattooed numbers on their arms. For me, therefore, the Holocaust has never been abstract. I have perpetually been drawn to study Freud and his circle because the history of psychoanalysis is a perspective from which one can try to make sense of the irrational—both personally and in social and political movements. It is also a perspective haunted by religion as a much-contested subject. The rise of overt antisemitism and the fusion of church and state at the turn of the twentieth century in Austria, together with Freud's adamant embrace of his Jewish heritage while utterly rejecting religious belief, make for fascinating research. And it is research that troubles the waters.

Psychoanalysis, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust

The Holocaust was a shattering of history, and has been investigated in every generation since with ever-deepening insights about the multi-generational impact of trauma.³⁰ Only recently have psychoanalysts begun to unpack the effects of the Holocaust on the analysts who escaped, on the institutes that received them, and even on the shaping (or mis-shaping) of postwar psychoanalytic theory.³¹ My project is slightly different, though related. The impact of the Holocaust should never be underestimated, but it is my contention that because it was, in Bettelheim's words, such an "extreme situation,"³² the long prior history of antisemitism in itself may become subsumed in its glare. I want to argue that in addition to the Holocaust itself, the decades—as well as centuries—of antisemitism that led up to it, are not incidental but are central to the development of psychoanalysis.

Freud's Jewishness has already been well examined as a dynamic factor in the development of psychoanalysis. Yet Jewishness in itself is, of course, not identical with antisemitism. The very long shadow of antisemitism *itself* must also be located as a catalyst at the *very origins* of psychoanalytic theory and practice—both in terms of what the first analysts saw (that no one else was seeing), and what they failed to see. This is not to say, of course, that antisemitism

³⁰ E.g., Françoise Davoine and Jan-Max Gauzeillière, *History Beyond Trauma*, trans. S. Fairfield (New York: Other Press, 2004); in the psychoanalytic literature see also Emily Kuriloff, *Psychoanalysis and the Third Reich: History, Memory, Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2014), and Dori Laub, "The Testimonial Process as a Reversal of the Traumatic Shutdown of Narrative and Symbolization," in *Answering a Question with a Question: Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Jewish Thought, Vol. II*, ed. Lewis Aron and Libby Henik (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2015), pp. 301-21.

³¹ Especially, see Emily Kuriloff, *Psychoanalysis and the Third Reich*; see also David James Fisher, "Towards a Psychoanalytic Understanding of Fascism and Anti-Semitism: Perceptions from the 1940's," online at www.hagalil.com/2009/12/fisher; Robert Prince, "Psychoanalysis Traumatized: The Legacy of the Holocaust," *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 69/3 (2009), 179-194.

³² Bruno Bettelheim, *Freud's Vienna and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage, 1991).

was the *only* factor in the development of psychoanalysis. The emergence of a science and a hermeneutic of the unconscious was overdetermined like everything else. Psychoanalysis incorporates a rich, complicated tapestry of sources and influences. Yet the core realization of psychoanalytic thought—that there is always more beneath the surface appearances of reality, and that this “more” is among other things affective, memory-laden and psychological—cannot fail to have had something to do with the experiences of the first Jewish analysts in their position of marginality and oppression.

The Influence of Antisemitism

Antisemitism, as a belief system saturating the dominant culture of Western Europe, perforce delineated the Jew as “Other.” Jews in different contexts at various times embraced this outsider position as a safe enclave, or sought to escape it through assimilation. But their view was always one from the margins, a view that Gentiles did not share or even perceive. As postcolonial theory has taught us,³³ the view from the margins is often more acute and penetrating than from the mountaintop of privilege.³⁴ Comparing Freud to other “great revolutionaries” of thought, Isaac Deutscher declared to the World Jewish Congress in 1968,

as Jews they dwelt on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions, and national cultures. Their mind matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilized each other. They lived on the margins or in the nooks and crannies of their respective nations. Each of them was in society and yet not in it, of it and yet not of it. It was this that enabled them to rise in thought above their societies, above their nations, above their times and generations, and to strike out mentally into wide new horizons and far into the future.³⁵

³³ The postcolonial literature is vast, and still expanding. A classic text is Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). Other foundational texts include Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. R. Philcox (New York: Grove, 2004; orig. publ. 1961) and Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. R. Philcox (New York: Grove, 2008; orig. publ. 1952); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon/Random House, 1979); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998). For overviews see also Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jaydeep Chakrabarty, *Postcolonialism: A Critical Introduction* (Booktango/amazon kindle, 2015). Said reads Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* through a postcolonial lens in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in *Freud and the Non-European* (London: Verso/Freud Museum, 2003).

³⁴ Contra Peter Gay, *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism and the Making of Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp.146-147. Contemporary historians of psychoanalysis have used the term “optimal marginality” to describe the acuity and creative genius from a marginal status, which has arisen within psychoanalysis from Freud to the present (summarized in Lewis Aron and Karen Starr, *A Psychotherapy for the People: Toward a Progressive Psychoanalysis*, New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 8-9, 29 et passim).

³⁵ Isaac Deutscher, “The Non-Jewish Jew,” in *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*, ed. T. Deutscher (New York: Hill & Wang, 1968), pp. 26-27.

As Dutch psychoanalyst Hans Reijzer has observed, “When people live between two cultures, they think dialectically and see society dynamically.”³⁶ The Jews of Austria could speak and understand the language and culture of both oppressed and oppressor, and they also could not but view and judge themselves through the lens of the dominant culture. In his culture shock during his first visit to the Wednesday Night Society, the famous Swiss psychiatrist C.G. Jung viewed the Viennese analysts as “cynical,”³⁷ but in their own context that was simply what came of being awake to the societal dynamics into which they were born. It was part and parcel of surviving in a hostile climate.

Yearning for acceptance and assimilation was one psychic force, which sometimes engendered both denial and hope. Realism and the knowledge of danger was a countervailing force. The former—the assimilationist story that psychoanalysis is a western science—is the narrative told most often. The latter—the subversive knowledge of oppression—is the uncanny truth of trauma, which returns again and again in disguised form, but can never remain entirely repressed.³⁸ The total context of antisemitism, and the first analysts’ efforts to resist its penetrating logic of denigration, could not have failed to inform and shape their ethical sensibilities and their vision of social justice. Moreover, this experience infused them with a psychic need to analyze what dark secrets lay beneath the human psyche—of which sex and aggression were perhaps the most powerful in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Vienna. Thus, antisemitism had an indelible impact, not only on their personal and professional lives and aspirations, but on the very formation of psychoanalytic theory.

Implications for the Field of Pastoral Theology, Care & Counseling

Some of my theologian colleagues might be wondering, “What’s a nice pastoral theologian like you doing in the Sigmund Freud Museum, presumed hotbed of atheism!?” For some time now, I have been seeking further depth and complexity for a statement I made in an article in 2011 on psychoanalysis and its implications for the pastoral disciplines,³⁹ in which I argued that pastoral psychology and pastoral theology should reclaim our Freudian and classic psychoanalytic heritage—including the drives, the oedipal struggle, and an appreciation for the tragic:

Borrowing an inelegant phrase from today’s youth culture, we should not “throw Freud under the bus.” Any temptation to do so may well be a neurotic

³⁶ Hans Reijzer, *A Dangerous Legacy: Judaism and the Psychoanalytic Movement*, trans. J. Ringold (London: Karnac, 2011), p. 25, also citing Deutscher, *op. cit.*, pp. [25-41].

³⁷ Deirdre Bair, *Jung: A Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2003), p. 119.

³⁸ Freud, “The Uncanny.”

³⁹ Pamela Cooper-White, “A Critical Tradition: Psychoanalysis,” in *Pastoralpsychologie und Religionspsychologie im Dialog: Impulse für die Seelsorge/Pastoral Psychology and Psychology of Religion in Dialogue: Implications*, ed. I. Noth, C. Morgenthaler, and K. J. Greider (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2011), p. 68.

defense against our embodied selves with our sexual and aggressive impulses, just as he warned us. By the same token, we may rightly subject Freud's defensive motives for rejecting all forms of organized religion to the same scrupulous analysis as he advocated for all other domains of life. Following [Melanie] Klein, can we tolerate the ambiguity of holding together both the good and bad of psychoanalysis, and the good and bad of religion? Following the contemporary relational[-psychoanalytic] theorists, we might consider a radical complexity of the human mind that can encompass sex and death, attachment and the fear of loss, and faith and dread.

It continues to be my hope that by examining the treatment of religious themes in the writings of the Vienna circle and Psychoanalytic Society, more complexity might be brought to light—not by rejecting or circumventing Freud's atheism, but by holding in creative tension the many contested but common concerns of psychoanalysis and religion. By the same token, psychoanalysis cannot be considered apart from its *Zeitgeist* following the emergence of a historical self-consciousness in the 19th century along with archaeological exploration and “orientalism,” and the beginnings of postmodernism in philosophy (e.g., Schopenhauer and Nietzsche), Marxism, expressionism in art and music (especially in Vienna with such figures as Klimt, Kandinsky, and Schiele; Karl Kraus; and Arnold Schönberg), or from its cultural context including rigid gender roles, pseudo-scientific racist taxonomies (including virulent antisemitism), and the brutality of war in 20th-century Europe with its consequent poverty and disease.

My research at the Freud Museum in Vienna, including both documentary and contextual resources, has convinced me all the more of the need in the field of *pastoral theology* in particular to “complicate the categories” in our perceptions of the historical treatment of religious themes in psychoanalysis, based on the evidence of much “creative tension” even in the earliest days of psychoanalysis. Although Freud's atheism did tend to rule the day and set certain rigid limits (both conscious and unconscious) around what aspects of the field of religion could be explored and how, Freud's conscious views on religion during the first half of the 20th century do not constitute the sum total of all that can be understood about psychoanalysis and religion, either then or now. All forms of western care and counseling continue to be influenced—however subliminally—by both the vision and the blind spots of the founder of psychoanalysis—and also his early circle of colleagues. For this reason, the “creative tensions” within their circle—as well as the analysis and critiques we can bring from the vantage point of different eras and different and evolving cultures (including Vienna itself), deserve continued, sustained scholarly examination. Even from within the broad field of psychoanalysis itself, the *methods* of psychoanalysis can be used for further exploration,⁴⁰ while *the early limits* re: what is a “proper” attitude or

⁴⁰ E.g., as shown by Diane Jonte-Pace, *Speaking the Unspeakable: Religion, Misogyny, and the Uncanny Mother in Freud's Cultural Texts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001);

approach toward religion can be greatly expanded in dialogue with both historic and contemporary global developments. This work has already been done by a number of psychologists of religion in the last two decades, and increasingly by psychoanalysts, but almost not at all by *pastoral theologians* (who are predominantly Protestant) in recent times.

A further question also arises within the discipline of pastoral theology, which is as much vocational as academic: how does this research translate to *theological education* and the *formation* of pastoral caregivers and counselors? In the words of Irving Greenberg, "*The Holocaust confronts us with unanswerable questions. But let us agree to one principle: no statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children.*"⁴¹

There are lessons we should derive from a closer examination within pastoral and practical theology of anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and the continuing legacy of late 19th and 20th century European history on our own North American context as pastoral theologians. Even as our field of pastoral theology in the U.S. and North America has been seriously and increasingly attentive to questions of difference, power, privilege and "the Other" in the past two-plus decades, we have largely focused this attention on the pastoral ramifications of gender and racial oppression in U.S. society, and the wisdom to be gained from postcolonial theologians from the Global South. Because of the (ongoing) near-absolute dominance of Protestantism among the members of the Society for Pastoral Theology, there is a dearth of writing about the (ongoing) antisemitism and the impact of the Holocaust on psychoanalysis, and by extension, pastoral theology and the practice of *Seelsorge*, care and counseling, as well as the field of psychology and religion.⁴² What would be the implications of such a study for the

Ana-María Rizzuto, *Why Did Freud Reject God? A Psychodynamic Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and Madelon Sprengnether *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

⁴¹ Irving Greenberg, "The Shoah and the Legacy of Antisemitism: Judaism, Christianity, and Partnership after the Twentieth Century," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. T. Frymer-Kensky, D. Novak, P. Ochs, D.F. Samuel, and M.A. Singer (Boulder, CO: Westview/Perseus, 2000), p. 27.

⁴² A literature review of the American Theological Library Association's ATLAS database, using key words "anti-Semitism," "Judaism" and "Jewish" + "pastoral theology," "pastoral care," and "pastoral counseling," yields only five brief articles on Jewish pastoral care by Jewish practitioners, one article on pastoral imagination using the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC as an exemplar for theological education (Douglas Purnell, "Educating the Whole Body: Addressing and Equipping the Imagination in Theological Education," *Pastoral Psychology*, 49/3, 2001, pp. 205-225), two entries with substantive material on pastoral theology and the Holocaust (Katherine A. Snyder, "A Post-Holocaust Theology of Suffering and Spiritual Grieving: Staying Attached to God in Loss," *Journal of Pastoral Counseling*, 43, 2008, pp. 67-78; and Larry Kent Graham, "Narratives of Families, Faith, and Nation: Insights from Research," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 21/2, 2011, online), and eight briefer articles on pastoral care or counseling with Holocaust survivors as case examples (in chronological order: Paul D. Steinke, "Black Milk: Literary Resources for Learning Pastoral Care," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 60/4, 2006, pp. 335-342; Rabbi Levi Meier, "The Traveling Torah and Healing," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 61/1-2, 2008, pp. 37-42); Bennett Gurian, "Selected Quotes from Three Years of Interviews with an Older Man," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 63/12, 2009 (online); James Newton Poling, "Creativity, Generativity, and the Next

formation of pastoral caregivers and counselors, and for theological education more generally? What might it mean subliminally that we have rejected or feel we have “superseded” the theories of the Jewish Freud, while the psychoanalyst we still most embrace and quote is the Methodist Winnicott (when we embrace psychoanalytic theory at all?)

Social Implications for Psychoanalysis

Taking into consideration years of mounting fear, the eventual terror of forced migration, and an aftermath of often intense survivor guilt, psychoanalysis was riddled at its origins with an often repressed but uncanny return of an innumerable crowd of unladen ghosts. Beginning with Freud's Viennese circle, and continuing on from the first generation of analysts in Europe across the globe, psychoanalysis bears a multi-generational wound—antisemitism and the Holocaust are its deepest scar and stain, a persistent, still largely unmetabolized trauma at the heart of the discipline.

One consequence of all this unmetabolized trauma may be that of all the psychotherapeutic disciplines, psychoanalysis has been among the slowest to recognize the impact of *context* on the psyche—both at the level of individual patients' sufferings, and at the level of society. This has finally been accomplished largely by relational psychoanalysts through the insistence on intersubjectivity and mutual psychic influence, via the recuperation of formerly exiled thinkers such as Sándor Ferenczi. Contemporary relational analysts (e.g., Lew Aron and Karen Starr,⁴³ Stephen Mitchell,⁴⁴ Neil Altman,⁴⁵ Jessica Benjamin,⁴⁶ Gilbert Cole,⁴⁷ Philip Cushman,⁴⁸ Adrienne Harris,⁴⁹ Dorothy Evans Holmes,⁵⁰ Kimber-

Generation,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 19/23, 2009, pp. 94-103; David J. Zucker, “Flourishing in the Later Years: Jewish Perspectives on Long-term Pastoral Care,” *Chaplaincy Today*, 25/2, 2009 (online); E. Byron Anderson, “Memory, Tradition, and the Re-membering of Suffering,” *Religious Education*, 105/2, 2010, pp. 124-139; Pamela Cooper-White, “Denial, Victims, and Survivors: Post-traumatic Identity Formation and Monuments in Heaven,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 22/1, 2012 (online); and Timothy A. Thorstenson, “The Emergence of the Chaplaincy: Re-defining Pastoral Care for the Postmodern Age,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 66(2), 2012 (online); plus a poem (E.C. Holmstrom, “A Small Stone,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 61/3, 2007, p. 276). There are 680 entries on “Holocaust + theology,” and over 28,000 hits on various combinations of “Jewish” and “Judaism” and “pastoral care” or “counseling,” but these search categories were obviously much too broad, and the resulting entries focused not on pastoral theology, care and counseling, but on interfaith dialogue, ethics, Christian systematic theology, and Jewish theology. Note that even the most generally relevant entries in ATLAS were all written in 2001 or later.

⁴³ Aron and Starr, *A Psychotherapy for the People*.

⁴⁴ E.g., Stephen Mitchell, *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) and Mitchell, *Relationality: From Attachment to Intersubjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁴⁵ E.g., Neil Altman, *The Analyst in the Inner City: Race, Class, and Culture through a Psychoanalytic Lens*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁴⁶ Numerous writings, e.g., Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988) and Benjamin, *Beyond Doer and Done To: Recognition Theory, Intersubjectivity, and the Third* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁴⁷ E.g., Gilbert Cole, “Categories as Symptoms: Concepts of Love in the Psychoanalytic Relationship,” *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 4/4 (2005), pp. 977-987.

lyn Leary,⁵¹ Melanie Suchet,⁵² Cleonie White,⁵³ among others) have begun to bring to the attention of psychoanalysis as a field to issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and politics. Increasing attention paid to race, gender, and power by the “Tavistock” school of unconscious group relations based originally in London on the work of Wilfred Bion.⁵⁴ This (re-)turn toward context begs the question how context really did matter to the first historic generation of psychoanalysts, and should recall that historic, immersive reality of antisemitism into our present awareness.

Conclusion

Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, who died just a little over a year ago, was known for his passionate exhortation that we must never forget the horrors of the Holocaust, lest we repeat them. Wiesel’s words were powerful, but only a little over seventy-five years after *Kristallnacht*, few Americans, especially those outside the Jewish community, know or remember what that was, much less how it might still be relevant today. We appear to be immersed in a period of history in both the United States and Europe that feels eerily similar to the emergence of hate speech, violence, and demagoguery that preceded the Holocaust in Europe. (How) can psychoanalysis with its deep appreciation for the impact of history—especially buried history—help facilitate Wiesel’s project of staying awake in the face of rising terror?

⁴⁸ E.g., Philip Cushman, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Beacon, 1996) and Cushman, “A Burning World, an Absent God: Midrash, Hermeneutics, and Relational Psychoanalysis,” *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 43/1 (2015), pp. 47-88.

⁴⁹ E.g., Adrienne Harris, “The Socio-political Recruitment of Identities,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 19 (2009), pp. 138-147.

⁵⁰ E.g., Dorothy Evans Holmes, “Come Hither, American Psychoanalysis: Our Complex Multicultural America Needs What We Have to Offer,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 63/3 (2016), pp. 569-586, and Holmes, “Culturally Imposed Trauma: The Sleeping Dog Has Awakened. Will Psychoanalysis Take Heed?” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 26/6 (2017), pp. 664-672.

⁵¹ E.g., Kimberlyn Leary, “Racial Enactments in Dynamic Treatment,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 10 (2000), pp. 639-653.

⁵² E.g., Melanie Suchet, “Unraveling Whiteness,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 17/6 (2007), pp. 867-886, and Suchet, “Facing Our Racialized Selves,” presentation to the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy Diversity Conference, New York, January, 2016.

⁵³ E.g., Cleonie White, “Surviving Hate and Being Hated: Some Personal Thoughts about Racism from a Psychoanalytic Perspective,” *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 39 (2002), pp. 401-422, and White, “What Dare We (Not) Do? Psychoanalysis: A Voice in Politics?” *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, 2/1 (2004), 49-55.

⁵⁴ Wilfred R. Bion, *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers* (London: Hogarth, 1961).