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“Freud and Levinas: Talmud and Psychoanalysis Before the Letter”

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The Jewish World
of Sigmund Freud

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*Essays on Cultural Roots and
the Problem of Religious Identity*

Edited by ARNOLD D. RICHARDS



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Freud and Levinas

Talmud and Psychoanalysis *Before the Letter*

ETHAN KLEINBERG

The names Sigmund Freud and Emmanuel Levinas conjure up vastly different images of Jewish identity. In most tellings, Freud is identified with atheism, assimilation, science, and secular Jewish thought. By contrast, the Lithuanian born French philosopher Levinas is identified with ritual observance, the study of Talmud, and religious Jewish thought. Thus if one were to consider these two thinkers under the rubric of "God and Godlessness," the pairing of Sigmund Freud and Emmanuel Levinas seems justified if one assumes Levinas will provide the "God" and Freud the "Godlessness." But the pairing becomes more interesting if we allow the "God and Godlessness" to serve as a common formative issue in the upbringing and education of these two apparently disparate thinkers. I would like to suggest that for both Freud and Levinas this issue of God and Godlessness in relation to the question of what it means to be a Jew comes to a head in their respective use and application of the figure of Moses.

Freud's *The Man Moses and the Monotheistic Religion* is a strange book and one that has attracted serious attention from scholars including Richard Bernstein in *Freud and the Legacy of Moses* and I must confess that I owe a debt to Professor Bernstein's work in the formation of this essay as will become apparent. But it was Yosef Yerushalmi's discussion of the "Talmudic" nature of Freud's Moses coupled with Levinas's stated recourse to "psychoanalysis before the letter" in his Talmudic lecture from 1963, *Towards the Other*, that is the basis of this investigation.¹

My first intuition was to search for the "Talmudic" in Freud and the "psychoanalytic" in Levinas but as I was reading *The Man Moses and the Monotheistic Religion* I was struck by another and apparently more controversial reading. The opening sentence of *Moses and Monotheism* has rightly been a lightning rod for religious, philosophical, and historical commentary. Freud states: "To deny a people the man whom it praises as the greatest of its sons is not a deed to be undertaken lightheartedly — especially by one belonging to that people."²

There are many ways to approach this sentence but I would like to do so using Amos Funkenstein's concept of "counter history." For Funkenstein, counter-histories form a specific genre of history "whose function is polemical. Their method consists of the systematic exploitation of the adversary's most trusted sources against their grain — 'die Geschichte gegen den Strich kämmen.' Their aim is the distortion of the adversary's self-image, of his identity, through the deconstruction of his memory."³ Now the use of this term is complicated by whether one sees Freud as an adversary or advocate of "Judaism" but there is no doubt that Freud's reading employs the most trusted sources of Judaism read against the grain. If Moses was an Egyptian, as Freud argues in this work, and if the monotheistic religion is in fact the creation of the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten, then Freud has transposed the identities of the Hebrews and the Egyptian in a fashion that turns the oppressors (the Egyptians) into the sav-
 iors and further turns the oppressed (the Hebrews) into the oppressors through the murder of this Egyptian Moses at the hands of the Hebrew people. Thus Freud has provided a counter-historical account of the Exodus that subverts the meaning of the original narrative. But Freud's argument, and Funkenstein's interpretive category, assumes an immanent historical approach that subordinates or denies the possibility of transcendent meaning. To put it simply, it privileges historical understanding over divine revelation.

But there is another definition of "counter history" or to put it more accurately "counter historicism" that has been employed by Samuel Moyn and myself in the investigation of Emmanuel Levinas's work.⁴ In this usage, "counter history" does not contain the same political connotations as in Funkenstein's variant and as are manifest in Freud's contentious claim about the origins of Jewish identity. Instead, "counterhistoricism" refers to the infinite nature of a thought or ideal that transcends time and space. Emmanuel Levinas's counter-historicism asserts that certain lessons, ideas, and morals transcend time and are thus always accessible regardless of the specific historical context.

Thus in contrast to Freud's counter-historical Moses whose true identity is revealed by scientific, historical, and psychoanalytic analysis, Levinas's counter-historical Moses is one whose teachings transcend time, space and historical context. Levinas tells a story about Moses who wants to know the future of the Talmud. Moses is transported to Rabbi Akiba's academy. When Moses enters the school he is disconsolate to discover that he doesn't understand anything of the lessons being taught. His mood is lifted, however, when at the end of the session Rabbi Akiba attributes his lesson to the teachings of Moses at Mt. Sinai. Here the eternal message is delivered within the context of temporal change and the authority of Rabbi Akiba is not questioned despite the incomprehensibility of his teachings to Moses. Thus Levinas places his emphasis on the transcendent communicability of God via the rule of Law as revealed to Moses.

In Freud and Levinas, the use of Moses highlights the issue of immanence

and transcendence in relation to Judaism, Jewish thought, and Jewish history. The psychoanalytic investigation into Moses and the monotheistic religion provides an immanent historical understanding of the Jewish people whereas Levinas's investigation into revelation and the permanence/infinite nature of Torah and Talmud emphasize the transcendent nature of Judaism. I suppose this would also correlate to the Levinas/God, Freud/Godless distinction. But I would mislead you if I suggested that there was such a distinct divide between the two for traces of each can be found in the other. There is transcendence in Freud and immanence in Levinas.

It should come as no surprise to find the concepts or categories of immanence and transcendence wrapped around each other in any discussion of Jewish thought. And while the title of this paper is "Talmud and Psychoanalysis Before the Letter" I could have pushed things further and referred to Talmud and psychoanalysis before the law because for both Freud and Levinas, an essential moment in the history of the Jewish people (of the culture and religion) is the revelation and presentation of the Ten Commandments and the Torah: the books of Moses. Here we can also refer to the significance that Derrida affords this ordinary or arche moment of archivization in *Mal d'Archives* and there is much to be said about this relation as well.⁵

But I want to turn our focus to the character of the Torah, the books of Moses, which is in itself an imminent object that implies the transcendent. As such it is the embodiment of this conflict, this tension between a historical reality conditioned by material circumstance and the infinite, unconditional, and unrepresentable force that gives it its authority. The tension embodied in this work authored by, or revealed to, Moses is what both Freud and Levinas see as the key to understanding the longevity and future of the Jewish people.

Now it must be said that Freud and Levinas are the products of different milieus, educational trajectories, and even cultures, as we will discuss presently. But it is also important to note that Freud was composing his *Moses* in the 1930s at the same time that Levinas was looking to the concept of transcendence in order to break with his former teacher (and at the time Nazi party member) Martin Heidegger.⁶ Thus the historical context of the mounting pressure of anti-Semitism in Austria and France provide the backdrop for our investigation into the specific uses, and perhaps abuses, of Moses in the service of some of the more peculiar assertions in the endeavors of both thinkers.

I will start with Freud. This serves our purposes well because Freud represents the enlightened Maskilim in the most canonical sense of the term. Yerushalmi's assertions notwithstanding, Freud represents a familiar trajectory for German speaking cosmopolitan Jews. Whether or not Freud knew Hebrew or Yiddish, whether or not he was versed in the religion of his fathers, Freud chose to present himself as a secular Jew absolved of the burden of religious belief and instead shackled to the project of scientific investigation. His early work on Feuerbach, whom in 1875 he claimed "among all other philoso-

phers I worship and admire this man the most," set the table for his future assessment of religion.⁷ Feuerbach's indefatigable mission to unmask theology as the outcome of purely human needs resonates in all of Freud's works. Indeed the language of Freud's statement about Feuerbach highlights the transition from the "worship" of religion to the "worship" of one who sought to uncover the underlying, and entirely human, sources of religious belief. Freud's views were not outside the mainstream of enlightened German Jewish culture as announced by the project of the Science of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*), itself a nineteenth century phenomenon announced by Immanuel Wolf in his 1822 essay *On the Concept of the Science of Judaism*. In this essay Wolf asserts "the fundamental principle of Judaism is again in a state of inner ferment, striving to assume a shape in harmony with the spirit of the time. But in accordance with the age, this development can only take place through the medium of science. For the scientific attitude is the characteristic of our time."⁸ By the early twentieth century, it was clear that this "scientific attitude" was antagonistic toward categories such as faith that could not be demonstrated through objective data and Freud's own rigorous science of psychoanalysis was clearly poised to expose the purely human aspects of religion and Freud makes this explicit in *Totem and Taboo* and *The Future of an Illusion*.

But this leads Freud to a problem that he articulates in his introduction to the 1930 Hebrew translation of *Totem and Taboo*.

No reader of [the Hebrew version of] this book will find it easy to put himself in the emotional position of an author who is ignorant of the language of holy writ, who is completely estranged from the religion of his fathers—as well as from every other religion—who cannot take a share in nationalist ideals, but who has yet never repudiated his people, who feels that he is in his essential nature a Jew and who has no desire to alter that nature. If the question were put to him: "Since you have abandoned all these common characteristics of your countrymen, what is left to you that is Jewish?" He could not now express that essence clearly in words; but some day, no doubt, it will become accessible to the scientific mind.⁹

The issue at hand is how to understand the essence of Judaism divorced from any religious pretenses. Freud was committed to the process of *bildung*, secularization and assimilation in his lifestyle and his work but this should not be equated with conversion or the sacrifice of his Jewish identity. Yerushalmi and Bernstein are both very instructive on this point. The commitment to a secular understanding of religion, thus Judaism, and the problems this raises in relation to any sort of "Jewish identity" seems to be the *raison d'être* of his *Moses* book. It is the basis for his counter historical claim that Moses was an Egyptian and that the origins of the Jewish people are the direct result of this "great man" and not divine revelation. Freud tells us that the Jews were not chosen by God but instead chosen by Moses. The question as to why Freud would make such a move at a time of mounting anti-Semitic persecution and on the eve of one of the darkest chapters in the history of the Jewish people is a source of great speculation. It is what makes Freud's *Moses* so strange. By removing

the transcendent theological imperative as the basis of Judaism (God's choice) Freud opens onto an ontological and purely anthropological question about the essence of Judaism that he hopes to answer via the science of psychoanalysis.

Here I'd like to turn to an aspect of Freud's *Moses* that is discussed at length in the studies by Yerushalmi, Derrida and Bernstein. Freud's historical argument that Moses was an Egyptian follower of the monotheistic religion of Akhenaten, who in the face of persecution from the Egyptian authorities chose to bestow his religion on the Hebrew people, seems to lack substantial historical support.¹⁰ But as it turns out the argument does not rest on historical evidence so much as psychoanalytic evidence as is revealed when Freud tells that there was not one Moses but two. The Egyptian Moses, the stern and strict father figure who was the tireless advocate of a monotheism that forbid graven images, was killed by the Hebrew people who incorporated these traits into their early conception of God based on their memory of Moses "for in truth it was not an invisible god but the man Moses who led them out of Egypt."¹¹ But if Moses was killed why wasn't the Jewish religion abandoned and how is it that two generations later (according to Freud) the second Moses came to found the religion of Judaism that fused the volcanic Jahve religion with the monotheistic religion of the Egyptian Moses? And how did the traits of the human Moses come to be ascribed to the former volcano God? For Yerushalmi this is a source of great consternation, as Freud's extrapolation from individual cases of trauma to the history of the Jewish people (or religion in general) appears to sit on very shaky ground that can only be supported by recourse to the discredited evolutionary theory of acquired characteristics espoused by Lamarck. Freud tells us that if "we accept the continued existence of such memory-traces in our archaic inheritance [heritage], then we have bridged the gap between individual and mass [group] psychology and can treat peoples as we do the individual neurotic."¹² This assertion requires the inheritance of memory traces independent of direct communication or education and thus some sort of "phylogenetic" transmission of traumatic memory from generation to generation.¹³ It is this leap that Yerushalmi finds embarrassing. But Richard Bernstein has shown Freud's position to be more circumspect, more nuanced and more fruitful and I would like to follow his lead. Bernstein tells us that while Freud does have some Lamarckian proclivities, they are not "striking or radical in the way in which Yerushalmi (and others) indicate." Instead Bernstein offers the possibility that what Freud has discovered "is that there are certain basic psychological dispositions and characteristics" and that these must be factored into our understanding of biological evolution.¹⁴ I would like to build on this based on work in the field of cultural evolutionary studies and evolutionary history.

In his work from 1976, *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins presents a construct he refers to as the meme.¹⁵ The meme (a shortening of the Greek "mimeme" meaning imitation) is precisely an acquired cultural trait that is passed down from generation to generation through natural selection: "Fash-

ions in dress and diet, ceremonies and customs, art and architecture, all evolve in historical time in a way that looks like highly speeded up genetic evolution, but has really nothing to do with genetic evolution."¹⁶ If we emphasize the transmission of ceremonies and customs, would it be too far a stretch to suggest that Freud is presenting the possibility that cultural traits are passed down from generation to generation through the interaction of parents and children but also predicated on cultural norms in a way that the response to a trauma long removed is re-enacted, encoded, and phylo-memetically transmitted so that the neurosis of the individual would precisely mimic, or at least be generated by, the neurosis of the group? Especially given Dawkins statement that "When you plant a fertile meme in my mind you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation."¹⁷ It is also the case that for Dawkins, the longer a meme survives the more fertile it is, and the more accurate its replications. One can't help but think of Freud's discussion of the longevity of the Jewish people. This may be too much so let us look to a separate instance of evolutionary history to provide an historical template that corresponds to Freud's own historical investigation in *Moses*.

In William McNeil's *Plagues and Peoples* from 1977, McNeil provides a macro narrative of human development based on Darwinian evolutionary theory and specifically the role that disease plays in the history of humankind.¹⁸ In this book the parasite seems to be afforded far more agency than any individual but it is really evolution that dictates why and how historical events occur. One example of McNeil's methodology will serve us well.¹⁹ In his analysis of the origins of the Black Plague in Europe, McNeil admits that he does not have sufficient historical evidence to recreate the conditions that led to the outbreak of bubonic plague. What he does have is evidence from more recent outbreaks and using an evolutionary framework he discerns the processes that lead from parasitic stasis to outbreak. Because the model is evolutionary and the process of natural selection is constant, McNeil can use his investigation into the plague outbreak in 1894 to give us an historically plausible account of the origins of the plague outbreak in the fourteenth century. Now this argument is based on scientific observation of verifiable data, it is immanent, but what is interesting is that it allows for a permanence of meaning based on a certain notion of the transcendent truth of natural selection. The mechanism used to analyze the modern case history is equally applicable to past events. But the longevity of this explanation comes at the expense of human agency.

I would like to argue that Freud follows the same scientific logic in his historical analysis of Moses which is not based on any hard evidence of what happened in the past but instead on the discoveries of psychoanalysis in the present. Like McNeil, Freud asserts that there is a permanent, in this case psychic, mechanism that is at play and given the correct conditions the archaic memory can be triggered. Thus the murder of the Egyptian Moses turns out to be the repetition of the killing of the primal father as enunciated in *Totem and Taboo*.

Bernstein tells us this acting out is the result of the psychic memory but triggered by specific historical events. "The great deed and misdeed of primeval times, the murder of the father, was brought home to the Jews, for fate decreed that they should repeat it on the person of Moses, an eminent father substitute."²⁰ But as with the first patricide this crime is also repressed and the memory lies latent until such historical conditions occur as to bring it forth again with the arrival of the second Moses and the transformation of the Yahweh religion. So again we see a scientific model that allows for historical understanding predicated on a certain notion of transcendence.²¹ For Freud's analysis to hold, the primal trauma can never be overcome and must sit locked within our psychic make up waiting to be triggered. As with McNeil, Freud's analysis assumes a permanence that allows for explanation but at the expense of agency.

Perhaps more important, Freud uses this investigative strategy to conserve a permanent essence of Judaism that will always survive. It is an encoded trace memory that evolved into an advance in intellectuality (*Der Fortschritt in der Geistesigkeit*).²² Furthermore this explanation of an inherited Jewish character allows Freud to assert the permanent or transcendent essence of Jewishness. Here Freud takes the mantle from the great man Moses who gave Judaism its essence. Freud reveals the historical truth about Moses and Jewishness and in so doing revokes the divine Revelation at Sinai and removes the cloak of religion. This then allows Freud to place his own legacy as the next advance (*der Fortschritt*) in the intellectuality (*der Geistesigkeit*) of the Jewish people.²³ One might argue that this is Freud the Talmudist who has uncovered the deepest secret of Judaism and has done so before the letter, by looking at the moment before the creation of the books of Moses. For Freud, Torah in and of itself is not the answer although it holds the clues to understand the importance of the man Moses. And yet it is still the Torah that provides the material for Freud's psychoanalytic investigation. And here we should be instructed by Derrida's discussion of Jacob Freud's gift to his son Sigmund: the bible of his youth but clothed in a new skin.²⁴ Indeed, the contents of the Torah do not change for Freud but the skin does. The stories and lessons of the Bible are to be conserved but now seen under the book cover of Freud's psychoanalytic understanding of religion. Thus Derrida's reference to a second circumcision, a second covenant, is made explicit in Freud's understanding of the essence of Judaism that conserves its transcendent quality but devoid of religion.

At the same time that Freud was working through the possibilities of a de-divinized Judaism, Emmanuel Levinas was performing a *Teshuvot* or return to the religion of his youth. Now it would be wrong to claim that Levinas was a Talmudic scholar in the traditional sense of the term. While he was raised in Vilna, Lithuania (the home of the famous Talmudic institutes of the Gaon of Vilna and Chaim of Volon) he did not study Talmud in his youth but came to it in the late 1940s and 1950s. Indeed he came to Talmud after the famous Talmudic institutes had been destroyed and the instructors killed in the Shoah.

There is a chasm between Levinas and the Talmudic traditions of Vilna that surrounded him in his youth but that he certainly did not embrace. Like Freud, Levinas was raised in an enlightened Jewish household. His parents owned a Russian bookstore and spoke Russian to him at home. Levinas went to Russian schools for as long as he could and then attended Moses Schwabes' *Gymnasium*. His parents did not intend him to become a rabbinic scholar but to attend a University and this is how Levinas came to study at the University of Strasbourg and then with Heidegger in Freiburg. There are certainly similarities between the assimilationist tendencies of the Freuds and the Levinases but here it is essential to stress that Maskilim in Vilna were not the Maskilim of Vienna. Levinas was not an assimilated Jew in the modern German, French or Austrian sense of the term. He was probably closer to Moses Mendelsohn than the more secular young Gershom Scholem or Raymond Aron and certainly less secular than Freud. Throughout his life Levinas was ritually observant but the belief that Levinas was trained as a Talmudic scholar overplays the importance of religious observance for Levinas. In contrast one must be careful not to overplay the importance of enlightenment or *Bildung* either. Any study of Levinas must take account of the importance of both Enlightenment and cultural assimilation as well as religious piety and ritual observance.

But here I want to point to a definitive moment in Levinas's philosophical career. Up until the second world-war, Levinas's emphasis was on the importance of philosophy in the service of understanding religion or the possibility of religion. After the war and the Shoah this relationship was inverted and from this point on Levinas presents religion as the necessary precondition for philosophy. This is evidenced by his turn to Talmud after the war but one can also read this in *Totality and Infinity* from 1961.

But the turn to Talmud and to Moses cannot be seen as a continuation of the Lithuanian Talmudic tradition. The debt to Torah of which Levinas speaks in the 1960s was not paid until after the war. Instead we must recognize Levinas's use of Talmud and Moses as indebted to extra talmudic sources such as phenomenology and perhaps most important the work of Søren Kierkegaard. I have argued elsewhere that the source of Levinas's counterhistoricism, his emphasis on meaning that transcends time, is the work of Søren Kierkegaard but while Levinas is not a traditional Talmudist he is not a protestant either.²⁵

In Kierkegaard's presentation, a story such as that of Abraham and Isaac is as meaningful to us today as it was to the first Hebrews because: "no generation begins other than where its predecessors did, every generation begins from the beginning, the succeeding generation comes no further than the previous one, provided the latter was true to its task and didn't betray it."²⁶ This statement is a response to the Hegelian view of history that was popular in the mid-nineteenth century. The movement away from Hegel is not incidental as Levinas follows Kierkegaard in part to move away from the Hegelian variants that were popular in Levinas's France. But Levinas also wants to escape the rule

of history, and perhaps the very real historical conditions that surrounded him in the 1940s (the Shoah). It is also this emphasis on the transcendent quality of the Torah and Talmud that allows Levinas to cross the "bridge of longing" between the destroyed Vilna of his youth and the Paris of his present. For Levinas the issue is Ethics and the turn to Talmud is a reversal of his pre-war emphasis on philosophy (an emphasis troubled throughout the thirties by Heidegger's political choices). After the Shoah, philosophy could not be trusted to provide an Ethics and because Levinas's focus is Ethics, the paradigmatic figure is not Abraham but Moses.

Levinas is not content to let Kierkegaard's "Knight of Faith" bask in personal salvation and instead looks to Moses who was given the daunting challenge of translating divine will into law. For Levinas it is essential that the Law be universal and communicable. But it must also be temporal, even if it is has recourse to the eternal, and this occurs via the study of Talmud. It is not the word of God in a miraculous sense but the word of God in our own context. Here the transcendent touches on the immanent and one cannot help but notice the way that the historical event of the Shoah serves as the impetus for Levinas's return to Talmud and his counterhistoricism.

The use of Moses points to some striking affinities between Freud and Levinas, especially in regard to the relation between Judaism and Christianity and the role of anti-Semitism in understanding Jewish identity. Freud characterizes Christianity as a regression of the intellectual advance of the rigorous monotheism of the Jews insofar as it is a return to a polytheism of sorts.²⁷ In one of his earliest forays into Talmud, "Place and Utopia" from 1950, Levinas characterizes Christianity as a religion of myth, a story for children where the Father will take care of them and miracles supplant agency and responsibility. Levinas presents Judaism as a religion for adults attached to the here and now. For Levinas, Judaism has "chosen action and the divine word moves it only as Law [Mosaic Law]. This action does not tackle the Whole in a global and magical fashion, but grapples with the particular."²⁸ Both see Christianity as a regression from the more mature stance taken by Judaism and presented as an "advance in intellectuality" by Freud and a "religion for adults" by Levinas. Both also see this as one of the sources of anti-Semitism.

But there are serious differences between Levinas and Freud highlighted by their uses of Moses. In his 1964 Talmudic lecture on "The Temptation of Temptation," Levinas examines a text from the tractate *Shabbat* pp. 88a and 88b. The text itself is a discussion of the moment in Exodus when Moses brought the Torah to the Jewish people, Rav Abdima bar Hama bar Hasa instructs us that the Lord said "If you accept the Torah, all is well, if not here will be your grave."²⁹ The tract is about Moses but the emphasis is on the seemingly predetermined choice in response to the Lord's statement. The issue gets more interesting for Levinas as he tells us that the "temptation of temptation" of which he speaks "may well describe the condition of the west." This temptation of

temptation is the temptation of philosophy, the seduction of reason as a tool by which humans can master and control the world around them. We must also be aware that this temptation is one that seduced Levinas in the years before World War Two and led him to Heidegger. "Philosophy, in any case, can be defined as the subordination of any act to the knowledge one may have of the act ... the act in its naiveté is made to lose its innocence. Now it will arise only after calculation, after a careful weighing of pros and cons. It will no longer leave the other in its otherness but will always include it in the whole ... from this stems the inability to recognize the other person as other person, as outside all calculation, as neighbor, as first come."³⁰ Make no mistake that Levinas is claiming that the love of, or quest for, knowledge in and of itself is the obfuscation or even obliteration of Ethics. It is the denial of the Other based on the hubris of the self that believes it can obtain the truth on its own. Freud would certainly have succumbed to the temptation of temptation in Levinas's eyes. But if knowledge, philosophical or scientific, is not the answer then what is? Here Levinas returns to Moses: "The revelation which is at stake in the following text will permit us to discover this order prior to the one in which a thought tempted by temptation is found."³¹ This is a revelation conditioned by the threat of death: "The teaching, which the Torah is, cannot come to the human being as a result of a choice." I suppose one could think about the ways that Freud's definition of Jewishness is not the result of a choice either. But Levinas continues: "That which must be received in order to make freedom of choice possible cannot have been chosen, unless after the fact."³² In Levinas's reading the consent to Torah is given before the revelation of the laws of Moses and is done so only when faced with the alternative of death. God chose the Jewish people. Thus for Levinas, Revelation is the condition for reason. This is why Levinas refers to the biblical response "we will do and we will hear." The doing precedes the hearing, the act of accepting comes before we hear the commandment.

But there is more at stake here for Levinas because even during times of crisis or turmoil, even when seemingly all of the Jewish people have strayed from the path, Revelation is still accessible. Thus even when the Hebrews chose to worship the golden calf and thus lost their adornments, Moses maintained the covenant and "kept his crowns." The connection is made more immanent when Levinas states "The text may be speaking of those times when Judaism is practiced or studied only by a small minority, perhaps only by one man, when it seems to be completely continued in treaties, immobilized between book bindings, and when living Jews have lost all influence as Jews."³³ Writing in 1964 one could imagine Levinas responding to the secularization of world Jewry or the historical conditions that annihilated over 6 million Jews. The key for Levinas is that even if only one man has access to the Torah, the meaning is still accessible to all because it transcends time, space and historical context even if it is relevant to all. But the onus is on that "one man."

Levinas recounts Chaim of Volozhin's interpretation of a passage from the *Saying of the Fathers*. In the passage the rabbinical scholars compare the Torah to glowing coals. And Levinas states: "Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin interpreted this remark approximately as follows: the coals light up by being blown on, the glow of the flame that thus comes alive depends on the interpreters' breath."³⁴ For Levinas, meaning remains in the coals regardless of time or context and what seems to matter most is not the blowers' training but his or her engagement with the coals. Here Levinas's counterhistoricism allows him to rekindle the coals through the force of his breath. And here the Levinasian interpretation encounters difficulties. Despite the pretensions to universalism, it appears that any one individual can access the transcendent meaning of Torah. But what is to keep this from proliferating into multiple potentially conflicting interpretations and ultimately into relativism? Levinas tells us that the relation between God and the individual is expressed in obedience to the Law through the reading and study of Talmud but that this reading cannot be solipsistic. It must be communicable to others in your time. But from where does Levinas obtain the authority to read and teach Talmud? And why is he not "the great man" whose intellectual interpretation and innovation is actually the most important factor, as in Freud's description of Moses or a description of Freud himself.

The issue of authority and authorization is essential to our understanding of both of these thinkers and to our understanding of their use and identification with Moses. Where does authority, intellectual or religious, come from and who grants it? For Freud, it is his faith in scientific investigation and his confidence in his own "scientific mind." The essence of Judaism is revealed through the science of psychoanalysis and thus the understanding of Judaism is revealed in his interpretation of Moses: Freud the atheist becomes the conduit of revelation. This is a revelation based on the immanent conditions of the human psyche but that conserves the transcendent permanence of Jewishness. For Levinas, it is his belief in divine revelation and his confidence in his own ability to read, interpret, and teach Talmud. Levinas's use of Moses reveals the transcendent nature of the Torah and Talmud that is always accessible and always relevant. But we must also take account of the immanent historical conditions of the Shoah that gave rise to Levinas's particular reading. Thus both thinkers claim to define, explain, and instruct us about the tradition of Judaism but both of their positions are self-authorized. Freud has granted himself authority to provide a scientific definition of the essence of Jewishness via his invention of psychoanalysis. Levinas has granted himself the authority to read, interpret and teach Talmud based on his own philosophical strategies and devoid of traditional rabbinic instruction or oversight. In a sense both are Moses. They are each the father/author of a school of thought with disciples and doctrines, acolytes and heretics. And as with their respective interpretations of the man Moses, their legitimacy can be interpreted as either self-gen-

erated or divinely inspired. In the end, both use Moses to construct a rapprochement between the categories of immanence and transcendence that presents an understanding of the essence of Judaism that is derived, be it through Talmud or psychoanalysis, "before the letter."

Notes

1. Sigmund Freud, *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion: Drei Abhandlungen* (Amsterdam: Verlag Albert de Lange, 1939); *Moses and Monotheism* trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Vintage, 1967); Richard Bernstein, *Freud and the Legacy of Moses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Yossef Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1991); Paul Schwaber, "Scientific Art: The Interpretation of Dreams," *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, Volume 31/1976, Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings* trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 24. This lecture was originally published in *La Conscience juive face à l'histoire: le pardon*, eds. Eliane Amado Levy-Halensi and Jean Halperin (Paris: PUF, 1965) and republished in Levinas, *Quatre lectures talmudiques* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1968).
2. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 3.
3. Amos Funkenstein, "History, Counterhistory, and Narrative" in *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 36.
4. See Samuel Moyn, "Emmanuel Levinas's Talmudic Readings: Between Tradition and Invention," *Proofs* 23, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 2003), 42–68, and Ethan Kleinberg, "The Myth of Emmanuel Levinas" in *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2004).
5. Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'Archive: une impression freudienne* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1995), *Archive Fever* trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
6. See Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927–1961* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), chapter 7; and also Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), chapter 3.
7. Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for our Time* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 28.
8. Immanuel Wolf (Wohlwill), "Über den Begriff einer Wissenschaft des Judentums" in *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 1 (Berlin 1822), translated into English as "On the Concepts of a Science of Judaism" in *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 2 (1957).
9. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 volumes, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogart, 1953–74), vol. XIII, xv.
10. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 31.
11. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 37.
12. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 128.
13. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 125. See also Sigmund Freud, *A Phylogenetic Fantasy: Overview of the Transference Neuroses*, ed. with an essay by Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, trans. Axel Hoffer and Peter T. Hoffer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).
14. Bernstein, *Freud and the Legacy of Moses*, 57.
15. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).
16. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 204.
17. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 207.
18. William H. McNeil, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York: Anchor, 1976).
19. McNeil, *Plagues and Peoples*, chapter 4.
20. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 113. Bernstein, *Freud and the Legacy of Moses*, 40–41. Bernstein uses the Strachey translation: "Fate had brought the great deed and misdeed of primeval days, the killing of the father, closer to the Jewish people by causing them to repeat it on the person of Moses, an outstanding father figure."
21. Joel Whitebook has suggested that the model presented by Freud, and McNeil as well, is transhistorical rather than transcendent. I would argue that belief in the transhistorical nature of these models requires the same sort of "leap of faith" that is necessary in religious belief but now

applied to the infallibility of scientific (modern secular) thought. Thus even the seemingly neutral term "transhistorical" assumes that the model itself is able to transcend time and place to be universally applicable. See Brad S. Gregory, "The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion," *History and Theory*, Theme Issue 45 (2006).

22. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 142–146. See Bernstein, *Freud and the Legacy of Moses*, 82–83. The term *Fortschritt* (progress, step forward) is far more Hegelian than the Darwinian term *Entwicklung* (development, evolution) and this Hegelian connotation is heightened by the coupling with *Geistigkeit*. It would be interesting to examine the Hegelian overtones of Freud's *der Fortschritt in der Geistigkeit*, especially in relation to Hegel's lectures on the "Philosophy of History" where he states that "*Welligeschichte ist der Fortschritt im Bewusstsein der Freiheit*." Here one might ponder the possibility that, for Freud, the Jewish people are the people of *Geist* and that as the embodiment of reason they are the principle of history according to the Hegelian use of "*Geist*" and "*Welligeschichte*." This too would be a sort of "counterhistory" where Freud inverts Hegel's claims about Christianity and Judaism.

24. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 22.

25. Kleinberg, "The Myth of Emmanuel Levinas," in *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France* (2004). See also Moyn, "Emmanuel Levinas's Talmudic Readings: Between Tradition and Invention," *Prooftexts* 23, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 2003), 42–68 and Moyn, *Origins of the Other*, 164–207.

26. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin Putnam), 146–147.

27. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 112.

28. Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficile Liberté* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1976), 145.

29. Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 30.

30. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 35.

31. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 36.

32. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 37.

33. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, 44.

34. Emmanuel Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. Gary D. Mole (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 109, 210 n. 8.

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