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### The illusion of a future: the rhetoric of Freud's critique of religious belief

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1. Freud took himself to have a psychoanalytically valid argument against the honest viability of religious belief. By *psychoanalytically valid* I mean an argument that ought to convince anyone who accepts the basic principles of psychoanalytic explanation and interpretation. Thus, while the argument was not meant to persuade those who did not already believe in psychoanalytic diagnoses, the claim was nevertheless a strong one: namely, that no one who properly understood psychoanalytic insights could legitimately find a way also to embrace religious belief. (I take “proper understanding” to imply living in the light of that understanding.) If Freud’s argument was as strong as he claimed it to be, it would mean that anyone who, in the face of his interpretation, continued to adhere to religious conviction would thereby reveal him- or herself as to some degree psychoanalytically unfit—that is, they would thereby show themselves to be clinging to infantile wishes. As a social fact, Freud’s argument had a significant effect on the development of psychoanalysis in the twentieth century: though there were a few exceptions, his argument provided an orientation for analysts towards analysands who professed religious conviction, and it played

an important role in who was allowed to train to be an analyst (for some notable exceptions, see, e.g., Loewald, 1953; Meissner, 1984; Rizzuto, 1998). This is one reason why a careful examination of Freud's argument is not an arcane matter: people were excluded from the psychoanalytic profession, and analysands were regularly regarded as psychically unhealthy, based on the assumption that Freud's argument was sound. By way of comparison: the American Psychoanalytic Association has officially distanced itself from Freud's arguments that homosexuality is a form of psychic ill health. Indeed, such a view is now taken to be a form of discrimination (APA, 1992). Is it not at least possible that Freud's argument against religious belief fosters a similar discrimination (not yet recognized as such) against religious believers?

It is characteristic of prejudice that those who suffer from it tend not to recognize it as such. (It is easy enough to recognize it in others.) So if one is on the lookout for discrimination in one's own practice or profession, one must proceed cautiously, looking for signs and symptoms. One sign is the way that the anti-religious view could be propped up by rhetorical gestures that fall sort of genuine argument. To take one example, in *A Godless Jew*, the historian Peter Gay wrote, "it is certain—and I am devoting the rest of this book to demonstrating this argument—that if Freud had been a [religious] believer . . . he would not have developed psychoanalysis" (1987, pp. 30–31).<sup>1</sup> According to Gay, the very existence of psychoanalysis depends on Freud having had the courage to reject religious belief. But if one looks for the purported demonstration, one looks in vain. Look for yourself, and you will see that there is no *argument* there. What one finds instead is the repetition of stock phrases—notably that "religious ideas are incorrigible, scientific ideas corrigible"—mixed in with historical anecdotes about Freud (p. 32). Gay never tells us what he means by his claim that "religious ideas are incorrigible"; and even if we only consider the Jewish tradition in which Freud was raised, there are obvious counterexamples. Maimonides' twelfth-century *Guide of the Perplexed* (1963) argues for a massive revision in the interpretation of the Torah, in part to reconcile it with the Hellenistic science and philosophy of his day. The mythic stories of the Bible, according to Maimonides, should not to be accepted as literally true but, rather, as a guide for the young and imma-

ture. (I return to Maimonides later in this chapter.) Of Spinoza, who was both influenced by and critical of Maimonides, Gay writes, “As early as the seventeenth century, Spinoza, one of the two or three philosophers Freud ever professed to admire, had laid it down that one must read the Bible as one reads all other books: critically” (Gay, 1987, p. 46). Fine; but Gay does not notice that he here provides compelling evidence against his own thesis. Spinoza’s claim that the Bible should be read critically—just as one reads other books, including scientific ones—is itself an instance of the corrigibility of religious ideas. Spinoza did not give up professing religious belief; rather, he argued for a radical revision in how God should be conceived (see Spinoza, 1992, 2001).<sup>2</sup> And even if, as some suspect, Spinoza was not sincere in his profession, that does not matter for the issue at hand: all that matters is that he *might* have been sincere. Indeed, if one takes him at his word, the very corrigibility of science should be understood as a process by which we better come to understand the divine. What is this, if not an attempt to correct religious ideas? The important point here is not to criticize Gay’s “argument”; it is to note that in the second half of the twentieth century, the fact that genuine argument was missing was not particularly noticed. Why not? I suspect that the “psychoanalytically informed” reader of the day did not notice because he did not feel the need for argument: it was common knowledge that “religious belief is illusion”. Whatever the truth of this last claim, these are the dynamics of professionally shared prejudice. If we wish to reassure ourselves that we are free of its lingering residues, it is imperative to return to Freud’s argument and determine just how good an argument it is.

2. Freud famously argued that religious belief is illusion. He meant this in a precise sense: a belief is an illusion if it is caused by a wish (Freud, 1927c, p. 31). This would typically be a misfire in the process of belief-formation. For if we take the paradigmatic case, it is inherent in the very idea of belief that it takes itself to be caused, in a truth-preserving way, by that which it is about. If I believe that there is a cat on the mat, it is because, for example, I take myself to be seeing a cat on the mat, and I take the actual cat’s presence on the mat to be causing—in the right sorts of ways—both my perceptual experience and the formation of a propositional belief.

Obviously, there are other legitimate routes to my belief: I might take Carol's word for it; and she might have taken Ted's word for it, and so on. But, roughly, I accept this chain of testimony because I believe that there is a causal chain leading back to that cat on the mat and that cat on the mat's causing all of our beliefs in the right sorts of ways. If, by contrast, my belief that there is a cat on the mat is caused not by any cat's being on any mat but, rather, by a wishful impulse—perhaps cats are unconsciously linked to my mother, and I have a wish to see her stretched out there on an imaginary mat—then I am mistaking a dreamlike experience for an experience of reality. My attempts to live within the truth, such as they are, are short-circuited.

To take a more salient example: consider the belief that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. How could someone come to have such a belief? In the paradigm cases at least, it is constituent of the very idea of belief that one has some idea, however hazy, of how one has come to have it. And the idea of how it came about ought at least to lend credence to the belief's being true. If, when asked why one believes that Moses received the Law, someone says, "I was holding a chewing-gum wrapper and I folded it into a paper airplane. I resolved that if I could fly it to the far wall, I would believe that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. The plane hit the wall."—by his very account of how the purported belief came about, it is thereby impugned. Obviously, his belief would be impugned even if God did give Moses the Ten Commandments. In that case, his belief would be true, but it would not have been acquired in the right sort of way. We all recognize that beliefs like this call for an account, however hazy, of how they appropriately have come about. In this case, a typical answer would be: "God did give Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Moses came down and reported this to the Israelites and gave them the Commandments. The account of this event was recorded in the Torah, and it has been passed on from generation to generation until the present day." Whether or not this account is true, it is the *sort* of answer that would legitimate having the belief. And it would seem that the very idea of having a factual belief—that is, a belief about how the world is, was, or will be—requires that one have some such account of how one has come to have it. If, when asked why he believes this, he says, "I have no idea; I just do"—then, although he

may be in a significant psychological and epistemic state, his claim to factual belief is impugned.

So, Freud's claim that religious belief is illusion seems to be threatening from inside the perspective of religious belief itself. To stick with the current example: if I were to come to see that my purported belief that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments was ultimately caused by wishes of mine—or perhaps also the wishes of others—that *ought* to impugn my belief. And if it does not, that reveals a problem about me and my epistemic relations to the world. The essential problem with illusion is that we are mistaken about the basis of our commitment to it. We take it to be a belief based on responsiveness to the world; in fact, it is primarily held in place by unconscious wishes. And if, when this is pointed out to us, we continue to cling to the religious belief, we thereby manifest a kind of pig-headedness. Rather than being rational animals, swayed in response to the way things are as well as to good arguments, we would show ourselves to be stubbornly clinging to wishful illusions. If that were all there was to be said about the matter, there would be reason to object to training any such person to be a psychoanalyst. There would also be reason to think that the analysis of any such person, persisting unabated in an illusion, was—to use an expression that was common in the last century and has its own wishfulness—“incomplete”.

3. Freud argues that religious belief is an illusion by offering an account of the wish that causes it. Religious belief, he argues, arises from infantile experiences of helplessness (Freud, 1927c, pp. 15–19). Religion emerges as a cultural elaboration of childhood fantasies whose function is to protect us against a sense of utter vulnerability. According to Freud, we wishfully imagine that the world is ordered according to a higher purpose, and we each have a proper role within it.

Over each one of us there watches a benevolent Providence which is only seemingly stern and which will not suffer us to become a plaything of the over-mighty and pitiless force of nature. Death itself is not extinction, is not a return to inorganic lifelessness, but the beginning of a new kind of existence which lies on the path of development to something higher. [Freud, 1927c, pp. 18–19]

Freud diagnoses this as a manifestation in adult life of an infantile longing for a protective father—a powerful figure who was on one’s side and who could ensure that the world was overall just (Freud, 1927c, p. 33). This is why Freud thinks that religion is illusion: it is held in place by “the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind”. The secret of their strength lies in the strength of those wishes. His judgement is merciless:

The whole thing is so patently infantile, so foreign to reality, that to anyone with a friendly attitude to humanity it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life [Freud, 1930a, p. 74]

Even more pathetic, Freud thinks, are those educated people who ought to know better but still try to defend religion “in a series of pitiful rearguard actions”.

4. How good is Freud’s argument? This is a difficult question to answer because it is not entirely clear what kind of an argument it is meant to be. So, for instance, it does not seem even to be trying to be a logically valid proof—in the sense of an argument that begins with clearly true premises and then moves by rules of inference that are necessarily truth-preserving to a conclusion that therefore must be true. The argument is not aspiring to that kind of rigour; so to criticize it for lacking it would miss the mark. But, then, what kind of an argument is it?

Freud’s argument seems to work along the lines of an interpretation: he is *pointing something out* for those who are ready and able to see it. In offering an interpretation, Freud is ostensibly supplying the concept (illusion) with which a phenomenon (religious belief) can be properly understood. This kind of argument is, as such, impeccable. The question, then, is how well it is being deployed in this case. This is not at all an easy question to answer. Overall, Freud’s argument seems to have the shape of a de-legitimizing genealogy.<sup>3</sup> Typically, genealogies are used to valorize and to legitimate.<sup>4</sup> So, to take a relevant case: the Israelites’ claim to have a special relation with God is meant to be legitimated by a genealogy that goes back to a special relation that God established with Abraham. Freud substitutes a subversive genealogy: the *story* of Abraham’s special relation with God goes back to primordial wishes among

the ancient Israelites that they should have such a relationship. (It may also go back to a series of all-too-human crimes that are subsequently covered over in myth—see also Freud, 1939a). This story is preserved through the generations not only by the Torah and its associated rituals, but by the same primordial wishes re-arising in each generation, fuelling this whole network of belief and ritual. So Freud's argument seems to have the form of a transformation of genealogies. He takes a pre-existing genealogy that is supernatural and legitimating and puts in its place one that is thoroughly naturalistic and de-legitimizing.

But if Freud is in effect offering a counter-genealogy, there ought to be a way to evaluate it. After all, Freud is himself claiming that his genealogy is better than those offered in traditional religious genealogies. His is purportedly true, the others are false. We need to consider three interrelated issues: First, on what basis could one judge that Freud's genealogy is true? This is a question of the *epistemic ground* of this account. Second, how does Freud's argument persuade? This is a question about the *rhetoric* of Freud's argument. Rhetoric studies not only how an argument leads the psyche along in the direction of being persuaded, but also whether the form of persuasion is legitimate. For even if Freud's analysis is ultimately correct, there is a further question of how we might legitimately come to grasp it. By way of analogy: in a logically valid proof, it is not enough that the conclusion be true. One needs to see it as following from true premises according to rules of inference that are obviously truth-preserving. In this way, the proof offers an account of how a reasonable inquirer could come to see the truth as true. In the case of Freud's counter-genealogy, it could conceivably be the case that, on the one hand, his overall analysis of religious belief as illusion is correct, but, on the other hand, he has persuaded us via bullying, crowd-pleasing, narcissistically gratifying wish-fulfilling fantasy. In other words, he could be right about his conclusion, but persuade by gratifying our own wishes. In which case, what we believed might be true, but our minds would nevertheless be stuffed with illusions. So even if we agree with Freud's conclusion—especially if we agree with it—we need to see how we have earned the right to believe what we believe. The third and final issue we need to consider is the *scope* or generality of the conclusion. Freud thought he had shown not merely that some people use religion

to gratify infantile needs—that is hardly news—but that illusion is what religious belief ultimately amounts to. How does he attain such a far-reaching conclusion?

5. I said earlier that Freud writes as though he is pointing something out. We have learned both from philosophy and from psychoanalysis that an enormous amount is involved in the ostensibly simple act of pointing something out. Philosophically speaking, for an act of pointing to succeed, there needs to be a shared background of understanding, a shared form of life, between the person doing the pointing and the person who is being invited to see what is being pointed out (Davidson, 1984; Wittgenstein, 1978). (What gestures count as pointing? Is the person pointing to the wall, its shape, colour or the writing upon it?) Psychoanalytically speaking, if we consider an individual analysis and think of an interpretation as a more sophisticated form of pointing something out, the question of the analysand's readiness to hear it is all-important. The history of psychoanalytic technique can be seen as unfolding from Freud's realization that simply speaking the truth to the analysand—in effect, pointing out the repressed memory or the unconscious conflict—is not sufficient for cure. Psychoanalytic technique is meant to facilitate a process by which the analysand can come to see the hitherto unconscious conflict for himself. Ideally, an interpretation comes at a time when the analysand is *ready* to see what the interpretation is talking about. So, in a broad context, the study of psychoanalytic technique can be seen as a branch of rhetoric: it studies how an interpretation can genuinely succeed in pointing something out.

It would seem that when it comes to large-scale cultural interpretation—in this case, an analysis of the general phenomenon of religious commitment—there ought to be a similar account of readiness. After all, if Freud's interpretation is true—if religious belief is illusion—then we ought to expect it to be held in place by powerful psychic forces that resist recognizing it as such. If religious commitment is illusion, how is it that we could come to see it in those terms?

As we have seen, Freud thought that “the great majority of mortals” will never be able to rise above their infantile attachments—and thus they will never be able to see that religious belief is illusion. His argument is clearly not for them. The argument thus

seems designed for (those whom Freud regarded to be) a psychological elite: those who are able to separate themselves from the pervasive illusions of humankind and face the truth. Freud seems to think that this psychological elite forms an historical vanguard. He grasps that he is writing in an historical period of secularization, and his critique is meant to contribute to that process. His argument seems to be directed either at those who have already abandoned religious belief or are already wavering in agnosticism or those who are insipidly going through the empty social forms of religious participation. For such readers, the argument is meant to facilitate their journey towards a non-religious life—by giving them an interpretation that vindicates it. In this way, Freud takes himself to be helping the historical process of secularization along by offering an interpretation that justifies it. There is thus a question of the legitimacy of such historical interpretation.

Freud thought that there were parallels between individual and historical development. If we look to individual development, he says, we see that a person develops through psychological stages. In particular, the inevitable oedipal crisis of childhood is eventually outgrown and falls away.

In just the same way, one might assume, humanity as a whole, in its development through the ages, fell into stages analogous to the neuroses, and for the same reasons. . . . Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity; like the obsessional neurosis of children, it arose out of the Oedipus complex, out of the relation to the father. If this view is right, it is to be supposed that a turning-away from religion is bound to occur with the *fatal inevitability* of a process of growth and that we find ourselves at this very juncture in the middle of that phase of development. [Freud, 1927c, p. 43; emphasis added]

On Freud's account, then, his interpretation will be persuasive to those who are attuned to the march of history: those who are historically ready to put up with this "fatal inevitability" and face the truth. Freud does not give an account of what it is about the psychological make-up of this historical vanguard that makes them ready and able to do this. And, with hindsight, his view of history seems to have its own kernel of wishfulness. He gives us no reason to believe that the history of civilization proceeds "in just the same way" as the development of an individual. He imagines a

conversation with a religious interlocutor that, read today, looks like a heroic fantasy.<sup>5</sup>

We desire the same things, but you are more impatient, more exacting, and—why should I not say it?—more self-seeking than I and those on my side. You would have the state of bliss begin directly after death; you expect the impossible from it, and you will not surrender the claims of the individual. Our God *Aogos* [Logos] will fulfil whichever of these wishes nature outside us allows, but he will do it very gradually, only in the unforeseeable future, and for a new generation of men. He promises no compensation for us, who suffer grievously from life. On the way to this distant goal your religious doctrines will have to be discarded, no matter whether the first attempts fail, or whether the first substitutes prove to be untenable. You know why: in the long run nothing can withstand reason and experience, and the contradiction which religion offers to both is all too palpable. Even purified religious ideas cannot escape this fate, so long as they try to preserve anything of the consolation of religion. [p. 54]

Whatever one thinks about religious belief—even if one ultimately agrees with Freud that it is illusion—one should by now see that this passage at least gives less the future of an illusion than the illusion of a future. History is assumed to be progressive, inexorably unfolding and ultimately truth-revealing. This is a triumphal story of human progress in which one can play a role if one is willing and able to participate in the triumph.

Suppose we turn away from Freud's progressivist image of history. There does not, then, seem to be an account of why anyone should be ready to grasp and accept Freud's interpretation. Even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that religious belief is illusion, why should we think that we should be able to see it as such simply by being invited to do so? In the absence of an account of why certain people are ready to face the truth, there seems to be no explanation of why this interpretation of religious belief, even if true, should have the right sort of effect on those who are exposed to it. Given the complexity of offering and receiving interpretations in the case of an individual analysis, this is a significant lacuna. In the individual case, by contrast, it is by now beyond question that not only must an interpretation be true, but an analysis must be

ready to hear it. It is not an exaggeration to say that there has been a hundred years of painstaking study of what it is for an interpretation to be formulated and delivered in an appropriate way and at an appropriate time for the analysand. It would seem that an analogous question of readiness ought to arise when it comes to large-scale cultural interpretations delivered to the culture at large. This is a serious rhetorical issue, and it raises a question about the value of such interpretations (I discuss this issue in Lear, 2007). Since psychoanalytic insight is so difficult to acquire in individual case, what good could large-scale cultural critique serve? To be sure: it might be true that religious belief is illusion; and it might be true that we are ready to grasp it as such if someone like Freud would point it out. But we need an account of what this readiness consists in.

On the surface, the claim that religious belief is illusion would seem to be self-undermining. If such belief is a powerful illusion, it would seem that I ought to be in the grip of it. And if I were in its grip, I would not be able to see it as such. Freud's own account of the painful historical process of enlightenment, where we are slowly weaned from this illusory attachment, gives one sort of answer. But if we abjure recourse to that type of answer, it is unclear what could take its place. Suppose we are persuaded by Freud's argument that religious belief is illusion. It would seem that a certain healthy scepticism is in order about how we came to be persuaded. For, in such a situation, we would not typically be diagnosing ourselves as suffering from illusion, but diagnosing others as suffering from an illusion from which we were free. It would seem incumbent on a psychoanalytically minded person who found himself in this position to enquire whether this interpretation—which in effect does look down on others—is providing narcissistic gratifications, or relieving anxiety, of which he might be unaware.

One solid answer could be: "In my own individual analysis I have come to see over time that religion has played a wishful, illusory role in my life." This could be part of, or even the conclusion of, a process of working-through the role of religious engagement in an individual analysand's life. One might come to a similar conclusion through the painstaking analysis of another. In each case, the analysis would show how one might come to know that religious belief is—at least in this individual's case—illusion. The theories of how the mind works that justify psychoanalytic technique would

thereby serve to legitimate the conclusion. This would provide what I have called the epistemic ground of claim that religious belief was illusion: it would give the reason for thinking the claim is true. One might even come to think that this is a typical use to which religious beliefs can be put. For example, one might gather data from a number of analyses, or come to think that what one has discovered in the individual case has a paradigmatic structure, and so on. However, if this is the route of discovery, then there is a question about the scope or generality of what one has discovered.

6. Freud wanted to make a stronger claim than that religious belief could be put to wishful use: he wanted to claim that it was constitutive of religious belief that it was wishful. The claim of psychoanalytic validity implies that there is *no way* one can both (a) believe in the principles of psychoanalysis and live according to them *and* (b) live a life that embodies religious commitment. The idea would be that in coming to recognize religious belief as illusion (in a psychoanalytically appropriate way), one would thereby be in the process of giving it up. One would be working-through the illusion and finding less illusory ways to live. Thus, in order to impugn Freud's argument—that is, to show that it is psychoanalytically *invalid* to claim that religious belief is illusion—one needs to show that there is a genuine possibility of someone fulfilling both conditions (a) and (b)—that is, one needs to establish that it is at least possible for someone to believe in and live according to psychoanalytic principles (including especially those regarding the nature of illusion) and also to live a religiously committed life.

It is not easy to understand how one argues for a possibility. Typically, when logicians want to establish a possibility, they construct a model. So, for instance, when they want to show that a certain form of argument is invalid, they construct a model in which the premises are true and the conclusion is false. This is meant to establish that it is at least possible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false. And the model need not be actually true: it need only be possible. In the present case, we are concerned not with forms of argument, but with forms of life: the possibility of a person living a life that is both psychoanalytically self-aware and religiously committed. Along the lines of constructing a model, we need to see if we can reasonably imagine such a person.

One needs to imagine someone for whom illusion does not exhaust or give the fundamental basis of their life of religious commitment. And it seems to me we need a plausible example, not just some weird counterexample. Freud purports to give us an account of what religious belief consists in. His argument would not be seriously impugned if we can imagine some utter oddball who is a wild exception to all of life's normal rules. On the other hand, we do not need to account for all religious believers: all we need to show is that the religious commitment of a plausible and serious person need not be illusion. So, a psychoanalytically minded person might accept, even welcome, the idea that there was an illusory dimension to her religious engagement. She might accept that, given the vagaries of infantile development, it is no surprise that her own initial engagements with religious ideas had an infantile, wishful aspect. And, following Freud, she might accept that there are aspects of infantile life that persist in adult life. Still, for her, these infantile forms of engagement were stepping-stones for deeper forms of religious engagement in adult life. Such a person, for instance, could be a serious reader of Maimonides (English translation, 1963).<sup>6</sup> Writing almost a millennium before Freud, Maimonides basically agrees with Freud that the stories in the Torah are wishful—but he does so in the service of deepening religious belief, not of debunking it. For Maimonides, the stories in the Bible are myths that are meant to attract and grab the young or religiously immature reader; but, properly interpreted, they could lead a serious reader in the right direction. The stories are there for the sake of growing beyond them. *A guide of the perplexed* is an extended account of how one might properly use the Torah so as to grow beyond literal belief in its stories. But this growth was meant to be religious growth. Contra Freud, Maimonides saw that there were sophisticated ways of living with these stories other than forming straightforward empirical beliefs about their literal truth. This does not mean that the issue of truth need not arise (Blass, 2004). But it need not arise in the form Freud thought it must. Maimonides, as I understand him, was committed to a robust form of religious truth—for him, God exists—but the problem of forming a non-idolatrous conception of God's existence was not only extraordinarily difficult: it was itself a religious task. It is an attempt to overcome idolatry—in the sense of overcoming rigid adherence to religious images and myths—that is

itself a way of worshipping God. From a Maimonidean perspective, although God really does exist, there is no way adequately to grasp this from the perspective of a detached empirical observer—*à la* Freud's nineteenth-century image of the inquiring scientist. And unless one is still in the grip of a tired and outworn positivism, it should no longer seem surprising or objectionable that there are genuine truths that elude such a stance.<sup>7</sup> Obviously, it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss Maimonides' conception of God in any detail, but I think enough has been said to show that Freud's critique of religious belief does not really touch it. And I do not see why there could not be room in the contemporary world for a psychoanalytic Maimonides: someone who believes that childish religious belief is illusion, but who also thought that that recognition was a step in overcoming idolatry, not a step in overcoming religious commitment.

Obviously, none of these considerations impugns the thought that religious belief can and does function as illusion. But they do impugn the idea that religious belief always and everywhere has to function that way. Of course, someone might think that, as a matter of fact, religion does always and everywhere function as illusion. But I do not see that there are any distinctively psychoanalytic considerations that support such a conclusion. Nor do I think there is anything in Freud's argument that establishes a claim of such broad scope. And that points us in the direction of an outlook that is, I think, more in tune with the overall spirit of Freudian psychoanalysis: that if one wants to grasp the role of religious belief in a given individual's life, there is no substitute for the analysis of that individual. Religious belief can play various roles in people's lives—and, no doubt, there is room to speculate about typical uses to which religious belief can be put—but Freud's one-size-fits-all diagnosis flattens differences that ought to make a difference.

## NOTES

I am indebted to Gabriel Lear and Hans Loewald for extended conversations on the topics discussed in this paper.

1. See also Gay, 1987, p. 41, where the claim is repeated.

2. Especially Spinoza, 1992, part I, "Concerning God". For an intro-

duction to Spinoza's thought, see Nadler, 1999, 2001, and Allison, 1987, especially chapter 3, "God".

3. This essay is a development of ideas I began to formulate in Lear, 2005.

4. For two excellent accounts of the functions of genealogies, see Geuss, 1999, and Williams, 2002.

5. The psychoanalytically imaginative reader might want to speculate on what split-off part of Freud's own psyche this "religious interlocutor" represents.

6. I am indebted to Leon Wieseltier for a seminar he gave on this text at the Committee on Social Thought.

7. For an introduction, see, e.g., Cartwright, 1983, 1989, 1999; Galison, 1987, 1997; Hacking, 1981, 1983; Kuhn, 1962, 1987, 1997. For a paradigm of the positivism that had such a deleterious effect on psychoanalytic thinking about religion in the twentieth century, see Gay, 1987.