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Moses between Ricœur and Freud: Narrative self-revelation between psychoanalysis and hermeneutics

Abstract: Focusing on his approaches to symbol in Ricœur's *Freud and Philosophy* as well as *On Psychoanalysis*, this article traces the resemblance between psychoanalytical and hermeneutical analyses of narrated experience. In Freud's texts about religion (specifically *Moses and Monotheism*), the scientific-analytical view on religion as repressed neurosis remains as an archaeological and historical explanation and must be enriched by the hermeneutical view to a meaningful, symbolical interpretation. Crossing the bridge between the Freudian conception of religious "facts" as neurotic acts to Ricœur's conception of the religious "text" as productive narrative opens new possibilities for the capable human. Questioning the status of psychoanalysis as a natural science and reopening the question of its epistemological status, Ricœur sees a kinship between a psychoanalytic fact and the notion of a text. The hermeneutical dimension that emerges from this resemblance sheds new light on Freud's reading of the Exodus Narrative. What Freud underestimates regarding a biblical text is its embeddedness in religious experience with a specific symbolic language that mediates a certain meaning via the polyphony of different discourses. The hermeneutical process is seen as "working through" and must pass from a more semiotic analysis to a semantic interpretation as regaining oneself before the text.

> The problem of self-recognition is the problem of recovering the ability to recount one's own history, to endlessly continue to give the form of a history to reflections about oneself. Working through is nothing other than this continuous narration.
>
> Paul Ricœur

1 Facing the hermeneutics of suspicion

Sigmund Freud is a core representative of the hermeneutics of suspicion, of reductive and demystifying hermeneutics, and a combatant towards any restorative hermeneutics of meaning. The discipline of philosophical hermeneutics is repeatedly shocked and questioned through the conflicts with psychoanalysis.[1]

1 See Ricœur, "Consciousness," 99.

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The strength of Paul Ricœur's work consists in facing these conflicts of interpretation.[2] By means of a phenomenological and a rather economic point of view, Ricœur seeks a dialectical reconciliation between these two hermeneutics and a way to relate these two, overcoming a static, absolute opposition.[3]

In focusing on Freud's interpretation of Moses and the Exodus narrative, and thus his critique of religion, one faces the same provocation by hermeneutics of suspicion:

> The hermeneutics of suspicion cannot be bracketed or put aside. It is the fire that purifies faith and keeps us from idolatry. In the final analysis, there are not *two* types of hermeneutics that can be neatly separated from each other; rather they are dialectically related. The hermeneutics of suspicion exemplified in Freud's multifaceted critique of religions *informs* a restorative hermeneutics of the signs of the Wholly Other. And a genuine hermeneutics of restorative meaning must pass through the fire of merciless suspicion.[4]

Richard J. Bernstein, describing Ricœur's aim in this poetic language, misses an actual application of this dialectical work. By admitting that Ricœur himself is aware of this project and honoring Ricœur's critical interpretation on Freud, as well as the emphasis of the integral character of the two hermeneutics, he reminds us that, in the end, this task still lies before us.[5]

In contributing to this volume,[6] the following article exemplifies these two types of hermeneutics by key biblical figures, particularly in that of Moses. In highlighting some of Ricœur's critique of Freud—especially the limited gain of knowledge by the analogy in refusing the symbolic dimension—the aim is to interrogate psychoanalysis with Ricœur's reflections on biblical hermeneutics and draw some connections showing how an inner-biblical discourse, seen as "work-

2 In reference to the Bible and its methodological conflicts, especially in the 1970s, Ricœur argues equally for the reciprocal need of divergent interpretations. For his thesis about the correlative need between historical-critical exegesis and structural analysis in questioning their conditions, see his contribution during the congress of the "Association catholique française pour l'étude de la Bible": Ricœur, *Du conflit à la convergence des méthodes en exégèse biblique*.

3 See Ricœur, "Consciousness," 118: "As long as we remain within the perspective of an opposition between the two, consciousness and the unconscious will answer to two inverse interpretations, progressive and regressive."

4 Bernstein, "Ricœur's Freud," 135 (emphasis original).

5 See Bernstein, "Ricœur's Freud," 138.

6 This contribution is a revised version of the paper presented at the Fonds Ricœur's Summer Workshop 2019 in Paris. I would like to thank the organizing committee for the fabulous Ateliers d'été and the editors for all their efforts in this book project. Furthermore, thanks are due to the participants of the workshop for their valuable remarks and to Brandon Sundh for his helpful feedback.

ing through," opens up for a productive interpretation as a (never ending) process of *distanciation* and regaining oneself before the text.

2 The analogy of individual and collective neurosis

In reading Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, his last work, quite complex in its story and reception,[7] it must be considered as a form of ethno-psychoanalysis in context of the interpretation of culture.[8] When drawing analogies between religion as collective compulsory neurosis[9] and the psychoanalytical situation of an individual, the dimensions of the cultural state must equally be taken into account.

The individual is perceived as a threatened human being. Besides external danger, which seems to be warded off effortlessly, internal danger has greater impact in confronting threats and avoiding harm. Threats of instincts, e. g., fear, and threats of conscience, as feeling of guilt, form resistances. Resistance towards becoming conscious or a sense of guilt can later be encountered as obstacles to a healing process.[10] If one fails in mastering these mental processes, forms of displacement and repression can emerge, e. g., projection as the idealization for the individual and the illusion for the (religious) collective. The projected ideal, the illusion, compensate for a lost narcissism: "Thus idealization is a way of retaining the narcissistic perfection of childhood by displacing it onto a new figure."[11]

Focusing on the neurotic character of religion, the observant practices and the faith contents as expressions about reality become immediately relevant. The biblical texts provide a plethora of such observant practices, from which some traces of analogies can be followed. The Priestly Code can be named as one example. This hypothetical source, particular detected in the Pentateuch,

7 For the complex history of the book's origin, as well as the broad reception in the 1990s, see Schäfer, "The Triumph of Pure Spirituality," 381–383. See further Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 147–150.

8 See Bernstein, "Ricœur's Freud," 133.

9 See Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 232: "It is an astonishing thing that man is capable both of religion and of neurosis, in such a way that their analogy can actually constitute a reciprocal imitation. As a result of this imitation, man is neurotic insofar as he is *homo religiosus* and religious insofar as he is neurotic" (emphasis original).

10 See Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 182–184.

11 Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 214.

was most probably written during the traumatic experience of the Exile (6th century B.C.) by a priestly class in ancient Israel. The priestly source emphasizes the connection between law and cult. Rituals and provisions are defined and specified down to the smallest, maybe even most significant detail. All incorrect or neglected procedures of these rituals entail tangible effects. In such a broad picture, the priestly discourse displays a Freudian form of neurosis.

In their concentration on law and cult, the priestly scriptures suppress or mutate history in a certain way. The traumatic experience created the need for stable and long-lasting practices within the religious belief system. This desire forms a path for the cultic institutions' outgrowth from History. This outgrowing is not to be understood in the sense of a total ignorance towards historical concerns, but rather as how the revelations and foundations are settled from one epoch to the next.[12] Seen through Freudian eyes, the Priestly Code depicts the compulsion of repetition, the repeatedly setting in action of the compensating rituals for chaos and guilt:

> But all later distortions, especially those of the Priestly Code, serve another aim. There was no longer any need to alter in a particular direction descriptions of happenings of long ago; that had long been done. On the other hand, an endeavor was made to date back to an early time certain laws and institutions of the present, to base them as a rule on the Mosaic law and to derive from this their claim to holiness and binding force.[13]

The ceremonial is the central and concrete praxis, particularly acts of penitence and invocations can be seen as defensive or protective measures against a feared punishment:

> Moreover, in connection with ceremonials, an early insight is gained into the depths of the "sense of guilt": ceremonials—and included here are acts of penitence and invocations—have a preventive value with regard to an expected and feared punishment; thus religious observances assume the meaning of "defensive or protective measures."[14]

For example, the guilt- or sin-offering atones misbehavior. In Leviticus 4 the ritual of the sin offering is described with exuberant accuracy, in which way the sacrificial animal has to be offered, where to sprinkle the blood, how to burn

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12 See Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 232–234. The reference to Gerhard von Rad (see also below IV.1) is among other things motivated by Ricœur's biblical hermeneutical work, wherein he highly esteemed von Rad's Theology, see, e. g., Paul Ricœur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," 78 f.

13 Freud, *Moses*, 75.

14 Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 232.

each single organ—all leading to forgiveness as it is stated in Lev. 4:35: "... And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven."[15]

Freud interprets the historical development of this neurotic obsession by the wounded narcissism and the unattainable illusion of the chosen and favored people—the true origin which was veiled by the feeling of guiltiness:

> This feeling of guiltiness, which the Prophets incessantly kept alive and which soon became an integral part of the religious system itself, had another, superficial motivation which cleverly veiled the true origin of the feeling [...] Our investigation is intended to show how it [the increasing instinctual renunciation as need for satisfying the feeling of guilt and thus reaching ethical heights over other people] is connected with the first one, the conception of the one and only God. The origin, however, of this ethics in feelings of guilt, due the repressed hostility to God, cannot be gainsaid.[16]

The idea of lost narcissism, the projection of self-love towards another authority named God is expressed in the anthropomorphic speaking of God's envy. Concerning the economic function of religion, the narcissistic satisfaction can be seen as a feature of instinctual renunciation implied by culture[17]: "the individual's proud and bellicose identification with his group [...] procures for him a narcissistic type of satisfaction which [...] reinforces the corrective action of social models."[18]

The unique adoration of one God reclaims an exclusive emotional engagement, no other love object may be worshiped. Jealousy is often pictured as consuming fire, e. g., Deut. 29:18 – 20:[18]

> Beware lest there be among you man or women [...] whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations [...] [19] one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart' [...] [20] The Lord will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the Lord and his jealousy will smoke against that man ...[19]

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15 Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

16 Freud, *Moses*, 211 – 212.

17 Besides "the three most universal prohibitions, against incest, cannibalism, and murder" (Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 249). These prohibitions are reflected in Lev. 18:6 – 14; Gen. 22; Exod. 20:13.

18 See Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 249.

19 See Deut. 4:24 as a typical formula: "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

These expressions—the people's carelessness in adultery, the hardness of the heart—exemplify the need for compulsive and normative elements in the monotheistic religion, as Jan Assmann states in analyzing Freud's Moses: "[...] blind belief brought about by brutal force and miracles as the means Moses had to resort to because of the 'brutishness of the people' and the heart's stubbornness, *propter duritiem cordis*."[20] This element of compulsion is even more intensified in Freud's concept of the monotheistic religion as he discovers the central role of guilt. With Assmann it is once more important to emphasize the transfer of individual psychology to collective psychology in this context. "By interpreting monotheism as a religion of the fathers, its history [in other words psychohistory] could be portrayed as the enactment of an Oedipal conflict."[21] With the reenactment of the "primal parricide" via the murder of Moses the Israelite people were (re-)traumatized. Comparable to an individual's trauma processes, the collective repressed their guilt (*defense*) and after a period of latency, an outbreak of neurotic illness, the return of the repressed came into effect—in this case the monotheistic religion with its juridical, cultic, and moral demands.[22] The cultic dimension has been exemplified with the (neurotic) rituals of atonement and of purification, based on the conceptional distinction between sacred and profane, clean and unclean. On this level, claimed Assmann, guilt is like uncleanliness, to be washed away by these rites.[23] The notion of uncleanliness reminds us of Ricœur's reflection about defilement in *The Symbolism of Evil*. This association is due to the fact that, in this context, we are dealing with 'guilt management' primarily motivated by dread or terror. The last chapter (see §6 below) will show another feeling that motivates one's own confrontation with guilt. Thus, with Ricœur, a more multifaceted dimension of guilt can be brought to Freud's interpretation—one that does more justice to the phenomenon as it is thought biblically. Before that, it is necessary to explain the generally insufficiently considered hermeneutic (as a precondition of the symbolic) dimension in Freud's "shortcut."

20 Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 166 (emphasis original), continuing that Freud's concept of monotheism even intensified the element of compulsion by integrating the central role of guilt.
21 Assmann, "Monotheism," 61.
22 See Freud, *Moses*, 129 and Assmann, "Monotheism," 49.
23 See Assmann, "Monotheism," 56.

3 The analogy's difficulty

These insights into the world of the biblical texts may be sufficient to demonstrate the analogy between forms of individual neurosis and those of collective religious comportment. For Ricœur, this analogy remains and must remain indefinite—in the end, one can only say, that man is just as capable of neurosis as he is capable of religion.[24] Ricœur perceives an abbreviation in Freud's bonding to the analogy on a descriptive level. Freud insists on the reiterative aspects of religion (e. g., displacement or ritual repetition), which form an indestructible basis of religion:

> Freud is much more interested in the repetitive aspect of religion. Omnipotence of thoughts, paranoiac projection, displacement of the father onto an animal, ritual repetition of the killing of the father and of the filial revolt constitute the 'indestructible' basis of religion. It is understandable why Freud stated many times over that naïve religion is the true religion ...[25]

With the return of the repressed and the feeling of guilt resulting in a permanent self-accusation, seen in the prophetic tradition, Freud's thoughts may be best revealed:

> Freud is completely uninterested in the development of religious sentiment. He has no interest in the theology of [the prophets], nor in the theology of Deuteronomy, nor in the relation between prophetism and the cultural and sacerdotal tradition [...]. The idea of the 'return of the repressed' enabled him to dispense with a hermeneutics that would take the circuitous path of an exegesis of the texts and rushed him into taking the shortcut of a psychology of the believer, patterned from the outset on the neurotic model.[26]

Ricœur's comment on this analogy as a shortcut, dispensing the detour of hermeneutics via exegesis,[27] provides the central reference for further exploration.

Discussing the difficulties in the analogy, Freud is aware of the gap between individual and mass psychology, understood as treating people as individually neurotic. This gap can be bridged "[i]f we accept the continued existence of

24 See Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 533.

25 Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 243 – 244.

26 Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 246.

27 Ricœur defines hermeneutics as a discipline close to exegesis. The difference is seen between general reflections about the conditions of possibility for interpretation and the more specific exploration of rules for interpretation, see Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics," 50.

such memory-traces in our archaic inheritance."[28] The biblical corpus as canonized holy scripture forms a discourse of written manifestations and as such depicts a form of preserved and collective memory. Freud concludes this chapter by according the value of reality to traditions as long as they pass traumatic processes:

> A tradition based only on oral [direct] communication could not produce the obsessive character which appertains to religious phenomena. It would be listened to, weighed and perhaps rejected, just like any other news from outside; it would never achieve the privilege of being freed from the coercion of logical thinking. It must first have suffered the fate of repression, the state of being unconscious, before it could produce such mighty effects on its return, and force the masses under its spell [..., as observed in religious tradition]. And this is a consideration which tilts the balance in favour of the belief that things really happened [...][29]

Freud introduces this remark as a psychological argument.[30] Referring to the biblical traditions as written communication,[31] this psychological approach should be interrelated with the hermeneutical, as Ricœur asserts:

> [...] I will say that the notion of a fact in psychoanalysis presents a kind of kinship with the notion of a text [= written discourse, M.W.], and that the theory stands in relation to the psychoanalytic facts in a relation analogous to the one between exegesis and a text in the hermeneutical disciplines.[32]

In other words, the crucial point in the analogy just elaborated is less the transfer from individual to collective pathologies. Rather, the analogy's difficulty is

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28 Freud, *Moses*, 160. This transference of concepts from individual to collective psychology did not remain without objections. For examples, see Schäfer, "The Triumph," 389.

29 Freud, *Moses*, 162–163.

30 See Freud, *Moses*, 162.

31 Ricœur's textual theory differentiates categorically between oral and written discourse. A shift is not only given in the medium of communication (language or scripture). Neither does the difference consist in an unpretentious transfer in the acts (speaking/listening or writing/reading). Far more, the transfer from oral to written discourse changes fundamentally the reference between the Self and the world: "The emancipation of the text from the oral situation entails a veritable upheaval in the relations between language and the world, as well as in the relation between language and the various subjectivities concerned [...] we shall have to go still further, but this time beginning from the upheaval that the referential relation of language to the world undergoes when the text takes the place of speech" (Ricœur, "What is a Text?," 108. For the essential distinction between the relation of writing and reading as well as speaking and hearing, see further Ricœur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," 133.

32 Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics," 53.

tied to the *facts* defined as "a collection of psychological information (*Einsichten*)."[33] As soon as these facts are perceived as observable, falsifiable, empirical data, psychoanalysis is taken as a natural science. But it is exactly this epistemological status that Ricœur calls into question.[34] In comparing the psychoanalytical situation with the interpretation of a text, he elaborates the hermeneutical dimension of these facts forming the necessary element to avoid Freud's shortcut.

4 Psychoanalysis and (biblical) hermeneutics

Asking in what way the facts in a psychoanalytic situation can be described, Ricœur points out four criteria.[35] Due to the intention to describe psychoanalysis as a hermeneutical task, as well as in extension to interweave this task with exegetical interpretation, the following passage enfolds the third and fourth criterion, which cover Freud's notion of 'psychical reality' and 'working through.'

4.1 The kerygmatic reality

The manifestations of the unconscious represent a psychical reality, discharged from material, external reality, beyond categories of true or not true. The imagined reality is a kind of imaginary, fantasies (*Phantasieren*) about the phenomena, best understood as a meaningful fantasy. It is not the observable or historical proved fact as in sciences based on observation.

Depreciating the biblical accounts as pious myths, drunken features that distort sober historical research,[36] Freud is looking for the (historical) facts about

33 Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics," 51.

34 See Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics," 52. Bernstein notes that the tension between the limitation to physical principles and the need for interpretation was detected by Ricœur already in Freud's "Project" (1895): "Consequently, even when Freud (before *The Interpretation of Dreams*) was most deeply influenced by the quantitative natural science of his time and hoped to provide a psychology limited to physical principles, we can already detect the hermeneutic tensions in the 'Project'—the beginning of Freud's sense of the need for interpretation of *meaning*" (Bernstein, "Ricœur's Freud," 132, emphasis original).

35 See Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics," 54–59. Similarly, see Ricœur, "The Question of Proof in Freud's Psychoanalytic Writings," 13–21.

36 "No historian can regard the Biblical account of Moses and the Exodus as other than a pious myth, which transformed a remote tradition in the interest of its own tendencies. How the tradition ran originally we do not know. What the distorting tendencies were we should like to

the figure of Moses to reach out for what "really happened." One central inquiry surrounds Moses' Egyptian origin. Freud cites the myth of Moses' birth, arguing with Moses as an Egyptian name and comparing it to other ancient Near Eastern traditions.[37] The issue is not to deny possible historical roots or comparable motives. Beyond the comparable elements in structure or pattern, the concrete and individual unfolding of the discourse is far more relevant. For the fantasy, in particular, the individual way of presenting this story, this imaginary reality is of utmost importance. The name Moses is explained by an explicit etiology in Exod. 2:10: "When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, 'Because,' she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'"

The Hebrew lexeme "to draw out" is quite unique, but its semantic connotation is "to rescue." The explanation may be an Egyptian origin, but the meaning given by the semantics expresses the idea of rescue, of salvation.[38] The narrative, rather the etiology, is not interested in historically proved facts, but creates a *fantastic* meaning:

> The result is that what is relevant for the analyst are not observable facts or reactions to variables in the environment, but rather the meaning that a subject attaches to these phenomena. I will risk trying to sum this up by saying that what is psychoanalytically relevant

guess, but we are kept in the dark by our ignorance of the historical events. That our reconstruction leaves no room for so many spectacular features of the Biblical text—the ten plagues, the passage through the Red Sea, the solemn law-giving on Mount Sinai—will not lead us astray. But we cannot remain indifferent on finding ourselves in opposition to the sober historical researches of our time" (Freud, *Moses*, 54). Interestingly, Ricœur speaks of the body metaphorically concerning historical research. It may not be in an enthusiastic, but rather a disappointed, obligingly manner: "Back to exegetical sobriety!" (Ricœur, "From Interpretation to Translation," 337.

37 See Freud, *Moses*, 11–17.

38 For the semantic connotation see, e.g., 2 Sam. 22:17; Ps. 18:17. Freud's comparison with the Neo-Assyrian myth of Sargon of Agade is absolutely convincing concerning the structure and relevant motives. This correlation between the biblical story and this ancient Near East parallel is widely attested in biblical exegesis; see Schmid, *A Historical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, 163. For Freud, the basket and the water are symbolic representations for the birth (see Freud, *Moses*, 18). This conception of symbolism differs from Ricœur's own, concerning what becomes quite relevant for the interpreting process. Rather we should speak of a semiotic, possibly allegorical representation: the basket stands as sign for the womb—one sign for the other. Freud speaks explicitly about the "[s]ymbolic substitution of one object through another" (Freud, *Moses*, 158). This must be distinguished from a metaphorical statement as observed on the level of a phrase, which cannot be translated by another term, only in paraphrasing the semantic innovation; see, e.g., Ricœur, "Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics," 103.

is what a subject makes of his or her fantasies (giving this word the full scope of the German *Phantasieren*).[39]

When we compare the psychoanalytical situation with the interpretation of the text, facts in the biblical texts must be qualified as reality in a specific manner, which is named in reference to Gerhard von Rad as 'kerygmatic or believed reality': "Old Testament writings confine themselves to representing Jahweh's relationship to Israel and the world in one aspect only, namely as a continuing divine activity in history. This implies that in principle Israel's faith is grounded in a theology of history."[40] It is of no surprise that this confessional character is divergent from an analytical view, as "[h]istorical investigation searches for a critically minimum—the kerygmatic picture tends towards a theological maximum."[41] But, as von Rad continues, it would be too simple to explain this kerygmatic view as unhistorical, keeping in mind that this picture of Israel's history is grounded in real history. The experience has not been invented, but made relevant for the self-perception of the people, manifested and mirrored in various literary forms and figurations, e. g., the liberation from Egypt. This imagined reality—might it be a psychical or kerygmatic reality—is not to be declared as distorted and irrational but must be taken serious as real figurative fact shaped by the communicating subject. The peculiarity of this communication (as telling or writing) leads to the following criterion of narrative character.

4.2 The symbolic figured narrative

The fourth criterion explains the narrative character in the analytic experience. The fantasies, single episodes of one's life, or the (collective) memory would not make any sense as isolated fragments. In remembering, one becomes "capable of forming meaning sequences, orderly connections [...] It is the narrative structure of these 'life histories' that make a 'case' into a 'case history.'"[42]

To engage this memory, to struggle against resistance and regression in ordering the episodes, Freud establishes the notion of "working-through." Working-through has a positive connotation of an active, progressive way of handling the traumatic experiences in a meaningful manner, may it be "after the factness" (*Nachträglichkeit*). In contrast, when Freud is analyzing the facts about Moses, he

39 Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics," 58 (emphasis original).
40 Rad, *Theology*, 106.
41 Rad, *Theology*, 108.
42 Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics," 59.

declares the 'working through' of the texts in an (occasionally) distorted way.[43] Freud discovers such distorting tendencies and influences, so that "we shall be able to bring to light more of the true course of events."[44] How can we declare these "distortions" as "working-through"?

"Working-through," the figuring of a narrative unfolds itself through language. What Freud underestimates regarding a biblical text is its embeddedness in religious experience. Every experience tends towards expression; religious experience is portrayed in various genres and discourses such as the prophetic, narrative, prescriptive discourse—on a pre-conceptual level.[45]

The Exodus has not (at least not only) been written in the language of and presentation as a historical novel,[46] but mediates a certain meaning through symbolic language. Freud negates this productive and experience-based character of symbols. Symbolism refers to archaic inheritance, to an original knowledge, a kind of inherited thought-disposition comparable to instinctual disposition. In that way, symbolism "would contribute nothing new to our problem."[47] For Ricœur, this understanding of symbolism—rather perceived in the sense of semiotics—mistakes the problem of the double meaning of symbolism in neglecting a phenomenological dimension.

> [Religion] does not begin by regarding symbols as a distortion of language. For the phenomenology of religion, symbols are the manifestation in the sensible—in imagination, gestures, and feelings—of a further reality, the expression of a depth which both shows and hides itself. [...] If then double-meaning expressions constitute the privileged theme of the hermeneutic field, it is at once clear that the problem of symbolism enters a philosophy of language by the intermediary of the act of interpretation.[48]

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43 See Freud, *Moses*, 54, 68. In the methods of historical-critical exegesis this way of working-through is mirrored in analysis of redactional processes. As biblical literature is defined as *Traditionsliteratur*, the genesis of the canonical final text is assumed as quite complex. The final literary composition incorporates long processes of growth, modification and arrangements of various pieces of traditions and redactions. Tendencies that depreciate later revisions as simple bricolage are sometimes implicitly brought into the exegetical debate.

44 Freud, *Moses*, 68.

45 See Ricœur, "Poétique et symbolique," 37–38. The preconceptual stage of religious expression is equal to a symbolic stage. It differs from conceptual stages as in, for example, a dogma or a canonized declaration of belief. The latter develop as a religious community has to face outer or inner critiques and the coercion to clarify their own contents, in a way to disambiguate the original discourse.

46 See Ofengenden, "Monotheism, the Incomplete Revolution," 291–292.

47 Freud, *Moses*, 158.

48 Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 7–8.

It has been shown that Ricœur underscores the hermeneutical dimension of psychoanalysis as interpretation. Notably the notion of a refigured reality and its symbolism function as a key element to avoid the one-sided and regressive approach of Freud's reading. The specificity in the interpretation of biblical texts was introduced by the term of kerygmatic reality before turning one's interest towards the linguistic mediation of this (religious) experience. At this point a further differentiation has to be presented with Ricœur, concerning his criticism of Freud for having dispensed with the circuitous path of an exegesis of the texts. Namely, as far as the exegesis of biblical texts is concerned, the characteristic of biblical hermeneutics and the polyphony of biblical discourse must be considered, as shown in the following section.

5 The polyphonic discourse as "working-through"

The analyzed texts about Moses differ not only from a psychoanalytical situation as written discourse which leads to a specific hermeneutical work. Moreover, these texts are manifestations of religious experience. Hence, to deepen knowledge-gaining interdependency between psychoanalysis and hermeneutics, it is helpful to consider Ricœur's reflection on the relation between philosophical and biblical hermeneutics.

Both correlate to each other in a complex and mutual way.[49] Regarding the text as written discourse, as *œuvre*, biblical hermeneutics may represent only a regional application of the general theory of interpretation. But by asking for the world of the text, the references and the self-understanding before the text, biblical hermeneutics boasts a unique and specified character by its appeal to the outrageous idea of revelation. Inheriting this unique reference named God or the Wholly Other, in all the biblical discourses, religious language itself is distinguished from other languages.[50]

The world of the text is the central category. This world is mediated through the written form and structure, designated as the text as discourse and the dis-

49 Theological hermeneutics are not only the application of philosophical hermeneutics to biblical texts; see Ricœur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics," 17. Similarly, see Ricœur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics," 89–90.

50 See Amherdt, "Paul Ricœur (1913–2005) et la Bible," 9.

course as work.[51] It is fundamental to pass through this first, more structural, process of analysis as a process of distanciation (*Verfremdung*). This liberates one from a premature over-interpretation guided by existential categories or the spiritualized and psychologized view of revelation as inspiration. Distanciation liberates one from illusion and guides the interpretation as unfolding the world of the text.[52] "This world is not presented immediately through psychological intentions but mediately through the structures of the work."[53]

Distanciation does not represent a methodological effect, it is a constitutive element of a text itself. In surpassing the antinomy of alienating distanciation or participation by belonging,[54] Ricœur seeks for "the positive and productive function of distanciation at the heart of the historicity of human experience."[55] The written text is autonomous which means:

> it belongs to a text to decontextualize itself as much from a sociological point of view as from a psychological one and to be able to recontextualize itself in new contexts. The act of reading accomplishes the latter.[56]

The act of reading becomes an act of decoding the discourse as a work, which results in explaining its composition and style. Detecting specific forms (the composition) that guide the hermeneutical process means defining certain genres as collective impregnated forms of discourse. Detecting the individual configuration of the discourse (the stylization) should not be understood as a leap, but as a choice, a category of production.

> Stylization appears as a transaction between a complex concrete situation which presents contradictions, indeterminacies and residues of previous unsatisfactory solutions, *and* an individual project.[57]

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51 For the text as discourse, the discourse as work, the text as projection of a world and the text as the mediation of self-understanding, see Ricœur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics," 16, and "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics," 80 – 88.

52 See Ricœur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics," 26.

53 Ricœur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics," 96.

54 This opposition is the essential outcome of Gadamer's work *Truth and Method*. For Ricœur's background regarding distanciation, see Ricœur, "Function of Distanciation," 129. For Ricœur's critique of Gadamer, see further Smith, "Distanciation and Textual Interpretation," and more recently Daniel Frey, *L'interprétation et la lecture chez Ricœur et Gadamer*.

55 Ricœur, "Function of Distanciation," 130.

56 Ricœur, "Function of Distanciation," 133.

57 Ricœur, "Function of Distanciation," 138 (emphasis original).

This less pejorative reception of distanciation encourages a narrative's interpretation through a modality of possibility rather than an alienated or distorted manifestation of reality.[58]

Again, Ricœur bears in mind the specific character of the biblical text as a condensation of the idea of revelation. It follows that the biblical texts cannot be categorized in strictly defined genres (*Gattungen*) such as cultic oracle, legal texts or prophetic admonition. This formalistic restriction would contradict the dynamic and vivid experience of the idea of revelation. In the polyphony of the biblical texts, Ricœur defines rather distinctive nuances of discourse in the way they mediate an experience, such as prescriptive, prophetic or narrative.[59] This enables the interpreter to perceive the biblical text as a sort of inner-biblical dialogue, as a polyphony that displays the task of "working-through."

Referring to the cited examples above (see §2) and concentrating on the symbolism of fire in other discourses, it can be demonstrated that cultic acts do not remain as regressive neurosis, but that already an inner-biblical interpretation works through this critical or painful confrontation with the past. The priestly regulations about the guilt offering are presented as burnt offerings. The imagination behind this is the vertically rising smoke, appeasing the fury of God. The anger of God is expressed through the bodily metaphor of burning nostrils.

If religion is a distorted compulsory neurosis, Ricœur asks: "Is this situation due to the underlying intention of religion, or is it the result of its degradation and regression when it begins to lose the meaning of its own symbolism?"[60] One can answer "Yes," reading the prophetic tradition that Freud neglects, being "completely uninterested in the development of religious sentiment."[61]

The prophetic tradition of social criticism refers to this lost meaning, recurring to a blind, observant ceremonial devoid of any ethics, e. g., Amos 5:21–24 (with verse numbers inserted):

> [21] I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight [literal: I will not smell] in your solemn assemblies. [22] Even though you offer me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them ...[24] But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Another example is a "working-through" of the notion of God's jealousy. The burning jealousy of God is transformed in positive ardor for the idea of holiness

58 See Ricœur, "Function of Distanciation," 141.

59 See Ricœur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," 43–57.

60 Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 232–233.

61 Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 246.

motivated in compassion for the people. The interpretation is no longer a narcissistic, destroying emotion, but a reconciling engagement for positive dynamics, e. g., Ezek. 39:25: "Therefore thus says the Lord God: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name."

To fully understand this transformation from blind obedience to righteous action, from fanatic partiality to merciful compassion, the interrelating character of the biblical polyphony must me underlined.

> Yet, if we separate the prophetic mode of discourse from its context, and especially if we separate it from that narrative discourse [...] we risk imprisoning the idea of revelation in too narrow a concept, the concept of speech of another. Now this narrowness is marked by several features. One is that prophecy remains bound to the literary genre of the oracle, which itself is one tributary of those archaic techniques that sought to tap the secrets of the divine, such as divination, omens, dreams, casting dice, astrology, etc.[62]

A prophetic discourse[63] would represent nothing other than archaic techniques of divination, separated from its narrative context. As mentioned above (see §4.2), history becomes meaningful insofar as the subject is capable of ordering the episodes in a sensible narrative. The Hebrew Bible narratives express the experience of Israel with their God; all traditions are ordered "around a few kernel events from which meaning spread out through the whole structure."[64] Condensed in a confession, the Hebraic Credo (Deut. 26:5 – 10) formulates the kernel event *par excellence*, the liberation from captivity, the Exodus from Egypt.

> What is essential in the case of narrative discourse is the emphasis on the founding event or events as the imprint, mark, or trace of God's act. Confession takes place through narration and the problematic of inspiration is in no way the primary consideration.[65]

Paradigmatic is the opening of the Ten Commandments—the preamble places this founding event right in the beginning in Exod. 20:1 – 2: "And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'"

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62 Ricœur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," 76.

63 I would include the cultic commands in a prophetic discourse, as they transfer God's will via the priests as ceremonial practices. Ricœur does not list a cultic discourse for itself.

64 Ricœur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," 79, referring to Rad, *Theology*, 122.

65 Ricœur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," 79.

This defines an indicative before any imperative, it is the promise of the commitment before fulfilling the laws.[66] This is the unique conception of a chosen people, but not seen in a narcissistic way bestowing the pride and a feeling of superiority but having been elected as the fewest of all people out of liberating compassion.[67] Narratives frame the prophetic discourse as well as the prescriptive discourse, formulated, e. g., in the law. The conception of monotheism, the idea of God's will in the commandments, the idea of jealousy is not declared as an attribute of a heteronomous or brutal God. On the contrary, these are expressions of the quality of the relationship.

The aspect of relationship to one another leads to Ricœur's second criterion in "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics."[68] It is not only about what is sayable, but what is said from one to another. One can thus associate this liberating and relation expressing discourse to transference as it

> reveals the following constitutive feature of human desire: not only its power to be spoken about, to be brought to language, but also to be addressed to another; more precisely, it addresses itself to another desire, one that may refuse to recognize it.[69]

The paradigmatic text as address towards another can be seen in Exod. 3:14, the self-revelation of God to Moses: "God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.'" The revelation of his name is enigmatic, it disturbs in its circulating structure. A long history of translations, a "history of meaning" could be portrayed.[70] Ricœur

66 See Exod. 6:7–8: "I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob…"
67 See Deut. 7:6–7: "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples." When Freud discusses the notion of the chosen people, he underestimates this 'fact' of being chosen 'although.' Instead, he mostly connects this self-consciousness with feelings of superiority, pride, and powerful achievements that lead to jealousy as shown in the legend of Joseph and his brothers. See, e. g., Freud, *Moses*, 73, 167 f., 181.
68 See Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics," 54–56.
69 Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics," 55.
70 In "From Interpretation to Translation," Ricœur investigates Exod. 3:14 profoundly. Every notion in a history of effects or reception (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) can be questioned, first of all its enigmatic character: "Who can say whether in the ears of the ancient Hebrews the declaration *'ehyeh 'ašer 'ehyeh* did not already have an enigmatic resonance? And if so, this resonance would already have at least a double sense: the enigma of a positive revelation giving rise to thought (about existence, efficacity, faithfulness, accompanying through history), and of a neg-

tries to figure out a "so-called ontological reading,"[71] a translation in one's own language, covering the same semantics and meaning.

To approach the perplexity of this phrase one has to regard the entangling of Exod. 3:14, as it arises in the context of a 'call narrative.'[72] In a complex exchange of speech and counter declaration the relationship between God and his prophet, this mutual recognition, is established. Only after Moses' objection—"If the people ask me for your name, what shall I say?"—does God reveal the formula 'I am who I am.'[73] The self-representation is the answer to an objection. It is God taking the role of the responsive part and not taking the initiative.[74] The broader context situates this revelation in a symbolism of fire: the burning bush that is not consumed (Exod. 3:2). With the semantics of fire gesturing to the passionate engagement between the One and the Other, once again this revelation is metamorphized as a desirable, reciprocal commitment to the relationship and not the heteronomous imposition of an authoritative will.

Bringing the aspect of relationship to the other into the debate, we name in psychoanalytical terms the notion of transference implicating the anthropological desire of addressing and being addressed.[75] The semantic of desire does not follow economic reciprocity, as the other person may refuse or threaten the self-revelation and interrupt a circle of addressing and being addressed. Furthermore, the other can incorporate any form, as imaginary, as source of anxiety:

> psychoanalysis puts all these possibilities into play by transposing the drama that engendered the neurotic situation into a kind of artificial scene in miniature. So it is the analytic experience itself that constrains the theory to include intersubjectivity in the very constitution of the libido and to conceive of it as less of a need and more as a wish directed to another.[76]

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ative revelation dissociating the Name from those utilitarian and magical values concerning power that were ordinarily associated with it" (Ricœur, "From Interpretation to Translation," 340 f.). One must be aware that no translation can be innocent as one cannot deny that the history of reception is a relevant hermeneutical assumption; see Ricœur, "From Interpretation to Translation," 331–332. See further Frey, "En marge de l'onto-théologie," 64–66.

71 Ricœur, "From Interpretation to Translation," 332.

72 See Ricœur, "From Interpretation to Translation," 335.

73 It is one of five objections in this call narrative. Surprisingly one precedent answer—"I shall be with you"—seems not to be sufficiently reassuring for the prophet; see Ricœur, "From Interpretation to Translation," 336.

74 See Ricœur, "From Interpretation to Translation," 333, which becomes clear in comparing it with further formulas of God's self-representation as "I am Yhwh."

75 See Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics," 55.

76 Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics," 56.

It is by this dialogical, interpersonal, and reciprocal process that 'working-through' opens up to a teleological perspective. Embedded in the desire to restore this relationship, the self-revelation differs fundamentally from self-restriction incorporated in neurotic atonement rituals out of fear as terror. This distinction brings us to the concluding thought as indicated above (see §2).

6 The ongoing task of existential translation

The existential dimension of transference and 'working-through' at the sight of another explains why an interpreting existence, either in the psychoanalytical situation or as hermeneutical task, never comes to an end, as quoted in the beginning:

> The problem of self-recognition is the problem of recovering the ability to recount one's own history, to endlessly continue to give the form of a history to reflections about oneself. Working-through is nothing other than this continuous narration.[77]

To detect the epistemological dimension in psychoanalysis means to deprive it of its denotated and defining approach to human existence. The idea is not about accomplishing a distortion's healing process, but the ongoing meditation of the self as another, to the other.

With Exod. 3:14 the interpreter is addressed in a twofold way. It is the self-interpretation before the text as well as the transference situation to and by the Wholly Other. This text cannot be read beyond its function. It turns towards the hermeneutical situation itself, in its polysemic formulation, towards pluriform interpretations. In this verse the limits of translation are reached. 'Being' as name of God is undefinable. All translations are mere paraphrasing. As a most convincing translation of the sacred,[78] Ricœur cites: "I shall show myself in that I shall show myself, as the one who will show himself."[79] With this poly-

77 Ricœur, "The Question of Proof," 42–43.

78 See Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 7: "What psychoanalysis encounters primarily as the distortion of elementary meanings connected with wishes or desires, the phenomenology of religion encounters primarily as the manifestation of a depth or, to use the word immediately [...] the revelation of the sacred."

79 This is the translation of the German original by Hartmut Gese: "ich erweise mich als der ich mich erweisen werde." See Ricœur, "From Interpretation to Translation," 361.

semy, one continues examining,[80] one rephrases again and again "the relationship between God and Being."[81] These three words in the Hebrew language give rise to thought, it is the surplus of meaning, that opens up for a dynamic, teleological interpretation.[82]

This allusion to *The Symbolism of Evil*[83] closes the arc to the initial question. It has been shown how Ricœur repeatedly criticizes Freud's interpretation to the extent that facts are treated as supposedly unambiguous, clearly definable statements. Insofar as the context of empirical medical science is concerned with the process of analysis and healing, this denotation may have its place. But as soon as the epistemological status is questioned and psychoanalysis is seen as a hermeneutic task, the facts become ambiguous while linguistic expressed experience, narrative configuration, and speech addressed to another enter the picture. Along with this, empirical historicity is expanded to include fantasy and linguistic polyphony and ultimately makes it necessary to integrate the symbolic dimension more firmly in the analytic (interpretive) process.

Thus, the main criticism is not directed against the transposition of individual guilt neurosis to collective guilt neurosis, but against the one-sided regressive, unimaginative backward-looking view of the ways of dealing with guilt. And this undifferentiated way of dealing with guilt can be related to a too narrow conception of guilt itself. In contrary, Ricœur distinguishes in *The Symbolism of Evil* guilt from defilement or stain and sin. If one recalls the cultic rites of atonement and purification (see §2 above), which symbolized guilt as a form of uncleanliness, this is the symbolism of something material that infects like dirt, the symbolism of defilement.

But like these rites proved to be neurotic, as the prophetic discourse already expressed a critique of these blind actions, either a focus solely on this idea of guilt as uncleanliness would remain regressive: "Such are the two archaic traits —objective and subjective—of defilement: a 'something' that infects, a dread that anticipates the unleashing of the avenging wrath of the interdiction. These are

80 See the concluding remarks in Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and Hermeneutics," 71–72, emphasizing the process of a self-understanding as mediated process, as disappropriation of oneself—at least it is never an unexamined process!

81 Ricœur, "From Interpretation to Translation," 331.

82 See Ricœur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," 117: "For what are the poem of the Exodus and the poem of the resurrection [...] addressed to if not to our imagination rather than our obedience? And what is the historical testimony that our reflection would like to internalize addressed to if not our imagination? If to understand oneself is to understand oneself in front of the text, must we not say that the reader's understanding is suspended, derealized, made potential just as the world itself is metamorphosized by the poem?"

83 See Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 347–348.

the two traits that we no longer comprehend except as moments in the representation of evil that we have gone beyond."[84]

It became apparent how the consideration of the entanglement of biblical discourses already introduces a teleological dimension. As soon as we integrate the purely cultic way of working-through into a narrative, the rite motivated more by fear[85] is transformed into the productive power of continuously telling one's own story. The core elements formed the self-revelation of God, the giving of the commandments, and the confession to this relationship. Thus, the category of the covenant is introduced, which transfers the guilty consciousness into the symbolism of sin.

The story of the Golden Calf is paradigmatic as a breach of fidelity, for such an adultery against the Covenant, that depicts a form of guilt that cannot be atoned for, as Assmann describes: "[The people] wanted to replace God's representative with a representation. That was their sin. The true God, however, cannot be represented. Every attempt at a representation necessarily becomes a lie, a false god."[86] Equally regarding the covenant and notably the violation of it, Ricœur understands this symbolism of evil as sin, which is foremost a religious dimension: "it is not the transgression of an abstract rule—of a value—but the violation of a personal bond. That is why deepening of the sense of sin will be linked with the deepening of the meaning of the primordial relationship which is Spirit and Word."[87] The difference between the consciousness of defilement to that of sin lies not in the disappearance of dread or anguish, but in a changed quality:[88] the paralyzed, rendering silent, consciousness changes into a dialogical, capable consciousness.

> Thus, the threat is inseparable from the nevertheless of a reconciliation that is always possible and is promised in the end; and the fury of the Jealous One also is inscribed in the drama of the point of rupture. Thus the distance that anguish discloses does not make God simply the Wholly Other; anguish dramatizes the Covenant without ever reaching the point of rupture where absolute otherness would be absence of relation. Just as jealousy is an affliction of love, so anguish is a moment that dialectizes the dialogue, but does not annul it.[89]

84 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 33.

85 See Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 29 – 30: "[defilement] is, we have said, a something that infects by contact. But this infectious contact is experienced subjectively in a specific feeling which is of the order of Dread. Man enters into the ethical world through fear and not through love."

86 Assmann, *Monotheism*, 56.

87 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 52.

88 See Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 63.

89 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 69.

To (psycho-)analyze the biblical figurations of guilt, trauma, and repressed feelings in confronting oneself with Freud's interpretation, we have *passed through the fire of merciless suspicion*. With Ricœur's reading of psychoanalysis as hermeneutics, the need for symbolism has been integrated into the process of interpretation. By including his reflections on biblical hermeneutics as well as his discourse of the multifaceted symbolism of evil as defilement or sin, a refined reading of religious experience of guilt was made possible.

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