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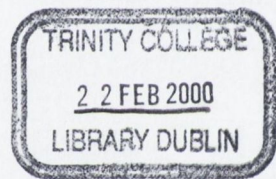
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Freud's Psychoanalysis of Religion

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INTRODUCTION: FREUD THE COUNTERAPOLOGIST

Freud was part of a long tradition of non-believers who offered a story about how religions originated. Notable works in this tradition include Hume's *The Natural History of Religion* and Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*. Such works typically fulfil one or more of the following three functions:

(1) To rebut the claim, sometimes made by religious apologists, that the fact of religion existing, and being as widespread as it is, cannot be explained in purely naturalistic terms, and therefore requires an explanation which invokes supernatural entities. I call this the *counterapologetic* aim.

(2) To discover, just as an end in itself, the truth about how religions originated. I call this the *historical* aim.

(3) To persuade readers to abandon religion without fear that the quality of their life will suffer thereby. I call this the *therapeutic* aim.

Not all the works I am talking about have all three of these aims. Freud's works in this area, however, do. I will say a little more about each.

(1) Religious apologists sometimes challenge non-believers with questions of the following type: if there is no God (or gods, or spirits, etc.), then why have so many people believed that there is? This includes people at many different periods of history, and includes highly intelligent and well-informed people. The thrust of this challenge is that if we are unable to account for this fact naturalistically, we are forced to accept that those beliefs came about through the influence of supernatural agencies. This argument is not always used to support truth-claims about the doctrines of one particular religion; sometimes it is just used to support the claim that whatever engenders religious belief, it is something that is somehow beyond the scope of naturalistic explanation and understanding, and is therefore worthy of being the object of religious awe. In recent times this line is taken, for example

in John Hick's *God and the Universe of Faiths* (1973) and *An Interpretation of Religion* (1989).

This can be seen as a variant of the age-old 'argument from common consent', but it in fact goes beyond that argument. The argument from common consent says that the fact of widespread agreement *alone* furnishes us with good reason for believing in the truth of religious doctrines. But this argument says that the fact of widespread agreement *which cannot be explained naturalistically*, furnishes us with good reason for believing them.

Works which offer naturalistic explanations for the origin (and persistence) of religion seem well-suited to meet this challenge. Such works, if they succeed, weaken the case for holding religious beliefs. If the apologists' challenge is construed as meaning 'you cannot explain naturalistically how religion originates; therefore it must have originated in supernatural events,' then the non-believer only has to respond with a story that is *possibly* true, and wholly naturalistic, to meet it. That is, it is not necessary for the counterapologist to prove that this story is what actually happened.

(2) Apart from this role in counterapologetics, there is also historical interest in the question. Religion is such a widespread phenomenon, and has such a major influence on many people's lives, that there must be an interesting story (or interesting stories) to tell about how it originated. If one is a non-believer, the story or stories must be naturalistic. Unlike the counterapologetic project, if one is interested in the historical project, then the demand arises for at least convincing evidence to support it.

(3) Many such works also aim to persuade readers to abandon religion without fear that the quality of their life will suffer thereby. This aspect of these works is addressed to apologetic arguments which seek to prove that, true or not, religions are *needed* by human beings. This can mean that religion exists because of universal ineradicable features of humans, or that if religion were to be abandoned, the consequences would be disastrous. The two claims can be interrelated if we take it that among the universal ineradicable features of humans are needs which religion alone can fulfil, or perhaps violent

impulses which religion alone can control. Works which offer a naturalistic account of religion *can* (although not all *will*) at least partly counter such claims by showing that religion is a contingent, not a necessary, feature of humanity; and perhaps also by showing that religion has had harmful effects, or failed to have beneficial effects. This last task is further served if the anti-religious writer can present, even sketchily, some plausible future scenario in which religion no longer exists.

Not all works which offer naturalistic explanations of religion even purport to carry out the therapeutic task, however. But Freud's work does, and for a reason which stems from the fundamental nature of his central claim.

What is novel in Freud's approach to the problem is that it employs a model of psychological forces analogous to (or perhaps the same as) those he postulated to explain neurotic symptoms, as well as dreams, parapraxes etc. On a number of occasions he describes religion as 'the universal obsessional neurosis of mankind.' (For example, in 'Obsessive Actions and Religious Practises', SE 9, 127¹; 'An Autobiographical Study', SE 20, 66; *The Future of an Illusion*, SE 21, 43.) By this he means two things.

Firstly, that religion originates in psychological forces, and as a result of traumatic events, like those which he alleges produce neurosis. Secondly, Freud is claiming that, like neurosis, religion is characterised by immature or 'pleasure principle' thinking instead of mature or 'reality principle' thinking. The two claims are interrelated, because for Freud pleasure principle thinking persists in pockets in otherwise mature people *because of* the psychological reaction to the traumatic events which occasion neurosis.

To be fair, Freud did not claim to have given an exhaustive account of religion (as we will see in 2.1²). But he did claim that any explanation of

¹ All References marked 'SE' are to *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, James Strachey ed. London, Hogarth Press, 1955. Volume numbers are followed by page numbers.

² That is, Chapter 2, Section 1.

religion must take into account the psychological factors which he postulated, or else be unable to account for all the phenomena. So Freud presumably saw his story as a helpful contribution to the counterapologetic project.

One advantage which he claimed, plausibly enough, for his explanation was that it made full allowance for the emotive strength with which religious doctrines are often endowed: he says that we can 'make use of psychoanalysis in order to give full value to the affective significance of religious doctrines.' (*The Future of an Illusion*, SE 21, 37.)³ This is because Freud's account introduces deep psychological determinants. The emotive strength of religion would not seem to be adequately accounted for if we were to say, for example, that religious beliefs were engendered by faulty reasoning, and it is debatable whether it would be adequately accounted for by purely social factors.

As we will see in 2.1, Freud also wants to claim that his approach is particularly well-suited to explaining other persistent features of religion, such as the presence of parent-like creator figures, or an unquestioning attitude towards ethical teachings. (For the moment, I will not address the question of whether these actually *are* persistent features of religion.)

Presumably, Freud also believed his story was true, and so relevant to the historical question as well.

Because Freud claims a neurotic 'aetiology' for religion, it is plausible for him to claim that religion can also be 'cured' or 'recovered from' in a manner analogous to the way in which a neurosis is cured or recovered from. This involves uncovering the psychological determinants, so his work in uncovering those determinants performs a necessary step on the way to fulfilling the therapeutic aim. Further, in setting up what he calls the 'scientific *Weltanschauung*' as a rival to religions for the allegiance of mankind,

³ Bizarrely, Freud thinks this fact will recommend psychoanalysis to defenders of religion - this in spite of the fact that he sees psychoanalysis as intrinsically connected to the 'scientific *Weltanschauung*' and hence hostile to religion.

he can be said to be offering a sketch of a possible future scenario in which religion no longer exists.

In the present work I wish to evaluate the cluster of claims centred around Freud's assertion that religion is a neurosis.

In Chapter 1 I will outline the relevant features of Freud's model of the mind and his explanation of neurosis, concentrating mainly on obsessional neurosis.

Chapter 2 will present his claims about religion in detail, together with his arguments in support of those claims.

Chapter 3 will examine his view that religion is engendered by the same (or analogous) psychological factors as obsessional neurosis. I will argue that there are strong positive reasons for believing this view false for the majority of religious believers. But I will leave two possible escape-routes for Freud. If it is possible that the 'universal obsessional neurosis' exists at a trans-individual level (I call this 'group psychology'), or that unconscious mental states are preserved unchanged over thousands of years (I call this 'mental preservation'), then Freud's story may turn out to be true of religious believers in general after all.

Chapter 4 will examine Freud's claim that religion is a manifestation of the pleasure principle. It will arrive at the same conclusion as Chapter 4, with the analogous escape-routes.

Chapter 5 will attempt to assess the hypotheses of group psychology and mental preservation. There I will argue that the latter is *possible*, but that it would be virtually impossible to produce positive evidence in favour of it.

Finally, a quick word about what I am *not* attempting to do. I will not be evaluating Freud's psychological theories as a whole. The first chapter is purely for the purposes of explanation and, in the case of the pleasure and reality principles, of interpretation. Nor will I be basing any of my arguments on disputes with Freud's atheistic assumptions. For to answer the apologists' challenge, the non-believer only has to answer the question: 'if there is no God (etc.), how do we explain religious beliefs?' That is, the challenge is to

reconcile certain facts about religion (the fact that many people believe in God etc.), with the possibility that the relevant religious beliefs are false (that there is no God etc.). For this purpose, it is not only acceptable but *necessary* to take for granted that the relevant religious beliefs are false. Because I am only defending the claim that Freud's explanatory story is *possibly* true, I will not be assessing the quality of the empirical evidence which he offered to support it. Of course, if there is compelling evidence *against* Freud's claims, that is a different matter. But in any event, at the end of Chapter 5, I will argue that the nature of Freud's claims about religion is such that it would probably be impossible in practise to produce decisive evidence either for or against them.

CHAPTER 1: FREUD'S MODEL OF THE MIND

Freud claimed that religion shared many important characteristics with certain types of mental illness - most importantly obsessional neurosis. He attempted to show that the distinctive model of the mind which he had developed to explain those mental illnesses could also explain certain typical features of religion. In this chapter I will outline the major features of Freud's model of the mind, and show how he employed this model to explain neuroses.

1.1 THE UNCONSCIOUS

Throughout the literature of psychoanalysis, certain psychological or mentalistic terms are routinely applied to processes which are not conscious. By psychological or mentalistic terms, I mean terms which, in everyday language, we use to attribute processes to entities, and which (if meant literally) entail the assumption that those entities have minds. This is admittedly, somewhat vague, and perhaps even tautological, since 'mental' is merely the adjective of 'mind'. However, a few examples will hopefully make my meaning clearer. Thought - which may cover believing something, entertaining an idea, forming plans, drawing conclusions, and so on - is an obvious example. So too is emotion, which I take to include both emotions which normally have an object - love, hate, hope, and so on - and ones which do not - elation, unfocused anger, and so on. Also, utterance, if we take it to mean an expression of thoughts and emotions, by definition presupposes the existence of thoughts or emotions, and is therefore a mentalistic term. Freud often makes use of the concept of unconscious utterance in this sense.

In the following quotes it can be clearly seen that Freud accepts the existence of unconscious thought, unconscious emotion, and unconscious

utterance. The first is an example of unconscious thought from *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900):

As a rule, patients [together in one ward] know more about one another than the doctor does about any of them; and after the doctor's visit is over they turn their attention to one another. Let us imagine that this patient had her attack on a particular day; then the others will quickly discover that it was caused by a letter from home, the revival of some unhappy love-affair, or some such thing. Their sympathy is aroused and they draw the following inference, though it fails to penetrate into consciousness: 'If a cause like this can produce an attack like this, I may have the same kind of attack since I have the same grounds for having it.' If this inference were capable of entering consciousness, it might possibly give rise to a *fear* of having the same kind of attack. But in fact the inference is made in a different psychical region, and consequently results in the actual realization of the dreaded symptom. (SE 4, 150)

The second is an example of unconscious emotion from the 'Rat Man' case history (1909):

At all the most important moments while he was telling his story his face took on a very strange, composite expression. I could only interpret it as one of *horror at pleasure of his own of which he was unaware*. (SE 10, 167, Freud's emphasis.)

The third is an example of an unconscious utterance from *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901):

[A woman patient's] memory failed her in the middle of reproducing a long-lost recollection of childhood. Her memory would not tell her what part of her body had been grasped by a prying and lascivious hand. Immediately afterwards she called on a friend with whom she discussed summer residences. When she was asked where her cottage at M. was

situated she answered: 'On the *Berglende* [hill-thigh] instead of *Berglehne* [hill-side]. (SE 6, 63)

So, as far as Freud is concerned, it is perfectly legitimate to say that one can think, emote, or utter, without being aware of the fact. In general he is claiming that *there are unconscious mental processes*. In the following quote from 'On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement', Freud says that the motives which he found in the unconscious were 'analogous to those of everyday life':⁴

He [Breuer] gave preference to a theory which was to some extent physiological ... I had taken the matter less scientifically; everywhere I seemed to discern motives and tendencies analogous to those of everyday life. (SE 14, 21)

One should not be misled by Freud's use of the phrase 'less scientifically' here. Throughout his career he regarded psychoanalysis as a scientific movement (he refers to it using just these words on p. 49 of the 'History', for example). By 'less scientifically' he simply means 'less dependent on concepts derived from the physical sciences'. Freud accepted the world view of the physical sciences, which he interpreted materialistically. This remained true even as late as the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933).⁵ More specifically, he retained the belief that all mental processes have a physiological cause. This is stated clearly in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1916-17):

Anything that is observable in mental life may occasionally be described as a mental phenomenon. The question will then be whether the

⁴ For the moment, we will assume that he means 'everyday *conscious* mental life'. However, he claimed that there were important differences between unconscious and conscious mental processes, and I will discuss these differences in 1.2.

⁵ See especially the last of these lectures 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*', SE, 22, pp. 158-182. I will be discussing this lecture in 2.3.2.2.

particular mental phenomenon has arisen immediately from somatic, organic and material influences - in which case its investigation will not be part of psychology - or whether it is derived in the first instance from other mental processes, somewhere behind which the series of organic influences begins. (SE 15, 60-61)

The difference he is pointing to between himself and Breuer is that Freud postponed the attempt to find a physiological explanation, and instead concentrated on those mental phenomena which were derived in the first instance from other mental processes, and hence, which could be dealt with using purely psychological concepts.

However, it is easy to discern a lot of mechanistic talk in Freud's descriptions of mental activity. This can be seen in the following quote from 'The Psycho-Neuroses of Defence' (1894):

... in mental functioning something is to be distinguished - a quota of effect or a sum of excitation - which possesses all the characteristics of a quantity (though we have no means of measuring it), which is capable of increase, diminution, displacement and discharge, and which is spread over the memory-traces of ideas somewhat as an electric charge is spread over the surface of a body.

This hypothesis ... can be applied in the same sense as physicists apply the hypothesis of a flow of electric fluid. It is justified by its utility in co-ordinating and explaining a great variety of psychical events. (SE 3, 60-61)

It has to be said that if Freud means us to understand this mentalistically, then he surely exaggerates when he says that 'it possesses all the characteristics of a quantity'. The primary meanings of 'quantity' are a number of objects or an amount of a substance. At least in principle, a number of objects is usually precisely countable, and an amount of a substance is usually measurable to some level of precision. This is not at all the case with

'quantities' of 'mental energy' - how can one quantify the difference between 'I am a little bit angry' and 'I am very angry'?

This type of talk eventually developed into the dynamic and economic models of the unconscious. I will discuss these models in 1.3 and 1.4.

1.1.1 The Preconscious

Freud distinguished between the unconscious proper and what he called the preconscious. At a common-sense level, it is obvious that not all the contents of our minds are conscious all the time. I can, for instance, remember my name without having to say it over and over. I can also carry out an intention without having to be conscious of it all the time. For example, I may get up in the morning, get dressed and leave the house while still on 'automatic pilot'. It may be said that I am acting with the intention of getting the train to work, and that all my actions clearly demonstrate this intention. If someone asks me what I am doing, I can say so without any difficulty, but if no-one asks me, it may never consciously enter my mind. In fact (as Freud points out in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*), it is a piece of popular wisdom that we often perform actions more efficiently when we do them automatically. There may also be emotions which are 'unconscious' in this sense: a person may say to me: 'you're annoyed, aren't you?', and even though I may not have realised it until then, I may admit that the person is right.

Assuming these examples are valid, then we may assert that there are unconscious mental processes, in the sense that there are mental processes of which we are not immediately aware. Freud indeed acknowledged the existence of such processes, which he termed preconscious. He explains this term in the metapsychological paper 'The Unconscious' (1915):

It is not conscious but it is certainly *capable of becoming conscious* (to use Breuer's expression) - that is, it can now, given certain conditions,

become an object of consciousness without any special resistance. (SE 14, 173, Freud's italics)

The Breuer reference is to a passage in the *Studies on Hysteria* (a work which Freud and Breuer co-authored in 1893-1895):

In normal people all ideas that can become current at all enter consciousness as well if they are sufficiently intense. In our patients we find a large complex of ideas that are admissible to consciousness existing side by side with a smaller complex of ideas that are not. (SE 2, 225)

There are a number of important differences between the views expressed here and those of the post-1900 Freud. Among these the most important for our purposes is that Freud came to believe that in all people there were ideas which were inadmissible to consciousness, and that these formed the greater, not the lesser, part of the contents of the mind. It is these inadmissible contents, which can only be brought to consciousness by tortuous means such as psychoanalysis, which are termed unconscious. The mere fact of not being, as it were, in the front of my mind, does not suffice to make a thing unconscious. The key difference between the preconscious and the unconscious is accessibility or inaccessibility to consciousness.

In 'The Unconscious', Freud (or rather, his translator James Strachey) used the abbreviation *Cs.* to cover both the conscious and the preconscious, and *Ucs.* to cover the unconscious proper. He used the abbreviation *Pcs.* for the preconscious, but he sometimes seemed indifferent as to whether the preconscious or the conscious was being talked about. He considered the division in the mind between that which was immediately conscious and that which was not, to be less important than the division between that which could easily be made conscious and that which could not. Furthermore, he believed the types of ideas and emotions to be found in the preconscious were basically similar to those to be found in the conscious, whereas those found in

the unconscious proper: '...if they were to become conscious, would stand out in the crudest contrast to the rest of the conscious processes.' (SE 14, 172) I will say more about the special characteristics which distinguish the processes of the unconscious proper from those of the conscious and preconscious in the following.

1.2 THE SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS

So far, we have said that there are processes which are unconscious in the sense of being inaccessible to consciousness, and mental in the sense of being more like the behaviour of thinking beings than of pieces of machinery. We also said that the mental processes of the unconscious were different from those of the conscious in more than just the fact of being inadmissible. Now it is time to add more detail to the picture.

In 'The Unconscious' Freud lists four 'special characteristics of the system *Ucs.*':

- [1] exemption from mutual contradiction,
- [2] primary process (mobility of cathexes),
- [3] timelessness, and
- [4] replacement of external by psychical reality. (SE 14, 187, numbers added.)

I will devote a subsection to explaining each of these characteristics. They are all held by Freud to be features of the unconscious proper, and not of the preconscious. In his later works (from about 1920 onwards), Freud subdivided the unconscious proper into id, super-ego and part of the ego. The conscious/preconscious comprises the remainder of the ego. According to this new model, the special characteristics belong most characteristically to the id. I will discuss these new subdivisions in 1.5.2. For the moment, however, we will stay with the earlier Freud, and not distinguish different parts of the unconscious.

1.2.1 Exemption from Mutual Contradiction

This term refers to what are really three related characteristics. Firstly, there is emotional ambivalence. Secondly, there is absence of negation, and thirdly, there is the characteristic that ideas which are opposites of one another may be interchanged.

(1) Emotional Ambivalence: The form of exemption from mutual contradiction most frequently discussed in Freud's writings is emotional ambivalence. It is a commonplace in psychoanalysis to say that a person may hold contradictory feelings towards the same thing without being aware of the fact. For example, I may have hostile wishes towards someone whom I nevertheless love. If we accept the notion of unconscious mental processes, we can say that I have unconscious hostile wishes, but am conscious only of friendly feelings. One could argue that ambivalence is not a special feature of the unconscious, on the grounds that a person may have ambivalent feelings towards someone or something and be fully aware of the fact - such as having reservations about an idea with which one is nonetheless broadly in agreement. However, this is a very mild type of ambivalence, and there is unlikely to be much emotion involved. Freud speaks of love for a person coexisting in the unconscious with unequivocally hostile wishes towards that same person, as in this example from the 'Rat Man' case history:

[After his beloved's departure] he knocked his foot against a stone lying in the road, and was *obliged* to put it out of the way by the side of the road, because the idea struck him that her carriage would be driving along the same road in a few hours' time and might come to grief against this stone. But a few minutes later it occurred to him that this was absurd, and he was *obliged* to go back and replace the stone in its original position in the middle of the road. (SE 10, 190, Freud's emphasis)

This is Freud's explanation of this behaviour:

A battle between love and hate was raging in the lover's breast, and the object of both these feelings was one and the same person. The battle was represented in a plastic form by his symbolic act of removing the stone from the road along which she was to drive, and then of undoing this deed of love by replacing the stone where it had lain, so that her carriage might come to grief against it and she herself be hurt. (Ibid.)

All that the patient experienced consciously was the pair of commands to move the stone and the ostensible reasons. He was not conscious of the hostile impulse which, Freud claims, lay behind the second command.

Normally, in conscious thought, once a contradiction of this kind is recognised, some kind of judgement must be made, or, failing this, a certain amount of uneasiness usually results. However, according to Freud, there is no such judgement in the unconscious:

The nucleus of the *Ucs.* ... consists of wishful impulses. These instinctual impulses are co-ordinate with one another, exist side by side without being influenced by one another, and are exempt from mutual contradiction. When two wishful impulses whose aims must appear to us incompatible become simultaneously active, the two impulses do not diminish each other or cancel each other out, but combine to form an intermediate aim, a compromise. ('The Unconscious', SE 14, 186)

The Rat Man's actions of moving and replacing the stone in the road showed the co-existence of love and hate towards the same person. In an example I gave earlier, the woman who said 'hill-thigh' instead of 'hillside' was influenced both by a desire to express a forbidden thought and a by desire to repress it. Actions which appear indicative of one emotional impulse can in fact be expressions of its opposite. For example, what is ostensibly an affectionate gesture can in fact be an expression of hostility.

(2) Absence of Negation: Freud effectively claims that the word 'no' has no meaning in the unconscious.⁶ Notoriously, this seems to allow the analyst sometimes to treat a denial of something on the part of the patient as an assertion of that thing. This is what happens in the following excerpt from the 'Rat Man' case history:

[The patient said that] as regards the lady for whose sake he had sacrificed his father in that idea of his, it was true that he had loved her very much, but he had never felt really sensual wishes towards her. At this I told him I thought he had produced the answer we were waiting for. (SE 10, 182-3)

This principle does not give the analyst licence to ask leading questions. Only if the patient issues a denial of something about which he was not asked, as in this instance he was not, may it be taken as a possible assertion.

As we shall see later (1.3.1), Freud postulated a 'censor' which prevented unacceptable thoughts from reaching consciousness except in disguised form. One could perhaps surmise that things representing their opposites, and 'not-p' meaning 'p', are merely ways in which this censor is evaded. Indeed, if by 'exemption from mutual contradiction' Freud merely meant that ideas are closely associated with their opposites, it would hardly seem such a controversial claim. In a word-association test, if you were given the word 'day', you would be quite likely to reply 'night'. Of course, Freud is saying more than this, but at least it shows that 'common-sense psychology' can meet him half-way.

(3) Interchangeability of Opposites: In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud claimed that an element in a dream could just as easily stand for its opposite as for itself:

⁶ See *The Interpretation of Dreams*, SE, 4, p. 318, and *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), SE, 8, p. 175.

There is no way of deciding at a first glance whether any element that admits of a contrary is present in the dream-thoughts as a positive or as a negative.⁷ (SE 4, 318)

So the idea 'tall' in a dream can stand for 'small'; 'alive' can stand for 'dead' and so on.

There might seem to be a major problem here. With both (2) and (3) Freud seems to be suggesting that contradictory pairs of attitudes towards the same proposition can be held by the unconscious mind. But how could we coherently attribute such pairs of attitudes to anyone? I suggest that we do not treat holding contradictory beliefs as habitual in the unconscious, but instead treat ambivalent emotional attitudes, and oscillating or constantly wavering beliefs as *far more common* in the unconscious than in the conscious. Insofar as attributions of states of this kind help us to make sense of neurotic behaviour, they will be justified.

It does seem from, for example, the Rat Man's attitude towards superstition, that these attributions are justified. Most of the time, the Rat Man did not believe in superstitions, but he occasionally believed in the power of his own thoughts to harm people: if he had hostile thoughts towards a person, something bad would happen to that person. Commenting on this aspect of the Rat Man's psychology, Freud says:

Our patient was to a high degree superstitious, ... although he was at times able to assure me that he did not believe a word of all this rubbish. Thus he was at once superstitious and not superstitious; and there was a clear distinction between his attitude and the superstition of uneducated people who feel themselves at one with their belief. ... I did not hesitate to assume that the truth was not that the patient still had an open mind

⁷ A word of explanation: the 'dream-thoughts' are those unconscious thoughts which led to the production of the 'manifest content'. The manifest content is the dream as it is actually consciously experienced.

upon this subject, but that he had two, separate and contradictory convictions upon it. (SE 10, 229-30.)

From what Freud tells us, it seems clearly inadequate to say that the Rat Man was open-minded; for at times he gave evidence of being *convinced* of the truth of his superstitious beliefs, and at other times he gives evidence of being convinced of their falsehood. It is not entirely clear to me why Freud has to say that this means the Rat Man held both views *simultaneously*, rather than that he fluctuated constantly in his views. Nonetheless, we can see 'exemption from mutual contradiction' as shorthand for emotional ambivalence plus fluctuations between beliefs and their opposites. If Freud's descriptions of the Rat Man and other obsessional neurotics are accurate, then this does seem to be an important feature of their mental life. And, as we will see in 1.7, present-day psychiatrists identify as typical of obsessive-compulsive disorder that sufferers have thoughts which they do not wish to have, and compulsive impulses to do things which they strongly do not wish to do. Freud's claim is that these phenomena reflect deeper-lying ambivalences which also exist in the unconscious of normal people.

1.2.2 Primary Process (Mobility of Cathexes)

The term 'cathexis' is used by Freud to refer to a kind of energy which acts as the driving force for all mental activity. Libido, or the sex drive, is one form of such energy. The plural 'cathexes' can be taken to refer to more-or-less discrete 'bundles' of energy.

The following example may help make clear the concept of mobility of cathexes. Someone whose sexual desires, or any strong desires, are being frustrated, may become prone to anger or even violence. We can think of the desires as a form of energy which, being deflected from its original object or aim, is transferred to another. Some may question the aptness of this

metaphor, pointing out that physical energy has no object or aim. It might help if we think of water flowing in one direction and then being forced by damming to flow in another. I take it that Freud is saying that we are justified in speaking of the sexual energy and the violent energy as the 'same' energy because of the causal connection between them and the fact (if it is a fact) that the strength of one is somehow proportional to the strength of the other.

Freud speaks of libido being transformed into energy which can be used for creative activity - a process known as 'sublimation'. He discusses this in a paper entitled "Civilised' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness' (1908):

The sexual instinct ... places extraordinarily large amounts of force at the disposal of civilised activity, and it does this in virtue of its especially marked characteristic of being able to displace its aim without materially diminishing in intensity. This capacity to exchange its originally sexual aim for another one, which is no longer sexual but which is psychically related to the first aim, is called the capacity for *sublimation*. (SE 9, 187)

Two further processes which demonstrate mobility of cathexes in the unconscious are condensation and displacement. In a dream, an object or idea can often be used to represent something else with which it is in some way associated. In this event, the emotional 'energy' which was directed towards the original object may become directed towards the substitute one. For example, I may become strangely uncomfortable at the sight of a blue scarf, similar to one which was worn once by someone who caused me pain. In Freudian parlance, the emotion has been displaced from the person onto the object.

Displacement plays its part in the formation of neurotic symptoms: let us say that for some reason I do not want to admit (even to myself) how wounded I am by a failed romance. I may be unable to say or hear a certain ostensibly perfectly innocent phrase without experiencing acute discomfort. This could be a phrase which came up in the conversation on the day a

relationship was broken off; we would say the emotion has been displaced from its real occasion onto the phrase.

Condensation is where a single object represents a whole group through being part of a chain of associations which includes all the other objects in the group. Such an object may have concentrated on it all the 'energy' properly belonging to the whole group. This is particularly likely if it lies on the intersection, as it were, of two or more chains of associations. Finally, the two processes may be combined, in which case a single element represents a whole group of which it itself is not even a member, but with which - or with a member of which - it is in some way associated. We can find examples of these processes in the following excerpt from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where Freud is discussing his own dream of 'Irma's injection':

In so far as Irma appeared to have a diphtheric membrane, which recalled my anxiety about my eldest daughter, she stood for that child and, behind her, through her possession of the same name as my daughter, was hidden the figure of my patient who succumbed to poisoning. In the further course of the dream the figure of Irma acquired still other meanings, without any alteration occurring in the visual picture of her in the dream. (SE 4, 292)

Irma is associated with Freud's child through having the same illness, and hence can be used to represent her. The child stands for herself, but also for another person of the same name, and so on.

All this may remind some readers of Hume's theory of association of impressions and ideas, where a 'gentle force' leading the mind from one impression or idea to another is invoked to explain a wide variety of mental phenomena. An obvious criticism of this theory was expressed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*:

If, therefore, we suppose the absence of all will, reason and judgement ... any part of any impression might recall any part of any other, without a cause present to determine what it should be ... There is in truth, but one

state to which this theory applies at all, namely complete light-headedness. (Coleridge 1817, pp. 64-5)

The point Coleridge is making here is that, by itself, the principle of association is not sufficient to explain ordinary everyday mental processes, because our thoughts do not just flow arbitrarily from one thing to another; they are channelled by 'will, reason and judgement'. Freud would agree that in the conscious and preconscious mind, mental energy flows in a disciplined way. This is what he refers to as the state of being 'bound'. In the unconscious, however, the energy is 'unbound' or 'mobile'. Thus, if Freud is correct, Hume's theory of association would be a fairly accurate description of unconscious mental processes, and Coleridge's criticism would only apply to someone who claimed that this is how the conscious mind operates.

1.2.3 Timelessness

The term 'timelessness' has two meanings for Freud, and they are not really related. Firstly, there is 'everlastingness' and secondly, there is indifference to the temporal order of external events.

(1) Everlastingness: During Freud's treatment of the Rat Man, he explained the first meaning and its implications:

I ... made some short observations upon the *psychological differences between the conscious and the unconscious*, and upon the fact that everything conscious was subject to a process of wearing-away, while what was unconscious was relatively unchangeable; and I illustrated my remarks by pointing to the antiques standing about in my room. They were, in fact, I said, only objects found in a tomb, and their burial had been their preservation: the destruction of Pompeii was only beginning now that it had been dug up. (SE 10, 176, Freud's emphasis)

Freud here links the characteristic of timelessness to the standard psychoanalytic claims that neurotic symptoms can be traced back to events

many years ago, and that becoming conscious of these events can produce a cure.

(2) Indifference to Temporal Order: 'Timelessness' in this sense is just a special instance of exemption from mutual contradiction. In this case, the opposition between 'before' and 'after' is disregarded. It is clear that if you disregard the order in which events take place, then you see no difference between 'event *a* happened before event *b*' and 'event *a* happened after event *b*'. In other words, you are prepared to allow that two statements which are contradictory are both true.

1.2.4 Replacement of External by Psychical Reality

Broadly speaking, when something is desired by the unconscious, but is unattainable, an imaginary substitute may be set up in the mind which serves at least partially to satisfy the desire. An example of this can be found in wish-fulfilment dreams. Freud claimed that all dreams were wish fulfilments, however strongly appearances may suggest the contrary. However, we can best illustrate the idea of replacement of external by psychical reality using straightforward wish-fulfilment dreams, such as those of infants. In an example Freud gives in the *Introductory Lectures*, Hermann, a twenty-two months old child, was frustrated in his desire to eat a whole basket of cherries; the next morning he reported having dreamt '*Hermann eaten all the cherrwies!*' (SE 15, 127) A simple mentalistic explanation of such dreams would be this: you are prevented from satisfying some strong desire or other, but fortunately you possess a virtual-reality machine which allows you to enjoy the next best thing. It cannot be denied that dreaming is a kind of virtual reality, and that dreams about pleasant occurrences can be almost as good as those occurrences themselves. However neither can it be denied that many dreams are unpleasant or merely neutral. These Freud explains by using the idea of a 'censor', which prevents the virtual pleasure from being enjoyed in an undisguised form. In this case, it is as if the virtual reality machine

belonged not to you but to a friend who disapproves of some of your more sordid wishes. I will say more about censorship in 1.3.1.

In wish-fulfilment dreams, however pleasant, the object of desire is enjoyed only for a fleeting time. Sometimes, however, an imaginary substitute for an unobtainable object may be set up permanently. An example of this is to be found in mourning, as here described by Freud in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917):

Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido should be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition. ... This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis. Normally, respect for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathetic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the object is psychically prolonged. (SE 14, 244-5)

Note that throughout this extract Freud uses mentalistic language: 'it proceeds to demand', 'arouses understandable opposition' (psychologically understandable, that is), and so on.

There is a negative side to this ability to substitute imaginary entities for real ones, however. This is that a hostile wish towards someone, which may take the form of an imaginary assault, can cause feelings of guilt similar to those which would be caused by an actual assault. This is the phenomenon which Freud refers to as the 'omnipotence of thought'. Children, whose conscious thought-processes Freud believed were similar to the unconscious thought-processes of adults, often believe that the thought of something bad happening to someone can cause the thing to happen.

1.3 THE DYNAMIC MODEL

In this and the following two sections I will discuss three of the models of the mental apparatus which Freud put forward.

The dynamic model uses the concept of forces to describe certain mental processes. Some - but by no means all - of the ideas in the unconscious are there because of a 'force' as it were holding them down. Freud further posited a force acting the other way, attempting to push the ideas upwards into consciousness. The first force is repression, and we may refer to the second as 'anti-repression'. As to the question of how literally we should take the concept of force, the same caveats apply as in the case of mobility of cathexes.

1.3.1 Repression and Censorship

Repression is where an idea from the unconscious is prevented from entering the conscious (or the preconscious), due to its being in some way unacceptable. An important assumption in psychoanalysis is that an idea which has been repressed can seek to express itself in an indirect way, through ideas which are associated with it. One obvious example of this is symbolism in dreams: a person may have an unconscious desire to kill someone, which may be expressed in a dream by the act of, say, cutting the person's hair. The connection is, to put it mildly, not immediately obvious. Freud argues that we should not expect to find obvious symbols for repressed ideas in dreams, because if an idea has been repressed due to being unacceptable, then any substitute-idea which obviously points to it will also be unacceptable. The situation here is described in the metapsychological paper 'Repression' (1915):

We have reason to assume that there is a primal repression, a first phase of repression, which consists in the psychical (ideational) representative of the instinct being denied entrance into the conscious ...

The second stage of repression, *repression proper*, affects mental derivatives of the repressed representative, or such trains of thought as, originating elsewhere, have come into associative connection with it. (SE 14, 148)

Freud makes much use of the metaphor of 'censorship': it is as if the mind is a kind of police state where any idea that is unacceptable to the authorities is prevented from being publicly expressed. However, if subversives are sufficiently keen to express their views, they will resort to clever roundabout means. Consider the Chinese film *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991). This is ostensibly a story about a man and his four wives in pre-revolutionary times, but it can be read as a commentary on the present-day Chinese regime, with its meaningless ritual, favouritism, and draconian punishments for those who fail to conform. This implies that some unacceptable ideas can get past the censor if they are sufficiently well-disguised. Freud says this in 'Repression':

... it is not even correct to suppose that repression withholds from the conscious *all* the derivatives of what was primarily repressed. If these derivatives have become sufficiently far removed from the repressed representative, whether owing to the adoption of distortions or by reason of the number of intermediate links inserted, they have free access to the conscious. (SE 14, 149)

Some qualification of this kind is necessary to Freud for two obvious reasons. Firstly, because psychoanalytic therapy would be impossible if there were no way of getting at ideas which were indirectly associated with the repressed idea. The therapist would not be able to get a foothold. Secondly, because *any* idea is connected to any other idea by *some* chain of associations. Once you have posited the existence of secondary repression, you have to posit a limit to it in order to account for the fact that the mind does not simply seize up altogether.

Not all unconscious mental contents are repressed, as Freud clearly indicates in this passage from 'Repression':

Psycho-analytic observation of the transference neuroses, moreover, leads us to conclude that repression is not a defensive mechanism which is present from the very beginning, and that it cannot arise until a sharp cleavage has occurred between conscious and unconscious mental activity - that *the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious.* (SE 14, 147, Freud's emphasis)

This clearly means that there must already be an unconscious before repression can take place, so that the unconscious cannot consist of the repressed alone. This point is reinforced in 'The Unconscious':

... we may say that in general a psychical act goes through two phases as regards its state, between which is interposed a kind of testing (censorship). In the first phase the psychical act is unconscious and belongs to the system *Ucs.* If, on testing, it is rejected by the censorship, it is not allowed to pass into the second phase; it is then said to be 'repressed' and must remain unconscious. (SE 14, 173)

In other words, material can be unconscious before it is repressed. However, the repressed material is particularly important in the formation of the neuroses whose treatment is the primary concern of psychoanalysis. This is why it can often appear to people coming newly to psychoanalytic literature that repressed contents are the only unconscious contents whose existence Freud recognises.

Let us return to the 'censorship' metaphor for a moment. If I open my newspaper and find in it large blocks of blacked-out print, I may not know what has been censored, but I know that *something* has. The hand of the censor is clearly visible. In the case of *Raise the Red Lantern*, however, an unsuspecting viewer might think that the film is just a straightforward story,

and that no censorship has taken place. Likewise a dream does not explicitly show the hand of the censor. It may appear as a nonsensical story, but it is not immediately apparent that it is a censored one. Thus the unconscious is not merely the 'place' to which repressed material goes. The act of repression itself, if we admit that it takes place, must be unconscious. So, in addition to repressed material, the unconscious contains repressing forces, which may be viewed mentalistically - thoughts which are unacceptable are rejected. It also contains material which has not yet, as it were, tried to enter consciousness. Considerations such as this led Freud to believe that the unconscious needed to be further subdivided, as we shall see in 1.5.2.

1.3.2 Anti-repression

Contents which are repressed remain active in the unconscious, as the following excerpt from 'Repression' makes clear:

... repression does not hinder the instinctual representative from continuing to exist in the unconscious, from organising itself further, putting out derivatives and establishing connections. (SE 14, 149)

He makes the 'dynamic' aspect more explicit in the *New Introductory Lectures*:

We must ... attribute to the repressed a strong upward drive, an impulsion to break through into consciousness. (SE 22, 68)

For Freud, the assumption that repressed contents are, as it were, struggling against repression, is useful for two reasons.

Firstly, it allows that those contents are capable of exerting an influence on our conscious thoughts and behaviour. Virtually any of the examples already given can be used to illustrate this point. In the 'Rat Man and the stone' story quoted in 1.2.1, for instance, Freud claims that the patient's

strange behaviour is due to the influence of material which was repressed but still active. Dreams, slips and so forth, are treated by Freud as disguised expressions of unconscious thoughts and emotions. However, to return to the cinema analogy, we can treat a film as a disguised criticism of society only if we assume that there is a desire on someone's part to express this criticism.

Secondly, repressed contents are capable - at least some of them - of emerging (or re-emerging) into consciousness. The whole aim of psychoanalytic therapy is to overcome repression and bring about the (re-)emergence of repressed mental contents. One of the most basic techniques by which this is done is free association. This is where the patient takes as a starting point, say, a dream-component or a parapraxis, and adopts a completely uncritical attitude to whatever ideas enter his or her mind in connection with it.⁸ This is supposed to lead to the uncovering of unconscious thoughts and emotions. But for this to happen, there must be present an urge to give expression to these thoughts and emotions, even though they are unacceptable to the censor.

1.4 THE ECONOMIC MODEL

Where the dynamic model focuses attention on the *direction* of forces in the mind, the economic model focuses attention on the *quantities* of energy or cathexes. Freud frequently claims that one of the main tasks of the ego is to ensure that the quantity of unbound energy is kept to a minimum. In the *Introductory Lectures* he says:

It seems as though our total mental activity is directed towards achieving pleasure and avoiding unpleasure. ... We can only venture to say this much, that pleasure is in some way connected with the diminution, reduction or extinction of the amounts of stimulus prevailing in the mental apparatus, and that similarly unpleasure is connected with their

⁸ See *The Interpretation of Dreams*, SE 4, 100-104.

release. ... We can say that the mental apparatus serves the purpose of mastering and disposing of the amounts of stimulus and sums of excitation that impinge on it from outside and inside. (SE 16, 356)

He expands on this in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920): '... the factor that determines the feeling is probably the amount of increase or diminution in the quantity of excitation *in a given period of time.*' (SE 18, 8, Freud's emphasis)

In some works Freud suggests that a correlation may be found between cathexes and physical energy, but he always places this in the realm of vague possibility, as in the following passage from the *Introductory Lectures*:

... supposing, now, that it was possible, by some chemical means, perhaps ... to increase or diminish the quantity of libido present at a given time or to strengthen one instinct at the cost of another - this would be a causal therapy in the true sense of the word ... At present, as you know, there is no question of any such method of influencing libidinal processes (SE 16, 436)

It may appear that the systematic use of the metaphor of energy makes Freud's view of the mind a crude pseudo-physicalist one, similar to the one he is supposed to have abandoned after the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895). However, the energy of which he speaks is always described in terms of two co-ordinates: direction (the dynamic model) and degree of intensity (the economic model). I believe that there is no difficulty in relating these properties to a psychology of thoughts and emotions. It is clear that many, perhaps all, of our thoughts and emotions are *about* things. It is this 'aboutness' that is the 'direction' spoken of in the dynamic model: ideas and emotions are 'directed towards' the things they are about. It is also clear that thoughts and emotions may be opposed to one another; proposition 'P' is opposed to proposition 'not-P', and 'I love x' is opposed to 'I hate x' (admitting this does not entail admitting that these oppositions actually exist in the unconscious of one person, as Freud claims they do). The dynamic

model deals with opposition in this sense, not in the sense of literal physical forces acting against each other. As for the economic model, there ought to be no difficulty in seeing that both thoughts and emotions can have degrees of intensity; 'I sort-of think that P' is weaker than 'I really think that P', and emotions can similarly vary in strength.

We may consider the dynamic and economic models together as the 'energy model' of mental activity. Another characteristic which mental 'energy' shares with actual energy is the potential to do work. It is clear that many of our thoughts and emotions have the potential to give rise to action, even if that potential is, due to circumstances, never realised. The action in question may be only that of giving expression to the particular thought or emotion, or of suppressing another thought or emotion.

Where the gain in explanatory power arises is in the notion of 'mobility of cathexes', that is, the notion of mental states as energy which can be pointed in different directions. This may seem little obscure, and non-Freudians may have difficulty accepting it. However, consider the following observation made by George Orwell. In part II of his essay 'Inside the Whale' (1940), he discusses what he sees as a widespread pattern of behaviour among English intellectuals in the thirties. Having been inculcated in public schools with religion and patriotism, many subsequently abandoned these beliefs and switched their allegiance to the Communist party. Orwell claims that, while their beliefs are no longer attached to the same objects, the structure of their beliefs has remained the same:

All the loyalties and superstitions that the intellect had seemingly banished could come rushing back under the thinnest of disguises. Patriotism, religion, empire, military glory - all in one word, Stalin. God - Stalin. The Devil - Hitler. Heaven - Moscow. Hell - Berlin. All the gaps were filled up. So after all the 'Communism' of the English intellectual is something explicable enough. It is the patriotism of the deracinated. (Orwell, 1940, p. 565)

Orwell's use of the word 'explicable' here fits in very well with Freud's concept of explanation as being to fill in gaps in order to give a coherent psychological account of why such-and-such an action was performed. To translate this example into the language of Freud's dynamic model: the feeling of loyalty, which was originally directed towards God, the British Empire and so on, has been *transferred* onto Stalin, the Communist International and so on. What this demonstrates is that the energy model of mind helps us to explain phenomena which one does not have to be a psychoanalyst to observe.

1.5 THE TOPOGRAPHIC MODEL

The very concepts 'conscious' and 'unconscious' suggest a model, however vague, of the mind divided into segments. Freud proposed two such models, the earlier of which he integrated into the later.

1.5.1 Conscious, Preconscious and Unconscious

As I mentioned earlier, Freud did not consider the distinction between conscious and preconscious, which focuses on the mere fact of 'not being conscious at the moment', to be very important. The important divide lay between the preconscious and the unconscious, and was based, at least partly, on the question of accessibility or inaccessibility to consciousness. This raises the question: while it is clear that some unconscious material can become accessible through psychoanalysis, is there some which is inaccessible in principle? It is hard to find a clear answer to this question in Freud's writings. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he says: 'These dream-thoughts are certainly not *in themselves* inadmissible to consciousness ...' (SE 5, 593, emphasis added). But in the *New Introductory Lectures* he says:

A consideration of these dynamic relations permits us now to distinguish two kinds of unconscious - one which is easily, under frequently occurring circumstances, transformed into something conscious [the preconscious], and another with which this transformation is difficult and takes place only subject to a considerable expenditure of effort *or possibly never at all*. (SE 22, 71, emphasis added)

The appearance of the word 'possibly' here seems to indicate that Freud himself was ambivalent on this question.

In 'The Unconscious', Freud warned against confusing the unconscious and the preconscious. This was not only because of the, admittedly important, question of accessibility to consciousness, but also because of the other important differences between the unconscious and the preconscious. He distinguishes between the merely descriptive use of the term 'unconscious', where it includes the preconscious, and a more systematic use, where it does not.

It would put an end to all misunderstandings if, in describing the various kinds of psychical acts we were to disregard the question of whether they were conscious or unconscious, and were to classify them and correlate them only according to their instincts and aims, according to their composition and according to which of the hierarchy of psychical systems they belong to. (SE 14, 172)

His continuing dissatisfaction with this first topographical division of the mind eventually led him to a second one, in which the unconscious proper was further subdivided.

1.5.2 Ego, Id and Super-ego

This new topographic model of the mind, sometimes referred to as the structural model, is to be found in its most developed form in *The Ego and the*

Id (1923) and in the lecture 'The Dissection of the Psychological Personality' in the *New Introductory Lectures*. In this model, there are three divisions:

(1) The Ego: Freud usefully summarises the characteristics of the ego in *The Ego and the Id*:

... in each individual there is a coherent organisation of mental processes; and this we call his ego. It is to this ego that consciousness is attached; the ego controls the approaches to motility - that is, to the discharge of excitations into the external world; it is the mental agency which supervises all its own constituent processes, and which goes to sleep at night, though even then it exercises censorship on dreams. From this ego proceed the repressions, too, by means of which it is sought to exclude certain trends in the mind not merely from consciousness but also from other forms of effectiveness and activity. (SE 19, 17)

The ego is that part of the mind that interacts with the external world. It should be noted, however, that the ego does not equal the conscious mind, even if we take that to include the preconscious. The conscious and the preconscious make up only part of the ego; some of the ego is unconscious. However, the ego owes its origin to the influence of external reality, and hence to the conscious.

It starts out, as we see, from the system *Pcpt.* [perception], which is its nucleus, and begins by embracing the *Pcs.* ... But ... the ego is also unconscious. (SE 19, 23)

Among the contents of the unconscious part of the ego are the 'imaginary people' set up by the replacement of external by psychical reality discussed above. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud speculates

... that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-cathexes. (SE 19, 29)

In other words, a person who was - at least unconsciously - loved or desired, but is unattainable, leaves behind a residue in the ego, which serves to at least partially satisfy the desire. Note that the source of this desire - as of all libido - is the id, not the ego, so that the replacement of external by psychical reality is an interaction between these two parts of the mind.

Because it has to deal with external reality, the ego does not possess the other three characteristics to as great an extent as the id (see below).

If the ego is partially conscious and partially unconscious (disregarding for the moment the difference between the preconscious and the conscious), this raises the question, what makes the difference between an unconscious idea or emotion and a conscious one? The answer Freud gives is: an unconscious idea or emotion becomes conscious 'through being connected with the word-presentations corresponding to it'. It does not follow that when a conscious idea or emotion becomes disconnected from the word-presentations, it must become unconscious. Freud does not explicitly deny the existence of wordless conscious ideas. He might perhaps allow that they can arise from the worded ones or from external perception. However, thinking in words is, he seems to be claiming, a peculiarity of the conscious mind. This is perhaps supposed to account for the looseness and irrationality of unconscious thought, as identified by Coleridge in his criticism of the theory of association.

(2) The Id: In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud introduces the id in contrast to the ego:

... the pleasure principle ... reigns unrestrictedly in the id. For the ego, perception plays the part which in the id falls to instinct. (SE 19, 25)

In other words, where the ego pays attention to the external world, the id is instead guided by instincts. By instinct, Freud means the basic animal instincts, most importantly the sexual instinct. The id is the source of all desire, and in general of all energy in the psyche. Even the energy which the ego uses to oppose the id's impulses is 'borrowed energy':

Thus in its relation to the id it [the ego] is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. (Ibid.)

The id exists prior to all other parts of the mind. The ego is 'a specially differentiated part of the id' (SE 19, 38), and 'the ego forms its super-ego out of the id'. (Ibid.) The ego only begins to come into existence when the external world begins to make its presence felt.

The id is entirely unconscious; if material is to become conscious, it must first enter the ego, and hence it must take on at least the superficial forms of rationality, attention to the external world, and so forth. This can be seen in the 'Rat Man and the stone' example. Here a pair of mutually exclusive wishes had to be given a rational justification in order to be represented in consciousness. This rational justification took the form of the two ostensible reasons for moving the stone which, at least in the second case ('it occurred to him that this was absurd') bore no relation to the unconscious reasons. Note that this need for the material to be comprehensible to the rational mind furnishes an additional reason, apart from censorship, why material cannot easily pass from the unconscious - or at least the id - to the conscious.

The id possesses all the special characteristics of the unconscious. In the case of three of them, this is made clear in 'The Dissection of the Psychological Personality':

Exemption from Mutual Contradiction:

The logical laws of thought do not apply in the id, and this is true above all of the law of contradiction. (SE 22, 73)

Timelessness (both senses):

There is nothing in the id that corresponds to the idea of time; there is no recognition of the passage of time and ... no alteration in its mental processes is produced by the passage of time. (SE 22, 74)

Mobility of Cathexes:

It even seems that the energy of these instinctual impulses is in a state different from that in the other regions of the mind, far more mobile and capable of discharge. (Ibid.)

As for the fourth characteristic, the replacement of external by psychical reality, I already showed above how this is a joint venture, as it were, between the ego and the id. It is as if the id were fooled into thinking that a part of the ego was in fact a desired person.

(3) The Super-ego: The super-ego may be seen as a kind of conscience, in the sense of the source of guilt. However, conscience is not the sole function of the super-ego. In 'The Dissection of the Psychological Apparatus', Freud points out: '... that conscience is one of its functions and that self-observation, which is an essential preliminary to the judging activity of conscience, is another of them.' (SE 22, 60) Note that by 'self-observation' Freud does not here mean 'introspection'. Rather he likens the self-observation of the super-ego to the 'being watched' of which neurotics sometimes complain. The super-ego is felt by the ego as another agency by which it is being watched.

A further function of the super-ego is that: 'it is also the vehicle of the ego ideal by which the ego measures itself' (SE 22, 68) The source of this ego-ideal, which is the nucleus of the super-ego as a whole, is the individual's parents. This is another instance of the replacement of external by psychical reality: '... the external restraint [imposed by one's parents] is internalised and the super-ego takes the place of the parental agency and observes, directs and threatens the ego in exactly the same way as the earlier parents did with the child.' (SE 22, 61) Note the mentalistic language which is used to describe the super-ego's behaviour: it 'observes, directs and threatens'.

The super-ego appears to possess the characteristic of exemption from mutual contradiction, as this quote from *The Ego and the Id* suggests:

The super-ego, however, is not simply a residue of the earliest object-choices of the id; it also represents an energetic reaction-formation

against those choices. Its relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: 'You *ought to be* like this (like your father). It also comprises the prohibition 'You *may not be* like this...' (SE 19, 34, Freud's italics)

The super-ego is, as I have shown above, a *product* of the replacement of external by psychological reality. It appears to possess the characteristic of timelessness in the sense of everlastingness, as feelings of guilt can remain long after the action was committed or imagined. It is not clear whether it exhibits mobility of cathexes. In general the super-ego appears to be viewed by Freud as less rational than the ego, perhaps because it is separated off at a very early stage of the ego's development.

Much of this sounds as though the ego, id and super-ego were persons with their own desires, aims and so forth. However, one should be careful not to take this too literally. The division represents conflicting groups of aims within the mind - the ego represents the attempt to produce a coherent self-image and deal with external reality, the id the brute instincts, and the super-ego the demands of conscience. One can accept the idea of conflicts occurring within a single mind, without having to believe that that mind contains within it several 'persons'. To give a non-Freudian example: I *should* do *x*, but I *want* to do *y*. The difference between this and the Freudian view is that, on the Freudian view, each of these groups of aims has a distinct mode of operation. The ego, for example, is more rational than the other two. It recognises the principles of identity and non-contradiction, as well as the laws of space and time, cause and effect. Furthermore, Freud would claim that the three groups already possess their distinctive features from a very early age, and are broadly similar throughout the human race.

This new topographic model does not supplant the old one; rather it incorporates it. The preconscious and the conscious are part of the ego, whereas the unconscious encompasses the remainder of the ego and the whole of the id. As for the super-ego, Freud says, in 'The Dissection of the Psychological Personality', that: '... portions of both of them, the ego and the super-ego themselves, are unconscious' (SE 22, 69), which suggests that

portions of both of them are (pre)conscious. However, in *The Ego and the Id*, he says that the super-ego 'is less firmly connected with consciousness'. (SE 19, 28)

1.6 THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE AND THE REALITY PRINCIPLE

Central to many of Freud's theories is the distinction between mental activity which is governed by the pleasure principle and that which is governed by the reality principle. The pleasure principle is supposed to be dominant in the unconscious (at least in the first topographical model), as well as being characteristic of infants and neurotics (when they are being neurotic). The process of becoming mature, or of being cured of a neurosis, is supposed to consist in more mental activity coming under the guidance of the reality principle. In a nutshell, the pleasure principle is the pursuit of immediate, short-term pleasures and the avoidance of immediate, short-term pains. The reality principle still has pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain as its ultimate aim, but it pursues this aim in a 'smarter' way. It takes steps which are more likely to be efficacious, pursues longer-term, more reliable pleasures and avoids longer-term pains. Further, in its smart pursuit of pleasure, the reality principle takes into consideration the self-preservation of the individual, which the pleasure principle neglects. In 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning' (1911), Freud describes the pleasure principle thus:

In the psychology which is founded on psychoanalysis we have become accustomed to taking as our starting-point the unconscious mental processes, with the peculiarities of which we have become accustomed through analysis. We consider these to be older, primary processes, the residues of a phase of development in which they were the only kind of mental processes. The governing purpose obeyed by these primary processes is easy to recognise; it is described as the pleasure-unpleasure principle, or more shortly the pleasure principle. These processes strive

towards gaining pleasure; psychical activity draws back from any event which might arouse unpleasure. (SE 12, 218)

Under the influence of the pleasure principle, a person will not postpone gratification, no matter how great the benefits of doing so. Under the influence of the reality principle, the person will postpone gratification if the reward for doing so outweighs the immediate gratification.

In Freudian terms, the person under the influence of the pleasure principle 'hallucinates' the satisfaction of his or her immediate desires, but this situation does not last long:

I suggest that the state of psychical rest [which a person is alleged by Freud to be in at birth] was originally disturbed by the peremptory demands of internal needs. When this happened, whatever was thought of (wished for) was simply presented in a hallucinatory manner, just as still happens today with our dream-thoughts every night. It was only the non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction, that led to the abandonment of this attempt at satisfaction by means of hallucination. Instead of it, the psychical apparatus had to decide to form a conception of the real circumstances in the external world and to endeavour to make a real alteration in them. A new principle was thus introduced; what was presented in the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable. This setting-up of the *reality principle* proved to be a momentous step. (SE 12, 219)

It is not clear what he means by 'hallucinates' here: is it a full-blown all-sensory-modalities hallucination, or simply a very strong belief that a certain state of affairs is the case, or something in between? Clearly, if the hallucination was strong enough it would satisfy whatever the desire was, and the person would be able to have whatever he or she wanted without any effort. Equally clearly, if the desire represents a real bodily need, such as hunger, then no matter how strong the hallucination, the need would not be met and the person would die. Freud says, however, that the person quickly

realises that the hallucination does not satisfy the desire, so clearly he cannot mean the full all-modalities version. He also says that an organism whose desires were always immediately met by the outside world without any effort on the organism's part would never develop the reality principle. Speaking of an infant which is fed on demand by its mother, he says:

It probably hallucinates the fulfilment of its internal needs; it betrays its unpleasure, when there is an increase of stimulus and an absence of satisfaction, by the motor discharge of screaming and beating about with its arms and legs, and it then experiences the satisfaction it has hallucinated. Later, as an older child, it learns to employ these manifestations of discharge intentionally as methods of expressing its feelings. Since the later care of children is modelled on the care of infants, the dominance of the pleasure principle can really come to an end only when a child has achieved complete psychical detachment from its parents. (SE 12, 220)

The point is, it is only because the 'hallucination' of the desired state of affairs is immediately accompanied by the real state of affairs, that the individual continues to attempt to satisfy desires by means of hallucination. Barring this situation, however, the person quickly realises that desires such as hunger are not satisfied by hallucinating the existence of food. The person then starts to take more efficacious steps towards bringing about the desired state of affairs. Once this starts to happen, the reality principle starts to come into existence.

Freud calls the reality principle a 'modification' of the pleasure principle. (e.g. *Introductory Lectures*, SE 16, 357, and *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, SE 8, 65, where he calls it an 'expedient modification'.) This is partly a genetic point - the reality principle grows out of the pleasure principle. But more importantly, the reality principle is a modification of the pleasure principle in that it fundamentally aims at the maximisation of pleasure and the minimisation of pain. He says this in 'Two Principles':

Just as the pleasure-ego can do nothing but *wish*, work for a yield of pleasure, and avoid unpleasure, so the reality-ego need do nothing but strive for what is useful and guard itself against damage. Actually the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding of it. A momentary pleasure, uncertain in its results, is given up, but only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time. (SE 12, 223)

In a footnote to this passage, Freud says: 'The superiority of the reality-ego over the pleasure-ego has been aptly expressed by Bernard Shaw in these words: 'To be able to choose the line of greatest advantage instead of yielding in the direction of least resistance.' The difference between them is that the pleasure principle goes for immediate gratification, whereas the reality principle pursues pleasure and avoids pain in ways which are more likely to be successful in the long run. It is clear that if one progresses from the first to the second, one must start to take into account features of external reality. This is so even if taking those features into account is painful. Note, however, that Freud does not consider that the reality principle means the pursuit of knowledge about external reality *as an end in itself*, but only as a means to the end of gaining an assured pleasure at a later time. This point is reiterated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

We know that the pleasure principle is proper to a primary method of working on the part of the mental apparatus, but from the point of view of the self-preservation of the organism among the difficulties of the external world, it is from the very outset inefficient and even highly dangerous. Under the influence of the ego's instincts of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the *reality principle*. This latter principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of

possibilities of obtaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure. (SE 18, 10)

Notice how here Freud has explicitly introduced self-preservation as one of the aims of the reality principle. It is not clear whether he thinks this can be subsumed under the heading of maximisation of pleasure and minimisation of pain, but this does not at any rate affect my interpretation of the reality principle as the smart pleasure principle. One could point out that if one were to make the ultimate aim of the reality principle the maximisation of pleasure alone, it is hardly too outrageous to say that surviving is a necessary precondition of this.

In one of his very last works, 'An Outline of Psychoanalysis' (1938), Freud showed that his view of the relationship between the pleasure principle and the reality principle had not changed:

The id obeys the inexorable pleasure principle. But not the id alone. It seems that the activity of the other psychical agencies too is able only to modify the pleasure principle but not to nullify it; (SE 23, 198)

And on the next page he says:

... the ego comes to a decision on whether the attempt to obtain satisfaction is to be carried out or postponed or whether it may not be necessary for the demand made by the instinct to be suppressed altogether as being dangerous. (Here we have the *reality principle*.) Just as the id is directed exclusively to obtaining pleasure, so the ego is governed by considerations of safety. The ego has set itself the task of self-preservation, which the id appears to neglect. (Ibid., 199, Freud's parenthesis and italics)

I will finish this section with a few brief points.

(1) The move from the unmodified pleasure principle to the reality principle does not take place all at once. Rather, different parts of one's beliefs

and desires can come under the sway of the reality principle while others remain under the pleasure principle. In the 'Two Principles', Freud says: 'The replacement of the pleasure principle by the reality principle, with all the psychological consequences involved, ... is not in fact accomplished all at once; nor does it take place simultaneously all along the line.' (SE 12, 222)

(2) It is also possible, he says for an area of the mind to be recaptured by the pleasure principle: sexual fantasy is, he says, 'the weak spot in our psychological organisation; and it can be employed to bring back under the dominance of pleasure principle thought-processes which had already become rational.' (Ibid., 223) Neurotics are supposed to be particularly prone to this regression.

(3) Further, Freud says, the pure pleasure principle is strictly speaking, an extrapolated 'fiction' (in this respect it is analogous, perhaps, to the 'state of nature' of Enlightenment political philosophers): 'It will rightly be objected that an organisation which was a slave to the pleasure principle and neglected the reality of the external world could not maintain itself alive for the shortest time, so that it could not have come into existence at all'. (Ibid., 220n.) Given Freud's increasing pessimism about humanity as he grew older, he probably believed, in his later years at least, that nobody is entirely governed by the reality principle either.

(4) In 1920, in a book called *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud postulated a fundamental self-destructive drive. This drive was used to explain behaviour which seemed impossible to account for in terms of any kind of pursuit of pleasure. In other words, he postulated a drive which was neither the pleasure principle nor the reality principle. This, however, does not affect the fact that the reality principle is just a smarter pleasure principle - it just means that in its smart pursuit of pleasure it may be hindered by a self-destructive drive as well as by the unreformed pleasure principle.

1.7 THE MODEL AT WORK

I will give a very brief account of how the distinctive features of Freud's model are meant to account for neurosis. I will talk for the most part about obsessional neurosis, as this is what Freud most frequently likens animism and religion to.

Obsessional neurosis is a condition where the sufferer is continually plagued by ideas which seem patently without foundation - such as 'I'm being watched', or 'I have to wash my hands again'. These ideas may take the form of irresistible impulses to perform elaborate ritualistic acts. Often, a ritualistic act is felt to be necessary prior to the performance of some otherwise prohibited act, even though there may be no apparent connection between the two, and the prohibited act may be something perfectly harmless. In severe cases, obsessional ideas can cause a person to waste great quantities of time and energy which could be more usefully employed. They can also create severe restrictions and prohibitions, which greatly reduce the person's quality of life. A typical example of obsessional behaviour would be a bed-time ritual - a series of actions which a person performs every night before going to bed, which serve no apparent purpose, but without which sleep would be impossible for that person. Freud discusses one such ritual in the *Introductory Lectures*. A nineteen-year-old girl had a highly elaborate bed-time ritual, which necessitated among other things ensuring that the pillow did not touch the headboard. During analysis, the patient revealed that she had always thought of the pillow as a man and the headboard as a woman. She also revealed that, as a child she had done various different things which had the effect of keeping her parents from having sexual intercourse:

She had simulated fear (or exploited a tendency to fear which was already present) in order that the connecting doors between her parents' bedroom and the nursery should not be shut. ... Not satisfied with disturbing her parents by this means, she contrived to be allowed from time to time to sleep in her parents' bed between them. Finally, when she

was so big that it was physically uncomfortable for her to find room in the bed between her parents, she managed, by a conscious simulation of anxiety, to arrange for her mother to exchange places with her for the night and to leave her own place so that the patient could sleep beside her father. (SE 16, 268)

Thus, the conscious demand that pillow and headboard must be kept apart is traced back by Freud to an unconscious demand that mother and father must be kept apart.

In conversion hysteria a person manifests physical symptoms - such as a cough or a tic - yet without having any of the physical diseases which these would usually indicate. Once again, these symptoms can in some cases be severe, as in the case of Anna O., described by Breuer in *Studies on Hysteria*:

... left-sided occipital headache; convergent squint (diplopia), markedly increased by excitement; complaints that the walls of the room seemed to be falling over (affection of the obliquus); disturbances of vision which it was hard to analyse; paresis of the muscles of the front of the neck, so that finally the patient could only move her head by pressing it backwards between her raised shoulders and moving her whole back; (etc. SE 2, 23)

Obsessional neurosis and conversion hysteria are collectively referred to by Freud as the transference neuroses. He explained them both by postulating unconscious ideas and emotions, usually originating in crises in early childhood, which will not go away or be modified. These ideas and emotions seek to express themselves - in the one case through obsessional ideas and in the other through physical symptoms. These unconscious mental states may involve beliefs which are flagrantly self-contradictory, or contradictory of external evidence or otherwise well-founded beliefs. They may include desires which are 'contradictory' in the sense explained in 1.2.1. None of these types of contradiction, however, cause any modification in the beliefs and desires. Nor does any amount of external evidence make any difference.

Often the symptom can appear very remote from the mental processes of which it is supposed to be an expression, but this is explained by repression and censorship. The meaning of the symptom can be reached through a chain of associations, and it is held that the unconscious ideas, being unable to express themselves directly, settle for indirect, super-cryptic expression instead.

Note how even this highly simplified explanation which I have just given relies not only on the notion of unconscious mental processes, but also on all four of Freud's 'special characteristics'. The repressed ideas 'will not go away or be modified'; this is an example of the characteristic of timelessness. They are likely to involve contradictory beliefs and desires; this involves exemption from mutual contradiction. No amount of external evidence makes any difference; this involves replacement of external by psychical reality. They express themselves through ideas or symptoms which are connected to them by - often very long - chains of associations; this implies mobility of cathexes. Historically, the picture of the individual mental apparatus which I summarised in the previous sections originated in large part as a model for explaining the transference neuroses.

Obsessional neurosis typically originates in some traumatic event in childhood which leads to powerful but ambivalent responses and emotional conflict. The traumatic event may be something very trivial, or even something entirely imaginary, but the child has no sense of the relative importance of things, and does not clearly distinguish between fantasy and reality. So being trivial or imaginary does not make the event any less traumatic. The emotional conflict is dealt with in the only way the immature mind knows how - by repression. Instinctual impulses, which according to Freud are invariably involved in such traumas, are repressed, along with associated beliefs, desires and memories. But repression does not stop the instincts, beliefs and desires from seeking to express themselves. They cannot express themselves directly (i.e. in a way which would be obvious to the conscious mind as an expression of them), due to the influence of the censor.

So they settle for indirect, super-cryptic expression instead. This takes the form of dreams, apparently arbitrary thoughts and apparently senseless rituals. The agencies involved in carrying out the repression are themselves hidden from the (pre)conscious mind, and manifest themselves in the form of apparently unwarranted guilt and avoidances.

Freud claims that the symptoms of these neuroses, which may appear random or meaningless even to the patient, actually have meanings and motives deriving from the patient's unconscious. Here is an example, from the 'Rat Man' case history:

After her [the patient's beloved's] departure he became prey to an *obsession for understanding*, which made him a curse to all his companions. He forced himself to understand the precise meaning of every syllable that was addressed to him, as though he might otherwise be missing some priceless treasure. Accordingly he kept asking 'what was it you said just then?' And after it had been repeated to him several times he could not help thinking it had sounded different the first time, so he remained dissatisfied. (SE 10, 190)

Freud explains this as follows:

When he had been taking leave of her in Vienna before the summer holidays, she had said something which he had construed into a desire on her part to disown him before the rest of the company ... [but later] the lady had been able to prove to him that these words of hers which he had misunderstood had on the contrary been intended to save him from looking ridiculous ... [The obsession for understanding] was constructed as though he were saying to himself: 'After such an experience you must never misunderstand anyone again, if you want to spare yourself unnecessary distress.' (Ibid.)

Here we find seemingly meaningless behaviour being interpreted as if it has a meaning and a motive, in the sense of being an expression of thoughts or emotions. But here, as in other cases of slips, dreams, and neurotic rituals,

there were no *conscious* thoughts or emotions which led to its production; therefore if we are to assert that it is meaningful, then we must assert that there are unconscious thoughts or emotions which led to its production. Likewise with the symptoms of conversion hysteria. The example, which I gave in 1.1, of the ward of hysterical patients imitating one particular patient, suffices to show that Freud considers these to be the results of unconscious mental processes too.

Another central concept in Freud's theory of neurosis is that of 'primary gain from illness'. Freud obviously does not deny that neuroses are harmful and painful to those who suffer from them. But he argues that in developing a neurosis, motives are acted upon which involve serving at least some of the person's interests. These interests may be, all things even cursorily considered, not the best ones for the person to act upon, and they may fail to be remotely served by the actual outcome, but nonetheless they play a vital part in the onset of the illness: the person *decides* on the basis of these motives to become ill, albeit this decision is unconscious. Laplanche and Pontalis give the following summary:

From its beginnings the Freudian theory of neurosis is inseparable from the notion that the illness is brought on and maintained by virtue of the satisfaction it affords the subject. ...

The 'primary gain' is bound up with the actual determination of the symptoms. Freud distinguishes between two aspects of it: First, there is an 'internal element' in the primary gain However painful the symptom may be, its aim is to free the subject from sometimes even more painful conflicts: here we have the mechanism known as 'flight into illness'. Secondly, the 'external element in the primary gain' is thought of as linked to the changes wrought by the symptom in the subject's interpersonal relationships. Thus a woman 'subjugated by her husband' is able, thanks to her neurosis, to procure more affection and attention while simultaneously getting her own back for the bad treatment she has received. (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988, pp. 182-3)

In addition, Freud speaks of a 'secondary gain'. The patient may enjoy receiving attention from concerned friends, family and therapists. Pleasant side-effects such as this may unconsciously motivate the patient in continuing to be ill, and hence make the therapist's task more difficult. This is in spite of the fact that it would be better, from the point of view of the patient's own happiness, to get well.

On Freud's own account, the mental conditions which his psychoanalysis was most successful in treating were the transference neuroses. In the *Introductory Lectures*, he says:

Obsessional neurosis and hysteria are the forms of neurotic illness upon the study of which psychoanalysis was first built, and in the treatment of which, too, our therapy celebrates its triumphs. (SE 16, 258.)

While Freud attempted to give partial psychoanalytic explanations of other conditions - such as paranoia and schizophrenia (See for example the 'Schreber' case history - SE 12, 1-80) - he admitted that he was unable to cure them.

Since Freud's time, his case-histories of conversion hysteria have come under severe criticism. Some critics go so far as to claim that hysteria was never a genuine illness at all, but merely a misdiagnosis by nineteenth-century doctors of various different, mainly physiological, illnesses. See for example E.M. Thornton's *The Freudian Fallacy* (1986) and Alison Orr-Andrewes' paper 'The Case of Anna O.: a Neuropsychiatric Perspective' (1987). Thornton claims that the hysterical symptoms described in *Studies on Hysteria* are fully explicable in terms of biological illnesses, some of which were known to medicine at the time. Orr-Andrewes gives neurophysiological support to this claim, arguing that Anna O's symptoms suggest some kind of temporal lobe epilepsy, due to an aneurysm, tumour or scar. Thornton further suggests that Freud's and Breuer's 'cures' of hysteria were obtained because there were no clear criteria for deciding when the true meaning of a symptom had been found. Hence, the analysis could keep going back to earlier and

earlier associations until the symptom ceased, at which point it was decided that the last association reached was the symptom's true meaning. Thornton claims that the analyst had no reason to assume that the analysis was what caused the cessation of symptoms. He argues that, being medical doctors, Freud and Breuer should have been aware of the phenomenon of spontaneous temporary remission. There is, in fact, strong evidence that Anna O.'s symptoms all recurred (see Ellenburger, Henri: 'The Story of Anna O.: A Critical Review with New Data' in *Beyond the Unconscious*). This suggests that what Freud and Breuer thought was a cure by psychoanalysis was simply the spontaneous temporary remission of the symptoms of a physical illness.

Freud's major case-history of obsessional neurosis - the 'Rat Man' - seems to have escaped this kind of severe criticism. Lacanian analyst Patrick Mahony (1986) criticises many details of the case, but he does not claim that obsessional neurosis does not exist at all, or that the Rat Man was not suffering from it.

Today, psychiatrists use the classification 'obsessive-compulsive disorder' (OCD), rather than 'obsessional neurosis'. Under this heading the 1996 Oxford *Psychiatric Dictionary* gives the following:

Considered a form of anxiety disorder, its characteristics are recurrent, disturbing, unwanted, anxiety-provoking obsessions (insistent thoughts or ruminations that initially are experienced as intrusive or absurd) or compulsions (repetitive ritualistic behaviours, or mental actions such as praying or counting, and purposeful actions that are intentional, even though they may be reluctantly performed, because they are considered abnormal, undesirable, or distasteful to the subject). The compulsion may consist of ritualistic, stereotyped behaviour or it may be a response to an obsession or to rules that the person feels obliged to follow. The obsession often involves the thought of harming others, or ideas that the subject feels are gory, sexually perverse, profane, or horrifying. The actual risk of a patient harming others is very low. Obsessions produce marked distress in the subject, while compulsions prevent or reduce anxiety.

In the beginning the clinical picture is often one of shifting symptoms; e.g. obsessions may appear only after months or years of performing different rituals. Among the most frequent patterns are cleaning or grooming rituals (in at least 50%); repeating actions a certain number of times (in 40% or 50%); excessive visual, verbal or physical checking (e.g. to make certain that the door has been locked, in about 40%); completing compulsions, in which a certain action must be performed in an exact, often highly complicated fashion, from beginning to end lest some feared consequence occur (10%); and meticulous behaviour, in which everything must be put in its proper place and in exact order (9%). (Campbell 1996, pp. 490-1)

The *Concise Oxford Textbook of Psychiatry* gives a similar account of OCD, and states that: 'It is the combination of being compelled to have the thoughts and of resisting them that characterizes obsessional thinking'. (Gelder *et al* 1994, p. 119). The *Encyclopaedia of Mental Health* tells us:

[In OCD] Mental rituals can be so disabling that the patient suffers from depression, panic attacks and phobias. Many sufferers quit their jobs and cannot leave their homes. (Kahn and Fawcett, 1993, p. 273.)

These descriptions of OCD and its effects agree very largely with Freud's of obsessional neurosis. So, although psychiatrists would not necessarily agree with Freud's *explanation* of obsessional neurosis, even in its broad outlines, they would not deny that it exists.

Freud was aware that it is *prima facie* easier to accept explanations which trace thoughts to other thoughts than it is to accept ones which trace physical symptoms of illness to thoughts. That Freud accepted this is suggested in the *Introductory Lectures*, when he speaks of 'obsessional neurosis, in which the *puzzling* leap from the mental to the physical plays no part'. (SE 16, 258, emphasis added.) This is not to claim any fundamental ontological divide, or to deny the reality of psychosomatic illnesses; it is merely to acknowledge a gap in our knowledge. It is undoubtedly for this reason that in the part of his

Introductory Lectures dealing with 'The General Theory of the Neuroses' he chooses to talk about obsessional neurosis first.

1.7.1 The Role of the Pleasure and Reality Principles

The loss of reality is held by Freud to be a common feature of neuroses and psychoses. In 'Two Principles', he says:

We have long observed that every neurosis has as its result, and probably therefore as its purpose, a forcing of the patient out of real life, an alienating of him from reality. ... Neurotics turn away from reality because they find it unbearable, either the whole or parts of it. The most extreme type of this turning away from reality is shown by certain cases of hallucinatory psychosis which seek to deny the particular event that occasioned the outbreak of their insanity [reference omitted]. But in fact every neurotic does the same with some fragment of reality. (SE 12, 218)

What characterises the condition of normality or sanity is for Freud characterised not by knowing about reality, but by balancing the various 'demands' of the external world, the id and the superego. Since the external world is not an agency, it does not in itself make any demand, so what Freud appears to mean by this is that, in the ideal sane individual, the realities of the external world are acknowledged in order to satisfy the demands of the id and the superego. If the external world is insufficiently acknowledged, a person may believe what the id or superego would like to be the case, rather than what is the case. For example, a person with an excessively developed superego may have an exaggerated view of the moral goodness of other people, in spite of evidence to the contrary. But what is important is that, to be neurotic, beliefs should fail to help one deal with the exigencies of reality, not just fail to correspond to reality. In a paper called 'The 'Loss of Reality' in Neurosis and Psychosis' (1924), he says: 'Both neurosis and psychosis are the expression of a rebellion on the part of the id against the external world, of its

unwillingness - or, if one prefers, its incapacity - to adapt itself to the exigencies of reality, to *Ananké* [Necessity].’ (SE 19, 185, emphasis added) Obsessional neurotics fail to adapt due to perpetual ambivalence - they still retain some allegiance to reality, but they find every possible excuse to doubt things. Psychotics, on the other hand, reject reality and remodel it to suit their own irrational wishes. In the same paper, Freud defines the relationship between normality and these two types of mental illness thus:

We call behaviour normal or ‘healthy’ if it combines features of both reactions - if it disavows reality as little as does a neurosis, but it then exerts itself, as does a psychosis, to effect an alteration of that reality. Of course, this expedient, normal behaviour leads to work being carried out on the external world; it does not stop, as in psychosis, at effecting internal changes. It is no longer *autoplastic* but *alloplastic*. (Ibid.)

So in this account of normal healthy behaviour, Freud emphasises the active nature of the relation to reality. He contrasts the expediency of a normal person’s dealings with reality with the futile attempts on the part of neurotics and psychotics to avoid reality.

In ‘An Outline of Psychoanalysis’ Freud emphasises the failure to balance the different demands which characterises neurotics, as well as the consequences which they suffer from it:

Neurotics have approximately the same innate dispositions as other people, they have the same experiences and they have the same tasks to perform. Why is it, then, that they live so much worse and with so much greater difficulty and, in the process, suffer more feelings of unpleasure, anxiety and pain?

We need not be at a loss to find an answer to this question. Quantitative *disharmonies* are what must be held responsible for the inadequacy and sufferings of neurotics. The determining cause of all the forms taken by human mental life, is, indeed, to be sought in the reciprocal relation between innate dispositions and accidental

experiences. Now a particular instinct may be too strong or too weak innately, or a particular capacity may be stunted or insufficiently developed in life. On the other hand, external impressions and experiences may make demands of differing strength on different people; and what one person's constitution can deal with may prove an unmanageable task for another's. These quantitative differences will determine the variety of the results. (SE 23, 183-184)

So it is the disharmony between different sets of demands that is responsible for the sufferings of neurotics. Given that the reality principle is the smart pleasure principle, its task is to bring about as much harmony as possible. The beliefs of neurotics are neurotic not insofar as they fail to correspond with reality, but insofar as they produce disharmony.

Freud unifies his theories on transference neuroses (such as obsessional neurosis) and psychoses (such as paranoia and schizophrenia) by suggesting that both involve flights from reality. That is, in both the person cannot cope with some fact. This may be a fact about himself (e.g. that he wants to kill his father), or a fact about the world (e.g. that he is no longer his parents' favourite, or that his mother sleeps with his father and not him). In transference neuroses, the flight is effected by doubt. It is possible to find reasons to doubt virtually anything, and the obsessional neurotic unconsciously exploits this. But the doubting quickly spreads from the central undesirable fact to other associated facts, and soon doubting becomes an ingrained habit. This makes things very difficult for the person. A popularly cited symptom is for the person to leave the house and immediately start wondering if the gas was turned off, or all the windows closed. The psychotic, on the other hand, avoids reality by setting up a private alternative reality. In schizophrenia this takes the form of actual hallucinations, in paranoia of an elaborate belief-system.

FINAL REMARKS

Freud sometimes uses the term 'primary process' to mean not just mobility of cathexes but all four special characteristics of unconscious (or id) mental processes. Primary processes in this extended sense are contrasted with secondary processes, those which take place in the rational, conscious ego. Freud tells us much more about primary processes, and by and large secondary processes are only described implicitly and by contrast. Primary processes are also alleged to characterise immature individuals, including children and neurotics. More controversially, they are supposed to characterise the thinking of prehistoric and 'primitive' people.⁹ Individual maturation is supposed to be a process of breaking away from primary process and adapting secondary process. Neurotics are those in whom this changeover has only partially taken place. Outcrops of primary process occur in the midst of more rational thought. Hence, neurotics are typically riven by doubt and indecision. Psychotics (although here Freud's theorising is more sketchy) are more completely under the sway of primary process. The hallucinations or delusions in which they seem to believe so absolutely are, according to Freud, projections into the external world of their own mental processes. They are substituting psychical for external reality.

The process of 'civilization' which every culture, and ultimately the whole of humanity, passes through, similarly entails abandoning primary for secondary process. This development is ongoing, not once-and-for-all. Freud does not say whether he believes it will ever be successfully completed. He seems to believe that European civilization is in a 'neurotic' stage, which is at least better than a 'psychotic' one. As we will see, religion is central to this

⁹ I realize that the word 'primitive' is regarded by many people as unacceptably pejorative, and that it is in any event misleading, as it is applied to cultures which are just as complex as modern European culture. However, I use it because it was the term Freud and the anthropologists of his time used (when they were not using 'savage', which is even worse) to refer to non-western, non-literate cultures; and because I cannot think of a better, short, alternative.

'neurosis'. Similarly, with individuals it is not entirely clear whether there is an attainable ideal level of maturity, or whether some degree of neurosis is always going to be present. In this section, I have briefly skimmed over a large range of topics. I will enlarge on them in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 2: RELIGION AS A NEUROSIS

The claim of Freud's that I wish to evaluate in this thesis is that religion is a neurosis. In this chapter I will outline what he means by this claim and how he argues for it. But first I will have to look at what the scope of Freud's claim is, and what he understands by 'religion'.

2.1 WHAT IS FREUD TRYING TO EXPLAIN?

In *Religion Defined and Explained* Clarke and Byrne discuss Freud's theory as an example of what they call a 'radical' theory of religion. That is, it is one of those theories, common in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which

... tend to be comprehensive in attempting to explain religion as a whole. They do not seek to add to our explanatory understanding of religion merely by making more of the facts about particular religions known, nor by interpreting specific religious phenomena. They tend in contrast to seek an explanation of religion as such. ... Something about the typical pattern of beliefs and behaviour we call 'religion' makes the thinkers we consider [in this book] question why it should exist at all and question its overall meaning and purpose. (Clarke and Byrne 1993, p. vii)

They go on to say that:

The inner logic of these explanations is to debunk and dismiss the assumptions that religious beliefs have a real reference to non-mundane states and entities, and that religious life is in part the outcome of human commerce with such transcendent, sacred realities. (Ibid. p. viii)

Freud does indeed dismiss the possibility that religious beliefs could be the outcome of 'commerce with ... sacred, transcendent realities.' He habitually assumes that the explanations which religious believers give for their beliefs (such as revelation) can be discounted. For example:

It would be another matter if demons really existed. But we know that, like gods, they are creations of the human mind: they were made by something and out of something. (SE 13, 24)

And a little further on he says:

... there is no sense in asking savages to tell us the real reason for their prohibitions. It follows from our postulates that they cannot answer, since their real reason must be 'unconscious'. (Ibid. 31)

Clarke and Byrne argue that anyone who attempts to give a single explanation of religion will need to give a definition of religion:

Piecemeal and tentative attempts to give the word 'religion' a usable sense by summing up in a definition some of the salient and characteristic features of members of the class of religions are not enough. A general theory of religion seeks some core, essential unifying feature or features of religion. It must do so, on pain of otherwise admitting that there is no uniform class of things called 'religions' which all require explanation, and the same explanation at that. (Clarke and Byrne, p. viii)

They allow that this definition does not have to be of the 'necessary and sufficient conditions' type, but could be of a 'family resemblance' type instead.

However, in *Totem and Taboo* Freud explicitly denies that his theory aims to explain all aspects of religion:

There are no grounds for fearing that psycho-analysis, which first discovered that psychological acts and structures are invariably overdetermined, will be tempted to trace the origin of anything so complicated as religion to a single source. If psychoanalysis is compelled - and is, indeed, in duty bound - to lay all the emphasis on one particular source, that does not mean it is claiming either that that source is the only one or that it occupies first place among the numerous contributory factors. Only when we can synthesise the findings of the different fields of research will it become possible to arrive at the relative importance of the part played in the genesis of religion by the mechanism described in these pages. Such a task lies beyond the means as well as beyond the purposes of a psycho-analyst. (SE 13, 100)

Later on in the same work he says that 'the beginnings of religion, morals, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex.' (Ibid., 156) But this need not be taken as a statement of the reductionist point of view that Clarke and Byrne attribute to Freud. Rather, it can be seen as analogous to saying that the beginnings of modern physics and the secularisation of Western society converge on the Copernican theory of the Solar System. That is, 'converge' does not imply that the later events can be reduced, or fully explained by, the earlier one. Rather, the earlier event had an important influencing role in the later ones. In a footnote on the next page, Freud stresses this point again:

Since I am used to being misunderstood, I think it worth while to insist explicitly that the derivations which I have proposed in these pages do not in the least overlook the complexity of the phenomena under review. All that they claim is to have added a new factor to the sources, known or still unknown, of religion, morality and society - a factor based on a consideration of the implications of psycho-analysis. I must leave to others the task of synthesising the explanation into a unity. It does, however, follow from the nature of the new contribution that it could not play any other than a central part in such a synthesis, ... (ibid. 157n.)

Nonetheless, anyone with even the limited aims Freud sets himself should be able to point out what features of religion his or her theory explains, even if it only partially explains them. Further, since Freud's claims about religion have all the appearances of universality, he needs to establish that those features of religion are present in all religions. So we need to ask: what are the features which he sees as being typical of religion and which he thinks his theory explains?

Freud offers what at first glance appears to be a definition of religion in *The Future of an Illusion*:

Religious ideas are teachings or assertions about facts and conditions of external (or internal) reality, which tell one something one has not discovered for oneself and which lay claim to one's belief. Since they give us information about what is most important and interesting in life, they are particularly highly prized. (SE 21, 25)

From the way the first sentence is phrased, it sounds as though it gives us what Freud considers a necessary condition or universal feature of religion. The second sounds more like he is claiming it as a typical characteristic. That the first is not considered by Freud to be a sufficient condition, is made clear when he goes on to say that there are many obvious examples of beliefs which one holds without having discovered them for oneself, but which are not religious beliefs. Many of the facts that one picks up in school would do as examples. But in contrast to religious teachings, Freud says, with the facts or theories of, say, geography or physics, we are always given *justifications* for the belief:

For instance, the earth is shaped like a sphere; the proofs adduced for this are Foucault's pendulum experiment, the behaviour of the horizon and the possibility of circumnavigating the earth. (Ibid., 26)

Freud contrasts reasons of this type with the type of reasons typically offered in support of religious beliefs:

Firstly, these teachings deserve to be believed because they were already believed by our primal ancestors; secondly, we possess proofs which have been handed down to us from those same primeval times; and thirdly, it is forbidden to raise the question of their authentication at all. (Ibid.)

Freud argues that the first two reasons ought to be clearly seen as inadequate, since our ancestors believed many things which we now have good reason to believe are false - he could give as examples that the earth is flat, or that spells and incantations can cure physical illnesses. As for the so-called proofs, he says, these are untrustworthy and full of contradictions. It is true that the traditional proofs of God's existence have been severely criticised by philosophers over the past few hundred years, and are today regarded by many theologians as 'aids to faith' rather than proofs. As for the third, he considers it unacceptable that any belief should be treated as exempt from the need for justification. Thus, what distinguishes religious beliefs from, say, scientific theories, is that they are held in the absence of evidence. Not only do believers take the beliefs on trust, they have not and could not be supplied with the means of testing the beliefs even if they wanted to.

In the lecture 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*' Freud lists three functions that religion performs for humans. There is no indication of whether or not he wishes to qualify this by saying 'some religions', but he must mean that they are at least regular features. The three functions are:

[1] It gives them information about the origin and coming into existence of the universe, [2] it assures them of its protection and of ultimate happiness in the ups and downs of life and [3] it directs their thoughts and actions by precepts which it lays down with its whole authority. (SE 22, 161)

(1) Freud claims that it is a regular feature of religions that they involve a story of the creation of the world by a powerful person-like figure:

The doctrine is, then, that the universe was created by a being resembling a man, but magnified in every respect, in power, wisdom and the strength of his passions - an idealized super-man. ... It is an interesting fact that this creator is always only a single being, even when there are believed to be many gods. It is interesting too that the creator is usually a man, though there is far from being a lack of female deities; ... (SE 22, 162)

(2) In speaking of assurances of protection and promises of happiness, Freud is obviously thinking of the reward in the hereafter promised to the faithful in Christianity and Islam, or the special favour shown to God's Chosen People in Judaism, or the benefits of prayer in many religions. He says that by some such means religion 'soothes the fear that men feel of the dangers and vicissitudes of life.' (SE 22, 161) Once again, the contrast is drawn with science, which has to recognize that certain dangers are real and must either be accepted as unavoidable or dealt with by means other than asking a supernatural being to deal with them for us. It may seem odd that Freud deems these last viewpoints to be distinctive of *science*, but we will see why this is so in 2.3.2.2.

(3) Religious ethics is, for Freud, marked by being absolute and unquestionable. Where ideally, he considers, one ought to base one's moral precepts on reasons, religion offers no reason other than the command of the deity. Because our acceptance of this is in turn based upon faith alone, it is not a good reason. A good reason for Freud appears to be something like: because such-and-such rules are necessary for the stability of society, and hence for the happiness of the individuals in that society. In *The Future of an Illusion* he offers the following Hobbesian scenario:

When civilization laid down the commandment that a man shall not kill the neighbour he hates or who is in his way or whose property he covets, this was clearly done in the interests of man's communal existence, which would not otherwise be practicable. For the murderer would draw down on himself the vengeance of the murdered man's kinsmen and the

secret envy of others, who within themselves feel as much inclined as he does for such acts of violence. Thus he would not enjoy his revenge or his robbery for long, but would have every prospect of soon being killed himself. Even if he protected himself against his single foes by extraordinary strength and caution, he would be bound to succumb to a combination of weaker men. If a combination of this sort did not take place, the murdering would continue endlessly and the final outcome would be that men would exterminate one another. We should arrive at the same state of affairs between individuals as still persists in Corsica between families, though elsewhere only between nations. Insecurity of life, which is an equal danger for everyone, now unites men into a society which prohibits the individual from killing and reserves to itself the right to communal killing of anyone who violates the prohibition. Here, then, we have justice and punishment.¹⁰ (SE 21, 40)

But, he claims, religion does not offer reasons of this kind for its ethical demands. What is worse, religious-based ethics makes no distinction between precepts which can be justified in this way and those which cannot. He says that in religion:

We assert that the prohibition has been issued by God. ... [But] through some kind of diffusion or infection, the character of sanctity or inviolability ... has spread from a few major prohibitions onto every other cultural regulation, law and ordinance. But on these the halo often looks far from becoming; not only do they invalidate one another by giving contrary decisions at different times and places, but apart from this they show every sign of human inadequacy. (Ibid., 41)

¹⁰ Note that while Freud says that it is in the interests of communal existence and stability that the injunction against killing exists, he does *not* say that it was because of people's consideration of this that the injunction came into existence. In fact, as we shall see, the story that Freud puts forward about the establishment of totemism, which he sees as the earliest form of religion and morality, explicitly contradicts the view that such rational considerations motivated people to set up the first laws.

As an example he might have given the Ten Commandments, in which 'Thou shalt not kill' is treated as of equal importance to 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy'. Both are treated as being in no need of justification other than that they are God's commands. Freud could also point out that orthodox Jews and Muslims would no more eat pork than they would commit a murder. Sometimes it is claimed that the injunction against eating pork is perfectly rational because in the Middle East at the time those religions originated, pork carried many diseases. But Freud could reply that Jews and Muslims still obey the injunction even if they live in countries where the pork is as safe as any other meat. Thus, the injunction is being treated as absolute and unquestionable, not as justified by rational considerations.

So the characteristics which Freud considers typical of religions are:

(1) They involve beliefs which are not based on good reasons, but on faith alone.

(2) They have a story about the origin of the universe which involves a powerful human-like figure. This figure is usually male.

(3) They promise protection and ultimate happiness.

(4) They offer ethical precepts which are held absolutely and unquestioningly.

He does not make the first a sufficient condition for religion, so it does him no harm to point out that things other than religions possess this feature. In fact, it is not absolutely clear that he regards it as a necessary condition either. The other three characteristics seem to be viewed by him as typical - rather than defining - characteristics, so it does not matter if not all religions possess all of them. Further, as we shall see, he gives an account of religion wherein it develops out of totemism, which seems to lack at least (2), and possibly also (3). The fact that he views religion as a historically evolving entity harmonises well with a family resemblance type of definition which picks out typical features rather than necessary and sufficient conditions. However, Freud would claim that all religions share a common origin, and that the features which he picks out, even if they are not all present in all

religions, are all indicative of that origin. Presumably, then, he would have to claim that every religion possesses at least some of the features which he picks out.

2.2 THE ARGUMENTS OF *TOTEM AND TABOO*

Freud's first book-length assault on religion is in *Totem and Taboo*. Here he presents a selection of diverse anthropological and historical data with a view to justifying three claims:

(1) The mental processes of primitive peoples share important characteristics with those of infants, neurotics and the unconscious. Namely, they exhibit the four 'special characteristics', or at least those features play a more prominent part than they do in the conscious of sane people in modern societies.

(2) Totemism came about as a response to traumatic events in the lives of early humans.

(3) All religions are derived from totemism, and continue to exhibit characteristics which are indicative of the special characteristics, and of its traumatic origins.

In what remains of this chapter, I will attempt to make Freud's case seem as plausible as possible, leaving the task of criticism for the later chapters.

2.2.1 The Psychological Traits of Primitive Peoples

Freud attempts to establish that a number of features that he has postulated of the mental activity of neurotics, are also characteristic of primitive peoples. It may be asked: does he claim that all (or the typical cases of) primitive people have mental states which are characterized by those features? Or is the evidence supposed to show that there are such states but at another level (e.g. 'collective psychology') among those people? It appears that Freud wants to say *both*. On the one hand he says: '... I have taken as the

basis of my whole position the existence of a collective mind, in which mental processes occur just as they do in the mind of an individual.' (SE 13, 157) But he also says:

In their [primitive people's] unconscious there is nothing they would like more than to violate them [their taboos], but they are afraid to do so; they are afraid precisely because they would like to, and the fear is stronger than the desire. The desire is unconscious, however, *in every individual member of the tribe* just as it is in neurotics. (SE 13, 31, italics added.)

Both possibilities will be addressed later on in this thesis: the first (all individuals) in Chapter 3 and the second (collective psychology) in Chapter 5. But for the moment it suffices to say that he believes that the institutions of primitive societies are supposed to provide evidence for these mental states, existing at some level or other among the people in these societies, and these mental states having had a formative influence on those institutions.

An initial assumption Freud makes is that it is possible to ascertain what our (and everyone else's) ancestors were like by studying certain 'savage' peoples of today. He explicitly says this at the beginning of *Totem and Taboo*:

There are men living who, as we believe, stand very near to primitive man, far nearer than we do, and whom we therefore regard as his direct heirs and representatives. Such is our view of those whom we describe as savages or half-savages; and their mental life must have a peculiar interest if we are right in seeing in it a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development. (SE 13, 1)

That he is making an assumption that he cannot justify by direct appeal to evidence he freely admits in a footnote shortly afterwards:

But it must not be forgotten that even the most primitive and conservative races are in some sense *ancient* races and have a long past history behind them during which their original conditions of life have been subject to much development and distortion. So it comes about that

in those races in which Totemism exists to-day, we may find it in various stages of decay and disintegration or in the process of transition to other social and religious institutions, or again in a stationary condition which may differ greatly from the original one. The difficulty in this last case is to decide whether we should regard the present state of things as a true picture of the significant features of the past or as a secondary distortion of them. (Ibid., 4n.)

But he justifies the overall project of *Totem and Taboo* as an experiment which will convince (or fail to convince) the reader on grounds of coherence rather than overwhelming evidence: 'Let us now make the experiment of treating taboo as though it were of the same nature as an obsessional prohibition'. (Ibid., 30-31) But for the purposes of this experiment it is necessary to treat taboo as though it originates in the same psychological factors as neurosis. This means that we must be able to identify those factors as having been present in taboo cultures, which in turn means we must use whatever evidence is available to us as evidence of what the ancestors of those cultures were like in the distant past. As we will see, this is not the only occasion on which we will have to either accept or reject a claim of Freud's on grounds of coherence alone.

I will group the mental characteristics that Freud picks out as shared by primitive peoples and neurotics under the following headings:

- (1) Incest avoidance
- (2) Displacement
- (3) Ambivalence
- (4) Replacement of external by psychological reality

It will be noticed that of the four characteristics which I discussed in 1.2., only two and a half are present here. (Displacement is only one half of the characteristic of mobility of cathexes.) However, the missing one, timelessness, in the sense of persistence of unconscious mental states unchanged over many generations, is a *condition* of his claims being true.

Indeed, it is being extended over many generations (an issue I will consider in 5.3).

2.2.1.1 Incest Avoidance

To support his view that this is a ubiquitous psychological feature of primitive peoples, Freud offers anthropological evidence about the phenomenon known as totemism. In many primitive tribes there are totem clans, together with very rigid laws against marriage within a clan.

A totem clan is a group of people who claim descent from one totem, which is usually an animal, but sometimes a plant or an inanimate object. Totem clans are exogamous - that is, sexual relations between members of the same clan are forbidden. Membership of the totem clan is often passed down the generations by inheritance through the male or female line. If it is through the female line, all the children of a particular couple have the same totem as their mother, but a different totem from their father, and *mutatis mutandis* if it is through the male line.

So in these cases the rules of totemism allow some unions which are incestuous (e.g. father and daughter if descent is through the female line), and forbid some which only involve very distant kinship. But because members of a totem clan are supposed to be all in some sense descended from the same totem, all the unions that are prohibited are in some - even if only symbolic - sense incestuous. Sometimes membership of a totem clan is even less clearly linked to real consanguinity. Freud cites Spencer and Gillen (1899) to the effect that among the Arunta tribe the totem of a child is determined by where the mother was when she first realised she was pregnant (SE 13, 114). Further, he claims that there is evidence that the Arunta know the difference between being 'descended' from the same totem animal and being biologically related. He says, paraphrasing Frazer (1910, vol. 2, pp. 89ff. and vol. 4, p. 59): 'Their denial of paternity does not appear to rest upon primitive ignorance; in some respects they themselves make use of descent through the father.' (SE 13, 118.)

So perhaps the descent from the totem animal is meant to be a spiritual one rather than a physical one, or perhaps the kinship is symbolic, as with members of college fraternities in the United States. Either way, it is taken seriously enough to warrant some very strict laws.

As well as being divided into totem clans, many tribes are divided into phratries and sub-phratries; and different phratries are exogamous. For example, let us say that a tribe is divided into six totem clans, A to F. A, B and C may form an exogamous phratry, and D, E and F another. But in addition, A and D may form an exogamous sub-phratry, and so on (SE 13, 8). Thus still more relationships which would not be literally incestuous are forbidden.

Freud also notes that the rule of exogamy, unlike other religious or taboo-based rules, is enforced very strictly by the members of the tribe. It is not left for the gods to punish the offenders; they are usually killed or very severely beaten by the tribe.

Because membership of the same totem clan is supposed to mean descent from a common ancestor, the rule against sexual relations within the clan is, even if only in a symbolic sense, a rule against incest. Freud argues that this rule cannot be explained by 'hygienic considerations' (i.e. the likelihood of congenital diseases being increased by inbreeding) because:

(i) Some real cases of incest slip through the net, and some non-real cases are forbidden, and:

(ii) People with no scientific knowledge could not know the dangers of inbreeding.

So, while prevention of inbreeding may have been a beneficial side-effect of the rules,¹¹ it was not the deciding factor in their creation. So it seems that there was a horror of incest which was for reasons other than avoidance of inbreeding. That this was very strong is shown by the severity of the punishments. But either this horror is only directed at certain types of incest (e.g. mother-son) and not others, or it is being expressed in a distorted form.

¹¹ Even that it is entirely beneficial is not clear; see Badock 1994, p. 158.

The first possibility *prima facie* fails to fit the facts, at least if we want to give a single explanation for totemic institutions, as Freud does. This is because, as he has told us, totem-membership sometimes passes down the male line, and if it does mother-son incest is allowed.

A further feature of primitive societies that Freud appeals to is that they have laws which seem to be designed to prevent encounters which could possibly lead to incest. Thus, among the Battas of Sumatra brothers are forbidden to see their sisters after puberty. Freud quotes one source as saying that this suggests that they assume that every encounter between two adults of the opposite sex will lead to carnal relations, and adds that 'the Dutch missionary who reports these customs adds that he is sorry to say that from what he knows of the Battas he believes the maintenance of most of these rules to be very necessary.' (SE 13, 11; quoting Frazer 1910, vol. 2, p. 146; quoting Fison 1885, p. 27ff.¹²) However, in some tribes brothers and sisters are even forbidden to say each others' names. So it seems that they must also assume that thinking about a person of the opposite sex is likely to lead to carnal relations with that person. This may be further evidence of how great their horror of incest is, and perhaps also that, like neurotics, they view the thought of a wrong action as itself wrong.

Freud quotes Frazer to the effect that such severe anti-incest laws can only be explained if we assume that there is no innate aversion to incest on the part of these tribespeople:

It is not easy to see why any deep human instinct should need to be reinforced by law. There is no law commanding men to eat and drink or forbidding them to put their hands in the fire. (Frazer 1910, vol.4, p. 97; quoted in SE 13, 123)

¹² This shows how 'armchair' Freud's approach is. This piece of information comes to him through no less than three intermediaries. However, it is not the aim of this thesis to either attack or defend Freud on the quality of his anthropological evidence.

Edward Westermarck, an early critic of *Totem and Taboo* (and of Frazer), gives the seemingly perfectly reasonable objection to this argument that the strong prohibitions could alternatively be because a small but visible minority want to do something the majority find repellent (Westermarck 1922, vol. 2, pp. 203n.-204n.). Another piece of evidence Freud offers may counter this, however. In many societies, the ban on incest is lifted on certain special occasions, and the opportunity is eagerly seized upon (SE 13, 11). Perhaps Freud does not need to claim that primitive humans have a strong desire to commit incest; it might be enough for his purposes to show that they take apparently unnecessarily strong measures to avoid it, and further that these measures are not adequately explained by a fear of the effects of inbreeding.

2.2.1.2 Displacement

In addition to totemism, a further feature which is common in primitive societies is taboo. It is from this phenomenon that Freud derives his argument for the claim that displacement is a feature of primitive psychology (SE 13, 18-35).

Taboo is a word derived from Polynesian. It indicates that something is untouchable or forbidden. Violation of a taboo is generally held to be punished automatically, without having to be enforced by the tribe (SE 13, 21). Something can be taboo either because it is 'sacred' or because it is 'unclean'. The sense in which kings are not supposed to be touched or approached by commoners in some cultures is similar to a taboo of the 'sacred' kind. The sense in which pigs are untouchable for Jews and Muslims is similar to a taboo of the 'unclean' kind.¹³ Closely related to taboo is the

¹³ I have chosen examples from cultures which are far removed from the primitive cultures Freud is talking about, but Freud would claim that these customs owe their origin and essential characteristics to much earlier tribal customs. He himself gives examples from feudal Japan, Ancient Rome and seventeenth-century England, in addition to Australian aborigines and Polynesians.

concept of *mana*. This appears to be a kind of spiritual force or property that inheres in objects which are taboo. The amount of *mana* in an object can vary. For example, a king has large amount, one of his immediate subordinates (a 'minister') has a little less, and so on. This means for example that the consequences of an ordinary person touching a king are more severe than the consequences of that ordinary person touching a minister. On the other hand, the minister's own *mana* allows him to approach the king in relative safety (SE 13, 33). A further feature of *mana* is that it is transmissible by contact. An object or person touched the tabooed thing becomes taboo. The dangers inherent in the original taboo object are passed on also. So a piece of clothing which belonged to a king, or (Freud's own example) an unfinished meal of the king's (SE 13, 42), will bring the same dire consequences to the person who touches it as if he had touched the king himself.

I explained Freud's concept of displacement in 1.2.2. Freud offers examples of displacement-behaviour in neurotics and taboo customs which he alleges are parallel.

I will now put side by side two instances of the transference (or, as it is better to say, the *displacement*) of a prohibition. ...

'A Maori chief would not blow a fire with his mouth; for his sacred breath would communicate its sanctity to the fire, which would pass it on to the pot on the fire, which would pass it on to the meat in the pot, which would pass it on to the man who ate the meat, which was in the pot, which stood on the fire, which was breathed on by the chief; so that the eater, infected by the chief's breath conveyed through these intermediaries, would surely die.'¹⁴

My patient's husband purchased a household article of some kind and brought it home with him. She insisted that it should be removed or it would make the room she lived in 'impossible'. For she had heard that the article had been bought in a shop situated in, let us say, 'Smith' Street. [footnote omitted] 'Smith', however, was the married name of a

¹⁴ Freud's source for this story is Taylor 1870, p. 165.

woman friend of hers who lived in a distant town and whom she had known in her youth under her maiden name. This friend of hers was at the moment 'impossible' or taboo. Consequently the article that had been purchased here in Vienna was as taboo as the friend herself with whom she must not come into contact. (SE 13, 27-28)

In 3.1 I will criticise the use Freud makes of the Maori chief's breath example.

2.2.1.3 Ambivalence

In book 4 of *Totem and Taboo* Freud picks out what he thinks are the two essential 'rules' of totemism:

- (1) No sex with members of the same totem clan, and
- (2) Do not kill the totem animal (or plant or object).

He claims that the actions covered by these prohibitions 'coincide with' the two wishes that make up the Oedipus complex - to kill one's father and have sex with one's mother or sisters. Hence, the prohibitions themselves 'coincide with' the repression of these desires. What does 'coincide with' mean here?

As we have seen, Freud has already argued for the presence of ambivalent psychological impulses based on incest-avoidance and displacement. As we have seen, he appeals to the Frazerian argument that violently enforced prohibitions on incest must indicate that there is no innate aversion to it. Freud moreover attempts to back up this claim with further evidence. But in addition Freud believes he has further evidence for ambivalence among primitive peoples. This evidence comes from two sources:

- (1) The antithetical meanings of primal words.
- (2) Taboos relating to enemies, kings and the dead.

In a paper entitled 'The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words' (1910, SE 11, 153-163), Freud claims to have found corroborating evidence for his claim

that contrary ideas may be interchanged in the unconscious. Some linguists in his time claimed that in Ancient Egyptian, the oldest known language, many words that were phonetically identical could have opposite meanings. For example, 'ken' could mean either 'strong' or 'weak'.

But Freud attaches far more importance to the argument based on taboos relating to kings, enemies and the dead. As I showed in 1.2.1, Freud claimed that 'exemption from mutual contradiction' was a characteristic of unconscious thought and emotion. This means, among other things, that elements in dreams or neurotic symptoms can represent their opposites, and that emotional ambivalence is common. Part II of *Totem and Taboo* ('Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence') is largely devoted to a presentation of some (allegedly) typical taboo customs which (also allegedly) demonstrate the existence of ambivalent impulses in the psychology of primitive peoples. Once again, I leave aside for the moment the question of whether these impulses are held to exist in the minds of individuals, or in some trans-individual way.

It is largely emotional ambivalence of which Freud is speaking here. But he also offers what appears to be evidence of beliefs which are contradictory. These contradictory beliefs, he might claim, are evidence of emotional ambivalence. In this connection, Freud quotes numerous examples of taboo customs or laws relating to treatment of enemies, kings and rulers, and the dead.

(1) Treatment of Enemies: Freud offers examples of taboo customs relating to the treatment of enemies whom one has killed in battle. He notes that in many cultures they are treated with extreme kindness (SE 13, 37). Among numerous examples., he quotes Frazer (1911, p. 166), to the effect that the Timorese ask the slain enemy for forgiveness in these terms:

"Be not angry", they say, "because your head is here with us; had we been less lucky, our heads might now be exposed in your village. We have offered sacrifice to appease you. Your spirit may now rest and leave us in peace. Why were you our enemy? Would it not have been better

that we should remain friends? Then your blood would not have been spilt and your head would not have been cut off." (Quoted in SE 13, 37)

On the other hand, those who have slain the tribes' enemies in battle are subjected to severe restrictions. For example:

In some Dyak tribes men returning from a successful expedition are obliged to keep to themselves for several days and abstain from various kinds of food; they may not touch iron or have intercourse with women. ... In the Toaripi or Motumotu tribe of south-eastern New Guinea a man who has killed another may not go near his wife, and may not touch food with his fingers. (Ibid., 39)

Freud says that the 'accepted explanation' for these customs involves two elements - the belief that the dead are vengeful demons, and the belief that the slain man has a transmissible dangerous property (i.e. *mana* again) (Ibid., 41). But Freud rejects such explanations on the grounds that his own psychoanalytic one is superior:

How these two factors are to be combined with each other to explain the ceremonials, whether they are to be regarded as of equal weight, whether one is primary and the other secondary, and if so which - none of these questions receives an answer, and indeed it would be hard to find one. We, on the other hand, can lay stress on the *unity* of our view, which derives all of these observances from emotional ambivalence towards the enemy. (Ibid., 41)

Once again, Freud is appealing to coherence.

(2) Kings and Rulers: In many cultures, severe restrictions are placed upon the king's movements. Some of these laws and customs are ostensibly justified on the grounds that the ruler is able to influence the weather, the prosperity of the kingdom, etc. with every little bodily movement he makes. For example, in ancient Japan it was believed that if a king spent too long looking in the direction of one part of his kingdom, disasters would result (SE

13, 45). So the king was obliged to observe severe restrictions on his actions. If the king sat down for too long, the seas would become calm and navigation would suffer. Similarly, the already-mentioned Polynesian belief that the king is possessed of *mana* or power which is dangerous to those who approach him may lead to restrictions on the king's movements.

Freud argues these restrictions are often so severe that they can only be explained by assuming an ambivalent attitude on the part of the tribe.¹⁵ Officially, the attitude to the king is one of love, reverence and respect, but unofficially (and perhaps unconsciously) feelings of hostility and envy are also present.¹⁶ On this account of things, the explanations for the customs in terms of the king's power are a rationalisation.

The hostile current of feeling sometimes becomes transparently obvious, Freud says, giving as an example a custom among the Timmes of Sierra Leone. There the person newly chosen to be king is beaten before coronation, often so severely that he does not live long afterwards (Ibid., 49). Also, in some cultures the hardships are so great that no-one wants to be king, and people have to be coerced into taking the job (Ibid., 47). Sometimes the restrictions are so severe that the king is effectively unable to rule, and *de facto* power is held by a first minister or equivalent (Ibid.).

Beliefs approaching contradictoriness are shown, Freud says, in the fact that in many cultures, although the king is possessed of magical power which will kill those who touch him, nonetheless if he touches them on purpose his touch can heal illnesses (Ibid., 42). Also, in spite of his awesome power and control over the elements, the taboo on commoners approaching him is sometimes explained as being needed to protect him from them (Ibid., 43). Both these attitudes, Freud would presumably say, are rationalisations of ambivalent attitudes towards the king. It is tacitly acknowledged, or

¹⁵ Once again, it is not made explicit whether this ambivalence is supposed to be in the minds of individuals, or to operate at some kind of group level.

¹⁶ This would also be related to the fact that the king is a substitute for the primal father (see 2.2.2 below). This is part of the 'overdetermination' of the 'symptoms'.

unconsciously known, that plenty of people would kill the king if they got the chance, so they have to be discouraged from going near him.

(3) The Dead: Many cultures impose restrictions on the recently bereaved. For example, they are not allowed to be in the company of others, they must eat restricted diets, or wear sackcloth. Those who come into contact with corpses are often taboo in the sense of 'unclean'. The names of the dead must not be spoken in many cultures. Sometimes the name of a person is changed immediately after death, and only the new one used from then on. Where this happens, sometimes anyone or anything sharing the name of the dead person must also be renamed (Ibid., 55). Sometimes any activity with which the person was connected may not be spoken of, so that the group may be unable to maintain any (conscious or public) historical memory (Ibid., 55-6). Freud quotes Westermarck (1908, vol.2, p. 532ff.) to the effect that the explanation for these taboos is that the dead are feared as malevolent spirits, and are regarded as particularly dangerous to those who were their nearest and dearest (SE 13, 58-59). But Freud argues that the belief in demons itself stands in need of explanation:

The hypothesis that after death those most beloved were transformed into demons clearly raises further questions. What was it that induced primitive men to attribute such a change of feeling to those who had been dear to them? Why did they make them into demons? (Ibid., p. 59)

By way of comparison, Freud gives examples of neurotics who are plagued with guilt over the death of loved ones, and claims that analysis reveals that they blame themselves for the death, and further that they harboured unconscious hostile feelings towards the person. He quotes Westermarck (1908, vol. 2, 534ff.) to the effect that for primitive peoples, death is something that is not inevitable but happens because a person is killed (Ibid.). Thus the belief that the dead are hostile and dangerous is a projection outwards of one's own unconscious hostile wishes (see 1.2.4 and 2.2.1.4. for more on this). Further, the restrictions on the dead person's nearest and

dearest often make life extremely uncomfortable for them, and the unconscious purpose of this is to punish them for killing the person. So those taboos are the result of a compromise-formation between hostile feelings towards the loved one and guilty feelings at the loved one's death. Once again, the explanation which the people themselves would presumably offer, in terms of demons or spiritual forces is viewed by Freud as a rationalisation covering up the real reasons for the taboos.

2.2.1.4 Replacement of External by Psychological Reality

As we saw in 1.2.4, Freud claims that in the unconscious, psychological entities are regularly mistaken for features of the real world. In part III of *Totem and Taboo*, he argues that this is also a feature of the psychology of primitive peoples. He appeals to three features of animistic cultures to justify this claim:

(1) They populate the world with person-like entities.

(2) They treat the principle of association as if it was a feature of the external world, whereas it is a feature of their minds.

(3) They implicitly believe in omnipotence of thoughts.

(1) Animism of its nature involves the belief that what we would call the physical world is populated by souls - that is, trees, rivers, mountains and so forth, have souls. Freud takes it that the animists are ascribing to these things person-like attributes, in particular psychological attributes. As evidence of this, he offers the fact that in such cultures aspects of the physical world are dealt with using procedures which would be appropriate for dealing with people: such as appeasement, persuasion or intimidation. (SE 13, 78). He distinguishes between this type of behaviour, which he calls *Zauberei*, and *Magie*, which is the attempt to influence nature by specific stereotyped procedures. He claims (Ibid.) that *Magie* is the more widespread; nevertheless what Freud calls *Zauberei* seems widespread enough in its own right. And it seems reasonable enough to conclude from the existence of *Zauberei* that its

practitioners believe that they are dealing with entities which have thoughts and feelings. This seems no more problematic than concluding from the fact that Christians ask God for forgiveness that they think He has such attributes as caring about people, or moral disapproval of certain actions. Whether it is reasonable to conclude from this that they are projecting their own psychological attributes onto the external world is another question, however.

(2) Freud argues, citing anthropological sources for support, that central to the practises of *Magie* is the principle of association. That is, it is as if the animists who practise *Magie* think that if two things are associated in some way in the mind, then they can influence each other in reality. In other words, as Tylor put it, the animists 'mistake an ideal connection for a real one'. (1903, vol. 1, 116, quoted in SE 13, 79)

Among the ways in which things can be associated in the mind are resemblance, contiguity, cause-and-effect¹⁷ and the sharing of a name. Some animists believe that rain can be produced by doing something that looks like rain, as with the Ainos of Japan, who scatter water by means of sieves (SE 13, 80). There is also the well-known practise of burning some hated person in effigy, which earlier cultures may have believed would really harm the person (Ibid. 79). These both seem to use association by resemblance. Some will try to cure a wound by rubbing balm on the weapon which produced it, or exacerbate a wound by placing the weapon which produced it near a fire (Ibid., 82). Here association by cause-and-effect seems to be playing a part.

What is happening in these cases, Freud claims, is that the animists are projecting outwards certain features of their own minds which they perceive by means of 'endopsychic perception'.¹⁸ 'Relations which hold between the

¹⁷ See once again the similarity to Hume's view of the mind that I pointed out in 1.2.2.

¹⁸ This appears to be some kind of process whereby one sees the contents of one's mind. In a footnote added to James Strachey's translation of *Totem and Taboo*, Alex Dickson says this is 'by the use of the outlying portions of the retina instead of the macula.' (Freud 1985, 149n2) It appears that what Freud has in mind is some kind of quasi-sensory perception of the activity of one's mind. But one can have this perception, it seems, while being mistaken about its

ideas of things are assumed to hold equally between the things themselves.' (Ibid., 85) And a little later he says: 'The technique of animism, magic [*Magie*], reveals in the clearest and most unmistakable way an intention to impose the laws governing mental life upon real things;' (Ibid., 91) The laws of mental life to which he is alluding here are the laws of association.

(3) As we saw, Freud claimed that neurotics typically believe that their own thoughts are omnipotent. The Rat Man believed that if he thought about something bad happening to a particular person, it would happen. Again, this is explained by Freud as a projection outwards; in our thoughts we can do what we like to a person, so by projection we might mistakenly believe that we can affect a person just by thinking.

In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud says:

It is easy to perceive the motives which lead men to practise magic: they are human wishes. All we need to suppose is that primitive man had an immense belief in the power of his wishes. The basic reason why what he sets about by magical means comes to pass is after all, simply that he wills it. (SE 13, 83)

I have to admit I can think of no way to make this argument even superficially convincing, so for the moment I have to depart from my stated aim in this chapter of making Freud's claims as plausible as possible. One might as well say that the motive for attempting to solve some practical problem by technological means is a wish, and therefore that those who do so are ascribing omnipotence to wishes. The fact that someone attempts to realize a wish by means which are ineffective does not show that the person thinks the wish is omnipotent. This does not affect Freud's other two arguments for saying that animists project their psychological states outwards, however.

source. An endopsychic perception does not carry its pedigree on its face, any more than a sensory impression does. (See also Berman 1991.)

2.2.2 The Origins of Totemism

Freud argues that totemism is universal and that it has two and only two essential features. These two features are the rule against killing and/or eating the totem animal, and the rule against intercourse with members of the same totem clan. To support these claims he needs to appeal to the authority of anthropologists. But, as he admits, many anthropologists (such as Frazer 1911) would disagree with one or both of these claims. Freud quotes many examples of alternative accounts of the essential features of totemism (e.g. Reinach's 'Code du Totemisme' at SE 13, 101-102). But he appeals to the coherence of the explanation that results if we go the way he suggests. We get an explanation in terms of what he would claim are fundamental factors in human psychology - that is, the factors he has unearthed in psychoanalysis. Even if we accept that psychoanalysis makes genuine discoveries, we cannot use Freud's evidence from the analyses of middle-class Europeans as evidence that the psychological features it unearths are universal. He is aware of this, as the following *caveat* shows:

The similarity between taboo and obsessional sickness may be no more than a matter of externals; it may apply only to the *forms* in which they are manifested and not extend to their essential character. Nature delights in making use of the same forms in the most various biological connections: as it does, for instance, in the appearance of branch-like structures both in coral and in plants, and indeed in some forms of crystal and in certain chemical precipitates. It would obviously be hasty and unprofitable to infer the existence of any internal relationship from such points of agreement as these, which merely derive from the operation of the same mechanical forces. (SE 13, 26.)

But it appears that Freud thinks that we can try out an explanation which is the same as his explanation for the symptoms of neurotics and that if it fits, that is good grounds for accepting it. (For the moment I will leave aside the question of what it means to say that Freud's explanation 'fits' the facts,

let alone whether it actually does.) As we have seen, Freud considered unity and simplicity of explanation an advantage; and he is surely not alone in this. Freud also makes use of theories which he admits are highly speculative - Darwin and Atkinson's 'primal horde' hypothesis, Robertson Smith's 'totem meal' hypothesis. His appeal to these, too, rests on the result being consistent with the evidence and giving a unified and consistent explanation.

Darwin (1871) and Atkinson (1903) suggested that at some time in prehistory humans lived in 'primal hordes' (which I will describe shortly). As we have seen, Freud believed, in common with some anthropologists of his time, that all humans had a phase of totemism at some stage in their ancestry. Thus we have two phases through which all human societies are alleged to pass. Freud's hypothesis is meant to fill in the gap between the two stages - to answer the question: how did we get from the primal hordes to the totemic societies? Once again, a single explanation is offered, presumably on the grounds that unity is an advantage.

Leaving aside for the moment any reservations about the speculative nature of this whole line of reasoning, let us proceed with Freud's story. According to the Darwin-Atkinson hypothesis, a primal horde consisted of one mature male and a large number of women and children. The one mature male had unrestricted sexual access to all the females in the horde, even those who were his own sisters and daughters. As his sons reached sexual maturity, they posed a threat to the dominant male's sexual monopoly. So he ejected them from the horde.¹⁹ As a result there was a large number of young sexually hungry males wandering around. Badcock suggests that these would have banded together, and that human hunting of big game began with such bands. (1980, pp. 11-12) In any event, the dominant male in a horde would, as

¹⁹ At one point Freud suggests that younger or weaker sons may have been allowed to remain in the horde under the protection of their mother. He further speculates that these sons may have later initiated successful rebellions against their ageing father. This, he says, would explain the prevalence in myths and folktales of younger sons who become heroes. (*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, SE 18, 136)

he got older, become increasingly vulnerable to attacks from the younger, stronger, sexually envious males outside it. Bands of young males would attack the dominant male and kill him. So far the account agrees with Atkinson's speculations.

Before looking at Freud's own distinctive contribution, consider the question: after the dominant male in a horde has been killed, what happens next? There are a number of possibilities. If one male is sufficiently strong, he could establish himself as a new dominant male, expel the others, and everything would return to the way it had been. Alternatively, the males, all desiring to enjoy the privileges of the dominant male, could fall to fighting each other. But this situation could not last forever. A third possibility is that the males somehow reach an arrangement whereby each can enjoy some procreation while not killing each other. This solution, according to Freud, was what eventually emerged in the two fundamental rules of totemic society.

The story of how humans actually got from the primal murder to the totemic society is somewhat vague. Crucial to Freud's hypothesis is the claim that totemism, involving the two characteristics which he picks out as essential, is a stage through all human cultures must pass or have passed - a claim which, as I have already pointed out, many anthropologists even in Freud's own time disputed. Freud's distinctively psychoanalytic contribution is to suggest that the process of transition from primal murder to totemic society, however long it may have taken and with however many false turns along the way, *must have involved repression*.

As we have seen, Freud argued that prehistoric humans must have had a mental apparatus with the same characteristics as the unconscious mind he postulates to explain neuroses. This 'primitive' mental apparatus would not allow a sophisticated process of reasoning such as: 'if one male sets himself up as the primal father, we will be back at square one; but if the fighting goes on indefinitely, life will be harder for everyone. So, although each male would like to enjoy all the females for himself, that is not a realistic option. So we

have to arrive at an arrangement whereby everyone can enjoy some sexual benefits, but no-one enjoys unrestricted sexual benefits.' However, these benefits would accrue as a result of setting up a totemic system, if by totemic system we mean one in which the two essential characteristics Freud picks out are present. This could be construed as a 'primary gain from illness'. It would also bring the benefits of a more stable society such as the possibility of co-operative ventures, intellectual progress and so forth. These would be the 'secondary gain'. But these benefits need not have been what occasioned the setting up of the totemic society.

Freud does not claim to have given a complete account of the setting up of totemism. What he does claim is to have discovered a factor which must have been present: the factor of repression. Repression of its nature is not an ideally rational process. It is not the same as a person saying: 'It is a bad idea to kill my father, so I won't', for that would be compatible with, and probably helped by, the fact of acknowledging one's desires to do such things. Rather, in repression one denies the existence of the desire itself, and turns away from any thoughts that are associated with it. But at the same time, the desire does not go away, and it gets itself expressed in *some way*, albeit an unsatisfactory one. Thus, the symptoms of neurosis are compromise-formations, expressions of both a repressed desire and its repudiation. Freud claims that the characteristic features of taboo can likewise be understood as compromise-formations. The two prohibitions which Freud considers essential to totemism represent the two things which all males (except the primal father) would most like to do: kill the father and have sex with their mothers and sisters.

As I showed in 2.2.1.1, although totem-kinship is not the same as blood-kinship, it is reasonable enough, if the facts about exogamy are as Freud says they are, to claim that it could be symbolic of it. But why should killing a totem animal represent killing the father? One argument in support of this claim might be to point out, as Freud does, that totem clans often claim descent from the totem-animal.

Like the repression in neurosis, the repression of the two 'primal' desires is imperfect. It allows the desired actions, or their representatives, to be carried out under certain restricted circumstances. For example, on certain festivals, the taboo against totemic incest is lifted, and totemic incest is enthusiastically indulged in. Apart from this, the desires are often fulfilled under disguises, as in neurosis. This can be seen, Freud would claim, in some of the rough treatment of kings I discussed above. The king can easily be seen as a substitute for the primal father.

2.3 FROM TOTEMISM TO RELIGION

In order to complete Freud's argument it is necessary to show how the neurotic psychological traits of totemism are carried through to religion. Freud does not do this in *Totem and Taboo*, although he makes it clear that he thinks it is possible to do so. In the 1930 preface to the Hebrew edition of *Totem and Taboo*, he says that the book 'deals with the origin of religion and morality' (SE 13, xv). We can extract some arguments to this effect from other works of Freud, notably 'Obsessive Actions and Religious Practises', *The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents*, and 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*'. Once again I wish to stress that for the moment I am attempting to make Freud's case seem as plausible as possible, leaving the task of criticism for the later chapters.

2.3.1 Religion and Neurosis Compared

Even before presenting the detailed story in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud suggested a number of times that there were obvious features of religion which suggested parallels with certain kinds of mental illness. In a 1907 paper called 'Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices', he pointed out the (at least superficially) shared feature of 'ceremonials'. As we saw in 1.7, compulsions such as the need to wash one's hands over and over, or making sure one's

pillow is in a particular exact position before going to sleep, are typical of obsessional neurotics. These ritualistic acts tend to be very rigidly specified, and tend to cause acute anxiety to the neurotic if they are not carried out to the letter. Freud lists three obvious points of similarity between these rituals and religious rituals.

... the qualms of conscience brought about by their neglect, ... their complete isolation from all other actions (shown in the prohibition against interruption) and ... the conscientiousness with which they are carried out in every detail. (SE 9, 119)

But he goes on to point out three equally obvious differences:

... the greater individual variability of [neurotic] ceremonial actions in contrast with the stereotyped character of [religious] rituals (prayer, turning to the east etc.), their private nature as opposed to the public and communal character of religious observances, above all, however, the fact that, while the minutiae of religious ceremonial are full of significance and have a symbolic meaning, those of neurotics seem foolish and senseless. (Ibid.)

The three points of resemblance *may* suggest that we can trace religion and obsessional neurosis to a common root, but anyone making such a claim must somehow account for the differences.

Freud offers a story about the origins of religion which is strongly analogous to his story about the origins of obsessional neurosis. To recap briefly, the neurosis originates in some traumatic event in childhood which leads to powerful but ambivalent responses and emotional conflict. This emotional conflict is dealt with by repression. Instinctual impulses, which according to Freud are invariably involved in such traumas, are repressed, along with associated beliefs, desires and memories. But the repressed instincts, beliefs and desires express themselves by indirect, super-cryptic means, such as apparently arbitrary thoughts and apparently senseless

rituals. The agencies involved in carrying out the repression are themselves hidden from the (pre)conscious mind, and manifest themselves in the form of apparently unwarranted guilt and avoidances.

Freud suggests that the 'symptoms' of religion may have an explanation analogous to those of neurosis. There was a traumatic event early in the history of the human race, which led to powerful but ambivalent responses and emotional conflict. The mental apparatus of these early humans is supposed to share the relevant features of that of children - that is, the four special characteristics are more prevalent. So the only way they can deal with the conflict is by repression. The repressed material continues to express itself through religious beliefs and rituals.

Given these parallel aetiologies, how does Freud try to account for the differences between religious and neurotic ritual? The first difference - that neurotic rituals are meaningless - he tries to explain away with a two-step argument (SE 9, 120-121). Firstly, he asserts that the rituals of neurotics are not meaningless at all, but expressions of unconscious mental states. This we saw in 1.7. But this still leaves an apparent disanalogy: the rituals of religious believers have meanings which are *consciously* known to at least some of those believers. Freud initially appears to counter this by saying that in practise the typical believer carries out rituals just as mechanically, and as obliviously to their meaning, as neurotics do theirs: '... the petty ceremonials of religious practise gradually become the essential thing and push aside the underlying thoughts.' (SE 9, 126.) However, this claim, even if it is true, leaves unscathed the religious rituals of those believers who *are* aware of the underlying religious meaning of their rituals. Further, the less reflective believers can ask the more reflective ones what the meaning is, just as the non-scientist can ask the scientist why we believe that the Earth is round.

But Freud has a hypothesis which applies to the reflective believers too. He argues that the 'official' meaning of the ritual (i.e. the religious meaning which the reflective believer would offer) is not the real meaning at all. Rather, the official meaning is the product of something analogous to what

Ernest Jones called 'rationalisation'. (See Laplanche and Pontalis 1988, 375-6.) Rationalisation is where an appearance of coherence is given to a neurotic behaviour by means of an apparently sensible justification for it. A man who has a compulsion to wash his hands may be able to come up with a perfectly good reason why he should wash them each time, and may even himself believe that this is why he does it. But if he washes his hands forty times a day, there are probably good grounds for saying the reasons he offers are rationalisations. The purpose of rationalisation is presumably to further evade the censor. If the rationalisation appears to the conscious mind to be satisfactory, it will help prevent inquiry into the real meaning of the behaviour.²⁰

In *Totem and Taboo* (pp. 94-99), Freud likens this process to 'secondary revision' in dreams - i.e. that process whereby dreams are given a appearance of coherence. He says that this process 'scarcely ever succeeds so completely as to leave no absurdity, no rift in its texture visible.' (SE 13, 94) Further on, he says: 'just as with the façades of dreams, if we look more attentively we find the most blatant inconsistency and arbitrariness in the structure of symptoms.' (Ibid., 97)

Some atheists and agnostics might claim that the most blatant inconsistency and arbitrariness are also detectable in religions. It appears that Freud is making an assumption of this kind. For the moment, I will not criticise him for this - I will return to this issue in 3.1.

If the explanations which religious people offer for their own rituals are not the real reasons for them, then one of the three disanalogies between obsessional rituals and religious rituals is dissolved. What about the other two? In *Totem and Taboo* Freud explains these by arguing that the instincts or emotional impulses involved in obsessional neurosis and those involved in

²⁰ An alternative explanation of rationalisation might be that it is the result of an attempt on the part of the rational part of the mind - the ego or the (pre)conscious - to make sense of apparently senseless thoughts and impulses to act which come to it from the irrational part. Which explanation we adapt does not matter for the purposes of this thesis.

religion are different: '*... the fact which is characteristic of the neurosis is the preponderance of the sexual over the social instinctual elements.*' (SE 13, 73, Freud's italics.) He blurs this distinction immediately afterwards, however, by saying that the social instincts are themselves reducible to sexual and egoistic ones (Ibid.). But this does not really get us any further. It might still be said that there is a difference between something's being engendered by sexual and egoistic instincts *directly*, and being engendered by something which is in turn engendered by sexual and egoistic instincts.

The real explanation of the two remaining differences between neurotic and religious rituals is that the neurotic ones are results of a purely private attempt to deal with unconscious conflicts, whereas religious ones are results of a collective attempt to deal with them. This explains why the neurotic rituals tend to be carried out in private - the neurotic has to carry them out in private to avoid the stigma of oddity. This does not just mean the censure the neurotic might receive from peers; the neurotic himself is influenced by considerations of social normality, and is therefore inclined to regard his own compulsive behaviour as somehow 'wrong'. We saw in 1.7 that the tendency to be aware of the 'wrongness' of their own compulsive behaviour is characteristic of obsessional neurotics. This difference also helps to explain why neurotics have a harder time of it in life than religious people: religious people know that their rituals are sanctioned by society as a whole (unless it is a purely private religion), whereas neurotics lack this comfort.²¹ Freud still considers that the non-religious non-neurotic person is better off again, but if it was a choice between being religious and being subject to an individual neurosis, being religious is the better option. Hence Freud says:

²¹ A borderline case is where the person is a member of a small religious minority. If that minority is persecuted by the majority, the difference between neurosis and religion on the basis of public *versus* private may be greatly lessened. That is not to say that there may not be other bases for making the distinction, however.

... religion succeeds in sparing many people an individual neurosis. But hardly anything more. (*Civilization and its Discontents*, SE 21, 85.)

A further point of analogy drawn by Freud is based on the strictness of the ethical demands which, as we saw above, he claimed was a regular feature of religions. In the 1907 paper he spells out the similarities in moral outlook:

A sense of guilt following upon continual temptation and an expectant anxiety in the form of fear of divine punishment have, after all, been familiar to us in the field of religion longer than that of neurosis. ... complete backslidings into sin are more common among pious people than among neurotics and these give rise to a new form of religious activity, namely acts of penance, which have their counterpart in obsessional neurosis. (SE 9, 125.)

Freud considers that one of the functions of the reality principle is, as it were, to advise people on what they should and should not do. This advice is based on the likely consequences of one's actions. These include consequences for other people, but ultimately reduce to consequences for oneself. This can be thought of as something like: one should not hurt others because it is likely to have damaging or painful effects to oneself in the long run. In other words, Freud considers that it is possible for a mature, rational person to make ethical decisions of this kind. This behaviour of a mature, rational person is contrasted with the behaviour of a neurotic.

Neurotic guilt attaches to the most insignificant acts as well as to acts which are genuinely guilt-worthy. Neurotics feel compelled by moral injunctions which are absolutely rigid, and which cause them acute discomfort if they are not obeyed. These injunctions can apply to the most trivial actions, e.g. one cannot go to bed until one has performed a definite sequence of actions. This is supposed to parallel the rigid ethical attitudes of religion. The neurotic, on Freud's view, is dominated by an excessively

powerful superego. A mature, rational person ought to be able to distinguish between acts which are morally significant and ones which are not.

The neurotic deals with urges to do forbidden things either by repressing them or by feeling copious amounts of guilt. He either denies - even to himself - that he feels these urges, or feels guilty about the mere fact of having those urges. The real root urges (such as the desire to kill one's father) are buried in the unconscious, but because it would not be possible to repress everything, urges which are indirectly associated do become conscious. These become the focus of neurotic guilt. The rational thing to do, Freud considers, would be to admit to having the urge, but to accept that this is not in itself any reason to feel guilty. One may feel anger towards one's father, and feel a desire to attack him, but it is *acting on* that desire that would be immoral, not merely having the desire. The neurotic solutions do prevent the person from acting on the desire, but at the cost of leading to other problems. Repression of its nature involves self-deception, and according to Freud leads to the repressed desire being expressed in other ways - neurotic symptoms. Guilt about desires themselves can lead to intellectual paralysis and inability to act, as well as avoidable unhappiness on its own account.

If one finds Freud's line of thinking attractive, one could also point out that religious observances such as not eating or touching pork, or not eating meat on Fridays, often occasion severe guilt if they were not observed, and hence might be taken as evidence of a lack of perspective similar to that of neurotics. Further, the guilt felt by the neurotic even for thinking about forbidden acts also has tempting parallels in religion. Consider the following, from the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus says:

You have heard that it was said 'you shall not commit adultery'. But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5: 27-28)

In other words, the thought of committing a wrong act is itself wrong.

Another tempting parallel that Freud offers is the excessive dependence on an all-powerful male figure. In childhood it is normal and appropriate to have a strong attitude of emotional dependence towards one's parents, and to regard them as much more powerful and knowledgeable than they actually are. On Freud's theory, a neurotic retains some infantile psychological features, among which is this attitude towards the parents. But the belief that one's parents are superhuman beings cannot directly manifest in the conscious mind of anyone who has even the partial grip on reality of a neurotic. It is all too obvious that they are only human. Instead, the attitude is displaced. It may be displaced into exaggerated feelings of love, hate or other emotions towards one's parents. Or a servile attitude may be taken towards some other vaguely parent-like figure - as with the Rat Man and the 'cruel captain' (SE 10, 165-73). Freud argues that God plays an analogous role in religion:

Even now, ... , he [the religious person] cannot do without the protection which he enjoyed as a child. But he has long since recognized, too, that his father is a being of limited power, and not equipped with every excellence. He therefore harks back to the mnemonic image of the father whom in his childhood he so greatly overvalued. He exalts this image into a deity and makes it into something contemporary and real. The effective strength of this mnemonic image and the persistence of his need for protection jointly sustain his belief in God. ('The Question of a *Weltanschauung*', SE 22, 163)

Once again, the difference between the types of displaced parent-dependence would boil down to the fact that the neurotic's is private, whereas the religious person's is (usually) shared by the society at large. But both are expressions of the same unconscious motivations.

2.3.2 Extending the Analogy

The parallels which have been suggested so far all point to an analogy between religion and obsessional neurosis. But Freud suggested other analogies between psychopathological states and social institutions. In *Totem and Taboo* he says:

It might be maintained that a case of hysteria is a caricature of a work of art, that a case of obsessional neurosis is a caricature of a religion, and that a paranoiac delusion is a caricature of a philosophical system. The divergence resolves itself ultimately into the fact that the neuroses are asocial structures; they endeavour to achieve by private means what is effected in society by collective effort. (SE 13, 73)

Thus Freud extends his point that the difference between obsessional neurosis and religion boils down to the difference between public and private attempts to deal with the same unconscious conflicts. The difference between the various psychopathological states and the social institutions of which they are 'caricatures' is the same. Freud does not say much about the analogy between art and hysteria anywhere in his works. Perhaps what he has in mind is that both express ideas in concrete representational ways.

2.3.2.1 Public Paranoia

As for philosophy, it appears that what he has in mind is something like the German idealism of the nineteenth century, or at least the caricature of it which positivistically-minded people like Freud would have seen. Freud's idea of philosophy can be seen in 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*':

Philosophy ... [is] clinging to the illusion of being able to present a picture of the universe which is without gaps and is coherent, though one which is bound to collapse with every fresh advance in our knowledge. It goes astray in its method by over-estimating the

epistemological value of our logical operations and by accepting other sources of knowledge such as intuition, and it often seems that the poet's derisive comment is not unjustified when he says of the philosopher:

Mit seinen Nachtmützen und Schlafrockfetzen
Stopft er die Lücken des Weltenbaus.²² (SE 22, 160-61)

In other words, Freud thought philosophers tried to build up complete pictures of the world down to its most fundamental aspects, without the aid of empirical evidence. Some Enlightenment rationalists or nineteenth century idealists may have done this. To someone as committed to the 'scientific *Weltanschauung*', or at least a particular conception of it, as Freud was (see 2.3.2.2), this is unacceptable. The parallel with paranoia is presumably the claim to know with absolute certainty How Things Really Are.

This feature of paranoia also suggests parallels with certain types of religious belief, as Freud says in an afterword to his commentary on the memoirs of a paranoid patient, Daniel Paul Schreber. Freud did not claim that psychoanalytic therapy could cure paranoia, but he nonetheless believed that psychoanalytic theory could shed some light on it. As is well-known from everyday usage, paranoia is characterised by delusions of persecution. These are indeed clearly to be found in Schreber's case - he believed that there was a 'plot' between his doctor and God 'whereby my soul was to be murdered and my body used like a strumpet.' (SE 12, 19) Among the typical general features of paranoia, even on non-psychoanalytic accounts, are a private, self-contained delusional set of beliefs which is held with absolute certainty and is impervious to all criticisms (delusional beliefs); including the belief that one is extraordinarily important (delusions of grandeur); and the belief that one is being persecuted and/or conspired against (persecution complex). Schreber did indeed have an elaborate religious or metaphysical system, of which the following is a sample:

²² 'With his nightcaps and the tatters of his dressing-gown he patches up the gaps in the structure of the universe.' From Heine's 'Die Heimkehr', LVIII.

The human soul is comprised of the *nerves* of the body. ...

Whereas men consist of bodies and nerves, God is from his very nature nothing but nerve. But the nerves of God are not, as is the case with human bodies, present in limited numbers, but are infinite or eternal. They possess all the propensities of human nerves to an enormously intensified degree. In their creative capacity - that is, their power of turning themselves into every imaginable object in the created world - they are known as *rays*. There is an intimate relation between God and the sun. (SE 12, 21-22, italics in original)

In addition, Freud says, Schreber 'dwelt upon the importance of his ideas to religious thought, and upon their invulnerability to the attacks of modern science.' (Ibid., 16.) It is also clear that Schreber believed himself to be of great importance in the universal scheme of things. He says that 'the right of scoffing at God belongs ... to me alone and not to other men' (Ibid., 28), and that 'no one who dies can enter the state of bliss so long as the greater part of the rays of God are absorbed in his [Schreber's] person, owing to his powers of attraction.' (Ibid.) Late in his memoirs, Schreber identifies himself with Jesus (Schreber 1988, p. 301).

As we saw, Freud suggests that both transference neuroses and psychoses (such as paranoia) involve flights from reality. In the psychoses this is done by setting up an alternative reality of one's own. Even apart from the fact that Schreber's belief-system explicitly involves God, we can see how tempting it is to draw comparisons between him and some types of religious believers. Certain religious revolutionaries - i.e. those who found new religions, or who bring about major upheavals in religion - seem vulnerable to the diagnosis of paranoia. Erik Erikson (1962) claims that Martin Luther had paranoid complications in a basically obsessional-neurotic personality. Badcock (1980, pp. 125-132) claims to find strongly paranoid traits in the monotheistic religious-reforming Pharaoh Akhenaten, as well as in Christ (Ibid., pp. 149-156). The facts that Luther seems to have seen himself as specially singled out for persecution by the devil (Erikson, 243-50), and Christ

seems to have claimed to be the son of God, are obvious reasons why one might accept these diagnoses.²³ According to Laplanche and Pontalis (1988, pp. 296-7), a feature of paranoia is that the patient suffers no intellectual impairment. (This is in contrast with the obsessional neurotic, whose thinking, at least in certain areas, is paralysed by ambivalence and repression.) So the diagnosis of paranoia is perfectly compatible with the fact that the person is able to develop a system of thought that is coherent enough to win converts.

Those who are reluctant to accept the suggestion that Jesus or Luther were paranoid may be more comfortable with the suggestion that some of the founders of fringe religious cults are. At the extreme end of this spectrum are undoubtedly paranoid figures such as David Koresh and Marshall Applewhite. As well as having elaborate world-involving belief-systems, both believed they were personally special and that powerful forces were conspiring against them. It might perhaps be suggested, in a vein similar to Freud, that the difference between the mentally ill person and the religious person boils down to the difference between private and public. Yet with figures like Applewhite and Koresh, this distinction is blurred, since their delusions were at least public to their own sects. It seems pretty clear that Applewhite was clinically paranoid, or perhaps schizophrenic. On the other hand, a religious revolutionary such as Akhenaten or Christ must at least begin with visions or ideas which are private to him or her. Further, a plausible case could be made that the other delusions of grandeur and persecution are likely to arise as consequences of this situation. If you have a belief about the Way Things Really Are which is unique to yourself, and which you hold with absolute conviction, you are likely to encounter others who do not share it, and who tell you that you are crazy. From this it would easily follow that you think of yourself as both especially important and persecuted. So it seems that the distinction between the visionary and the madman here boils down to the *post*

²³ Which is not to say that they are *compelling* reasons, however. Albert Schweitzer, in *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus* (1948), argues that given the prevailing beliefs in Christ's time, it need not have been indicative of any psychopathology for him to claim to be the son of God.

facto circumstances of whether or not one's views come to be generally accepted by a broad community. A determined anti-religionist, following this argument, might ask: what is the difference between a paranoid like Applewhite and a religious revolutionary like Christ? A visionary is just a psychotic with good public relations.

The paranoid, in contrast to the obsessional neurotic, is unlikely to be troubled by doubts about whatever delusional ideas occur to him because of his illness. The obsessional neurotic is at least this much in touch with reality. (This is illustrated by the Rat Man's attitude towards superstition.) The neurotic will typically suffer agonies of self-doubt which, according to Freud, he could have reduced by choosing the 'group neurosis' of religion. An obsessional neurotic, then, is unlikely to *found* a new religion. It is tempting to suggest that those who *join* a new religion are likely to be neurotics. They could develop an attitude towards a doubt-free, and therefore strong-willed, paranoid individual similar to the Rat Man's attitude towards the cruel captain. This would alleviate some of the neurotic's doubts, but at the cost of cutting him further off from reality. But to say that obsessional neurotics are likely to join new religions is to go beyond what Freud actually says.²⁴

2.3.2.2 Science as Sanity

A dilemma arises at this point: obsessional neurosis is characterised by doubting things; paranoia is characterised by believing things with great conviction. But you have to either doubt x or be sure of x , so where if anywhere does the golden mean lie? Doubting some things and being sure of others may seem a simple way out of this dilemma, but this could just mean being a neurotic with paranoid complications or vice versa. Unless, that is,

²⁴ Freud also picks up on similarities between (apparently) more idiosyncratic features of Schreber's paranoia and features of mythology. For example, the importance of sun symbolism. (SE 12, 80-81)

there is a rational, systematic way of deciding what we should doubt and what we should be sure about.

One possible answer may be that there is a state between doubting in the sense of suspending judgement absolutely, and being absolutely certain come what may. This might be something like: I accept that such-and-such is probably the case, but I allow that sufficient reasons would persuade me to change my mind. One could hold this attitude without necessarily knowing in advance what those sufficient reasons might be. But it would have to be more than just saying to oneself: 'I allow that something might persuade me to change my mind.' A paranoid could say (and even honestly believe) that this is so, but in practise be such that no evidence would ever actually persuade him to change his mind. His stubbornness about the belief could be completely unconscious, and exist while he deludes himself that he is open-minded. For the golden mean state to exist, one must actually be disposed to change one's mind given sufficient reason to do so.

But this makes the phrase 'sufficient reason to do so' do all the work. What constitutes sufficient reason to change one's beliefs? For that matter, what constitutes sufficient reason for holding a belief in the first place? The problem of how to demarcate between beliefs it is appropriate to be sure about and ones it is not, overlaps with the problem of identifying the golden mean between doubt and certainty.

How would Freud answer these questions? He appears to be an empirical realist - that is, he believes that there is a world independently of our perceptions, and that at least some features of that world can be known by means of sense-data. That he holds the first is clear from the fact that he draws a distinction between beliefs which substitute psychical for external reality, and ones which do not (see 1.2.4). Further, in 'Two Principles of Mental Functioning' he takes it that we receive impressions from the outside world. On his account, when the reality principle takes effect, we start to make these impressions, rather than our fantasies, the basis of our beliefs.:

[With the advent of the reality principle] The increased significance of external reality heightened the importance ... of the sense-organs that are directed towards the external world, and of the consciousness attached to them. ... A special function was instituted which had periodically to search the external world, in order that its data might be familiar already if an urgent internal need should arise - the function of *attention*. (SE 12, 220, Freud's italics)

He may believe that we distinguish fantasised perceptions from veridical ones by some such factor as constancy *versus* inconstancy (à la Hume), or controllability by thinking *versus* the opposite.²⁵ Or he may simply believe that we simply are able, at least sometimes, to distinguish veridical from non-veridical perceptions, full stop. But it is clear that he thinks we are able to make the distinction. It does not follow from this that from the veridical impressions we are able to build up a complete true picture of the world. Nevertheless, certain real features of the world he believes to be accessible.

On Freud's analogy, religion usually resembles a neurosis, but sometimes it resembles a psychosis: a neurosis if it is held in a doublethinkful 'I believe it but at the same time I don't believe it' way, a psychosis if it is held in an absolutely dogmatic, immune from all criticism, way. Note that Freud tacitly holds that religious beliefs are characteristically held in one or other of these ways²⁶, and not in a reasonable 'I have good reasons to believe it but those reasons may be overthrown in the future' way. It appears that Freud holds that some beliefs follow smoothly from observation (or what empiricists

²⁵ There is some evidence that he may have thought this latter. ('It was only the non-occurrence of ... expected satisfaction, that led to the abandonment of this attempt at satisfaction by means of hallucination.' (SE 12, 219)) But this might simply mean that this is how the reality principle first *begins* to take effect, rather than that it is how we in general distinguish between veridical and non-veridical perceptions.

²⁶ It is perfectly consistent with his theories to say that they are held in *both* ways in different compartments of the mind.

call 'sense-data'), and that religious beliefs are never among those beliefs. Put in individual psychological terms, Freud's picture seems to be like this: certain true states of affairs are just as plain as the nose on one's face. The neurotic unconsciously tries to avoid some of these by exploiting any potential for doubt there might be. There is always *some* potential. The psychotic goes further and denies the unwelcome facts outright, no matter how plain they are. He holds with absolute certainty beliefs which contradict them. A philosopher of a certain frame of mind might object: 'but surely it is perfectly reasonable to say that any belief, no matter how obvious it may seem, may be false, and one need not be labelled neurotic for taking this attitude.' We may term this attitude 'philosophical suspension of judgement'. But as Hume argued in the *Treatise* (Book I, part IV, section VIII), there is a difference between this and really taking seriously the possibility that, say, the back of one's head does not exist. This point is particularly sharpened if by taking seriously, we mean taking seriously enough to influence one's actions. Indeed, holding that a belief is probably true but overturnable by new evidence, *requires* that at some level we do philosophically suspend judgement on that belief. But this is not the same as suspending judgement to the extent that if there is a man-eating lion in front of you, you will not run away because it might be a hallucination. Freud might say that religious beliefs are held in a doublethinkful way that is more than just a philosophical suspension of disbelief.

Let us grant Freud for the sake of argument, then, that:

(1) We receive veridical impressions from the outside world.

(2) These impressions cause us to hold, and moreover *justify* us in holding, certain beliefs as being 'as plain as the nose on one's face'.

(3) There are intermediary positions between holding a belief with absolute dogmatism, and suspending judgement to such an extent that as far as you are concerned, it is equally likely that there is a glass in front of you as that there is a monster from outer space in front of you.

(4) Among these intermediary positions are the attitudes which a sane person typically takes towards his or her beliefs.

On Freud's analogy between psychological states and social institutions or *Weltanschauungen*, science is what corresponds to the condition of being mentally healthy. On Freud's empirical realist view, scientific theories are held on the basis of evidence which is ultimately reducible to impressions which come to us from the independently existing, real world. The theories are treated as probably true insofar as they are justified by that evidence, but subject to revision if better counter-evidence is forthcoming.

Freud considers that there is a scientific world view fully capable of being an alternative to the world-views of religions. This does not mean that he equates science with a particular body of doctrines. Rather, he sees it as a method:

It is true that [science] assumes the *uniformity* of the explanation of the universe; but it does so only as a programme, the fulfilment of which is relegated to the future. Apart from this, it is marked by negative characteristics, by its limitation to what is at the moment knowable and by its sharp rejection of certain elements that are alien to it. It asserts that there are no sources of knowledge of the universe other than the intellectual working-over of carefully scrutinised observations - in other words, what we call research - and alongside of it no knowledge derived from revelation, intuition or divination. ('The Question of a *Weltanschauung*'. SE 22, 159.)

But he thinks that the truths reached by the scientific method constitute such a world-view. They are, he says, incomplete, provisional and full of gaps, but that is just to say that a scientist has to admit, just as any sane person does, that there are limits to what he knows. Religion supposedly transgresses these limits:

Intuition and divination ... may safely be reckoned as illusions, the fulfilments of wishful impulses. It is easy to see, too, that these demands

upon a *Weltanschauung* are only based on emotion. Science takes notice of the fact that the human mind produces these demands and is ready to examine their sources; but it has not the slightest reason to regard them as justified. On the contrary it sees this as a warning carefully to separate from knowledge everything that is illusion and an outcome of emotional demands like these. (SE 22, 159)

In fact, Freud seems inclined to attribute all the virtues which we might describe as 'sanity' or 'common sense' to science. In 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*' he says:

No belittlement of science can in any way alter the fact that it is attempting to take account of our dependence on the real external world; while religion is an illusion and it derives its strength from its readiness to fit in with our instinctual wishful impulses. (SE 22, 147)

It may reasonably be asked: why is this fact distinctive of science? Surely religious believers also try to take into account our dependence on the external world; they just may happen to have different ideas from Freud's ideal (i.e. atheistic) scientist as to what that world contains. Freud wants to claim that science is especially closely connected with the reality principle in a way that religion is not - that the reality principle's virtues are science's virtues. I will discuss this last point further in Chapter 4.

This attitude of Freud's is evident in *Totem and Taboo* also, when he offers a three-stage analogy between the development of *Weltanschauungen* in human history, and the psychological development of individual human beings:

The animistic phase would correspond to narcissism both chronologically and in its content; the religious stage would correspond to the stage of object-choice of which the characteristic is a child's attachment to his parents; while the scientific phase would have an exact counterpart in the stage at which an individual has reached maturity, has

renounced the pleasure principle, adjusted himself to reality and turned to the external world for the object of his desires. (SE 13, p. 90)

Once again, science seems to be associated with a broad range of common-sensical virtues.

Now it is time to proceed with my criticisms of Freud's claims.

CHAPTER 3: IS RELIGION ENGENDERED BY IRRATIONAL MOTIVES?

As we have seen, Freud is prepared to describe religion as a 'universal obsessional neurosis' (SE 9, 127) on the basis of alleged similarities between the two things. Among these alleged similarities are the type of origin that each has. 'The formation of religion, too, seems to be based on the suppression, the renunciation of certain instinctual impulses' (Ibid., p. 125) As we have seen, there are some disanalogies which Freud allows for, but nonetheless both religion and neurosis are supposed to be engendered by these psychological factors. As we have also seen, this process is supposed to take place at both an individual-psychological and a group-psychological level. In this chapter, I will present a case against what appears to be a blanket claim that religion in general is so engendered. As we shall see, however, my argument will only apply to the claim at the individual-psychological level. Some may feel that this is enough, since the notion of 'group psychology' is *prima facie* implausible. However, I propose to take group psychology at least seriously enough to critically examine it. I will also suggest that there is another possibility which may allow Freud to evade the arguments of this chapter - the possibility of 'mental preservation'. I will explain what I mean by both of these at the end of 3.2, and discuss them at length in Chapter 5.

In 3.1 I will present a case for saying that, for a great many cases of religious beliefs and practices, the answer to the question that is this chapter's title must be 'no'. This case will hinge on the fact that those beliefs and practices flow from a coherent world-view. In 3.2 I will present a further argument, to the effect that we cannot take any belief or behaviour as evidence of irrational psychological motives (in the relevant sense of irrational) unless that belief or behaviour is in some way idiosyncratic. In 3.2.1

I will attempt to deal with what some people might see as an unacceptably relativistic viewpoint arising from this claim. At the same time, I wish to contrast my criticisms of Freud on religion with those of an important recent commentator, Adolf Grünbaum.

3.0.1 Grünbaum on Freud on Religion

In Chapter 7 of *Validation in the Clinical Theory of Psychoanalysis*, (Grünbaum 1993, pp. 257-309) Grünbaum considers Freud's psychoanalytic explanations of religion. He is sceptical about many of the details of these explanations, because they are based on clinical explanations which, he believes, are insufficiently warranted by evidence. However, he accepts Freud's claim that many religious beliefs are *delusions* - i.e. false beliefs which are engendered by irrational psychological motivations. For example, Grünbaum claims that belief in the doctrine of the virgin birth bespeaks 'a strong desire to dissociate motherhood from sexuality' (Ibid., p. 296) and may be inspired by 'a guilt-ridden, jaundiced view of sexuality' (Ibid., p. 297). Other religious beliefs he considers to be held due to wish-fulfilment (Ibid., p. 298). I do not dispute Grünbaum's, or Freud's, claim that religious beliefs are, *in some individuals*, engendered by irrational psychological motives of this kind. However Grünbaum considers that it is possible that *all* belief in God could be engendered by irrational psychological motivations.

He says this explicitly on p. 284:

... we can allow that all cases of belief in God may perhaps be inspired by conscious favoritism for consoling beliefs, combined with any repressed wishes that do turn out to have such psychogenetic credentials.

What he is saying is that it is possible that all belief in God may be held because it fulfils wishes - such as, presumably, the wish to be cared for, or to feel safe - rather than because of rational justifications such as evidence or argument. He considers these wishes normal and such as would be avowed

by many perfectly sane people. He says: 'it is rather a commonplace that people seek to avoid anxiety, and that they therefore tend to welcome the replacement of threatening beliefs by reassuring ones.' (p. 265.) He quickly adds 'which is not to say, however, that it is obviously true.' Nonetheless, as the quotation above clearly indicates, he does not think there is any positive reason for disbelieving the claim that all belief in God is so engendered. Note that there is a difference between, on one hand, merely having such wishes as the wish to be cared for, and on the other, letting one's beliefs be swayed by those wishes. The first may be perfectly normal and rational, but the second is a case of irrational psychological motivation. Grünbaum goes further and says that all belief in God may be inspired not only by these normal, openly avowed wishes, but by repressed wishes, i.e. ones which people having them would not avow even to themselves. Among the repressed wishes which Grünbaum considers may have helped bring about belief in God, are the classical Freudian Oedipal and obsessional ones. Grünbaum considers that Freud did not produce sufficient evidence to prove the existence of these wishes: 'far from having good empirical support, at best these obsessional and oedipal hypotheses have yet to be adequately tested, even prior to their use in a psychology of religion.' (p. 275) Nonetheless, Grünbaum thinks Freud's case is only not proven; he still thinks it is possible in principle that all belief in God is motivated by such wishes, together with the less controversial unrepressed ones. There may be some cases where belief in God is so motivated. It is the move from *some* to *all*, even considered as a possibility, to which I wish to object. My criticisms of Freud will go beyond Grünbaum's in that, whereas Grünbaum seems only to hold that Freud's 'diagnosis' of the causes of religion is insufficiently supported by evidence, I argue that there are positive reasons for believing that it is probably false in many instances. Clearly, Freud endorsed a blanket claim to the effect that religious beliefs in general were irrationally psychologically motivated. What I wish to offer in this chapter is an argument against this blanket claim, which does not depend on insufficiency of empirical evidence, as Grünbaum's does. Rather, I aim to

offer positive reasons for rejecting the claim that religious beliefs as a whole are caused by irrational psychological motives.

3.1 MANY RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES STEM FROM A COHERENT WORLD-VIEW

Freud claims that religious beliefs can be compared to the insulated areas of belief which are incompatible with one's larger body of beliefs. An example of this phenomenon in a neurotic is to be found in the Rat Man's attitude towards superstition, which I will discuss at the end of this section. Freud would also liken some religious belief-systems to the elaborate substitute realities which are constructed by psychotics.

Let us begin with the animistic beliefs and practises which Freud examines in *Totem and Taboo*. Totemic institutions and rituals are explained, like neurotic symptoms, as reactions to a primal trauma, the memory of which has been distorted by repression, compromise-formation, and so on. In the case both of neurotics and animists, the explanations which they themselves give for their actions are not regarded by Freud as the real reasons for them. Instead, these explanations are regarded as 'secondary revisions'. With obsessional neurotics, the term 'secondary revision' refers to the explanations which they themselves offer for their actions. These explanations are makeshifts whose only purpose, according to Freud, is to prevent the real meanings of the actions from becoming evident. Freud provides examples of this phenomenon in neurotics. For instance:

This woman's neurosis was aimed at her husband and culminated in her defence against an unconscious wish that he should die. Her manifest, systematic phobia, however, related to the mention of death in general, while her husband was entirely excluded from it and was never an object of her conscious solicitude. One day she heard her husband giving instructions that his razors, which had lost their edge, were to be taken to a particular shop to be re-set. Driven by a strange uneasiness, she herself

set off for the shop. After reconnoitring the ground, she came back and insisted that her husband should get rid of the razors for good and all, since she had discovered that next door to the shop he had named there was an undertaker's establishment: owing to the plan he had made, she said, the razors had become inextricably involved with thoughts of death. ... The *real* cause of her prohibition upon the razors was, of course, as it was easy to discover, her repugnance to attaching any pleasurable feeling to the idea that her husband might cut his throat with the newly ground razors. (SE 13, 96, Freud's italics)

Whatever one may think of Freud's explanation, the makeshift character and inadequacy of the patient's own explanation is fairly self-evident. This may lead one to search for hidden meanings, or it may lead one to conclude that the actions are meaningless - that is, that they are not determined by intentional states but by physical quirks in the brain or whatever. Either way, it seems clear enough that the reasons the patient offers for her actions cannot be the real ones. Turning to the other side of the analogy, then, what is the group-psychological equivalent of these makeshift explanations? As we saw in Chapter 2, Freud quotes numerous anthropologists to the effect that common to many animistic institutions is the belief in *mana*. This is a kind of spiritual energy or power which is transmissible by contact and, in certain circumstances, potentially lethal. We already saw a clear example in this report from Taylor:

A Maori chief would not blow a fire with his mouth; for his sacred breath would communicate its sanctity to the fire, which would pass it on to the pot on the fire, which would pass it on to the meat in the pot, which would pass it on to the man who ate the meat, which was in the pot, which stood on the fire, which was breathed on by the chief; so that the eater, infected by the chief's breath conveyed through these intermediaries, would surely die. (Taylor 1870, p. 165, quoted in Freud 1912-13, 28)

Taylor is here giving us the Maori's own explanation of their prohibiting the chief from blowing on the fire. This explanation is not as self-evidently makeshift as the neurotic patient's explanation of her behaviour in the previous quote. Rather, it is part-and-parcel of a complete world-view, in which 'spiritual energy' exists and has such-and-such properties. This world-view is not necessarily consciously present to the individuals whose behaviour allegedly flows from it. There is no doubt, however, that it is essential to any explanation which they themselves would offer. This seems to suggest that, for Freud, the entire world-view is a secondary revision. However, Freud himself says of animism that:

It does not merely give an explanation of a particular phenomenon, but allows us to grasp the whole universe as a single unity from a single point of view. The human race, if we are to follow the authorities, have in the course of ages developed three such systems of thought - three great pictures of the universe: animistic (or mythological), religious and scientific. Of these, animism, the first to be created, is perhaps the one which is most consistent and exhaustive and which gives a truly complete explanation of the nature of the universe. (SE 13, 77)

This is quite a contrast with the makeshift secondary revisions of obsessional neurotics.

Freud's basis for treating animistic world-views as secondary revisions cannot be any self-evident arbitrariness which those world-views exhibit. He himself considers them consistent and complete and, moreover, they are perfectly adequate as psychological explanations of the behaviour. If I think that the chief blowing on the cooking-fire will render the meat inedible, then I will not let him do it. It seems that Freud thinks we can dismiss explanations of behaviour which invoke a belief in spirits, simply because spirits do not exist. At one point, he discusses Wilhelm Wundt's attempt to explain taboo prohibitions in terms of fear of demons, and dismisses it saying:

It would be another matter if demons really existed. But we know that, like gods, they are creations of the human mind: they were made by something and out of something. (Ibid., 24)

This raises the question of how belief in spirits originated. On this question, any answer we give must be highly speculative. Perhaps it is the case, as Hume suggested in *The Natural History of Religion*, that an innate tendency exists to see anthropomorphic properties in all areas of nature. Freud actually quotes the relevant passage from Hume in *Totem and Taboo* (p. 77), but he considers this explanation to be inadequate.

From the above quote it appears that Freud accepts that if spirits existed, then behaviour such as that of the Maori, in the example, would be perfectly rational. But what he does not appear to accept is that a question such as 'do spirits exist?' is not one whose answer is self-evidently obvious. In such a case, it may be rational to act on assumptions, provided those assumptions are not themselves blatantly irrational. It is clear, then, that any claim to the effect that it is only rational to hold and act upon a belief if that belief is true, is unrealistically stringent.

An alternative claim might be that it is rational to hold and act upon any belief if and only if that belief is justified. But what might we mean by 'justified' here? We might mean justified in some absolute sense; capable in principle of being justified even if, at the present time and location, we have no idea how to do so. However, this seems just as unrealistic as the previous demand that all our beliefs be true. Alternatively, it might mean a belief which we do in fact justify, or know how to justify. But if we apply this criterion, where does that leave the non-scientist's acceptance of scientific facts in present-day society? Every day we let our actions be influenced by beliefs which we cannot, or perhaps just do not bother to, justify. We do not bring electrical appliances with us into the bath, and this appears to be a 'prohibition' analogous to that of the Maori on letting the chief breathe on the fire. We could easily test the belief that the electrical appliance will kill the person in the bath, if we could find a willing volunteer. But rather than do

this, we simply take the belief on trust. There are many scientific theories which non-scientists explicitly or implicitly accept, which we would have no idea how to set about testing. This is not to say that the justifications for these theories do not exist, but it does mean that, if holding and acting upon a belief which we cannot or do not justify is irrational, then virtually everyone is irrational.

There may be a sense in which this is true - the sense in which by 'irrational' we mean philosophically slapdash. But we ought to remember that Freud is not accusing animists of being philosophically slapdash, he is saying that they are like neurotics. If the two things were the same, then the most mentally healthy person would be the one who doubted everything it was possible to doubt, and refused to make any decision to act until every single belief which that decision implied was rigorously justified. However, as we have seen, Freud explicitly says that a tendency to doubt is typical of neurotics. Clearly it is necessary to make many assumptions in order to function in everyday life. But does this mean that any old assumptions will do? Clearly not, and if we look at examples of obsessional neurotics' beliefs and behaviour as given in Freud's works we see clear examples of bad assumptions. I will present some of these, and discuss the reasons why they are bad assumptions. What I mean to show is that they are of a very different order from the belief that spirits exist.

First, I will take the example, from the Rat Man's case history, of the imaginary debt (SE 10, 168-73). The Rat Man was told that he owed a debt to one of his fellow-officers, Lieutenant A, because that officer had paid a postal charge on his behalf. However, some time later, Lieutenant A himself told the Rat Man he had not in fact paid the charge, and that the Rat Man in fact owed the money to an official at the post office. The Rat Man had every reason to believe this - after all, why would Lieutenant A defraud himself of money? But the Rat Man would not abandon the idea that he had to pay the money to Lieutenant A. He devised elaborate plans to let himself do so. One such plan involved bringing Lieutenant A with him to the post-office, where Lieutenant

A would pay the official, and the Rat Man would then pay Lieutenant A. The reality of the situation was that Lieutenant A had not paid any charge for the Rat Man. In believing that he owed money to Lieutenant A, the Rat Man was clearly ignoring this reality. In what sense is the word 'reality' being employed here? Clearly it is not a sense that has deep ontological commitments. Rather, it is an everyday matter where we accept everyday standards of confirmation. Of course, in applying these standards, assumptions are being made – for example, that the person who told him who really paid the debt is reliable; one can go further and say that unspoken epistemological assumptions are being made, about the reliability of the senses as a source of information about reality, and so forth. It is clear, however, that Freud does not consider the Rat Man irrational for making these perfectly ordinary assumptions. Quite the contrary, it is the Rat Man's persistent belief that he *does* owe money to Lieutenant A that is regarded as irrational. In other words, Freud considers that the Rat Man ought to accept the consequences of the ordinary assumptions.

A further example of the Rat Man's behaviour, and one which relates to a type of animistic belief, concerns the subject of superstition. In general, the Rat Man's attitude towards superstition was one of disbelief. However, he reported incidents in his life where certain superstitious hypotheses seemed to be confirmed. For example:

If he thought of someone, he would be sure to meet that very person immediately afterwards, as if by magic. If he suddenly asked after the health of an acquaintance whom he had not seen for a long time, he would hear that he had just died, so that it would look as though a telepathic message had arrived from him. If, without any really serious intention, he swore at some stranger, he might be sure that the man would die soon afterwards, so that he would feel responsible for his death. (SE 13, 86)

However, immediately after this, Freud tells us:

In the course of the treatment he himself was able to tell me how the deceptive appearance arose in most of these cases, and by what contrivances he himself had helped to strengthen his own superstitious beliefs. (Ibid.)

Yet, in spite of this, and in spite of his avowed belief that superstitions of this kind were all nonsense, the Rat Man persisted in believing that he had in fact caused people's deaths and other misfortunes. So his attitude towards superstition was a highly ambivalent one. His superstitious beliefs seem to have had a life of their own, cut off from the main body of his consciously held beliefs, inconsistent with them and yet persisting. As we saw in 2.3.1, this is what Freud says religious beliefs sometimes do too. The Rat Man coined the term 'omnipotence of thoughts' to describe his supposed power of life and death, and Freud subsequently adapted this term. In *Totem and Taboo*, he likens the Rat Man's belief in omnipotence of thoughts to the belief of animists that their magic rituals will be successful. However, there are a number of obvious and significant differences. In the theoretical section of the Rat Man's case history, we are told that 'he was at once superstitious and not superstitious; and there was a clear distinction between his attitude and the superstition of uneducated people who feel themselves at one with their belief.' (SE 10, 229) However, all the evidence suggests that the animists, whatever their level of education, do feel at one with their belief. Furthermore, we have no reason to suspect that they are able to account for the deceptive appearance that their animistic beliefs are true.

To make the contrast as clear as possible: the neurotic impulses in the Rat Man are causing him to disregard external reality, and this disregard of external reality is an infantile feature. Freud wishes us to believe that the animists are also disregarding external reality in believing in spirits, because spirits do not exist, and that this disregard of external reality is also an infantile feature. But what exactly do we mean when we say that the Rat Man is disregarding external reality? There are a number of possibilities:

- (1) He believes something that is not true.

(2) He believes something that is not justified.

(3) He has a consciously held world-view which includes or implies the proposition: certain superstitions x , y , and z (which include the omnipotence of thoughts) are false. Yet at least sometimes he has particular beliefs which contradict this proposition. Thus he sometimes ignores what he in general takes to be the truth about external reality.

(4) He both believes and disbelieves in omnipotence of thoughts - in other words he believes something to be the case and not the case simultaneously, which is impossible in reality.

(5) There is a fifth possibility, which does not involve a disregard for external reality, but is compatible with the Rat Man's behaviour. He is open-minded. In general, he believes that superstitions are nonsense, but he is not so certain of this belief that he does not occasionally waver.

But Freud explicitly denies this last possibility:

I did not hesitate to assume that the truth was not that the patient still had an open mind upon this subject, but that he had two, separate and contradictory convictions upon it. (Ibid., 229-30)

Granted Freud is only assuming this, but the application of his model to the Rat Man's behaviour requires this assumption, so any application of it to the behaviour of the animists would also require it. This quote seems to support option (4), that he simultaneously believes and disbelieves in superstitions, although it could be stretched to accommodate option (3). As for the first two options, Freud probably does believe that in sometimes believing in superstitions, the Rat Man was believing something both false and unjustified. However, as I have already argued, this in itself does not make those beliefs neurotic. In any event, the Rat Man's ambivalent attitude towards his own beliefs seems to be an essential feature of the neurosis. So we are left with options (3) and (4). If we take option (3), that the Rat Man sometimes believes the converse of his general belief, then, in order for the analogy to hold, the animists would have to sometimes believe the converse

of their general belief. But their general belief is that spirits exist. It is this belief that is held by Freud to make them comparable to neurotics, but for the analogy to hold, they would have to sometimes hold that spirits do not exist, and this would be the neurotic belief. There is, however, no evidence that the animists do in fact sometimes believe that spirits do not exist, much less that they believe it persistently. This rules out both option (3) and option (4), that they hold two contradictory beliefs.

I do not wish to adopt a completely relativistic standpoint, claiming that all belief-systems are equally rational. However, I do claim that some belief-systems are roughly as rational as some others, especially when we take into account differences in availability of evidence, existence of alternative theories and so on. Even Richard Dawkins - no friend to religion - allows this when he says: 'I could not imagine being an atheist at any time before 1859, when Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published.' (Dawkins 1986, p. 5.) Nor do I have any wish to dispute Freud's claim that we can sometimes apply a psychoanalytic model of explanation to belief-systems. *Prima facie*, it seems easier to apply it to certain of an individual's beliefs, rather than to the belief-systems of whole cultures. The Rat Man's superstitions would be a case in point. But perhaps, if we found that the relevant points of analogy with neurosis were present in certain belief-systems, then the model could be applied. These points might include blatant contradiction of external evidence, or blatant self-contradiction. It is an open question whether any belief-system which has been adapted by a whole culture can have such features. This of course would require that it is legitimate to speak of 'collective psychology' at all. I will return to this issue in Chapter 5.

3.2 NO PSYCHOPATHOLOGY WITHOUT IDIOSYNCRASY

A further, and fairly obvious, objection to the blanket claim that all religious belief is engendered by irrational psychological motives is that

surely, in many cases, it is engendered by purely cultural factors - i.e. it is passively accepted by an individual because it is a generally held belief in the society in which that individual grew up. It would seem that a belief acquired in such a way cannot be said to be engendered by irrational psychological motives. This of course presumes that the categories 'culturally engendered' and 'irrationally psychologically motivated' are mutually exclusive. If it is true that in many cases religious beliefs are purely culturally engendered, then the only way to uphold the blanket claim is to deny this mutual exclusivity. So the claim that religious beliefs are always irrationally psychologically motivated can only be true if either:

(1) it is possible that religious beliefs are never culturally engendered, *or*

(2) a belief's being culturally engendered is compatible with its being engendered by irrational motives.

The first option does not seem remotely plausible; in many cases, religious beliefs must have been acquired by individuals as part of their education from parents, teachers and other authority figures, and since then, simply not questioned. Alternatively, it may be accepted simply because someone who is generally regarded as an expert in those matters obviously accepts it. This latter possibility is still a *cultural* factor, because I am talking here about someone who is *generally regarded* as an expert, not someone who is so regarded by a single other individual or fringe group. For someone to be generally regarded as an expert, just means that the public at large trusts that person's opinions in a certain field. It does not, of course, say anything about whether or not that person's opinions really are trustworthy. For many people, doctors, scientists, historians, counsellors and others, are experts in this sense. In many societies, religious leaders are too. One might want to say, then, that in the cases of ordinary, unreflecting religious believers, their religious beliefs are a product of cultural background, not of psychological factors. Then, since irrational motives are just a particular class of psychological factors, the belief cannot be a product of irrational motives.

This, however, assumes that 'being a product of cultural factors' and 'being a product of psychological factors' are mutually exclusive. Someone who wants to defend the claim that all religious beliefs, even those of ordinary unreflecting believers, may be irrationally motivated, only has to deny this mutual exclusivity.²⁷ There are three ways in which one might try to evade the dichotomy of culturally acquired *versus* irrationally motivated:

(1) One is to say that a belief's being culturally acquired by me is compatible with its being engendered by my irrational motives. On this view, the social ways of acquiring beliefs which were described above are (or can be) reflective of irrational motives on the part of the individual who thus acquires them.

(2) Another is to say that a belief of mine being irrationally motivated does not depend on my having acquired them as a result of *my own* irrational motives. On this view, even though my (say) belief in God is not engendered by *my* irrational motives, it is nonetheless engendered by irrational psychological motives because the people from whom I acquired the belief (or the people from whom they in turn acquired it, etc.) acquired it because of *their* irrational motives.

(3) A third possibility is that the beliefs are engendered by irrational psychological motives, but they are not the irrational psychological motives of any individual. This view requires that whole groups may have irrational psychological states, which do not require that any of the individuals in that

²⁷ There is evidence that Grünbaum does deny it. For example, he criticises the Oxford *Psychiatric Dictionary's* definition of 'delusion' for saying that 'culturally engendered concepts are not considered delusions'. (Campbell 1981, p. 157, quoted in Grünbaum 1993, p. 286.) He comments: 'Evidently, no matter how inordinately primitive, superstitious or anthropomorphic the belief, it does not earn the Oxford label "delusion" if it is shared in its cultural milieu.' (Grünbaum 1993, p. 286.) It appears from this complaint that Grünbaum thinks it should be permissible to classify a belief as delusional solely in virtue of its being 'inordinately primitive, superstitious or anthropocentric', regardless of whether or not it is culturally engendered. Further, he commends Freud because the latter 'does not relativize his notion of delusion to social reality' (Ibid., p. 287).

group be irrational - just as a person's being mentally ill does not require malfunctioning of individual neurones. I will try to further explain this slightly obscure notion later.

I hope it is clear that these three options exhaust all the possibilities if one wants to say that a given belief is irrationally motivated. Either it is irrationally motivated because of *my* (the person's who holds the belief) motivations (option 1), or because of *someone else's* motivations (option 2), or because of motivations *which are not the motivations of any individual* (option 3). I will take each of these three options in turn.

(1) It may be that to accept beliefs simply because they are accepted by most others in one's society is itself irrational (in the psychological sense). Or: to leave unquestioned beliefs which were acquired in one's childhood is irrational. I might conform because I crave others' approval, for example.

However, if it was correct to say that to accept beliefs simply because they are accepted by most others in one's society is itself irrational in the psychological sense, there would be as much reason to call the belief of non-scientists in science irrational, as their belief in religion. If conformity to beliefs without evidence is *by itself* supposed to be indicative of irrational motives, then by definition this is not in the least affected by the content of those beliefs.

Some might want to say that belief in God - at least if He is seen as a benevolent, loving God, as is usual in Christianity - flies in the face of blatantly obvious facts, such as the amount of evil and suffering in the world. This line of argument might continue: acceptance of the belief in the face of such obvious facts can only be because of deliberate self-blinding, which in turn suggests irrational psychological motives. This point is not answered by saying that theologians and philosophers have proposed solutions to the problem of evil, because those solutions tend to be highly intellectually refined, and certainly less obvious than the existence of the problem itself. In other words, from the point of view of 'common sense' it ought to be obvious that there are good reasons for doubting the existence of God. Even assuming

this to be true, however, this does not suffice to call belief in God irrationally motivated, because many scientific theories fly in the face of similarly 'obvious' facts. In modern societies, for example, everyone learns in school that the Earth goes around the Sun and that matter is made of tiny particles, in spite of obvious appearances to the contrary. How many people would know how to justify these beliefs, other than by appeal to scientific authority?

Furthermore, using such passive acceptance as evidence of irrational motives ignores the necessity of taking a great many beliefs on trust. This necessity is imposed on individuals by the limitations of time and other resources. Such gullibility as this may be deplorable from the point of view of an ideal epistemologist, but in a complex world where people are busy with day-to-day concerns, it is unavoidable. Even experts have to accept the opinions of other experts on areas outside their expertise - which means most areas.

We would also have to consider the individual's level of intelligence. The person may have been converted to a religion because he or she was unable to see flaws in a preacher's arguments which would be obvious to someone else. It may be the case that unconscious wishes blinded the person to those flaws, but it may be simply lack of intelligence. This is of course assuming for the sake of argument that the reasons usually advanced for holding religious beliefs are as clearly inadequate as Freud says they are. Even so, believing because one is unable to see the weaknesses in someone else's argument due to lack of intelligence is not the same as believing things out of irrational psychological motives. It is not irrational in the relevant sense, since it is not a case of unconscious psychological quasi-agencies causing us to hold a belief for reasons of their own.

Consider once again the belief that bringing electrical appliances into the bath is dangerous because of certain properties of electricity. There are many scientific theories which non-scientists explicitly or implicitly accept, and which we would have no idea how to set about testing. This is not to say that the justifications for these theories do not exist, but it does mean that, if

holding and acting upon a belief which we cannot or do not justify is irrational, then virtually everyone is irrational. Clearly it is necessary to make many assumptions in order to function in everyday life. But does this mean that any old assumptions will do? Clearly not, but most ordinary, sane people have no choice, given the busyness of their lives, but to accept the opinions of 'experts' on many issues. That certain opinions of 'experts' in certain societies can be challenged by present-day scientific evidence, can hardly be given as evidence that the acceptance of those opinions by non-'experts' is a sign of irrational motives. This is not to say that belief in God and belief in the heliocentric or atomic theories are *epistemologically* equivalent, but that in many cases they are *psychologically* equivalent. It is precisely their psychological status that is at issue here.

A more subtle variant of this option is this: what moved me to accept a belief suggested to me by someone else was that the belief satisfied some deep emotional need of mine. This does not require that the passive acceptance of beliefs on trust is always indicative of irrational psychological motives. If we accept this possibility, the belief in question is culturally acquired, but my holding it is due to individual psychological factors. This may be what Freud had in mind when he wrote in *The Future of an Illusion* that 'their [devout believers'] acceptance of the universal neurosis spares them the task of constructing a personal one.' (SE 21, 44)

For example, let us say that virtually everyone has deep-seated needs to feel protected and loved, and that believing in God goes some way towards meeting these needs. Accepting this, one might want to claim that these needs unconsciously motivate my accepting the belief in God which I find ready-made in the society in which I grow up. However, if there is no other option open to me, then it makes no sense to say that my holding the belief is motivated by unconscious wishes, or any other psychological factor. A belief may *coincide with* unconscious wishes, but to say that I hold it *as a result of* those wishes, when my holding the belief was determined by cultural factors, is nonsensical. It would be like saying that, because I am glad I have arms, my

having arms is as a result of my wishes. It may seem that I have exaggerated the necessity of accepting culturally engendered beliefs here, but nonetheless for ordinary believers, especially in societies where alternative viewpoints are simply not available, there is realistically no choice but to accept them.

(2) The second option requires that the beliefs were acquired by *someone* as a result of *their* irrational motives, and subsequently acquired by me culturally. If we allow this we can say that such beliefs fulfil the criterion of being 'irrationally motivated'.

A case could be made that, at least sometimes, deep-seated wishes motivated theologians, mystics, visionaries, and other extraordinary religious types. It may further be the case that the religious beliefs of ordinary people derive, albeit indirectly, from these extraordinary types. This may lead us to conclude that the religious beliefs of ordinary people are, strictly speaking, irrationally motivated after all. This leads to the odd conclusion that a person who is psychologically perfectly rational (i.e. perfectly sane and well-balanced) could nonetheless hold irrationally motivated beliefs.

But supposing I ask the opinion of a scientist on a question within his acknowledged area of expertise. Unbeknownst to me this scientist has, for irrational motives of his own, a false pet theory relating to the specific question I ask. According to the understanding of irrational psychological motives just articulated, if I accept his word I am *deluded* - that is, subject to false, irrationally motivated beliefs - rather than just misinformed. We would have to say that *my* belief in what the scientist tells me is irrationally motivated. My point here is that, in so describing my belief, we seem to be assuming that the psychological motive of some prior person in holding a belief, which I got from that person, is 'the' psychological motive for the belief. *That* in turn seems to imply that, whenever a belief is acquired, we treat the *motives* for the belief as being acquired along with it. If we allow this, why do we not allow that someone who learns a scientific theory from a scientist also acquires the epistemological justification for that theory? I assume that, at least in some instances, that epistemological justification is the scientists'

motive for holding the theory. In any event, there seems no reason why we should allow one type of reason for a belief to be transmitted, but not the other. So we should not classify beliefs as irrationally motivated by means of this strategy.

In any event, saying that religious beliefs are 'irrationally motivated' because they were irrationally motivated at some time in the past, assumes that they *were* irrationally motivated at some time in the past. We still have to consider the question of what epistemological resources were available in practice to the people who originally developed the beliefs. Many theological assumptions and arguments may have been reasonable given the resources available in, say, mediaeval times. Grünbaum appears to accept that, even in the case of someone individually adopting a belief, rather than culturally acquiring it, it may be due to inadequate epistemological resources, and not irrational motives. He shows this when he says that 'the belief that the earth is flat may be induced mainly by inadequate observations, rather than by wishes.' (1993, p. 260.) In fact, he goes further and says that even an epistemological justification which is *inadequate* can be a sufficient motive for a belief. That is, it may be that this inadequate justification, and not an irrational motive, motivated the belief:

Let us grant Freud that theists have produced no proofs for the existence of God that are cogent, either severally or even collectively. Then there still remains the motivational question whether some of the faithful, when giving assent to theism, had not, in fact, *been decisively motivated by supposed proofs, rather than deep-seated wishes.* (Ibid., p. 283, emphasis added.)

It seems, then, that if I am convinced by a poor argument to agree with a view, then my agreement with this view need not have been irrationally motivated. This raises the question: how poor does the argument have to be before we can say that, for example, wish-fulfilment played a decisive role in

my accepting its conclusion? Further, does my level of intelligence play a part in answering this? I will leave these questions aside, however.

Inadequacy of observational data is not the only consideration here. A further consideration is availability of alternative theories. I am not talking here about the claim I made earlier, that many ordinary religious believers do not, and probably could not, question the generally accepted view. What I am saying here is that it is reasonable, even for a reflective person, to accept the best currently available theory that explains the phenomena. For example, in a pre-Darwinian world, the argument from design may have led a perfectly rational person to conclude that there is a God. As we have seen, even an outspoken atheist like Dawkins admits this. Even to a thoughtful person, the only alternatives would have been to produce a new theory or to simply suspend judgement. We do not have to call someone irrational, in the sense of being motivated by unconscious mental states, for failing to do either of these.

(3) A final recourse is to say that a belief's being irrationally motivated does not mean that it is irrationally motivated in the mind of any one individual. This in turn requires that irrational motives - and therefore things like beliefs and wishes - can be ascribed not only to individuals but to groups. Furthermore, it requires that a group's being irrational in this sense does not depend on any individuals in that group being irrational. This means that somehow we would have to ascribe beliefs and desires to groups, which are not simply the sum of the beliefs and desires of the members of the group. For irrationality in the psychological sense presupposes beliefs and desires, albeit irrational ones. Perhaps sense can be made of this notion of a 'collective mind'. However, it seems *prima facie* far more likely that psychological categories such as belief or wish can only be applied to individuals.

Leaving the possibility of group psychology aside for the moment, what my arguments lead to is that for a belief to have been psychologically motivated at all (and *a fortiori* for it to have been irrationally psychologically motivated), the person who holds the belief must have somehow or other *chosen* to hold it, even if unconsciously. This is because my holding a belief

due to psychological factors requires that it was open to me not to hold that belief. This in turn requires *either* that my belief is in some way idiosyncratic, or that the society I live in is divided on the relevant issue in such a way that cultural factors alone are not sufficient to determine my views. Imagine, for example, growing up in a society where among my family, my teachers and my peers, there is a mix of theists, atheists and agnostics. In such a situation, my believing (or my not believing!) in God would probably have to be a matter of choice - albeit perhaps an unconscious choice. For many people in western societies today, this is probably the situation. But equally there are many societies, and there were even more in the past, where this is *not* the situation, and adherence to one religion is pretty much unanimous. In such cases, a belief must be in some way idiosyncratic before we can say it was engendered by psychological rather than cultural factors. This does not mean that the *content* of the belief has to be idiosyncratic - it may only be the intensity with which a person holds the belief.

Grünbaum strongly resists the idea that a belief has to be idiosyncratic to be a delusion. He asks:

how does the sharing of an avowedly delusional belief "fundamentally alter" its content? If a Protestant in Northern Ireland whips up a frenzied group of his coreligionists to have a hysterical fear of Irish Catholics, how is the agitator's phobic belief basically changed thereby? (1993, p. 287.)

He is of course right that the *content* of a belief is not altered by being shared, but the fact of a belief being shared may indicate that it is held for cultural, rather than psychological, reasons. So, while the agitator's own belief may be phobic, his followers may have been convinced by arguments he produces, even if they are not very good arguments (we have seen that Grünbaum allows this possibility), or simply by the agitator's generally being respected in the community. If this is so, then the beliefs of those followers,

though they may be identical in content to the agitator's, are not phobic, if phobic is taken to mean 'engendered by irrational fears'.

Further, in his objections to the Oxford *Psychiatric Dictionary's*²⁸ definition of delusion to which I already referred, Grünbaum says:

we are not told how many others in a given society need to share an idea, if it is to be part of what the dictionary calls "social reality" [i.e. non-delusional, culturally engendered belief]. Does it have to be a majority? (Ibid., p. 286.)

But there is no hard and fast dividing line here. A belief held by one person alone and in the absence of evidence or reasoning, is almost certainly psychologically motivated. So too are the beliefs of a cult if they are unsupported by evidence or argument, and its members chose to join rather than being brought up in it. At the other extreme, a belief that is shared by virtually everyone in a society which has no dealings with other societies, is almost certainly not psychologically engendered for most people in that society. A belief does not have to be confined to one person to be psychologically engendered; there is such a thing as *folie à deux* (and perhaps *folie à trois, à quatre* and so on). But the closer we get to a society where a given religious belief is universal, the less likely is it that the holding of that belief on the part of an individual in that society is indicative of psychological motives on that individual's part.

Having said all that, it must be emphasised that all I am claiming is that idiosyncrasy is (if I may be permitted to use these expressions) a *necessary* condition for calling any belief irrationally psychologically motivated, not a *sufficient* one. A belief may be rationally motivated, even if idiosyncratic (and even if false).

One might counter the line of argument I have been giving by saying: but surely every religious person's beliefs and practices have *some*

²⁸ Henceforth, 'OPD'.

idiosyncratic aspects? No two believers believe exactly the same things, and it is plausible to claim that, given the complexity of (say) the Roman Catholic religion, every believer is likely to have unorthodox (which is just another word for idiosyncratic) elements somewhere or other. So, this counterargument might run, if the objection to the claim that all religious beliefs are irrationally psychologically motivated relies on the claim 'no psychopathology without idiosyncrasy', then the argument does not work. We might go further, and add that it is quite plausible to claim that the idiosyncratic aspects of people's religious beliefs are irrationally psychologically motivated.

This counterargument fails, however. Consider an analogous case. Let us say for the sake of argument that everybody has some idiosyncratic, quirky features in the way he or she dresses. And it is plausible to claim that those idiosyncratic features reflect features of each individual's personality. But this does not mean that the fact of wearing clothes *at all* reflects features of an individual's personality, for there is nothing idiosyncratic about wearing clothes. Likewise, the fact that a person is religious *at all* does not reflect features of the person's personality, such as irrational psychological motives. Unless, that is, there is something idiosyncratic that affects the person's religion 'root and branch'. That is, unless the person's religious beliefs as a whole are idiosyncratic (as with members of tiny religious cults), or are held with extraordinary fervour (as in Freud's 'Wolf Man' case history), or - what is really a special case of the first - the person lives in a society where *any* religious belief is idiosyncratic. Again I must stress that none of these states of affairs *entail* that the person's religious beliefs are irrationally psychologically motivated; root-and-branch idiosyncrasy is a necessary condition for something's being irrationally motivated, not a sufficient one. Nor am I claiming that a person's having mostly non-idiosyncratic views about religion means that the person cannot be seriously mentally ill - just that the non-idiosyncratic views cannot be taken as a manifestation of this mental illness.

Freud wants to claim that being religious is *in itself* a manifestation of a deep-lying neurosis.

In any event, if we appeal to the counterargument that every religious person's beliefs have some idiosyncratic aspects, we also have to admit that every non-religious person's beliefs and practices are also bound to have some idiosyncratic aspects. So if the idiosyncratic aspects are to be taken as evidence that all religious believers are irrationally motivated, other idiosyncratic aspects could be taken as evidence that everybody is irrationally psychologically motivated. Some may find this view attractive. If it is taken to mean 'sometimes irrationally psychologically motivated', then it is very probably true. But there is a difference between beliefs which are held because of the general cultural background - such as a 12th-century European's belief in God, or a 20th-century European's belief that the Earth is round - and idiosyncratic adjuncts or aspects to those beliefs - such as belief that one is God's personal favourite, or that the Earth is round because extra-terrestrials designed it for use as a billiard ball. The latter two beliefs would rightly arouse the suspicion that they are irrationally psychologically motivated. So too would the holding of perfectly normal beliefs but in a compulsive way, for example, in such a way that absolutely no evidence or argument would ever overthrow it, or that one dwells obsessively on it morning, noon and night. But if someone does hold to beliefs in a compulsive way, that should only be taken as evidence that that particular person is neurotic. That a person holds to *religious* beliefs in a compulsive way should be taken as evidence that the person is neurotic, rather than that religious beliefs in general are neurotic.

The claim that there is no psychopathology without idiosyncrasy puts me at variance with another commentator on Freud's psychoanalysis of religion - W. W. Meissner (1984, 1992). Meissner is a Catholic priest and also a psychoanalyst, and to some degree sympathetic to Freud's aetiological claims about religion. But he believes that Freud's diagnosis can be plausibly claimed to be true only of the general mass of unquestioning religious believers:

A caricature of religion, which Freud himself employed as an analogy to obsessional states, is not infrequently found among religious people in whom blind adherence to ritual and scrupulous conscientiousness, as well as conscience, dominate religious life. In fact, we can say that the great mass of believers lend credence to Freud's formulations. (Meissner 1984, p. 15.)

It appears that Meissner means by 'blind acceptance' of religion, acceptance which is engendered by the social factors I have suggested. But my argument implies that it is precisely religious beliefs which are 'blind' in this sense that are exempt from Freud's diagnosis. 'The great mass of believers' in my view fall into this category. Meissner contrasts the 'great mass of believers' with those who have 'a rarely attained level of religious maturity'. Presumably these latter are the saints, theologians, mystics and so on. Freud would claim that these are just as neurotic in their beliefs as any other religious believer. My argument in this section leaves open the possibility that Freud is right in his diagnosis of these exceptional cases, because they are idiosyncratic at least in taking a greater than average active interest in their religion. But my arguments do not provide positive reasons for believing even these exceptional cases to be neurotic.

As already indicated, I have left open the possibility that we can ascribe beliefs and desires to groups, not just to individuals. The 'mass hysteria' manifested at football riots and so on may be a case in point. However, mass hysteria is a passing phenomenon and there is no reason to believe that it is the habitual state of any society. For the moment I will only point out that 'group psychology' and 'mental preservation' in a sense which would support Freud's claim are, to say the least, highly controversial notions. So my conclusion from the argument so far is that unless one accepts one or other of these highly controversial notions, it is not possible that all religious beliefs are engendered by psychologically irrational motives. In Chapter 5, I will address the issues of group-psychology and mental preservation.

3.2.1 Does this View Lead to Relativism?

My claim that there can be no psychopathology without idiosyncrasy appears to be similar to a claim made in the entry on 'delusion' in the fifth edition of the Oxford *Psychiatric Dictionary*. Grünbaum quotes from this entry as follows:

While it is true that some superstitions and religious beliefs are held despite the lack of confirmatory evidence, such culturally engendered concepts are not considered delusions. What is characteristic of the delusion is that it is not shared by others; rather it is an idiosyncratic and individual misconception or misinterpretation. (Campbell 1981, p. 157.)

It can be seen that this definition shows a point of view that is similar to mine in one important respect: idiosyncrasy is made a criterion for delusionality. It does not appear, however, that the OPD authors had in mind arguments like those I have given. Rather, they seem to see it as simply a matter of definition or linguistic convention: 'culturally engendered beliefs are not considered delusions'. Grünbaum fears that this view leads to relativism, for he says: 'it allows a false belief to qualify as a delusion *only* if it is held idiosyncratically, *and it makes social consensus the sole arbiter of reality.*' (Grünbaum 1993, p. 285, emphasis added.)

He contrasts this OPD definition of delusion with Freud's. For Freud, delusions constitute a subclass of *illusions*. An *illusion*, according to Freud's definition of the term, is a belief in which 'wish-fulfilment is a prominent factor in its motivation.' (*The Future of an Illusion*, SE 21, 31. Grünbaum quotes this definition on p. 259.) For a belief to be an illusion according to this definition, it is not necessary that it be false. However, it is not sufficient for the belief to merely coincide with the fulfilment of a wish; it must be completely or largely *motivated* by a wish. Grünbaum observes that:

... Freud calls a belief an illusion, just when it is inspired by wishes *rather than* by awareness of some evidential warrant for it. Hence, as he uses the

label, it is psychogenetically descriptive but epistemologically derogatory. (Grünbaum, pp. 259-60, Grünbaum's emphasis.)

A *delusion*, in Freud's terminology, is a *false* illusion with a particular type of psychogenesis - one rooted in the same kind of unconscious mental processes as are neuroses. This definition renders the term 'delusion' psychologically, as well as epistemologically, derogatory - it entails that the person in the grip of a delusion has some of the characteristics which distinguish a psychotic or neurotic from a normal, (rational, well-adjusted) individual.

According to Freud's definition, then, a delusion must fulfil three criteria:

wish-motivation (it must be wholly or primarily motivated by a wish),

falsehood, and

psychopathology (it must have been caused by the same unconscious factors as give rise to psychoses and neuroses).

The OPD adds a fourth criterion:

idiosyncrasy.

I wish to argue against Grünbaum's claim that the OPD authors are making social consensus the sole arbiter of reality.

Grünbaum quotes from the *fourth* edition of the OPD that a delusion is 'maintained by one in spite of what to normal beings constitutes incontrovertible and 'plain-as-day' evidence to the contrary.' (Hinsie, and Campbell 1970, p. 191, quoted in Grünbaum, p. 285.) Grünbaum considers that this statement is not in conflict with Freud's concept of delusion. The conflict only arises, he thinks, when the OPD authors introduce a 'sociological demurrer': 'further, the belief held is not one which is ordinarily accepted by other members of the patient's culture or subculture (i.e. it is not a commonly believed superstition).' (Ibid.) However, this sociological factor is already implicit in the consideration of 'what to normal beings constitutes incontrovertible and 'plain-as-day' evidence'. On many subjects, not just religious ones, what is 'plain-as-day' varies from one society to another.

If we accept Freud's general theory of neuroses, then their symptoms, including any beliefs which they engender, are disguised attempts to fulfil wishes. This means that, for Freud, if a belief fulfils the criterion of psychopathology, then it automatically also fulfils the criterion of wish-motivation. He more-or-less takes it for granted that religious beliefs are false. In attempting to establish that they are delusions, then, his main efforts go into establishing that they are psychopathological. If a belief happened to be true, but we showed that it was both wish-motivated and psychopathological, it would suffer from the same epistemological and psychological derogation as a delusion. We may not accept enough of Freud's general theory to grant that any belief which is psychopathological is automatically wish-motivated, but even so, showing that it is psychopathological would on its own still be psychologically derogatory. Grünbaum is very sceptical about Freud's general theory, but he seems happy to accept the characterisation of religious beliefs as akin to those of psychotics and neurotics. He also believes that religious beliefs are false, and that they are motivated by wishes, albeit not necessarily the same wishes as those posited by Freud. So Grünbaum accepts that they fulfil all Freud's criteria for classification as delusions.

I wish to say that we can grant Grünbaum his premise (which was also Freud's conviction) that social consensus is not the sole arbiter of reality, without granting that the non-idiosyncratic beliefs of (say) mediaeval Christians were delusions according to Freud's definition.

What Grünbaum appears to be worried about here, is that in saying that a culturally engendered belief is not a delusion, we are somehow granting that belief a kind of reality. So, he thinks, in doing so we are being culturally relativistic about reality. A short answer to this is implicit in what I have already said: in the whole of my argument to the effect that culturally engendered beliefs are not delusions, the question of whether or not the beliefs correspond to reality has not been raised. I argued that a culturally engendered belief in God is not a delusion, on the grounds that culturally engendered beliefs are not irrationally psychologically engendered, *not* on the

grounds that they are in any sense true. (I take it that Grünbaum is a realist, so he would not object to my using the terms 'truth' and 'reality' more-or-less interchangeably.) So my claim that culturally engendered beliefs are not delusions does not depend on saying that the culturally engendered beliefs in any sense correspond to reality. So one can acknowledge that frequently people hold beliefs for cultural reasons, and that their doing so is not irrational in the psychological sense, without thinking that 'social consensus is the sole arbiter of reality.'

Alasdair MacIntyre has argued that liberal historians of the nineteenth century, in describing the witch-hunters of earlier centuries as irrational, were confusing rationality with truth. (1971, p. 248) MacIntyre also points out that there is an opposite mistake which some twentieth-century historians make in wanting to abandon ascriptions of rationality or irrationality to the beliefs of other cultures at all. This is a mistake, he argues, because whether we describe a belief as rational or irrational makes a difference to how we explain it. If we call it rational we commit ourselves to the view that it is explainable by reference to 'appropriate intellectual norms and procedures'. (Ibid., p. 248.) But if we call it irrational, this is just to say that it fails to meet such norms, which means 'that the belief is held as the outcome of antecedent events or states or states of affairs which are quite independent of any relevant process of appropriate deliberation.' (Ibid.) It seems that Grünbaum, in trying to avoid the twentieth-century historians' type of error, may have slipped into the nineteenth-century historians' type of error. He wants to avoid being relativistic about truth and also, I think, about rationality. However, Grünbaum's claim implies that we are faced with just two alternatives. *Either:*

(1) We have to call (for example) the belief in God a delusion, which by definition implies that it is irrational in the psychological sense, *or*

(2) We have to say that a belief's being held by the majority of people in a society is a sufficient condition for calling that belief true. (Actually, he says that on the OPD definition of delusion social consensus is the *sole* arbiter of reality, so the view he is attacking allegedly makes social consensus both a

necessary and a sufficient condition for truth. However, I will focus on the 'sufficient' aspect.)

There are, however, two other alternatives:

(3) A belief may be false but rational.

(4) A belief can be both false and irrational without being held due to irrational psychological motives.

If we can show that false beliefs which are held due to social conformity fit either of these two possibilities, then we have shown that those beliefs are not delusions, since they fail to meet the 'psychopathology' criterion.

Possibility (3) would be the case if, for example, the belief formed an integral part of what was the best explanation of things at the time, given such local limitations as paucity of evidence, or lack of alternative theories. If Dawkins is right, belief in an artificer-God, prior to Darwin, would be an example. Any belief which flowed smoothly from this belief would also qualify, even if these 'secondary' beliefs did no actual explanatory work. For example, belief in an all-powerful God might lead smoothly to belief in the possibility of miracles, even in someone who had never actually witnessed an event that seemed to require a miraculous explanation.

Irrationality just means failing to meet appropriate norms. One may want to assert that some or all of these norms are culturally-independent, and that belief in God, or religious belief in general, *always* fails to meet these culturally-independent norms. There is evidence that Grünbaum is not so rigid as to think that the standards of rationality are such that anyone applying them in any circumstances will reach the same conclusions regarding everything. At least this seems to be implied when he says, as I have already quoted, 'the belief that the earth is flat may be induced mainly by inadequate observations, rather than by wishes.' (This may not be the best example: belief that the sun goes around the earth might be better.) I take it that he would accept that inadequate observations can at least sometimes be due to limitations in the available technology, rather than to any failure of rationality on the observers' part: they may simply have accepted what the

evidence available to them most clearly suggested. Given the same circumstances, anybody might conclude that the earth is flat: *prima facie*, it appears flat. One can say this without falling into the obvious absurdity of saying that when enough people started believing the earth was round, it became round. I do not think anybody actually believes this. However, some pragmatists and coherentists want to separate the notions of truth and reality, so they might say that at one time it was *true* that the earth was flat. Nonetheless, you can distance yourself from such a view, and say as loudly and clearly as one likes that in the Middle Ages it was false that the earth was flat, without saying that people who believed the earth was flat were thereby irrational.

However, Grünbaum might claim that no faulty observation could lead someone to believe in God without the influence of irrational motivations. He could simply disagree with Dawkins, and say that at no time did evidence warrant believing in God. This is a very difficult issue to adjudicate - Grünbaum could perhaps cite the arguments of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* in support of the view that atheism, or at least agnosticism, made sense before Darwin. He could also perhaps point to those early church fathers who said '*Credo quia absurdem*'. (I will have more to say about these in 4.3.5.) Let us allow, then, that belief in God fails to meet certain timeless standards of rationality. If this is so, then possibility (3) is ruled out for belief in God. He could then go further and say that if a belief is passively accepted due to social influences, this means that it is not based on appropriate rational norms. We might counter this by saying, with MacIntyre, that some norms of rationality are culturally relative. This does not quite address the issue, however, since we are not now talking about those who base a belief on norms which were considered appropriate at the time. Such people would be reflective believers, albeit they might be accused of failing to reflect on the norms by which they justify their beliefs. What we are talking about is believers who accept beliefs *simply* because they are generally held. One might argue that social consensus is one appropriate norm of justification,

albeit one that does not take precedence over such other norms as the principle of non-contradiction, or the acceptance of overwhelmingly strong evidence. However, Grünbaum might deny even this.

In this event, we still have possibility (4): a belief may be irrational but due to causes other than psychological ones. The causes in question could be social, such as passive acceptance of generally held beliefs. As I have already argued, such passive acceptance is not in itself indicative of irrational psychological motives. This would mean that the person's belief is explained by causal factors, rather than rational norms. But the causal factors in question are social ones, rather than psychological ones.

If one is unhappy with the claim that some norms of rationality are culturally relative, one is still left with the possibility that a belief can be both false and irrational, but not indicative of irrational psychological motives on the part of the individual holding the belief. The belief *may* be due to irrational psychological motives on the part of whoever originated the belief. Even so, I have already argued that we cannot say that it is irrationally psychologically motivated on the part of the passive acceptor, unless we accept some kind of 'group psychology'. If one does say that some norms of rationality are culturally relative, *or* that social consensus is itself one such norm, then one can say that a belief may be both false and rational. If any of these options are admitted, then one has to admit that a belief which is held purely due to social influences is not indicative of irrational psychological motives, and *a fortiori*, not a delusion. This can all be said without making social consensus the sole arbiter of reality.

In conclusion, I believe that in saying that Freud's psychological explanations of religion are insufficiently warranted by evidence, but in principle possibly true, Grünbaum has let Freud off too lightly. My view is that there are good positive reasons for believing that Freud's explanations of religion are false in many cases, rather than just not proven. There still remains a possible escape route for Freud, however, via either group

psychology or mental preservation. I will examine these issues in Chapter 5. Before that, however, I will discuss another alleged point of analogy between neurosis and religion – namely, that both are supposed to be manifestations of the pleasure principle.

CHAPTER 4: RELIGION AND THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

In addition to claiming that religion is aetiologically akin to a neurosis, Freud frequently claimed that religion, like neurosis, involved a submission to the pleasure principle, rather than to the reality principle. I have shown in 1.6 how Freud draws the contrast between these two principles, and in 1.7.1 how this contrast is central to the distinction between neurosis and normality. In this chapter I will argue that Freud has failed to show that religion is a manifestation of the pleasure principle rather than the reality principle.

4.1 HOW DOES THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PLEASURE PRINCIPLE AND REALITY PRINCIPLE APPLY TO BELIEFS?

I argued in 1.6 that for Freud the reality principle is the 'smart' pleasure principle. Both principles pursue pleasure as an end, but the pleasure principle pursues immediate pleasure and tends, in the long term at least, to incur pain, whereas the reality principle pursues more reliable, long-term pleasure. What is relevant for my purposes is how the distinction between pleasure principle and reality principle applies to beliefs. The pleasure principle tends to cause people to believe what they want to believe, i.e. what it is more comfortable in the immediate present to believe. For Freud, wish-fulfilment is characteristic of immature and neurotic thinking. This of course has the corollary that people under the influence of the pleasure principle avoid believing things they do not want to believe. This includes facts which one does not want to deal with, even though ignoring them is likely to lead to greater pain in the long run. So the more under the influence of the pleasure principle you are, the more likely you are to ignore evidence for beliefs which you find uncomfortable. Central to the distinction between the two principles

is that the reality principle takes more efficacious steps towards bringing about the desired state of affairs. In practice, a necessary part of such efficacious steps is the taking into account of real features of the environment, or 'external reality' as Freud calls it. So coming under the influence of the reality principle entails believing that certain states of affairs are as they are, not as one might wish them to be.

With the advent of the reality principle, a process that Freud calls 'reality testing' begins to take place:

The increased significance of external reality heightened the importance ... of the sense-organs that are directed towards the external world, and of the consciousness attached to them. Consciousness now learned to comprehend sensory qualities in addition to the qualities of pleasure and unpleasure which hitherto had alone been of interest to it. A special function was instituted which had periodically to search the external world, in order that its data might be familiar already if an urgent internal need should arise - the function of *attention* ('Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning', SE 12, 220)

Freud seems to take it that regardless of whether the pleasure principle or the reality principle predominates, the individual receives some veridical sense-impressions from the outside world. Under the influence of the pleasure principle, these impressions are ignored if they are painful, and in general not treated as any more real than the productions of fantasy:

The strongest characteristic of unconscious (repressed) processes, to which no investigator can become accustomed without the exercise of great self-discipline, is due to their entire disregard of reality-testing; they equate reality of thought with external actuality, and wishes with their fulfilment - with the event - just as happens under the dominance of the ancient pleasure principle. (Ibid., 225)

Freud wants to account for the features of what he calls 'secondary process' thought by the transition from the pleasure principle to the reality principle. Secondary process thought is the thought which is characteristic of the rational, mature, non-neurotic part of the mind. Its characteristic features are defined by contrast with those of primary process thought, which characterises the unconscious, the immature and the neurotic. To recap briefly what I said in 1.4, the special characteristics which typify unconscious thought (as listed in 'The Unconscious', SE 14, 187) are:

'exemption from mutual contradiction' (tolerance of contradictions),

'mobility of cathexes' (transferability of affects to objects or states of affairs other than those which occasioned them)

'timelessness' (imperviousness to modification of beliefs and desires)

'replacement of external by psychological reality' (projecting of one's own fantasies onto the world, and externalising of one's own inner conflicts.)

So the contrasting features of conscious, rational thought are: intolerance of contradictions, recognition of the real occasions of one's affects, letting beliefs and desires be modified over time, recognition that one's fantasies are fantasies, and recognition that certain conflicts are internal to oneself. Freud takes it that in infants, neurotics, and the unconscious, the special characteristics are prevalent. (He also takes it for granted that organisms pursue pleasure.) The transition from the dominance of these processes to mature, rational thinking takes place because of the development of the reality principle. In order to maximise pleasure and minimise pain, we have to learn to take relevant features of the environment into account as they actually are, not just as we would like them to be. This involves becoming intolerant of contradictory beliefs - accepting that if P is the case, not-P cannot simultaneously be the case, and also that one cannot do A and not do A at the same time. It also entails becoming willing to modify beliefs and desires for various reasons. It also entails not letting affects attach themselves to any old thing - not thinking my happiness depends on moving a stone in the road, for example. This last point is tricky, but basically the idea for Freud is that

neurotics let affects attach to inappropriate objects, so that doing action A becomes urgently desired even though the action is completely unsuited to satisfying the desire. Finally, the move from the pleasure principle to the reality principle entails recognising the difference between external reality and mental states - recognition that one's fantasies are fantasies, and recognition of conflicts that are internal to oneself.

The upshot of all this is: Freud wants to explain the features of rational mental activity as what we need if we are to maximise pleasure and minimise pain. This is an extremely ambitious project, and one which Freud only outlines very sketchily. It is clear that in order to maximise pleasure and minimise pain, it is necessary to know a lot about features of the environment. So the formation of beliefs which tend towards the maximisation of pleasure and the minimisation of pain, coincides to some extent with learning about relevant features of the environment. This includes physical features, such as whether something is edible, or whether ice is thick enough to walk on. It also includes social features, such as calendar-dates, clock-time, bank-accounts, laws and codes of etiquette. Knowledge of both kinds of feature of the environment is obviously often necessary to maximise pleasure and avoid pain. If you eat things you should not, or if you miss appointments a lot, or let your bank account run into a massive overdraft, the results are likely to be painful.

The reality principle would also require recognising features of one's own self, for example 'I always get sick if I eat seafood'. More importantly from the point of view of psychoanalysis, it means recognising features of one's own personality and psychical history, what Freud calls 'internal reality'. Many of these features of one's internal reality may have been repressed. There is a slightly subtle point here: repression is an expression of the pleasure principle, not the reality principle. One may have repressed mental states such as - to give a clichéd example - the desire to kill one's father. This desire is, on Freud's account of things, an expression of the unmodified pleasure principle, but the repression of the desire is equally so. It

is clear enough that the desire itself is an expression of the pleasure principle. It may bring immediate pleasure, but it is far more likely on balance to bring greater pain. Even if it does not bring remorse, it is likely to bring punishment. But why is *repressing* the desire not an expression of the reality-principle? This is because Freud thinks it is better – in the sense of more likely to lead to increased pleasure and decreased pain – to recognise desires one has. Repression takes place because to know that one has certain desires is painful – for example, wounding to one's self-image. So it is easier to pretend to oneself that one does not have those desires. Freud says that when one has properly matured, or when one is cured of a neurosis, one recognises the desire and realises that it is a bad idea, i.e. that given the likely consequences and one's other desires, one should not act on it. In the 'Little Hans' case history, he says that '*analysis replaces repression by condemnation.*' (SE 10, 145, Freud's italics) To accept this claim one has to accept a certain amount of psychoanalytic theory: namely, that repressed wishes remain active in the unconscious, and manifest themselves in forms that get past the censor, leading to neurotic symptoms. Nonetheless, one does not have to subscribe to psychoanalytic theory to accept that in general self-knowledge is better than self-deception from the point of view of one's own interests.

In addition to beliefs that certain states of affairs are the case, the pleasure principle-reality principle distinction can clearly also apply to beliefs that one should or should not do certain things. This is easy to see; 'maximise pleasure and minimise pain' can be seen as a directive that encapsulates the reality principle, and it turn would lead to more specific directives: for example, 'don't smoke in bed', 'laugh at your boss's jokes', 'always carry condoms'.

The point I want to emphasise is that being governed by the reality principle would entail a lot of getting to know about how things are. However, the reality principle cannot simply be equated with the pursuit of such knowledge. In other words, being governed by the reality principle does not involve the pursuit of objective knowledge, or the pursuit of truth, or

whatever else we might want to call it, *as an end in itself*. This point is not in the least affected by whether or not one thinks there are such things as objective knowledge or truth in a strict, non-shallow sense. The knowledge with which the reality principle is concerned is knowledge in the shallow, non-strict sense of knowledge of features of the environment which are useful in maximising pleasure and minimising pain; features which are as they are whether we want them to be or not. This does indeed include much that on many ontologies would be regarded as real in a strict sense, but the ultimate reason we should believe in the existence of such states of affairs is, as far as the reality principle is concerned, not because they are real in this strict sense, but because it would lead to painful consequences if we ignore or deny them. Stripped of psychoanalytic and philosophical jargon, you might tell me that I am being unrealistic in cherishing certain beliefs or desires. In saying this, you are not necessarily urging me to develop a love of truth as an end in itself. More likely you are telling me that I am harming myself because of those beliefs and desires. If you do this, you are basically urging me to develop beliefs and, if not desires, at least *aims*, that are more in accord with the reality principle.

4.2 HOW IS THE DISTINCTION SUPPOSED TO APPLY TO RELIGION?

We have seen how the pleasure principle and the reality principle can be expressed in the form of beliefs. Freud further claims that we can see them in operation in whole systems of beliefs - *Weltanschauungen*. In the last of his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, he defines a *Weltanschauung* as 'an intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis, which, accordingly leaves no question unanswered and in which everything that interests us finds its fixed place.' (SE 22, 158) It is clear that some religions, and perhaps some political theories such as Marxism, come close to fitting this definition. It is not immediately obvious that *science* fits it, however. Freud, however, says

that science is a *Weltanschauung* in as much as it challenges religion, but otherwise it only promises to develop into a full-blown one, a promise which may or may not ever be fulfilled:

... the *Weltanschauung* of science already departs noticeably from our definition. It is true that it too assumes the uniformity of the explanation of the universe; but it does so only as a programme, the fulfillment of which is relegated to the future. Apart from this it is marked by negative characteristics, by its limitation to what is at the moment knowable and its sharp rejection of certain elements that are alien to it. It asserts that there are no sources of knowledge of the universe other than the intellectual working-over of carefully scrutinized observations - in other words, what we call research - and alongside of it no knowledge derived from intuition, revelation or divination. (Ibid., 159)

Religion is supposed to be an expression of the pleasure principle, and science of the reality principle. Freud says in 'Two Principles':

religions have been able to effect absolute renunciation of pleasure in this life by means of the promise of compensation in a future existence; but they have not by this means achieved a conquest of the pleasure principle. It is *science* which has succeeded in that conquest; (SE 12, 223, Freud's italics)

In *Totem and Taboo*, he says that there have been three great *Weltanschauungen* in human history - animism, religion and science. He wants to draw a parallel between the historical progression of societies through these three stages and the stages in the psychological development of individuals:

The animistic phase would correspond to narcissism both chronologically and in its content; the religious stage would correspond to the stage of object-choice of which the characteristic is a child's attachment to his parents; while the scientific phase would have an exact

counterpart in the stage at which an individual has reached maturity, has renounced the pleasure principle, adjusted himself to reality and turned to the external world for the object of his desires. (SE 13, 90)

Clearly, there are a number of empirical claims embedded in this analogy. On the individual side, there are Freud's developmental hypotheses, which he presented at great length before *Totem and Taboo*; on the collective side, there is the theory that all cultures pass through more or less the same phases of development. This view was characteristic of the so-called 'evolutionist' anthropologists of Freud's day, such as J. G. Frazer and W. Robertson Smith, from whom Freud derived much of the material for *Totem and Taboo*. (I will discuss this further in 5.2.) However, it is not on these empirical questions that I wish to take issue with Freud. My criticisms will apply even if his developmental hypotheses are correct, and even if we limit what he says about animism and religion to those societies (if any) which did pass through the three phases.

It is clear from the quote that Freud considers the stages in both individual and group development to be characterisable as a progressive renunciation of the pleasure principle in favour of the reality principle. Thus, the animistic phase is supposed to correspond to a stage where a person thinks the world is under the immediate control of their mind; like this person, animists (if we accept Freud's account of animism - see 2.2.1.4) try to bring about desired states of affairs immediately, and without taking into account actual features of the world. The use of incantations and spells which characterise animism is supposed by Freud to indicate this. In the religious phase, we no longer think we have this amount of direct control over things, but we think the world is ruled by a basically benevolent being. This being will order things so as to maximise our happiness, at least if we behave ourselves. In the scientific phase, we acknowledge that the world is not like that, and we set about trying to discover how it actually works.

This analogy is very tempting, and it is easy enough to think of subsidiary points in favour of it. If one is an empirical realist, as Freud was,

part of the very nature of science is that one carries out experiments to find out if a given hypothesis is supported by what happens in the world. One might think that some religious beliefs ought to be in principle testable, for example the efficacy of prayer, but they are not usually tested. In fact, it is often thought impious to suggest that one should try to test them, as faith without evidence is considered a virtue in some religions. Further, one might say that scientific research is harder work than unquestioningly accepting beliefs, but is likely to lead to more beneficial results in the long run. (This of course leaves aside the question of the uses to which scientific knowledge is put, but knowledge can still be reality-principle governed in that it enhances our *ability* to improve our situation, even if it is put at the service of desires which are not reality-principle governed.) What has to be borne in mind is that, even if we accept the view that scientific knowledge corresponds to reality, what makes it reality-principle governed is not this fact, but its effects on our chances of survival and maximisation of pleasure. Freud could perhaps justify the claim that scientific knowledge, or well-tested theories in general, or just believing what is true, is an expression of the reality principle, on the grounds that it is good to get into the habit of getting to know how things actually are; that by and large doing so is likely to maximise one's pleasure and minimise one's pain, even if some bits of knowledge have no practical application. In a passage I have already quoted, where Freud is speaking of the reality-testing carried out by individuals under the influence of the reality principle he says that the person periodically searches the external world 'in order that its data might be familiar already if an urgent internal need should arise.' (SE 12, 220)

Let us take it that by science Freud understands the careful building up of theories using evidence, not just current scientific theories. As we saw in 2.3.2.2, there is evidence that his view of knowledge is an empirical realist one, by which I mean that he believes there is an independently existing real world, characteristics of which are discoverable by means of evidence. In 'An Outline of Psychoanalysis' he says:

In our science [i.e. psychoanalysis] as in others the problem is the same: behind the attributes (qualities) of the object under examination which are presented directly to our perception, we have to discover something else which is more independent of the particular receptive capacity of our sense organs and which approximates more closely to what may be supposed to be the real state of affairs. We have no hope of being able to reach the latter itself, since it is evident that everything that we have inferred must nevertheless be translated back into the language of our perceptions, from which it is simply impossible for us to free ourselves. But herein lies the very nature and limitation of our science. It is as though we were to say in physics: 'If we could see clearly enough we should find that what appears to be a solid body is made up of particles of such and such a shape and size and occupying such and such relative positions.' In the meantime we try to increase the efficiency of our sense-organs to the furthest possible extent by artificial aids; but it may be expected that all such efforts will fail to effect the ultimate outcome. Reality will always remain 'unknowable'. (SE 23, 196)

Those who are sympathetic to Freud's claim that science corresponds to the operation of the reality principle might consider this account of scientific knowledge to parallel the description of reality-testing which I quoted in 4.1 above.

It will be remembered that Freud claimed that the reality principle cannot properly develop in individuals until they have become fully independent of their parents. Religion is supposed to correspond to a state of affairs in which dependence on the parents persists. God (or the gods) corresponds to the parents, and although religious believers no longer think their thoughts are omnipotent, they still believe they have a protector who can be relied upon to cater to their needs. Only with the abandonment of this belief, which corresponds to 'complete psychical detachment' from the parents (SE 12, 220), can the dominance of the pleasure principle come to an end. It is clear from this that Freud sees atheism, or at least the view that God does not look after us, as an integral part of the scientific *Weltanschauung*.

I have argued that for Freud the reality principle is the 'smart' pleasure principle, and we saw in 1.9.1 that for him the difference between the neurotic and the normal person is that the neurotic fails to balance the demands of reality with those of the id. So, in order to establish an analogy between religion and neurosis on the basis of the relationship between beliefs and reality, Freud needs to show either that religious beliefs fail to maximise pleasure and minimise pain, or that they make it difficult to establish the right balance between the demands of the external world and those of the id. Freud advances arguments to the effect that, in spite of mortifications which religion often demands, religious beliefs fundamentally serve pleasurable ends. Examples of such ends might be: the feeling of being loved and protected, or that our life has a purpose. In addition, there are the aims which are posited by psychoanalysis to characterise the unconscious – such as the expiation of guilt, the repression or externalisation of psychological conflicts. He also offers some time-honoured philosophical arguments to the effect that religious beliefs are evidentially ill-founded (e.g. in *The Future of an Illusion*, SE 21), and that there are positive reasons for believing them to be false (e.g. in 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*', SE 22, 167, he gives the problem of evil). However, to sustain his claim that, because of their relation to reality, religious beliefs are like neurotic symptoms, he needs more than that they serve pleasurable ends and are evidentially ill-founded and most likely false. The fact that they serve pleasurable ends is not sufficient, because beliefs which conform to the reality-principle also serve pleasurable ends. What is relevant is whether they serve those ends successfully in the long run. Adding the fact that they are evidentially ill-founded and most likely false, does not get us any closer to their failing to conform to the smart pleasure principle.

It might be claimed that Freud had at least a valid argument. This valid argument would look something like this:

Freud's Argument, version 1:

(1) A is maximally rational *iff* A does what increases A's chances of survival and happiness,²⁹ and avoids doing what decreases those chances.

(2) Having true beliefs always increases A's chances of survival and happiness, and having false beliefs always decreases those chances.

(3) Therefore (from 1 and 2) A is maximally rational *iff* A has true beliefs and does not have false beliefs.

(4) Religious beliefs are false (which implies that the negations of those beliefs are true).

(5) Therefore (from 4) if A has religious beliefs, A has false beliefs, and fails to have true beliefs.

(6) Therefore (from 3 and 5) if A has religious beliefs, A fails to be maximally rational.

It is not quite clear whether Freud claimed (2). Perhaps he only made the weaker claim (2*) that having true beliefs *usually* increases etc., and having false beliefs usually decreases etc. Substituting this for (2) makes the move to (3) invalid, and removes one of the premises for (6). To get from (1) to (6) we would need to establish that if A has religious beliefs, A fails to do what increases etc. The principle of charity perhaps dictates that we should grant that Freud meant to claim (2), so his argument is valid. In this event, we could challenge him by denying premise (2). We can make a superficially plausible case for (2) or (2*) by appealing to mundane examples, such as the belief that you need food to live and so forth. But there could be truths the believing of which does not increase, but rather reduces, one's chances of survival and happiness, and falsehoods the believing of which does increase those chances. Since the aim of the whole argument is to prove that if A has religious beliefs, A fails to be maximally rational, as defined in premise (1), it needs to be established that if A has religious beliefs, A fails to do what increases his or

²⁹ I am using this formulation as shorthand for what the reality principle is supposed to aim at.

her chances of survival and happiness. If this could be established, it would not be necessary for Freud to make claim (2). So, whether he claimed (2) or (2*), the onus is on Freud to show that religious beliefs fail to increase one's chances of survival and happiness.

Freud has, of course, other arguments to the effect that religious beliefs are like neurotic symptoms. One important one is that they are not only evidentially ill-founded and pleasure-serving, but are also motivated by wishes. Clearly it is one thing for a belief to coincide with the fulfilment of a wish, and another for it to be motivated by a wish. A belief which is pleasure-serving may be the first without being the second. Further, a belief may be wish-motivated and still be true. But even if one is not a Freudian, one can accept that believing something because it fulfils a wish is irrational. Any argument to the effect that a belief is wish-fulfilling is a claim about 'aetiological' features of the belief rather than about its relation to reality. Dealing with claims about the aetiological features of beliefs was the work of Chapter 3.

The claim that all false beliefs are harmful is *prima facie* a difficult one to defend. As a counterexample, a person snowbound on the side of a mountain may falsely believe that the snow is about to melt, and this belief may help give the person the strength to stay alive long enough for a rescue party to arrive. But what we are concerned with is Freud's claim that religion is a neurosis (or at least like one in specified ways). So, for our purposes we need to evaluate his claim that religious beliefs are a manifestation of the pleasure principle, rather than the reality principle. To support this claim it is necessary to establish that religious beliefs are more harmful than either their denials or the suspension of judgement. In addition, it is necessary to establish that religious beliefs are more harmful than realistically available alternatives. So it is necessary to assume that atheism or agnosticism is always available as an option. If there are no realistically available alternatives, as I argued in Chapter 3 is often the case, then the belief cannot be strictly speaking said to be harmful. This is because for something to be harmful it must produce a

state of affairs which is worse than would otherwise be the case. But if there is no realistically possible 'otherwise', then this cannot be so. For the purposes of the following discussion, I will behave as though, as Freud assumes, there are usually or always realistically available alternatives to religion, and consider the claim that religious beliefs are more harmful than these alternatives. What does not need to be considered is whether or not religious beliefs are true.

There is a further advantage to following this route - namely, that somebody might object to the premise that all religious beliefs are false. If some religious beliefs are true, then premise (4) has to be altered to 'some religious beliefs, etc.' and (5) and (6) have to be prefaced with 'in some cases'. However, if we can establish that religious beliefs are always harmful, independently of whether they are true or false, and if we further drop premise (2), we get a valid, and much simpler, argument, as follows:

Freud's Argument, version 2:

(1) A is maximally rational *iff* A does what increases A's chances of survival and happiness, and does not do what decreases those chances.

(2) Having religious beliefs always decreases A's chances of survival and happiness.

(3) Therefore, (from 2) if A has religious beliefs, A does what decreases A's chances of survival and happiness, and fails to do what increases those chances.

(4) Therefore, (from 1 and 3), if A has religious beliefs, A fails to be maximally rational.

In both this and the previous version of the argument, as I have stated them, I made claims of the form 'religious beliefs are always ...' But if we only assert that religious beliefs normally or usually have the relevant feature (falsehood or harmfulness) and the argument as a whole is otherwise sound, we are left with the conclusion that religion normally or usually entails failure

to be maximally rational. This is still a substantial and interesting claim. Freud definitely wants to claim something stronger than that *some* religious beliefs entail such failure. He clearly thinks that the balance of rationality is against religion, which requires at least 'normally' or 'usually'. And in fact he probably believed it was 'always'.

Freud may well have held *both* that it is in general beneficial to hold true beliefs and that it is in general harmful to hold false ones. (Indeed, if we see all false beliefs as the negations of true ones and *vice versa*, then it seems inevitable that if one holds the first one must also hold the second.) However, we have already shown that he can have a valid argument even without this claim. Can he still have a valid argument even if we assume that true beliefs are sometimes harmful? Yes, version 2 is just such an argument. But it might appear that there is a paradox here. If we allow that some religious beliefs may be true, how can it be harmful to hold those beliefs? Even if it is not always beneficial to hold true beliefs and not always positively harmful to hold false ones, could it ever be positively harmful to hold true ones? One might say that it can sometimes be harmful to hold true beliefs by reference to our 'snowbound' example. If the person had believed - correctly - that the snow was not about to melt, that person might have despaired and died.

However, it is specifically religious beliefs that we are concerned with. Some of Freud's arguments to the effect that religious beliefs are harmful do not appear to be affected by whether those beliefs are true or false. For example, there is what I will call the 'bad habits' argument. As we saw in 2.1, Freud thought that a defining feature of religious beliefs was that they are based on faith rather than evidence. He could further argue that believing things purely on the basis of faith is a bad habit and that, like all bad habits, it becomes more deeply ingrained the more we do it. This could be the case even if the belief happens to be true, for if I believe something purely on faith and it happens to be true, I just happen to have been lucky in that particular instance. In general, (this argument might run) if I believe things purely on faith, most of those things will turn out to be false. Further, (it might go on) if

I have the habit of accepting things on faith, the chances of my being grossly misled, for example by confidence tricksters or charismatic paranoids, are increased. Therefore, in accepting any belief purely on faith, we are making a bad habit more deeply ingrained. By a 'bad habit' here is meant one that decreases one's chances of survival and happiness. So, if we make a bad habit more deeply ingrained, we decrease our own chances of survival and happiness. So, in taking things purely on faith, we are decreasing our chances of survival and happiness. For the moment I am not saying whether I think this is a sound argument in itself (although I will address this question later on). My immediate concern is with the fact that there is at least one argument that does not appear to be affected by whether the beliefs in question are true or false - but is it so affected?

A religious person might reply that, in the case of religious beliefs at any rate, it is affected. The argument just given seems only to make reference to 'this world'. But if certain religious beliefs are true, there is a Heaven and a Hell and admission to Heaven is only possible if one has the right set of beliefs. God *rewards* faith, and this reward outweighs any possible hardship that one might endure in this life. Conversely the punishment incurred by non-belief outweighs any possible benefits that might result from the good habit of believing things only on evidence. Depending on whether God annihilates the unfaithful, as some religions claim, or sends them to Hell as others claim, the wrong beliefs can be said to affect either one's prospects of survival or of comfort in the longest-term. So, according to the criteria Freud has set up, we are maximally rational if and only if we have the relevant true beliefs.

One reply to this argument might be to suggest that, for all we know, reward or punishment in the next life might be based not on having the relevant true beliefs, but on ethical merit alone. In this case, the non-believer would be better off, all other things being equal (i.e. assuming ethical merit is equal), since he has a better time in this life owing to his good habit of not taking things on faith alone, and the long-term outcome is the same in either

case. It could even be the case that God values intellectual honesty and genuine striving to understand, wherever that leads, so that those who after careful consideration cannot bring themselves to believe, are favoured over those who self-deceivingly suppress any doubts they might have. However, this does not answer the religious challenge, as what is being proposed is that *if certain religious beliefs are true*, then the effect of holding certain religious beliefs is such and such. It is therefore no answer to this to say that if those beliefs are not true, something different follows. Let us then grant that God rewards those who adhere to one true religion, whatever that religion is. Even if this is so, it has to be admitted that there are many different religions, including many in which Heaven operates this 'members only' door policy. Since only *at most* one of these religions can be true, it follows that adherents of all other religions are just as damned as adherents of none. This means that, in the case of all religions but one, faithful adherence does not save a person from damnation. If the claim being defended is that *most* religious beliefs, rather than all religious beliefs, are harmful, then pointing out that in the case of one true religion its adherents reap the enormous benefits of salvation in the next life, does not damage this claim.

One final recourse is to say that God punishes those who do not adhere to *any* religion, and rewards those who do. If this is so, then indeed the claim that religion maximises one's chances of survival and happiness is true. It has to be admitted that it is a logical possibility. There is no reply to this except to say that, if we are dealing in logical possibilities, it is also a logical possibility that God punishes believers and rewards non-believers. Leaving these last two possibilities aside, however, all that is needed to uphold the claim that religion usually reduces one's chances of survival and happiness, is to show that religious beliefs are very likely to harm their holders in this life.

Freud assumes that religious beliefs in general are false, and that there is no life after death in which they can make any difference. But if the main argument in the last paragraph is correct, any weakness in these claims does not weaken the argument that religions are normally or usually harmful. To

uphold this claim, all Freud need do is establish that religious beliefs damage our prospects of survival and happiness in this life. This is exactly what he sets out to do in *The Future of an Illusion* and other works.

4.3 HOW MIGHT FREUD ESTABLISH THAT RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ARE HARMFUL?

Freud's attacks on religion on the grounds of its harmful effects may be found most fully developed in *The Future of an Illusion* and the lecture 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*'. He explicitly acknowledges his debt to anti-religious writers of the past, although he does not name any. In 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*' he says: 'I am aware that you can find everything I said to you said better elsewhere. Nothing in it is new.' (SE 22, 169) In the tradition of anti-religious writing there are a number of arguments to the effect that religious beliefs are harmful. I will list six in total. With the possible exception of the sixth, they are all familiar to anyone who has read the 'classics' of anti-religious literature - such as Diderot, Voltaire and Russell - so I take it that I do not need to explain them in great detail. The sixth is the only one that Freud claims is distinctively psychoanalytic. However, it is possible to give a psychoanalytic twist to some of the others, and Freud sometimes explicitly does so. Freud at one time or another explicitly or implicitly endorses, in at least their non-psychoanalytic versions, all the arguments I give here, with the possible exception of (2).

(1) The 'moral effects' argument: Religion causes fanatical intolerance of others, and has led among other things to crusades, inquisitions, censorship and suppression of healthy sexual impulses. Further, religion causes people to adapt an unquestioning attitude to the prevailing moral attitudes of their particular social milieu, and so prevents 'moral progress', by which is presumably meant beneficial changes in people's moral outlook.

Freud would have probably have endorsed all the points in this argument. In *The Future of an Illusion* he says that religious-based moral commands:

invalidate one another by giving contrary demands at different times and places, but apart from this they show every sign of human inadequacy. It is easy to recognise in them things that can only be the product of short-sighted apprehensiveness or an expression of selfishly narrow interests or a conclusion based on false premises. (SE 21, 41)

As we saw in 2.1, Freud thought that an unquestioning attitude to ethical rules was a typical feature of religions; here we see that he believed many of those rules display short-sightedness or selfishly narrow interests.

(2) The '(irrational) fears' argument: Religions typically lead to fear of Hell, fear of evil spirits, divine retribution and so on, and in this way make life more uncomfortable than it would be without them. Some anti-religionists would characterise these fears as irrational, by which is sometimes meant just 'unfounded', but which sometimes also means that they are caused by, and also reinforce, psychopathological states.

(3) The '(irrational) guilt' argument: Religion causes people to be plagued with guilt about things they would not otherwise feel guilty about, such as sexual urges, intellectual doubts or failure to observe rituals. This makes life more uncomfortable for the believer than for the non-believer. As with religious fears, some anti-religionists characterise these guilt feelings as irrational.

Freud was quick to claim similarities between religious guilt and neurotic guilt, and clearly believed that both kinds cause the person needless suffering. In 'Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices' he says that with a neurotic 'any deviation from the ceremonial is visited by intolerable anxiety, which obliges him at once to make his omission good.' (SE 9, 118) And a little further on he says: 'The sense of guilt of obsessional neurotics finds its

counterpart in the protestations of pious people that they know at heart that they are miserable sinners;' (Ibid., 123)

(4) The 'inconsistency' argument: Many religious beliefs are either internally contradictory, or inconsistent with what *prima facie* appears to be the case. Examples of the first might be: God is both one person and three persons; an example of the second might be: prayer works, or God is benevolent. (For the moment, I am not saying that I agree that these are examples of inconsistency.) Furthermore, with the advance of scientific and historical knowledge, more and more religious beliefs (e.g. the story of the Flood, which is still believed by some fundamentalist Christians) are seen to be inconsistent with what we now have good reason to believe to be the case. Thus, accepting religious beliefs requires 'doublethink', which is psychologically harmful and a bad habit.

Freud frequently alludes to the inconsistency of religious beliefs with other generally held beliefs, or with other things we have good reason to believe. For example he says: 'in the long run nothing can withstand reason and experience, and the contradiction which religion offers to both is all too palpable.' (SE 21, 54) Also: 'What first gave rise to suspicion and scepticism [regarding religion] were its tales of miracles, for they contradicted everything that had been taught by sober observation' He also alludes to the inconsistency of religious beliefs *inter alia*: 'When a man has once brought himself to accept uncritically all the absurdities that religious doctrines put before him and even to overlook the contradictions between them (etc.)' (SE 21, 48)

To this Freud would add that the holding of contradictory beliefs is a distinctive feature of unconscious mental activity, and is both formative of, and closely allied to, the ambivalent attitudes which are characteristic of obsessional neurotics. This we saw in 1.4.1.

(5) The 'bad habits' argument: It is a good habit to believe things on the basis of evidence rather than on the basis of (for example), wishes, arguments from authority, or inertia. If this seems too much to demand of all our beliefs,

then we might say that at least it is a good habit to refrain from believing things that flagrantly contradict evidence. Religious beliefs are either insufficiently supported by evidence or contradicted by evidence. (I showed in 2.1 that Freud viewed this as a defining feature of religion.) Believing things purely on the basis of faith is a bad habit and, like all bad habits, it becomes more deeply ingrained the more times we do it. This is the case even if the belief happens to be true for, if I believe something purely on faith and it happens to be true, I just happen to have been lucky in that particular instance. In general, if I believe things purely on faith, most of those things will turn out to be false. Further, if I have the habit of accepting things on faith, the chances of my being grossly misled, for example by confidence tricksters, are increased. Therefore, in accepting any belief purely on faith, we are making a bad habit more deeply ingrained. By a 'bad habit' here is meant one that decreases one's chances of survival and happiness. So, if we make a bad habit more deeply ingrained, we decrease our own chances of survival and happiness. So, in taking things purely on faith, we are decreasing our chances of survival and happiness.

In *The Future of an Illusion* Freud suggests that religion causes intellectual 'atrophy':

Think of the depressing contrast between the radiant intelligence of a healthy child and the feeble intellectual powers of the average adult. Can we be quite certain that it is not precisely religious education which bears a large share of the blame for this relative atrophy? (SE 21, 47)

But elsewhere, as we have seen in 2.3.1 and 4.2, Freud likens religion to an immature psychological state. So in saying that it is children who are radiantly intelligent and adults who, as a result of religion, are mentally atrophied, is he not contradicting himself? Not necessarily. What he might have in mind is the intellectual achievements of a healthy child, which though limited are on the right track and not inhibited, contrasted with the stunted and inhibited intellectual achievements of a neurotic adult. Because of

religion, Freud claims, most adults turn out to be in this stunted intellectual state. A little further on he says: 'When a man has once brought himself to accept uncritically all the absurdities that religious doctrines put before him and even to overlook the contradictions between them, we need not be greatly surprised at the weakness of his intellect.' (Ibid., 48) What Freud is suggesting is that the weakness of intellect is a *result* of this uncritical acceptance. Furthermore, 'the effect of religious consolations may be likened to a narcotic ...' (Ibid., 49). Freud might add that in practice the only alternative to believing things on the basis of evidence is believing things on the basis of wish-fulfilment. (See 1.4.4.) This, he would claim, is a bad habit characteristic of neurotics.

(6) The 'parental fixation' argument: A person who adheres to religious beliefs is in an analogous position to a person who is too dependent emotionally on one or both parents. Such a person is incapable, while they remain in this state, of developing into a fully mature, individuated human being, able to think independently or interact properly with other people. This is a bad thing even from the point of view of the person's own happiness.

In 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*' Freud says:

The last contribution to the criticism of the religious *Weltanschauung* was effected by psychoanalysis, by showing how religion originated from the helplessness of children and by tracing its contents to the survival into maturity of the wishes and needs of childhood. (SE 22, 167)

Furthermore, part of the three-stage analogy in *Totem and Taboo* is that 'the religious stage would correspond to the stage of object-choice of which the characteristic is a child's attachment to his parents; ...' (SE 13, 90). As we saw already, Freud claimed that emotional dependence on one's parents is harmful.

* * *

We must bear in mind that Freud wants to say that religion is a manifestation of the pleasure principle, in contrast with the '*Weltanschauung* of science', which is a manifestation of the reality principle. This is a claim about the 'aetiology' of religion and, if the interpretation I gave in 1.9 of the two principles is correct, a claim about the effects of religion. If my arguments of Chapter 3 hold water, then we have good reason to reject the aetiological claim for many cases of religious belief. In brief, Freud needs to establish that religion somehow involves choosing a short-term, unreliable source of pleasure over a more long-term, reliable one. This requires that there be available, at least in principle, some alternative to the beliefs which are held to be a manifestation of the pleasure principle. If no such alternative is available, then a given mode of behaviour, even if it leads to harmful consequences, cannot be a manifestation of the pleasure-principle. Of course, in virtually any situation we can imagine, there is almost always going to be some alternative course of action or belief available in principle, even if that alternative is something equally unsatisfactory. In the case of religious beliefs it is possible in principle to suspend judgement - even if, as I argued in Chapter 3, this is often not a realistically feasible alternative. In any event, is religion more harmful to believers than the alternatives? In asking this we need to compare the likely effects of religious beliefs with the likely effects of whatever the alternatives are - not just talk about the effects of religious beliefs. Looked at this way, the first two arguments at least can be seen to be two-edged swords.

I do not want to make my arguments against Freud rely on the claim that religious beliefs are true, or even possibly true. Rather, my aim is to point to weaknesses in his claims which are there even if religious beliefs are in general false.

Another line of argument I am not taking is to appeal to the Kierkegaardian view that what is essential to religion is not the holding of any particular beliefs but an attitude of loyalty or adherence to a cause or a way of life. I am no Kierkegaardian scholar, but it seems to me that one can cut this line of argument short in the following way. One can say that on this

understanding of religion, a devotion to football would count as a religion. On the other hand, if what is distinctively religious is devotion to some figure like God, or Jesus, then this surely entails holding some beliefs. In any event, it seems clear to me that many believers hold their beliefs to be *true* in the same sense as one holds the belief that Australia exists to be true. Even Buddhists, who are often mentioned as a purported counterexample to this claim, believe that there is such a thing as a state of enlightenment. So even if Kierkegaard's particular type of belief does escape Freud's criticisms, it would only take with it the attitudes of a minority of 'refined' religious believers. It would still be open to us to adapt a view analogous to Meissner's - that Freud's characterisation of religion applies to the majority of religious believers. I have argued in the previous chapter that if by 'Freud's characterisation of religion' we mean his claim that religion is engendered by irrational motives at the individual psychological level, then the Meissnerian modification of it is likely to be false. Here I want to argue that it is also likely to be false if we take Freud's characterisation of religion to be that it is a manifestation of the unmodified pleasure principle.

4.3.1 The 'Moral Effects' Argument

Firstly, it must be said that the effects listed here can only strictly be considered *moral* effects on *some* views of morality - specifically, only on those views of morality which presuppose that a person doing what is right according to their own lights can still be acting immorally. Utilitarianism might be an example of such a view. However, we can still accept that to promote ethical attitudes that produce otherwise avoidable harmful effects is to do harm. So the argument is not affected by this consideration.

Religious believers can counter the argument by saying that, in some instances, religious belief can help to make people more moral, even to do acts which non-religious people would acknowledge as productive of good effects. Love of God, or fear of Hell, can be highly effective incentives to good

behaviour. Further, they may argue that intolerance is neither confined to, nor universal among, religious believers. Some states in history which were officially atheistic, actively persecuted religious people, as well as being generally intolerant in other ways. Some religions, such as Taoism if Raymond Smullyan's book on it is to be trusted (Smullyan 1977), actively promote tolerance. Further still, some people have fought against tyranny on grounds of their religious beliefs, and liberal reforms such as the abolition of slavery have been at least in part inspired by a religious-derived belief in the ethical value of all human beings. Such a belief is greatly emphasised, for example, in the teachings of most forms of Christianity. If there are Christians who do not practice it, perhaps some factor other than their religion is to blame. It can be argued that 'moral progress' cannot take place without the aid of some ethical beliefs which are viewed as foundational, and religion is capable of providing, and has in practice often provided, such beliefs. It is at least as capable of doing so as, for example, humanism. It can of course also be argued that if religion can sometimes prevent changes in ethical attitudes which would be beneficial, it can also prevent ones which would be harmful. Further still, the religious justifications for crusades, inquisitions and so forth, can be removed without removing everything that is distinctively religious (even in Freud's restricted sense) about a given belief-system.

The conclusion of this is: religious people are sometimes inspired by their beliefs to harmful acts, but they are also sometimes inspired by their beliefs to perform beneficial acts, and refrain from harmful ones. Here I am talking about acts which one does not have to be religious to regard as harmful or beneficial. So for 'beneficial acts' we need not read 'acts such as praying for somebody's soul'. Rather, for 'beneficial acts' we may read 'acts such as helping the poor or the sick', and for 'harmful acts' we may read 'acts such as keeping slaves'. If being inspired to do something is a causal process, then we have to say that without those beliefs, those people might not have acted as they did. On the other hand if, as Grünbaum claims, religious beliefs

make no difference to people's morals one way or the other (Grünbaum 1992, 1993-4, 1995), then the argument from moral effects cannot be used to support the claim that religious beliefs are harmful, only to support the claim that they are not beneficial. To establish that religious beliefs are harmful by this route, we would need to establish that people with religious beliefs behave worse than they otherwise would. This is a tall order, and as I have shown there is *prima facie* evidence against it.

Of course, the trouble with both sides of this dispute, as I have presented them here, is that they rely on loose inferences from features of religion to what its effects might be. This is a poor substitute for empirical evidence correlating religious belief, or the lack of it, with behaviour. Certainly Freud presents no such evidence.

4.3.2 The '(Irrational) Fears' Argument

While religion may create fears it may also help to soothe other fears, as well as other unpleasant emotions. For example, belief in life after death must surely help people to cope with fear of death, as well as comforting the bereaved; belief in the efficacy of prayer must sometimes help one to deal with feelings of helplessness in the face of life's uncertainties; belief in a loving God may allay feelings of loneliness and purposelessness. Conversely, atheism or even agnosticism may make the uncertainty and apparent purposelessness of life harder to bear. Freud acknowledges much of this:

Science can be no match for it [religion] when it soothes the fear that men feel of the dangers and vicissitudes of life, when it assures them of a happy ending and offers them comfort in unhappiness. It is true that science can teach us how to avoid certain dangers and that there are some sufferings which it can successfully combat; ... ; but there are many situations in which it must leave a man to his suffering and can only advise him to submit to it. (SE 22, 161)

But he might appeal to the 'bad habits' argument or one of the other arguments to counter it. Leaving this aside for the moment, we can say that, once again, this argument fails to be decisive against religion.

We can put a new spin on the argument by saying that religion does not just create fears but *irrational* fears. Atheism may increase fear of death, or of loneliness, but these are *rational* fears, at least if atheism is true. Fearing things that we ought to fear is not harmful to us; indeed as a general rule it is probably beneficial, e.g. fear of poisonous snakes, whereas irrational fears create inconveniences, possibly even very serious inconveniences. 'Irrational' here presumably means something like 'unfounded' or 'unmerited by the situation'. For example, suppose I have a fear of heights which makes it impossible for me to go to the upper floors of tall buildings. This is unaffected by assurances that the tall buildings are unlikely to spontaneously fall down, by the fact that the glass in the windows is so thick that I couldn't possibly fall through it, or by the presence of large sturdy guard-rails in exposed high places. This fear may diminish my quality of life, in that it may prevent me from enjoying the breathtaking view from the top of the Empire State Building, or from attending exhibitions or conferences if they take place high up in a tall building. One can imagine similar petty inconveniences being caused by religious fears - as in a recent example (reported in the *Guardian*, July 29, 1991) of orthodox Jews who could not use menthol cough remedies because they did not know if all the ingredients were kosher or not.

For these to be irrational fears, they need to be unfounded. However, they are founded in a particular set of beliefs. If these beliefs are true then the fears are rational in the sense of 'merited by the situation', and they are rational in the sense of 'well-founded' if I hold the beliefs for the best possible reasons. If I believe for the best possible reasons that Hell exists, then it is rational for me to fear Hell. But, as I argued in Chapter 3, in real life 'the best possible reasons' encompasses such reasons as 'because it is the best, most consistent story we currently have', and 'because the acknowledged experts

believe it', and the beliefs that satisfy such criteria can vary from culture to culture.

Calling a fear irrational inevitably raises questions about what the fear is based on, since if it is based on beliefs which are not themselves irrational, then it is not an irrational fear. This leaves us back with the question of: what is the effect of holding these beliefs as against holding different beliefs? Even if we accept for the sake of argument that it is generally harmful to have irrational beliefs (and irrational fears), we are then saddled with the task of establishing that the beliefs are irrational. We could save ourselves this task by simply looking at the effect of the beliefs and their associated fears.

The analogy between phobia *versus* rational fear on the one hand, and fear peculiar to believers *versus* fear shared by non-believers on the other, does not hold if we look at it from this perspective. Many of the fears which religion can help to allay are fears of things we cannot do anything about. Fear of poisonous snakes is helpful to us only because we can take steps to avoid poisonous snakes. Fears of death or loneliness may seem to be analogous in that they can lead us to take steps to avoid premature death, or find ways to alleviate loneliness. But we cannot avoid the fact that we are going to die eventually, or that sometimes we can do nothing about our loneliness. So in the case of such unavoidable evils, fearing them does us no good at all, and probably makes things worse. Moreover, religions do not normally prevent people from taking action to avoid premature death, etc. (Admittedly some minority religions, such as Christian Science, do.) Certainly, their preventing people from doing so is not an intrinsic part of religion as such. We could eliminate the parts of any religion that entail such injunctions without eliminating everything that is religious about it. This is so even if we accept Freud's limited definition of religion. On the other hand, religion might help someone to bear unavoidable evils the fear of which would make an atheist or agnostic's life more difficult. As for the petty inconveniences brought about by religious fears, these need to be weighed in the overall balance of increased fears here, reduced fears there.

Once again, a lot of empirical data would need to be gathered to support the claim that on balance religion produces more fear, and hence more needless suffering, than either atheism or agnosticism.

4.3.3 The '(Irrational) Guilt' Argument

Guilt stems from the belief that one has done something ethically wrong, and hence it is a product of having ethics rather than of being religious. If guilt is an integral part of, or a necessary by-product of having ethics at all, and having ethics is in general a good thing, then either guilt is itself a good thing or, at worst, something that we must put up with for the sake of a good thing. I am not going to attempt to argue the case for ethics being a good thing. On the other hand, if guilt is not integral or necessary to ethics, it is still not clear that it is more endemic to religious ethical systems than to non-religious ones. There are, for example, the well-known phenomena of middle-class guilt induced by socialism, and male guilt induced by feminism.

We may want to say that guilt involves the feeling that one has done wrong *to someone*, rather than just that one has violated an ethical code. In non-religious ethics, there are still other people and animals to feel one has done wrong towards. We may say that religion increases such feelings because any violation of its ethical codes implies offending God.

There is however a further factor which needs to be taken into account. Any religion that has a sufficiently well-defined ethics to make one feel guilty, also has the ability to give people a fairly definite ethical orientation. It is a commonplace (which is not say that it is therefore true) that if one wants a fully satisfactory, ultimate answer to the questions: 'why is it right to do *x*?' 'why is it wrong to do *y*?', religion can provide it. That is not to say that religion is the only thing that can provide it, or that religion provides an answer in every particular ethical dilemma, or that the answers religion provides are always the most desirable. But for questions like 'why is murder wrong?', 'why is stealing wrong?', the answer 'because it offends God' is a

short and for many people highly satisfactory answer. By satisfactory here I mean *psychologically* satisfactory, not necessarily satisfactory in the sense of being able to stand up to critical scrutiny. So any alleged philosophical difficulties with basing ethics on religion - such as the Euthyphro dilemma - do not alter the fact that for many believers it is a satisfactory basis. Religious believers are likely to have a greater certainty about ethical matters than non-believers. This may give the religious believer a clear conscience in situations where the non-believer might be left wondering whether they did the right thing. In saying this I am of course presupposing that religious believers take a less questioning attitude towards their ethical codes than non-religious people, but the assumption that religion increases the burden of guilt also relies on this being the case. If they do not tend to adopt this unquestioning attitude, then they will not have the ethical certainty, but they are also less likely to be burdened with guilt. The ethical certainty may mean that people will do destructive things in the name of religion, but as I argued while discussing the 'moral effects' argument, it may by the same token motivate them to do beneficial things.

This factor of ethical certainty also breaks down the analogy that Freud wants to establish between religious guilt and neurotic guilt. Neurotic guilt, according to Freud's own account, tends to transfer freely from one thing to another along a loose chain of associations. On Freud's theory, this happens because the ostensible reasons for the neurotic's guilt are not the real reasons for it. The transfer of guilt onto a false reason serves the unconscious motive of preventing the real reason from being known. If an attempt is made to expiate the guilt on the assumption that the ostensible reason is the real one, it is bound to fail. The guilt persists and is transferred on to a different object. This is harmful to the neurotics themselves because it causes them unnecessary suffering - they are guilty about something they need not be guilty about (according to Freud, both the ostensible reasons and the real reason for the guilt are usually very trivial things), and their efforts to expiate the guilt are doomed to be futile as long as they remain neurotics.

Let us say that religious believers have guilty feelings stemming from the belief that they have offended God. If they believe God exists, and that certain acts they have committed offend God, the guilt follows smoothly from those beliefs. If my arguments in Chapter 3 are correct, then for at least the great majority of religious believers, there is every reason to believe that these beliefs do not need to be traced back to any further psychological factor. Further, it is up to Freud to show that the measures taken by religious believers to expiate guilt are ineffective. If a religious person's guilty feelings do transfer along loose associative paths, and if this is supposed to be a sure indicator of neurosis, then this is because the person is neurotic, not because the person is religious. Or at least, to say that it is because the person is religious is to make the question-begging claim that religion is a neurosis. I have already given reasons for believing this claim to be false.

The question of whether a certain state of guilt is rational or irrational can be answered in a way analogous to the question of whether a certain fear is irrational. That is, a state of guilt is rational if (a) it follows from one's overall set of beliefs and desires and (b) those beliefs and desires are themselves rational. Clearly, guilt is only religious guilt if it follows from religious beliefs (although it may still be so described if these beliefs operate along with other factors). It is religious *insofar* as it follows from religious beliefs. To say that guilt, insofar as it is religious, is irrational, is to say that it fails to be either (a) or (b). But if it fails to be (a), this is to say that guilt, insofar as it follows from religious beliefs, does not follow from one's overall set of beliefs and desires. But if religious beliefs are part of one's overall set of beliefs and desires, then this is absurd. (We could counter this by saying that one's religious beliefs are inconsistent with one's other beliefs, but I will deal with this under the heading of the 'inconsistency' argument below.) As I have already argued at length (Chapter 3), in a great many cases religious belief is perfectly rational.

One may want to say that guilt never *follows* from any other set of beliefs and desires, and hence is never rational. One may also say that guilt in itself is

useless or even harmful in that it makes life uncomfortable for the person undergoing it, while not really making it any more likely that the person will behave any better. Some might claim that experiencing copious amounts of guilt over something one has done is simply a lazy person's substitute for actually doing something to rectify things. Whatever the merits of these claims, they do not by themselves show that religion does harm by engendering guilt. This is not rectified by making inferences from certain characteristic features of religions - such as the fact that they tend to give us codes of ethics that are held to be absolute and unalterable - to a claim that religion produces guilt. Even if the relevant features are universal among religions, they may, as I have argued, do as much good as harm. What is needed is to show that religion does in fact produce more guilt than its absence, and that it does not in the process do any good which it could not have done without producing the guilt. As I have tried to show, there is *prima facie* evidence against this. Even so, more definite empirical evidence is needed. A further claim may be made that while guilt which is justified by religious beliefs need not be considered irrational, perhaps religion somehow increases one's proneness to guilty feelings *in general*, and thus increases the likelihood that one will suffer irrational feelings of guilt. This also sounds like something that could be settled only by empirical means.

4.3.4 The 'Inconsistency' Argument

There are two ways this argument can go. Firstly, we might say that it is harmful to hold inconsistent beliefs because of undesirable psychological effects. Secondly, we might say that it is harmful to hold inconsistent beliefs because at least some of those beliefs must be false.

The first argument can only be applied to religious believers whose beliefs are clearly inconsistent with other things they believe. By 'clearly inconsistent' I mean 'such that the inconsistency is obvious to the person holding the belief unless that person is practising self-deception'. Why do I

say that the argument can only be applied if this is the case? This can be answered by considering the questions: What are the psychological ill-effects of holding inconsistent beliefs supposed to be? And, how is the inconsistency supposed to give rise to those ill-effects? The answer to both questions is something like this: it is psychologically impossible for a healthy person to believe something of the form ' P is the case and P is not the case'. Freud's spin on this is to add that this is only true of the conscious (or preconscious) mind. In the unconscious mind contradictions can exist without any difficulty. If a contradiction becomes conscious, the mentally healthy person will simply reject one or other side of it, or resolve it by preserving elements of both in a new, non-contradictory set of beliefs. But a person may want to keep both sides of the contradiction as they are. So such a person, if a contradiction becomes conscious, or threatens to become conscious, either represses one side of it, which continues to be believed in the unconscious, or represses *both* sides and lets them coexist in the unconscious. Either way, according to Freud, psychological conflicts will arise, leading to neurosis. The harmful self-deception that arises from holding inconsistent beliefs and desires is distinct from any harmfulness that might attach to holding false beliefs about the world, since it arises equally, as Freud convincingly argues, from holding mutually inconsistent *desires*, and it is the same harm regardless of which of the inconsistent set of beliefs is true. It is the same even if we have no way of determining which is true and which false. The harmful effects arise because of conflicts between the beliefs *inter alia*, rather than between the beliefs and states of affairs in the world.

One does not have to be a Freudian, however, to accept that self-deception is a bad thing. But to be *self-deceived*, even if it is by one's unconscious, one must be capable, with all the knowledge and intelligence one has at one's disposal, of recognising that a contradiction is present. Consider this example: you have never heard of Pythagoras' theorem, and one day someone asks you: do you think it is possible to draw a right-angled triangle on a plane surface, whose lines are of length 2 inches, 2 inches, and 3

inches. You think about it and, seeing no reason why not, you answer 'yes'. But Pythagoras' theorem states that it is impossible. Further, it is possible to state the proof of Pythagoras' theorem in the form of a *reductio* (i.e. it can be shown that assuming the negation of the theorem leads to a contradiction). This means that, implicitly at least, you believe a contradiction. But does it mean that you are self-deceiving? No, and the reason is that you are not aware - even unconsciously - of the contradiction. If this were not a factor to be taken into consideration, then people who happened to believe mathematical falsehoods, even very recondite ones, would be guilty of self-deception.

On the other hand, psychological ill-effects such as self-deception may be incurred by religious beliefs which are not, strictly speaking, contradictions, but which in a looser, informal sense, would be described as contradictions. I am thinking of beliefs of the type: if x is true then it is *unlikely* that y is also true, but I believe both x and y . Or, if I believe x then it is *inappropriate* for me to believe y , but I believe both x and y . For example, suppose I was present at the scene when some alleged miracle took place, and clearly saw that nothing extraordinary happened at all. It is claimed, for example, that some 'holy man' levitated at such and such a place and time. However, I was present when this incident is supposed to have taken place, and clearly witnessed the holy man claim that he was going to levitate, but remain on the ground the whole time. Supposing, however, that subsequently the church to which I belong officially declares that this miracle took place. Being a believer who accepts the authority of official church teaching, I then accept the story as true, albeit after experiencing considerable misgivings. Whether this kind of thing actually happens or not is beside the point. The point I want to make here is that, although 'I have good first-hand evidence for disbelieving x , and yet I believe x ', is not, strictly speaking, a contradiction, it does clearly involve self-deception, and is probably not much different psychologically from believing P and not- P even though one is aware of the contradiction. In fact, it can be treated as a clear case of believing P and not- P

if we say that people implicitly hold the belief that the direct evidence of their senses is more reliable than the pronouncements of people who were not even there when the alleged event happened. Thus, even if I repudiate (or repress) the evidentially well-founded belief that the holy man did not actually levitate, in doing so I am acting against the more general belief; my belief that the holy man did levitate clearly contradicts the general belief. On the other hand, we can say that holding such clearly contradictory beliefs always involves self-deception, if we say that we normally know that we should not do this. If this is so, then we are either choosing to ignore this belief or pretending that the clear contradiction is not really there.

There is no *logical* reason why I cannot simply rationalise away the apparently glaring contradiction in a case such as this. I can say, for example, that the eyes of pure faith would have seen the holy man levitate and my faith therefore must not be pure enough. This is an act of self-deception if and only if *by my own standards* it is. In saying this I do not want to imply an out-and-out relativism about standards. One can accept that some standards of justifying beliefs (or of declaring beliefs consistent) are better than others, or even that there is one and only one correct standard, without having to say that if a person fails to meet that standard, that person is self-deceiving. Say for the sake of argument that some people are failing to meet the 'one right standard', this failure may carry penalties in itself, but for this failure to involve self-deception, they have to be failing to meet standards which they themselves recognise, however good or bad those standards may be. If Freud wishes to claim that there is one standard of justification which, not only *ought* everyone to hold, but everyone *does* hold (even implicitly), then he has to show that this is so, and that religious beliefs normally fail to meet that standard. That he believed this is suggested when he says:

Scientific thinking does not differ in its nature from the normal activity of thought, which all of us, believers and unbelievers, employ in looking after our affairs in ordinary life. ... It is asking a great deal of a person who has learnt to conduct his ordinary affairs in accordance with the

rules of experience and with regard to reality, to suggest that he shall hand over the care of what are precisely his most intimate interests to an agency which claims as its privilege freedom from the precepts of rational thinking. And as regards the protection which religion promises its believers, I think none of us would be so much as prepared to enter a motor-car if its driver announced that he drove, unperturbed by traffic regulations, in accordance with the impulses of his soaring imagination. (SE 22, 170-71)

But it is up to Freud to show that ordinary believers think that that is what religious leaders are doing. A consequence of my arguments in Chapter 3 is that it is likely that many religious believers do not see things this way, even unconsciously.

What about the second strand of the inconsistency argument, that holding inconsistent beliefs is harmful in itself, quite apart from its psychological effects? This can be treated as a special case of the claim that holding false beliefs is harmful. Why is this so? Because if one accepts a correspondence view of truth, as Freud does, then for two things to be true means that two states of affairs in the world are the case, and for two contradictory things to be true means that the same state of affairs both is and is not the case, which is an impossibility. At least one of the two things must be false. So to believe two contradictory propositions entails believing at least one false proposition. What we are concerned with is Freud's claim that religious beliefs are harmful. An argument based on the contradictory nature of those beliefs might go as follows:

Freud's argument, version 3:

- (1) A is maximally rational *iff* A does what increases A's chances of survival and happiness, and does not do what decreases those chances.
- (2) Having true beliefs always increases A's chances of survival and happiness, and having false beliefs always decreases those chances.

(3) Therefore (from 1 and 2) A is maximally rational *iff* A has true beliefs and does not have false beliefs.

(4) If A has beliefs which are inconsistent with each other, then A has at least one false belief.

(5) Religious beliefs are always either inconsistent *inter alia*, or inconsistent with other beliefs which the person holds.

(6) Therefore (from 5) having religious beliefs always entails having beliefs which are inconsistent with each other.

(7) Therefore (from 4 and 6) if A has religious beliefs, A has at least one false belief.

(8) Therefore (from 3 and 7) if A has religious beliefs, A fails to be maximally rational.

To make the premises of this argument more plausible, we might substitute 'normally or usually' for 'always' in (2), (5), and (6). However, this would make the argument invalid. In this type of argument, 'normally or usually S is P' is equivalent to 'some S is P'. This means that (3) must be changed to 'sometimes those who have false beliefs fail to be maximally rational'; (7) changes to 'sometimes those who have religious beliefs have at least one false belief'. But from 'some S is P' and 'some P is Q' we cannot conclude anything. Even if it is 'almost always', it could still be the case that those falsehoods that we perforce hold in virtue of religious beliefs are among the small number of falsehoods which are harmless. In fact, for this version of Freud's argument to be valid, even if only to prove 'some religious beliefs are harmful', he needs to assert that having false beliefs always decreases A's chances of survival and happiness. But he can get away with asserting that 'religious beliefs are usually or normally inconsistent.'

We may want to allow that 'a belief's being false entails that there is a high probability of its being harmful' can act as an 'all S is P' type premise. That is, even if not all false beliefs are actually harmful, yet in all cases, if a belief is false, there is a good chance of its being harmful. So 'being something

that has a good chance of being harmful' may be taken as a feature of all false beliefs. Less technically, an argument of the form 'S is usually P, and P is usually Q, therefore we have good reason to suspect that S is usually Q' is, though not strictly valid, one that will be accepted as reasonable and persuasive by many people.

It can be clearly seen that this argument resembles 'Freud's argument, version 1', in that they share some premises and a conclusion. Like that argument, this argument falls prey to the weakness of the premise that all or most false beliefs are harmful. I have not, however, established that the 'most' version of this premise is false. A stronger line of criticism of this argument is to question premise (5). It is not at all clear that religious beliefs in general are normally or usually inconsistent either *inter alia*, or with other commonly held beliefs. Freud himself claims that animism is 'the most consistent and exhaustive' of the world-views which have been developed by humans (SE 13, 77). Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that the beliefs of mediaeval Christians were inconsistent *inter alia*. This is of course distinct from the question of whether those beliefs are consistent with what we now know or believe to be the case. Saying this in no way implies any relativism with regard to reality or truth. There is no anomaly in saying this: the Earth really and truly goes around the Sun, and the stars really and truly are billions of miles away, but when the mediaevals believed the Sun went around the Earth, and the stars were only a few hundred miles away, they were not being inconsistent. This reply works against all versions of the inconsistency argument, not just those that go by the 'inconsistency-implies-falsehood' route.

4.3.5 The 'Bad Habits' Argument

This argument relies on the assumption that those who believe religious doctrines do so out of 'blind faith', while those who believe, say, scientific theories do so because of evidence. Let us grant for the sake of argument that

scientific theories are generally well-supported by evidence, and religious beliefs are not. We could make 'theory which is well-supported by evidence' a definition of 'science', and 'belief which is held in spite of lack of evidence' a definition of religion. (As we saw in Chapter 2, Freud did consider this a defining feature of religious beliefs.) This would of course leave unanswered the question of what constitutes good evidential support, and it might also lead to some surprising categorisations. Let us assume these problems are surmountable, however. The answer to the bad habits argument is contained in what I have already said in Chapter 3. A distinction needs to be made between believing something for which there is good evidential support, and believing something *because of* good evidential support. The first just means that someone, somewhere has good evidential grounds for believing something. Even this is in many cases dependent on historical circumstances. In ancient Babylon there were (I take it) no evidential grounds for believing that water is composed of atoms of hydrogen and oxygen, whereas there was *some* evidence for the curvature of the Earth's surface, even if no-one actually made the inference. There being evidence for something means that the evidence is available, whether or not anyone uses it. If any societies exist today which have had no contact with western culture, then the evidence for many scientific theories is unavailable to people in those societies. The distinction between evidence being available and evidence not being available is one of degree, with large grey areas; evidence can be more or less readily available. But this should be no more surprising than the fact that empirical evidence only ever at best supports our *provisional* acceptance that such-and-such is the case.

To accept the definition of scientific theories as ones which are based on good evidence, all one needs to say is that good evidence for those theories is available, and has been used in building up the theories. That is, if one accepts this view of science at all - and Freud clearly does - a theory is still scientific even if not everyone who accepts it does so on the basis of evidence. (There is a problem of how are we to view a theory the evidence for which has

subsequently been lost, but that does not affect the argument here.) In probably the vast majority of cases, as I argued in Chapter 3, people accept scientific theories because they are accepted generally, or because they are accepted by those who are generally regarded as experts. Religious doctrines are defined as beliefs which are held in spite of lack of evidence. A distinction must be drawn which parallels that made in the preceding paragraph. Are religious beliefs held in the full knowledge that there is no evidence for them, or not? I have already argued that for many believers the answer is 'not'. It is perfectly compatible with the definition of religion just given, for a religious person to think that there is good evidence for certain religious doctrines, albeit that person must in fact be wrong in thinking this. The person may hold the doctrines for exactly the same reasons as those for which a non-scientist accepts scientific theories - general acceptance and/or the opinion of experts.

Freud could dig in his heels here and say: but believing something solely on these grounds is a bad habit, and is equally a bad habit even if the belief happens to be a good scientific theory. This would mean that the only people who are truly under the sway of the reality principle are those who hold only beliefs for which they themselves know of good evidential grounds. In practice this probably means no-one, since even scientists only know in detail about their own area of expertise. Perhaps Freud would claim that people are under the sway of the reality principle only insofar as they hold beliefs for which they know of good evidential grounds, so that most of the time everyone is under the sway of the pleasure principle. This would mean however that there is nothing about religion, as opposed to science, which makes it especially deficient in the reality principle. Freud clearly believes that there is, as we saw in 4.2. What he might have in mind is that science as practised by a small élite is the ultimate expression of the reality principle. If we accept Freud's additional posit that belief in God and so forth was never at any time justified by evidence, then religion always failed to live up to the standards of this ultimate expression of the reality principle, whereas at least science sometimes does.

However, the analogy which Freud is trying to make is supposed to be with the pleasure principle and the reality principle as manifested in everyday life. According to the theory, the pleasure principle replaces the reality principle as we stop believing what we want to believe and doing what we find it easiest to do, and start believing what there is good evidence for, and doing what, given the way the world is (as shown by this evidence), is in our best long-term interests. This can be seen as a matter of degree: we go from completely disregarding evidence to paying some heed to it, to being highly exacting in our demand for it. This last condition would be the ultimate expression of the reality principle. But would this condition maximise one's chances of survival and happiness? Hardly. In practice, one often has to make a decision before one has much evidence to go on. One may see the pursuit of truth as a worthy end in itself, but pursuit of truth is not the same as pursuit of beliefs which increase one's chances of survival and happiness. As I have already argued, the two are not even coextensive. Nor is believing falsehoods coextensive with believing that which decreases one's chances of survival and happiness. In fact, the condition of systematic doubt, as I have already argued in Chapter 2, is strongly analogous to what Freud identifies as a major feature of obsessional neurosis, and would presumably have the same ill-effects. One need not see systematic doubt as a feature of good scientific inquiry. There are times (for example, in 'The Question of a *Weltanschauung*') where Freud appears to say that it is, perhaps believing that a substantial body of science can withstand systematic doubt. But at the beginning of 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes', he seems to take the line that good scientific practice consists in accepting the best currently available theory that works. But taking this line means admitting that scientific theory is not determined by evidence alone. This in turn raises the question: what makes up the difference? Since Freud is claiming that science is an expression of the reality principle, the answer must be: consideration of what increases one's chances of survival and happiness. (This goes along with Freud's apparent view that the virtues of a reality-principle dictated outlook on things

are distinctive of science - see 2.3.2.2 and 4.2.) So at the end of all this, the onus remains on Freud to show that religious beliefs fail to do this. Merely saying that they must fail because they are based on faith alone is begging the question.

So far I have talked about cases where something is believed in the absence of evidence. What about cases where things are believed even though there is evidence to the contrary? My hypothetical case of the levitating holy man would be an example of this. Here a parallel distinction to one made earlier can be made: between believing something against which there happens to be contrary evidence, and believing something in spite of what one knows to be contrary evidence. Clearly the first without the second is no more a bad habit than believing something even though, unknown to you, there is no evidence for it. The second seems more serious, however. In this connection Freud quotes the famous saying attributed to Tertullian: 'I believe because it is absurd'. It is perfectly possible that this saying was just a rhetorical flourish on Tertullian's part - he may have been saying 'I believe what many people think is absurd', and put it the way he did out of some kind of stylistic bravado. However, it is also possible that the saying means what it appears to mean, and that absurd means 'absurd according to standards which I myself accept'. This could mean 'such that I have strong positive evidence against the belief', and this appears to be the way Freud reads it. If we further take literally Tertullian's saying not 'even though it is absurd' but '*because* it is absurd', then Freud's sarcastic remarks seem entirely apt: 'Am I obliged to believe *every* absurdity? And if not, why this one in particular?' (SE 21, 28, Freud's italics) There are examples in more recent religious literature of people making similar claims to Tertullian's (for example Kierkegaard or Unamuno). Again, it may be that these writers too are only making such claims in the rhetorical sense I have suggested, but they may not be. If they are not, then this does indeed suggest strong parallels with psychopathological modes of thinking. To show that they are evidence of the pleasure principle, one would need to show that the practice involves

sacrificing long-term reliable goods for short-term unreliable ones. Freud would claim that this follows because such sacrificing is a feature of all psychopathological modes of thinking. (Wish-fulfilment is a characteristic of unconscious thinking, as we saw in 1.2.4, and is invoked by Freud as a central part of explanation of neurosis, as we saw in 1.7.) However, even if one does not accept this view one could use a variant of the 'bad habits' argument. Believing things which one knows to be 'absurd' (for which we may read: contrary to evidence which one accepts as strong) is a bad habit, even if in each individual instance it produces no harmful results. One could also plausibly claim that it is likely to be wish-fulfilling. Unfortunately for this argument however, attitudes like Tertullian's and Kiekegaard's are far from universal among religious believers.

Finally, it has to be asked as an empirical question: does being religious make people more gullible? Is believing things on faith a habit like smoking, that is reinforced by practice? The argument as I stated it earlier presupposes that it is. We could conceivably devise experiments to discover if people who hold religious beliefs on faith are especially likely to believe other things on faith. Perhaps religion has its own psychological laws, such that standards of justification which we would not accept anywhere else we accept there. It may be that to adopt this type of double-standard is itself psychologically harmful. But this moves us away from the bad habits and back to one version of the contradictory beliefs argument which I discussed above. Adapting a double-standard in this way would be psychologically harmful in virtue of being self-deceptive. But for this to be the case, religious beliefs would have to fail to meet standards which the believers themselves recognise, however good or bad those standards may be. But not all religious believers are Tertullians.

On the other hand, a religious belief which is held on grounds which we would not normally consider adequate, might have no direct influence on our practical decisions. Perhaps for many believers it is only because religious beliefs do not influence their actions in the way more everyday beliefs do, that

they are allowed to stand without justification. To show that religious beliefs are harmful by the 'bad habits' route, Freud needs to show either that religious beliefs which are held in spite of lack of evidence are treated in the same way as well-supported beliefs, including acting on them, and that this is harmful, or that religious people are more likely than others to be gullible in general.

4.3.6 The 'Parental Fixation' Argument.

This argument relies on a parallel between the attitude of dependence of a religious believer towards God, and the condition of a person who is in some way emotionally or psychologically dependent on one or both parents. Two assumptions are needed to support this argument. Firstly, that all religions have the idea of a powerful figure (or figures) who is seen as person-like, and towards whom the believer has feelings of emotional attachment and dependence. As I argued in Chapter 2, Freud did treat this as a defining feature of religion. It is undoubtedly a feature of *many* religions, so let us take it that Freud is only talking about those religions. Secondly, since Freud is claiming that this analogy with parental fixation is a reason for saying that religion exemplifies the pleasure principle, he is assuming that being emotionally dependent on one's parents is harmful. This second claim is plausible enough. He is clearly talking about emotional dependence that continues on into adulthood. It is unlikely that too many people will dispute that this has harmful effects. Even if we grant Freud both assumptions, however, we do not get a valid argument to the effect that religion is harmful. Instead, what we get is something like this:

- (1) Being emotionally dependent on one's parents is harmful.
- (2) Being religious is analogous to being emotionally dependent on one's parents.
- (3) Therefore religion is harmful.

Clearly, the conclusion does not follow from the premises. We need to be shown in what sense religion is analogous to parental fixation. What features do the two share? And are they the features that make parental fixation harmful? If we can answer the first question and answer 'yes' to the second, then we get an argument like this:

- (1) Parental fixation produces effects x , y and z .
- (2) Anything that produces effects x , y , and z is harmful.
- (3) Religion produces effects x , y and z .
- (4) Therefore religion is harmful.

In this argument the first premise is superfluous, but the argument is valid. Of course, the first premise may not be superfluous to Freud's simultaneous project of showing that religion and neurosis have parallel aetiologies, but I have dealt with this in Chapter 3. As far as showing that religion is harmful is concerned, Freud has not told us enough about what the shared features are to support his argument.

There is another approach, however. Let us grant Freud his premise that parental fixation is harmful. His argument could be construed to mean that religion is not only analogous to parental fixation, but *reinforces* it. If he takes this line, he does not have to specify *how* exactly parental fixation is harmful, but simply take advantage of the (probably) well-founded consensus that it is. So now Freud's argument would look like this:

- (1) Parental fixation is harmful.
- (2) Religion increases parental fixation.
- (3) Therefore religion increases something that is harmful.

This argument is valid. Premise (2) looks like a fairly straightforward empirical claim. The appropriate response is to challenge Freud to produce evidence in support of it, but he has not produced any.

FINAL REMARKS

At this point, an anti-religionist who is sympathetic to Freud might say: 'but all these replies miss the central point: religious beliefs are false and it is bad to believe what is false.' However, I have already given grounds for doubting that it is always harmful to believe what is false and beneficial to believe what is true. So to defend the claim that it is bad to believe what is false, it is necessary to produce a criterion of good and bad other than benefit and harm, or simply to declare that truth is a value in itself. But to do the second would not support the claim that certain false beliefs fail to satisfy the reality principle.

We would also, of course, have to justify the claim that all religious beliefs are false - a very tall order. The issue is further complicated by the fact that Freud's ultimate point in his attack on religion is that religion is like a neurosis. However, a false belief that is held because it is well-justified according to the best available standards (such as belief in God prior to Darwin) is not neurotic. We cannot make the truth or falsehood of a belief in itself criterial for that belief's being neurotic, as I argued in Chapter 3. A belief is neurotic either because of a particular type of origin it has, or because of particular harmful effects it has compared with other available beliefs. However, as I have argued in this and the previous chapter, many religious beliefs fail to meet either of these criteria, and many non-religious beliefs meet them.

It may perhaps be argued that these are not the only reasons we can have for calling a belief neurotic. We might instead base our claim on the 'structure' of the belief. The elements making up the belief might relate to one another in a way clearly analogous to the elements in a belief already

accepted as being neurotic. For example, the belief of Christians that God the Son had to die to appease the wrath of God the Father, might be seen as analogous to the belief of obsessional neurotics that they are so sinful that they deserve to die at the hands of their fathers. Tempting though this might be, however, there would be no reason to call this belief neurotic unless it was pathological in origin or harmful in effect. For one could reach a belief which just happened to be analogous to a neurotic belief on good grounds (i.e. grounds which even Freud would accept as good), or on grounds of general acceptance. Moreover, that belief could be beneficial. There would then be no reason to call this belief neurotic.

In any event, characterising a state as (something analogous to) a neurosis entails claiming a specific type of 'aetiology' for that state. If we are in doubt as to whether Freud means to claim such an aetiology for religion, he makes the claim explicitly in *Totem and Taboo*. But if my arguments in Chapter 3 are right, then we cannot claim this aetiology for most religious believers.

There is, however, one possible escape route left to Freud, as I have already suggested. This is to say that although religious beliefs do not have a (quasi-) neurotic aetiology at the level of individual psychology, they do have such an aetiology at a group level. There are two ways in which this might be the case. One is if the belief had a neurotic aetiology when it first originated deep in the past of the human race, and that the neurotic factors which caused the belief at that time are somehow transmitted down through the generations along with the belief itself. I will call this possibility 'mental preservation'. For many it will carry unacceptable connotations of Lamarckism. The second possibility is likely to appear even more unacceptable. This is that psychological categories can somehow be applied to a whole group of people, in a way which is not simply adding up the psychological states of the individuals in that group. I will call this possibility 'group psychology'.

If we can somehow show that either of these two possibilities is coherent, we may also be able to evade this chapter's criticisms of the claim

that religion is a manifestation of the unmodified pleasure principle. For the long-term goods being sacrificed, and the short-term goods being reaped, may be at the level of whole societies and their histories. On this interpretation of the claim, it does not matter that millions of individuals have their lives positively improved by religion, for this is perfectly compatible with the claim that religion is nonetheless harmful to humanity as a whole, or some large section of it, in a long term which goes over many generations. This last claim does not depend on either group psychology or mental preservation. But the more substantial claim does – that is, the claim that religion is harmful to humanity as a whole, or some large section of it, in a long term which goes over many generations, *and this is because of its neurotic character*. Further, this claim is manifestly closer to Freud's avowed intentions to elucidate a fundamental feature of the origin of religion which has left its mark on present-day religion. The claim that religion is harmful to humanity as a whole by itself would not get us any nearer carrying out the counterapologetic project which I outlined in the introduction. In any event, Freud's account of neurosis involves the view that its aetiology and its failure to satisfy the reality principle are interrelated. So, if he wishes to give an analogous account of religion, as he clearly does, then the analogues for aetiology and failure to satisfy the reality principle should be similarly interrelated.

I will explore the two possible escape-routes of group psychology and mental preservation in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 5: GROUP PSYCHOLOGY AND MENTAL PRESERVATION

Freud claims that groups as well as individuals have psychological characteristics and a psychological history. That is, a group has beliefs and desires collectively, over and above the beliefs and desires of the individuals who make up the group. Further, he applies the distinctively Freudian model of the mind that I outlined in Chapter 1 to groups as well as to individuals. A group has an unconscious, and undergoes repression, neurosis and such psychological episodes as the Oedipus complex and the latency period. I call this claim 'group psychology'.

Freud also claims that 'mental formations' which were characteristic of the earliest humans have continued to exist in a more-or-less unmodified form in humans up to the present day. According to his theory, these formations are especially prevalent in the thinking of children and neurotics. But they are also alleged to be present in the unconscious of normal adults. These 'mental formations' include broad features of mental activity - such as the four special characteristics and the pleasure principle (see Chapter 1). But they also include specific mental states - beliefs, desires and memories - such as the memory of the primal murder, the guilt associated with it, and the beliefs and desires which make up the Oedipus complex. I call this claim 'mental preservation'.

Allegedly, as a person matures, the influence of these formations declines. However, in a neurotic individual they still make themselves felt. In psychoanalytic therapy the patient is supposed to discover the contents of his or her own individual unconscious which have been shaped by these formations. In being brought to consciousness, these contents are supposed to become subject to rational, mature critical scrutiny and be eroded away. This

is not to say that the inherited mental formations *themselves* wear away as a result of psychoanalysis. Or at least, if Freud thinks they are, I think he would claim that it would take a far more extensive analysis than he himself has actually carried out on anyone. Perhaps, as Badcock suggests (1980, p. 1), Freud's ultimate aim in the works on culture (*Totem and Taboo*, *Moses and Monotheism* etc.) is to effect this deeper analysis.

In 5.1 I argue that Freud needs some version of at least one of the two claims to be true if his psychoanalytic account of religion is to hold up. In 5.2 and 5.3 I attempt to evaluate these claims.

5.1 WHY FREUD NEEDS EITHER GROUP PSYCHOLOGY OR MENTAL PRESERVATION

I suggested in Chapter 3 that either group psychology or mental inheritance is the only way to salvage Freud's blanket claim about religion being a neurosis. In any event, he repeatedly makes claims to the effect that specific mental states are preserved over many generations and/or exist at a group psychological level.

Freud claims that religious beliefs in general are neurotic, in the sense of being engendered by traumas and maintained in existence by unconscious psychological states connected with those traumas. But in Chapter 3 I argued that if 'engendered and maintained by traumas' means 'engendered and maintained by traumas in the lifetime of the individual' then this claim is, in the majority of cases of religious believers, unlikely to be true. Freud is left with the further recourse of saying that the ultimate reasons for religious beliefs are either in the unconscious traumas of individuals in the past when the beliefs originated, or in a collective 'trauma' in the 'childhood' of the human race. Freud's analogy-based arguments are meant to support claims about the psychology of religious believers in general (i.e. not just about the originators of religious beliefs). But religious beliefs and practices are

supposed to be maintained in existence by unconscious psychological states connected with those traumas. For this reason, he needs to say that, not just the beliefs and practices themselves, but the unconscious mental conflicts as well, are somehow transmitted down through the generations. So they must either be transmitted to each new individual, or they must exist in some way which transcends individual psychology.

Strictly speaking, this does not completely exhaust all the possibilities, if all that is needed is for the same mental states to be present in people of widely separated cultural backgrounds. One may want to say that those mental states are due to persistent features of the environment: some things are so obvious that people in any culture must have noticed them. Quite apart from any problems with this claim, it can for our purposes be assimilated under the heading of 'mental preservation', since even if we managed to establish that the relevant environmental factors are always there, humans would at least need to have *something* which their ancestors also had that caused them to have the tendency to react to those features in the same way.

It is at least to Freud's credit that he fully realises this. He boldly makes both the group psychology and the mental preservation claim at the end of *Totem and Taboo*:

... I have taken as the basis of my whole position the existence of a collective mind, in which mental processes occur just as they do in the mind of an individual. In particular, I have supposed that the sense of guilt for an action has persisted for many thousands of years and has remained operative in generations which can have had no knowledge of that action. (SE 13, 157-8)

From this it appears that he thinks the two claims are the same. However, they are not. I can claim that all humans inherit the tendency to pass through a sequence of psychological episodes, such as early trauma - repression - latency - outbreak of neurosis, without thereby claiming that the human race or any other group *collectively* passes through these episodes.

Freud claims both, but either one on its own would suffice. Merely showing that mental preservation or group psychology is possible is, of course, of no help against the objection that Freud has insufficient evidence to support his theories.

What Freud is talking about is clearly *specific* psychological states - beliefs and emotions - not just general dispositions. This is clear, for example, when he says that '... I have supposed that the *sense of guilt* for an action has persisted for many thousands of years.' 'Sense of guilt' is a specific emotion and as such entails specific beliefs, such as the belief that one has done something wrong. (That the beliefs involved may be unconscious does not alter this.) In *Moses and Monotheism* he says '... men have always known (in this special way) that they once possessed a primal father and killed him.' (SE 23, 100) Once again, it is a specific memory (i.e. a belief) which is being attributed to mankind as a whole. (In 5.3.1 I will discuss this quotation at length, including the issue of what 'this special way' is.) Further, Freud *needs* the claim that specific mental states, and not just general dispositions, are preserved and/or exist at a group level. He needs it because to attribute a neurotic aetiology to anything is, by his own theory of neurosis, to say that it is the outcome of mental conflicts, that is, conflicts between sets of beliefs and emotions.

I will attempt to evaluate the two claims - group psychology and mental preservation - in sections 5.2 and 5.3 respectively.

5.2 GROUP PSYCHOLOGY

Freud wants to claim that groups as well as individuals can have psychological states attributed to them, and that these psychological states include those features which make up his distinctive picture of the unconscious mind. The second as well as the first part of this claim is necessary if we are to use the group-psychological route to lend plausibility to Freud's claims about the aetiology of religion. This is because Freud not only

claims that religion is engendered by psychological states, but that it is engendered by the type of unconscious psychological apparatus which he postulates to explain neurosis - the apparatus which includes the Oedipus complex, repression, ambivalence and so on. So if we want to say that this story is true at the level of group psychology, then the group has to have a Freudian psychology.

In a short book called *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (SE 18), Freud cites situations where individuals undergo radical changes in their usual patterns of thinking and behaviour owing to the influence of a group. He discusses both disorganised groups, such as a rioting mob, and organised groups, such as an army. He claims that in both types of group the individual member's thoughts and emotions (or at least the dominant thoughts and emotions) become uniform with those of all the other individuals in the group. Thus, in respect of those thoughts and emotions the group is like a single person. In this sense, we may speak of a 'group mind'.

However, the groups which most obviously involve this 'thinking as one person' aspect are in Freud's own words 'noisy ephemeral groups' (SE 18, 129). Pointing out that these groups exist will not do the work that, I have argued, Freud needs either group psychology or mental preservation to do. For this he needs a more permanent group mind. Towards the end of the book he briefly suggests that such more permanent group minds exist:

Each individual is a component part of numerous groups, he is bound by ties of identification in many directions, and he has built up his ego ideal upon the most various models. Each individual therefore has a share in numerous group minds - those of his race, of his class, of his creed, of his nationality, etc. - and he can also raise himself above them to the extent of having a scrap of independence and originality. Such stable and lasting group formations, with their uniform and constant effects, are less striking to an observer than the rapidly formed and transient groups from which Le Bon has made his brilliant psychological character sketch of the group mind. (SE 18, 129)

But Freud is even more ambitious than this suggests. He wants to claim that the human race as a whole has a psychological history analogous to the psychological history of an individual. This is explicitly stated in the three-stage analogy which I have already quoted from *Totem and Taboo*, and points in the story are elaborated in *Moses and Monotheism*, as well as in the posthumously published manuscript *A Phylogenetic Fantasy* (Freud 1987). Freud claims that the human race as a whole has a childhood, adolescence and maturity, and that it goes through the same psychological episodes as typically occur in an individual's development. Thus, there is supposed to be a collective Oedipal trauma, a collective latency period, and so on.

An obvious problem with this is that, even accepting for the moment Freud's claim that an animistic culture is in a state analogous to childhood, a religious one to adolescence, and a scientific one to maturity, surely the whole human race does not pass through these phases concurrently. Animistic, religious and scientific cultures exist at the same time in different parts of the world.

Of course, Freud realised this. As we saw in Chapter 2, he used data on the animistic culture of contemporary Australian aborigines as a major source of evidence in *Totem and Taboo*. So why did he nonetheless believe that there was only one line of development in human history? This was because he accepted the view, held by many anthropologists in his day, that different cultures had parallel developmental histories (see Wallace 1983, pp. 18-19). The school of anthropologists known as 'evolutionists' believed that the development of societies tended to follow one general law. This means that different societies exist at different points along the same line of development, and can be ranked as being at 'earlier' or 'later' stages, regardless of actual chronology. They believed that the human mind is strictly limited in its capacities and can only vary to a very limited extent. Further, they believed that cultural artefacts, such as customs, beliefs or technologies, which are similar to those of 'earlier' societies can be explained as 'survivals'. This means that if society A is at developmental stage n , and society B is at

developmental stage n minus x (i.e. an 'earlier' stage), and society A has a custom which is 'the same as' (we will see shortly why I put this in quotation marks) one practised by society B, then both societies developed this custom at the same stage, which must be n minus x or earlier.

In addition, the evolutionists believed in what was known as the 'Comparative Method'. That is, they believed that one can use what happens in one society at a certain level of development to discover what happened in other societies when they were at the same level. This school of thought included Tylor, Lubbock, McLellan and Frazer, all of whom were appealed to by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* as sources of evidence. Further, Freud explicitly admits that his speculations in *Totem and Taboo* are propped up by evolutionist doctrines. On the first page he says: '[Aborigines'] mental life must have a peculiar interest for us if we are right in seeing in it a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development.' (SE 13, 1) A little later he says 'Many investigators are ... inclined to regard [totemism] as a necessary phase of human development which has been passed through universally.' (Ibid., 3) - He implicitly endorses this view with the whole book's lines of argument. Further, he shares the trait of using cultural affinities to support his cross-cultural claims. As we saw in chapter 2, he was prepared to make free use of examples of customs from different societies on the assumption that they all must indicate the same psychological processes. He was not deterred from doing this by his own *caveat* that similarities between different sets of phenomena need not indicate the same cause, even in physical systems.

In light of this *caveat* how can he justify ascribing the same causes in the case of the cultural phenomena which he is discussing? This problem seems particularly acute when we consider that identifying two different, say, customs, as instances of the 'same' phenomenon, can often be a controversial business. Cultural practices tend to be complex things, and it is all too easy to play up some aspects and play down others in order to find the similarities one needs to support one's theory. For example, an evolutionist

anthropologist from another planet might decide that a doctor using a stethoscope and a person wearing a walkman are both doing the same thing, since they are both listening to rhythmic sounds through earpieces. I deliberately chose a ridiculous example, but some of the similarities picked out by Freud to support his arguments in *Totem and Taboo* and elsewhere will appear to many to be just as far-fetched.

The theory of parallel development was already coming under criticism among anthropologists as early as the turn of the century (for examples of the criticisms, see Max Müller 1897, Goldenweiser 1910, Steiner 1956). According to these critics, the evolutionists were insufficiently sensitive to historical context, and too lax in deciding to treat two cultural phenomena as instances of the same phenomenon. If we examine some of the alleged similarities between the customs of different cultures, taking proper account of the different contexts, we find they are only superficial (this is why I put 'the same as' in quotation marks). Critics of Freud have been quick to apply these charges to him (see for example Wallace 1983; Kitcher 1992, pp. 100-102). Freud was, according to these critics, too quick to treat any apparent similarity as significant.

It is easy to see how, accepting the theory of parallel development, Freud was able to believe that there was only one history of human development. But not only did Freud claim that cultures develop in parallel; he claimed that 'the' development of cultures was parallel to the development of an individual. In this he was employing a variant of the theory that 'ontogeny repeats phylogeny'. (See Gould 1977.) This is the idea, widely held by evolutionary biologists in the nineteenth century, that the development of an individual was a kind of telescoped repetition of the evolution of the species. In fact, this was supposed to be one of the main pieces of evidence for the descent of humans from other mammals, mammals from reptiles, reptiles from amphibians and so on. Thus, the human foetus was supposed, at an early period in its development, to resemble a fish; then it was supposed to resemble an amphibian, a reptile and a 'lower' mammal in succession.

Freud's version of this doctrine was different from the standard version in two important respects:

(1) In the 'standard version', the *physical* development of a species' ancestors since the beginnings of life is mirrored in the *pre-natal* physical development individuals of that species. In Freud's version, however, the *psychological* and *cultural* development of the human species is mirrored by the psychological development of the individual human *from birth onwards* (At least, I do not know of anywhere where Freud speculates on pre-natal psychological development). That is, an individual passes through a phase of being psychologically like a human from cultural developmental stage *a*, then stage *a+1*, and so on. Freud's version of the principle 'ontogeny repeats phylogeny' does not contradict the standard version. It is easy to see how tempting it is to extend the parallel in the way Freud does. However, such an extension is not required by the standard version of the principle.

(2) In the standard version, the earlier stages are superseded, and do not leave traces in the adult. For example, the gills which are supposed to be present for a while in human embryos are not present in adults. In Freud's psychological version, the earlier stages do not disappear but are pushed into the unconscious where they persist fully-formed. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud offers a metaphor for this:

Now let us, by a flight of the imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past - an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue alongside the latest one. ... In the place occupied by the Palazzo Caffarelli would once more stand - without the Palazzo having to be removed - the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus; and this not only in its latest shape, as the Romans of the Empire saw it, but also in its earliest one, when it still showed Etruscan forms and was ornamented with terra-cotta antefixes. (...etc. SE 21, 70)

Freud believed that this view held for both the individual mind and collective 'mind'.³⁰

In adhering to the 'parallel development of cultures' doctrine, Freud could at least appeal to the authority of a number of eminent anthropologists - albeit a dwindling number as he got older. But because his version of the 'ontogeny repeats phylogeny' doctrine was so idiosyncratic, he could appeal to no authority in support of it but his own. This is of course equally true of his theories of individual psychology alone, but at least these were based on his own direct clinical experience. There has of course been no shortage of critics who claim that this experience does not come remotely close to justifying Freud's claims about individual psychology. Whether it does or not is not the subject of this thesis. What I am concerned with is whether, even if Freud's clinically-based claims about individual psychology are well-founded, we can justify his move to non-clinically-based claims such as 'religion is a neurosis'. I have already (Chapter 3) argued that this cannot hold for most religious believers if by neurosis he means something originating in psychological conflicts in an individual. But can we make sense of group psychology?

The mistake should be avoided of finding instances where Freud makes analogies between individual development and group development and saying that, because the principle 'ontogeny repeats phylogeny' is no longer accepted, we can conclude straight away that Freud was wrong in these instances. The approach we should take is not to point out similarities

³⁰ Freud believed in the standard version of 'ontogeny repeats phylogeny'; he explicitly says so in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

We see how the germ of a living animal is obliged in the course of its development to recapitulate (even if only in a transient and abbreviated form) the structures of all the forms from which it has sprung, instead of proceeding quickly by the shortest path to its final shape. (SE 18, 37)

However, he does not employ the doctrine in this form in his psychological theories. In his view, the primitive structures are *not* recapitulated 'only in a transient form'.

between Freud's views and various discredited theories, and then assume that the discreditation passes automatically on to Freud. Rather, we should attempt to ascertain (1) whether Freud's theories *must* fall along with the discredited ones and, if not, (2) whether evidence in support of Freud's theories could come from some other source. The answer to the first is clearly no. Freud's belief that the psychological development of individuals follows the path history of their ancestors, does not entail that 'ontogeny repeats phylogeny' is in general true.

But that is the easy part. The hard part is to ask: what could positively support any claim that, in one particular instance, ontogeny has recapitulated phylogeny? Let us say that it just happens to be the case that at an early stage in its development, an individual animal happens to have some feature which it will not have as an adult, but which its ancestors at some stage in history had as adults. Let us further say that the route by which the individual arrives at the adult state, in respect of this particular trait, passes through intermediate stages analogous to those passed through by successive adult ancestors. As long as we do not attempt to infer that this *must* happen by appealing to the general principle 'ontogeny repeats phylogeny', but infer from independent evidence that in this particular instance, ontogeny just happens to have repeated phylogeny, there is no problem. Lest this sound too fanciful, consider this example:

Plaice, sole and halibut [varieties of flatfish] ... are bony fish (with swimbladders), related to herrings, trout etc.. ... [Bony fish] have a natural tendency to be flattened in a vertical direction. A herring, for instance, is much 'taller' than it is wide. ... it was natural, therefore, that when the ancestors of plaice and sole took to the sea bottom, they should have lain on one side rather than on the belly like the ancestors of skates and rays. But this raised the problem that one eye was always looking down into the sand and was effectively useless. In evolution, this problem was solved by the lower eye 'moving' round to the other side.

*We see this process of moving around re-enacted in the development of every young bony flatfish. A young flatfish starts life swimming near the surface, and it is symmetrical and vertically flattened just like a herring. But then the skull starts to grow in a strange, asymmetrical, twisted fashion, so that one eye ... moves over the top of the head to finish up on the other side. (Dawkins 1986, pp. 91-92, emphasis added.)*³¹

In this example, the 're-enactment' takes place after birth, so in one respect it is further removed from the standard nineteenth-century model and closer to Freud. It is clear that the movement of the individual fish's eye from one side to the other is a repetition of what happened to the mature forms of the species as a whole over successive generations. However, we could not have used the principle 'ontogeny repeats phylogeny', plus knowledge of the life history of an individual of a given species, to justify claims about the history of that species. If we wish to claim that some phenomenon is an example of ontogeny repeating phylogeny, we must have knowledge of *both* the evolutionary history of the group (species or whatever), *and* the developmental history of the individual.

Something similar holds for the parallel development theory. The fact that this theory is now no longer believed by anthropologists means that Freud cannot either (1) use evidence for how one culture developed as evidence for how another developed, or (2) construct a general theory of how cultures develop out of fragmentary evidence of how different cultures were at certain periods in their respective histories. By 'fragmentary evidence' I mean pieces of evidence which at most would show that a certain culture was a certain way at a certain time, and that another culture was another way at another time. Thus Freud cannot take evidence that culture C1 was once in state S1, and evidence that culture C2 was once in state S2, and combine these for use as evidence that cultures in general pass through states S1 and S2. If he

³¹ I should stress that Dawkins' aim in presenting this example is *not* to demonstrate ontogeny repeating phylogeny.

wants to claim that two cultures developed in parallel, what he needs is evidence that culture C1 was in S1, S2, S3 etc. and, *independently of this*, evidence that culture C2 was in same states in the same temporal sequence. If his claim is to apply to all cultures, it needs more evidence still. Freud is concerned with the development of cultures in respect of certain psychological characteristics. He can make the claim that cultures develop in parallel in respect of these characteristics, without having to make - and hence, without having to justify - the claim that they also develop in parallel with respect to other things. This is unfortunately complicated by the fact that Freud tends to see psychological and certain other developments as interrelated. In particular, science and religion are seen as manifestations of certain psychological conditions.

The problem with a group psychology which includes certain predictable-in-advance episodes is not that it depends on now-discredited theories such as 'ontogeny repeats phylogeny', but this does not mean that there are no problems with it. One problem is that it is difficult to imagine even in principle what kind of evidence could support it. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, like certain other once-influential theories, it is a 'pattern-in-history' theory. Where Hegel claimed that history followed the pattern of thesis-synthesis-antithesis leading to a growth in the 'self-consciousness of spirit', Freud claims that it follows the pattern of childhood-adolescence-maturity, with certain characteristic episodes, such as Oedipal trauma and latency period, along the way. Freud shows considerable ingenuity in matching this pattern to facts in history. Unfortunately it is a very coarse-grained pattern relative to the detail of history itself. Martin Gardner has likened the practise of finding patterns in history to the attempts of some religious fundamentalists to find prophecies encoded in the measurements of the Pyramids. He comments: 'The ability of the mind to fool itself by an unconscious 'fudging' of the facts - an overemphasis here and underemphasis there - is far greater than most people realize.' (Gardner 1957, p. 184.) There is a such a mass of incident in human history that, even if it

could be agreed what really happened, any presentation of historical facts must of necessity be selective.

In reality, of course, there are very many episodes in history of which there are two or more disputed versions, and one can choose whichever side of a dispute happens to support one's pattern-finding enterprise. That Freud is guilty of this is clear in *Totem and Taboo*, where he accepts Robertson Smith's totem meal hypothesis, which was highly controversial and never generally accepted. In *Moses and Monotheism*, he attempts to justify this procedure simply on the grounds that it fits his own anthropological theories to do so:

I have repeatedly met with violent reproaches for not having altered my opinions in later editions of my book [*Totem and Taboo*] in spite of the fact that more recent ethnologists have unanimously rejected Robertson Smith's hypotheses and brought forward other, totally divergent, theories. ... However, I am not an ethnologist but a psycho-analyst. I had a right to take out of the ethnological literature what I might need for the work of analysis. The writings of Robertson Smith - a man of genius - have given me valuable points of contact with the psychological material of analysis and indications for its employment. (SE 23, 131)

In other words, Robertson Smith's theories are accepted by Freud because they fit his claim that the mental factors he postulated on the basis of psychoanalysing individuals also exist in groups. *Moses and Monotheism* as a whole makes use of the controversial claim that Moses was an Egyptian to support its speculative hypothesis about a traumatic incident in the history of Judaism. This is hardly better than the reported practise of a 'pyramidologist' secretly filing down a stone to make it conform to one of his theories (Gardner, op. cit.).

A further problem with the imposition of the coarse-grained pattern on the intricate detail of history is that it violates Freud's own principles. He clearly states that all human actions in every tiny detail are determined by psychological states. In the *Introductory Lectures* he emphasises his belief in the

'determinism whose rule extends over mental life' (SE 15, 106). Further, he frequently claims that a psychoanalytic explanation must be able to account for every tiny detail of, say, a dream or a slip. If it fails so to account, it must be not only regarded as incomplete but as suspect, possibly wrong. This is because every tiny detail is regarded by Freud as significant - why was the man facing *left*? The apparent triviality of a particular detail may be a way of evading the censor; it may turn out to be the most important thing in the dream. (See the discussion of 'displacement' in 1.2.2.) On the analogy that Freud is trying to draw, the counterpart of dreams, slips, neurotic symptoms etc. are religious beliefs and practices. According to his own theory, even the most apparently trivial element of, for example, a dream may turn out to be of central importance, so that an interpretation which fails to take it into account could be utterly wrong. By Freud's own analogy, this means that even the most apparently trivial element of a religious belief or practice may turn out to be of central importance, so that an interpretation which fails to take it into account could be utterly wrong. Freud's imposition of a very broad pattern on the myriad facts of history is clearly meant to be a psychoanalytic interpretation, analogous to the interpretations of dreams or neurotic symptoms. This must of virtual necessity leave him open to the danger of ignoring seemingly trivial, displaced elements.

A third problem is this: many psychoanalysts claim that reliable inferences from symptoms to psychological causes can only be made when there is continual and intense interaction between the analyst and the patient. In his early cases Freud took it for granted that it is up to the analysand to produce the associative links that lead to a correct analysis. Without this input from the analysand, the analyst's inferences can be little more than speculation. However, Freud violated this doctrine in the 'Little Hans' case history: he only met Little Hans once, relying on Hans' father's reports for data. He violated it more flagrantly in his studies of Schreber, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Seventeenth century artist Christoph Haizmann. However, one might accept the claim that Freud makes in 'Little Hans', that an experienced

analyst can spot regular patterns and thus predict the outcome of analysis in advance with some confidence: from a point about halfway through the analysis, Little Hans 'carried out a programme which I was able to announce in advance'. (SE 10, 43) If we accept this we might also accept that Freud's inferences about (say) Haizmann's 'demonological neurosis' were in a loose sense based on valid inductions, and so were not merely wild speculations. This is, on Freud's own showing, only justified if the theories he applied to Haizmann were initially based on direct experience of patients. He is still vulnerable to the objection that we do not know whether people from widely different cultures have similar deep psychological characteristics. This problem may however be surmounted in some people's eyes if we find enough evidence of similar symptoms. At least with Haizmann and the rest, we are speaking of individuals, and if we have any faith in the findings of psychoanalysis at all, we accept that at least some individuals have the deep psychological characteristics of which Freud speaks. But this tells us nothing about whether groups have those characteristics. There are examples of individuals who were analysed in depth, upon experience with whom analysts base their theories of individual psychology. But there are no large groups who have been so analysed. We know that individuals have psychological states, but whether groups have psychological states at all is precisely the point that wants establishing. Nobody could possibly have intense psychoanalytic interaction with a group of the size of a whole nation over a long period of history. Yet Freud makes psychological claims about, for example, Australian aborigine tribes, and the Jewish people as a whole, and the 'primal hordes'. These include claims about psychological characteristics which are supposed to transcend generations and last for thousands of years.

But even apart from the difficulty of finding convincing evidence for the group-psychological hypothesis, a further problem is this. It is, to put it mildly, not immediately obvious why it should turn out that events at a group level should mirror those at an individual psychological level. How is it legitimate to attribute psychological states to whole cultures? Judging from

Moses and Monotheism III, part 1, what Freud has in mind appears to be something like this. Individual humans pass through a series of psychological episodes or stages. It is not inevitable that any given person will pass through all the stages, but it is necessary to pass through the earlier stages before one can reach the later ones. So to speak, you have to crawl before you can walk, walk before you can run, and run at all before you can run a four-minute-mile. Of course, that does not mean that everybody will run a four-minute-mile. It is possible to get stuck at any stage along the way, as neurotics do. A neurotic is like someone who develops more elaborate ways of crawling rather than learning how to walk. Whole societies can be characterised as being at a certain stage in that typical members of the society are at that stage, and this is expressed in the cultural productions of the society, such as religion. So a whole society can for example be at the 'latency period' stage.

The psychological development of the individual is supposed to recapitulate that of the species, and in *Totem and Taboo* (SE 13, 90), as well as in other places, he shows in outline how this takes place. The cultural or intellectual development from an animistic world-view, *via* a religious one, to a scientific one, is supposed to be mirrored in the individual's development from a narcissistic, wish-fulfilment-hallucinating infant *via* a parent-fixated child, to a mature adult. However, surely at least some individuals managed to reach psychological maturity in the ages before the scientific culture was attained. Indeed, Freud would probably say that the scientific culture has yet to be fully attained. This would suggest that, rather than simply recapitulating the history of the species, the history of an individual can, in Freud's view, be ahead of it. This in itself is not necessarily a problem as, on any evolutionary theory, it can be said that individuals who possess advantageous mutations which will in time come to be standard features, are ahead of the group in a meaningful sense. However, such modifications are generally extremely minor, whereas the attainment of intellectual maturity and acquisition of the reality principle and the characteristics of secondary mental process, hardly seems so minor. There is a possible way out of this for

Freud, and that is to suggest that in a religious age, someone can progress beyond the parent-fixated stage by individually abandoning the dominant world-view of their time in favour of one which has not yet been developed. Note that if Freud's analogy is to hold, it is not enough for the person to abandon religion in favour of scepticism, since - as we saw in 1.7 - *doubt* is held by Freud to be a characteristic feature of obsessional neurosis. Somehow the adoption by an isolated individual of a yet-to-be-developed positive world-view seems extremely unlikely. We do, it is true, speak of individuals being 'ahead of their time' intellectually, but this would once again seem to be a case of minor modifications. It is generally acknowledged that large-scale shifts of world-view - such as the shift away from religion around the Renaissance and Enlightenment - take place over periods far longer than any individual's life. In any event, when we speak of someone being ahead of their time, we do not necessarily imply that they were more mature psychologically than their contemporaries.³² Surely some individuals can be well-adjusted and so forth while accepting the dominant world-view of their time and place. Certainly, they can be well-adjusted to social and (everyday) physical reality. Further, there is no particular reason to believe that normal members of religiously-oriented cultures lack self-knowledge any more than those in cultures dominated by science and atheism. But being well-adjusted to 'external reality' and having a reasonable amount of self-knowledge, seems to be what 'well-adjusted', as opposed to immature or neurotic, means.

So Freud faces this dilemma: He believes cultures can be classified as 'mature' or 'immature' in a way analogous to individual maturity. Either some individuals in an 'immature' culture are mature, or none are. If some are, then they are radically outside their culture. If none are, then in some cultures - including virtually everyone before 1700 or so - not one single

³² It might be worthwhile to study the biographies of scientists, philosophers, artists etc. to whom the term 'ahead of their time' has justifiably been applied, and attempt to ascertain whether they were especially mature individuals. I somehow suspect not that they were not.

person was mature.³³ Neither of these possibilities seems particularly satisfactory.

For these reasons, I believe Freud's group psychological claims to be unsustainable. So what of mental preservation?

5.3 MENTAL PRESERVATION

If we want to go the 'mental preservation' route, the two most obvious candidates for means of transmission are genetic inheritance and cultural influence. Freud himself suggested both of these at different times, albeit what he says about them is extremely sketchy. I will attempt to assess these suggestions here.

There is one relatively uncontroversial sense in which mental preservation is obviously possible. That is, the direct receiving of ideas by children from parents (and others) by learning, or some other more subtle form of influence. But this does not seem to be capable by itself of doing the job. Clearly, ideas which are transmitted in this way are subject to modification - otherwise how does culture change as it does? The ideas which we pick up from our parents (and from the pre-existing cultural environment generally) are not the same as the ideas they picked up from their parents, and so on back. Or at least it is clear that *a great many* of those ideas are subject to modification. What Freud wants to establish is that some 'mental formations' persist with almost no modification over tens of thousands of years. The passing on of ideas by learning, or other non-biological factors, guarantees continuity but it does not guarantee that any ideas will remain unchanged.

³³ Actually, the world-view of the Epicureans may be scientific in Freud's sense because, however many of its details may be contradicted by subsequent science, it featured a materialistic ontology in which the gods, if there were any, were supposed not to play any part in our lives. But do we want to say that the Epicureans were more mature as individuals than their contemporaries who adhered to other schools of philosophy, or to none at all?

The fact that it is *unconscious* mental states which are supposed to be transmitted, makes Freud's case *prima facie* more difficult again. Pointing to learned cultural entities which have lasted with little change for thousands of years, such as alphabets, does not help, for we are fully conscious of them. It needs to be shown that a memory of which we are not conscious can be transmitted. Further, for Freud's story to be true, it is necessary for the process of transmission to be itself unconscious. Nobody told us that we killed the primal father. This is another disanalogy with learning something like the alphabet. However, there may be more indirect means of transmission which will escape this problem.

It may appear then that biological means of transmission is the only thing that could solve this difficulty. The extremely high copying fidelity of genes is in sharp contrast to the extremely low copying fidelity of cultural transmission. However, biological transmission of ideas is widely agreed by Freud's critics to be not possible at all. I will look at why this is so in 5.3.1. I will then look at other possibilities in 5.3.2. and 5.3.3.

5.3.1 Genetic Inheritance

It is often claimed by Freud's critics that the idea of genetically inherited mental states is inherently 'Lamarckian' (e.g. Wallace 1983, p. 12; Sulloway 1992, pp. 373-75; Grünbaum 1993, p. 277). What does this charge mean? The term 'Lamarckian' is applied to any theory which presupposes that characteristics that an organism acquired through interaction with its environment during its lifetime are genetically inheritable.³⁴ Badcock has

³⁴ As some scholars have pointed out (e.g. Ritvo 1990, pp. 31-59; Badcock 1994, pp. 10-16), Darwin himself believed in inheritance of acquired characteristics. In *The Origin of Species*, he says: 'I think there is little doubt that use in our domestic animals strengthens and enlarges certain parts, and disuse diminishes them; and that such modifications are inherited.' (Penguin Classics edition, p. 175, emphasis added.) So this is not the real difference between Darwin's

attempted to defend Freud against this charge. I will argue that the notion of genetic inheritance of mental states, while not exactly Lamarckian, relies on presuppositions which are just as unacceptable as Lamarckism is to many people.

First let us get clear on what the charge of 'Lamarckism' entails. A theory is said to be Lamarckian if it violates the central dogma of genetics. Dawkins (1982, p. 285) gives the following definition:

central dogma: In molecular biology, the dogma that nucleic acids act as templates for the synthesis of proteins, but never the reverse. More generally, the dogma that genes exert an influence over the form of a body, but the form of a body is never translated back into genetic code: acquired characteristics are not inherited.

It is Freud's claim that mental characteristics can be inherited that is generally described as Lamarckian. This clearly assumes that mental characteristics, or at least those that Freud thinks are inherited, were acquired in the first place. Ostensibly, it is easy to make a case for this, as follows: Among the mental characteristics which Freud thought were inherited are memories, such as the memory of the primal murder. One could argue that by definition, in order for me to have a memory of something, I have to have at one time experienced it or observed it happening. Therefore memories are by definition acquired.

Not only that, but even if Lamarckian inheritance were possible, it would by the same definition be impossible to inherit, or in any other way take on, another person's memory. The only way the state of 'being someone who experienced or observed x ' can be transferred to another person, is for the other person to experience or observe it too.

views and Lamarck's. However, in modern parlance, the term 'Lamarckian' is used to refer to inheritance of acquired characteristics, and 'Darwinian' to its denial.

However, as we saw in Chapter 1, Freud claimed that the unconscious does not distinguish between reality and fantasy. So the unconscious can have pseudo-memories of things which never actually happened; further, these may be present in the unconscious as memories without ever having been present as experiences, even hallucinated ones. Perhaps the language needs a new word for 'a person's memory of something which that person never experienced'. Perhaps 'false memory' will do. There remains the question of whether there really are 'false memories'. But whether there are or not, if we extend the definition of memory to include 'a person's mental state which is *as if* the thing really happened to that person', then we cannot say that *by definition* a memory of *a* requires that *a* actually happened to, or was observed by, the person having the memory. But the question still remains: how might even a false memory be genetically transmitted without violating the central dogma?

5.3.1.1 Freud's Defence of Genetic Mental Preservation

Let us look at Freud's attempt to solve the problem of mental preservation along biological lines. Freud accepts the view that many of his critics take, that his belief in inherited memories is inescapably Lamarckian. He says this in *Moses and Monotheism*:

On further reflection I must admit that I have behaved for a long time as though the inheritance of memory-traces of the experience of our ancestors, independently of direct communication and of the influence of education by the setting of an example, were established beyond question. When I spoke of the survival of a tradition among a people or the formation of a people's character, I had mostly in mind an inherited tradition of this kind and not one transmitted by communication. Or at least I made no distinction between the two and was not clearly aware of my audacity in neglecting to do so. My position, no doubt, is made more difficult by the present attitude of biological science, which refuses to

hear of the inheritance of acquired characters by succeeding generations.

(SE 22, 99-100)

But he believes that there is evidence such that the assumption that mental states are inherited is inescapable. He believes that some of this evidence comes from the findings of clinical psychoanalysis (see for example 'The Claims of Psychoanalysis to Scientific Interest', SE 13, 183-4; the 'Wolf Man' case history, SE 17 (IX); *Moses and Monotheism*, SE 23, 99). Those who are sceptical of the ability of clinical psychoanalysis to make genuine discoveries will of course dismiss any such claim. They may further argue that the fact that some of the 'findings' of clinical psychoanalysis require Lamarckian inheritance is enough to discredit those 'findings'. Anyone who regards the evidence of clinical psychoanalysis as little better than anecdotal, will regard it as far from sufficient to overthrow the good reasons we have for believing inheritance of mental characteristics to be impossible.

A further argument Freud gives is to say that:

A tradition that was based only on communication could not lead to the compulsive character that attaches to religious phenomena. It would be listened to, judged, and perhaps dismissed, like any other piece of information from outside; it would never attain the privilege of being liberated from logical thought. (SE 23, 101)

But if my line of reasoning in 3.2 is correct, then this argument of Freud's carries no force. It can at best only apply to those whose religious beliefs are in fact compulsive. It is simply begging the question to characterise religious beliefs in general as compulsive. If for many believers, religious doctrines are not subjected to critical scrutiny, this does not mean that those beliefs are neurotic, or compulsive as he says here. It may simply mean that for practical reasons one cannot question every belief, so one accepts the consensus, or the opinion of the experts. And realistically, this factor probably explains the fact that many believers do not question religious teachings.

But Freud also claims that there is evidence independent of psychoanalysis which demands inheritance of mental characteristics. In *Moses and Monotheism* he says:

If any explanation is to be found of what are called the instincts of animals, which allow them to behave from the first in a new situation in life as though it were an old and familiar one - if any explanation at all is to be found of this instinctive life of animals, it can only be that they bring the experiences of their species with them into their own new existence - that is, that they have preserved memories of what was experienced by their ancestors. The position in the human animal would not at bottom be different. His own archaic heritage corresponds to the instincts of animals even though it is different in its compass and contents.

After this discussion, I have no hesitation in declaring that men have always known (in this special way) that they once possessed a primal father and killed him. (SE 23, p. 100-101)

What he appears to be suggesting is that the instincts of animals have come about because of actual events that happened in the lifetimes of those animals' ancestors. The argument appears to be that the instinctive responses which animals unquestionably have, the appropriate reactions to situations which they have not experienced before, indicate that they have knowledge of those situations. Since this knowledge is not learned, it must be innate.

However, the fact that the animals respond appropriately in situations which their ancestors experienced does not entail that the animals have memories, even unconscious memories, of the events. The trouble with Freud's argument is that the instincts of animals are far more like dispositions to behave, reflexes which can be characterised purely behaviouristically, than like specific memories, which cannot. But I may have a reflex which I acquired during my own lifetime, for example, I may have been a subject of Pavlovian experiments which means that I lift my right leg every time an alarm rings. This experimentally-produced disposition does not require that I

have any memory of the experiment which produced the disposition. But Freud claims that the instincts of animals can only be explained by positing memories of events in the lives of those animals' ancestors. If reflex responses acquired during one's own lifetime do not require any memory of the events by which one acquired them, then instincts which an animal has due to the highly indirect influence of events in the lifetime of its ancestors, do not require memory of those events either.

Freud's words '*ability to act* in a new and unfamiliar situation' suggest that he is talking about dispositions to behave in specific ways in response to certain situations, and that he accepts the view that that is what instincts are. If this is so then he seems to be arguing that these dispositions can only be explained by something like memories, or that we can non-misleadingly describe the dispositions themselves as memories. But we can read him in a different way: perhaps what he means by 'instinctive responses' is not just dispositions to act, but also includes the tendency to have appropriate mental states in new and unfamiliar situations. Is this defensible? An example might be 'he instinctively knew that ...'. 'Instinctively knew' here presumably means 'knew even though he did not know of any process of inference by which he knew'. This paraphrase could cover knowledge or belief acquired by non-conscious processes of inference that are based on things one learned earlier in life which one does not consciously remember. In using the word 'non-conscious' here, I do not mean a specifically Freudian unconscious; rather I am using it to cover any information-processing which is not conscious. This would include information-processing of the type which, for example, cognitive scientists posit in their theories. But to fit Freud's bill, it needs to be based on things which were not learned (even non-consciously) at any time in one's own life. Conceivably, experiments could be devised to show that people do sometimes use information which they could not have acquired in their own life. More difficult, but perhaps still not beyond the ingenuity of experimenters, would be to show that this information must somehow be specific enough to be called memories, beliefs etc., rather than

just dispositions to react. The fact that people flee the first time they see a certain type of poisonous snake would *not* be sufficient, for it could be a purely behavioural response to a visual stimulus. It would not be indicative of a memory, even an unconscious one, of ancestors' bad experiences with snakes. Even the fact that a person responded with *fear* on first encountering the snake would not be sufficient, for the visual stimulus could trigger a hormone which, in an animal sufficiently cognitively sophisticated to feel fear at all, would tend to produce non-specific fear, which it automatically attributes to the most obvious source, the snake. What would be needed to establish that more than this was taking place would be for the subject to report, or otherwise give good evidence of, believing something specific about the snake, such as that it is poisonous. Of course, this could only support the hypothesis of innate memory if the person was known not to have the resources to arrive at this belief inferentially, such as the belief that snakes in general tend to be poisonous. Admittedly, it would be difficult to find a person who does not believe this, but perhaps a parallel experiment could be devised using a different example.

A further problem is this: does the central dogma of genetics rule out in advance the possibility of an experimental result such as the last one I suggested above? In other words, is the suggestion that specific mental states can be biologically inherited inherently Lamarckian? Badcock attempts to rebut the charge that it is.

5.3.1.2 Badcock's Defence of Genetic Mental Preservation

Unlike Freud himself, Badcock wants to claim that the assumption of genetically inherited mental states does not require Lamarckian inheritance. In his defence of Freud in *The Psychoanalysis of Culture*, Badcock quotes the above passage from *Moses and Monotheism*, where Freud says that animals 'have preserved memories' and that humanity's 'archaic heritage corresponds to the instincts of animals' and so forth. Badcock comments:

Now, if this is what Freud means, there is no difficulty. True, the phrase 'they have preserved memories of what was experienced by their ancestors' sounds highly Lamarckian but, as a manner of speaking, it is fair enough. What Freud does not appear to appreciate, but what modern biologists do, is that this 'persistence of memory' of the experiences of past generations is not brought about by each individual up-dating the genetic code during his lifetime but, like all other evolutionary change, by mutation. (Badcock 1980, p. 32)

Badcock wants to claim that we can treat what Freud says here as 'a manner of speaking'. He does not deny that Freud personally believed that Lamarckian inheritance takes place, but he appears to be claiming that a biologist today who rejects Lamarckism could nonetheless use this manner of speaking to mean something which was acceptable in non-Lamarckian terms. The phrase 'they have inherited mental formations', Badcock claims, can be taken as meaning that mental formations which were produced by mutation can be inherited. But how are mental formations supposed to be produced by mutation?

According to modern genetic theory, the process works like this: a mutation (a change in the genetic code) takes place which produces effects which may prove to be either harmful or beneficial. 'Beneficial' in this context just means 'tending to increase the organism's chances of reproducing'. So the new genetic codes produced by beneficial mutations will tend to spread through a population. If a given feature of an organism seems patently too complex to have been produced by a single mutation, we can postulate that it was produced by many small modifications over a long period of time. On this theory, there is no problem in principle in explaining how complex pieces of 'machinery' such as eyes and hearts were produced by mutations. Badcock wants us to believe that the mental formations of which Freud speaks would also in principle be so explainable. If Badcock is right, then claiming the existence of biologically inherited memories is not Lamarckian.

How might this work? Hypothetically, the story might look something like this: In the past, ancestors of these animals regularly encountered a certain situation. Those who acted in one particular way in this situation, even if that only happened by sheer coincidence, were at an advantage over those who did not. To take a hypothetical example, animals who ducked when a low-flying object approached them, tended to survive, while those who did not, did not. Let us say that a genetic mutation, by sheer accident, produces an automatic ducking response to approaching low-flying objects. The first animal with the new gene has an advantage over its conspecifics, so the innate reflex has a good chance of getting spread throughout the species. One could say, as Freud does, that the innate reflex allows them to 'behave from the first in a new situation in life as though it were an old and familiar one'. Freud wants to say that an instinct such as this is evidence that animals 'bring the experience of their species with them into their own new existence - that is, they have preserved memories of what was experienced by their ancestors.' The events did not directly cause the instincts to become part of an innate genetic endowment. If they did, that would be Lamarckian. Nonetheless, the first part of Freud's claim is true in the very loose sense that in telling the story of how the reflex came to be part of the animals' genetic endowment, we can refer in a genuinely informative way to events that regularly happened to their ancestors.

This is not, however, the same as saying that the animals today have *memories* of those events in the lives of their ancestors, for reasons stated above. Something more is needed to establish that inheritance of memories is possible.

Genes produce their effects by catalysing chemical reactions, which in turn cause the 'building' of organs. Of course, the environment plays its part - in the most obvious way, nutrients have to be present to provide the 'building materials' - if these are not in adequate supply, the organism will fail to develop normally. This is why an important distinction is made between genotype and phenotype. 'Genotype' refers to the genetic information alone;

'phenotype' to the actual characteristics of the organism. However, presumably the prevailing environmental conditions can be relied upon to be invariant enough for, for example, most people's hearts to develop in the same way. Oxygen and various basic minerals are usually present. So, we can say that we genetically inherited the structure of our hearts from distant ancestors, meaning that we inherited a certain genetic code from them which, in conjunction with certain relevant features of the environment which are virtually unchanged since their time, produce hearts of the same type. If some new environmental feature, such as pollution, caused people to be born with some abnormality, we would not say that this new feature was inherited. The building of physical organs is presumably a 'mechanical' process, that is, describable in physical terms and more-or-less invariant from one individual to another.

In support of Badcock's point, one might say that mental contents must ultimately exist in the form of physical structures in the brain, and that there is no reason why these structures could not be genetically inherited in the same way as eyes or hearts. Accepting this for the moment, let us suppose a genetic mutation produced the physical brain structure which corresponds to the (false and unconscious) memory of a primal murder. The person would then be born with this memory even though the event of which it was a memory had never happened to, or even been fantasised by, the person. If we accept, as Freud does, the possibility of 'false memories', then it may appear reasonable to suppose that I can have memories which were inherited in this way which are false in the sense of not being based upon any occurrence (real or hallucinated) in my lifetime.

One apparent problem with this is that, on some views of genetics, to be propagated reliably through the species the memory has to make a difference. It has to be beneficial, or at least be a necessary by-product of something which is beneficial. If the story has to be broken down into steps due to the complexity of the feature in question, each step itself has to be beneficial, or a by-product of something beneficial. There is a little leeway here, but not

much. Non-beneficial genetic changes do occur, but if they are to have the cumulative effect of producing a complex entity, rather than just randomly drift, there must be some reason for their doing so. This view has been labelled the 'Panglossian paradigm' (see Gould and Lewontin 1979; Dennett 1998). Not all evolutionists' subscribe to the Panglossian paradigm, but enough do to make claims that non-adaptive changes become spread throughout whole populations and are maintained for many generations, a controversial one. And in any event, one aspect of Freud's analogy between religion and neurosis is that religion, like neurosis, owes its continued existence to 'primary and secondary gains from the illness'. However, I will argue that even if we accept the Panglossian paradigm this need not present problems for Freudian mental preservation. The real problem lies elsewhere.

The Panglossian view *seems* to present a problem because according to Freud's own story, the repressed memory of the primal murder is part of a collective neurosis, and on his own account neurosis makes life more difficult for the individual (as I showed in Chapter 1). Freud repeatedly describes religion - and sometimes civilization as a whole - together with the memory of the primal murder upon which they are founded, as a neurosis. However, he claims that it nonetheless produces benefits. The primal memory and the guilt associated with it, followed by the rise of religion, were necessary for the beginning of, among other things, science, technology and morals. All of these enabled human beings to survive and multiply in greater numbers. But as we saw in Chapter 4, Freud claims that religion is harmful, in the sense of reducing the organism's chances of survival and comfort. So have we caught him in a contradiction? No, because if all we are concerned with is the benefits that lead to a gene spreading throughout the population, the only thing that counts as a benefit is something which increases the organism's chances of reproducing (and increases its offspring's chances of reproducing, and so on). Even its survival is secondary to this. There is no contradiction in saying that the effect produced by a certain mutation enables the organism and its offspring to reproduce faster, while at the same time making life less happy

for individual organisms. It is consistent with Freud's view to say that religions do this, and it would strengthen the analogy with neurosis because of the 'gain from illness'. Neither is there any contradiction in saying that the effect produced by a certain mutation enables the organism and its offspring to reproduce faster, while at the same time being bad for the species as a whole in the very long term. Freud would also claim that religion does this. As we saw in 2.1, the initial act of repression on which he believes totemism – and hence religion – is founded, he also believes produced the benefits of stability and social cohesion. Finally, a mutation may be propagated due to benefits it produces, even though there is some 'road not taken' which would be even better, but either the mutations required did not arise, or some necessary background condition was not met.

Freud's story is very sketchy. The hypothesis is that at some points in history, repressions took place which led to gains in terms of propagation, while at the same time producing unhappiness, and leading to long-term harms, and not being the best of all possible options. We may lend plausibility to this hypothesis by appealing to particular hypothetical examples, such as those suggested by Freud. Even if these examples are only hypothetical, they may help support the claim that Freud's general story is at least *possible*. Take the following hypothesis from Freud's paper 'The Acquisition and Control of Fire' (SE 22, 183-93). Freud claims that when the earliest humans encountered fire, the men urinated on it, thus gratifying their feelings of phallic potency. (Bear in mind that Freud claims that loose, associative thinking is a characteristic of primitive mental processes.) Let us grant Freud his premise that some prehistoric men found this behaviour gratifying. More plausibly for some, we could claim that whenever they encountered fire they immediately, out of fear, either extinguished it or ran away. However, according to Freud's hypothesis, some of them eventually learned not to carry out this desire (or, on the alternative story, learned to overcome their fear), thus allowing the possibility of using the fire for their benefit. Being primitive humans, dominated by primary-process modes of thinking, they could not say 'I

would like to do this, but it is in my best interests to refrain'. That would require a mental sophistication which was beyond them. Instead they repressed the desire; this repression could have taken place for some completely irrelevant reason, the benefits being only a side-effect. If by a chance mutation someone was born with an innate tendency to repress the desire, that person would have an advantage over someone who might or might not acquire this tendency. This assumes that the domestication of fire confers fairly swift advantages, that is, advantages which manifest themselves within the lifetime of the person who first refrained from extinguishing it. Perhaps the use of fire to prevent a person from dying of cold can be learned fairly quickly. At the same time, according to Freud's theory, repression tends to produce unpleasant side-effects. The desire (or perhaps the fear) remains active in the unconscious, although it is repudiated by the conscious, so it leads to self-deception, mental conflict and neurosis.

Can we concoct a similar story for the memory of the primal murder and the guilt attached to it? The guilt for the primal murder, according to Freud, drove early humans to make injunctions against incest and murder, which in turn made for a more stable, safer existence for most of the members of the society. At the same time this guilt is not the best possible way to bring about this result; it would be better if it were attained by humans realising what the benefits of refraining from incest and murder were, while at the same time avoiding the self-deception and so forth which the cruder solution brings. But because of their primitive mental apparatus, this more satisfactory option was not available to people at the time. So the new guilt-and-taboo ridden society which emerged was far from ideal, but it was better than the repressionless 'society' (the 'primal horde', in Freud's story) that preceded it. Once again, if a spontaneous mutation happened to produce the unconscious guilt ready-made, this would be an advantage.

One problem with this story is this: guilt for something (even if unconscious) requires a memory of having done that thing (even if unconscious, and false), so what we have is a complex of ideas. As with

complex organs, we might need to break the story of how it came about into steps sufficiently small that we can plausibly claim that a chance mutation could have led to each new development. We need to get from 'no memory of, let alone guilt for, the primal murder' to 'guilt for the primal murder'. Further, whatever series of steps we posit, for each step we need to explain how the result of that step came to be propagated. In other words, if we accept the Panglossian paradigm, we need to say how that step by itself led to reproductive benefits. There is a little leeway here, but not much. However, with sufficient ingenuity we might devise a story that met these requirements.

A more serious problem remains, however: can a genetic mutation bring about psychological effects specific enough to be called memories, or feelings of guilt, etc.? Can genotypic changes produce psychological modifications in the same way as they can bring about modifications in the structure of the eye? The answers to these questions depend partly on what one considers to be a psychological modification. There is clearly a spectrum running from straightforwardly physical modifications which produce generalised psychological effects, to specific detailed psychological effects. For example, a change in the amount of some hormone being produced by an organism will be likely to have effects on the psychology of that organism; it might be more aggressive, thus being more likely, if it is capable of thought in the first place, to think about, and want to commit, violent acts. But the effects will be very non-specific - a change in the amount of a hormone present will not by itself produce a specific belief. A little further along the spectrum might be a change in the amount of a hormone being produced whenever factor x is present. This might mean an increase in the probability that the organism, if it is capable of thought in the first place, will have the thought 'x is bad', 'x is good', 'x is exciting' etc. It is still a long way from this to a fairly specific memory such as 'we killed the primal father' - not the *most* specific mental state, but still more specific than 'x is bad'.

Still, we might say: what is wrong in principle with saying that, by a series of genetic mutations, there could arise an innate physical formation in

the brain, such that everyone who has that formation also has the memory x ? What is wrong is that it requires that every time a person is in physical state y , that person is in mental state x , where x is something fairly specific (i.e. a belief that P , a desire that Q , etc.). This is not exactly the same as 'type-type reductionism' - the claim that every time a person is in mental state x that person is in physical state y . Unlike type-type reductionism, our requirement allows that the same mental state could be physically instantiated in any number of different ways. Nonetheless, it means that a description of the physical state of a person would give us enough information to determine at least some of that person's specific mental states. I will call this requirement 'if physical state p then mental state m ', or ' m if p ' for short.

For Freud to glide from the obvious and uncontroversial fact that animals have inherited instincts to the claim that therefore it is possible for humans to have inherited specific mental states is precisely to beg an important question. Namely, the question 'can mental states as specific as "sense of guilt" or the knowledge that we once possessed a primal father and killed him, be smoothly reduced to physical states of a type which are inheritable?' It is not enough for Freud's needs that we can have 'token-token' reduction, for this only means that every mental state is identifiable with *some* physical state. What is needed, it would appear, is ' m if p '. Only if this is the case can a mental state of the specificity Freud requires be biologically inherited. (I am only arguing, however, that ' m if p ' is a *necessary* condition, not that it is a *sufficient* one.) That at least some dispositions to act in certain ways can be correlated in a type-type way with physical states is *prima facie* far more plausible.

Someone wishing to defend ' m if p ' might claim that if a lot of empirical evidence could be produced to show that there are innate specific mental contents such as those Freud adduces, then this could provide evidence for ' m if p '. However, this does not follow. We could accept the view that mental states always require a conjunction of external and internal conditions, and add that if specific universal mental state x proves to be as universal as Freud

claims, it must be the case that the environmental conditions necessary for production of state x are invariably present. An argument could be put together that, although instinctive dispositions to react are not sufficient by themselves for innate specific mental contents, nonetheless, given certain ubiquitous environmental conditions, such instinctive dispositions make it virtually inevitable that certain specific mental states will be present in any case. This may not have been what Freud had in mind, but what is relevant for our purposes is whether it would do the job Freud wants innate mental states to do. I will discuss this in 5.3.3.

5.3.2 Cultural Transmission

What about the other possibility I mentioned earlier - the acquisition of mental states through learning or other forms of cultural transmission? This avoids the problem of ' m if p ' for it is clear that detailed and specific information is transmitted down through generations by learning and imitation. There are a number of other problems with this suggestion, however. What I wish to argue is that those problems may not be insurmountable.

The problems arise from disanalogies between the types of specific memory that Freud wants to claim is transmitted, and the type of information which we can clearly see is transmitted. What Freud wants is the transmission of fairly specific pieces of mental content - memories and so forth. Very specific information is indeed transmitted by learning. For example, the Latin alphabet and the rules of chess have lasted for thousands of years due to transmission by learning. But these are instances of direct, deliberate, conscious teaching and learning. There are publicly agreed, consciously adhered-to rules of the alphabet, and of chess. If the learner gets details wrong, the teacher or the community of chess-players or alphabet-users as a whole will quickly put the learner right. Features of these activities which are not part of the deliberately adhered-to rules, tend to 'drift' over time. For

example, the style of forming letters and the exact design of chess pieces have changed over the centuries. This suggests two problems with Freudian transmission:

(1) The mental formations Freud wants to say are transmitted are unconscious, as is the process of transmission itself - but how can such specific information be transmitted unconsciously?

(2) Even assuming unconscious transmission to be possible, what is to prevent 'poor copying', or correct it if it happens? 'Poor copying' could alter any information beyond recognition after a few generations.

A solution to the first problem is partly suggested by Freud. There are some indications that he believed it was possible for information to be passed from one person's unconscious to another's. As I showed in 1.2, he believed that many forms of otherwise inexplicable behaviour were in fact 'utterances' of the unconscious mind. The unconscious mind, using such means as symbolic rituals, psychosomatic symptoms, and verbal utterances with hidden meanings, *says* things. Taking this idea a little further, he also suggests that one person's unconscious can understand the 'sayings' of another's, without either person's conscious mind being aware of what is going on. An example of this can be found in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (SE 6, 41): a woman student was telling three young men about an English novel she had recently read which included an account of Christ's life. However, she found she was momentarily unable to remember the title of the book, which was *Ben Hur*. The men knew what book she was talking about, but they too were struck with temporary amnesia about its title. After the woman had remembered the title, it occurred to her that her temporary amnesia had been 'because it contains an expression that I (like any other girl) do not care to use - especially in the company of young men.' The woman's native language was German, and 'Ben Hur' sounds like 'Bin Hure' (I am a whore). Freud suggests that 'saying the words 'Ben Hur' was unconsciously equated by her with a sexual offer, and her forgetting accordingly corresponded to the fending-off

of an unconscious temptation of that kind.' Most significant for our present purposes is what Freud says next:

We have reason for supposing that similarly unconscious purposes had determined the young men's forgetting. Their unconscious understood the real significance of the girl's forgetting and, so to speak, interpreted it. The men's forgetting shows respect for this modest behaviour. ... It is as if the girl who was talking with them had by her sudden lapse of memory given a clear sign, which the men had understood clearly enough.

Whether or not one finds this particular example plausible, a case can be made that the general phenomenon of 'people unconsciously gathering information from other people' is perfectly real. Consider 'body language'. If you are an acute reader of body language, you can pick up information about a person's mood from aspects of the person's behaviour of which the person is unaware. Further, you may combine this information with more general information about the person and the general background, to make more-accurate-than-chance guesses about the person's beliefs and desires. For example, you might on such a basis say: 'he's annoyed about what I said last week', or 'she's excited about this trip abroad', or 'he thinks I stole the money'. Freud acknowledges the power of body language to reveal information of this kind:

He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore. (SE 7, 78)

Taking this a step further, it is plausible to conjecture that people who are said to be 'intuitive' - i.e. quick to make accurate guesses about other people's moods and thoughts - are in fact making use of this kind of behavioural clues (which is not to say that is not still an impressive ability). People of this type might themselves profess to 'just know' that the other

person thinks x or feels y . If my conjecture is correct, the difference between the acute body-language readers and the intuitive people who 'just know' would be that the former are able to report on what basis they make their guesses, whereas the latter are not. In other words, the acute body language readers are conscious of the process of transmission, whereas the intuitive people are not. However, in both of these cases the 'readers' are conscious of what information is being transmitted (or at least if the conclusion they arrive at is correct they are). The 'transmitters' may or may not be conscious of either the information being transmitted or the fact that they are transmitting information: good body language readers can be just as good at picking up information about a person's state of mind even if that person is unaware of those states of mind. (We do not think it nonsensical for someone to say: 'I know you better than you know yourself.') But we still need to take one further step: So far we have allowed the possibility for information-transmission where the 'transmitter' is not conscious of either the process of transmission, or the information itself, and where the receiver is not conscious of the process, but is conscious of the information. What Freud needs, however, is a process of information-transmission where *neither* party is conscious of *either* the transmission process or the information being transmitted.

Just this seems to be the case when we consider that some cultural phenomena, such as *mores* or fashions, seem to spread very widely through cultures without necessarily being consciously passed from one person to another. This consideration also partially takes care of two other objections to my 'intuitive person' suggestion - namely, that the guesses that people make on the basis of this kind of information are only more accurate than chance, they are not infallible, and that this ability varies from person to person. A further answer to these objections is suggested by Freud in *Group Psychology*, where he points to the indisputable phenomena of hypnosis and suggestion by which individuals influence each other. He admits that the mechanisms which underlie these phenomena are unknown, but nonetheless, he says, we

cannot deny that they are real. He goes on to argue that the processes can operate among large groups of people in subtle ways of which even the person doing the influencing is not consciously aware. Likewise, although we do not know the mechanisms whereby *mores* and fashions are spread, we cannot deny that the spreading does happen. *Mores* and fashions can become so pervasive as to affect almost everybody in a culture. It is not necessary for Freud's purposes that absolutely everybody in a culture is subject to the complex of memory, guilt and so forth. If most people are affected by it, and the cultural products in which Freud is interested, such as religion, are manifestations of it, then regardless of the exceptions, Freud can still make an interesting and substantial claim.

However, at best this only takes care of the means of transmission. Fashions and *mores* are notoriously variable. The problem remains: how could mental attributes acquired by cultural transmission manage to persist unchanged for thousands of years and transcend cultural differences, as Freud claims they do? Are there any examples of culturally transmitted ideas or practises which have so survived? One might instance certain very basic ideas such as the wheel or the pot. Of course, these artefacts display a great amount of variation from culture to culture. Nonetheless, the solid wooden wheels on carts of ancient times, and the spoked metal wheels with rubber tyres on bicycles today, do share basic common features - such as being round and able to rotate around their axis. Further, it is not merely accidental that these particular features have survived - they are part and parcel of the usefulness of wheels. 'Not merely accidental' does not mean that it was *inevitable* that the idea would survive, however.

How does this get us any closer to what Freud needs? In all likelihood the idea of making wheels was passed down from generation to generation through deliberate, conscious teaching and learning. In any event, wheels are publicly accessible, visible and physically durable objects, not something hidden deep in the unconscious. But this disanalogy may not make any difference. For one thing, the fact of an idea's being consciously learned does

not prevent it from being modified over generations. A story, for example, may be passed down orally over thousands of years, and could conceivably be so altered over that period that, although there is perfect continuity, there is no single feature of the 'original' story remaining. And the same goes for physical artefacts. We have to ask: what is it about the features of roundness and rotatability that have given them their longevity as features of wheels? The answer has nothing to do with whether or not those features were acquired by deliberate conscious learning or not. A plausible answer is that it is because the 'essential' features are necessary for the usefulness of wheels. What I am suggesting is that certain very basic ideas, such as the wheel, have lasted as long as they have in what may be regarded as their 'essence', because of advantages which they conferred on people or societies which adapted them. By advantages I mean survival advantages. In the case of some ideas, such as wheels and pots, the advantages are such as to be effective in a wide variety of different physical and cultural environments. Being able to transport goods over land more quickly and with less expenditure of energy must be advantageous to people in a wide variety of different situations. It is not necessary that people in any society said to themselves 'this wheel is a good idea, let's use it', although that may well have happened. That wheels confer survival advantages on people and societies *just means* that the likelihood is high that people and societies possessing wheels will become more widespread. So whether or not the idea is consciously learned is irrelevant.

I am not suggesting that usefulness is the *only* reason that ideas may be preserved. But it is certainly *often* the reason certain ideas are preserved. Further, if we want to claim that this is why the core ideas of the neurosis of religion were preserved, it harmonises with one aspect of the 'religion is a neurosis' analogy - the 'gain from illness.' We saw in 1.7 that Freud believed that a causal factor in the creation and maintenance in existence of neuroses was some benefit which the patient derived from it. This benefit is only in the short-term, and perhaps not even much of a benefit then. Likewise with

religion, Freud acknowledges that it has some benefits in the (relatively) short term, such as the work it plays in stabilising culture and the comfort it gives to believers. But the analogue of recovering from the neurosis is to abandon religion, look for social stability on some other basis, and learn to live without the comfort.

If usefulness is the reason for their preservation, then features of wheels which do not contribute to their usefulness, or which are only useful in more limited contexts, will for the same reason probably turn out not to be as ubiquitous or long-lasting as the 'essential' features. For example, a wheel's being made of one particular type of wood rather than another may make no difference to its usefulness; the addition of caterpillar tracks to a set of wheels may increase their efficiency in some terrains but not in others; a wheel's bearing a certain design may be of great ritual significance in one particular culture only. I mention this last to show that the cultural environment may be just as important as the physical to the *de facto* usefulness of any idea. Some ideas may have no usefulness at all, or may be useful only in very local circumstances, and so may die out quickly.

There is nothing at all inevitable about the development of even such extremely useful items as wheels. Some advanced cultures, such as the Incas and Aztecs, seem never to have developed the wheel. Even if my suggestion is correct for a certain cultural artefact or idea, all it means is that if it emerges at all, it is more likely to last than something which is of more limited usefulness. But Freud claims something close to total ubiquity for his postulated 'mental formations'. My suggestion only supports the view that it is not impossible that they could be very widespread despite being culturally acquired. This does not absolve Freud from the need to produce evidence that the mental formations are in fact as ubiquitous as he claims.

Some remaining problems are: do Freud's postulated mental formations have an identifiable 'essence'? Further, if they have, are they useful to their possessors? Even if they are as universal as Freud claims, it may be that they merely 'latch onto' some ubiquitous feature of humans and/or their

environment, or that they arise for different reasons in different cultures. If the former possibility is the case, we need to considerably water down Freud's story. The latter possibility would spell complete disaster for Freud's anthropological project. For he not only wants to claim that the same mental formations are ubiquitous in humans, but also to give a single explanation for all cases of those formations.

Even as it is, approaching the story as I am proposing here involves departing from what Freud clearly believed to be the case. Freud wants to attribute the continuity of his proposed mental formations to biological inheritance. In *Totem and Taboo*, he explicitly says he does not think cultural transmission can do the job he wants:

... how much can we attribute to psychical continuity in the sequence of generations? and what are the ways and means employed by one generation in order to hand on its mental states to the next one? I shall not pretend that these problems are sufficiently explained or that direct communication and tradition - which are the first things that occur to one - are enough to account for the process. (SE 13, p. 158)

So in trying to put together a story about mental formations which owe their continuity to cultural transmission, are we not defending a hypothesis which has nothing to do with Freud? Not quite. As someone who knew Darwin's work very well (see Ritvo 1990, Badcock 1994), Freud undoubtedly realised that genetic inheritance by itself cannot, any more than cultural transmission by itself, explain why a complex system develops or survives. Whether the system is biologically or culturally engendered, it interacts with an environment, and it is the results of this interaction that decide whether any trait perishes in the first generation or lasts longer. As I have already shown, Freud believed that the neurotic complex which included the memory of the primal trauma and the guilt attached to it, conferred survival advantages on those who had it. This view remains tenable even if we also claim, as Freud did, that the complex led to individual unhappiness, and was

harmful to the group in the very long term. Of course, defending the claim that religious beliefs confer survival advantages is just as tall an order as defending the claim that religious beliefs are in the long-term harmful. But what I am concerned with here is the coherence of Freud's view rather than its empirical credentials. Freud's belief that the collective neurotic complex has lasted for tens of thousands of years because of survival advantages is separable from his claim that elements of this complex were biologically inherited.

This type of story does not involve any direct causal lineage from the events in the life of the ancestors to the false memories in the descendants, as Lamarckian inheritance would. But neither does inheritance by genetic mutation. If we accept Freud's notion of false memory however, this does not present a problem.

5.3.3 A Combined Approach

What I have said so far may seem to imply that the categories 'biologically inherited trait' and 'culturally acquired trait' are mutually exclusive. But obviously many traits owe their existence to a combination of the two. You may be born with an innate aptitude for mathematics, and with the right teaching you will be likely to learn recondite theorems etc. But if you happen to be born into a culture where mathematics is in a primitive state, you will probably learn much less. A contemporary of Freud's, James Mark Baldwin, proposed a model whereby biological natural selection and learning may reinforce each other and produce cumulatively developing psychological traits over generations (see Baldwin 1895, 1896). This model does not require that anybody is born with inbuilt specific mental states; nor does it require that any developments in the psychological characteristics of humans over generations are inevitable.

Baldwin's model works like this: Assume there is a population of the same species with a wide variety of different genotypes. This is in fact the case

with any sexually reproducing species. Among the features determined by genetics in this species are features of the brain. Some of these features vary in a way which gives different members of the species different innate aptitudes for learning things. 'Aptitude' is vague but what I mean by it is an ease of learning some particular thing. Musical or mathematical ability may be facilitated by genetics in some such way: a person may for genetic reasons be born with a physical feature of the brain which means that that person finds it easier to learn mathematics or music. This does not mean that it is inevitable that the person will learn mathematics or music. The person still needs the appropriate 'stimulus' from the environment to learn it. It is just that with this kind of person even a small amount of stimulus may produce an impressive result. Neither need it be said that the person is born knowing things about mathematics or music. To attribute this type of innate specific knowledge to someone would be to assume '*m* if *p*', as I explained at the end of 5.2.

Let us say then that some people, due to genotype, are born with a greater likelihood that they will learn a particular thing. This assumes that whatever features of the brain change when a person acquires new knowledge (let us call such features 'wiring') are to a degree flexible. But it is obviously the case that humans are flexible in this way. Some 'rewiring' will always be necessary in order for any individual to acquire any specific belief - that is, one is not born with any specific beliefs. But individuals may be born with a 'wiring' which is nearer to, or somehow favourable to the acquisition of, a state in which the person knows the thing in question. This may seem to move dangerously close to the view that a particular brain state equals a particular mental state. But in fact all that is required is that we accept that different people are born with different aptitudes for different things. This, although inexplicable at present, is difficult to doubt. If mental states require brain states plus external context, a person may be born with brain states close to ones which will fulfil that part of the requirements for a particular mental state. This may still be so even if there are many such brain states. We can accept the anomalous monist view that no brain state by itself determines

what mental state a person is in, while still accepting that nonetheless mental states are *in part* determined (or if that is too strong, influenced) by physical states of the person. All that is needed to establish this is to point to the undoubted affects physiological changes on mental states - for example, the effects of drugs.

If someone is born with an innate higher likelihood of acquiring some mental state, that person has a greater chance of acquiring it by learning, or for that matter by accident or trial-and-error if that is what it takes. By higher likelihood of acquiring some mental state, I do not wish to imply any receptivity which is specific to just one mental state, but a receptivity to some broad set or type of mental state which includes the specific one in question. For example, a person who is innately musical and grows up in a favourable cultural environment will be likely get to know many pieces of music by heart, but the fact that it was *those* particular pieces of music and not others is a result of cultural background. If, as is the case with music, it is possible to learn specific things from others, the more innately receptive person will on average be able to learn them more quickly and with less expenditure of energy.

In Freud's story, the beliefs and so on are acquired by unconscious transmission rather than deliberate teaching and learning. The receptivity to these is presumably due to a number of factors: an innate aptitude for repressing, a tendency to acquire unconscious guilt feelings, among others. I do not pretend that Freud has established that these things exist.

Let us say that a certain set of beliefs is advantageous to individuals in the sense of increasing the chances of survival and - more importantly given that the story I am trying to put forward appeals to natural selection - reproduction. If some individuals have, due to their genotype, an innate tendency to acquire those beliefs faster and with less expenditure of energy than others, this means that their genotype gives them an advantage over those others. So the principle of natural selection means that that genotype will tend to become more widespread. But this can only happen if the

environment has features which make it likely that those with the innate receptivity will develop the relevant beliefs. If the beliefs are being transmitted unconsciously to new individuals then this is just such an environmental feature.

So Freud's story would look like this: at some time in the past, some humans acquired a certain set of mental states. They passed these on to other humans by unconscious transmission. But some humans, due to genetically-determined features of their brains, were more receptive to this transmission than others. Having these mental states gave people an advantage in natural selection terms, and therefore gave those who had the genetically-determined receptivity an advantage in natural selection terms. So the innate receptivity became more widespread throughout the population. If the advantage that the mental states conferred was very great, the innate receptivity could become ubiquitous. This would of course require that the advantages were conferred under conditions which held in the wide variety of different environments, including cultural environments, in which humans live. The set of mental states may have been acquired in a gradual step-by-step process, just like any complex physical organ. Likewise with the brain features which make up the 'innate receptivity'. The initial acquisition of the mental states, or of some of them, could have involved accident or trial-and-error, as the genotypes could have come about by accidental mutations. This would not prevent the advantages conferred from producing the selection effects.

Freud may have read at least one of the relevant works by Baldwin. In a letter to Wilhelm Fliess in 1897, he says he received a book on the psychology of children by Baldwin, which Masson says is *Mental Development in the Child and the Race*. (Freud-Fliess 1985, p. 277 and 278n.1) It seems clear that he understood the ubiquity of the shared features of the unconscious to be due to the mutually reinforcing influence of biological inheritance and cultural influence. In *Totem and Taboo* he says:

Social psychology shows very little interest, on the whole, in the manner in which the required continuity in the mental life of individuals is

established. A part of the problem seems to be met by the inheritance of psychical dispositions which, however, need to be given some sort of impetus in the life of the individual before they can be roused into actual operation. This may be the meaning of the poet's words:

Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast,
Erwib es, um es zu besitzen.³⁵ (SE 13, 158)

The final section of the discussion in the 'Wolf Man' case history (SE 17) makes similar claims. Some psychoanalysts after Freud claimed that in very rare cases a person can lack very central components of the normal unconscious (see for example Melanie Klein's 'Little Dick' in Klein 1975). This is compatible with the view that the acquisition of those features by any individual is only very likely, not inevitable. But it seems that Freud never completely made up his mind on this. The passage from *Moses and Monotheism* which I discussed in 5.3.1.1. indicates that at that late date he was thinking in terms of biological inheritance pure and simple.

³⁵ 'What thou hast inherited from thy fathers, acquire it to make it thine.' From Goethe's *Faust*, part 1, scene 1.

CONCLUSION

For our purposes, it does not matter that Freud did not himself settle on this combined approach. All that matters is that the combined approach allows that specific mental states of the kind Freud postulates, may be preserved in the unconscious over the periods of time he claims they do. As I indicated in the Introduction, all I hope to establish is that Freud's story is a *possible* naturalistic account of the origin of religion. If my arguments are correct, then Freud successfully counters the religious apologists' claim that the near-ubiquity of religion *cannot* be explained naturalistically.

But that was only one of the three aims which I claimed naturalistic accounts of religion such as Freud's have. The second was the historical one: to discover the truth about how religion actually originated. It does not look as though Freud's theory will achieve that aim, for the combined approach does not overcome the problem of lack of evidence. As with group psychology, this problem is such that it is unlikely ever to be overcome. For Freud is making claims about the deep psychology of people thousands of years ago, and in cultures very different from his or ours. The available evidence about individual people in these remote periods is at best fragmentary, and none of it is of a clinical psychoanalytic nature. Further, because of large cultural differences, any claim to understand the psychology of these people on the basis of an interpretation of their actions, their cultural institutions and so forth, is bound to be tenuous.

As for what I have called the therapeutic aim, if Badcock's reading of Freud in *The Psychoanalysis of Culture* is correct, then the notion of 'therapy for religion' is to be taken seriously. Freud's aim is to give religious people an insight into the causes of their religion analogous to the insight into the causes of their neurosis which patients attain in psychoanalytic therapy. But the analogy here is not exact; for reading an account of the traumatic origin of a

condition one is in, is not the same as directly re-experiencing the thoughts and feelings involved in the originating trauma. And presumably, it is the latter that is supposed to take place in a successful analysis. Nonetheless, an account like Freud's may, if it is found plausible, help a religious believer to distance herself from her beliefs and judge them from a more mature, sober perspective. This would be analogous to the way in which cured psychoanalysts are held by Freud to be able to look at the formerly unconscious desires which were central to their neurosis, and rationally judge that they should not be acted on. Of course, to have this effect, Freud's explanatory story needs to be more than coherent - it needs to be plausible as well.

If it is plausible, it has a further advantage from the therapeutic point of view. It allows us to see religion as something which is tied to deep and widespread features of human beings, but not as thereby something which is *inevitably* present because of those features. Thus we can admit that religion's grip on people's minds could not be broken simply by showing up logical fallacies in apologists' arguments, but that it could be broken by other means. It would be necessary to this process to show that the emotional and other benefits which religion brings can be bettered by some other *Weltanschauung*, such as Freud's 'scientific' one. In this connection, one could use Freud to argue that religion has had a stabilising influence on society, and brings emotional comforts, but also that the stabilising influence could be attained by other means in a society of sufficiently mature people, and that all things considered we are better off learning to live without the comforts.

A question I have not addressed is whether the features of religion which Freud thinks are typical, and which his theory is held to explain, are actually as widespread as he thinks. Many religions lack a single father-like God, for example. One might concede this point and hold only that Freud's theory applies to religions which do have those features, and this would still make Freud's theory a substantive and interesting theory. But alternatively, one could appeal to family resemblances between different religions, and to

the vagueness of the concepts involved, to argue that features of religions which seem to bear no resemblance to Freud's template may have evolved from the features that Freud picks out as the typical ones. This would be to make a bold claim about the history of religion, however, and one would still need to give reasons for believing that, for example, non-monotheistic religions actually bore traces of their Freudian origins.

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