

A Friendly Reply to Fuhito Endo's  
“Patricide of Monotheism or Metapsychology:  
Freud's Historiography of Transcendental Negativity”

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The "middle period" of Freud's development overlaps roughly with the time of the First World War. With two sons at war, analytic colleagues distracted by or enlisted in the war effort, and a clinical practice in decline, Freud had extra time on his hands. And so he attempted "Preliminaries to a Metapsychology," a book comprised of twelve essays. These attempts at a "meta-" psychology, literally a realm "beyond" psychology, are among the most challenging works in the Freud canon; works routinely described by scholars as abstract, theoretical, speculative, even philosophical. However, the book project was abandoned. Freud published only five separate essays and, until a sixth essay was published in 1987, the other seven were abandoned and presumed lost.

In a thoughtful essay on the relationship between Freud's final work, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), and the traumatic break with Carl Jung years before in 1914, Professor Endo (2019) privileges the metapsychology essays from 1914 to 1915. His basic claim: Freud's late interest in Moses could be an after-effect of this earlier break with Jung; an after-effect caught in the undertow of the works on metapsychology. This makes sense (although Freud's interest in Moses actually goes further back, and includes additional, and highly relevant, dynamics with Jung). Both periods turn on the question of authority and patricide, precisely those dynamics which, in Freud's thinking, made society possible – including the society of psychoanalysts gathered around Freud. Although Professor Endo doesn't spell it out, he means that Freud's metapsychology and the critique of the Mosaic tradition that developed between 1934 and 1939 are forms of "working through." Such are the "self-referential" characteristics, in Professor Endo's estimation, of even Freud's most abstract essays.

On the one hand, I completely agree. In a recent book (Dufresne 2017) I

make a case for understanding the "late Freud," the period from 1920 to 1939, in precisely these terms. Let's stick to *Moses and Monotheism*. In my view it is not only Freud's own commentary on psychoanalysis, but his final will and testament – very nearly a legal document instructing readers on how one does psychoanalysis, in this case, how one applies psychoanalysis to the history and beliefs of Judaism. Freud showed Jung and the other dissidents how it should be done, and he did so at least twice: in *Totem and Taboo* of 1912-13, and again in the Moses book in 1939. As I put it in a cheeky remark, *Moses and Monotheism* was Freud's "final *fuck you* to everyone, but first and foremost to his would-be son and successor, Carl Jung" (2017: 243). For, in my view, Freud 'out-Junged' Jung in these two works on the meaning, and deep history, of religious belief.

So far, so good. I also agree that Freud does it, against the specter of Jungian mysticism, with the help of his metapsychology. But in this regard I contend, first of all, that *Moses and Monotheism* functions beyond the pleasure principle, and therefore 'beyond psychoanalysis', in the grip of the death drive; and second, that the much-misunderstood and maligned Moses book is really the "first work of applied metapsychology" (243). This metapsychology is overwhelmingly informed by Freud's belief in an outdated biology; belief that goes back to the earliest days of Freud's thinking about the "psychic apparatus," for example, as advanced in the unfinished "Project for a Scientific Psychology" of 1895 (see Dufresne 2000).

It is here that Professor Endo and I part company – and ironically so, because he is probably the most insightful reader of my early book, *Tales From the Freudian Crypt*, on the biological foundation of the metapsychology. That fact led to Professor Endo's translation of that book into Japanese in 2010. Consequently I take his arguments about the late period of Freud's work very seriously, and am keen to explore, if briefly, the source of our friendly disagreement.

In his essay Professor Endo privileges the early phase of the middle period of Freud's metapsychology: 1914-15. I do not. I privilege the final phase of the middle period of Freud's metapsychology, 1919-1920, the phase that advances

the new dualism of life and death drives. I'm aware that this level of exactitude will strike casual readers of Freud as a kind of mind-numbing scholasticism. But far from being a pointless exercise in hair splitting – what Freud rightly calls the “narcissism of small differences” – these two choices are monumental for our different understandings of Freud and psychoanalysis, most especially in the late period.

Instead of laying out in detail my alternative view of Freud – one that sees Freud double down on the outdated biologism, or meta-biology, that Professor Endo's Freud has supposedly surpassed – I want to more simply insist on the importance of 1919-1920 for an adequate understanding of the final period of Freud's development. First of all, it is important to note that, although Freud abandoned the project to write “Preliminaries to a Metapsychology,” he didn't abandon the project to produce a metapsychology. On the contrary. Freud abandoned only the “preliminary” aspect of his speculations, publishing instead a full-blown accounting; one that culminates, and thus supersedes, the twelve preliminary essays that he duly set aside.

The origins of this work of 1920 occur a few years before. Freud and his Hungarian friend, the analyst Sandor Ferenczi, planned on co-authoring this new accounting under the working title of “Lamarck and Psychoanalysis.” Jean-Baptiste Lamarck is still remembered for advancing the non-Darwinian ‘Theory of the Inheritance of Acquired Characteristics’; a theory that plugged perfectly, and often, into another popular theory of the 19th Century, Ernst Haeckel's theory of ‘Recapitulation’. Freud accepted both theories, which are at the heart of his new theory of repetition that arrived in “The Uncanny” of 1919 – and, indeed, was readily incorporated into the “paleopsychology” of stalwart analysts like Karl Abraham, Hanns Sachs, and Theodor Reik (see Dufresne 2017; Tatsumi 2019). So this is not just a wayward interpretation, or a tenuous inference, based on hermeneutic detective work. Freud *explicitly* argues in *Moses and Monotheism*, his last major work, that he can't think in any other way – damn the scientists, who accepted Mendelian genetics after 1900, and damn the other analysts like Ernest Jones, who found Freud's reliance on the old biology horribly embarrassing. To all these nay-sayers

Freud couldn't be more clear: "I must, however, in all modesty confess that nevertheless I cannot do without this factor in biological evolution" (SE 23: 99-100).

Freud and Ferenczi never did co-author the proposed book on Lamarck and psychoanalysis. Instead they went ahead and individually published works that summarize their *verboten* views; views that overlap perfectly, as we know from the works themselves and from their highly illuminating correspondence of the time (see Freud and Ferenczi 1996, 2000). In 1920 Freud published *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; and in 1924 Ferenczi published *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality* [*Versuch einer Genitaltheorie*].

Why does any of this matter? Well, if we are inclined to take seriously the idea that the late works of Freud, including his final work on Moses, function as a commentary on Freud and other lapsed Freudians, to wit, that Freud, in a self-referential mode, never stopped ruminating about and instructing readers about the true meaning of psychoanalysis; and if the metapsychology of the middle period is indeed crucial to that end; then it follows that it makes a big difference if we privilege the incomplete and unfinished fragments of his "Preliminaries" project of 1914-15, or privilege the culminating work of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* of 1920 (of which these fragments are important parts).

One more thing. We know very well that the lost metapsychology essay published in 1987 is steeped in the same language of phylogenesis and biology that is found in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. And it was written in 1915, from the same period as the essays Professor Endo cites in favour of the claim that Freud left biology behind. Freud's biologism is not, therefore, an aberration or outlier in his thinking (see Dufresne 2019). Of course the idea that Freud really was a "biologist of the mind" or "crypto-biologist" (see Sulloway 1979) is anathema, if not heresy, to most humanities scholars at work today. Same with the analysts. For isn't Freud the hero who left all that positivism behind? Isn't Freud's contribution precisely this shift toward a view of unconscious processes that are purely psychological? And isn't Freud really, at bottom, a sophisticated literary thinker who made possible much of

what passes today as applied arts criticism?

Faced with this puzzle, and with the cognitive dissonance that results, we get all kinds of bad faith rationalizations, if not willful whitewashings, of Freud's explicit reliance on biology. Take again Freud's lost essay, "Overview of the Transference Neuroses." When it was published as a little bilingual book in 1987, the editor, a German analyst, demoted Freud's prosaic title to a subtitle and invented an entirely new title for the reading public: *A Phylogentic Fantasy*. This sort of willful manipulation is, unfortunately, very typical of Freud Studies. And it's awful. For it is nothing less than an attempt, misguided and condescending at its core, to 'save Freud' from his own beliefs; to spin his supposed mistakes as amusing 'fantasies', unanalyzed neuroses, ravings of a misanthrope, ramblings of a late style, or, finally, as inessential asides or supplements about *Kultur* that do not, should not, and cannot challenge the received meaning, practice, and business of psychoanalysis. This is what we get when analysts train and analyze each other, run their own journals and publishing houses, host their own conferences, and then become published authors about the history and theory of psychoanalysis: all sources of dissension, including unwelcome corrections, are set aside, practically at a structural level, so as not to muddy the accepted narrative, however false. And this is what we get, sadly, when even good and decent scholars like Edward Said parrot this nonsense and lend credence to a stream of thought that is not just defensive and unprofessional, but is shockingly anti-intellectual.

I'm pleased to say that Professor Endo is a brilliant exception. As a literary critic he makes a coherent case for a Freud that surpasses the old biology, and rallies sources and arguments to advance his position. However, I contend that he can only do so by ignoring what happens to the metapsychology in the culminating work of the middle period (i.e., in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) and, indeed, by ignoring what happens to the metapsychology during the final "cultural" phase of Freud's work – including in *Moses and Monotheism*. What happens is the biology, to wit, Freud's phylogenetic 'fantasies' that inform everything he says about society. Let me underscore that again: the biology informs *everything*. Freud never stops using, thinking, and defending the

retrograde biology in his work after 1920. On this score Professor Endo and I part company, but on the common ground of argumentation and citation, in short, on the ground of scholarship.

Professor Endo's essay is a clear, concise, and thoughtful statement for one side of the argument about Freud's legacy. It happens to be the conventional or traditional side. I freely admit that it remains the majority position, most especially among arts scholars who dabble in psychoanalysis; don't give a jot about Freud's reliance on meta-biology; and, in some cases, don't even care what Freud actually thought, said, and argued when those thoughts, statements, and arguments conflict with their own pet theories. If necessary, they'll say that Freud's claims are really metaphors signifying something radically other (Lacan being the classic case); or they'll embrace ad hominem arguments and say, for instance, that with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud lost his mind to neurotic grief, and so we should just ignore the coherence of his arguments-as-arguments and analyze the analyst (most recently Joel Whitebook). I disagree. I think, instead, that these scholars should come clean and admit they don't care about facts, evidence, coherence, and context – so that people like me can, in turn, stop reading and correcting their unsubstantiated opinions, their 'alt-facts', about the histories and theories of psychoanalysis.

And so I stand, militantly even, on the other side. It happens to be the side of so-called 'revisionism', less politely referred to as 'Freud bashing', but what I call 'Critical Freud Studies' (see Dufresne 2003). I admit that it remains the minority position. But I also insist that this fact is telling about the field of Freud Studies, which non-specialists naively accept on good faith. Most scholars simply don't know that Freud Studies, based on decades of vanity publishing, is the intellectual equivalent of one hundred and thirty years of fake news.

I thank my old friend for sharing his insights – for provoking me once again to thought – and for suggesting this avenue for vigorous and open debate. That's the way intellectual disagreements should be handled, and the way, too, that they can be resolved. I am in his debt.

Dufresne was Visiting Professor of English at Seikei University between April and August of 2019, during which time he wrote this reply and also participated in a Workshop on Freud and *Moses & Monotheism* at Keio University. Dufresne's latest book is *The Democracy of Suffering* (MQUP 2019).

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