After *Beyond* Comes *The Future*: Freud's Absurdist Theatre of Reason

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> "This is my worst book! It isn't even a book of Freud. It's the book of an old man. Besides Freud is dead now, and believe me, the genuine Freud was really a great man. I am particularly sorry that you didn't know him better."
>
> **Freud criticizes *The Future of an Illusion***

In the Spring of 1927 Freud began work on *The Future of an Illusion*, finished it in September, and published it in November. It is by all accounts a slight book, unoriginal in its condemnation of religion and not very well strung together conceptually. It is also considered one of the least Freudian of all of Freud's works, for in it Freud mounts an uncharacteristically optimistic defence of Logos, Greek god of Reason, against the forces that make religion possible, namely biological instinct, infantilism, and anxiety about the external world. This is certainly not the grumpy, pessimistic, tragic Freud we find almost everywhere else in his work, including three years later in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. This is Freud as Enlightenment philosopher, uncompromising defender of rationality and scientific progress.

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Consequently, Freud's own harsh assessment of the book comes as no surprise. In October of 1927, referring to the advance proofs of his manuscript, Freud admitted to Sandor Ferenczi that *The Future* "already strikes me as childish, I basically think differently, consider this work analytically frail and insufficient as a confession" (*Correspondence* 326). This is quite a litany of complaints, even fatal complaints—so much so that we might ask why Freud wrote the book and then, more curiously, bothered to publish it. After all, Freud had in the recent past set aside works that failed to meet his standards.

In what follows I examine this work in light of Freud's self-critical remarks and make an unusual claim. While *The Future* is indeed a disappointment, Freud's self-critical remarks of October 1927 are entirely caught within its logic; indeed, they faithfully repeat its tone and rhetoric. Hence the paradox: if Freud's self-critical remarks of *The Future* are indeed a feature of *The Future*, then that self-criticism implicates and invalidates itself. It therefore follows that we shouldn't be satisfied with Freud's complaint that the work is simply childish, unFreudian, analytically weak, and insufficient as a confession. I will argue just the opposite, namely that the work is in some ways fully mature, quintessentially Freudian, and analytically unimpeachable. Moreover, *The Future* is abundantly confessional and, in that mode, requires that readers attend not only to its ideas but to the self-presentation of those ideas. In fact, I will attempt to demonstrate that Freud's self-presentational, self-referential, and performative gestures provide the best window on both the internal and external stakes of this work—from its hermeneutic inside to that outside called institutional politics. What it reveals is a work less concerned with religion than with a handful of seemingly tangential concerns: identity, reason, conscience, cruelty, guilt, and authority.

1. The Structure of *The Future*

With one exception, and perhaps not even then, Freud's late work on culture and society is made possible by a brooding theoretical work of 1920, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The one exception may be *The Future of an Illusion*, which is at least superficially more closely aligned in theory and spirit with *The Ego and the Id* of 1923. This is certainly interesting, since *The Future* was the very first of Freud's late cultural works. As such, it is an inaugural work that seems aberrant.

Of course, it was only when *The Future* was relegated to the past that commentators, including Freud himself, could appreciate the shift in emphasis it announced. The best reckoning can be found in Freud's

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1935 "Postscript" to an older work of 1925, "An Autobiographical Study." In it Freud acknowledges that a "significant change" occurred in the early to mid 1920s. Having managed to survive cancer of the jaw, with which he was diagnosed in 1923, Freud found himself returning to his oldest interests. He writes: "Threads which in the course of my development had become inter-tangled [*miteinander verschlungen*, had become entwined, devoured] have now begun to separate; interests which I acquired in the later part of life have receded, while the older and original ones become prominent once more" (71). And again: "My interests, after making a life-long *détour* through the natural sciences, medicine, and psychotherapy, returned to the cultural problems which had fascinated me long before" (72). As a result, his "analytic work," by which he means clinically relevant theoretical work, suffered. As Freud bluntly concedes, "[I]t would be true to say that, since I put forward my hypothesis of the existence of two classes of instinct (Eros and the death instinct) and since I proposed a division of the mental personality into an ego, a super-ego and an id, I have made no decisive contributions to psychoanalysis" (72). In other words, if a certain kind of psychoanalytic writing came into existence with *The Future* in 1927, another kind came to an end around the time of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923).

What is typical of the late Freud especially is a self-conscious attempt to make the theory of psychoanalysis overlap with the circumstances of his life. And so not only does Freud in the "Postscript" speak knowingly, for example, of "acquired" interests and "detours"—the former an allusion to his lifelong belief in the inheritance of acquired characteristics, the latter to his theory of the reality and pleasure principles—but he makes sure we don't miss his meaning in this regard. "This circumstance," Freud writes of the shift in his work, "is connected with an alteration in myself, with what might be described as a phase of regressive development" (72). Freud had already floated a similar idea, albeit more explicitly, in a letter of 1925 to Lou Andreas-Salomé: "A crust of indifference is slowly creeping up around me; a fact I state without complaining. It is a natural development, a way of beginning to grow inorganic. The 'detachment of old age,' I think it's called" (*Letters* 154). Freud's meaning is plain enough: near the end of a long life, detour complete, he is finally back to where every individual instinctually strives to be, regressively, masochistically, namely, to the point of death and non-existence. The "alteration" in Freud is biological, linked to the inevitable dominance of the death drive over his life, and is expressed in his return to old cultural interests. To put a fine point on it,

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Freud in 1935 is saying that the culture works exist in that after-life he won from surviving numerous surgeries on his jaw.

This fascinating, narcissistic, cancerous self-involvement of the subject, Sigmund Freud, in his own theories is a significant feature of both *Beyond* and *The Future*. Both works are highly self-conscious, self-referential, and performative. Consider the former. As Jacques Derrida demonstrates, Freud in *Beyond* throws out one thesis after the other and, like the spool of thread being analyzed there, pulls them back in again ("To Speculate," 1987). The result is a text that seems to go nowhere and yet fundamentally alters the theory of psychoanalysis—including the introduction, not incidentally, of a deadly "compulsion to repeat" that goes beyond the pleasure principle (and thus beyond psychoanalysis proper). Derrida's essential claim is that Freud's speculative writing is itself the best demonstration of repetition and death in life. Or again, Freud teaches by example.

Something similarly performative and instructive is at play in *The Future*. However, in this work the thread of Freud's enquiry doesn't compulsively wind back upon itself like a yo-yo, fort/da, but is in turns tangled, cut in two, set aside, knotted, and picked up again. The result is as surprising as it is inevitable. Freud often seems incapable of directing his enquiry in any discernable direction, most especially as it concerns the forward march of time into the future.

"Let us now take up the thread of our enquiry" (25). With this remark Freud announces that *The Future* is no longer what it used to be. In itself, of course, the remark is wholly unremarkable. Freud merely says it's time to get to the business of *The Future*. What is remarkable is the timing of this statement, not near the beginning of his enquiry—as you might expect from such a call to action—but at the beginning of Chapter 5, nearly half way through the work. Therein lies its significance. With this remark Freud admits (I won't say confesses, at least not yet) he had lost his way, at least as it concerns the status, epistemological and ontological, of the enquiry. The remark certainly begs the question: If Freud is only now picking up the thread, what was he doing before that? Was he still engaged in "enquiry"? Or is something else, something other, already at play in *The Future* by the time he gets to Chapter 5?

The English translation by James Strachey compounds the uncertainty of these remarks, radicalizing what is already uncertain in the original German. In *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*, Freud recalls the thread but doesn't cut off his sentence as abruptly as Strachey has it (German edition 346). Instead, he appends to the remark, following a full colon, a question; it is a question Strachey relegates to a self-standing second sentence. "What,

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then," Freud immediately adds, "is the psychological significance of religious ideas and under what heading are we to classify them?" (25). This question clarifies the remark, better telegraphing what in *Die Zukunft* is connected to the thread Freud has just picked up—namely, the psychology of religion. But actually this is a rhetorical sleight of hand, and Strachey's translation hits the right note. For when Freud picks up the thread of his enquiry at the beginning of Chapter 5, it really is uncertain which thread he could possibly mean. Until this precise moment it is unclear which thesis Freud has been threading through *The Future*. Indeed, the threads of this work have been so badly tangled (or, if you prefer, inter-tangled) by the time Freud gets to Chapter 5 that a reader can only guess at which way the text will turn. For example, readers of Chapters 1 and 2 might surmise that *The Future of an Illusion* is really about Marxism and the debate between nature and nurture, psychology and materialism. Or readers might surmise that the three opening chapters are merely an abridged overview of psychoanalysis, the point of which is still unclear. But whatever readers decide, at no point in *The Future* does Freud spell out for us anything like a thesis. He simply picks up one thread among the others.

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Strachey does his best to untangle this uncertainty, which he has radicalized the better to push aside decisively. To Freud's remark, "Let us now take up the thread of our enquiry," Strachey interjects a full stop, a period, and a footnote. In brackets he adds his own clarification: "From the end of Chapter III, p. 20" (25). With this addition Strachey comes to the rescue of Freud's text, explicitly knotting together the opening thread about religion in Chapter 5 to some closing remarks about religion and the end of Chapter 3. Henceforth the ambiguous passage reads: "Let us now take up the thread of our enquiry [from the end of Chapter III, p. 20]."

This is an unusual intervention. Nowhere else in *The Future* does Strachey feel compelled to direct the reader so paternalistically, a reader he clearly suspects has lost his way in Freud's text, but no more or less, perhaps, than Freud himself. Such an explicit stage direction, or redirection, is a judgment about the tangled and then cut-off thread of Freud's enquiry. It is a call to order, a strategic time-out, and an intervention on behalf of both Freud and an imagined reader. However, Strachey's knotting together of Chapters 5 and 3 is also, and simultaneously, a virtual re-enactment of the very subject matter that has just occupied Freud, literally in *The Future*, for it is the *performance* of judgment that cuts through the thread of rationality and subjectivity in advance of Chapter 5. And it is this performance that is cut out of the loop by the knotting together of Chapters 5 and 3, while at the very same time it is reinstated by his dutiful

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translator's own performance of judgment. The upshot: a tension is introduced between what Freud says and what he does, between the content and its performative structure.

So the performance of judgment in Chapter 4 cuts into the thread of the enquiry and thereupon determines its future. The chapter opens, ominously, under a threat of "danger":

> An enquiry which proceeds like a monologue, without interruption, is not altogether free from danger. One is too easily tempted into pushing aside thoughts which threaten to break into it, and in exchange one is left with a feeling of uncertainty which in the end one tries to keep down by over-decisiveness. I shall therefore imagine that I have an opponent. (21)

Of necessity, then, let's interrupt Freud. He has identified a danger, one he implies is already at work in *The Future*. Apparently, monological enquiries are threatened by self-criticism. His claim is that "interruption" in the guise of "thoughts which threaten to break into it," that is, into the monologue, are pushed aside. Note the negative form of his claim: monological enquiry "is not altogether free from danger." Freud could have emphasized the positive side of this equation by claiming that monological enquiry is in fact *mostly safe* from danger. But Freud emphasizes the negative, presumably because the impulse to push thoughts aside, to repress or censor them, is always a temptation. Indeed, the enquiry is "too easily tempted" in this regard. Note also that Strachey has Freud adopt the first person singular—"One is too easily tempted"—which perfectly reflects the fact that, even now, Freud is still dangerously at work within the monological structure of *The Future*. This cannot last, however, since this opening paragraph is above all an explanation, if not an apologia, for what lies ahead in *The Future*. It is just this: the danger of monological enquiry, although small, will be studiously avoided. Clearly Freud is unwilling to pay the price for remaining strictly monological. What price? "In exchange" for producing soliloquies, *ein Monolog*, "one is left with a feeling of uncertainty." The monological has not yet finished paying the price, since Freud adds that this is a feeling of uncertainty "one tries to keep down by over-decisiveness" [*allzu große Entschiedenheit übertönen will*]. Once again Freud's verdict is essentially negative: one *tries* to keep it down.

The upshot could not be more clear or, for that matter, more classically Freudian. What was once pushed aside must now be kept down, a reiteration of the old chestnut (from the 1880s) about "the return of the repressed." No matter what we do, Freud claims, critical voices will be

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heard. The unified subject is a haunted subject, and it's pointless to pretend otherwise.

In this brief apologia to the rest of *The Future*, Freud is diagnosing a psychological problem, namely the problem of defensive over-decisiveness in the face of self-critical doubt. It is a common enough problem among writers, especially intellectuals, who do their work in isolation, and it is through writing that Freud seeks to address it. Enter the imaginary opponent. He is called upon by Freud to ward off the threat of danger. "I shall therefore imagine," Freud says, "that I have an opponent who follows my arguments with mistrust, and here and there I shall allow him to interject some remarks" (21).

So who is Freud's imaginary opponent, his enemy, *Gegner*? The answer brings us back a few years, a millennium in fact, but 1923 will suffice. The imaginary opponent is none other than Freud's own superego, the product of human history or, more prosaically, of Freud's late topography of the mind as announced in *The Ego and the Id.*

2. Freud vs. Freud

So Freud, in the middle of a work (supposedly) concerned with religion, admits that he hears voices, that we all hear voices. We haven't yet examined what it is these voices have to say or what Freud has to say in response—assuming, in the end, that there is any point whatsoever in separating the self-critical voice from its subject, the-ego-Sigmund-Freud. We only know that, from this moment on, Freud will try to accomplish the impossible: he will write *The Future* in two voices. The one will give, the other (which is the same) will take away; the one will hypothesize, and the other (which is the same) will criticize; the one will construct, and the other—I won't say deconstruct, because that's too easy—the one will construct and the other (which is the same) will observe, direct, instruct, inspire, restrict, demand, threaten, humiliate, hector, admonish, judge, and censor.

If this contest of opposing terms sounds dramatic, even melodramatic, that is because it is. At the individual level, the conflict between two voices, ego and super-ego, is a conflict between reality and fantasy. "Whereas the ego is essentially the representative of the external world, of reality," Freud declares in *The Ego and the Id*, "the super-ego stands in contrast to it as the representative of the internal world, of the id" (36). At the institutional level, moreover, the conflict between ego and super-ego is similarly an idealized conflict about ego psychology and id psychology, one where the father of psychoanalysis himself gives voice to the two

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choices: the-future-driven-rationalistic-ego-Freud versus the-past-driven-irrational-super-ego-Freud.

On the one hand, the dramatic encounter of ego and super-ego in *The Future* has all the significance of an identity crisis in and for psychoanalysis. Its future is well-known: after Freud's death the division will crystalize around American and French analytic cultures. On the other hand, the seriousness of this crisis is all the more incredible since the attempt to write *The Future* in two voices is not only imaginary, as Freud puts it, but is so obviously scripted and staged. In this respect, there is a jarring disjuncture between artifice in *The Future* and what quickly escalates into a serious matter, between simulated judgment, part of a rhetorical strategy, and judgment itself, part of a self-confession.

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Recall again what Freud says of his internal enemy: "I shall *allow him* to interject some remarks." It is Freud, as author, who directs and is in control of this fiction. Clearly we are not in the presence of Freud's actual super-ego in Chapter 4 (which would never accept these terms) but with its imaginary double. Why does this matter, at least initially? Because the danger of the monological, of unwisely repressing self-criticism—a danger as old and, for Freud, as real as any in psychoanalysis—is by no means averted by this practiced, if surreal, gesture. If anything it is exploded, for where could we hope to find a more perfect instance of defensive over-decisiveness than with someone pretending to defend himself from fake self-criticism? What could be more illusory than counterfeiting judgment in the name of judgment itself? And what, in the service of certainty and Logos, could be more absurd or, as it turns out, more effective?

3. Freud's Absurdist Theatre of Reason

This structure of writing in two voices, super-ego versus ego, defines, limits, and determines the future of *The Future*, for it is on the basis of this false dichotomy, one that is not so neatly reflected in the differences between *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *The Ego and the Id*, that Freud quickly writes himself into a conceptual corner.

It all begins the moment Freud, in Chapter 5, picks up the thread on the psychology of religion. Freud discusses why people believe in religion, even though religion is impossible to prove and is very likely a product of "their own mental activity" (28). Then he rehearses for us two defences of religion, one old and one new: "The first is the "*Credo quia absurdum*" [I believe because it is absurd] of the early Father of the Church [Tertullian]. It maintains that religious doctrines are outside the jurisdiction of

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reason—are above reason. Their truth must be felt inwardly, and they need not be comprehended."

The second attempt is the one made by the philosophers of "As if." This asserts that our thought-activity includes a great number of hypotheses whose groundlessness and even absurdity we fully realize. They are called "fictions," but for a variety of reasons we behave "as if" we believed in these fictions. This is the case with religious doctrines because of their incomparable importance for the maintenance of human society. This line of argument is not far removed from the "*Credo quia absurdum*."

Freud's attack on these defences is telling. Of the "*Credo*" Freud says it is "only of interest as a self-confession." Then he introduces the thread for which *The Future* is best known: "There is no appeal," he asserts, "to a court above that of reason." This same thread he then wraps around the philosophy of "As if": "[T]he admission that something is absurd or contrary to reason leaves no more to be said" (28–29).

Nothing could be less obviously Freudian, for here we have the founder of psychoanalysis declaring that self-confessions are of no interest or value, that reason is the supreme court, and that nothing more needs to be said of arguments that are absurd or unreasonable. Freud should have stopped there, especially given his claim that the absurd or irrational require no comment at all. They invalidate themselves. But instead Freud turns to the science of the self-confessional, to psychoanalysis, to try and make sense of the absurdly self-confessional. The result is a tangled mess.

Two discussions stand out: the first concerns Freud's sporadic treatment of illusion; the second concerns his confessional remarks about reason and cruelty. Religious beliefs, he begins in Chapter 6, are wish-fulfilments and as such are illusions (30). Just how different illusions are from delusions is an open question for Freud. Illusions disregard reality and are indifferent to verification; delusions contradict reality altogether. Religion, Freud submits, seems a bit like both. Of course, this is slippery territory, since Freud's criticism could easily (as least by his own critics) be turned on psychoanalysis in particular and science in general. He will return to this problem in the next chapter.

For the moment, though, Freud has backed himself into a corner and so holds ever more tightly on to reason and science. Freud writes: "Scientific work is the only road which can lead us to a knowledge of reality outside ourselves. It is once again merely an illusion to expect anything from intuition and introspection; they can give us nothing but particulars about our own mental life" (31). So much, it would seem, for dream

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analysis as the royal road to knowledge of the unconscious. And so much for psychoanalysis, at least as id psychology.

For the first time outside of Chapter 4, Freud allows the voice to interject. He makes a fair point: If reason is unable to refute religion, then why forsake religion? What is gained by skepticism? In place of an argument Freud produces a rant. "Ignorance is ignorance," he insists, and we have "no right to believe that anything can be derived from it." Although he doesn't say so, we are back to the philosophy of "As if," where people only act as if they believe in religion. In a word, they pretend. "In reality," Freud complains, "these are only attempts at pretending to oneself or to other people that one is still firmly attached to religion, when one has long cut oneself loose from it." At this precise moment a key feature of the harsh superego, namely guilt, announces itself in *The Future*. It is the guilt of acting in bad faith. In truth it was always operating just below the surface. "Where questions of religion are concerned," Freud says, "people are guilty of every possible sort of dishonesty and intellectual misdemeanour" (32).

Chapter 7 begins with the slippery slope argument. "May not other cultural assets," Freud asks, "be of a similar nature" (34)? Interestingly enough, this question is not posed by the self-critical voice but by the-ego-Freud. He goes on to implicate politics ("political regulations"), sexuality ("relations between the sexes"), and philosophy ("external reality") in a more comprehensive critique of illusion. However, Freud suggests that this bigger project is beyond his talents and so he sticks with the limited scope of his critique of religion.

For the second time outside Chapter 4 the self-critical voice interjects, this time laying the ground for Freud's discussion of reason and cruelty. Once again guilt is involved: "The loud voice of our opponent brings us to a halt. We are called to account for our wrong-doing [*verboten Tuns*]" (34). What is wrong and forbidden, according to the voice, is Freud's unwise attack on an institution that keeps our "asocial, egoistic instincts" in check. "Chaos," the voice warns, "will come again." Once again a "danger" must be averted:

> Even if we knew, and could prove, that religion was not in possession of the truth, we ought to conceal the fact and behave in the way prescribed by the philosophy of "As if"—and this in the interest of the preservation of us all. And apart from the danger of the undertaking [of criticizing religion], it would be a purposeless cruelty. (34–35)

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The contest between super-ego and ego, tradition and reason, has crystalized around the choice between preservation or chaos, paternalistic beneficence or enlightened cruelty. According to the self-critical voice, the voice of conscience, Freud's guilt lies with the latter of these pairings, on the side of cruelty toward others.

The opponent is not quite done. He finally says what everyone is thinking, including, necessarily, Freud himself:

> It is very strange—indeed it is the height of inconsistency—that a psychologist who has always insisted on what a minor part is played in human affairs by the intelligence as compared to the life of the instincts—that such a psychologist should now try to rob mankind of a precious wish-fulfilment and should propose to compensate them for it with intellectual nourishment. (35)

In response—"What a lot of accusations all at once!"—Freud does his best to defend himself from himself. In the process he steps beyond his concern for the future, so far beyond that he invokes an ancient past, one that undercuts the dominance of the pleasure principle. In short, the death drive whispers in his ear.

Freud insists that the opponent is wrong to conclude that his rationalistic attack on religion does anything at all to induce chaos in the world. True believers will never be swayed by reason. Nothing will change. Freud is therefore not being cruel to others. He is merely being cruel to himself. "The one person this publication may injure," Freud admits, "is myself" (35). Similarly, the publication of *The Future* is likely to "do harm" only to "the cause of psychoanalysis," which he qualifies is "my creation" (36). Despite superficial appearances, then, the-rationalistic-ego-Freud is not sadistic. He is merely masochistic, bent on his own destruction.

This is a remarkable passage, for in it the artifice of a self-critical voice as first introduced in Chapter 4 drops away. What is left is pure self-flagellation and self-confession—the performance of judgment itself. To parrot Freud, it is no doubt a natural, if regressive, development in the unfolding of *The Future* after *Beyond*.

But *The Future* doesn't quite belong to *Beyond*—at least not yet. In Chapter 9, the self-critical, masochistic voice of conscience and guilt rightly poses the question begged all along, the one with which we began: Why publish this work? (46). Freud has some explaining to do, but never does. Instead, bad faith and making pretend have Freud hiding behind nurture and education. Like our irrational attitudes toward sexuality,

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religious illusion is fuelled by ignorance. Against this, Freud proposes a republic of reason, the point of which is "education to reality" (49). It is here, however belatedly, that Freud comes closest to providing us with a thesis for *The Future*. It comes in the form of a back-handed confession: "Men cannot remain children forever; they must in the end go out into 'hostile life.' We may call this '*education to reality*.' Need I confess to you that the sole purpose of my book is to point out the necessity of this forward step?" (49).

Pressed by his conscience, Freud feels compelled to say the obvious: apparently psychoanalysis has a part to play in this "education to reality." And apparently psychoanalysis will be part of this wished for the "experiment of an irreligious education" and an optimistic "hope for the future" (48).

Apparently. Actually, though, nurture and education have no place within Freudian psychoanalysis, not even in *The Future*. As Freud already says in Chapter 1, "[A]rguments are of no avail" when confronted by human passion (8). In fact, humankind has a limited "capacity for education" (9). The truth is Freud was openly hostile to any attempt to soften the blow of human nature, of biological instinct, and was dismissive of cultural prophylaxis. This is why Freud rejected Marxist analysts like Wilhelm Reich who were bent on improving the material conditions of society as a way to improve mental health and was horrified by Ferenczi's penchant, late in life, for hugging and thus reinforcing the battered egos of his neurotic patients. According to Freud, one cannot avoid the tragedy of existence—whether rich or poor, hugged or beaten. The late chapters of *The Future* are the sole exception to this rule, the one time Freud championed a position that was radically other.

Of course it is not that easy. Freud never really identifies with this other position. In Chapter 9 Freud concedes that he may indeed have been wrong about his high evaluation of reason in *The Future*. "I will moderate my zeal and admit the possibility," Freud says, "that I, too, am chasing an illusion" (48). More self-flagellation. And then there is Chapter 10, which finds the-ego-Freud on the wrong side of the argument, cheerleading a cause he doesn't believe. The opponent opens with mockery:

> That sounds splendid! A race of men who have renounced all illusions and have thus become capable of making their existence on earth tolerable! I, however, cannot share your expectations. And that is not because I am the obstinate reactionary you perhaps take me for. No, it is because I am sensible. We

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> seem now to have exchanged roles: you emerge as an enthusiast who allows himself to be carried away by illusions, and I stand for the claims of reason, the rights of scepticism. (51)

Freud's response is one of resignation; he concedes to the superior, *Freudian* argument of his opponent. He says simply: "You will not find me inaccessible to your criticism." The rest is confession:

> These discoveries [in *The Future*] derived from individual psychology may be insufficient, their application to the human race unjustified, and his [the psychologist's] optimism unfounded. I grant you all these uncertainties. But often one cannot refrain from saying what one thinks, and one excuses oneself on the ground that one is not giving it out for more than it's worth. (53)

Despite his turn to inner dialogue to help ward off the feeling of uncertainty associated with what is dangerously monological, Freud ends with uncertainty. He grants it. If anything, it has been strengthened. This has to be because Freud, caught by his defensive, over-decisive strategy of speaking in two voices, is guilty of every possible dishonesty and intellectual misdemeanour, because Freud has put forward a number of hypotheses whose groundlessness and even absurdity he very well recognizes, and because Freud has only acted "as if" he believes what he clearly does not.

Amusingly, Freud forgives himself for behaving as if this strategy could possibly work, excusing himself on the ground that he has not "giving it out for more than it's worth." Fortunately, we know exactly how much he thinks *The Future* is worth. It is childish, unFreudian, analytically frail, and insufficient as a confession. This extra-textual self-criticism is, of course, a faithful continuation of the strategy begun in *The Future* proper. It is present there as that guilty bad faith called irony. "The primacy of the intellect," Freud smirks, "lies, it is true, in a distant, distant future" (53). Reason will win out against instinct, he adds, "very gradually, only in the unforeseeable future."

So how distant is this "distant, distant, future"? The answer is very, very. As Freud qualifies, "but probably not in an *infinitely* distant one" [*unendlicher Ferne*] (53). Probably not. Clearly our mistake has been to base "our judgments on periods of time that are too short" (55). Final judgment must rather set its sight beyond what we normally think of as the future: "We should make the geologists our pattern." And with this final admission, the two voices merge as one: Freud returns to himself as the

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pessimistic father of psychoanalysis, the one who admits the limitations of both the human condition and psychoanalysis. The far distant future will be just like the past, that is, will be determined by all the good and bad experiences that evolution passes on to our descendants. Hopefully more rational than not. Probably. But with Freud, the "genuine" Freud, one never really knows, careful as he is to hedge his bets even when contemplating the geologically distant future.

Until this distant future life will, naturally, continue to be dominated by instinct and irrationality and, therefore, by psychoanalysis as id psychology. True, in practice analysis has therefore been rendered never-ending—a conclusion Freud ratifies ten years later in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable"—but not necessarily pointless, at least from the perspective of geological time. But it is certainly pointless to you and me, that is, from the perspective of human time.

Freud may echo Enlightenment platitudes about religion in this work, but in the end he remains committed to what we call classical psychoanalysis—in short, id psychology. Ego psychology he leaves to the dreamers.

4. The Politics of the Present

It is one thing to trace the masochistic subtext of *The Future*, a question of the work's inside, its internal world. It is quite another to answer why it is that Freud submitted this performance to the inspection of others, a question of the work's outside, its external world. What's still missing is an answer to our opening question: Why did Freud publish *The Future of an Illusion*? Or, stated otherwise, for whom was this awkward, masochistic performance intended?

A plausible answer is: The Americans. In 1926 Freud published *The Question of Lay Analysis: Conversations with an Impartial Person*, in which he defended the right of non-medical adherents to practise psychoanalysis. American analysts, flexing their muscle and also their independence, rejected Freud's position and insisted that analysts be first of all trained in medicine. In the autumn of 1926, the New York legislature agreed and formally outlawed the practice of lay analysis. Freud was not pleased, complaining that he was left a "Commander-in-chief without an army" (cited in Jones 297). Arguably, *The Future* was Freud's revenge against those people he judged to be not just disloyal, but idiotically short-sighted.

If so, to the masochistic subtext of the work we can finally add a little context, namely Freud's sadistic guilt-tripping on those analysts who had the temerity to challenge his authority. Indeed, if the elaborately staged performance of judgment is anything in *The Future*, it is just this: a dem-

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onstration of Freud's absolutely singular position as the living Logos of the psychoanalytic art and science. Consequently, the performance, the play, is quite literally the thing. It is not just that Freud lost himself in his own fictional play of a self divided against itself. It is also that, in the end, none of the contradictory threads of his work matter nearly so much as the performance itself, a performance that telegraphs decisively, precisely because it is absurd and unconvincing, that the future of psychoanalysis, like its past, belongs to whatever Freud says it does. Therein lies the master's lesson.

Put in the discursive terms they all accepted, the Americans had failed to overcome their Oedipus complexes because they had failed to identify fully enough with their ego ideal—Freud as the primal father and final authority of psychoanalysis. Within the society that was psychoanalysis, the Americans had acted badly. The inevitable consequence was guilt. "The tension between the demands of conscience," Freud writes in *The Ego and the Id*, "and the actual performances of the ego is experienced as a sense of guilt" (37). Freud performs this guilt in *The Future* as *The Future*, the better to spread the guilt or, more accurately, to assign it. As masochist, he martyrs himself to his Cause. As sadist, he takes on the mantle of Logos and bludgeons his detractors—American analysts, certainly, but also Americans in general, whom he mocks in *The Future* for their anti-scientific rejection of evolution in the "monkey trial" of 1925 (38). Indeed, one can see how the American courts had twice, in the space of two years, earned his utter contempt. In the first case, about evolution, they failed to understand the distant past. In the second case, about psychoanalysis, they failed to understand the distant future—no doubt because they had just failed to understand the distant past.

One can also see how Freud's guilt-ridden performance follows all the rules he laid out for the philosophy of "As if." Although Freud knew very well that the thought-activity called psychoanalysis includes a great number of hypotheses whose groundlessness and even absurdity he fully realized, he acted "as if" he believed in them. For example, he acted as if he believed in the fiction that psychoanalysis was a rational science. Why pretend? Because some doctrines are of incomparable importance for the maintenance of society, in this case the psychoanalytic society. And in fact Freud had attempted to pretend to himself and to other people that he was still firmly attached to psychoanalysis when he had cut himself loose from it, for the late Freud knew perfectly well that analytic treatment did very little for patients, beyond, at least, laying the ontogenetic grounds for their lucky descendants who inherit a rational, albeit distant, future. In

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short, Freud knew that psychoanalysis was not in possession of the truth but concealed the fact and behaved as if it did—and this in the interest of (self-) preservation. To do otherwise, to openly admit that psychoanalysis was an illusion, would be a purposeless cruelty, first, to the evolutionary past, and second, to the psychoanalytic future.

In the end, *The Future of an Illusion* was never overly concerned with untangling the psychological problems of religion. It was rather more concerned with the institutional entanglements that threatened the future of that belief system called psychoanalysis. Of course it is significant that this engagement took place against the backdrop of religion, for religion and sociality were, for Freud, inextricably linked. In this respect Freud returned in 1927 to a topic that had served him well just fifteen years earlier, in *Totem and Taboo* (1912–13), and with the same intent of disciplining his erstwhile followers. But the baffling substance of the new work, which is in so many ways unFreudian, has blinded generations of readers to its structure or, more precisely, to its performative and self-referential qualities. As an absurd theatre of reason, *The Future* performs Freud's identity as the father of psychoanalysis. To that end Freud pretends to risk his identity, and thus his authority, in a contest of two voices—both his own. Then, when he loses control of this strategy, and thus of his identity, he simply pulls on a thread that excuses everything: the masochistic/sadistic death drive and, along with it, a constellation of concepts associated with the over-harsh super-ego, namely, conscience, guilt, and cruelty.

Consequently, *The Future of an Illusion* marks the moment when an Enlightenment version of psychoanalysis was decisively squashed by the kind of pessimism crystalized seven years earlier in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). In other words, *The Future* is Freud's own "return to Freud," the moment par excellence when he laid down the law on what is, and what is not, "Freudian." The faith he had come to place in the ego and in rationality, in the future, is thus revealed as an elaborate act, a piece of theatre draped over his fundamental id psychology. Less charitably, the late ego psychology first announced in *The Ego and the Id* (1923) is revealed as a kind of marketing ploy likely to assuage the very people he could no longer trust, the Americans. By 1927 Freud had had enough. In *The Future* the republic of reason is enacted so that it can be destroyed.

Freud sacrificed psychoanalysis to save psychoanalysis. Such was his cruelty. And such, too, I submit, was his overweening vanity.

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