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## PATHOANALYSIS OF EXISTENCE AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION – AN UNFINISHED FREUDIAN PROJECT

BY HERMAN WESTERINK

*In this article, I argue that Freud's interest in extraordinary cultural phenomena such as religion and art can be understood from the idea that psychoanalysis is fundamentally a pathoanalysis of human existence. In his earlier writings on hysteria and the theory of sexuality, Freud points out that the study of the psychopathologies is the best and maybe only way to understand the psychic life of human beings and consequently of a specific group of cultural products that cannot only be explained in functional terms. It is also argued, however, that Freud never fully explored to the full potential of this pathoanalytic approach to cultural phenomena, because of the increasing domination of the Oedipus complex and a developmental perspective in his theories. In the final section of this article, the*

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*potential of a pathoanalysis of religion is further explored and offered as a promising field of research.*

**Keywords:** Freud, pathoanalysis of existence, psychopathology, religion, theory of sexuality.

## INTRODUCTION

What does it mean for the psychoanalytic study of cultural phenomena when we assume that Freudian psychoanalysis is fundamentally a pathoanalysis of human existence, that is to say, the study of human existence from the perspective of the psychopathologies? What are the conditions for a Freudian applied psychoanalysis? Freud himself argued in *Totem and Taboo* that hysteria is a caricature of art creations, obsessional neurosis a caricature of religion and paranoia a caricature of a philosophical system (Freud 1912-13, p. 73). We can read this statement as follows: if we can study human existence from the perspective of the psychopathologies, we can also study certain cultural products in which important aspects of human existence are expressed from the perspective of these psychopathologies. Hence, we can study art from the perspective of hysteria, religion from the perspective of obsessional neurosis, and philosophy from the perspective of paranoia. But why are art, religion, and philosophy privileged here? And what exactly do these specific cultural phenomena reveal about human psychic life? Why are these three phenomena exclusively linked to a particular psychopathology? And what are the consequences of this exclusiveness both for a Freudian understanding of religion and for Freudian theory? What problems arise? And what challenges and possibilities for further research can we detect? These questions will be explored in this article.

## FROM THE *THREE ESSAYS* TO APPLIED PSYCHOANALYSIS

In their programmatic opening article of the first issue of *Imago*—the journal for applied psychoanalysis in the humanities—Otto Rank and Hans Sachs argue the following: the application of psychoanalytic theory and methods in the humanities is very promising, because its findings derived

from the analysis of the psychopathologies cannot be limited to the field of pathology alone, but also concern normal psychic life (Rank and Sachs 1912). After all, Freud's studies had surprisingly produced a full-fledged psychology when discovering that the psychic impressions and processes (repression, resistance, unconscious representations, recollections, etc.) from which mental illnesses emerge proved to be in conformity with the psychic dynamics of normal people. The hysterical conversion is for example merely a caricature of normal corporeal expressions originating from the (failure of the) repression of unpleasant representations and undesirable memories. The psychic life of the mentally ill shows in a strongly exaggerated form (*in krasser Übertreibung*) the mechanisms of all man's psychic life. Freud's remark "that we are all to some extent hysterics" is nothing but the consequence of an approach in which there is "an unbroken chain" between the neuroses and normality (Freud 1905, p. 171).

Rank and Sachs add that this discovery has led to a fundamental new perspective on the relation between pathology and normality. It is no longer possible to review pathologies in strong contrast to normality. Instead, the discovery of continuity between pathology and normality on the one hand means that pathologies can shed light on previously more hidden psychic processes. This implies on the other hand that these pathologies become more understandable and less absurd when seen as meaningful and purposeful exaggerations of normal mental processes (Freud 1905, p. 4). To substantiate this claim Rank and Sachs particularly recall Freud's findings on repression and infantile sexuality. It is especially these findings that serve as starting point for applied psychoanalysis, that is, for the study of cultural phenomena such as religion, myth, and art.

According to Rank and Sachs, these cultural phenomena can be regarded as theatre stages (compare with Freud 1905-06) or architectural structures (*Durchbruchgebilde*, Rank and Sachs 1912, p. 13) expressing those repressed drives that were apparently unusable for practical cultural life—that is, unusable for the social life aimed at maintaining the individual and the group through procreation and labor (communal life, family life). Religion, myth, and art are those peculiar cultural phenomena that are an integral part of culture—and are even held in the highest esteem—due to the very fact that here unusable drives can be ventilated through fantasy and sublimated resulting satisfaction without

degrading the cultural level.<sup>1</sup> These phenomena are thus “safety relief valves” of egoistic and antisocial drives that prevent from regression to actual perversions and crimes.

From a psychoanalytic point of view religion, myth, and art are thus extraordinary human creations in which the most social disturbing impulses can be expressed and drained off. And yet, they are evidently also considered normal cultural phenomena. While they have no immediate practical use, they do guarantee the stability of the culture as a whole. So, in what sense exactly are these phenomena extraordinary? Religion, myth, and art are apparently closely related to the psychoneuroses, because both in the psychoneuroses and in these specific cultural phenomena the normal repression of drives fails. Psychoneuroses result from constitutionally strong and constant sexual impulses and—as reaction formation—an excessively strong attempted repression of these impulses (which are only partly usable for practical life). This repression fails because of the high quantity and urgency of sexual energy, and hence the energy is released in the various symptom formations of the psychoneuroses. Religion, myth, and art are like symptom formations. They are domains and places (*Durchbruchstellen*) in the totality of culture where those drives can be accommodated that are unusable for practical cultural life (Rank and Sachs 1912, p. 12).

The idea that religion, myth and art are *Durchbruchstellen* within the totality of culture is interesting and significant. It seems that Rank and Sachs are here basically applying the model of hysteria on culture. Culture is a kind of “body” in which there are spots or zones (*-stellen*) where the drive energy is drained off via “somatic” (*-gebilde*) expressions. This association with hysteria is not surprising when we realize that Freud made the most important step towards defining in a completely new way the relation between pathology and normality in his first edition of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). In that text, hysteria provided the main model for a radically new conceptualization of sexuality,

<sup>1</sup> Freud had highlighted this character of religion in “Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices” reasoning that religion provides the opportunity to fantasize about revenge and the death of others (by transferring the act of revenge or punishment to the deity) without actually committing an antisocial act. Religious rites and representations “always reproduce something of the pleasure which they are designed to prevent” (Freud 1907, p. 125).

pathology, and normality. Rank and Sachs refer to this text as ground-breaking for applied psychoanalysis. After all, it was in *Three Essays* that Freud had first severely criticized the nineteenth-century theories of sexual psychopathology when arguing that no specific object and aim formed any part of the sexual drive, i.e. that the sexual drive initially manifests itself independent of any specific inherent object or aim (Freud 1905, pp. 147-148; Davidson 2001). Pathologies could therefore no longer be explained in terms of a defect or deterioration of the normal sexual instinct, object and aim, and could hence no longer simply be opposed to the normal sexual organization. For, if the object is not naturally internal to the drive, there is no clinical reason to assume that for example the inverted object choice is more than a variation in spectrum of options. Such choice of object does no longer coincide with a given natural (normal, healthy) or unnatural (abnormal, pathological) sexual organization (Van Haute and Westerink 2016a, 2016b).

In “My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses” (Freud 1906), Freud clearly states what he intended to do in his *Three Essays*. In his psychoanalytic early writings, he had severely criticized the central paradigm in the contemporary literature, namely the idea that the neuropathic disposition as decisive in the Aetiology of the neuroses. Against this paradigm Freud had brought to the for his trauma theory: decisive in the aetiology of the neuroses are accidental (traumatic) experiences. But when he found that the frequency of these traumatic events were overestimated, and, more importantly, when finding that children were often actively involved in sexual activities, the accidental (traumatic influences receded more into the background, and the constitutional factors “gained the upper hand once more” (Freud 1906, p. 275). But now, the generally human “‘sexual constitution’ took the place of a ‘general neuropathic disposition’” (Freud 1906, p. 276). *Three Essays* was a text meant to deliver exactly such theory of a sexual constitution from which both the normal sexual development and the sexual variations and aberrations could be understood (Freud 1906, p. 277).

There are three important implications of these developments in Freud’s that culminate in *Three Essays* for psychoanalytic theory and its

possible applications in the humanities. Firstly, as Freud writes in a footnote in *Three Essays*, “the pathological approach to the study of inversion has been displaced by the anthropological” (Freud 1905, p. 139). In other words, those cases that in the contemporary paradigm were considered to be abnormal (unnatural and pathological) and were evaluated in sharp contrast to normality should actually be regarded as variations grounded in a general human sexual constitution. When psychopathologies are merely variations relative to normal psychic life, the study of such pathologies becomes a study into the psychic forces and patterns that constitute human life as such.

Secondly, the new paradigm regarding the relation between pathology and normality produces the idea of what can be called a “pathoanalysis of existence” (Van Haute 2005; Van Haute and Westerink 2016a). The anthropological approach means that human psychic life can best be studied from the perspective of the psychopathologies, i.e. from the perspective of its exaggerated and magnified variations. Human psychic life can best be studied from the perspective of these psychoneuroses, because these mental illnesses cannot be explained in terms of an organic defect or as the sole result of an accidental factor. Moreover, the psychoneuroses *par excellence* presents themselves as merely exaggerations of normal psychic life (Freud 1905, pp. 160-161), because both the psychoneuroses and so-called normal mental life are grounded in the same sexual constitution. This is one of the major reasons why Freud brings in hysteria in *Three Essays* (p. 163ff). Hysteria is a pathology quite “near” to normality and at the same time it is characterized by higher than average quantities of sexual energy, by intensified and excessive repression and by corporeal symptom formations that appear to be magnifications of normal corporeal expressions of the always more or less unstable human emotional life. The psychoneuroses are near to normality, notably because of the role of repression and resistance, and the instability or failure of these mechanisms. The differences between the various psychoneuroses are not depending on the nature of the drives, but on the psychic constellation and the scenes of expression (Van Haute and Geyskens 2013, p. 117).

Thirdly, there is the fact that pathologies can no longer be viewed as a group of disorders or diseases originating from inherited defects,

degeneration or deterioration of the brain and nerve system. Instead moreover, they appear as variations relative to normal mental life. The distinction between abnormal and normal mental life is related to biology since it is the quantity and urgency of the drive energy that is the decisive constitutional factor in the aetiology of the neuroses. Yet also this distinction should be considered relative to cultural moral conventions and the subsequent loci and severity of repression. Freud even suggests that the sexual constitution itself varies “with the different degrees of culture and education” (Freud 1906, p. 279). This obviously implies that the analysis of culture has to be included in the new anthropological approach.

Freud’s considerations on this point mainly deal with two related issues. The first issue concerns the question which drives (and to what extent) are considered to be useable and admissible in cultural life. In his 1908 essay “‘Civilized’ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness” he deals with this issue exploring three cultural stages in which the sexual drives are evaluated and organized in different ways. Freud argues here that the exclusion of a number of individuals as perverts and the creation of a number of people as neurotics depends on the societal distribution of sexual freedom and constraint. The latter group is especially important, since these individuals succeed in the repression of perverse impulses for a large part due to the pressure from the outside world (culture) but only at the cost of other symptom formations that are equally damaging to the individual and equally unusable for society. These neurotics succeed in adaptation to cultural demands but pay a high price, and because of this Freud criticizes the severe restrictions of contemporary cultural morality.

This leads to the second issue. Already in his earlier writings from the 1890s, Freud had argued that cultural morality cannot be the only source of repression, because the perversions show that when the quantity of sexual energy is large enough and when psychic reaction formations (disgust, shame, etc.) are not produced, cultural morality is easily dismissed (Westerink 2009, pp. 25-30). In his *Three Essays* he therefore formulates the impact of culture (morality, education) in terms of deepening, straightening and strengthening the “dams” and “patterns” that resulted from “organically determined” counter forces (reaction formations) spontaneously repressing feelings of unpleasure and limiting the

sexual impulses (Freud 1905, p. 34).<sup>2</sup> What was first “organically” and spontaneously repressed is only later – after socialization in culture – associated with concrete representations.<sup>3</sup> In other words, cultural demands and constraint only have strong impact on the individual when they can relate to already formed psychic dams and patterns. We may therefore expect that cultural demands and constraints are conceptualized in such a way that they can connect with these psychic structures, and vice versa, we may expect that certain cultural phenomena on a collective level exhibit psychic patterns, structures, and mechanisms. Such relations between psychic life and cultural phenomena are the starting point for applied psychoanalysis.

## FROM RELIGION AS *DURCHBRUCHSTELLE* TO “NEUROTIC RELIC”

From what we have said thus far, it becomes clear that the “anthropological” and pathoanalytic approach is intrinsically linked with a certain view of culture. Culture demands renunciation of the drives, and ideally the cultural demand of renunciation is not too severe and does not produce too much pressure on the individuals who are always already potentially in danger of becoming psychoneurotics. It is from this notion of culture that the psychoneuroses can be said to be “nearer” to normal psychic life: both in the psychoneuroses and in normal human existence we find the (failure of) repression of drives. The actual production of the psychoneuroses is largely based on the societal

<sup>2</sup> Reaction formations are psychic counter forces that are spontaneously constructed in order to repress the unpleasure that somehow results from sexual excitation. The crucial point here is that shame and disgust are seen as the “organically determined” limitation of the sexual drive without the involvement of external objects, norms and principles. In 1906 Freud writes that his views on organic sexual repression were a crucial aspect of his theory of sexuality, that is to say, a theory in which the essence of sexuality could be described in terms of pure physiological processes (Freud 1906, pp. 278-279).

<sup>3</sup> The theory of a first organic repression and a later repression through (cultural) representations is linked to the trauma theory we find (for example) in Freud’s Dora case. The first trauma in childhood is characterized by a spontaneous reaction of disgust and a pre-representational equation of the sexual and “dirt.” In the second trauma (in puberty) the early rejection of the sexual is linked to concrete representation infused by knowledge of sexuality and reproduction, of sexual difference, and of cultural norms.

distribution of sexual freedom and constraint. The more severe the cultural demands are, the higher the number of psychoneurotic individuals (Freud 1908). This is why Freud can say that the distinction between the normal and the abnormal is first of all a matter of societal convention—the identification of the abnormal automatically produces psychoneuroses because of the cultural demand to repress the impulses engaged in the abnormal. The notion of cultural “safety relieve valves” follows from this view of culture and from the Freudian perspective of the drive as a constant pressure, and of pleasure as the release of tension. As we have seen, these valves are those cultural phenomena that are necessary to sustain culture but without being immediately practically involved in the maintenance of the life of the group or the individual.

As we have seen, Rank and Sachs list three such phenomena—religion, myth, and art. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud will also mention three: art, religion and philosophy (Freud 1912-13, p. 73). These cultural phenomena are regarded to be creations of human psychic life, i.e. expressions of a collective of individual psyches (Rank and Sachs 1912, p. 1). As we have seen these phenomena are intrinsically linked to the psychoneuroses since both present *Durchbruchstellen* of unusable, non-functional drives. Such cultural phenomena that stage (express, canalize, redirect) repressed and unusable drives show on a collective level the basic architecture of the psychoneuroses and human psychic life: a body with symptoms, repression and release of tension, pleasure and phantasy (representations), et cetera.

One can recognize the contours of an applied psychoanalysis in which all kinds of apparent analogies between strange religious phenomena or bizarre works of art and the different psychoneuroses are explored. Yet, Freud did not further radically pursue or systematically elaborate the pathoanalytic perspective on religion and art. He did not systematically study religion (or art and philosophy) from the perspective of a *variety* of psychoneuroses as “theatrical stages” where unusable drives and psychic conflicts are “realized” (*verwirklicht*) and manifest themselves in an almost infinite range of forms and situations (Freud 1905-06). Nor did he further study extraordinary cultural phenomena in relation to the totality of culture, i.e. the relation between the “normal” culture in which the drives are made practical and those “abnormal” phenomena manifesting

unusable drives. Instead, he will for the most part follow a different line of approach that I will briefly sketch and discuss.

In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud famously stated that hysteria is a caricature of art creations, obsessional neurosis a caricature of religion, and paranoia a caricature of a philosophical system (Freud 1912-13, p. 73). This exclusive association of obsessional neurosis with religion has two major consequences. The first is that the whole study of religion becomes focussed on those characteristics of religion that can be reviewed in analogy with its "caricature," obsessional neurosis. Hence, Freud is hardly interested in for example the corporeal expressions of emotional life in religious phenomena such as demonic possession or ecstasy. Also, he seems hardly interested in the systematization and rationalization of faith and the longing for a hidden and yet transparent order in for example religious doctrines. Such emotional and cognitive aspects of religion that might be illuminated from the perspective of hysteria or paranoia are hardly explored. And even when he mentions such aspects of religious life they are sooner or later subsumed under an oedipal and developmental perspective that gains he upper hand in Freud's theory in the period he is working on *Totem and Taboo*. Apparently, for Freud there is neither an obvious reason why religion should be studied from other perspectives nor is there any reason for studying any other aspects of religion than those that can be approached from the perspective of its caricature, obsessional neurosis.

This narrowing view of religion is entangled with another major thesis. In *Totem and Taboo* Freud for the first time explicitly identifies the Oedipus complex as the nuclear complex not only of obsessional neurosis, but of *all* the psychoneuroses. As a result, obsessional neurosis becomes the *primus inter pares* among the psychoneuroses. And here we witness a second consequence of the exclusive association of religion and its caricature: religion becomes the primal subject in Freud's cultural studies and applied psychoanalysis. Religion is the cultural phenomenon *par excellence* where one can study oedipal dynamics on a cultural level—an analogy to the oedipal complex found in obsessional neurosis. After *Totem and Taboo* Freud still occasionally writes on art, but there are only relatively few and short texts in comparison with the period before. Philosophy will never be the subject of an essay or larger study. Because of the claimed centrality of oedipal structures that are

regarded to be timeless and universal the importance and impact of the fourth essay of *Totem and Taboo* for Freudian applied psychoanalysis cannot be overestimated. Religion is here solely considered from the perspective of obsessional neurosis and its nuclear oedipal complex characterized by the organization of the drives in relation to the child's first objects (parents).

Freud's initial pathoanalytic approach of religion is not only limited through the focus on the analogy between religion and obsessive neurosis, while disregarding other possible analogies. More importantly, in Freud's writings the pathoanalytic approach is undermined through the turn to a developmental perspective that increasingly will determine Freud's theories. In the first edition of *Three Essays* this developmental perspective was almost absent (Van Haute and Westerink 2016a, 2016b). Freud however progressively introduces a developmental perspective in his theory of sexuality. This has important methodological and theoretical implications. It implies a redefinition of the relation between normality and pathology. The focus is no longer on continuity between the two. What gains the upper hand is the notion of a "normal" development through various stages and phases on the one hand, and a series of inhibitions (compare with Freud 1913) that result in aberrations and distortions on the other hand. In short, the developmental perspective makes it possible to clearly distinguish normality from pathology again.

In applied psychoanalysis this means the introduction of a new analogy, namely between psychic development and cultural development. The result of this can best be witnessed in *The Future of an Illusion*. At first sight, in this text again a pathoanalytic approach comes to the fore, notably when Freud mentions the oedipal aspects of religion one can also find in obsessional neurosis, or when he draws a parallel between the religious systems of wish illusions and the "blissful hallucinatory confusion" found in amentia (Freud 1927, p. 44). However, these aspects of the text that point toward a pathoanalytic approach, are taken up in more predominant train of thought. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud strongly underscores cultural development analogous to individual development. From this perspective he argues that the vicissitudes of religion in the modern era should be compared to most infantile neuroses that spontaneously dissolve in the normal development toward adulthood (p. 43). From this line of reasoning Freud can now write that religion can be considered "the

universal obsessional neurosis of humanity.” Religion is an obsessional neurosis, not because of the analogies Freud had mapped in previous writings such as *Totem and Taboo*, but because both religion and obsessional neuroses can be seen as inhibitions in developments. Like neuroses can spontaneously be overcome in the course of a person’s development, religion is subjected to “the fatal inevitability of a process of growth” in culture of which the outcome is already determined. The religious teachings are as if they were “neurotic relics” and “we may now argue that the time has probably come, as it does in an analytic treatment, for replacing the effects of repression by the results of the rational operation of the intellect” (p. 45). Religion inevitably becomes outdated when one adopts a scientific, realistic, and healthy attitude towards life—just like the children’s narcissistic wishes and needs are overcome in adulthood through a more realistic assessment of life and its limitations.

The outcome of these developments is that a Freudian psychoanalytic approach of religion, art, and philosophy was never fully realized and systematically applied, although the idea that normality should be studied from the perspective of pathological exaggerations was the original starting point for applied psychoanalysis in the humanities. Freud’s focus on the Oedipus complex as the nuclear complex of all the psychoneuroses and his turn to a developmental approach implied that the various psychopathologies could be seen as defects, aberrations and distortions of a normal development. As a direct consequence, the psychopathologies lose their general anthropological relevance as they now merely describe the aberrations and deviations from the normal psychic life and development.

## FROM HYSTERIA TO OBSESSIONAL NEUROSIS: TOWARDS OEDIPAL HATRED

In the previous sections it was argued that the first turn to an applied psychoanalysis was based on two crucial moments. First, there is the psychoanalytic perspective Freud develops in the 1905 edition of *Three Essays* and other texts from that period. Second, there is the idea of cultural phenomena as *Durchbruchstellen* of the unusable, non-functional drives. In *Totem and Taboo* the notion of religion as theatrical stage of unusable drive impulses is still present. One only needs to think of the Eucharist as the Christian form of the exhibition of perverse cannibalistic impulses (Freud

1912-13, pp. 154-155). But, the idea of religion as theatrical stage of various partial sexual drives is eclipsed by another train of thought in which the focus is on the antisocial, destructive drives and the subsequent repressive cultural morality on the one hand, and religion as the domain in which the ambivalent and guilt-laden relation with the father is manifest and symbolically articulated. Instead of a psychoanalytic approach in which religious phenomena are studied from the perspective of the *variety* of psychopathologies, the study of religion will solely evolve around the one nuclear complex of oedipal dynamics—aggression, ambivalence, identification, the father figure, and guilt and conscience formations. It is from this development that we can begin to understand why, for example, the model of hysteria was not applied in the analysis of religion. First, in his major studies on hysteria, Freud does not describe hysteria in oedipal terms, i.e. the theory of hysteria in for example the Dora case is a non-oedipal theory. Second, the central “complex” of hysteria concerns the problem of sexuality and its repression (through disgust), not the problem of aggression.

In his studies of obsessional neurosis from the period between *Three Essays* and *Totem and Taboo* we can witness what, far from self-evident, theoretical choices Freud made and how gradually the theory of the Oedipus complex (or more precise, the father complex) took shape and would be introduced in *Totem and Taboo* as the nuclear complex of all the psychoneuroses.<sup>4</sup> His early intuitions on the relation between obsessional neurosis and religion are still very close to his early drive theory from 1905. In his short article “Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices” (Freud 1907), Freud points out that religion is not so much concerned with the repression and cultivation of the obsessive neurotics’ sexual impulses, but with anti-social, destructive drives. As the nature of

<sup>4</sup> Although it has often been argued in secondary literature that Freud “discovered” the Oedipus complex in the period of his self-analysis preceding the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), it is more correct to say that first articulated the emblematic quality of the Oedipus myth, but in fact introduced the Oedipus complex much later. After all, the first text in which the Oedipus complex is mentioned as such is a short text from 1910 (“Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis”). A full description and articulation of the Oedipus complex can only be found in writings from the 1920s. It is therefore appropriate to speak of a gradual “oedipalization” of Freudian theory and thought. This implies that there is a “non-oedipal” Freudian theory. On this issue see Van Haute and Geyskens (2012) and Van Haute and Westerink (2016a, 2016b).

aggression, Freud seems primarily to have anger and rage in mind, since he refers to the displacement (*Verschiebung*) as typical mechanism in anger and rage that plays a central role in obsessional neurosis. Also, one can detect the reasoning on reaction formations from 1905: there is a powerful aggressive impulse on the one hand, and a powerful reaction formation against the rage and anger in the form of anxiety and conscientiousness on the other hand. This anxiety will in fact serve as a defence mechanism against an always-anticipated outburst of anger. What characterizes obsessional neurosis is the anxious anticipation of and protection against the ill which is expected" (Freud 1905, p. 124; Westerink 2016), i.e. of an aggressive drive in search of a theatrical stage.<sup>5</sup> In this context religion offers something like a "safety relief valve." Freud highlights the religious representations of revenge and religion's role in redirecting and satisfying aggressive impulses in and through phantasy ("Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord") (Freud 1907, p. 127). This is still very much in line with what Rank and Sachs called *Durchbruchstellen* or unusable drives, and the idea that extraordinary cultural phenomena such as religion could be approached from the perspective of the various psychoneuroses.

The case of the Rat Man is of crucial importance for the further developments of Freudian theory on aggression and the role of the father figure. When reading the case history – the first part of the text – one cannot but notice that the Rat Man is suffering from outbursts of anger and his anxious reactions against and anticipations of these outbursts. At crucial moments in the case history we learn about the Rat Man's anger occasionally bursting out when someone obstructs his intentions. Freud claims that the Rat Man's successive outbursts of rage—against an old professor that occupies a room next to a nurse that he fancies, against his fiancée who stays with her grandmother instead of visiting him, against the cousin (Dick) of a woman he admires, et cetera—are nothing but replays of an infantile scene of "a terrible rage" that was triggered when his father had forbidden him to do "something naughty." This sudden outburst of anger made a "permanent impression" on the Rat Man, not so much because of the father's reaction (he stopped beating the little boy and said: "This child will either be a great man or a criminal!"), but because the Rat Man developed "a fear of the

<sup>5</sup> In this context the role of the father is highlighted, and the Oedipus complex is not even mentioned.

violence of his own rage” (Freud 1909, pp. 205-206). This fear was not the direct result of the frustrating intervention of the father, but a spontaneous reaction formation of anxiety. So far, the case history is in line with Freud’s ideas from 1907.

Given this central issue of rage/anger and anxiety, one might expect Freud to expand on these dynamics between drive and reaction formation in the theoretical part of the text. And yet, in this part of the text Freud does not even mention anger or rage. In the theoretical discussion of the case history Freud instead focusses on the problem of the sadistic component of the sexual drive and the complex way in which this component contributes to the hatred of objects, notably the father figure who is always already and evidently present as an important authority figure in the life of a child (Van Haute and Westerink 2020). In other words, Freud does not so much focus on the primal scene as an outburst of anger and the subsequent reaction formation, but on the scene as the moment where the sadistic component of the libido connects with the naturally present father figure thus infusing hatred of the father. The scene marks the moment the relation with the father becomes “sexualized,” that is, infused with sadistic impulses. In other words, the scene marks the moment when the strong ambivalence of love and hate as grounded in the sadistic component of the libido (Van Haute and Westerink 2020, p. 240) is “bound together” with the choice of one’s love object and the depreciation of other objects (p. 238). The terrible rage in the primal scene is thus interpreted in terms of hatred of a specific object (Van Haute and Geyskens 2013; Westerink 2016). The fit of rage is seen as a manifestation of an already latent hatred of the father. The father complex is subsequently put to the fore as the nuclear complex of the obsessional neurosis: “We may regard the repression of the infantile hatred of his father as the event which brought his whole subsequent career under the dominion of the neurosis” (Freud 1909, p. 238).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> We should notice that Freud only first explicitly associates obsessional neurosis with the father complex in the case of the Rat Man (Freud 1909). In much earlier texts such as Manuscript K from 1896 Freud defines obsessional neurosis without any reference to the father figure. In that text he argues that a primal pleasurable sexual experience spontaneously produces a self-reproach which is then repressed not because of any new inside or outside interventions, but because the reproach produces an unpleasure. According to Freud, this first self-reproach or sense of guilt is without any content. It is strictly defined in terms of a reaction to the experience, and it will only later – in or after puberty – connect with a content (Freud 1892-97).

In the Rat Man case we can thus witness how Freud shifts attention from anger/rage and anxiety, via the notion of the sadistic component of the sexual drive, towards the hatred of interfering and depreciated objects. Parallel to this there is the shift from reaction formations as the inner limitations of the drives towards (the societal need of) prohibiting interventions of the father (and moral authorities) frustrating and obstructing the realization of aggressive impulses.

The turn to the role of the father in the case of the Rat Man (and in other texts from that period) is confirmed and further advanced in *Totem and Taboo*. As regards the nuclear complex in this text, the significance of a paradoxical and often unnoticed presumption in this text should not be overlooked. Already before culture originates there is a cultural formation (family life – primal father, mothers, sons) which Freud introduces as man's natural state in which the drives have objects (mother, father) and aims (reproduction, power/status). This is an important presupposition that reflects a major change in his thought, at least in comparison to the 1905 edition of *Three Essays*. As we have seen, he had reasoned there that the sexual drive finding satisfaction in random objects and aims runs counter to its own limitations in the form of reaction formations. In *Totem and Taboo* the drama of the origin of culture—morality, religion, social organizations—unfolds as based upon naturally given (pre-cultural) objects and aims. Freud in effect argues that this primal hatred of the father, like other aspects of the Oedipus complex (love, guilt), is inherent to the human psychic life, i.e. it is an inborn human tendency (Blass 2006; Westerink 2009). It is for this reason that he does not describe this natural state, the primal events and its consequences in terms of drives and reaction formations, but in terms of the ambivalent feelings of love and hate, identification and mourning—these are central concepts in Freud's later work that always already include the primacy of certain object relations. From earlier writings (including the first part of the Rat Man case) we could imagine another train of thought in *Totem and Taboo* running from (centuries of) brutal acts of cannibalism and sexual violence via reactions of disgust, shame, anxiety and compassion as the drive's inner limitations towards the first collective taboos deepening and strengthening these "patterns." But Freud takes a different path connecting again with the psychiatric literature that he distanced himself from in the 1905 *Three Essays*. The drive is again seen as intrinsically linked to specific objects and aims.

We don't need to explore this issue in further detail in order to recognize that the implications of this train of thought for the psychoanalytic interpretation of cultural phenomena such as religion is far-reaching. Apparently, all forms of aggression as expressed in for example rituals or as articulated in religious teachings (such as anger, wrath, hostility, destruction, punishment, judgment, et cetera) can now be reduced to hate of an object. Also, the hate towards any object can always be traced back to hate of the father (of which every object is a substitute object). And hence, when applied to religion this means that every religious phenomenon, any case material or particular history in which aggressive impulses play a role can be linked to the father complex. In short, underneath the *variety* of relational issues articulated or expressed in religion Freud will now always be able to detect the *same* nuclear complex. But in doing so, he is eventually only able to describe a specific form of religion, namely the one in which obsessional thought and behavior originating from an unconscious oedipal complex (ambivalence, sense of guilt) is at the heart of a religion characterized by strict ritualistic behavior, moral-religious habits, and obedience to authorities and teachings. Religion is that part of culture in which the sense of guilt and the father complex are cultivated as the strongest possible motives for the repression of aggressive impulses and for the enforcement of proper relations between human beings. It is intrinsically linked to cultural morality and social organizations that demand the renunciation of anti-social drive impulses. What is more and more lost from sight are those aspects of religion that present themselves as theatrical stages of powerful passions and phantasies.

A pathoanalytic approach of religion in fact runs counter this form of reductionism since its premise consists of the idea that the various pathologies are magnifications of certain psychic forces, patterns and constellations that inform us about *different* aspects of general human psychic life and *different* aspects of highly complex cultural phenomena such as religion.

## THE PATHOANALYTIC APPROACH AND THE PROBLEM OF UNIVERSALITY AND REDUCTIONISM

From the previous we can begin to understand why Freud's pathoanalytic approach of cultural phenomena was never fully developed and

explored. The introduction of the Oedipus complex and the turn towards a developmental perspective prevented Freud from a systematic pathoanalysis of religion, art, and philosophy. Having said this, I could raise the question as to what the potential of such a pathoanalytic approach would be, and what the conditions of such pathoanalysis of cultural phenomena would have to be. One of the main problems in an answer to these questions concerns the status of the psychopathologies. For Freud hysteria, obsessional neurosis and paranoia—and later also melancholia—were the preferred psychopathologies. But can it be maintained that these psychoneuroses can still serve as point of reference in a contemporary applied psychoanalysis? Does not the history of psychiatry and psychoanalysis show us that nosological categories come and go, or describe different clinical phenomena in different era, and can thus hardly function as stable references?

In what follows I will show that at first sight Freud's views on the psychoneuroses as pathological constellations that are supposed to remain "essentially" unchanged and can be identified everywhere and throughout all times,<sup>7</sup> constitutes a problem for the pathoanalysis of human existence and of cultural phenomena. I will, however, also argue that Freud's own characterizations of the various psychoneuroses produce some insights that point towards a model that helps us to overcome some of the major problems in a Freudian pathoanalysis of existence.

In order to understand the main problems involved in the project of a pathoanalysis of existence in the field of applied psychoanalysis, it is important to see that Freud and scholars such as Rank and Sachs argue that even though the psychoneuroses are produced in culture, their psychic constellations and scenes are always and everywhere the same, independent of any specific cultural context. There is historical development of religions (from totemism to advanced monotheistic religions), there is development in philosophy (from animistic philosophies of life to Schelling's philosophy of nature [Freud 1912-13, p. 76]), and there is development in art (from

<sup>7</sup> This is notably confirmed in *Totem and Taboo* in the idea of the universality of the Oedipus complex as the nuclear complex of all the psychoneuroses and as the nuclear complex of all cultures, religions, morality and social organizations.

*Oedipus Rex* to *Hamlet*<sup>8</sup>). But though psychopathologies are produced in culture, Freud and his early followers do not see them as historical constructs. The dynamics and components, i.e. the central “complexes” of the various psychoneuroses are not considered to be produced and embedded in a specific cultural-historic context. Despite the fact that he considers the distinction between normal and abnormal a matter of social convention, and despite the fact that he recognizes cultural developments and formations, he never questions the status of the psychopathologies as such. In fact, Freud’s claim in *Totem and Taboo* that the Oedipus complex is the nuclear complex of the psychoneuroses, of all human psychic life and of culture, religion, morality, and social organizations, gives impetus to the idea that the psychoneuroses also are universal psychopathologies.

For Freud it seems to be fundamental that the psychopathologies are no historical constructs bound to a specific cultural context. After having dismissed the predominant neurological approaches of his time, he puts to the fore the significance of the sexual constitution of man (polymorphous-perverse nature of drives; drive components). The psychopathologies are now first of all defined in terms of quantity and intensity of the drives. They are thus no longer defined as organic defects contrasting a normal physical constitution, but as intensification of general human psychic forces. The psychopathologies are constitutionally based exaggerations of the forces and mechanisms that define human nature. Because of this relation to the nature of the drives Freud basically considers the psychopathologies as non-arbitrary categories or types organized by laws of nature (for example Fechner’s equilibrium principle) and causal explanations (for example the relation between drive energy and drive release). Individual lives throughout the ages and various collective cultural formations seem to be merely appearances of *the same* underlying constitutional mechanisms we find in human nature (compare to Hacking 2007; Koslicki 2008).

Do the psychoneuroses describe the hidden reality under a variety of cultural manifestations? Let me explore this by means of an example:

<sup>8</sup> In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud argues that both Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* stage the neurotic conflict between drive and morality, but also differ according to the cultural context in which these plays were created: in *Oedipus Rex* man’s desires are directly acted out whereas *Hamlet* continuously represses the desire to kill his father (Freud 1900, pp. 241-276).

Freud's occasional remarks on demonic possession (see also, Westerink 2014). In a letter to Wilhelm Fliess on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1897 Freud writes that he is surprised to find that the old theory of demonic possession is "identical" (*identisch*) with key aspects of the theory of hysteria. This notably concerns the fact that one finds a split consciousness in hysteria, i.e. the presence of an internal strange object that seems detached from other mental representations and that behaves like an infiltrate resisting approach (Freud 1892-97, p. 242). More than 25 years later he repeats this basic intuition when he writes: "We should not be surprised to find that, whereas the neuroses of our unpsychological modern days take on a hypochondriacal aspect and appears disguised as organic illnesses, the neuroses of those earlier times emerge in demonological trappings." And he adds: "The states of possession correspond (*entsprechen*) to our neuroses, for the explanation of which we once more have recourse to psychical powers" (Freud 1923, p. 72).

The question is how to interpret the words "identical" (*identisch*) and "correspond" (*entsprechen*). The most obvious way to answer this question would be to say that Freud uses the word "identical" in a way one could describe as a Charcotian style of reasoning<sup>9</sup> that appears to be predominant also in Freud's writings. In this view the demonic possession in early modern times is actually nothing but hysteria unrecognized. Because of lack of scientific knowledge, language, and practices, the corporeal and psychic manifestations visible in the phenomenon were interpreted in the religious worldviews and language available and could therefore not be identified as what the phenomenon in reality actually was. In this view "identical" indicates that the phenomenon formerly called demonic possession was actually and really hysteria. It is only because in our time and age we have a better, scientific understanding of the natural world and hence also of human nature that we know what demonic possession in reality was: hysteria.

The problem with this view and attitude becomes apparent in issues partly already mentioned before. First, there is the problem of reductionism as an aspect of the identification of something *different* in terms

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot and his colleague D.M. Bourneville at the Paris Salpêtrière founded the *Bibliothèque diabolique* (1882-1902), a series of reprints of classic texts in which accounts of possession, mystic ecstasy and witchcraft were reinterpreted and explained in terms of hysteria (Westerink 2014).

of the *same* while excluding all other aspects from consideration. Different historical phenomena can then be identified as and reduced to one and the same neurotic complex. This reductionism we find in (Charcot and) Freud is part of a positivist scientific style of reasoning typical of the late nineteenth century natural sciences—the context in which Freud was educated and trained. Also, this approach to demonic possession reflects a radical but also problematic enlightened attitude towards religion, i.e. the view that religion is a composition of outdated knowledge and practices no longer of use in a scientific era. This train of thought is confirmed in *The Future of an Illusion*—a text in which Freud set to scientifically “explain” religious faith.

Another problem concerns the definitions and stability of psychiatric taxa. Freud is aware of this problem when he writes that whereas Charcot “identified the manifestations of hysteria in the portrayals of possession and ecstasy” it would in fact “not have been difficult to retrace in them the subject-matter of a neurosis” if more attention had been paid to the individual case histories (Freud 1923, p. 72). Freud is indeed forced to this new evaluation of possession not only because of the gradual disappearance of hysteria from psychiatric literature (Micale 1993), but notably also because the Charcotian type of hysteria and the depiction of its characteristics was not identical with the hysteria Freud studied and analysed.

Yet another problem concerns the historical relation between demonic possession in early modernity and hysteria or melancholy, but one of a different kind than suggested by Freud. The emergence of modern conceptualizations of mental illnesses such as melancholy and hysteria is deeply rooted in modern religious movements and confessions, the controversies and rivalries between them, the turn to subject as the locus of faith, and the new models and possibilities of religious subjectivity developed in the early modern age (Westerink 2019). In the context of intensified religiosity and increased pastoral interference in religious lives different forms of demonic possession emerge that, because of their excessiveness and uncontrollability, are soon associated with mental illnesses. This development cannot simply be translated in terms of better scientific knowledge or attempts to “recapture the disease from the realms of religion and magic” (Micale 1995, p. 21). New spiritual and medical perspectives on possession first appear strictly within a religious context and the mutual (religious and secular) effort

to interpret and understand the various “sicknesses of the soul” produced in that age of intensification of religious life and the in-depth Christianization of all the domains of everyday life through pastoral discourse and spiritual direction (Foucault 2003, p. 177).

It is against the background of religious discourses and practices organizing new modes of religious subjectivity that we can understand both the appearance of specific forms of intense religious experiences and manifestations, and the emergence of a new medical literature interested in the psychic aspects of reconceptualized mental illnesses. Paradigmatic are the association of corporeal demonic possession with hysteria from the early sixteenth century onwards<sup>10</sup> and of spiritual demonic possession (spiritual struggles, spiritual abandonment) with melancholy.<sup>11</sup> Freud does/could not recognize the fact that the conceptualizations of the various psychoneuroses are deeply rooted in early modern religious contexts and are thus historical constructs, as far as their psychological content and contours are concerned (hence, as far as they are not caused by organic defects). Instead he seems to hold on to the idea that “our neuroses” are scientifically established facts. They can therefore help to explain different phenomena that may be seen as shapes and disguises of the same neurotic complexes can explain different phenomena that all prove to be

<sup>10</sup> The first to interpret the symptoms of demonic possession as hysterical is an English physician named Edward Jorden, in *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* from 1603. The decorum of this text is the on-going religious controversies in his time, notably between puritans who successfully practiced exorcism and Anglican clergy opposing these practices. It is telling that Jorden wrote his treatise after being commissioned by the Anglican bishop of London (Bonzol 2009; MacDonald 1991; Rousseau 1993; Su 2004)

<sup>11</sup> It was Luther who made a distinction between demonic possession of the body and of the soul. The latter form – which one might call the “Faustian” type of possession – was particularly highlighted as the type that merely describes the sinner’s radical estrangement from God. The devil is here always the opponent who tries to incite man’s godless natural sinful and evil propensities and separates man from God. These spiritual attacks and this awareness of sinfulness take the form of despair, anxiety and sadness that necessary precede faith. Luther’s concept of spiritual attacks and its constitutive function in faith plays a central role in sixteenth century Lutheran comfort literature in which the medical, moral and spiritual aspects and treatment of melancholy are described. In this literature we find a growing interest in forms of sadness, despair and anxiety that are not caused by some physical process, but that are solely related to unbelief and the lack of experience of God’s presence (Gowland 2006; Midelfort 1999).

different shapes and disguises of the same complex found in all human beings. According to Freud, the early modern “demonological trappings” can thus be identified as “our neuroses.”

## TOWARDS A PATHOANALYTIC APPROACH OF RELIGION?

Can the problem of reductionism in Freudian thought be overcome? Can we advance a pathoanalysis of human existence and of religion in a way that accounts for the historicity of nosological categories? In order to answer this question, we might again look want to look at the characteristics of the psychoneuroses and of the pathoanalytic approach. With regards to this approach, we should first highlight that at the heart of a Freudian pathoanalysis of cultural phenomena we find the notion of “analogy.” The idea that obsessional neurosis can be seen as a caricature of religion, does not express that religion is “nothing but” or “identical with” obsessional neurosis. In the strictly sense, it means that one can draw analogies between the central “complex” one finds in obsessional neurosis and some aspects of religion. We have already seen that notably in his later writings Freud undermines this principle. We have seen this happening in *The Future of an Illusion*, where Freud through the application of a developmental perspective writes that religion can be considered to be “nothing but” the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity. However, this undermining of the pathoanalytic approach by Freud himself does not mean that this approach cannot be further developed. For such project it is vital to interpret notions of “identical” (*identisch*) and “corresponding” (*entsprechen*) in terms of “analogies.” Freud’s 1907 article “Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices” provides an—and likely the best—example of this approach.

When we turn our attention to the various psychoneuroses and their various complexes, we should note that, according to Freud, the psychoneuroses have two important traits in common. First, they are caricatures of normal, more or less stable psychic constellations, always produced in a certain cultural context in which there is a certain consensus on normality (and abnormality) and in which there is pressure on the individual to live and behave accordingly. Second, the psychoneuroses can be defined in terms of inner conflict, and they can be distinguished from

one another by means of the different loci and mechanisms involved in the conflict. In hysteria the conflict concerns intensified (bi-)sexual needs and the repression of these needs through disgust, located in an organic disposition full of energetic tension (erogenous zones, internal excitation). In obsessional neurosis the conflict is between the sadistic component of the sexual drive and the repressive cultural morality represented by the active prohibiting father. This results a sense of guilt which should be distinguished from the self-reproaches that characterize melancholy, since the latter is about a narcissistic problematic concerning narcissistic object choices, disappointment, and the inner dynamics between oneself (conscience) and oneself (ego). In paranoia the scene of the inner conflict concerning homosexual impulses is the relation with reality. What we thus find in the various psychoneuroses is a *variety* of psychic conflicts and scenes. The psychoneuroses do not point at one nuclear complex beneath a variety of appearances but can actually better be understood as *different* constellations in which an inner conflict is staged.

Also, the idea that the psychoneuroses can be seen as culturally and historically determined constructs needs to be taken seriously. The psychoneuroses Freud is studying and describing are what Ian Hacking has called “possibilities for personhood” bound to a historical context in which the psychoneuroses appear as category and in which a body of knowledge and practices is developed classifying and constituting a group of subjects as psychoneurotics (Hacking 2002, p. 107)—just like in early modernity the main types of demonic possession appear on the scene as possibilities for personhood in the context of the intensified Christianization of all domains of life.

Having said this, one can provide a basic outline of the conditions for and characteristics of a pathoanalysis of cultural phenomena such as religion. Both corporeal demonic possession and hysteria show how the presence of and conflict with an internal strange object that seems detached from other mental representations finds its expression in corporeal manifestations such as convulsions. In both cases the sexualized excitable body is the scene of conflict between affect-laden representations. Both in spiritual demonic possession and in melancholy we find sadness and despair in relation to loss of love (that is, loss of being loved by an object) and a deep concern about and dramatic preoccupation

with one's own life (and death) in face of this loss, a preoccupation with oneself as the scene of conflict between inner powers that determine the self-image (conscience and ego). In these two examples, there appears to be an analogy between different phenomena—the different scenes of inner conflicts, and various successive disguises that can be traced through history ... they reveal corresponding complexes, i.e., relations (associations) between psychic representations and affects (compare De Certeau 1988, 294-295). These varieties of shapes and disguises thus all inform us about (aspects of) human psychic life as such.

For the pathoanalysis of existence this is important, because we can proceed from this arguing that aspects of normal psychic life—normal defined in terms of conventions—in a specific cultural context can be studied from the perspective of the “caricatures,” the exaggerated variations, produced in that same context. Such exaggerated forms inform us about (the genealogy of) subjectivity in a specific context, but also provide insight in more general human psychic forces, patterns, and constellations. From this perspective, corporeal demonic possession can be seen as an abnormal religious phenomenon emerging as an after-effect of early modern in-depth Christianization and pastoral investment in the examination of the sinful movements of the body. It can inform us about the body as the “theatrical stage” of the conflict between concupiscence (sexual pleasures and desires) given weight in post-Tridentine conceptualizations of sin and practices of penance on the one hand, and the outside powers that want to organize and control these pleasures and desires of the flesh. In this way it informs us about the excitable body as the scene of conflict of sexual pleasures, repression and the failure of repression. Thus, it informs us about what it is to be a human being in that particular context, but also provides insight in the more general interaction between sexual impulses, psychic conflict, and the body.

In a similar way spiritual demonic possession, spiritual struggles and spiritual abandonment present the exaggerated forms of an intensified religious life marked by the more pessimistic Protestant anthropologies in which the experiences and feelings of loss (of love of God and of self-love), sadness, anxiety and despair are seen as constitutive for a religious faith preoccupied with the question of personal salvation and election. Here also, these religious issues inform us on more general

characteristics of subjectivity in early modernity. But these phenomena also provide insight in a more general human problematic, namely the relation between self-love, loss and death (Westerink 2019).

## CLOSING REMARKS

In order to overcome the main problem in the pathoanalysis of existence in general and that of religion in particular it is important to carefully study the relation between pathology and normality from a cultural historical perspective. For, a pathoanalysis of existence is only conceivable when (a certain group of) pathologies can be identified as the caricatures of normal subjectivity and cultural phenomena (as products of individual and collective psychic processes) in the specific context in which these pathologies appear as possibilities of personhood. It is fair to say that these possibilities only emerged in modernity, hence, in the era in which the general intensification of individual religious life enforced by detailed theological knowledge and pastoral techniques and practices not only organized individual and collective psychic life and behavior but also produced the exaggerated forms and manifestations that soon became the objects of an emerging modern medical science that now also included psychological descriptions and explanations when classifying mental illnesses.

In modernity the various Christian confessions created their own caricatures, which they partly found to be beyond control and were eager to hand over to the physician's care, but which were often also given special spiritual status as paradigms of faith and revelation (Foucault 2003). The intensified attention and care for man's interior emotional life as the locus of faith, unbelief, and health, generated a whole literature concerned with the question of the relation and subtle distinctions between faith, unbelief, and health. At stake were certain forms of extraordinary and excessive mental states that might be illustrative for the depth and severity of general concerns and experiences in the religious life of every believer. In this way the various confessions managed to maintain a podium for the experiences and expressions that were elsewhere suspect or impossible, but that also provided these confessions with the opportunity to define their specific identity. Christian confessions thus played a crucial role in establishing what

Freud in fact rediscovered: the continuity between normality and pathology.

For a further theoretical development of the pathoanalysis of religious phenomena this entanglement between the early modern Christianization and the emergence of a new scientific inquiry in the mental illnesses could serve as a starting point. For, it is exactly from this point that we can see how specific religious formations interact with specific pathologies. From this perspective I have argued above that the various conceptualizations of pathologies not only provide knowledge of specific modes of religious life highlighted in a particular cultural context but also refer to more general human psychic forces, patterns and constellations beyond these contexts. This implies a careful analysis of such interactions and transformations in order to grasp the insights that the pathoanalytical perspective can generate. Clearly, this is a more moderate and slightly different approach than the ambitious project of an applied psychoanalysis Freud and his early students had in mind. Instead of explaining certain extraordinary cultural phenomena in terms of the universal nuclear complex of all the psychoneuroses, I would propose to focus on the interaction between pathology and religion from a cultural historical perspective in order to determine in what sense exactly certain psychopathologies become and are the caricatures of normal psychic life in a specific cultural field.

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