

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSCENDENT OBJECTS AND RELIGION BASED ON FREUDIAN THEORY

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**ABSTRACT.** Perhaps, man is the unique entity to have and establish relationships with certain 'objects' that go beyond their material reality, transcending it to designate another reality beyond the physical. Among them, we could characterize as 'Transcendent Objects' (e.g. God, par excellence, such as the Devil and other entities belonging to this universe, whether subject to acceptance, aversion or rejection) those responsible for constituting the basis for developing feelings and religious ideas, and they can also be understood (in their origin, sense and function) from the perspective of psychoanalysis. Therefore, delimiting our proposal of analysis, this article aimed to analyze such objects from the point of view of Sigmund Freud, thus, analyzing their origin in the processes of sublimation of sexuality and in the projective and identification processes that characterize the emotional development of the human being. Such understanding can assist in clinical intervention of cases where there is a personal relationship or a centrality of these objects in personal experiences, as well as with the area of psychology of religion in its investigations.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis and religion; psychology of religion; Freud.

## O DESENVOLVIMENTO DOS OBJETOS TRANSCENDENTES E DA RELIGIÃO FUNDAMENTADO NA TEORIA FREUDIANA

**RESUMO.** Talvez, o homem seja o único dos entes a ter e a estabelecer relações com certos 'objetos' que ultrapassam a sua realidade material transcendendo-a para designar outra realidade para além da física. Dentre eles, poderíamos caracterizar como sendo 'Objetos Transcendentes' (e. g. Deus, por excelência, assim como o Demônio e outras entidades deste universo, quer passíveis de aceitação, aversão ou rejeição) aqueles que constituem a base para o desenvolvimento de sentimentos e de ideias religiosas e podem, também, ser entendidos (na sua origem, sentido e função) sob perspectiva da psicanálise. Nesse sentido, delimitando nossa proposta de análise, este artigo se propõe a analisar estes objetos a partir do ponto de vista de Sigmund Freud almejando e, com isto, analisar sua origem nos processos de sublimação da sexualidade e nos processos projetivos e identificatórios que caracterizam o desenvolvimento emocional do ser humano. Tal compreensão pode auxiliar na compreensão e intervenção clínica com aqueles que se relacionam com esses objetos ocupam um lugar central em seus modos de ser e estar no mundo, bem como com área da psicologia da religião em suas investigações.

**Palavras-chave:** Psicanálise e religião; psicologia da religião; Freud.

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## EL DESARROLLO DE LOS OBJETOS TRASCENDENTES Y DE LA RELIGIÓN BASADOS EN LA TEORÍA FREUDIANA

**RESUMEN.** Quizás, el Hombre es la única de las entidades que tiene y establece relaciones con ciertos 'objetos' que van más allá de su realidad material, trascendiéndola para designar otra realidad además de la física. Entre ellos, podríamos caracterizar como 'Objetos Trascendentes' (ej. Dios, por excelencia, así como el Demonio y otras entidades de este universo, ya sean sujetos a aceptación, aversión o rechazo) a aquellos que constituyen la base para el desarrollo de los sentimientos y ideas religiosas y también pueden ser entendidas (en su origen, significado y función) por el psicoanálisis. En este sentido, delimitando nuestra propuesta de análisis, este artículo propone analizar estos objetos desde el punto de vista de Sigmund Freud apuntando y, con ello, analizar su origen en los procesos de sublimación de la sexualidad y en los procesos proyectivos e identificativos que caracterizan el desarrollo emocional de los seres humanos. Tal comprensión puede ayudar en la comprensión e intervención clínica con quienes se relacionan con estos objetos que ocupan un lugar central en sus formas de ser y estar en el mundo, así como con el área de Psicología de la Religión en sus investigaciones.

**Palabras clave:** Psicoanálisis y religión; psicología de la religión; Freud.

### Introduction

The ways in which man relates to religion and sacred representations and objects has always been a topic of scientific psychology in its most diverse paradigms. Among the pioneers, we can highlight Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), William James (1842-1910), Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) (Rodrigues & Gomes, 2013). Delimiting our focus of analysis, we intend, in this article, to present an understanding of how the development of transcendent objects occurs from the point of view of S. Freud's theory of development of sexuality, understood as one of the theories of human development. In this direction, we ask ourselves the following questions: "Is it possible to find in Freudian theory a foundation about how Transcendent Objects develop? If so, how does this theory suggest the development of these objects occur? What is the relationship of Transcendent Objects to religion?"

To begin, let's go back to what we are calling 'Transcendent Objects'. Among the empirical referents of these objects, we can mention 'God' in its multiple expressions, whether in religious contexts or when it is the object of studies or artistic and cultural productions. We decided to use the term 'object' to delimit the subject of study and that these objects participate in the affective and symbolic psychodynamics of individuals and groups. The adjective 'transcendent' is attributed here because these objects refer to something that can be considered 'sacred' or that is able to achieve this condition. In this understanding, Transcendent Objects can be any 'things' that go beyond the common sense attributed to physical or abstract existence and come to have metaphysical

qualities, such as extraordinary powers or attributes, sometimes magical or belonging to something that goes beyond our phenomenal world (Marques, 2019).

In the various religious denominations or when a religious connotation is used, 'entities' or 'objects' are usually found supporting the organization of cults, beliefs, dogmas, liturgies, etc. According to Paiva et al. (2009), 'God' is the name most often attributed to the Transcendent Object, especially in the West, however, it can vary according to the culture considered. Other references to the transcendent can also be found in concrete objects (amulet, mojo, string of beads, scapular, ...), abstract representations (angel, guardian, Devil, Evil, Sacred Feminine, Sacred Masculine, spirits, ...), in the mention of community spaces (temples, churches, places of worship, prayer groups, ...) or even in intentional behaviors or in function of a sacred transcendent (prayer, worship, cult, witchcraft, ...).

The referents of these objects, therefore, go beyond physical reality, taking them to a 'beyond' or to a metaphysical instance of a mystical-religious nature. As a rule, they are objects invested with affection by the individual or by the social group that recognizes them as such, and it is possible to observe the existence of different positions towards them (e.g. acceptance, denial, conflict, withdrawal, adoration, providence).

Once contextualized, we can say that Transcendent Objects are closely related to human conduct. According to Belzen (2009), human conduct is always filled with meanings that can be analyzed through narratives, which contain symbols, concepts and words that are stimulators and organizers of psychological phenomena. Such narratives contain and present existential expressions that can help in the psycho-emotional analysis, given that the Transcendent Objects participate in relational dynamics, not only in the properly religious space, but also in everyday situations.

However, narratives to which we refer are not restricted to the transcendent of the religious institution. They can be identified in other contexts in which something has reached a fundamental and organizing importance that can be considered as 'sacred' (Paloutzian, 2017). In this case, expressions of this nature presuppose the existence of representations that, to some degree, organize thoughts, behaviors and routines in terms of something valued as sacred, even without the mystical or religious sense.

Colloquial expressions that make an implicit reference to something sacred can be added to existential expressions that specifically address the religious sacred. In summary, we propose to consider as Transcendent Objects the denominations that go beyond the common sense of physical objects and abstract representations and that can achieve a value considered 'sacred', organize behaviors and feelings, even if they are not institutionally inserted in a religious denomination (Marques, 2019).

In this sense, the transcendent character becomes perceptible as the concrete or abstract object receives a meaning or power beyond the immanent reality of the object itself, and the appreciation of the object as something 'sacred' elevates it to a transcendent dimension. This new condition continues structuring and organizing daily life, perceptions about reality, cause and effect relationships and interference with the fate and cycle of things in general. Even going through actions aimed at maintaining its sacred character, the Transcendent Object is not immutable, as it changes as new attributions of meaning arise, and it may also be rendered useless or replaced.

Additionally, in this study, we are considering the Transcendent Object as the basis or, at the very least, as a fundamental element for structuring religious institutions or similar to them. By religion, here, we will consider institutions whose practices aim at some interaction with Transcendent Objects, through the direction and organization of daily

practices, meanings for life, to face adversities and affections that can be experienced, lived and meant individually and collectively.

Once we have contextualized our object of study, we will analyze the psychoanalytic work of Sigmund Freud. We aimed at how the Freudian work can collaborate and provide us with a theoretical-clinical basis capable of assisting in the study of the development of transcendent objects, their role in the emergence and establishment of religions, as well as some limits present in it. Considering the occurrence of narratives with references to the transcendent, whether inserted in institutionalized religion or not, the study of these objects can help in the understanding and investigation of the psychodynamic constitution of users of psychology and psychoanalysis services. In the academic sphere, we expect to provide a study from a developmental perspective, helping psychologists, psychoanalysts and scholars of the Freudian work or psychoanalysis in their research and production.

## **Method**

Visando os objetivos acima, foi realizado um levantamento dos trabalhos de Sigmund Freud buscando os textos nos quais realizara estudos ou análises em que os objetos transcendentais ou a religião fossem apresentados nos títulos ou nos primeiros parágrafos. Também selecionamos para análise os textos freudianos costumeiramente citados em pesquisas da área da psicologia da religião. Após este levantamento, foi realizada uma análise hermenêutica dos textos seguindo a ordem cronológica de publicação, com o propósito de destacar os pressupostos da teoria freudiana até o momento de cada publicação e a influência do referido texto nos trabalhos e elaborações conceituais subsequentes.

## **Results and discussion**

Among the main texts addressing the theme objectified in this study, we can highlight *Sobre a psicopatologia da vida cotidiana* (1996a), *Atos obsessivos e práticas religiosas* (2015b), *Totem e Tabu* (2012b), *Uma neurose do século XVII envolvendo o demônio* (2011c), *Uma experiência religiosa* (2014b), *O futuro de uma ilusão* (2014a), *O mal-estar na civilização* (Freud, 2010b) and *Moisés e o monoteísmo* (2018b).

In general, Freud used to relate religion and Transcendent Objects to a psychic determinism derived from infantile imagos, especially the paternal one, and with defense mechanisms in a dynamic process of elaboration. In the analyzed texts, aspects of emotional ambivalence, the role of libido and the feeling of guilt are constantly highlighted, which are interrelated in processes that lead to the emergence of transcendent representations of the sacred, but not limited to those of a religious nature.

## **Transcendent objects and representations of the sacred**

One of the first texts in which Freud considered religion was *Atos obsessivos e práticas religiosas* (Freud, 2015b). In that work, published in 1907, Freud proposed that the obsessive actions of a neurotic person could be compared to actions of a religious person. Such a comparison consisted in the fact that the ritualistic and expiatory behaviors performed by a neurotic person could also be performed by a religious person. However,

the difference between these behaviors would be in the context in which they are practiced: a pathological character would be attributed to the obsessive neurotic for behaviors carried out in private and secret life, whereas those of the religious person would not have a pathological nature for being carried out in the collective scope, that is, an atonement for a personal act in the collective sphere, a way of escaping censorship.

Although no clear perspective on the development of Transcendent Objects was found in this first, we can observe Freud's initial position in it. For him, both for the neurotic person and for the religious person, there is some guilt, conscious or not, which finds in the ritual act an attempt to expiate a crime committed, even if in fantasy, or a reprehensible desire (Freud, 2015b). Such positioning is one of the elements that remains constant in all analyzed texts and guides the Freudian understanding about the emergence and function of religions.

After 1907, there are works focusing more on the study of religions and hypotheses that may indicate the Freudian perspective. Among them, in *Totem e Tabu* (Freud, 2012b), *Uma neurose demoníaca do século XVII* (Freud, 2011c) and in *Uma experiência religiosa* (Freud, 2014b), we find basic references about the emergence and use of Transcendent Objects, as well as properly psychoanalytic analyses about the representations of 'God' and the 'Devil'.

In *Totem e Tabu* (Freud, 2012b), the theme of the origin of religions became the focus from a social and anthropological perspective. In the course of his investigation, Freud was based on works on totemic religions widely discussed at that time. In general, one can observe his interest on the subject and his personal effort to apply psychoanalysis to reaffirm the importance of sexuality in the formation of religious thought and habits. Among the bases for the analysis proposed by Freud, ancestry, the ban on incest and the need for exogamy are important for the constitution of objects (places, artifacts, people, animals and plants) of sacred value (totems), which refer to the ancestry and regulate relationships with nature and the community, organizing the interdictions and imposed rules (taboos). It is worth noting that, from an anthropological perspective, Freud considered that totems refer to something or an event important to an ancestor and, thanks to defense mechanisms such as displacement and condensation, other objects could receive attributions of high value to the point to also become sacred.

For our purpose in this article, the apex of the analysis in *Totem e Tabu* (Freud, 2012b) is the proposal of a 'myth' to illustrate what Freud supposed to have happened in primeval times: the murder of the primeval father. In this hypothetical myth, men would live in hordes led by an older man, who would have the primacy of sexual relations with females of the group and would leave all the younger men subjugated and these, in turn, would have to leave the group to kidnap their own females or accept the subjugated position. However, at some point, a group of 'brother' males would have organized to depose and murder the primeval father.

Considering these first humans as cannibals, Freud assumed that this group would have eaten the body of the murdered father and started to hold celebrations. Such commemorations or celebrations would cause the blame to be shared by the members as the traumatic event was remembered. The guilt, now shared, would be assuaged by expiatory sacrifices offered to the ancestor's soul in order to prevent his return and his vengeful acts. Freud (2012b) reported that the myth of the primal horde has a hypothetical character, which was elaborated from several sources which were presented in his argument. In addition to being an anthropological hypothesis supported by his readings of

the time, the clinical experiences Freud had regarding the fear of castration by the older male displaced to phobic objects (Freud, 2015a) can be identified in the proposed myth.

Resuming, Freud proposed that the development of representations of evil spirits and, later, of the gods, would have occurred, at its base, through the cult of these entities as a collective attempt to appease the murdered ancestor, prevent its return and unite the children through solidary participation in expiatory ceremonies of the guilt experienced. In addition, as with the primal horde, the oedipal conflict that boys still go through as they develop continues to generate guilt and remorse capable of provoking the need for appeasement and the attempt to avoid the vengeful return of the father 'murdered' or affectively attacked. Thus, in *Totem e Tabu* (Freud, 2012b), the argument is that representations of the transcendent (such as spirits, gods, demons, etc.) would be derived from the paternal imago and from the individual and collective psychodynamic process through which this imago has gone through until reaching a representative form.

In 1923, Freud produced another work with the formulations presented in 1912. In *Uma neurose do século XVII envolvendo o demônio* (2011c), Freud dedicated himself to analyzing a historical case of a painter who had made a pact with the devil and whose deadline was about to expire. In the analysis in focus, Freud summarized the ideas proposed in 1912.

To begin with, we know that God is a father substitute, or, more correctly, he is an exalted father, or rather that he is a copy of a father as he is seen and experienced in childhood - by individuals in their own childhood and by humanity in its prehistory, as the father of the primitive and primeval horde. Later in life, the individual sees his father as different and smaller. However, the ideational image that belongs to childhood is preserved and merges with memory traces inherited from the primeval father to form the individual's idea of God. We also know from the individual's secret life revealed by analysis that his relationship to his father was perhaps ambivalent from the very beginning, or at least it soon came to be so. This is to say that it contained two sets of impulses of an affectionate and submissive nature, but also hostile and defiant impulses. It is our opinion that the same ambivalence directs humanity's relations with its Divinity. The unresolved problem between the yearning for the father, on the one hand, and, on the other, his fear and his defiance for his son, has provided us with an important characteristic of religion and decisive vicissitudes in it (Freud, 1996b, p. 103).

In this passage, we find a synthesis of the development of representations present in most religions. Such representations, God and Devil, are, for Freud, the result of relationships with the father (real, fantasized or lost) who, passing through the ambivalences of love and hate impulses, merge with the traces of representations present in the collective memory (can present in the memory found in the cultural history of the community), thus creating the image of the God or the Devil with which the individual relates in the present. Despite the focus on transcendent representations, the importance of the traits present in the 'historical heritage' is something that expands to other aspects of human life (Freud, 2018a).

Freud's statements in *Uma neurose demoníaca do século XVII* provide an understanding that adds to *Totem e Tabu*. In general, the abstract representations of Transcendent Objects (God, Devil, spirits, etc.) arise thanks to the relationship with the immediate ancestor and are added to the traits present in the community (including the ancestors in the collective scope and their other representations) constituting, thus, sacred representations of high affective value. On the other hand, material Transcendent Objects (places, animals, artifacts, objects in general, etc.) consist of objects of common reality that would become sacred thanks to a remarkable event with a figure of value for the community and, especially, for the individual with whom there is a bond. In this case, the affections towards the personal ancestor move to representations that already exist in the

collective sphere or to other more private ones, but which are shared as time passes and the cult of them becomes more frequent.

### **A hypothesis on the emergence of religions**

For Freud, the most complex religions would have been derived from an evolutionary process of human thought. In general, religions would consist of a form of knowledge, interaction and intervention on the natural world and, later, they began to constitute forms of moral regulation. Throughout the analyzed texts, representations of the sacred are fundamental to religious systems, such as animism and totemism (Freud, 2012b) and polytheism and monotheism (Freud, 2018b).

Throughout Freud's work, we can observe the occurrence of some changes in perspective regarding the dynamics of religion. In the first published works, we highlight the psychopathological character attributed to religion, mainly when constituted by ritualistic habits that are basically individual and not integrated into social life, with emphasis on the analysis of sexual drives in neuroses and obsessional neuroses (Freud, 1996a, 2015b). According to Freud, these habits have origin as attempts to deal with libido repressed by censorship.

In *Totem e Tabu* (Freud, 2012b), there are several points that present the Freudian interest in religions. We draw attention to Freud's proposal regarding the hierarchy in which religion would participate. In the Freudian perspective, this hierarchy starts from the premise that human beings evolved as they abandoned magical thinking and started to think in a more abstract and empiricist way. In this sense, moving from magical-omnipotent thinking towards an objective way of living in society and acting on reality, animism would be in a basic position of hierarchy and religion would be in an intermediate degree, while philosophy and science would be the most evolved. According to Wondracek (2003), in this hierarchy of the mode of knowledge in which religion would participate, it is possible to observe the influence of Auguste Comte's thought on the scientific education of Freud, as this hierarchical model marked science in the 19th and 20th centuries.

According to Freud, in animism, actions are performed with the aim of intervening events in reality, avoiding or favoring events, and would be more associated with a magical action by similarity with natural action (Freud, 2012b). An example would be the rain dance, in which water is thrown up and its fall, similar to natural rain, would favor the occurrence of rain.

Spells would also be performed to intervene with something, but they are different from magical acts. According to Freud (2012b), in spells the action would be indirect, requiring an intermediary entity for the desired action to occur or be avoided. Such entities could be considered as more or less complex manifestations of the idea of soul, with the power and capacity of these entities being something relevant for them to be requested in their respective endeavors. On a simplified scale, we would have soul – spirits – guardians – jinn, angels/demons – gods, all of which are derived from individual or community ancestors that went through the elaboration process previously discussed under the previous topic.

Although spells differ from magical acts by the participation of entities, for Freud, animism could not yet be considered a religion. Such understanding is mainly due to the fact that in animism there is still no systematized organization aimed at the moral regulation of acts towards these entities and, consequently, of the social relations between the members of the group. The importance of religion in this social organization appears

especially as incest prohibitions, the regulation of sexual relations and the internal and external hierarchies of the group are being systematized.

Even if animism was not considered a religion by Freud, we can infer a relationship between magical acts and omnipotent thinking, as well as witchcraft acts with the passage to the triadic relationship and the need for a third element for something to occur. In this logic, religion would be established as the magical thoughts and acts in the individual's relationship with reality gave way to Oedipal dynamics, as well as the expiation of guilt through collective ceremonies and rituals began to occur. Thus, it is not just the passage to the triadic relationship, but the guilt experienced by the (real/symbolic) death of the ancestor, added to ritualistic acts, exogamy and the establishment of an internalized moral agent (Freud, 2011a), the base scenario for the transition from animism to the emergence of the first religion, which, according to Freud, would be totemism.

Considering that totemism constitutes a fundamental and constant point in Freud's work, two points need to be highlighted: the importance of the totem's heritage and the function of displacement. Regarding the first, totemism was the object of several studies and it was speculated that it would be the first religion (Durkheim, 1996). Such studies showed that, in totemism, there was a ban on sexual relationships between members of the same totem and that new members and descendants of the clan came to belong to the maternal or paternal clan. For example, if male lineage in a clan was the basis, men should have relationships with women from other clans, and they and their children would then belong to the same clan as the man and vice versa.

Considering totemism as the first religion, *Totem e Tabu* (Freud, 2012b) provide a basis regarding the importance of Transcendent Objects and related behaviors for the emergence of religions, including poly- and monotheistic ones. Among them, Freud's work brings to the psychoanalytic discussion the importance of the sacred in community relationships and places totems as a guiding element of these relationships. According to Freud, the places, animals, plants, people of the community, natural events and situations of human life are liable to become totems and, when in this condition, such elements pass to the sacred level.

Once in this condition, a series of restrictions and norms (taboos) are applied when interacting with the sacred (totems). In general, totems can be understood in this analysis as an expression of Transcendent Objects in totemic religion and can help in the understanding of expressions in other religions, given that religions have some element of sacred value that guides various aspects of the group such as worship, doctrine, internal and external relations. It is also identified their importance in the constitution of a tribe or community, the notion of ancestry, identification of the group, among others. In *Totem e Tabu*, we find these issues analyzed from a more anthropological perspective and with the father figure as the organizer of the emergence of religions, but this perspective is not the only one in Freudian works.

Another point addressed by Freud as a determining factor for the emergence or not of personal religion is the question of drives. An alternative destination for sexual drives not so permeated by censorship can be identified in Freud's analysis of *Uma recordação de infância de Leonardo da Vinci* (Freud, 2013). Instead of censoring the libido and the production of religious habits, artistic skills and scientific interest are presented as alternative forms of sublimation of sexual desires. The Freudian interpretation is that the aptitude for science and inventiveness could be remarkable in Leonardo's trajectory, thanks to the absence of his father and the maternal participation in the first years of his life.

On the other hand, the absence of the father in the early years is directly related to a particular form of the Oedipal dynamic: in the absence of a father, the aspects of rivalry and fear of castration, for example, would have been experienced in a specific way or not at all. In this hypothesis, the scenario would not provoke guilt or fear of castration capable of generating basic behaviors for the religious behavior.

Thus, in the Freudian analysis, in the absence of a favorable context for religion, Leonardo would have moved to more 'evolved' forms in the hierarchy of modes of interaction with reality, such as science and art (Freud, 2013), which were mentioned previously. It is worth remembering that in the analysis proposed by Freud, the question of the sublimation of sexuality was also interpreted and must be considered in a macro-perspective regarding that analysis, since Freud's interest was in the love life and the analysis of a remarkable and enigmatic personality, who had not had an active religious belief in a God, even though he had devoted himself to sacred works

Another important work for psychoanalytic studies on religion was *O futuro de uma ilusão* (Freud, 2014a), in which Freud's pessimistic position regarding religious organizations and religious thought was presented. In it, Freud brought to the psychoanalytic environment religion as an illusory thought that aimed to deal with or influence the world in a childish way. Also influential in this position, the cases of neurosis worked on and studied until then were remarkable for Freud to affirm that religion configured a 'childish' way of dealing with the world and of censoring sexuality, which should, instead, be a force for health and the elaboration of more evolved forms.

According to Freud (2014a), as there is no objective confrontation of adversities and reality, the illusion is configured as a kind of escape and, in this case, religion would be, at the same time, the promoter and the result of this escape. Here, we find the influence of the second topic regarding the psychic apparatus by saying that permanence in an illusory state is something negative and greater maturity would imply a transition from the pleasure principle to the reality principle. It is worth remembering that Freud did not consider illusion necessarily a mistake, but an attempt at self-deception that should be overcome and provide a direct action on reality in a practical way and not through abstract or magical formulations. In *O Futuro de uma ilusão*, again, the indication of science as a means 'destined' to replace religion or, even, that the mystical god was replaced by the logos god.

From 1930 onwards, some changes in the Freudian thought can be observed. Influenced by other psychoanalysts, including Oscar Pfister and his response to Freud (Wondracek, 2003), we find in *O mal-estar da civilização* (Freud, 2010b) a more positive position, clearly placing religion in a status equivalent to other forms of knowledge considered to be 'more evolved'.

In *O mal-estar na civilização* (Freud, 2014a), one of the central points of the study is the cultural aspect considered by Freud. Under the cultural dimension, which is also recommended in contemporary studies on religion (Paiva, 2017), Freud places religion more equivalent to philosophy and science as ways of knowing the world. In fact, religion was considered as a source of models for human behavior and of basic conditions for the development of civilization, such as morality.

The idea that morality is a precondition for the development of civilization is based on the inconsequential character of human animality that needs to be 'tamed' so that it is possible to achieve conditions of life in society. In this understanding, religion would be one of the first, if not the first, attempts to organize life in society, as well as rules, rights, conduct and conflict resolutions, that is, a morality. Still regarding the establishment of morality, in *O mal-estar na civilização* (Freud, 2010b), there is a continuity of the

elaborations present in *O eu e o id* (Freud, 2011a), because, when considering the need for an 'ego' arising from where there is the 'id' and, in conjunction with the internalized 'superego', Freud claimed that only in this way would life in society and the birth of civilization be possible.

However, in *Moisés e o monoteísmo* (2018b), Freud took a clearly different position on religion. The historical figure of Moses was of great interest to Freud: a statue of this historical figure deserved a special study in *O Moisés de Michelangelo* (Freud, 2012a), in addition to being of importance in the constitution of family history, of Jewish origin, and in the problematic and developments in Freud's personal life (Rizzuto, 2001).

When searching in historical studies about the figure of Moses, Freud (2018b) maintained his habit of doing an 'archaeology' that could organize facts about this fundamental character for large groups: Jews, Muslims and Christians. Throughout his extensive work, Freud made several incursions into archaeological data and interpretations, psychoanalytic and historical, such as origins of names and words, periods and dates, relationships with other historical figures, migratory movements, among others.

In *Moisés e o monoteísmo*, there is a deep imprint of the ideas presented in *Totem e Tabu* (Freud, 2012b), which demonstrates the constancy of the Freudian thought, but several other concepts and individual dynamics (Freud, 2011c, 2014b) applied to mass behavior (Freud, 2011b) can be observed. Among them, the development of the hero myth, the revolt against the castrating father and the praise of the father or patriarch once murdered, physically and/or symbolically, play a decisive role throughout the work, leading to consider Moses as the patriarch of a people and its God, Yahweh, the exalted form of the relations of this people with its leader or, still, a divine figure representative of several leaders condensed in the figure of Moses himself.

An important formula is found in *Moisés e o monoteísmo*. According to Freud, the formula 'primal trauma – defense – latency – onset of neurotic illness – partial return of the repressed' provides an auxiliary equation in the analysis of psychopathological conditions, but it can also be applied in the analysis on the emergence of Transcendent Objects and religion. This formula, when applied to studies on Moses, could be presented as the murder of the patriarch Moses (primal trauma) - repression by denial (defense) - period of exile of the Jewish people and other misfortunes in the latency phase (triggering) - anguish of abandonment (neurotic illness) – return of Moses in the representation of Yahweh in its various nuances (return of the repressed). In this case, if we consider the ideas present in previous texts (Freud, 2010b, 2011c, 2012b), we would have in the recurrent expiatory ceremonial act (sacrifices, festivals, commemorations, etc.) the emergence of the Jewish religion, as well as the establishment of a moral code (commandments and other associates).

This Freudian formulation is difficult (we can say almost impossible) to prove. Even though it is a hypothesis, it is directly related to the myth of the primal hour, but it differs greatly from it because it provides a logic based on psychoanalytic assumptions that can, in some way, be studied in contemporary individual and collective cases.

As stated by Rodrigues and Gomes (2013), in *Moisés e o monoteísmo* the positive function of religion is a substratum of value for the Freudian understanding of religion. Although already present in *O mal-estar da civilização* (Freud, 2010b), morality as one of the conditions for living in society is one of the fundamental themes in this 1939 work. *Moisés e o monoteísmo* is not just an archaeological study, but a presentation of how psychoanalysis can help in the understanding of a mass movement, in the construction of national symbols and in the dynamics of existing forces within groups through the

dynamics of individual psychology and the relationships between its members. It is worth mentioning that, despite the aspect of the constitution of a nation being a very present element, in a way, the analysis has the premise that the nation arises around something or someone (including religion) and its symbols that, in rooted way, they also give a specificity to the identity of the group as a nation.

Criticisms can be made regarding the validity of data used in the analysis proposed by Freud, but the result present in *Moisés e o monoteísmo* (Freud, 2018b) is largely an appreciation of religion in the organization of groups and in the maintenance of civilization, in addition to finding an equation of religion with other forms of transcendence (such as art, philosophy and science). In addition, religion is effectively placed as a stage for the development of civilization in a sense closer to the idea of historical construction of a people and as a potential for the creation of symbols, representations and icons capable of organizing and managing aspects of human life, either individually or in society. In this case, religion can be understood as the great 'cradle' of Transcendent Objects, but also that such objects are the very origin of religions.

### **Additional remarks for the analysis of transcendent objects and religion**

The positioning of the Freudian theory is similar to what Belzen (2013) considered as a 'Critical' theory. Psychological theories of this group, initially, position as anti-religious and often point out negative aspects of religious behavior. Nevertheless, later on, they tend to develop in a fundamentalist way, resembling 'religions'. This tendency was even alerted by Freud (2010a), when he guided psychoanalysis to maintain an openness to different perspectives of knowledge and to move away from closed modes of knowledge, analogous to fundamentalist religions. Furthermore, in letters later published, we find the correspondence between Freud and Pfister, in which Freud claimed that psychoanalysis is neither religious nor anti-religious, but a non-partisan science at the service of those who suffer (Freud, 2001).

A delicate point is the need to bear in mind that, when analyzing the emergence of Transcendent Objects and religions in the Freudian perspective, we tend to understand that such objects of study are nothing more than psychological elaborations and, consequently, reduce the sacred and religion to psychic mechanisms. Even so, it is a relevant starting point, especially if there is no objective proselytizing or denying or affirming the existence of the sacred (Zangari & Machado, 2016).

Thus, the Freudian thought was neither static nor rigid, but maintained its foundations throughout the development of the author's work and thought. Among the most emblematic points are the psychopathological positioning present at the beginning of the work, the illusory character to be overcome in the 1920s and the return of religion inserted in the universe of culture, which may still be a source of psychopathologies, but also fundamental for the constitution of the civilization.

In general, the Freudian perspective presents useful elements for the analysis regarding the development of Transcendent Objects and religions, including those of a more individual scope. Among them, when considering the clinical context or any other that proposes to analyze the meaning and psychodynamics of individuals or groups using as a reference some element capable of reaching a level and value considered sacred, including people in daily life, public figures, entities or others, it is necessary to consider: 1) the private or public dimension in which the Transcendent Object is used, and when shared some degree of contact with reality and group relationships can allow a greater or

lesser degree of fanaticism; 2) that a Transcendent Object can present itself at a conscious level with certain affects in contrast to the paternal imago at a non-conscious level, and it can even be used as a substitute for the real father, as a way of balancing ambivalent affections or, even, to face the reality that internal contents are not able to face; 3) that in the psychotherapeutic relationship, and here we highlight the psychoanalytic one, there is a tendency to seek and analyze children imagos and it may change the way in which reality is dealt with in an objective and less fanciful way, with tolerance and coexistence with those different from themselves, and; 4) that, when considering Transcendent Objects as symbols derived from the personal paternal imago combined with representations present in the culture, analysts and psychotherapists can pay attention to changes that have occurred in the personal way of using and addressing the representations of Transcendent Objects in parallel to changes derived from the analysis process, whether positive or negative.

Regarding the latter, an example would be the possibility of someone resorting irrationally and without support to people, objects, places or institutions when faced with situations that expose the individual to demands that they cannot cope with. We could add other examples, but in all of them the recommendation is that there is attention and acceptance of the expressions of subjectivity through what someone has for something 'sacred' for themselves and with which they find a sense of belonging and identifications.

## **Final considerations**

In this study, it was possible to find in the Freudian theory a psychodynamic basis for the study of Transcendent Objects and religion. In general, we observe the importance of the father figure, the defense mechanisms, the representations present in the cultural environment and the need to deal with reality in a more or less objective way so that there is development of representations of Transcendent Objects of positive, negative, persecutory, punitive, castrating, protective qualities, among others. On the other hand, religion, initially, tended to be appreciated as something analogous to child psychology and that can/must be overcome in order to reach maturity, however, towards the end of the work, we find a change of positioning that, despite maintaining an atheist posture associated with a series of scientific-cultural factors of his time, Freud started to consider religion as something fundamental for the development of civilization.

Although Freud also started to consider religion as a phenomenon within the universe of culture, this position only became clearer in the last years of his life and work. In general, if the Freudian works were analyzed separately, a psychoanalytic foundation will be found that will lead the reader to the fact that Freud was against religion. There are records that confirm his position against religion and to reduce the representations of the transcendent to the psychodynamics to the figure of the father, it is valid that the reader of Freud's work is careful not to make generalizations based on isolated works. In this sense, the study of Transcendent Objects and religion in the Freud's work, for example, requires the researcher to carry out a hermeneutic analysis taking into account the historical-scientific context and the point of development of the psychoanalytic theory at which Freud was in each text. Thus, contemporary researchers and psychoanalysts will be able to avoid making incomplete positive or negative criticisms by only using specific works with the intention of talking about the legacy as a whole.

When considering the Freudian theory as a guide for psychotherapeutic practice and other forms of professional intervention, we can keep in mind that it provides subsidies for analysis of the development of Transcendent Objects and religion, but it does not account for all forms and expressions of these phenomena. One of the points to be raised is the limitation to paternal importance and the use of speculation, which makes the empirical conference difficult without the use of secondary elaborations and other metalanguages, in addition to the lack of a theorization that has been dedicated to the maternal imago and the other familiar settings. Even so, Freudian assumptions can be important to shed light on psychotherapeutic processes and psychoanalytic analysis and help in the qualitative understanding and analysis of narratives and religions that have in their Transcendent Objects a dynamic associated with paternal imagos and patriarchal figures.

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