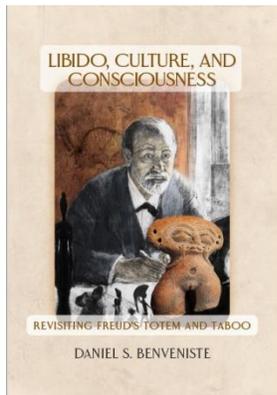


Throwing Down the Gauntlet for Freud’s Phylogenetic Project – Michael J. Poff in praise of Daniel Benveniste’s *Libido, Culture, and Consciousness: Revisiting Freud's Totem and Taboo* (2022) by Daniel Benveniste. International Psychoanalytic Books

<https://ipbooks.net/product/libido-culture-and-consciousness-revisiting-freuds-totem-and-taboo-by-daniel-s-benveniste/>



Libido, Culture and Consciousness is a masterpiece of synthesis, drawing extensively on clinical observation, paleoanthropological, archaeological and primatological data to make its case. Benveniste is among those rare theorists who continue Freud’s “phylogenetic project” in the service of a systematic psychoanalytic theory of cultural evolution. He takes seriously Freud’s question to Wilhelm Fliess in 1897: “Can you imagine what endopsychic myths are?” Freud called these projections “psychomythology” and Benveniste demonstrates that they are the very stuff of human consciousness. The clinical implication of Benveniste’s accomplishment is that it attunes the clinician to the metaphors they and their analysands live by, those very “metaphors that enslave us and those that can open doors to new experience.” Benveniste ventures beyond depth psychology and psychosocial theory into the “psychomythic” dimension of human experience. He demonstrates cultural evolution to be the corollary of symbolically constituted self-consciousness – the *soul* - and its tragic dimension, the “anxiety of *being* in the face of non-being”. He constructs a schematic description of the spiritual adaptations that evolved to protect the human psyche from the overwhelming consequences of this consciousness. The resulting “stratigraphy of religious ideas” is a brilliant extension of Freud’s insights on the function of culture as a compromise solution to the conflicts between Id and Ego, between the pleasure principle and the exigencies of reality. Benveniste applies Freud’s clinical principle “Where Id was, Ego shall be” to psychomythology and society: “Where chaos was, there cosmos shall be. Where wilderness was, there culture shall be.” He follows Freud’s examination in *Totem and Taboo* of “points of agreement” between ontogeny and phylogeny. From this emerge clusters of metaphors corresponding to the different stages of cultural evolution; these same metaphors show up in the analogous stages of human psychosexual development. Benveniste’s fundamental assumption is that human cultural experience is rooted in primate ritualizations, which serve to

neutralize aggression; in the course of human evolution these social instincts became symbolized, thus forming the basis of human psychodynamics. With an eloquence that characterizes the entirety of Benveniste's writing, he asserts that "from the profane and brutish to the sacred and sublime, we have taken our very human experience, created with it a world in our own image, and projected our deepest concerns onto the walls of the universe."

With *Libido, Culture and Consciousness* a gauntlet has been thrown down on behalf of psychoanalysis and the importance of Freud's phylogenetic project. Along with its remarkable breadth and depth, Benveniste has also managed to pose this challenge with a "playful and humble attitude before the enormity of the task". His hope (and mine also) is that others will find inspiration and build upon this groundbreaking opus.

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"Praise For" in Benveniste, D.S., (2022). *Libido, Culture, and Consciousness: Revisiting Freud's Totem and Taboo*. International Psychoanalytic Books Press. 2022, p.x