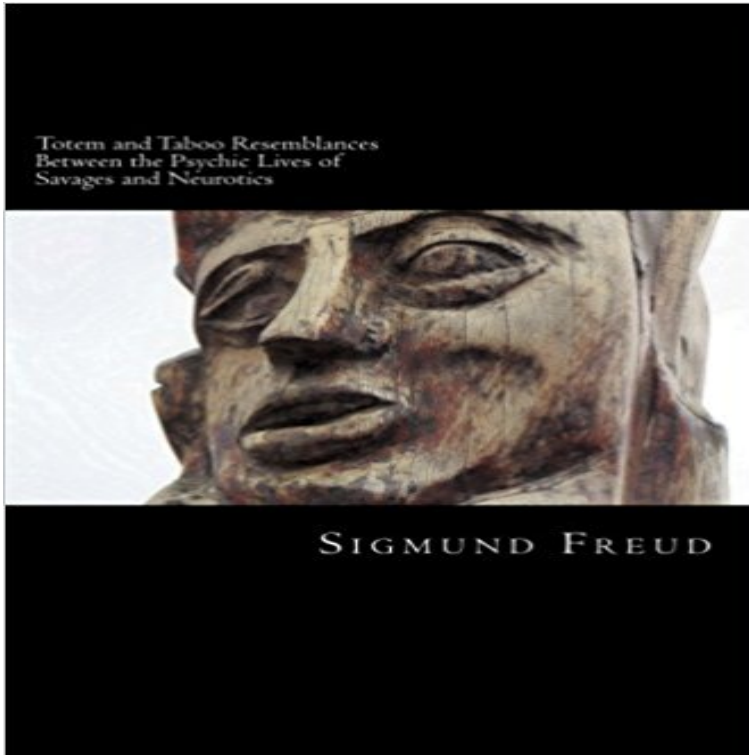


Totem and Taboo Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics



In this brilliant exploratory attempt to extend the analysis of the individual psyche to society and culture, Freud laid the lines for much of his late thought, and made a major contribution to the psychology of religion. Primitive societies and the individual, he found, mutually illuminate each other, and the psychology of primitive races bears marked resemblances to the psychology of neurotics. Basing his investigations on the findings of anthropologists, Freud came to the conclusion that totemism and its accompanying restriction of exogamy derive from the savages' dread of incest, and that taboo customs parallel closely the symptoms of compulsion neurosis. The killing of the primal father and the consequent sense of guilt are seen as determining events both in the misty tribal pre-history of mankind, and in the suppressed wishes of individual men. Both totemism and taboo are thus held to have their roots in the Oedipus complex, which lies at the basis of all neurosis, and, as Freud argues, is also the origin of religion, ethics, society, and art. I am fully aware of the shortcomings in these essays. I shall not touch upon those which are characteristic of first efforts at investigation. The others, however, demand a word of explanation. The four essays which are here collected will be of interest to a wide circle of educated people, but they can only be thoroughly understood and judged by those who are really acquainted with psychoanalysis as such. It is hoped that they may serve as a bond between students of ethnology, philology, folklore and of the allied sciences, and psychoanalysts; they cannot, however, supply both groups the entire requisites for such co-operation. They will not furnish the former with sufficient insight into the new psychological technique, nor will the psychoanalysts acquire through them an adequate command over the material to be

elaborated. Both groups will have to content themselves with whatever attention they can stimulate here and there and with the hope that frequent meetings between them will not remain unproductive for science. The two principal themes, totem and taboo, which give the name to this small book are not treated alike here. The problem of taboo is presented more exhaustively, and the effort to solve it is approached with perfect confidence. The investigation of totemism may be modestly expressed as: This is all that psychoanalytic study can contribute at present to the elucidation of the problem of totemism. This difference in the treatment of the two subjects is due to the fact that taboo still exists in our midst. To be sure, it is negatively conceived and directed to different contents, but according to its psychological nature, it is still nothing else than Kants Categorical Imperative, which tends to act compulsively and rejects all conscious motivations. On the other hand, totemism is a religio-social institution which is alien to our present feelings; it has long been abandoned and replaced by new forms. In the religions, morals, and customs of the civilized races of to-day it has left only slight traces, and even among those races where it is still retained, it has had to undergo great changes. The social and material progress of the history of mankind could obviously change taboo much less than totemism. -Sigmund Freud

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