



# Jewish- Christian Roots of European Civilization

CEVRO INSTITUTE

Fall 2021

Petr Sláma

# The cultural memory at the ruins of the **myth of eternal progress**



**Aleida Assmann**

University of Konstanz

*A shift **from** the orientation  
to a (better) future*

***to** the question*

*Where do we come from?*

*What is our common past?*

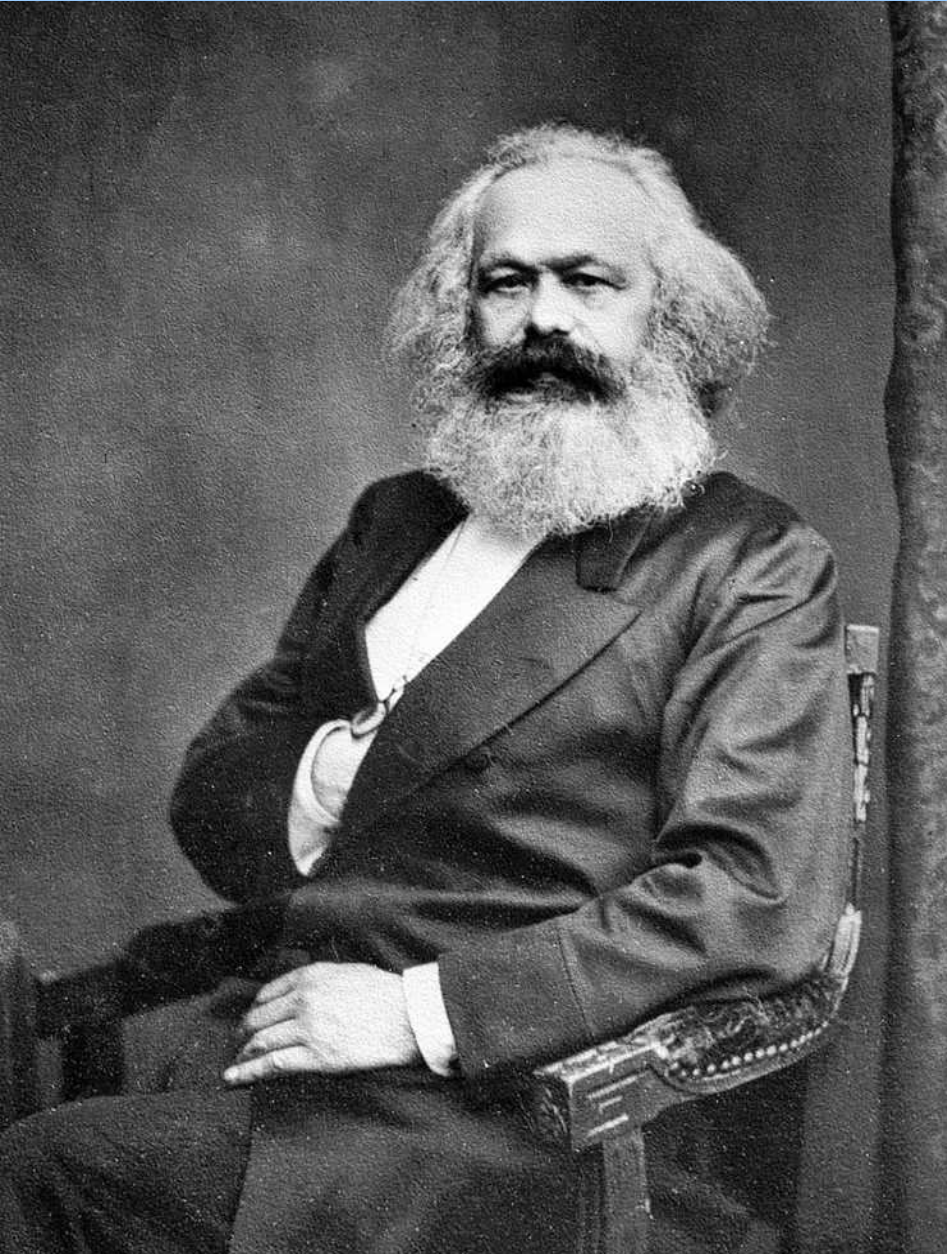
# The Myth of eternal progress



Drawing from the Christian idea of **salvation history** **Georg W. F. Hegel** (1770-1831, *The Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 1837) formulates:

**When subjective spirit meets the objective spirit of World's progress, then the age of absolute spirit takes place.**

# The Myth of eternal progress



**Karl Marx (1818 – 1883):**

***Human societies develop through class struggle. Because of the tension between the rulers and the ruled ones, revolutions come periodically, pushing forwards the inevitable progress. Final stage of history = **Communism.*****

# The cultural memory

## How do cultures hold together?



**Jan Assmann** (\*1938),  
University of Heidelberg:  
*Cultural Memory  
and Early Civilization:  
Writing, Rememberance,  
and Political Imagination,*

Cambridge University Press 2011  
(originally in German at C.H.Beck 2000)

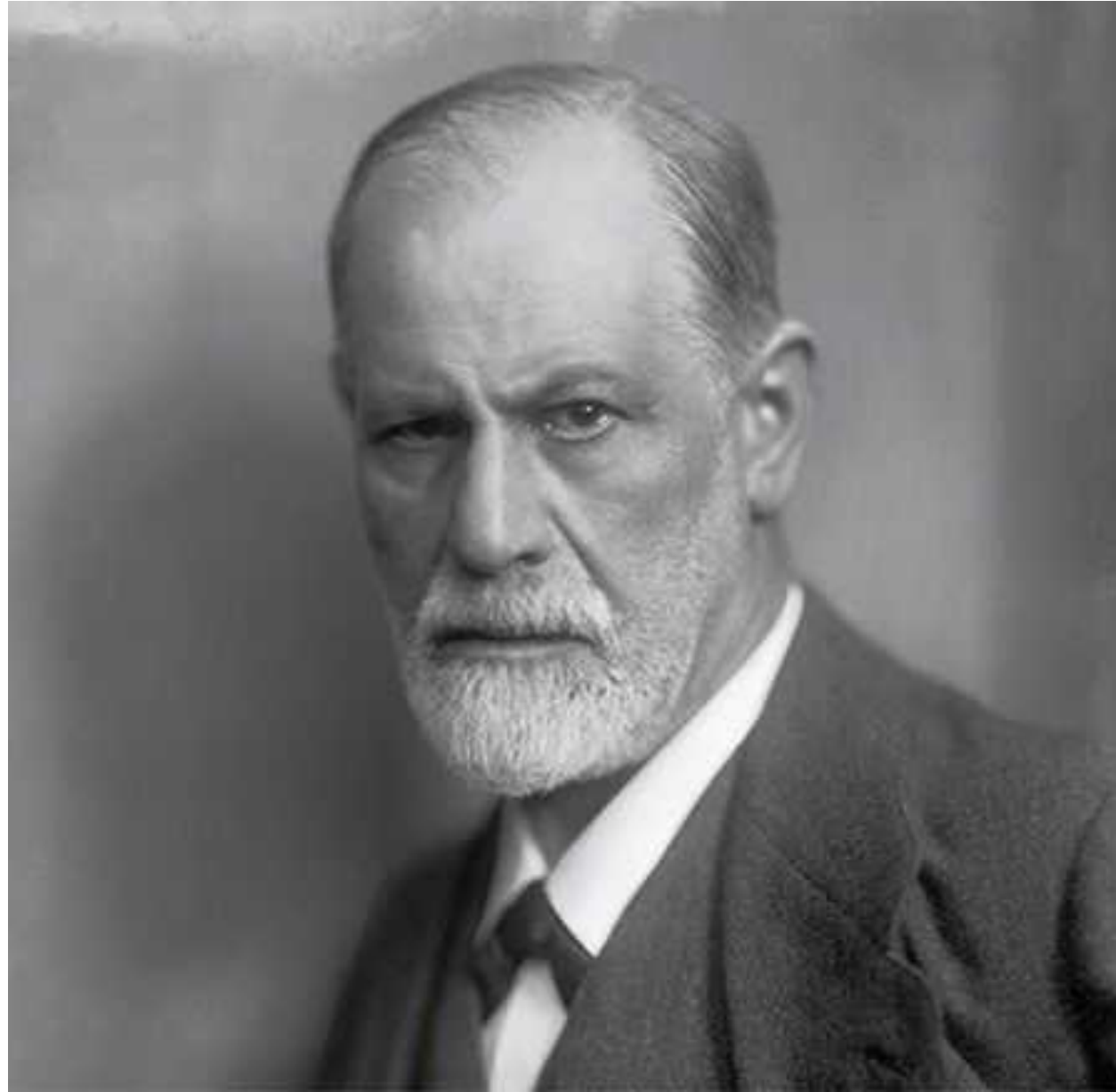
# The cultural memory

## Driven by *the Unconscious Mind*

### Sigmund Freud

(1856 – 1939)

- Early sexual experiences suppressed by socialization into the unconscious.
- The unconscious governs one's personality
- Neutralize it by making it conscious



# The cultural memory

## Driven by collective *Unconscious Mind*



**Carl Gustav Jung**  
(1875 – 1961)

- There is a collective unconscious that we all participate at
- Archetypes: universal recurring mental images
- Reflected in religion

# The cultural memory

## How do cultures hold together?



**Maurice Halbwachs**

(1877-1945):

„No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections.“

- **individual memory** vs.

- **collective memory**:  
structuring time and space



# The cultural memory

## How do cultures hold together?

Jan Assmann:

- What counts for **cultural memory** is not factual but **remembered history**.
  - One might even say that cultural memory transforms factual into remembered history, thus turning it into myth.
  - Myth is foundational history
- that is narrated in order to illuminate the present from the standpoint of its origins. Through memory, history becomes myth.
- This does not make it unreal – on the contrary, this is what makes it real, in the sense that it becomes a lasting, normative, and formative power. (p.37-38)

# An individual to participate in the **cultural memory** = A society to secure its **cultural coherence**

- The oral cultures organize regularly **rituals to re-present** the founding events (e.g. the Jewish Pesah reminding the deliverance from Egypt).
- The written cultures regularly **interpret** the canonical texts **to retain meaning** for interpreters' presence.

# Hot and cold societies cooling and heating elements of remembering



Claude Lévi-Strauss  
(1908-2009)

- **Cold societies**: to annul the possible effects of historical factors on their equilibrium and continuity
- **Hot societies**: history as a driving force behind their developments.

# Texts of written cultures

- **Classical** texts:  
to be imitated

- **Canonical** texts: to  
be interpreted

- **Sacred** texts:  
to be recited

- (Assmann 2011, 76ff)



The term **canon** is from Greek *kanón*, „measure“, originally west-Semitic term קִנְיָה, reed or cane.