The following chapter proposes to examine the conception of the mass that runs through Freud’s work with particular reference to the analysis of religion that is developed in the essays on application. In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), this reflection leads to the hope that, one day, science will take over from religious ideas. This prediction rests on a traditional apportioning whereby ignorance and superstition are the lot of the many while enlightenment through science the prerogative of the few. The psychoanalytic examination of religion does not entirely modify this view, it could even be said to reinforce it. Our purpose, however, is less to insist on the pejorative view on ‘the great number’ that psychoanalysis undeniably holds than to explore the way in which the scientific activity that psychoanalysis aims to constitute cannot easily make room for ‘the many’. It is mostly as far as the future science at issue in *The Future* is above all the psychoanalytic science of the mind, whose object of study is a psychical apparatus that the incompatibility between science and ‘the many’ takes its full importance. An overview of the apparently only ‘social’ concept of the mass that runs through Freud thus leads us to the core of the psychoanalytic project, by confronting us with the ‘delicate apparatus of the mind’, whose operations are not easily conceivable on a large scale.

The term ‘Masse’ and its cognates rarely appear in Freud’s writing. It is used either in a social sense, interchangeably with crowd, multitude or mob to mention but a few more or less synonymous terms [Menge, Haufen, Pöbel]. It is also used in a loose physical sense, such as, for example, in ‘The Project for a Scientific Psychology’ (1895), where Freud describes the external world in terms of ‘powerful masses which are in violent motion and which transmit their motion [heftig bewegte Massen . . . die ihre Bewegung fortpflanzen]’. Somewhat
departing from the physical sense, Freud also speaks of the ego as a ‘a constantly cathected mass of neurones [eine stetig besetzte Neuronenmasse]’ in the same work.\textsuperscript{1} It occurs, moreover, in compound nouns such as Massenseele, Massenphantasie, Massen-Ideal, and it can have a quantitative sense such as Libido-Menge, Vorstellungsmasse, or Empfindungsmasse.\textsuperscript{2}

Let us specify that the term mass ‘rarely appears’ for a reader of the English translation of Freud’s work, since the term is often translated as ‘group’, most noticeably in the Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse (1921), the existing English translation of the title [Group psychology and the Analysis of the Ego] we have systematically avoided so far. According to the editors of a recent French translation of that essay, James Strachey and his co-translators aimed to leave any possible association with the totalitarian concept of the mass out of Freud’s writing. We will not here go back over the controversy surrounding the translation of Freud’s writings, and of that essay in particular. Strachey does sometimes use ‘mass’ in some essays where Freud unambiguously speaks of the ‘mob’, and of the great numbers. It is noteworthy however that whereas Strachey generally avoids ‘mass’ for translating Masse and its synonym – for translating the not obviously pejorative ‘social’ occurrences of the term – he does not hesitate to use the English ‘mass’ for rendering a number of quantitative nouns, notably in The Interpretation of Dreams (1900), where for example, a Summe of impressions becomes ‘a mass’.\textsuperscript{3} In this context, it would not be difficult, and not entirely wrong either for a reader of Freud in English to deem that the term mass in Freud is a quantitative term, and not to take any particular notice of it.

If we provisionally limit ourselves to the examples of the ‘social’ use of these terms, they apparently pose no serious semantic problems apart from having ‘a very wide meaning’.\textsuperscript{4} In ‘Lines of Advance in Psychoanalytic Therapy’ (1919 [1918]), for example, Freud speaks of the possibility of offering psychoanalytic treatment to the ‘considerable mass of the population’. In Civilization and its Discontents (1930), he distinguishes the greatness of some men from ‘the aims and ideals of the multitude’ [Ziele und Ideale der Menge], or states that ‘philosophy has no direct influence on the great mass of mankind [die große Menge von Menschen]; it is of interest to only a small number even of the top layers of intellectuals and is scarcely intelligible to anyone else.’\textsuperscript{5} What is at issue in these examples is at least partly a large number of individuals, although how large a number remains unspecified.

These terms never however designate neutrally an indefinitely large quantity of people. They signal the separation of mankind into a