

Freud, Religion, and Anxiety

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How Freud's Critique of Religion Neglected His
Advances in Psychoanalytic Theory

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For Cristi and Madeline

Who enrich the world every day

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Preface (2007)

The present work was written in 1988-1989 and is incomplete in terms of contemporary references. For years, I hoped and planned to bring it up to date, but my research has followed other paths and it appears increasingly unlikely that I will have the opportunity to make a complete and comprehensive revision. A partial exposition of the thesis was published in 1997 (Chapman, 1997), but the research here presents a more complete thesis that is not yet widely considered in the literature on psychoanalysis and religion. I am making this work available, unchanged since 1989 except for minor editing, in the hopes that even in its historical form it will be of value to other scholars.

In lieu of a revision, I can instead suggest several areas that should be considered to extend the present work. Most obviously, it should be brought up to date with psychoanalytic literature. In terms of understanding of religious behavior, a good place to start would be works of W. W. Meissner, and the explorations of Ana-Maria Rizzuto, who has explored both the individual experience of religion (*Birth of the Living God*, 1979) and the motivations that may have colored Freud's understanding of religion (*Why Did Freud Reject God?*, 1998).

I argue here that Freud's development of the structural theory, and especially the establishment of anxiety as a principal psychological force, should have led him to change his theory of religion, which was firmly grounded in earlier psychoanalytic concepts. Since writing the present work almost 20 years ago, dominance of the structural theory in English-language psychoanalysis has been waning. Psychoanalysis in the United States has become pluralistic and less dogmatic; alternatives such as self psychology, Kleinian analysis, and British object relations theories are more widely discussed and practiced; and, especially among academic psychoanalysts, there is increasing access to and understanding of the work of Jacques Lacan, who challenged the orthodox view that the structural theory is an improvement or replacement of Freud's earlier work.

Given these developments in psychoanalysis, the present work could be strengthened in two ways. First, it would be helpful to extend the coverage to consider how the questions addressed here would appear if examined through other psychoanalytic theories. For instance, if, as I suggest, it makes more sense to consider religion in terms of anxiety rather than infantile fantasy, there would certainly be implications for consideration of religious behavior from an object-relational or self psychology point of view.

A second approach would be to examine one of the basic premises of the work, namely, that Freud's structural model in some way supersedes his earlier, so-called topological model. One might challenge this premise, either by arguing that Freud's model did not change as significantly as is presumed by ego psychology, or by accepting such change but denying that the later theory is preferable. In either case, the fact that Freud's early theory of religion was maintained throughout his life could be less problematic than the present work suggests. For my part, I am today inclined somewhat towards the latter view, namely, that the early topological model – albeit grounded in archaic and no longer appropriate metaphors of energy and mechanics – more closely agrees with observation of the power, scope, and operation of the unconscious mind than does an ego-centered interpretation of the structural theory.

Beyond my discussion of Freud's theory, I suggest in later chapters that a reassessment of the theory of religious behavior opens a path for engagement with modern theology, especially the theology of Paul Tillich. My knowledge of current theology is woefully limited, but I see three obvious areas to explore. First, one could consider modern scholarship on Tillich and other existentialist and related theologies, and inquire whether such work agrees with the suggestions here. Second, it would be interesting to consider the most important non-theoretical developments in religion. In particular, the theories advanced here could be examined in relation to the worldwide rise and importance of fundamentalist religion and the continued decline of traditional Christian denominations in many societies. Third, the growing importance in North America and Europe of non-Christian religions such as Buddhism and other spiritual practices such as yoga affords opportunity to examine the theories here in different contexts.

The continued vitality of psychoanalytic theory relies upon critical examination and revision of its theories, not only in clinical practice but also in application to important nonclinical theories and behaviors. Religion is a significant force acting in the modern world, and more than ever, we may feel challenged, even demanded, to understand its importance. At the same time, there is greater opportunity than ever for such study, both in the diversity of religious behavior to consider, and in the potential benefit that such study may bring, not only to scholars and students of human behavior, but to the community at large.

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Two revered scholars in the Harvard community, the late psychologist and psychoanalyst Philip Holzman and theologian Gordon Kaufman, provided early input on the project and served as examiners of the resulting essay. They provided many insightful suggestions and constructive challenges, not all of which, unfortunately, are answered in the final work. Kathleen Higgins at the University of Texas provided extensive commentary and insight for the planned revision that has not yet occurred.

My Harvard psychology student colleague Rachel Hellenga contributed generously to revising and editing the essay. Arun Malik of the Harvard Business School assisted with production work of what was, at that time, a very long document for personal computers.

After years of trying, my friend, writer and editor Greg Spira, convinced me that it was a disservice to let this manuscript languish, even if it could not be brought up to date. He recommended Lulu as a route for effective distribution that would meet scholars' need for access to the work.

In the course of my study at Harvard, the Department of Psychology and the Committee on Degrees in the Comparative Study of Religion gave me the opportunity to join two rather diverse fields in a combined major. The rigors of simultaneously meeting the demands of two courses of study were far more than compensated by the rewards of experiencing twice as many brilliant faculty.

Finally, the Harvard Department of Psychology surprised me with a wholly undeserved honor for this work, the Gordon W. Allport Prize in Psychology for 1989. I wish my work could live up to the profound and pioneering work of Allport, but failing that, I hope it may at least provide some degree of inspiration to other scholars.

Introduction

This essay addresses Freud's psychoanalytic critique of religion. I review two main trends in Freud's writing on religion: the empiricist denial of religion's truth claims and the pragmatic argument that religion simply fails to help people. I argue that changes in Freud's understanding of anxiety necessitate changes in his critique of religion. Discussion of Freud is followed by a look at Paul Tillich's theology. I suggest that Tillich's writings on anxiety might help us to address shortcomings in Freud's analysis of religion.

My aim in this essay is neither to rewrite psychoanalytic theory nor to attempt to show a fundamental flaw in Freud's theory. Instead I argue that Freud's later writings on religion did not take proper account of the *interpretive* shift in his view of anxiety. His writings on religion ignored important aspects of his work on anxiety and thus are too limited in their approach to the problems of religious belief. It makes a fundamental difference to the attitude towards religion that grows from one's theory whether one chooses to view religion as an infantile system of promises or as an attempt to cope with the basic human problem of anxiety.

The analysis in these pages almost exclusively cites primary material from Freud and Tillich; I have very little discussion of commentators on either thinker. My textual approach allows the essay to focus on the basic issues with greater clarity than could any attempt to provide a survey of the vast material written about Freud or Paul Tillich. To the extent that secondary material has been important to my analysis of any specific point in the discussion that follows, I have noted the appropriate references. A note on important reading not mentioned in the text precedes my bibliography at the end of the document. It would be disingenuous to pretend that I have not been influenced by a number of works on Freud and Tillich, but I can say that my main argument is not found in any other work of which I am aware. The bibliographic note gives credit to the sources which were especially interesting to me.

It will be useful to summarize the essentials of my argument in the remainder of this introduction. This overview of the essay may help one to consider the overall argument while reading each chapter.

Freud's early anxiety theory (1900) understood anxiety to be a derivative of converted psychic energy originally bound to specific wishes. For some reason – which may be either internal (repressive) or external (suppressive) – an unconscious wish remains unfulfilled and presses for expression. At the same time, its quantity of psychic energy

increases through the addition of affect from related unconscious wishes and ideas to a point where the energy can no longer be adequately checked by the preconscious censor. The desire grows and becomes too strong for repression to function perfectly. The energy may then overflow and, in some unspecified way, create the conversion symptoms of anxiety, or, in more dramatic cases, hysteria. These conversion symptoms help to release some of the excess libidinal energy. In this theory we may say that anxiety is a by-product of unfulfilled desires. Anxiety is the result of repression and has a fundamentally pathological character whether it is present in the form of a simple worry or in the form of more debilitating generalized anxiety.

In his later anxiety theory (1926), Freud understood basic anxiety to be a normal state in which the ego is warned of impending danger by one of the mental agencies responsible for psychic or sensory apperception. In learned or possibly inborn responses to certain situations the psyche recognizes a physical or psychical danger to the person and “communicates” this danger to the rest of the organism by initiating a state of anxiety. This danger may be external, as when a child fears punishment for some act, or it may be internal, when some arising desire in the mind is condemned by the superego or comes into conflict with an external prohibition. Physically, anxiety prepares the body for a fight-or-flight reaction, and psychically it warns the ego to end the danger through repression of a desire or avoidance of a dangerous external situation.

Freud’s views on religion evolved in notable chronological synchrony with his anxiety theories. His first stage of religious exploration focused on religious acts as behaviors symptomatic of underlying repression. This stage was initiated by his “Obsessive actions and religious practices” of 1907, coming soon after his highly productive years of 1900-1905, which saw the publication of his early view of anxiety in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and further elaboration of his theory of instincts in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). Over the next decades, Freud gradually became more interested in the cultural significance of religion rather than its phenomenology. His final stage of cultural critique of religion was announced by *The Future of an Illusion* in 1927, just after the release of the anxiety theory of 1926.

However, Freud’s later understanding of religion did not take full account of the theoretical shift made in the anxiety theory. In 1907, Freud could view religious acts as symptomatic fulfillments of unconscious desires. Religion would then serve the function of assisting repression in discharging libidinal energy *by acting as a substitute*

gratification. This becomes clear in *Totem and Taboo* (1915) where Freud attempts to show that belief in a god is primarily a derivative of the childhood desire to be loved, protected, and provided for by one's parents. This desire survives into adulthood and is gratified by the parental substitute of a powerful deity. Religion stops anxiety by insuring that libido does not build up to such a degree that conversion symptoms are produced. Freud comments that religion may be able to prevent people from developing neuroses of their own, by serving itself as essentially a neurosis. After the modification of the theory of neuroses and anxiety in 1926 this can no longer be the function of religion, at least in relation to anxiety. Religion now must alleviate anxiety through some protective function it exercises (at least symbolically). The difference is that now anxiety comes before repression and the function of religion is to meet it, not to act as a substitute for some other gratification. In this view, if religion is able actually to alleviate anxiety it would be a true preventative of neurosis rather than a form of quasi-neurosis itself. In this view, critique of religion would need to focus on its efficacy in meeting the demands of anxiety.

Freud never explicitly came to this stage of criticism. Even in his latest writings on religion he concentrated primarily on the function of religious beliefs in symbolic gratification of infantile desires, i.e., on religion's function as a substitute gratification *preventing* anxiety rather than a gratification itself *relieving* anxiety. The difference is crucial for drawing any conclusions from the phenomenology of religious beliefs and acts. We may grant that some aspects of religious belief contain infantile residues. Under the view that religion is a substitute gratification for infantile desires we would ultimately conclude that religion is essentially worthless and that it should be replaced by more rational means of gratification. This is essentially Freud's primary view in the *Future*. If, however, religion is viewed as a relief for some basic anxiety, then the fact that some religious beliefs contain residual infantile ideas is fundamentally unimportant for theory because it says nothing about the essential nature of religion. It merely gives evidence that gratification of some infantile desires may help to alleviate anxiety, which is hardly a surprise to psychologists. It does not permit the inference that religious ideas are fundamentally infantile.

Most expositions of Freud's critique of religion focus on his notion that religious beliefs derive from infantile desires and that science is a more rational way of learning about the world and satisfying human needs. It is often pointed out that this scientific world-view is too reductive, and that religion may be valuable for its function in meeting needs of human symbolic life and imaginative needs which science cannot fulfill. However, this overlooks the secondary criticism

contained in Freud's works (especially the *Future of an Illusion*) that religion fails to perform the task of making people happy, even on pragmatic terms. This oversight is understandable since Freud here does not fully integrate his later position on anxiety and repression which could justify examination of religion's pragmatic aims. He sees that religion may have some function outside the bounds of empirical science and truth claims, i.e., of finding the scientifically best forms of gratification, yet he continues to discuss religion in terms of gratification. What he does not explicitly realize is that religion's role in libidinal gratification is less important than its role in meeting anxiety.

This realization opens up two possibilities for discussion of religion and anxiety. First, thinkers both sympathetic and hostile to religion may focus on its efficacy in meeting the human need of coping with anxiety. Those working on the internal functioning of religious traditions might use psychoanalytic critique to inform them in revision and creation of religious practices, symbolism, and doctrine. A contemporary example here would be the use of psychoanalytic insight to assist dissection and removal of sexist traditions such as the use of male oriented language for god-talk and normative values ("the brotherhood of believers" which consists of "all good men"). Those working from a point of view external to a tradition may focus on religion's positive or negative value in helping people meet human needs. They may use psychoanalytic tools to deal with religion generally, or abstractly. An example here would be a debate whether it is possible to remove sexist elements from religious language, or whether religion itself is fundamentally dependent upon some such elitism and inseparable from it. This potential meeting of religious and psychoanalytic methodology is intriguing but my essay here focuses on a different relation between the two fields.

The second possibility for discussion of religion and anxiety rests upon the philosophical discussions of anxiety in vogue during the middle decades of this century. Here, Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich appear on the side of theology in discussion of anxiety, and Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre make anxiety central to some branches of European philosophy. Much of the discussion during this time no longer seems particularly compelling in relation to contemporary philosophical or theological issues. However, these discussions of anxiety are important for their potential contribution to clarification of the role of anxiety in psychoanalytic theory and critique.

In the fifth and sixth chapters of this essay, I specifically address Paul Tillich's theology in relation to psychoanalysis. Tillich's view of anxiety as an inescapable ontological condition for human existence provides an abstract basis for the Freudian hypothesis that anxiety is an

omnipresent signal in the mental agency. By developing Freud's view of anxiety we see that the impetus to religious belief may be its role in reducing anxiety. This is an empirical correlate to Tillich's acceptance of anxiety in the metaphysical centering of the self around one's ultimate concern, i.e., God. Tillich's critique of idolatrous ideas in religion is then analogous to Freud's critique of infantile residues in religious belief; the notion of God as a provider who meets our demands is unacceptable to both thinkers. Tillich, unlike Freud, believes that the concept of God does not have to be categorically dismissed but should be refined.

The point of dispute between the thinkers is whether religion thus cleansed of idolatrous or infantile beliefs is actually able to assist people. Freud would hold that a purified notion of God on the order of Tillich's ultimate concern has very little psychic power. This position needs to be clarified in light of the difference between religion as a fulfillment of desire and as an alleviator of anxiety. In the first case a vague "god of the philosophers," in Freud's words, would surely be insufficient, but in the second case it might not be. Tillich admits the existence of inescapable doubt and uncertainty but believes that no other human condition is possible, that the religious grasp of anxiety is imperfect but is still the best we can manage.

Chapter I. Basics of Freud's Critique of Religion

Background of Freud's Anti-Religious Sentiment

We learn from Ernest Jones that the young Sigmund Freud, born in Moravia in 1856, was not brought up in a religious household. His father Josef was reared as an orthodox Jew but later gave up most of his religious belief. However, the Freud family continued to observe many Jewish rituals and Sigmund became "certainly conversant with all Jewish customs and festivals." (Jones, 1961, p. 17) There is no evidence, Jones says, that Sigmund ever had any belief in a god.

This picture is complicated a little by reports of Sigmund's attachment in early childhood to his nanny, who was a devout Roman Catholic. The young Freud attended mass with his nanny, and, his mother told him, "When you got home, you would preach and tell us what God Almighty does." (Gay, *Freud*, p. 7). This nanny was dismissed for theft before Freud turned three, and Sigmund's concern with God Almighty and his occasional sermons apparently disappeared. Freud did not believe in God, but we may suppose that these childhood events left in him some trace of awe for a majestic power.

When Freud was four years old his family moved to Vienna. He spent the next eight decades of life in that city before finally having to move to London after the Nazis' invasion of Austria in 1938. During adolescence, Freud was conscious of Christian (primarily Roman Catholic) anti-Semitism in Austria. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he reports a famous incident which showed his father as impotent in the face of anti-Jewish sentiment. On one of their customary walks together, Josef Freud told Sigmund the following story.

'When I was a young man', he [Josef Freud] said, 'I went for a walk one Saturday in the streets of your birthplace; I was well-dressed, and had a new fur cap on my head. A Christian came up to me and with a single blow knocked off my cap into the mud and shouted: "Jew! Get off the pavement!" ' 'And what did you do?' I [Sigmund] asked. 'I went into the roadway and picked up my cap,' was his quiet reply. (Freud, 1900, p. 230).

This scene occurred in Moravia, where Freud was born, but his father's report of it fueled Freud's hatred of anti-Semitism everywhere, including, of course, his home of Vienna. Freud says that this story caused him to think of his father as somewhat cowardly, and spurred Sigmund's own fantasies of revenge on the Christians.

This struck me as unheroic conduct on the part of the big, strong man who was holding the little boy by the hand. I contrasted this situation with another which fitted my feelings better: the scene in which Hannibal's father, Hamilcar Barca, made his boy swear before the household altar to take vengeance on the Romans. Ever since that time Hannibal had had a place in my phantasies. (1900, p. 230).

We may trace Freud's antagonism towards the Roman Catholic Church, which always remained for him the prototype of organized religion, to this point in his psychological life. Freud wanted to become the conqueror Hannibal and lead his own attack on Rome. Freud comments, "when ... I began to understand for the first time what is meant to belong to an alien race, and anti-Semitic feelings among the other boys warned me that I must take up a definite position, the figure of the Semitic general rose still higher in my esteem. To my youthful mind Hannibal and Rome symbolized the conflict between the tenacity of Jewry and the organization of the Catholic Church." (1900, p. 229).

In fantasy, Freud was a sworn fighter of Christianity; however, his dislike for religious beliefs and practices extended to Judaism as well. His refusal to associate with any form of Jewish ritual is strikingly clear in the story of his marriage to Martha Bernays. Martha came from an orthodox Jewish family and was orthodox herself. During their five year engagement, Freud had expressed to Martha his intense dislike of religious practice, and she finally accepted this though possibly without realizing the true extent of Freud's anti-religious fervor. When they finally decided on a time to marry, September 1886, Freud insisted on a civil marriage, which was legally acceptable in Martha's native Germany. However, he learned that such a civil marriage would be null in their ultimate home state of Austria. Austria required some religious ceremony for any wedding to be valid. Thus Freud was forced to endure a Jewish wedding in addition to the civil wedding.

Once married, Freud firmly asserted his will (and his control) and prevented Martha from following any Jewish observances. "I remember very well her telling me," a cousin of Martha Bernays, now Martha Freud, recalled, "how not being able to light the Sabbath lights on the first Friday night after her marriage was one of the more upsetting experiences of her life." (Gay, 1988, p. 54). Freud always expressed his pride in being a Jew but did not allow Jewish religious practices to enter his family life at all. Peter Gay reports that Freud's children were completely ignorant of even the most elementary Jewish customs.

'Our festivals,' Freud's son Martin recalled, 'were Christmas, with

presents under a candle-lit tree, and Easter, with gaily painted Easter eggs. I had never been in a synagogue ...' When Martin Freud got married, he had to go through a religious ceremony as required by Austrian law; all dressed up, he entered the sanctuary, and took off his top hat as a sign of respect for a holy place. The escort on his left, better informed, firmly jammed the hat back on Martin Freud's head. But the groom, unable to believe that one kept one's head covered during a religious ceremony, took it off again, whereupon his escort on the right repeated the gesture, putting Martin Freud's hat back on. (1988, pp. 600-601).

From a psychoanalytic point of view we should not be surprised to learn that Freud rarely but occasionally displayed more positive interest in religion. His usual hatred of religious belief and philosophy may have helped to defuse another weaker attraction to this area. In his medical studies at the University of Vienna, Freud was required to attend a certain number of courses on philosophy. He chose the lectures on the history of philosophy offered by the theist Franz Brentano. Peter Gay says that Freud "attended no fewer than five courses of lectures and seminars offered by this 'damned clever fellow,' this 'genius,' and sought him out for private interviews." (1988, p. 29). Later, Freud confessed to a friend that "Temporarily, I am no longer a materialist, also not yet a theist." (*ibid.*).¹

1. In addition to noting Freud's temptation towards theism, we may speculate on the influence Brentano's proto-phenomenological philosophy of intentionality might have had on Freud's later development of psychoanalysis. Brentano viewed the distinguishing feature of psychical formations as their character of being oriented (intended) towards some real or ideal object. Physical, empirical phenomena are not oriented towards any such objects; they simply exist. A similar form of subjective intentionality is evident in psychoanalysis, especially in Freud's theories of over-determination of psychic elements and the dictum that every aspect of dreams and other unconscious phenomena has some valid symbolic interpretation (even if it is often impossible to uncover this in practice). However, Olsen and Koppe (1988) "do not believe that Freud was directly influenced by Brentano's phenomenological theories. The lectures were about the history of philosophy and Freud's own theoretical development shows no sign of any phenomenological influence.... Different versions of this view [of intentionality] can be found in Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, Schopenhauer, and Brentano. This view is also found in Freud, but we will venture the conjecture that it came to him indirectly ..." (p. 32).

An interesting aspect of Brentano's theories is that his intentionality could apply equally well to conscious and non-conscious psychical contents. Not only was Brentano the first philosopher to use the term *intentionality*, he was also the only philosopher of the time to develop such a theory which could apply to unconscious ideas. (Certain aspects of Hegel's and Marx's theories of determination could operate unconsciously but are separate from any form of intentionality. Later phenomenologists who elaborated upon intentionality, notably Husserl and Sartre, focused exclusively on

Certainly Freud soon reverted to being a complete unbeliever, but in correspondence from the last years of his life when he suffered terribly from pain caused by mouth cancer and its treatments he sometimes expressed the sentiment that a moral order in the universe would be comforting (cf. letters to Pfister (1963) and A. Zweig (1970)). The problem, as he expressed in *The Future of an Illusion* and other works, is that such a wish is too tempting; that there could be a loving God is so improbable that the idea must be a fantasy.

We also find that Freud's original work in the last twelve years of his life focused almost exclusively on problems of religion. He published several important papers on the status of psychoanalysis (e.g. "Analysis terminable and interminable" (1937)) but most of his work on technique during these years seems unimportant compared to *The Future of an Illusion*, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, and *Moses and Monotheism*. Even his more mundane work is infused with a concern for religion; witness the famous chapter on "The question of a Weltanschauung" in the *New Introductory Lectures*.

This increasing interest in religious questions as Freud aged is remarkable and showed the culmination of his lifelong interest in religion. In his *Autobiographical Study* (1926), Freud states, "My early familiarity with the Bible story (at a time almost before I had learnt the art of reading) had, as I recognized much later, an enduring effect upon the direction of my interest." (p. 13). In his 1935 postscript to the *Study*, he reflected upon his increasing interest in cultural problems. "My interest, after making a long detour through the natural sciences, medicine, and psychotherapy, returned to the cultural problems which had fascinated me long before, when I was a youth scarcely old enough for thinking." (p. 123).

Freud thought that one of the tasks of enlightened, scientific thinkers was to oppose religious influences on education and culture.

conscious mentation.) The phenomenologist Herbert Spiegelberg, contrary to Olsen and Koppe, even denies that anything very similar to Brentano's intentionality can be found in earlier writers. "[A]s far as I can make out, this characterization is completely original with Brentano, except for whatever credit he himself generously extends to Aristotle for its 'first germs' in a rather minor passage of the *Metaphysics* (1021 a 29)." (1982, p. 37).

In view of all this, we might not be wrong to disagree with Olsen and Koppe about Brentano's possible influence on Freud and think it possible that in his five classes with Brentano, Freud picked up hints of the idea of intentionality mixed with Brentano's comments on the history of philosophy. However, such hints must have operated silently on Freud, who certainly never attributed any influence to Brentano and was not interested in phenomenological philosophy.

He did not go so far as to oppose religious belief in his patients; his duty as a psychoanalyst was to understand and possibly to help, not to persuade them to abandon their beliefs. However, his ultimate position in his written work was that of a cultural critic who must fight the dangerous role of religion in society. This position was quite a distance from his earliest writings on religion. Freud began by studying religious ritual; only over time did he become primarily interested in the cultural significance of religion. Our next task is to trace these various forms of criticism of religion that we find over Freud's career.

Religious Practices as Symptomatic Acts

Freud's first major paper on religion was his "Obsessive Acts and Religious Practices," published in 1907. In this paper, Freud notes a similarity "between what are called obsessive acts in neurotics and those religious observances by means of which the faithful give expression to their piety.... The resemblance, however, seems to me to be something more than superficial ..." (p. 17).

An obsessional neurosis is characterized by "little prescriptions, performances, restrictions, and arrangements in certain activities of every-day life which have to be carried out always in the same or in a methodically varied way." (p. 18). These activities appear to be meaningless, and a person under their sway also sees them as meaningless but is still compelled to perform them. The obsessive neurotic experiences paralyzing anxiety if the rituals are not observed.

"It is easy," says Freud, "to see wherein lies the resemblance between neurotic ceremonial and religious rites; it is in the fear of pangs of conscience after their omission, in the complete isolation of them from all other activities (the feeling that one must not be disturbed), and in the conscientiousness with which the details are carried out." (p. 19). However, the differences between religious practices and neurotic obsessions are also important. First, religious ceremonies have a fixed form for everyone practicing them in a given church or denomination, whereas neurotic rituals vary widely from person to person. This adoption of the same religious rituals by everyone is possible because religious observances are communal while neurotic rites are private and are generally hidden from others. Finally, the greatest difference between the two, according to Freud, is that "the little details of religious ceremonies are full of meaning and are understood symbolically, while those of neurotics seem silly and meaningless." (p. 19).

This greatest distinction between the religious and neurotic forms of ritual disappears under the scrutiny of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis reveals that neurotic rituals are highly charged with symbolic meaning that may be understood in relation to a person's history. "It is found that obsessive acts are throughout and in all their details full of meaning, that they serve important interests of the personality, and that they give expression both to persisting impressions of previous experience and to thoughts about them which are strongly charged with affect." Moreover, "[W]hat is expressed in an obsessive act or ceremonial is derived from the most intimate, and for the most part from the sexual, experiences of the patient." (p. 20).

Obsessional acts, which appear meaningless, are actually charged with relevance for the person's life, much in the same way that religious images are symbolic representations of divine power, immortality, and so forth. As we have noted, religious beliefs, unlike obsessions, are communal. However, the principle qualitative difference is that the symbolic meaning of neurotic rituals is unconscious, while the symbolism of religious images is understood by at least some members of the religious tradition. "Here we seem to find a further departure [of neurotic ritual] from religious rites; but we must remember that as a rule the ordinary religious observer carries out a ceremonial without concerning himself with its significance, although priests and investigators may be familiar with its meaning, which is usually symbolic." (p. 22).

Freud goes further. This symbolic meaning is not the core of religious images. "In all believers ... the *motives* impelling them to religious practices are unknown, or are replaced in consciousness by others which are advanced in their stead." (*ibid.*, Freud's italics). Freud then considers the mental phenomena responsible for neurotic obsessions.

His first observation is that a person under the sway of a compulsion is beset by anxiety and is afraid that some misfortune will occur if a particular ritual is not performed. Carrying out the ritual eliminates this fear; thus we may say that the ritual serves as a "protective measure." Freud comments that this fear of misfortune is so pervasive that it can only appear to be a form of guilt with a concomitant fear of punishment. The neurotic, however, does not necessarily recognize this feeling of guilt. Freud infers it and calls it an unconscious sense of guilt.

This sense of guilt matches Freud's view of religious confession. "The protestations of the pious that they know they are miserable sinners in their hearts correspond to the sense of guilt of the

obsessional neurotic; while the pious observances (prayers, invocations, etc.) with which they begin every act of the day, and especially every unusual undertaking, seem to have the significance of defensive and protective measures.” (p. 23).

Now “the primary factor underlying [an obsessional neurosis] ... is always the repression of an impulse (one component of the sexual instinct) which is inherent in the constitution of the person, and which for a while found expression in his childhood but later succumbed to suppression.... The influence of the repressed impulse is felt as a temptation, and anxiety is produced by the process of repression itself ...” (p. 23).

Freud had written on obsessional neuroses as early as 1894, in “Obsessions and phobias: their psychical mechanisms and their aetiology.” His thesis from that time remains essentially unchanged in the 1907 paper. In 1894, after reviewing eleven cases of obsessions, Freud finds that an obsession results from opposition to an instinctual desire such as sexuality or to an idea related to such a fundamental instinctual desire. The person’s ego may substitute a neurotic ritual for the forbidden instinctual activity. He poses three essential questions concerning obsessions and gives his answers to them:

1. How does this substitution come about?

It seems to be the expression of a special mental disposition.... A ‘similar heredity’ is often enough found.

2. What is the motive for this substitution?

I think it may be regarded as a defensive reaction of the ego against the intolerable idea. Among my patients several remember a deliberate effort to banish the idea or the painful recollection of the voice of conscience.... In other cases the repugnance is banished by an unconscious process that has left no trace in the patients’ memory.

3. Why does the emotional state that is attached to the obsessive idea persist ...?

[B]y the very fact of the substitution the disappearance of the emotional state is rendered impossible.” (1894, pp. 88-89).

In the first of these answers we may note that the special mental disposition is not necessarily meant to be understood as a biological condition. Freud’s writings are often filled with quasi-biological

hypotheses. I do not deny that Freud used biological thinking in his psychoanalytic work or that he saw psychoanalysis as a science, but it is not entirely clear that the specifically biological components of his writing must be understood as more than strong analogies, even if Freud did find them especially fascinating. In this case, for instance, Freud adds that “a ‘similar heredity’ is often enough found...” and gives an example where an obsession prevailed in several members of a family. Here he explicitly places the term “heredity” in quotation marks to defuse its biological connotations.²

The ritual provides the repressed instinct with a path to partial fulfillment. The original desire which the ego opposes may appear in the guise of the compulsive act, which then symbolically represents it. A famous example recounted in the 1907 paper is that of a woman under the sway of a compulsion to call her maid for no apparent reason. Each time, however, she stood beside a table with its cover cloth arranged so as to reveal a stain. In psychoanalysis it was

2. Sulloway (1983) has given an interesting and thorough analysis of what he calls the “crypto-biological myth” in Freud. However, I would give less emphasis than does Sulloway to the function of the crypto-biological tendency in Freud’s thought, although certain other forms of myth certainly flourish in the psychoanalytic tradition. We may perhaps give Freud more credit by considering his masterful literary style and erudition, and consequently focus critical attention on his systematic and probably quite deliberate usage of metaphor. In doing this we would clearly be moving away from the traditional mechanistic reading of Freud followed in the United States, and would be coming closer to work on Freud done in Europe, especially in France. One advantage of shifting attention away from mechanistic interpretations of Freud is the consequent reintegration of psychoanalytic studies into current philosophy and intellectual debate, “rewriting” Freud in terms of contemporary scholarship instead of nineteenth century natural science.

This shift may seem to imply that psychoanalysis would then be moving away from a “scientific” discipline towards some form of interpretative or hermeneutic study. However, this is not necessarily the case; valid sciences such as anthropology and linguistics do not have to preserve a quasi-natural scientific foundation. The work of Lacan, whatever one may think of it, is certainly intriguing for his attempt to provide a basis for scientific psychoanalysis in light of contemporary human sciences and philosophy. I cannot pursue this theme here, but would like to cite the following as just a few interesting examples of rereading Freud. From psychoanalysts we find Lacan’s *Écrits* (1966) (though Anika Lemaire’s excellent study *Jacques Lacan* (1970) is much more accessible) and Jean Laplanche’s *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (1975). Well-known readings outside psychoanalytic work include Deleuze and Guattari’s overwhelming *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), and several papers and sections of books by Jacques Derrida beginning with “Freud and the Scene of Writing” (1967).

In any case, one may notice in the present essay that in situations such as the one occasioning this note, where my interpretation of Freud could indicate either a mechanical (crypto-biological) or metaphorical reading of Freud, I will generally incline towards the metaphorical interpretation.

discovered that the woman's husband had been impotent on their wedding night, and, so as to avoid embarrassment with the hotel maid the next morning, had taken a bottle of red ink and stained the bed sheets. The woman's neurotic ritual unconsciously repeated this sexual demonstration to the maid.

An obsessional act provides a symbolic substitute for an instinctual desire. It also provides a means of avoiding anxiety. Freud stated that "anxiety is produced by the process of repression itself." Fulfilling a desire and thereby temporarily reducing the degree of repression required by the ego may also help to alleviate anxiety. However, gratifying a desire through a substitute for it is essentially a form of repression itself. It assists the ego by dispersing libidinal energy and keeping a desire in check. This leads to a paradoxical quality of obsessional actions: "they serve the repressed impulse no less than the repressing element." (1907, p. 24). Fenichel (1945) comments, "Actually, the phenomenon of compulsion is a condensation of both instinctual and anti-instinctual forces. The manifest clinical picture reveals the first aspect more in some cases, in others the second." (p. 269). The obsessional act is a symptom of repression and displays both the inherent repression and the essential nature of the repressed instinct. A classic example is that of Lady Macbeth with her compulsive hand-washing after Macbeth has carried out his murders. The symptom of compulsive hand-washing displays both her urge to forget the murders, to overcome them by cleaning herself, and also the fact that her hands are "bloody" through her complicity in Macbeth's actions. The symptom displays her guilt at the same that it attempts to overcome it.

In his 1907 paper on religious practices, Freud clearly aligns religious practices with compulsive neurotic symptoms. "This state of things ([obsessional neurosis]) has counterparts in the sphere of religious life, as follows: the structure of religion seems also to be founded on the suppression or renunciation of certain instinctual trends; these trends are not, however, as in the neurosis, exclusively components of the sexual instinct, but are egoistic, antisocial instincts, though even these for the most part are not without a sexual element." (p. 24). And, as with the return of repressed instincts in neurotic symptoms, "the suppression active in religion proves here also to be neither completely effective nor final. Unredeemed backslidings into sin are even more common among the pious than among neurotics, and these give rise to a new form of religious activity, namely, the acts of penance of which one finds counterparts in obsessional neurosis." (*ibid.*).

Now we may summarize Freud's position. Anxiety occurs when a libidinal impulse has to be repressed by the ego; the libidinal energy is directly converted into anxious energy. In the case of neurotic obsessions this impulse is sexual; in the case of compulsive religious acts this repressed impulse may concern selfish desires or other non-sexual instincts, as well as prohibited sexual desires. The ego attempts to alleviate this anxiety by performing a ritual act linked to the repressed impulse. We saw the example of Lady Macbeth's washing off the blood of murder. At the same time that this act alleviates anxiety it also displays the symbolic essence of the repressed instinct. Thus, the instinct achieves partial gratification; the unconscious desire breaks through and finds expression in the very act helping to repress it. The ritualistic acts of religious behavior are essentially the same as the obsessions of neurotics. In religion just as much as in neuroses the ritual defends against the expression of repressed instincts but also demonstrates the same instincts. The difference between neurotic compulsions and religious practices is that the former are private whereas the latter are communal. Freud concludes, "In view of these resemblances and analogies one might venture to regard the obsessional neurosis as a pathological counterpart to the formation of a religion, to describe this neurosis as a private religious system, and religion as a universal obsessional neurosis." (1907, p. 25).

This seems clear enough, but one detail has slipped through the analysis. We saw above (p. 42) that Freud said, "In all believers, however, the *motives* impelling them to religious practices are unknown, or are replaced in consciousness by others which are advanced in their stead." (1907, p. 22). This is cryptic; it does not seem to be the case that religious believers do not know their motives for their beliefs. Freud claims that the impulses to religious practices are generally egoistic instincts, but religious thinkers are hardly unaware that their practices are designed to combat selfish impulses (cf., e.g., Loyola's *Exercises* (1541)). In what sense are these motives unknown? We might say that the true repressed impulses are unconscious, rather than conscious as are the selfish desires apprehended by religious thinkers. However, this seems needlessly sophistic; it is an *ad hoc* explanation that merely reinstates Freud's assertion without explaining it.

The best solution, I believe, rests upon the distinction between belief and practice, which is occasionally blurred in Freud's writings on religion but is extremely important. Religious beliefs serve as the basis for religious practices; while the roots of religious practice may be to combat egoism, and these roots may be consciously realized, they are not the fundamental motives of religious belief in general. Let me

clarify this distinction. A religious person has certain beliefs. These beliefs may include confidence in the existence and beneficence of a supreme God, the evil character of selfish acts, and so forth. Religious practices are designated as means of behaving in accordance with these beliefs. Belief that humans are arrogant may necessitate some spiritual exercise for inducing humility. Belief that God appreciates obeisance necessitates sacrifice and worship. Thus we see that many religious beliefs are synonymous with, or are intimately tied to, religious prescriptions and prohibitions. The psychoanalytic theory considered thus far explains the tie between these prohibitions and the resulting practices. Anxiety arises as the result of possible punishment for transgression of these rules; this anxiety is then handled through religious practices in the same way as is the anxiety found in neurotic obsessions.

This does not explain the origin of these prohibitions, the nature of the beliefs from which rules and anxiety arise. This deeper source of religious practices, I believe, is what Freud referred to when he stated that the ultimate motives for religious acts are unknown to their practitioners. Freud was indicating his path from the symptomatology of religious behavior to the deeper roots of those practices to be found in religious belief. Seeing that religious practices follow the laws of anxiety relief is interesting and widens the scope of psychoanalytic investigation, but it does not come to the root of religious practices, which lies in their relation to religious belief. It is the foundation of religious belief that Freud attempted to expose in his next essay on religion, *Totem and Taboo*.

The Infantile Origin of Religious Belief

When reading *Totem and Taboo* (1912-13), it is sometimes difficult to decide what Freud intended to be the true subject of the essay. The first of the four chapters begins rather humbly, promising us that the book will “show numerous points of agreement” between “the psychology of primitive peoples ... and the psychology of neurotics ...” (p. 1). By the end of the book, Freud has become more forceful. He does not merely summarize points of agreement, but claims to have discovered an equation between infantile psychology developed in prehistory and the structure of civilization. “At the conclusion, then, of this exceedingly condensed inquiry, I should like to insist that its outcome shows that the beginnings of religion, morals, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex.” (p. 156). We are left to wonder whether Freud’s

purpose in writing the book was to explore a few areas of overlap between the findings of psychoanalysis and those of psychological anthropology, to attempt to solve some anthropological problems, or to attempt a psychoanalytic exegesis of the beginnings of civilization. The book seems to move from the first of these possibilities increasingly towards the last. It is also important to note that Freud originally conceived of *Totem and Taboo* to have three chapters, all primarily concerned with anthropological findings and their counterparts in psychoanalytic theory. When the book had already gone to press, he added the fourth chapter on “The Return of Totemism in Childhood,” where he gave rein to broader speculation on society than he displayed in the earlier chapters. My analysis focuses on these latter, more speculative issues because they mainly concern the nature of religion and provide the basis for Freud’s later work on religion.

We do not have room in this essay to recount the entire fascinating argument of *Totem and Taboo*. However, one primary strand of Freud’s thought may be teased out and seen to be relevant for our discussion of religion. This path then leads us directly to consideration of the book Freud wrote nearly 15 years later, tying all of his work on religion together, *The Future of an Illusion*.

In *Totem and Taboo* Freud notes two prohibitions present in all civilizations, even the ones which are most primitive by modern standards, and which prohibitions are enforced vigorously even in societies where little other law enforcement is extant. These are the taboos against incest and patricide. Freud shows that they are linked and he begins by considering the taboo on incest. The exact origin of this taboo is unclear. It cannot be the case that people have an instinctive dislike for incest; anything instinctively distasteful does not need to be prohibited by a powerful taboo. Nor is it plausible to present an evolutionary hypothesis and argue that the taboo on incest resulted from prehistoric observation of the harmful effects of inbreeding. Such effects are generally not dramatic and would not come to the attention of primitives, especially since the effects take generations of observation to uncover.

The prohibition against incest is tied to the power structure of primitive societies. This power structure is reflected in Freud’s hypothesis of the primal horde (not a massive group of people in Freud’s usage – derived from Darwin – but something on the order of a very large extended family). One powerful male leads a group and keeps all the women for himself. Less powerful males, principally the leader’s sons, are not content with this state of affairs and desire to have power and sexual opportunity for themselves, opportunities which

the leader will not allow. One day this privation becomes intolerable; the sons band together and kill the leader of the horde, their father. However, after the murder they feel guilt; they were attached to the dominating father whom they killed. To atone for this guilt they renounce the sexual objects they have won and raise up the killed father³ as a god. The women and sisters they desired are now seen as forbidden; to possess them would be to enjoy fruits of the terrible patricide. The sons fear retribution from the totem god for such incestuous action. The totem clan is thus established, regulating worship of the totemic god derived from the father and fearing incest and its punishment so much that extreme controls forcing exogamy may be enacted. The taboo on incest originates simultaneously with the other great taboo, the prohibition of patricide. "The dead father became stronger than the living one had been ... They revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem, the substitute for their father; and they renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to the women who had now been set free." (p. 143).

Freud believes that prehistoric guilt led clans into worship of the totem animal, and that these early rites developed into the systems of religion which we have today. The totem was eventually deified; the relationship between the tribespeople and this god evolved but always retained the essential feature that the god was a derivative of the slain father. "Totemic religion arose from the filial sense of guilt, in an attempt to allay that feeling and to appease the father by deferred obedience to him. All later religions are seen to be attempts at solving the same problem." (p. 145).

It is not surprising that this picture of the development of primitive societies corresponds quite closely to Freud's picture of the Oedipus complex in children and neurotics; Freud saw the Oedipus complex in

3. Freud always uses the child's experience of the father as the prototype of the later image of a god, but we may note that this father is not necessarily the biological father, but the *psychical* father. In Freud's view, these two roles are usually the same, but it is possible that a child would be fatherless, have a weak father, etc. In this case, the psychical father would be whoever is responsible for protection, punishment, and the aggregate of other experiences Freud connects with the father. This psychical father could be a widowed mother, an uncle, or even an amalgamation of various people in the child's fantasy. Thus, the *role* of the father is more important here than the *sex* of the father, although the psychical picture Freud describes would necessarily differ in cases where the psychical father is not the biological father, or at least is not viewed by the child as being such. The imaginal role of the father was given special emphasis in Lacan's reworking of Freudian concepts and called the "name-of-the-father," the symbolic expression of the father's place and power in the quasi-linguistic social structure.

nearly all complex human social structures. Considering whether he was right to do so is beyond our scope here, but we should elaborate on the similarities Freud found between totemic psychology and the Oedipus complex.

The child – the male child, with whom classic developmental psychoanalysis is almost exclusively concerned – has an ambivalent attitude towards his father. The child is attached to his father through love and protection. However, the child also desires his mother's sole attention and physical affection, and in the child's imagination the father stands in the way of this bond. Thus the child's affectionate feelings towards the father are clouded by feelings of jealousy and even hatred. According to Freud, psychoanalysis reveals childhood fantasies of killing the father and taking his place with the mother. This infantile situation of the Oedipus complex precisely matches the historical story which Freud describes in the primitive hordes of sons wishing to depose their despotic father.

In childhood, unlike Freud's primitive hordes, the boy does not murder his father but has to meet the conflicting situations of simultaneous love and hatred for the father and of unrealizable love for the mother in another way. The father is too powerful for the boy to compete with, and the boy fears the father's imagined punishment – castration – for incestuous and competitive fantasies. This intolerable fear occurs in response to the fantasies and forces resolution of the oedipal situation. Generally speaking, the outcome of the Oedipus complex is for the boy to identify with his father and renounce competition for the mother. This renunciation of the incestuous relationship and elevation of the father is again the same as Freud outlined in the primal horde, although accomplished somewhat differently.

This relationship to the father has three essential elements: repressed and forgotten fantasies of killing the father; fearing retaliation from the father for these thoughts; and loving the father, identifying with him, and wanting to please him. Freud points out in *Totem and Taboo* that these same elements are present in the ritual totem meal and its derivatives such as Christian communion. In the totem meal, the totem animal is sacrificed, mourned, and then eaten. These display the symbolic murder, guilt for this killing and corresponding anxiety, and finally identification with the totem. Elements of the father relationship are also seen in other aspects of religious traditions: the father god who is both loving and vengeful, for example.

In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Freud builds upon these ideas in his outline of the infantile components of the origin of religious belief.

The infant sees its parents as immensely stronger and more capable than itself, and one may speculate that it has particular fantasies or images of the parents' abilities vastly surpassing its own. This issue has become a matter for much speculation in various schools of contemporary psychoanalysis with their increased attention to so-called pre-oedipal development. The infant's actual experience no doubt will remain unknown, but Freud believed it possible in psychoanalysis to discover current, adult psychic material which is at least imaginally related to the childhood experience of inferiority to one's powerful parents.

According to Freud, the image of a powerful protector and provider is highly pleasurable, and we might expect an infant to desire (unconsciously) to hold on to this image. Yet there is another side to this. The child soon realizes that the mother is dependent upon the father, that the father of the family is the ultimate judge and provider. Yet this father who is the loved provider is also the one who disciplines and punishes the child. The child's attitude toward the father is thus ambivalent; the father is loved as the protector, but feared as the one who punishes.

As the child matures, it becomes aware that the parents are not perfect and are not omnipotent. Sometimes the parents are late bringing food or other comforts, at other times they are angry or unavailable when the infant wants them, and the infant learns that the parents are fallible. Yet the desire for protection from the strange and often hostile forces of the world remains strong. A growing child becomes less of a subject to the wishes of his or her parents, but becomes more aware of the human dependence upon the powers of nature. This dependence upon nature parallels the earlier dependence upon the father and it is natural for the child to lend these other powers the image formed of the father. "When the growing individual finds that he is destined to remain a child for ever, that he can never do without protection against strange superior powers, he lends those powers the features belonging to the figure of his father; he creates for himself the gods whom he dreads, whom he seeks to propitiate, and whom he nevertheless entrusts with his own protection." (*Future*, p. 24). Presumably this creation of gods, if not otherwise affected, could turn into pantheism if the image of power were stressed, or into monotheism if the image of a personal father were stressed; Freud does not discuss this. What we find is that these images of the child's are only the seeds of religious feeling. They are molded into particular shape by the culture in which the individual lives. "Moreover, it is especially apposite to say that civilization gives the individual these

ideas, for he finds them there already; they are presented to him ready-made, and he would not be able to discover them for himself.” (p. 21).

Now Freud seems to have radically turned around in the space of four pages. He says that “[the individual] creates for himself the gods whom he dreads,” (p. 24) but this follows close after saying that “civilization gives the individual these ideas ... and he would not be able to discover them for himself.” (p. 21). To be sure, in the first case Freud is more concerned with the notion of a god while in the second he is speaking primarily of religious ideas in general, but this difference alone would not explain the sharp contradiction here. What are we to make of this?

One way of interpreting these two passages involves reading the word “individual” in two different ways. A person bereft of the comfort of believing in an omnipotent parent might or might not spontaneously develop the notion of some greater power analogous to the parent but genuinely infallible. If this psychic development of one person is possible, with billions of people and thousands of societies it becomes probable. The generalized “individual” or the imaginary representative of all the members of society is the one who “creates for himself the gods.” This is a different matter from the experience of most particular individuals within a given society who inherit the concept of a god without having to create it. In this case, the idea has evolved and it would indeed have been impossible for one person to have created it in full force. Freud has described the effect of evolution of an idea through multiple persons, but has described this evolution in terms of a single person. In reality, the described process would never have occurred to any one particular person. This use of a hypothesis generalized over many people is not uncommon for Freud. In *Totem and Taboo*, he maintained the notion of the primal horde, even though he realized that the features of its development and dissolution probably never all occurred to any given primitive (or what is now called “traditional”) society. This generalization across many people is also closely related to Freud’s acceptance of a collective unconscious mind. In *Totem and Taboo* we find him defending the notion that there is a collective unconscious. “Further reflection ... will show that I am not alone in the responsibility for this bold procedure. Without the assumption of a collective, which makes it possible to neglect the interruptions of mental acts caused by the extinction of the individual, social psychology in general cannot exist.” (p. 158). Freud was indeed not alone in this assumption; the notion of some sort of collective mind, serving as a pool of symbols and a source of racial or national character, was common among German thinkers in the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries.

A related way of interpreting the contradiction here between individual and societal creation of gods takes an analogy from Freud's idea of libidinal energy and its attachment to psychic material. Libido, or primary psychic energy, forms the potentiality for all psychic acts. The strength of a drive or an affect depends upon the quantities of energy which move or are "attached to" that psychic element (and to its inhibitors). This forms Freud's theory of *cathexis*. Cathexis refers to the action of libido attaching to psychic material and energizing this material's related symbols and affects. This forms the potential for action, desire, repression, etc. Yet libido does not create acts by itself. Its possibilities are limited by the environment, and the very material upon which it acts is originally given to the individual largely by the environment. Within psychoanalytic theory one may or may not believe that there are inborn symbols and drives, but in either case one realizes that most raw psychic material (images) derives from the environment. When libido 'cathects' these acquired images or memories, they may gain the energy needed to arouse particular desires or affects. In an analogous way, the affective energy associated with an infant's desires for protection and fear of a protector may be viewed as being unbound, free energy waiting to be attached to the images which culture provides of a god. The fantasy of the omnipotent parent is reawakened and appropriated by religious mythology. Derivatives of an individual's infantile fantasies provide the essential affective basis for religious belief – they create the conditions and affective energy for a god-image – but culture actually provides the image itself. In Freud's view these images evolved to fill the vacant spot of the omnipotent father.

In any case, the creation of the gods, and particularly the adoption of the gods by an individual serves to gratify the residues of infantile desire left over from the childhood experience of a loving, protecting, and providing father, coupled with the need to propitiate this father. Adult belief in God or the gods is a wish-fulfillment, a compromise image formed to satisfy the conflict between desire for love and protection and the realization that one is alone in the world and that one's parents are imperfect.

The conclusion that religious beliefs are wish-fulfillments connects with Freud's exposition of religious acts as symptomatic fulfillments of repressed desires, which we considered above. We distinguished there between analysis of the ritual elements of religion and analysis of the psychic foundations of religious belief, noting that religious belief must be logically prior to ritual. Now these two can be related through their common basis in wish-fulfillment. The image of god is formed as an

answer to the infantile desire to feel love and protection from the father, and is clouded by the child's experience of the father's role as disciplinarian. This situation is linked to various instinctual desires which a person has, egoistic desires, sexual desires, and so forth. In the case of an increase in stimulation from a specific desire the person turns to religious ritual for help in keeping the desire under control. This ritual control of the desire is analogous to the compulsive rituals of neurotics, and thus serves to express the repressed wish as well as control it. One example of this dual nature of ritual may be seen in the expression of humility before God. At the same time that the confessor expresses his or her sinful nature, there is also a trace of exaltation coming from the very fact that he or she is in this position with God, where his or her desires and behavior take on cosmic importance; i.e., in the process of denying egoistic and arrogant desires through humility a person also expresses his or her importance in being able to command God's attention.

We may summarize Freud's position: all religious behavior, from the foundations of belief to subtle ritual, is grounded in the gratification of infantile desire. Freud next turns to examination of the consequences of this basis of religion. This moves us from psychoanalytic consideration of the phenomenology of religious behavior into a psychoanalytically informed philosophical examination of religion. This philosophical point of view is examined next.

Chapter II. Philosophical Roots of Freud's Critique

Illusions: Religion and the Scope of Religious Knowledge

Before we consider the fundamental bases of religion from a theoretical perspective it will be helpful to clarify Freud's usage of the term *religion*. His understanding of religion was strongly influenced by his own particular background in the German school of naturalistic science. Freud trained in the laboratory of Brucke, and adopted essentially positivistic views which took a strong stance against any ideas not verifiable by strict application of the scientific method. This view was expressed most forcefully in the naturalistic vow between Brucke, Helmholtz, and Karl Ludwig not to be content with any explanation of a phenomenon until it had been reduced to description by purely mechanical and chemical forces. These views were moderated, however, by Freud's interest in the human side of belief, the emotional needs which psychoanalysis discovered to underlie particular ideas, beliefs, and world-views. In clarifying Freud's view of religion, I will first briefly recount some of the philosophical positions related to the division between naturalistic or positivistic understanding of truth and belief, and corresponding "pragmatic" views of truth and belief.

Religion sometimes has been used to refer to any belief system, held with zeal and emotion, which rests on non-verifiable premises.⁴ This definition has been used both by theologians and philosophers friendly toward religious traditions, and by logical positivists and others quite hostile to religion. This situation where both sides of the dispute may claim the same basis for their argument arises from the ambiguity of the phrase "non-verifiable premises," particularly from ambiguity in the notion of verification.

If we understand verification in the strong sense of a strictly logical

4. This definition may seem to lack critical reflection. This is undoubtedly the case when it is invoked as a reflexive response to a disfavored idea. Much criticism of psychoanalysis as a "religious system" falls into this category of uncritical response which claims that psychoanalysis is not provable but hortative and charismatic, even mystical, and thus may be called a religion. This question is outside the scope of this essay, but to my mind Peter Gay has adequately discredited this view in his two recent books on Freud (Gay, 1987, 1988). In any case the admittedly vague definition of religion as an unprovable belief system is not necessarily uncritical, as I shall attempt to show in discussion of Freud.

proof, then most of our beliefs cannot be verified. Scientists cannot *prove* that an external world exists, nor can psychologists prove that other minds exist. Obviously, such a view soon lands us in the middle of pointless pseudo-metaphysical discussion, or even eliminates the possibility of any discussion of these matters. Because of this impossibility of proof of important scientific assumptions, some scientists and philosophers have held that scientific premises are somewhat arbitrary but essential hypotheses, theoretical fictions which are pragmatic but have no ascertainable “real-world” validity. They are verified through experience of how well they function in meeting human needs or creating cogent theories, but should have no absolute truth claims made about them. Fundamental assumptions such as the law of causality are maintained for the pragmatic reason that scientific hypotheses based upon them are useful in creating theories which correspond to our current experience of the world. These assumptions help to order the way we think about scientific problems but are themselves not open to the stepwise revision characteristic of the scientific method, which deals with problems within the framework created by scientific assumptions. Our assumed conventions about how we wish to talk about the world determine much of the nature of our science.

Perhaps the most important early exponent of a conventionalist view was the pragmatist John Dewey, whom I discuss below (p. 46). His influence today is felt in much of the work of Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam. W.V. Quine has dealt with this problem from a strong background in logic, and also ends up with a conventionalist or pragmatic viewpoint. In his “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (in Quine, 1961) he argues that all supposedly necessary or analytic truths are actually merely conventional. There is no *a priori* necessity of any truths; we hold them to be true for pragmatic reasons which could change, as in Einstein’s revision of the supposedly *a priori* truths of Newtonian physics (Kant). It is unclear whether Quine believes that this same pragmatic account of truth holds for logical necessity as well. His primary target is statements about the world which are said to be necessarily true, such as the hackneyed “All bachelors are unmarried” (pp. 22-23). However, he later states that even the law of contradiction (not both A and not-A), which is certainly essential for logic, could conceivably be abandoned (section 6). Quine might even object to the distinction between questions handled by the scientific method and those outside of science. He describes our theories as a “net” of interrelated hypotheses and assumptions, with no qualitative levels but merely “quantitative” degrees of importance. Our most fundamental assumptions, such as the law of contradiction are closer to the center of

the net and are more difficult to change since their modification would necessitate reevaluation of many other parts of the system. In all of this Quine has no doubt that all scientific assumptions are conventional and not necessary in any logical sense.⁵

The view of scientific truth as relative to human needs is attractive to many thinkers who wish to assert the validity of religious experience or the continuing importance of religious traditions. Belief systems are understood as important for human existence. They order all of our activity and thought, including our scientific research. Just as scientific paradigms organize our thought about scientific problems, religious models organize our thought about the meaning of human life, the origin and destiny of the world, and standards for human conduct. They are considered verified if they succeed in these tasks.

The notion of verification has been understood differently by thinkers opposed to religious views. The prototypical understanding here is that of the logical positivists who agree that strictly logical proofs of empirical or scientific assertions are impossible⁶, but hold that science has validity against other systems because it is open to *experimental* (empirical) verification.⁷ Positivists reject religious and other systems which assert facts about the world that are not open to empirical confirmation or disconfirmation. I am using *empirical* here in the same sense in which verificationists use it. Its exact meaning is very difficult to formulate precisely, though several positivists have tried to

5. Thomas Kuhn described changes in the underlying conventional assumptions of science and called them changes in paradigm. (Kuhn, 1962). Unfortunately the term *paradigm* has been overused to such an extent that Kuhn has recently abandoned use of the word (Kuhn, 1976). What is upsetting today is that paradigms are not generally understood to be the large, encompassing sets of interrelated assumptions and hypotheses organizing science that Kuhn portrayed. We now find many competing “paradigms” in quite restricted fields of scientific inquiry. In psychopathology research, for instance, we may hear of the “biochemical paradigm” versus the “conditioning paradigm.” The broader importance of Kuhn’s insights into the formulation of scientific viewpoints has been lost.

6. Cf. Wittgenstein’s famous assertion that tautologies say nothing about the world. “The propositions of logic are tautologies. The propositions of logic therefore say nothing.” (*Tractatus*, 6.1-6.11.)

7. Karl Popper’s doctrine that scientific assertions must be open to possible falsification is only a more rigorous form of verificationism, and does not even completely replace the principle of verification in practice. If a scientific / empirical statement is easily verifiable (“People exist”) there is often no reason to worry whether it is conceivably falsifiable. Its falsifiability may be irrelevant. Also, science often wishes to make statements which definitely are not conceivably falsifiable (“Sub-atomic particles exist”). These statements, though non-falsifiable, are still open to the tests of verifiability.

do so. Some of the most important work on its formulation was done by Rudolf Carnap (cf. Carnap, 1928). Roughly, an empirical verification is one that relies upon data that is apprehended by our external sensory organs, or which is measured by scientific instruments, and which uses only the notions of time, three-dimensional space, and a small number of extensional properties such as color for its description. Feelings, intuitions, and other psychological data are explicitly excluded from consideration. The idea of non-empirical truth is seen as nonsensical, and scientific truth is sharply distinguished from ethical values and comforting beliefs. A non-empirical statement has no conceivable validity; it is merely fantasy. A classic case of such argument occurs in the logical positivists' treatment of the existence of God. "[The] term 'god' is a metaphysical term. And if 'god' is a metaphysical term, then it cannot be even probable that a god exists. For to say that 'God exists' is to make a metaphysical utterance which cannot be either true or false.... unless [the theist] can formulate his 'knowledge' in propositions that are empirically verifiable, we may be sure he is deceiving himself." (Ayer, 1946, pp. 114, 120).

To sum up the two general points of view considered here, we may distinguish a non-empiricist view of truth and its correlative understanding of "truth" on pragmatic grounds from an empiricist view of truth stemming from scientific verification. For simplicity, I will refer to these two views as the *pragmatic* view and the *verificationist* view.

Freud primarily adhered to the verificationist view of truth when writing of religion. We will see that he also gave arguments rejecting the pragmatic efficacy of religion, yet in *The Future of an Illusion* he gave criteria for specifying a belief as a religious belief according to the verificationist viewpoint: Religious beliefs make non-verified claims about the world. "What, then, is the psychological significance of religious ideas and under what heading are we to classify them? The question is not at all easy to answer immediately. After rejecting a number of formulations, we will take our stand on the following one. Religious ideas are teachings and assertions about facts and conditions of external (or internal) reality which tell one something one has not discovered for oneself and which lay claim to one's belief." (Freud, 1927, p. 25).

Freud points out that "There are, of course, many such teachings about the most various things in the world." One example he offers is "that the town of Constance lies on the Bodensee. A student song adds: 'if you don't believe it, go and see.'" "This song provides nice folk material relevant to Freud's distinction of this geographical knowledge from religious knowledge: such teachings "demand belief in their

contents, but not without producing grounds for their claim.” (p. 26). Unlike geographical knowledge, religious teachings fail to provide any similar path for convincing oneself of the validity of their claims. We simply must accept them without proof. Freud wryly concludes, “Of all the information provided by our cultural assets it is precisely the elements which might be of the greatest importance to us ... that are the least well authenticated of any. We should not be able to bring ourselves to accept anything of so little concern to us as the fact that whales bear young instead of laying eggs, if it were not capable of better proof than this.” (p. 27).

For Freud, then, religion is a system of beliefs which are not open to verification. Freud calls these beliefs (and religious systems in general) *illusions*, but he is careful to distinguish illusions from *delusions*. An illusion is a belief which has no supporting evidence but is not necessarily false. This differs from a delusion, which is believed but is evidentially false. Religious beliefs, says Freud, are illusions. They may be true but are exceedingly unlikely, and in any case cannot be demonstrated. “[A] middle-class girl may have the illusion that a prince will come and marry her. This is possible; and a few such cases have occurred. That the Messiah will come and found a golden age is much less likely.” (p. 31).

Freud gives another distinguishing feature of illusions: they are based on wishful, irrational thinking. People have no particular reason to hold non-verifiable beliefs unless they are deriving some libidinal gain, the pleasure of wish-fulfillment, from the beliefs. An illusion, as the product of wish-fulfillment, has no definite relation to reality. Thus the question of its truth or falsity may be ignored. “[We] call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfillment is a prominent factor in its motivation, and in doing so we disregard its relations to reality, just as the illusion itself sets no store by verification.” (p. 31). This of course reinforces our earlier finding that religious belief and behavior rest upon gratification of infantile wishes; here this finding that religious ideas are wish-fulfillments is elevated to a principle distinguishing religious ideas from other ideas, rather than being a psychoanalytic observation.

At this point we may become concerned with Freud’s extension of the category “religious.” Freud’s definition of religion would necessarily include under the category of religion many beliefs which are not properly classified as religious, or which are not clearly relevant to religion as Freud discusses it. Are we to understand that *any* non-verifiable belief is religious? To take Freud’s example, if a girl believes that a prince will come and marry her, is this a religious belief? We

should say not, and Freud would no doubt classify this as a neurosis.⁸ Examination of the *Future* shows that Freud is not concerned with the properties of the abstract notion of religion as he has defined it. Rather, he is concerned with the properties of specific religious traditions, especially Western European Christianity. Thus, on the one hand Freud implicitly claims to delineate the essentials of religion in general, but on the other hand he has “singled out one such phase [of religion], which roughly corresponds to the final form taken by our present-day white Christian civilization.” (p. 20).

What is actually happening is that Freud wants to criticize the Christian religious tradition (and the Jewish tradition as well, insofar as it shares with Christianity belief in a father-god, divine will, and so forth); calling religion an “illusion” is a way of using theoretical terminology to criticize religion, not a means of delineating what is religious. Freud certainly did not express this as his goal, and it is possible that he was unaware of it. But there is no other good explanation for the fact that he uses an extremely broad definition for religious ideas.

Freud has a specific sort of “religion” in mind as a target. His definition of religion as a system of illusions is not a sufficient criterion for classifying a belief as religious but rather is a commentary on the nature of the specific tradition with which he is concerned. Non-verifiable belief may be a universal and necessary criterion for all religions; however, Freud is unconcerned with anything other than Judeo-Christian traditions. He has “singled out” this phase of religion.

As we have seen, Freud asked, “What, then, is the psychological significance of religious ideas and under what heading are we to classify them?” (p. 25). He answers “Religious ideas are teachings and assertions ... which tell one something one has not discovered for oneself and which lay claim to one’s belief.” We may now use the phrase “psychological significance” to limit and qualify his statement “Religious ideas are ...” Freud is not discussing the essence of religious ideas nor is he giving us a means of distinguishing these ideas. Rather, he is commenting on the psychological status of belief. For this reason, we do not have to extend Freud’s comments on religion to all religions, though there is also no reason not to do so; we simply read more closely and see that he is targeting Christianity but using a broad theoretical frame to do so.

8. We saw, however, that Freud also called a neurosis a “private religion,” no doubt for this reason. This was of course an analogy.

For Freud, in the context of *The Future of an Illusion*, “religion” refers to white Christianity and specifically to those doctrines which are not verifiable.⁹ This two-part definition rescues Freud from the quite demanding task of considering religion in general or considering a number of religious traditions, and also eliminates the necessity of tackling Christianity in its full cultural manifestation. Instead of having to take up all of these issues, Freud is free to concentrate attention on the epistemological status (the “psychological significance”) of Christian doctrines.

Though Freud says religious ideas are illusions and as such have no definite truth status, we may conclude from his trenchant comments about religious beliefs that he considers most religious ideas to be entirely impossible and therefore false. A certain reading of *The Future of an Illusion* may present Freud as concerned with attacking religious truth-claims. He reviews claims religion puts forth for its validity and rejects those based on authority either of the church or of the scriptures. As for the church, a tradition of asserting a belief does not prove it true. As for scriptures and religious writings, Freud states that they “bear every mark of untrustworthiness. They are full of contradictions, revisions and falsifications, and where they speak of factual confirmations they are themselves unconfirmed.” (p. 27).

Freud then reviews two “desperate efforts to evade the problem.” First is the *Credo quia absurdum* often attributed (probably incorrectly) to Tertullian, that we believe the Christian story *because* it is absurd. Needless to say, this does not impress Freud. “This *Credo* is only of interest as a self-confession.... Am I to be obliged to believe *every* absurdity? And if not, why this one in particular?” (p. 28).

The second desperate effort to establish the validity of religion comes from religious philosophers. Here Freud directly attacks the pragmatic notion of truth which we discussed above. “The second attempt is made by the philosophy of ‘As if’¹⁰. This asserts that our thought-activity includes a great number of hypotheses whose groundlessness and even absurdity we fully realize. They are called ‘fictions’, but for a variety of practical reasons we have to behave ‘as if

9. This is a distinction that Hans Kung missed in his book on *Freud and the Problem of God*. In his section on “Freud’s understanding of religion: What is the essence of religion?” he quotes Freud beginning with “Religious ideas are ...” and leaves out Freud’s crucial setting, “What is the psychological significance...” (Kung, 1979, p. 42).

10. Freud’s footnote attributes this view to Hans Vaihinger (1924), but makes clear that he “take[s] the philosopher of ‘As if’ as the representative of a view which is not foreign to other thinkers.” (p. 29).

we believed in these fictions. This is the case with religious doctrines because of their incomparable importance for the maintenance of human society.” Here Freud loses his scorn. “But I think the demand made by the ‘As if’ argument is one that only a philosopher could put forward. A man whose thinking is not influenced by the artifices of philosophy will never be able to accept it; in such a man’s view the admission that something is absurd or contrary to reason leaves no more to be said.” (p. 28, 29).

The interesting thing about these statements is that Freud seems content not to press them any farther. We might expect him, after having derided the epistemological foundations of religion (and his attack here *is* epistemological despite his disdain for philosophy), then to go farther and attack specific beliefs of religion. But this he does not do. He casts doubt upon the beliefs, classifies them as illusions, and then leaves them without carrying out the kill. To be sure, his disbelief is unmistakable. But the final step of specific criticism of doctrine is lacking from the *Future*. This contrasts some of Freud’s other writings on religion. In *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Freud examines Jewish beliefs about Moses and attacks them. He hopes to show that Moses was not a Hebrew but an Egyptian, and that monotheism likewise was not a Hebrew but an Egyptian religious idea.¹¹ In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud attacks the commandment to “love thy neighbor.” (p. 62ff). In the *Future*, this sort of direct criticism is absent. We find that Freud states explicitly, “Of the reality value of most of them [religious beliefs] we cannot judge; just as they cannot be proved, so they cannot be refuted. We still know too little to make a critical approach to them.” (p. 31).

As the nineteenth century evolution of naturalism shows, scientific criticism of specific religious doctrines is not difficult to carry out. The task of showing that ideas of miracles, resurrection, and angels are unscientific did not require Freud’s talent. Instead, as I will argue, Freud’s primary concern in *The Future of an Illusion* was to discuss the significance of religion for culture, and more specifically to dispel the notion that religion is an important and irreplaceable asset of

11. We also find that this specific criticism, especially in the *Moses* book, lost for Freud virtually all remaining support from religious thinkers that he had kept in spite of his earlier criticism of religion. The letters to Arnold Zwiig (Freud, Zwiig, 1970) show this final hostility of religious thinkers. We may speculate that some of these thinkers could regard Freud’s earlier work on religious rituals and cultural significance as somewhat useful criticism for purging idolatrous ritualism and other undesirable remnants from the tradition (see Freud’s correspondence with the Protestant minister Pfister; Freud, Pfister, 1963) but that Freud went too far when he wanted to attack Moses.

civilization. He did not want to spend much time showing that religious ideas are absurd, a task which he felt had already been accomplished well (cf. *Future*, p. 35), but was determined to remove the lingering belief that religion is essential for social order and morality.

Let us review what we have found so far. First, I have distinguished between pragmatic and verificationist accounts of truth. Freud is a representative of the verificationist or positivist school, at least in his discussion of religion. Second, we have seen that Freud understands religious doctrines as illusions, as non-verifiable beliefs tied to wishful thinking. Third, I have argued that Freud's definition of religion actually serves as a criticism of western Christianity and is not a universal criterion for religion. Finally, I argued that Freud is not primarily concerned with the truth claims of religious statements but with their social importance. This last claim will be the subject of the next section of this essay.

The Emotional Function of Religion

Freud attacked religion on two grounds. As we have seen, he called its assertions about reality illusions. Yet he was more concerned with the social effects and constitution of religion. He saw religion as a repressive, and ultimately as a dangerous, social force. He directed his energy towards exposing the emotional roots of religion, and hoped that a clear understanding of its origin and purpose could help us to replace it with a more rational system of morality and social control. These goals bring Freud to contend directly with what I have called the pragmatic argument for religion.

The pragmatic argument for religion claims that religious feelings and expressions are universal in human beings, and must be given a place in one's world-view. Many, if not all, people are concerned with questions of the ultimate meaning of life, standards for human conduct, the nature of death, and so forth. It is natural for societies to evolve mythologies for answering these questions, and for comforting persons facing anxiety or experiences with their own or loved ones' deaths. The post-phenomenological philosopher Heidegger characterized the basic question of philosophy as "Why is there something and why not nothing?" The theologian Tillich echoed this fundamental ontological question, and for him it was implicitly the basic question of life.

In the pragmatic view, mythologies are constructed by societies over time to reflect their basic concerns and needs. The fundamental

task of providing a meaningful answer to the questions of life might be largely the same for many different cultures, but specific cultural situations differ and provide various basic images and ideas for the building blocks of mythologies. One mythological tradition may focus on relations to a world spirit to whom land and people belong, while another may picture several gods who represent different aspects of human emotions and activities. These systems grow, change, arise, and die over generations as images are added, reinterpreted, or forgotten according to the needs of people in societies. Perhaps the most potent examples of these systems are the various religious traditions of the world. These are by no means the only important mythological traditions in societies. The capitalistic work ethic of western society, and the sports hero mythology of America demonstrate many of the same features. Generally, however, religious mythologies are older, better developed, and more comprehensive in scope. For this reason they are more interesting subjects for analysis and study, and potentially more rewarding systems for many people to live under.

In terming these constructs *mythologies*, pragmatists mean to imply nothing as to their truth value. In reality, it is very difficult to maintain that such interpretations of religious systems are neutral regarding the truth value of belief statements. When a religion claims that its beliefs are directly revealed by a divine agent, it seems hostile to represent its beliefs as the derivatives of social necessity and construction.

Some implicit conflict is inescapable here. However, this conflict is minimized, at least for pragmatists eager not to tread on other persons' beliefs, by modification of the notion of truth. As I mentioned earlier, pragmatists test beliefs by their value for human life. If a belief comforts a person, organizes one's thinking about human existence, and assists (or does not hinder) work towards other social objectives, then it is a "true" belief. We find this view of truth present in various degrees ranging from a moderate degree in Mohandas Gandhi (who wrote a book titled *All Religions are True*, but was not a complete pragmatist¹²) to the complete adherence to this sort of conventionalism found in Richard Rorty, the American neo-pragmatist philosopher. As I mentioned above, John Dewey was a key exponent of this view in the American philosophical world. In *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, published in 1920, he argued that "If ideas, meanings, conceptions, notions, theories, systems are instrumental to an active reorganization of the

12. Gandhi believed in absolute Truth and would object to some expressions of conventionalist pragmatism such as we find in Dewey, but he maintained that absolute Truth is found in the many various forms of religious traditions and ethical systems. I take this to be a moderation of absolutism and to have a pragmatic element.

given environment, to a removal of some specific trouble and perplexity, then the test of their validity and value lies in accomplishing this work. If they succeed in office, they are reliable, sound, valid, good, true. If they fail to clear up confusion, to eliminate defects, if they increase confusion, uncertainty and evil when acted upon, then they are false.” (1948, p. 156). In the theological community Gordon Kaufman has done much work on the constructive nature of religious beliefs. He views theological systems and assertions as responses to the emotional and existential needs of people. Kaufman is more reluctant than Dewey and Rorty to use the designation *true* with its absolutist residues of classical philosophical systems for these beliefs,¹³ but he does hold that beliefs may be tested according to their value for solving the demands of human ontological questioning and ethics. “The purpose of theological construction is to produce concepts (and world-pictures and stories) which make possible adequate orientation in life and the world. Of proposed concepts of God and world, therefore, one must ask such questions as these: What forms of human life do these conceptions of its context facilitate? which forms inhibit? What possibilities do they open up for men and women? which do they close off?” (Kaufman, 1979, p. 32).

Freud is often criticized for failing to appreciate the practical function of religion and for not realizing the important emotional role which religious concerns (in a broad sense) have for human beings. In his Terry Lectures on *Freud and the Problem of God*, the theologian Hans Kung approaches Freud from this perspective. However, he does not do justice to Freud and instead becomes mired in considerations of Freud’s psychological critique of religious validity – the verificationist attack on religious truth claims which we have examined. He links Freud’s analysis of religion to Feuerbach’s theory of religion as a projection of human ideals and concludes that “insofar as Feuerbach’s (and Marx’s) atheism has turned out to be a hypothesis which in the last resort has not been conclusively proved, so too must Freud’s atheism now, in the last resort, be seen as a *hypothesis which has not been conclusively proved.*” (1979, p. 76). The italics here are Kung’s; presumably they indicate some important point, but there seems to be no great secret to the fact that Freud could not prove his atheism. Nor did he ever attempt to do so. But this limitation of Freud’s atheism is eagerly pointed out by Kung, who sees it as a positive opening for religion. He then asserts that many people have emotional needs that religious beliefs, which may be true, help to meet. Kung concludes, without giving us any supporting evidence, that “the typical neurosis of our time

13. See the Appendix to his *Essay on Theological Method*. (Kaufman, 1979).

is not the repression of sexuality and guilt, but the lack of orientation, of norms, of meaning. Psychotherapists of the most diverse trends today increasingly deplore ‘the proliferation of the pleasure principle together with the simultaneous neglect and repression of spiritual and religious principles.’” (p. 119; Kung quotes from “E. Wiesenhutter, *Kritik an Freud*, p. 87.”)

Kung then goes on to cite Erik Erikson: “The psychopathologist cannot avoid observing that there are millions of people who cannot really afford to be without religion, and whose pride in not having it is so much whistling in the dark. On the other hand, there are millions who seem to derive faith from other than religious dogmas, that is, from fellowship, productive works, social action, scientific pursuit, and artistic creation.” (Erikson, 1959, p. 64; Kung, p. 120). It is difficult to see the relevance of this passage for Kung’s argument; Freud’s position seems to be quite close to that of Erikson in this passage, though Erikson’s tone is perhaps more conciliatory towards religion. Freud certainly felt that many people cannot do without religion; he did not attempt to convince his analytic patients nor anyone else to abandon religion if they were rewarded by it. Rather, he hoped to reduce the importance of religion in education and society, and in this way eventually eliminate the dependence of people upon religion and replace religion with something similar to Erikson’s “fellowship, productive works, social action, scientific pursuit, and artistic creation.” His program for reducing the importance of religion does not consist in stripping it away from anyone needing it, but in decreasing its importance in society over time, and replacing it with more effective and more rational means of satisfying human needs.

I want to make it clear that Freud did not ignore the emotional importance of religion. In fact, were this not a common complaint against Freud, it would seem nearly absurd to consider that he did so underestimate religion; psychoanalytic examination of religion concentrates almost exclusively on the importance of religion in meeting people’s emotional needs. Yet this view of Freud’s ignorance persists, as we have seen with Professor Kung.

There are two theoretical factors which may contribute to viewing Freud in this way. The first is a distinction between the emotional lives of children and those of adults. The second is the difference between recognizing the emotional importance of religion and agreeing that it meets these emotional needs satisfactorily. Both of these factors are important here. A third emotional element that may contribute to this dismissal of Freud is a strong desire of many people to find some way to avoid having to come to terms with his criticisms of religion; this is

evident in much discussion of Freud by people who know little about him, but it is not consequential in this essay.

Psychoanalysis views emotional states and language describing emotional states somewhat differently than people ordinarily do. Adult emotions are seen as being built up from and out of childhood emotions; both the usual distinction between them, and the notion that adult emotions are more “mature” than infantile emotions, have less importance in psychoanalysis than in common understanding. Corresponding to this is Freud’s emphasis on the fact that the germs of all important adult emotions from love to anger to sexual desire are found in children. Saying that an emotion is infantile is not necessarily pejorative in Freudian theory. It merely means that the emotion in question has a strong antecedent relating to a person’s childhood, and that this childhood pattern is of primary importance in the structure of this emotion and its expressions today. The modifier *infantile* may indicate immaturity, as with adult derivatives of childhood jealousy, but it may also simply indicate strength or importance of an affect, as with the reawakening of memories of a childhood trauma. An infantile trauma is a powerful influence on much of a person’s life. Viewing an emotion as infantile does not mean that it is necessarily regressive, although this may be the case. Primarily it indicates origin and strength. Clearly this is important in understanding Freud’s writings on religion since they are filled with references to infantile emotional life. It is sometimes easy to read Freud’s arguments on the empirical untruth of religious doctrines and conclude that he was not very concerned with the influence of religious affect in adults and simply called it immature. This is untrue; the fact that religion is founded upon childhood affect and experience indicates that it is that much *more* important for adults.

Freud *did* view religion as an unsatisfactory answer to these emotional needs. If one believes that Freud dismissed religious needs (derived from childhood) then it seems obvious why Freud thinks religion is not a good answer for people’s problems: there are no religious problems. However, this is too simplistic. For one thing, Freud obviously did not consider the issue to be this simple else he would not have spent so many years writing about it. It is true that Freud was “biased” against religion, probably from childhood. This is not a good reason to dismiss his comments. He also presents us with rational arguments why religion has outlived its time, why it must now be replaced by other ways of relating ourselves to the world. It is this view of religion as unsatisfactory that we take up in our next discussion.

The Pragmatic Argument against Religion

In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud argues that the primary function of civilization is to protect people from the destructive forces of nature. “[Nature] destroys us – coldly, cruelly, relentlessly, as it seems to us, and possibly through the very things that occasioned our satisfaction. It was precisely because of these dangers with which nature threatens us that we came together and created civilization...” (*Future*, p. 15). However, participation in civilization exacts a steep price from people: they must renounce some of their selfish instincts and learn to live without intruding upon the rights of others. Otherwise, civilization would break down and we would once again be at the sheer mercy of natural forces.

Civilization must protect itself against this possibility. Because the instincts of the individual for power, money, sexual freedom, aggression, and so forth, are largely at odds with the good of civilization, these instincts must be suppressed. This makes an uneasy situation: “every individual is virtually an enemy of civilization... Thus civilization has to be defended against the individual, and its regulations, institutions, and commands are directed to that task.” (p. 6). However, brute force will not adequately accomplish this suppression of people’s instincts, for people would eventually band together and revolt, as we have seen in the case of the oppressed sons in Freud’s primal horde.

The decisive question is whether and to what extent it is possible to lessen the burden of the instinctual sacrifices imposed on men, to reconcile men to those which must necessarily remain and to provide a compensation for them. It is just as impossible to do without control of the mass by a minority as it is to dispense with coercion in the work of civilization. For masses are lazy and unintelligent; they have no love for instinctual renunciation, and they are not to be convinced by argument of its inevitability ... [M]en are not spontaneously fond of work and ... arguments are of no avail against their passions. (p. 7-8).

Culture helps to relieve this situation by adding incentive for people to stay in line with the demands of living in society. Freud describes three aspects of culture which make important contributions to satisfying people and give people a stake in the functioning of society. These “psychical assets” include the cultural ideal or pride in membership in the nation, the aesthetic satisfaction provided by art and its

concomitant feeling of identification with the essential nature of one's culture, and finally and most importantly, cultural religious ideas which provide illusions supporting people's wishes.

We have seen that Freud considers religious to have no support in reality; indeed, I argued above (pp. 37-45) that he considers most religious beliefs to be not merely illusions but to be delusions, to be wholly impossible, fantastical, and therefore false. However, Freud also argues in *The Future of an Illusion* that religion is false on the terms of pragmatism, i.e., that it fails to be useful to people and to societies.

Freud was largely uninterested in philosophy and even hostile to it (as in his outburst against philosophers quoted above, p. 44), and certainly did not present his arguments in the *Future* as being examples of negative argumentation on pragmatic grounds. This contributes to some of the difficulty in grasping the essentials of his arguments in the *Future*, because in some places he presents verificationist arguments against religion while in other places he argues that religion fails to meet its expressed aims, a pragmatic argument which verificationists such as A. J. Ayer would never mix with their philosophical attacks. Once we notice that these two different strands of argument are mixed in Freud, we may end our natural effort to assimilate all the contents of the book into one argument; it is then easier to grasp. But let us proceed with Freud's arguments against religion.

Freud's pragmatic argument is very simple. He believes that religion has had adequate opportunity to show its ability to relieve human suffering and that it has simply failed, or rather, it has failed to work well enough to justify its existence. The following section of the *Future* expresses his view forcefully:

Religion has clearly performed great services for human civilization. It has contributed much towards the taming of the asocial instincts. But not enough. It has ruled human society for many thousands of years and has had time to show what it can achieve. If it had succeeded in making the majority of mankind happy, in comforting them, in reconciling them to life and in making them into vehicles of civilization, no one would dream of attempting to alter the existing conditions. But what do we see instead? We see that an appallingly large number of people are dissatisfied with civilization and unhappy in it, and feel it as a yoke which must be shaken off ... At this point it will be objected against us that this state of affairs is due to the very fact that religion has lost a part of its influence over human masses ... this objection itself has no force.

It is doubtful whether men were in general happier at a time when religious doctrines held unrestricted sway; more moral they certainly were not. They have always known how to externalize the precepts of religion and thus to nullify their intentions.... Thus it was agreed: God alone is strong and good, man is weak and sinful. In every age immorality has found no less support in religion than morality has. If the achievements of religion in respect to man's happiness, susceptibility to culture and moral control are no better than this, the question cannot but arise whether we are not overrating its necessity for mankind..." (pp. 37-38).

Since religion fails to make people happy, their discontent with the burdens placed upon by civilization grows. Freud fears this possibility; his desire to alleviate human suffering is the very same as his desire to ensure the protection of civilization against revolt. If religion fails to make people happy, it also fails in its duty to protect civilization from human destructive impulses; unhappy people will turn on civilization and destroy it. We see that the pragmatic status of religion focuses not merely on its function for people or for culture but on the relation between satisfying human needs and thereby enhancing culture.

This balance between happiness and culture is too precarious to risk on a system as flawed as religious beliefs. How can irrational illusions provide a solid foundation for culture and the alleviation of human misery? They can't, and to attempt such a structure is dangerous. "If the sole reason why you must not kill your neighbor is because God has forbidden it and will severely punish you for it in this or the next life – then, when you learn that there is no God and that you need not fear His punishment, you will certainly kill your neighbor without hesitation, and you can only be prevented from doing so by mundane force. Thus either these dangerous masses must be held down most severely and kept most carefully away from any chance of intellectual awakening, or else the relationship between civilization and religion must undergo a fundamental revision." (*Future*, p. 39). It is Freud's primary aim in *The Future of an Illusion* to point out what he sees as the best revision to make.

We need, says Freud, to put our trust not in deities constructed from childhood images of our parents, but in the power of reason, especially as it is manifested in the rational proceedings of science. Instead of creating rituals and promising propitiation and blessings our energies need to be turned towards goals which see definite progress. Religion does little to alleviate suffering, but science has proven its ability to better human life. It may not be able to promise eternal bliss,

divine providence, or a perfect moral order, but at least it is realistic about the world.

Our god *Logos* [(reason)] is perhaps not a very almighty one, and he may only be able to fulfil a small part of what his predecessors have promised. If we have to acknowledge this we shall not on that account lose our interest in the world and in life, for we have one sure support which you [supporters of religion] lack. We believe that it is possible for scientific work to gain some knowledge about the reality of the world, by means of which we can increase our power and in accordance with which we can arrange our life. If this belief is an illusion, then we are in the same position as you. But science has given us evidence by its numerous and important successes that it is no illusion. (pp. 54-55).

Freud compares this acceptance of science to the process of education. “We know that a human child cannot successfully complete its development to the civilized stage without passing through a phase of neurosis ...” Children eventually grow out of the neurosis of the Oedipus complex, and Freud feels that civilization must ultimately grow out of its own Oedipal phase of religious neurosis. “[O]ne might assume, humanity as a whole, in its development through the ages, fell into states analogous to the neuroses ... Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity ... If this view is right, it is to be supposed that a turning-away from religion is bound to occur with the fatal inevitability of the process of growth, and that we find ourselves at this very juncture in the middle of that phase of development.” (pp. 42-43).

There are many points deserving of commentary in all of this. For example, the notion of adolescence and its violent turmoils, sudden shifts, and sometimes shocking cruelty may be useful in looking at the events of the twentieth century, such as revolutionary communism, the world wars, Nazism, the cold war, and so forth; psychoanalysis might provide certain ideas about conflict and analytical methodology which could help one to understand these events, and indeed some theorists such as Adorno and Marcuse have found Freud to be somewhat useful in this way. However, I would like to content myself with one observation, the element which ties all of this section to the main argument of this essay. Freud’s pragmatic argument relies upon precisely the same idea as the rest of his critique of religion, the idea of religion as a wish-fulfillment. Religion serves as wish-fulfillment and that is its sole justification. If it fails, if it cannot keep people happy,

then it is obsolete and must be discarded and replaced with something else; with science, according to Freud.

Indeed, now we cannot resist the merger of the two strands I have pulled apart, the verificationist and the pragmatic arguments against religion. Since religion is non-verifiable, its only possible basis is wish-fulfillment. It does not address reality and serves only to make people happy. However, it ultimately fails at this, according to Freud, and continuing to insist upon it for human happiness is dangerous. Some people may be content with it, and that is fine during the period in which civilization is maturing, but we must provide for the masses who are discontent with religion, who have precious little to tie them to our culture, who have no reason not to revolt and insist on better circumstances. We must use science to improve the lives of these unhappy people.

But this entire argument really rests upon the assumption that wish-fulfillment is the proper interpretation of religious belief and activities. The next chapter shows that Freud's development of psychoanalytic theory complicates this interpretation.

Chapter III. Freud's Changing Theories of Anxiety

The Primary Psychoanalytic Theory of Anxiety

We have completed an extensive summary of Freud's basic critique of religion. In every aspect of this critique Freud placed great emphasis on the role of religious ideas, beliefs, and actions as wish-fulfillments. Let us review the essentials of this position.

Humans have basic desires which press for gratification. If these desires are not fulfilled their driving energy will continue to reverberate in the mental apparatus. If this psychic energy becomes too great we may see symptoms of its conversion into forms of mental expression indirectly related to the basic desires, primarily into anxiety and symptomatic substitutes for the desired gratification which cannot be provided. Religious ideas are one example of this process which creates substitute gratifications for unsatisfiable desires. Religion meets the desire for love, support, and protection, on the same pattern as the support which an infant experiences in relation to its parents. Thus, religion allows an outlet for instinctual desires, and it partially fulfills them. However, it fulfills them on the basis of infantile patterns which are outdated for adults.

Religious beliefs are not verifiable, and the authority supporting them is highly questionable. They are irrational; the best explanation for their existence is that they are created by individuals and societies to satisfy desires left over from childhood. The strength given them by this gratification may then be used by society to support conservative social structure and even outright oppression. In any case, the beliefs themselves are merely tools satisfying fundamental infantile desires; they are purely wish-fulfillments with no truth value.

Since these ideas serve only as wish-fulfillments it might be possible to replace them with other means of satisfying the same wishes. There are two possible reasons for doing so. First, we might be able more completely to satisfy the basic desires. Freud argues that this ability to fulfill desires will eventually be possible with the increased ability of science to meet human needs in the world. Second, the consequences of religion's detachment from reality and the consequent possibilities of its abuse in society might be too great. Freud follows this path in his discussion of the conservative role of religion in oppressing human desire, i.e., in denying people various forms of happiness from democratic power to sexual expression. Closely related

to this is Freud's observation that religion often simply fails to work: people are not satisfied by it but, at least until the past century or two, have no other option but to believe.

The structure of this argument is basically clear and is logically cogent. If one believes in divine revelation of religious truths, then the argument falls apart with the claim that religion has no relation to the real world. Apart from this objection, the obvious point of concern is Freud's view that scientific progress can provide for the basic needs which religion attempts to meet.

However, there is another angle from which we may critically view Freud's critique. We may take our bearings from Freud's own revision of his theory of anxiety, which fundamentally alters the way in which desire-gratification is understood.

Freud's Later Theory of Anxiety (1926)

In *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* (1926), Freud reconsiders the fundamental tenets of his earlier theory of anxiety as the result of unbound instinctual energy. He reviews the famous case of Little Hans.

Little Hans, a bright five year old boy, suffered from a fear of being bitten by a horse. He was terrified to leave his house. His father carried out an experimental psychoanalysis with him, as directed by Freud. Freud later reported on the case and analyzed it fully in his quite lengthy paper, "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy" (1909). The essential analysis of the case proceeds as follows. Little Hans connected horses with his father, for various reasons, including that he played "horses," riding his father's back, and that horses, like his father, possess a "big widdler."

Freud infers from the analysis that Hans had recently gone through the most critical period of resolution of his Oedipus complex. Hans felt jealousy towards his father for his father's sole possession of his mother. He desired to have his mother "play with his widdler," but she threatened him with castration (as she said, to be performed by the family physician) for the activity of playing with his penis. (p. 49). This introduced the fear of castration for his sexual activities and fantasies. It would also seem reasonable to Hans that his competition with his father for possession of the mother would lead to castration, since the same sexual desires were at stake. However, there was another factor at work, too. At the same time that Hans was jealous of his father, hated him for his possession of the mother, and feared retaliation from the

father in the form of castration, Hans also entertained fonder feelings towards his father. Just as Hans wished to love his mother in the same degree as his father did, so he also wanted to love his father as his mother did. This relationship to the father would necessitate Hans becoming a woman, just as his mother was female. It would require castration, the cutting off of his widdler. Thus castration was again introduced as the outcome of Hans's sexual wishes.

This threat of castration helped to occasion the repression needed to end Hans's Oedipus complex, repression demanded by his perception of helplessness and inferiority in the Oedipal triangle. However, according to Freud's model, the specific affect of anxiety expressed in Hans's neurosis was secondary to the repression of these impulses. Hans has to repress his Oedipal sexual desires for reasons of conflict with his parents; this repression causes buildup of psychic energy which is then attached to the idea of being bitten by horses, which is unconsciously connected by Hans to castration. This anxiety results from the repression of Hans's sexual impulses, and derives its psychic energy from Hans's unsatisfied sexual impulses. In the equation Freud later used in reference to this theory of anxiety, repression produces anxiety. (I have tried here to make clear the distinction between the fear of castration and the later affect of anxiety, according to Freud's model. However, the issues are still somewhat confusing. Freud himself was dissatisfied with this explanation and this led to his reexamination of the concept of anxiety which we will soon discuss.)

Through Hans's identification of his father with horses, Hans turns his fear of castration from his father for his sexual wishes into the fear of castration from a horse, which Freud says is not difficult to assume from Hans's specific fear of being bitten. This is then turned into general anxiety at leaving his house. What has happened is that Hans's sexual instincts are turned into paralyzing anxiety. We may note that Freud has not carried out any successful systematic distinction between fear and anxiety; he sometimes uses them interchangeably. However, in general, Freud uses *fear* in connection with specific instances or circumstances (fearing to approach horses) and *anxiety* in reference to more general situations (anxiety about leaving the house).¹⁴ However, the general idea is clear: Hans has sexual impulses; he fears castration

14. This raises the question of the reliability of the translation, as well. However, while the German words *Furcht* and *Angst* do not exactly coincide with the English *fear* and *anxiety*, they are close enough to trust the judgement of translators. We may also note that Freud's principle translator into English, James Strachey, comments in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that "Freud is very far indeed from always carrying out the distinction [between fright, fear, and anxiety] he makes here." (1920, p. 7n).

for these; this fear undergoes modification and emerges as anxiety at leaving his house.

In *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, Freud reconsiders this important case study. He briefly recounts the outline of the case, and then emphasizes the fact that the repression instigated in Little Hans “attacked almost all the components of his Oedipus complex – both his hostile and his tender impulses towards his father and his tender impulses towards his mother.” As we have seen, these are all related to Hans’s fear of castration: castration as a result of wanting to possess his mother and eliminate the father, and castration as a result of becoming a woman so as to take his mother’s place with the father. Freud now changes his mind and concludes *it is this fear of castration which successfully explains the broad repression found in Little Hans*.¹⁵ We do not need to assume that repression occurred to guard against sexual impulses *per se*, but against the anxiety they provoke through the fear of castration. Repression solves the problem of anxiety by attempting to eliminate the instincts provoking it.

Freud says “the *affect* of anxiety, which was the essence of the phobia, came, not from the process of repression, not from the libidinal cathexes [(psychic energy)] of the repressed impulses, but from the repressing agency itself. The anxiety belonging to the animal phobias was an untransformed fear of castration.... *It was anxiety which produced repression and not, as I formerly believed, repression which produced anxiety.*” (1926, pp. 34-35, latter italics added). Anxiety here functions as a signal given by a person’s ego of an impending danger, in this case, the danger aroused by a sexual impulse and its consequent result of castration. Anxiety signals the organism to stop the danger, to stop the instinct which puts the person into danger. In this way anxiety produces repression.

This is a major theoretical shift. First, it eliminates the mysterious process by which repressed instincts somehow have their energy channeled off and converted into anxiety. Secondly, and of greater importance, it frees the concept of anxiety from a quasi-physiological theory and brings it directly into the theory of ego activities. This is a great advance in the importance of the ego, and consequently of conscious mentation which the ego encloses, in psychoanalytic theory. For this reason, it is understandable that this revision of the anxiety theory occurred only after the publication of Freud’s *The Ego and the Id* (1923), in which he found that the important distinction between parts

15. Freud also considers another of his five famous cases studies, the case of the “Wolf-Man” (1918). This case supports Freud’s conclusions from the Little Hans case.

of the mind does not consist in their state of consciousness or unconsciousness but in their function (instincts, regulation, etc.). In that work, the formulation of the ego and its control over unconscious impulses of the id was first formalized. Freud comments on the role of the ego in the new anxiety theory: "It is always the ego's attitude of anxiety which is the primary thing and which sets repression going. Anxiety never arises from repressed libido." (*Inhibitions ...*, p. 35). Freud later qualifies this and maintains that in the case of *coitus interruptus* and other examples of traumatic physiological situations conversion of libido into anxiety may occur. However, the basic consideration of anxiety relevant for such psychological mechanisms as the production of phobias, obsessional neuroses, hysteria, and so forth remains radically modified. The ego and the feeling of anxiety has gained prominence in the production of repression. Since repression is the basis of neuroses, symptomatic acts, and a vast array of other human behaviors we have, *modus ponens*, anxiety as a fundamentally important determinant of human mental life, not merely a byproduct of excitation.

In the case of Little Hans, instinctual desires created the situation in which castration became a possibility. In that sense, libido served as a prerequisite for anxiety, though in a much different way than in the previous theory of direct libidinal conversion into anxiety. Even this situation of instincts creating a situation where anxiety is realized is not necessary. Anxiety may occur as a response to some threat separate from any particular desires and still occasion repression. Also, even in the case where instincts provide the opportunity for the appearance of anxiety, as with Little Hans, this anxiety may continue later to function separately from the instincts which gave rise to its preconditions. We may imagine that Little Hans's desires for sexual gratification in the Oedipal pattern could have receded, but he might continue to fear castration. This fear would keep his neurosis functioning even without the original precipitating instincts. This modification to the theory further separates anxiety from the functioning of instinctual impulses, and gives additional power to the independent functioning of ego in its role as the respondent to anxiety.

Another important modification signalled by the new anxiety theory is the lessened importance of factors of psychical economy in the new model of neurosis. It is customary when discussing Freud to note four different perspectives from which we may understand various aspects of psychoanalytic theory. These perspectives are not perfectly clear in Freud, but they are present and are important to keep in mind when one focusses on any particular aspect of his theories. The first

perspective is the *economic* model, where psychological events are determined by the amount of energy (strength) attached to various competing instincts, memories, and ideas. Next is the *topographic* model, which pictures the mind as a structure with a particular flow of information from section to section (i.e., flow from perception to consciousness, from consciousness to memory, from the unconscious to consciousness, etc.). We also have the *dynamic* model, which pictures mental events arising from conflict between instincts, prohibitions, wishes, and so forth. Finally, there is the *structural* theory, which combined aspects of the three other models and viewed the psyche as a system composed of the id, ego, and super-ego, each agent with its own particular function in dealing with desires, reality, or ego control. These four methods for viewing the psyche are not exclusive and each of them has a particular contribution to make to the overall picture of psychoanalysis.¹⁶

In the early anxiety theory, the economic model is obviously of prime importance. Anxiety occurs as a response to the buildup of instinctual energy, and is noticeably expressed in symptoms of neuroses or the anxiety affect itself only when it gains a certain strength. The dynamic element also plays a role in this creation of anxiety: the buildup of energy occurs only because an instinct is opposed by some restriction or prohibition. One element of the psyche (instincts) is dynamically opposed (repressed) by another part of the mind (the preconscious censor of disallowed instincts).

In the later theory, the economic model is not so prominent. Anxiety is now a signal of danger to the ego. It is a warning of a situation which may be harmful for the person. The strength of this warning and of the psychic functions affected by it is not nearly as important as is the signal itself. The structural approach to understanding mental functioning is emphasized: anxiety is a signal to the ego, the psychic structure responsible for reacting to a danger signal (among other things).

Laplanche and Pontalis (1967) clarify several aspects of the importance of this signal in the new anxiety theory. First, they note that

16. Arlow and Brenner (1964) argue that it is not tenable to maintain the topographic model found in Freud's early distinction between the conscious, unconscious, and preconscious. The structural model has supplanted the topographic model and the two cannot be completely merged; there are points of irresolvable conflict between them. They argue that the structural model is more complete and is a better model for psychoanalytic theorists to use. This does not change our view here, since we are concerned with a historical understanding of Freud, not with contemporary psychoanalytic theory.

the signal of anxiety “embodies the gist of the new theory.” (p. 422). The nature of anxiety as a signal is now the core of the theory, not the fact that anxiety may sometimes appear to be a response to instinctual dissatisfaction. Secondly, they emphasize the point I just argued, that “[t]he triggering of the signal of anxiety does not necessarily depend upon economic factors – in fact the signal may operate as the ‘mnemonic symbol’ or ‘affective symbol’ of a situation that has not yet arisen ...” (*ibid.*) I would add to this that the effect of the signal of anxiety on the ego similarly does not depend upon the economic strength of the signal; the ‘mnemonic symbol’, or psychic representation of the feared situation, is the critical factor. This does not mean that the economic factor is unimportant; “[t]he adoption of the idea of anxiety as signal does not, however, exclude an explanation.... [A] certain quantity of energy has to be mobilised before the anxiety can be set off[.]...” (*ibid.*) although it is less important than the symbolic function of the anxiety signal. “Finally, note that Freud associates the signal of anxiety with the ego.” (*ibid.*) This last statement reinforces my argument that the new anxiety theory gives additional strength to the importance of the ego and its functions in the anxiety theory.

Now the new anxiety theory requires changes in the theory of the formation of symptoms, the process which Freud found to be important in the production of religious activities. Under the new system, symptoms serve to alleviate anxiety or to block it. “Since we have traced back the generating of anxiety to a situation of danger, we shall prefer to say that symptoms are created in order to remove the ego from a situation of danger.... Thus in our view the relation between anxiety and symptom is less close than was supposed, for we have inserted the factor of the danger-situation between them. We can also add that the generating of anxiety sets symptom formation going and is, indeed, a necessary prerequisite of it.” (1926, p. 70). We can no longer explain symptoms solely in terms of a symbolic gratification of instincts, nor in terms of a condensation between gratification and repression. These factors are certainly not eliminated, but now we must add to them consideration of the role of fundamental anxiety to which the symptoms help respond. Anxiety can no longer be given a secondary ranking in discussion of neuroses; we cannot say, “The anxiety is a secondary, derivative, affect while wish fulfillment is primary.” The person’s anxiety, whether realistic or not, must be understood as one of the essential roots of symptom formation.¹⁷

17. We may note that this addition of the fundamental anxiety affect to the earlier notions of repression helps to increase the orthogonality of psychoanalysis by providing a richer theory for describing neuroses; it is now possible to discuss the importance of,

This function of symptoms in relation to anxiety requires a more complex analysis of neuroses than did the earlier theory, where it was clear that an instinct was being repressed in some maladaptive way and producing anxiety symptoms. Now it is fundamentally important to understand the danger situation and view the production of symptoms as a response to that situation. The importance of this shift in viewpoint for the understanding of the symptoms of religious behavior will be the focus of the next chapter.

and interaction between, anxiety relief and wish fulfillment in various cases. We do not have to squeeze any given case entirely into either theoretical construct; both anxiety and wish fulfillment are essential.

Chapter IV. Reexamination of Freud's Critique of Religion

Under Freud's 1926 theory of anxiety, neurotic symptoms are formed in response to the presence of anxiety. This suggests that it is necessary to reinterpret religious symptomatology on the basis of anxiety rather than desire-gratification. We would have to uncover the hidden roots of anxiety which are being met through ritual; this would be a proper task for a new psychoanalytic investigation of these symptoms. This task is apparently unappealing to analysts, and it is not difficult to understand why. We saw in the case of Little Hans that the origin of anxiety corresponds with the increased demands of instinctual impulses; desire caused the situation in which anxiety was discovered, and anxiety then took over and initiated repression of these desires. Neurotic symptoms fight this anxiety, and do not necessarily, as was formerly theorized, express a sort of desire-gratification. Evaluation of religious behavior could be expected to shift its focus in a similar manner from the interpretation of ritual as providing symbolic gratification to interpreting its role as a means of reducing anxiety. Yet the essential material in the cases of ritual remains the same as always, and there is no particular opening for new psychoanalytic discovery in this process of reinterpretation. The task of reinterpretation is merely a form of theoretical house-cleaning.

However, this shift in interpretation does have important repercussions outside the narrow domain of psychoanalytic formalization. It modifies the fundamental way in which religion should be approached by psychoanalytic critique. Specific analyses of religious behavior may not change much, but the understanding of the basic motive impelling people to participation in religion is more friendly. The interpretation of the cultural phenomenon of religion shifts its emphasis from neurotic ritual to understanding of human needs, i.e., human response to anxiety.

I would like to present an example of this shift in interpretation. In a previous essay,¹⁸ I described a curious case involving religious

18. Unpublished essay for the Harvard University Department of Psychology, titled *Psychoanalysis and Existentialism: Conflict in Human Nature*, May 1987. This essay focused on Freud's theories of neurosis and the modification of the idea of the Oedipus complex undertaken by Ernest Becker in his book, *The Denial of Death* (1975, Free Press, New York). Becker wants to interpret the Oedipus complex as demonstrating one's desire to become one's own father, to create oneself and thereby achieve immortality. I argued that Becker's ideas neglect the important emphasis of Freud's theories on sexual processes and instincts in children. We may also note that Becker, an

motives. A young woman I knew, a graduate student, was engaged to be married to a young man. They had been engaged for approximately two years and planned to marry in the summer immediately after graduation from graduate school. The wedding date was set, preparations were under way for the gala event, a beautiful wedding dress had been chosen; only two months separated these people from marriage. Then the completely unexpected occurred: Eric, the groom, decided to call off the wedding plans. His bride Lisa was shocked and heartbroken; she could hardly believe this had happened.

In addition to my sympathy for Lisa I was curious to know what led to Eric's decision. At first I assumed that there was some stress between the engaged couple; this proved not to be the case. I then thought that perhaps the approaching wedding caused Eric to panic and abandon his plans; it is not uncommon for such reactions of panic to occur as intimate relations progress and for people to begin to dread spending their lives with people they once loved. Still, this was not the entire answer. A few weeks after the dissolution of Lisa's and Eric's engagement, I learned of another important factor. Eric was considering joining the Roman Catholic priesthood.

There are numerous approaches we might take in discussion of this case. For example, we could focus on the breakup of the engagement *per se* and examine the stresses and anxieties which might have inhibited Eric's desire to be married. The counterpart to this would be an examination of the positive value of the priesthood for Eric. No doubt it would be best to integrate concern for all of the emotional realms which are mixed in any complex living example. However, if we look only at the specific religious component of the case then our options for choosing a point of view are more limited – and the significance of choosing a definite point of view is greater.

One way of viewing this case would put great emphasis on the Oedipal component of Eric's situation. In particular, this analysis would stress the revivification of Eric's sexual instincts which were once directed at his mother and are now focused on Lisa, and would find a conflict between these sexual desires and the conflict over them with his father who is now raised up as God through Eric's Roman Catholic faith. Freud writes in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) that

anthropologist, is concerned with the relation between Freud's individual psychology and social psychology. To some extent this makes his neglect of Freud's theories of instincts and sexuality more understandable; these elements of psychoanalysis focus almost exclusively on the individual psyche and it is difficult to connect them with social psychology.

“The man seeks above all [in love relationships] the memory picture of his mother as it has dominated him since the beginning of childhood.” (p. 618). Freud is here using “memory picture” in a rather loose way to connote a general emotional tie, not an explicit resemblance or other tie to the mother, but it is still clear that the mother is the man’s prototype for an emotional object.

We have already seen that the image of the omnipotent father serves as the prototype for the religious image of God. In the fantasies of the Oedipus complex, the father blocks the son’s access to the mother and threatens punishment if the son transgresses these rules. In Eric’s situation with the Church we have a similar conflict between the desire for the mother image and the rules of the Church; it is most striking in the fact that Catholic priests are unmarried. The institutionalized father image demands that Eric renounce his sexual instincts. The analogy to the Oedipus complex is, of course, not perfect, but it might serve as a good basis for one sort of interpretation of the story. I do not mean to claim that this is one actual psychoanalytic interpretation; I have no desire to conduct a ‘wild psychoanalysis.’ However, it is clear that an episode such as the one I have described here may be viewed with the assistance of Freudian metaphors such as the Oedipus complex. Such interpretation is common and psychoanalysts themselves are hardly free from this kind of discussion. My presentation of this interpretation of religion in terms of the Oedipus complex is meant to outline one possibility for a basic prototype of analysis which may be especially salient to psychoanalysts and other Freudian-informed writers on the subject of religion.

By its nature, such an Oedipal interpretation would focus on the function of wish-fulfillment. What we have in this case are competing wishes: the wish for marriage to Lisa, i.e., to finally possess the ‘mother image,’ versus the wish to attain a higher spirituality, that is, to improve one’s standing with the father. The notion of anxiety is hardly noticeable here. We may wonder what has become of the castration anxiety expected as result of fearing the father’s punishment, but there is no sort of explicit threat involved in not becoming a priest. Eric might fantasize some such idea, but this is not available to us; it also seems possible that this situation may have no particular aspect which would correspond to Oedipal fears of punishment and castration by the father.

If we shift our viewpoint to consider the role of anxiety as fundamental, in correspondence with the later theory of neurogenesis, this reliance upon the idea of wish-fulfillment disappears. We now have a vastly different picture of the situation from

the one we might lay out on the basis of hypothesis Oedipal wishes. We presume that the decision to break off the impending marriage was not easy, that Eric must have been in conflict over the decision. We would expect him to feel a rather great degree of anxiety as he considered his situation and his possibilities for the future, the possibility of becoming a priest opposed to the possibility of settling into marriage.

This viewpoint does not lend itself well to creating generic quasi-psychoanalytic proto-structures for interpreting cases. The notion of Oedipal wish fulfillment gives us a good, generic model for easily constructing explanations of a vast number of case studies. My simple presentation above of the current case in terms of Oedipal issues is one example of case analysis which may proceed nearly automatically. We assume a few instincts, a few wishes, apply a childhood pattern which is presumed to reappear in adult life, and an instant 'psychoanalysis' is available. Such interpretations are not necessarily wrong, in either an absolute or a pragmatic sense. They may be correct to some extent, and they may be useful in the actual practice of psychoanalysis. Many persons, including myself, believe that Oedipal issues and the reactivation of Oedipal conflicts in adult life are quite important. However, interpretations which focus on them are not especially useful because of their lack of essential content; they are a form waiting to be filled with the names of people with whom one has relationships. For this reason, such interpretations are also a theoretical dead end. They tell us nothing new about human situations, neither in general nor in particular cases.

The viewpoint of anxiety may be more productive because it poses questions for discussion rather than the answer of a framework for any possible explanation. When we view anxiety as the fundamentally important issues we must begin to ask, How did Eric experience the conflict between the two possibilities for his life? What did it mean to him to become a priest? What did it mean to leave Lisa? What would it have meant for him to abandon the possibility of being a priest? These are the sorts of questions which typify so-called humanistic psychotherapy, but there is no reason why they cannot occur in psychoanalysis proper; in fact, they typify psychoanalytic therapy as well. More important for our discussion here, however, is that they should provide at least the starting point for theoretical psychoanalytic discussion outside of analysis itself. Such a foundation is largely missing from Freud's discussions of religion, which discussions were, after all, no different for Freud from attention to neuroses.

Freud published no cases after the modification of his anxiety theory and the corresponding changes in his theories of neuroses.

However, the structural point of view and the new emphasis on anxiety show that cases must now focus on the notion of *conflict*, in a more systematized form than the earlier dynamic model. Id instincts fight for expression; the super-ego attempts to impose its controls internalized from social prohibitions; the ego tries to achieve autonomy and coordinate demands from the other parts of the psyche. All behavior may be seen as compromise formations balancing and mediating the different impulses in the mind. Anxiety is the central control mechanism for all of this. Anxiety signals inform the ego of external danger, of overpowering instinctual forces, of impending super-ego conscience punishment. Anxiety triggers specific responses to avoid internal and external danger and keep the organism safely under control.¹⁹

How would a psychoanalytic examination of religion proceed when based on the notion of understanding the fundamental anxieties underlying religion? We have seen that Freud largely focuses on religion as a form of desire gratification. However, he also presents some discussion of the importance of anxiety in the function of religious belief. I would like to argue that he was on the path towards an analysis of religion in terms of anxiety such I show the need for here. The first good indications of this occur in *The Future of an Illusion*. This book was published in 1927, shortly after his announcement of the shift in the anxiety theory in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* in 1926. Thus, we would expect some account to be taken of the anxiety theory.

We see the introduction of anxiety by re-reading Freud's comments on the reenactment of infantile images of the parents in religious belief. Remember that for Freud religion is the most powerful expression of the need of society to reconcile humans to the civil tasks demanded for protection from the crushing powers of nature. But protection from such danger is exactly the response anxiety tries to initiate. "Civilization does not call a halt in the task of defending man against nature, it merely pursues it by other means. The task is a manifold one. Man's

19. The principle of conflict becomes quite important in the main development of Freudian psychoanalysis, especially in its English language adherents. A recent exposition of these notions which brings them into striking refinement and centrality is Charles Brenner's *The Mind in Conflict* (1982). Brenner expresses the same view that I have here, that all mental functioning competes with other impulses in the mind, that the ego mediates between these impulses, and that the affect of anxiety has a central regulatory function. He gives numerous short cases to illustrate the ways in which this sort of conflict functions in the psyche. Brenner presents this as the essential view inherent in Freud's final works on the structural theory of the mind, but he believes that depressive affect must be added to anxiety affect as an important mechanism in order to complete the system.

self-regard, seriously menaced, calls for consolation; life and the universe must be robbed of their terrors; moreover his curiosity, moved, it is true, by the strongest practical interest, demands an answer.” (p. 16). The answer to this problem is the spiritualization of nature, a way of making the cosmos intelligible for humans on the basis of their own experiences.

A great deal is already gained with the first step: the humanization of nature. Impersonal forces and destinies cannot be approached; they remain eternally remote. But if the elements have passions that rage as they do in our own souls, if death itself is not something spontaneous but the violent act of an evil Will, if everywhere in nature there are Beings around us of a kind that we know in our own society, then we can breathe freely, can feel at home in the uncanny *and can deal by psychical means with our senseless anxiety*. (1927, pp. 16-17, italics added).

This humanization serves to reduce our fear of the powerful forces of nature. If nature can be understood as gods resembling humans, we may propitiate them to gain control over the environment.

This argument as to the genesis of religion is of course not original with Freud. It was common in the nineteenth century to view the evolution of religion as beginning with the projection of human qualities onto natural forces. This animistic view of the world was thought to have evolved into totemism, polytheism and pantheism, and finally monotheistic religions.

Freud did contribute to this argument the findings of psychoanalysis, especially the notion that religious belief is based on infantile emotional patterns. These Oedipal remnants may be understood as fulfilling needs for love – a desire gratification – but they may also be understood as a means of protection on the basis of the infantile prototype of parental protection; this serves to meet anxiety. “For this situation is nothing new. It has an infantile prototype, of which it is in fact only the continuation. For once before one has found oneself in a similar state of helplessness: as a small child, in relation to one’s parents.” (*Future*, p. 17). Such protection does not actually *give* us anything, no love, no manna, no wish-fulfillment *per se*; instead, it sets up the conditions under which one can feel secure in the world.

This function of the gods is very different indeed from their role in providing promises of happiness in this or a next life, promises serving to control people and keep them content with the social order. Relieving anxiety about the place of humanity in the universe may help

sedate people but it does not blind them. Freud realizes that these functions of the gods are separate. He writes, “The gods retain their threefold task: they must exorcize the terrors of nature, they must reconcile men to the cruelty of fate, particularly as it is shown in death, and they must compensate them for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on them.” (*Future*, p. 18). However, the first two of these functions are dismissed by Freud in a lengthy passage critical for understanding his shift to the concerns we outlined in his critique of religion in the first and second chapters above:

But within these [three] functions [of the gods] there is a gradual displacement of accent. It was observed that the phenomena of nature developed automatically according to internal necessities. Without doubt the gods were the lords of nature; they had arranged it to be as it was and now they could leave it to itself. Only occasionally, in what are known as miracles, did they intervene in its course, as though to make plain that they had relinquished nothing of their original sphere of power. As regards the apportioning of destinies, an unpleasant suspicion persisted that the perplexity and helplessness of the human race could not be remedied. It was here that the gods were most apt to fail. If they themselves created Fate, then their counsels must be deemed inscrutable. The notion dawned on the most gifted people of antiquity that Moira [Fate] stood above the gods and that the gods themselves had their own destinies. And the more autonomous nature became and the more the gods withdrew from it, the more earnestly were all expectations directed to the third function of the gods – the more did morality become their true domain. It now became the task of the gods to even out the defects and evils of civilization, to attend to the sufferings which men inflict on one another in their life together and to watch over the fulfilment of the precepts of civilization, which men obey so imperfectly. (*Future*, p. 18).

Freud argues that ancient peoples realized that fate was not influenced very much by their religious efforts; appeasing the gods did not alter destinies, thus destiny must be a power higher than the gods. We find this notion in the religious concepts of ancient Greece, in particular. It is not clear here whether Freud intends to refer to people as recent as the Greeks when he mentions the “gifted people of antiquity,” but it is certainly possible: he was an avid classicist and fluent in classic Greek.

This passage indicates the central shift in Freud’s writing from the

concern for relieving “senseless anxiety” to the concern of “even[ing] out the defects and evils of civilization,” that is, of reconciling people to civilization on the basis of fantasized wishes. What has happened to the notion of anxiety? In the space of little more than one page in *The Future of an Illusion*, it has disappeared entirely from Freud’s analysis.

Freud has aligned anxiety over life with the idea of destiny; he then argues that people have detached destiny from religion and drops it from consideration along with anxiety. Both of these steps are mistakes. Freud assumes that anxiety, as he uses the word here, is anxiety over one’s destiny. This is not necessarily the case. One can accept one’s destiny and still feel anxiety over the essential moral order of life, the nature of the universe, or whatever one wishes to call the “ultimate reality” or “ultimate truth.” But it is a more important error to dissociate destiny from religion; perhaps the Greeks did so, but for that very reason their religion is quite different from Judeo-Christian traditions, which are the exact religious traditions Freud wants to address in his book (cf. Chapter 2 above). The Greek gods were very much modeled after humans. They were often larger, faster, smarter, and stronger, but they were not mighty forces who controlled every aspect of creation. They were themselves subject to each other and to the forces of fate. The Gods were linked to humans and dissociated from destiny. In Judaism and Christianity, however, any dissociation that occurs is between the nature of God and the nature of humans; God is not pictured as a being subject to higher Fate; He *is* that higher fate.

What we have in this passage of the *Future* is the meeting of the two strands of understanding religion that I have distinguished. The idea of anxiety over destiny and the meaning of existence meets the notion of wish fulfillment from the gods. Freud dismisses the first and is then free to pursue the central analysis we saw in the first two chapters of this essay. Yet the idea of anxiety still remains latent in his work on religion. It is present, for example, in the idea that viewing the forces of nature as gods allows people to “deal by psychical means with [their] senseless anxiety.” (*Future*, p. 17; cf. pp. 67-68 above). However, this mention of anxiety is not central to his analysis. It appears for a page or so and then disappears into Freud’s concern with empiricism and wish fulfillment.²⁰

20. It should be clear that wish fulfillment and anxiety relief are fundamentally different tasks. One might think that the desire to relieve anxiety is itself a wish, and thus concern with anxiety relief is an indirect form of wish fulfillment. This is not the case in Freudian theory. Basic wishes, such as Freudian theory is concerned with, are psychical representations of instinctual desires or the derivatives of instinctual desires.

It seems most plausible to propose that Freud intended to write a little book on religion and push his earlier analyses of religious belief a little farther than he had done so before. In his paper on “Obsessional acts and religious practices,” he compared religious acts to neurotic ritual. In *Totem and Taboo* he laid out the basic plans for an understanding of religious belief on the basis of the Oedipus complex.²¹ We might suppose that in the *Future of an Illusion* he wanted to tie this into an analysis of the repressive structures of society, along the same lines as many writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Freud writes, “I have said nothing which other and better men have not said before me in a much more complete, forcible, and impressive manner. Their names are well known, and I shall not cite them, for I should not like to give an impression that I am seeking to rank myself as one of them. All I have done – and this is the only thing that is new in my exposition – is to add some psychological foundation to the criticisms of my great predecessors.” (*Future*, p. 35). Peter Gay lists Spinoza, Voltaire, Diderot, Feuerbach, and Darwin as Freud’s predecessors in criticism of religion (1988, p. 528); I would add Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as well, since Freud admits to having read them, and very possibly Brentano also.²² Freud did not intend to do

As such they are not secondary relief for other instinctual needs. Anxiety relief is not a wish because it is not attached to any particular psychic representation; in fact, the very distinguishing characteristic of anxiety is that it is objectless. An organism does not seek to avoid anxiety through gratification. Anxiety cannot be escaped because it is a signal. Rather the danger situation somehow must be handled (even if in a ‘escapist’ manner); this is very different from desire gratification.

21. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), Freud went further and applied the notion of the Oedipus complex and concomitant transference and identification with the father to an analysis of the social structures of the Church and the military. This book is something of an oddity in Freud’s corpus and is the best expression of his latent concern with social psychology. The analysis of religion that we have discussed here focuses almost exclusively on individual psychic development and impulses; the social sphere (outside the Oedipal family triangle) only figures as an external force coercing people to do its bidding so as to protect itself against nature. In the *Group Psychology* book, though, Freud argues that social psychology *is* individual psychology and he proceeds with an analysis of social structures as extensions of the Oedipal transference. This book is certainly intriguing but is not as breath-taking as is much of Freud’s writing; perhaps this explains why it is almost entirely neglected.

22. We saw Freud’s respect for Brentano in the biographical outline I gave of Freud’s relation to religion. Brentano was once a Roman Catholic priest as well as a philosopher, but had argued for the complete separation of philosophy from theology, and brought this to a head in a brief against the doctrine of papal infallibility. He was forced to resign the priesthood and leave the Church. A few years later, in 1874, he took a professorship at the University of Vienna. Freud studied with him shortly after this, and no doubt the college-aged Hannibal would have been interested in Brentano’s battles with the Roman Church. (Cf. Spiegelberg, 1982, pp. 28-29).

more than criticize religion as an ‘opiate’ and show how it derives from wishful, delusional thinking. He draws a clear line from residues of infantile desires to pacification of human masses and consequent blinding to reality. Such illusions cannot make people happy; religion that tries to do so must be ultimately harmful.

Yet the concept of anxiety presented an obstacle to his discussion, before he successfully silenced it. He must have wanted to connect his recent work on anxiety with his discussion of religion. Perhaps his intense feelings about religion and the strength of his earlier criticisms prevented him from realizing the new direction his criticism could take. However, I believe that what mention he does make of anxiety shows us the path his analysis should have taken. The proper question is not, Can religion make people happy? but rather, Can religion provide a proper grounding for people’s problem of anxiety in the world? Under Freudian criticism – and the criticism of Enlightenment thinkers in general²³ – it is very difficult to answer the first question in the affirmative. Religion clearly fails to make people happy, at least in the contexts of realistic knowledge and social progress if not necessarily the context of limited individual contentment; there is no other rational response. If religion’s function is to answer questions about reality and satisfy our desires, it is not epistemologically or pragmatically valid and must be overcome in favor of science or some rational system of thought.

If, however, religion serves to help people in their orientation to the world, then its flawed epistemological status is not the central issue. Religion serves to meet the needs of anxiety and of orientation to the world. It must now be judged on the pragmatic ground of whether it succeeds in helping people cope with their anxiety about orientation in life and their own destinies. It simply does not matter whether the doctrines of religion are correct in any scientific sense. From this point of view, religion functions somewhat similarly to love, in that both meet a internal need; the question of whether they are rational or empirically justifiable is meaningless. We do not question whether it is correct to say that one’s beloved is actually “the most beautiful person in the world.” In much the same way we can construct a notion of God as the ground of being, the ultimate reality, or something similar, and it becomes meaningless to ask whether such a spirit actually “exists.” The pragmatic question about the efficacy of religion has shifted

23. Cf. Peter Gay’s lectures on Freud and atheism (Gay, 1987) for a discussion of Freud’s place in the tradition of the European Enlightenment and its opposition to organized religion.

dramatically from the pragmatism of providing for people's desires to the pragmatism of helping them to live and to make sense of the world.

This is not to say that criticism of religion must be abandoned. It only implies that Freudian criticism of religion is somewhat sidetracked because Freud focused on realistic wish fulfillment and scientific reason. The issue of social oppression, for example, is still quite important and it is possible that religion cannot adequately defend itself against the charge that it ultimately serves as an ally to repressive social structures. Psychoanalytic work can provide important insights into this sort of criticism. Ernest Becker has written of the Oedipus complex as the basis for social organization and control, and has criticized the blind actions of people in groups, such as supporters of fascism, political parties, and organized churches²⁴. Much of Freud's criticism could serve as important steps in arguments based on this sort of analysis. But this is not the main trend we find in Freud's writings.

It may be objected to my argument in these pages that the concept of anxiety has grown beyond recognition in the course of my discussion, that it began as a danger signal and has ended up as anxiety about the general human condition. However, I would point out that Freud saw a quantitative continuum of all of his theoretical ideas and indeed all human emotions, and not a qualitative difference between small examples of an idea and more powerful demonstrations of it. The notion of desire gratification or wish fulfillment begins, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, as the need to rid an organism, even a paramecium, of unbalanced stimuli. Yet the idea is broad enough to encompass the intricate turnings of the theories of dreaming and sexuality. I maintain that a similar range of applicability may be maintained for the theory of anxiety as well. Freud's own writings demonstrate this. We have seen his mention of "senseless anxiety" of primitive peoples in the face of the powers of Nature. His essay on "The Question of a Weltanschauung" (1933) shows this as well. The Weltanschauung lecture essentially recounts the argument of *The Future of an Illusion* but in more schematic form. But notice that Freud's concern is with a Weltanschauung, a world-view, a system which can help humans in the task of constructing a system to explain the meaning of existence. This surely encompasses the broadest possible expression of human anxiety.

Freud was not averse to moving from the smallest details to the most wide ranging speculation. While this pattern may not be a good example for those of us with lesser abilities to follow in the

24. Cf. Chapter 7, "The Spell Cast by Persons -- The Nexus of Unfreedom," in *The Denial of Death* (Becker, 1975).

construction of our own theories, we cannot be faulted in discussion of him for following the path of his own thinking and enlarging our concepts as we discuss him. One of the most fascinating aspects of Freud, and one of the best reasons to read him, is his speculative streak. He continually makes brilliant leaps, leaving us to fill in the details of his course, which so often combines a mixture of deep behavioral insight, personal predilection, and grand theory. I hope to have accomplished here some of the detail work in clarifying Freud's thoughts.

Chapter V. Paul Tillich and the Concept of Anxiety

In the first four chapters of this essay I have argued that Freud's analysis of religion in *The Future of an Illusion* did not incorporate the sort of discussion of anxiety that we would expect on the basis of his late modification of the theory of neuroses. He never became clear about the role of anxiety in the psychological genesis of religious ideas. However, some religious thinkers have given extensive thought to the idea of anxiety and this work in theology may serve as something of a corrective to the limited viewpoint present in Freud's critique. I have chosen to address the work of Paul Tillich on anxiety; Tillich has perhaps the most extensive discussion of anxiety of modern theologians.

Paulus Tillich was a German philosophical theologian, born in 1886, who emigrated to the United States after the rise of Nazism.²⁵ In an autobiographical lecture later published, Tillich emphasizes "part of my life belongs to the nineteenth century, especially if one assumes the nineteenth century to end (as one should) with August 1, 1914 ..." (1984, p. 23). He notes that the nineteenth century combined the "highest flourishing of bourgeois society" with "aesthetic ugliness and spiritual disintegration." It also gave him "a consciousness of the Christian humanist values which underlie even the antireligious forms of this society ..." (*ibid.*). Tillich was later to find in all important human enterprises the same essential religious expression of seeking an ultimate reality; Freud and other humanistic "atheists" actually express the same fundamental religious system as theologians – or as theologians should express. Tillich believes that the primary difference between his thinking and that of persons such as Freud is the degree of self-consciousness reached in the understanding of the fundamental structures of human inquiry and presence in the world.

After serving as a Lutheran chaplain in World War I, Tillich taught theology at the University of Berlin. In 1925, he accepted a professorship at Marburg; there he came into contact with the circle of students around Martin Heidegger, who had, in a very few years, galvanized the philosophical imagination of many young Germans. Hannah Arendt recalled the excitement of the group around Heidegger,

25. Tillich had the distinction of being the first Christian professor in Germany to be dismissed after Hitler's accession to power. Shortly thereafter he was advised to leave Germany and came to the United States to teach at Union Theological Seminary in New York. His best known work, including all of the material I discuss here, was written in English.

telling us how they thought of him at the time:

Thinking has come to life again; the cultural treasures of the past, believed to be dead, are being made to speak, in the course of which it turns out that they propose things altogether different from the familiar, worn-out trivialities they had been presumed to say. There exists a teacher; one can perhaps learn to think. (Arendt, 1971, p. 295).

This same excitement affected Tillich. "It took years before I became fully aware of the impact of this encounter on my own thinking. I resisted, I tried to learn, I accepted the new way of thinking more than the answers it gave." (1984, p. 42). Tillich notes this as the beginning of his concern with existentialism and the existential movement in philosophy. His fascination with the topic of Being and the structures of human existence in the world is evident in much of his writing. Heidegger triggered this interest, but Tillich was never a Heideggerian; his actual concern with existentialism, insofar as it resembles the work of any philosopher, comes much closer to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre than to Heidegger.²⁶ It is in Tillich's writings on anxiety that the

26. I resist classifying Heidegger as an existentialist and prefer the designation 'post-phenomenologist' if a label must be used. Tillich, however, certainly does classify Heidegger as an existentialist. It is common to do so, and it is true that many of the themes of existentialism as later developed in what Tillich calls 'the existential movement' are present in Heidegger's revolutionary book, *Being and Time* (1927). In the mid-1930s, Heidegger appeared to move away from the sort of analysis of Being that he pursued in *Being and Time* towards great concern with language and with the function of philosophical language of the Western metaphysical tradition in obscuring the 'showing-forth' of Being in its 'house of language.' This change in emphasis is often called 'The Turn' in his thinking, and one customary view is that Heidegger was an existentialist in the 1920s, with all of the usual ramifications that that term brings with it, but that he changed sometime in the 1930s and repudiated his earlier work. We may find a new style of writing in his "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935, in Heidegger, 1977) and follow his development through "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," (1964, in 1977) where he discusses the overcoming of philosophical thinking which is still tainted by metaphysics even in the attempt to overcome metaphysics -- a charge he brings against his own *Being and Time*. However, I believe that this movement in Heidegger's thought is not a radical shift but a logical development from his concern with the world and the human condition of 'thrownness' into the world that we find in *Being and Time*. The crucial concepts of world, Being, and so forth show through all his work, but his task of ushering in the 'end of metaphysics,' which is present in *Being and Time* as well, shows his ultimate concern to be quite different from that of, e.g., Sartre and Tillich. We might also use what I argue (p.) is Tillich's criterion for being an existentialist: that one is concerned with the meaning of truth in relation to human beings and their existence. After *Being and Time*, Heidegger's philosophy is neither explicitly concerned nor unconcerned with this sort of analysis of meaning; he tries to dig beneath the metaphysics implicit in such ideas and examine how being, people, the world, language, and truth are all wrapped up in some package which is nearly impossible to think about. (See, for example,

existentialist element in his thinking is most pronounced.

In his biographical sketch of Tillich, *Paulus*, Rollo May reports on the background of Tillich's interest in existential issues.

Tillich had begun his philosophical career as a German idealist ... He believed in the identity of essence and existence ... But one night, while he was a chaplain in World War I, in a battle on the Marne all that changed. His fellow officers were brought in on stretchers, chopped to pieces by gunfire, wounded or dead. That night 'absolutely transformed me,' he used to say. 'All my friends were among these dying and dead. That night I became an existentialist.' From then on he could no longer separate truth from the human being who acts on it; right and wrong were no longer decided purely at ethereal heights of thought; the living, pulsing, committing, suffering and loving human being must always be taken into account. (1988, p. 18).

Beyond its biographical interest, this passage provides us with insight into the meaning of the word *existentialist*, which Tillich occasionally uses rather loosely. An existentialist, for Tillich, is someone who views truth in the light of human beings and their constitution. Truth is relative to human needs and is created by humans; it is not imposed upon us by some divine or logical higher order.

In general, so-called existentialists place special emphasis on the role of anxiety in human existence. This focus on anxiety arises from the existentialist ontology. Let's briefly review this ontology. Existence is seen to be relevant only insofar as it exists in distinction to its opposite, with non-being. This notion comes from the reading of Hegel's discussion of being and nothingness in his *Logic* (1830), where being is the first and the most empty of all possible concepts and thus actually is nothingness. "Pure **Being** makes the beginning: because it is on one hand pure thought, and on the other immediacy itself, simple and indeterminate ... But this mere Being, as it is mere abstraction, is therefore the absolutely negative: which, in a similarly immediate aspect, is just **Nothing**." (Sections 86 and 87, pp. 124-127). Existentialists do not emphasize the movement of being and nothingness in a metaphysical Hegelian dialectic but rather set up the

"Building Dwelling Thinking" and "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in Heidegger, 1977). He was probably unsuccessful at this attempted excavation of thought, but his analysis of the problems of metaphysics and his methods of thinking about these problems have significantly influenced the work of important contemporary philosophers and critical theorists such as Derrida and Gadamer.

two in tension at the core of human existence. Nothingness does not exist anywhere in the world, but is a possibility continually apprehended by people. This apprehension of the possibility of nothingness is the root of anxiety in human existence.

Tillich's analysis of anxiety may be found most clearly in his book on *The Courage to Be*, and in the second part of his *Systematic Theology*, where he outlines the metaphysical basis of his theology. The *Systematic Theology* is more difficult than the book on *Courage*, and most prohibitively it relies upon an elaborate structure of terminology that makes penetration or exposition difficult to attain in a brief essay. I will use it to look at Tillich's idea of anxiety as an ontological precondition in existence, but I will not attempt to manipulate the text in any detailed manner. My exposition of the possible resolution of the situation of anxiety is taken from *The Courage to Be*.

Anxiety as an Ontological Condition of Human Existence

The Courage to Be (1952) explores the ontological and existential nature of anxiety. Tillich sees anxiety as a fundamental condition of human existence. He outlines its origin, manifestations, and possible (partial) resolution through the "courage to accept acceptance."

Anxiety results from the individual's awareness of the possibility of non-being. The individual in the world exists, participates in and manifests the simple nature of being. Yet the ability of consciousness to transcend simple awareness of existence leads one to awareness of the possibility of non-being. Non-being should not be understood as merely discontinued existence, or death. Death presupposes some existence upon which it works, but non-being is the very negation of being. In relation to oneself, the possibility of non-being is the possibility that one might never have existed at all. However, non-being extends beyond the personal sphere. Non-being is also apprehended as the negation of *all being*, not just ourselves but all life and the very universe. In Sartrean terms, awareness of non-being is the full realization with one's personality – not just one's critical faculties – that all existence is pure contingency, that there is no necessary existence, no reason why anything or anyone should exist. Tillich writes, "The first assertion about the nature of anxiety is this: anxiety is the state in which a being is aware of its possible nonbeing.... It is not the realization of universal transitoriness, not even the experience of the death of others, but the impression of these events on the always latent

awareness of our own having to die that produces anxiety. Anxiety is finitude, experienced as one's own finitude. This is the natural anxiety of man as man." (Tillich, 1952, p. 35).

In the first volume of his *Systematic Theology* (1951; hereafter *ST*), Tillich presents the philosophical roots of anxiety in more detail. Part II of the first volume of *ST* is devoted to exposition of "Being and God". It is here that Tillich presents his fundamental ontology (to borrow this phrase from Heidegger), including the structure and categories of existence.

According to Tillich, all philosophy must, and all theology should, come to grips with the basic ontological question: "What is being itself?" Philosophy examines the nature of being, and does not rest with a description of the world. Rather, philosophy seeks to explicate the necessary nature of reality. This leads it to consider fundamental ontology. "The ontological question, the question of being-itself, arises in something like a 'metaphysical shock' – the shock of possible nonbeing. This shock has often been expressed in the question, 'Why is there something; why not nothing?'" (*ST*:1, p. 163).

Acceptance of this ontological question as meaningful implies an acceptance of the "basic ontological structure." This basic structure is a product of the reality of human being as being "threatened" by the possibility of nonbeing. This is not a psychological analysis; the assertion is that there is some manifestation of being in which we can observe the possibility of negation, or nonbeing. But notice that it is difficult to state this assertion without some phrase such as "which we can observe," or some anthropomorphism such as "threatened." This seeming lack of linguistic rigor might be thought to cause problems from the outset, yet Tillich does not address the problem. Instead, he accepts it as normal: "The ontological structure presupposes an asking subject and an object about which the question is asked; it presupposes the subject-object structure of being, which in turn presupposes the self-world structure as the basic articulation of being." (p. 164). The logical problem of whether this ontological structure is somehow inherent in reality or whether it is an addition brought to reality by human existence is avoided. Indeed, it seems right to ignore the question because it is actually meaningless. The nature of reality and the structure that the psyche must take are ultimately the same for persons who are constituted by this psyche; for beings without a psyche the question cannot arise.²⁷ Sartre addresses this in the introductory pages

27. We may note that this brings us again to Hegel and his analysis of the constitution of *Geist* (Spirit or Mind) in his *Phenomenology* (1807). In Hegel's idealism, the fundamental structures of the mind and of reality are identical.

of *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and the analysis of being-in-the-world occupies much of Heidegger's attention in the second half of *Being and Time* (1927); Tillich assumes that it is self-evident that the world and consciousness cannot be separated – “the self-world structure [is] the basic articulation of being.”

Once we have taken the ontological structure as given, we may proceed to “the second level of ontological analysis, [which] deals with the elements which constitute the basic structure of being.” (*ST*:1, p. 165). These elements manifest the ontological structure of being / nonbeing and are thus found to be in pairs, or what Tillich calls “ontological polarities.” The basic ontological polarities are the polarities of “individuality and universality, dynamics and form, [and] freedom and destiny.” (p. 165).²⁸ At this point we lose sight of the problem of anxiety for some time, yet we will see that Tillich is preparing the ground work for a possible answer later to the problem posed by anxiety in human life. This answer grows from his elaboration of the ontological polarity of freedom and destiny.

Tillich notes that his polarity of freedom and destiny is unusual because freedom is commonly opposed to necessity. The problem with this is that in such usage, “necessity is understood in terms of mechanistic determinacy and freedom is thought of in terms of indeterministic contingency.” (*ST*, p. 182). The classical discussion of free will and determinism is based on the assumption that freedom and necessity can be understood in this way. However, this effectively limits

28. It is unclear whether the three ontological polarities listed by Tillich are the *only* manifest polarities. It would seem possible to think of other polarities not reducible to these three. For example, an ontology influenced by phenomenology might wish to posit something on the order of “internality vs. externality.” However, this is probably unimportant for Tillich's purposes. He points out in the introduction to *ST* (vol. 1) that he does not pretend to have a complete analysis of ontological categories, and does not wish to contend with Kant in presenting such an analysis. Presumably, Tillich would not claim to present a complete philosophical analysis of the other parts of his ontology either, but only of those parts relevant for theology. It could be argued that his “first formal criterion of theology” supports this: “The object of theology is what concerns us ultimately. Only those propositions are theological which deal with their object in so far as it can become a matter of ultimate concern for us.” (*ST*:1, p. 12). If certain possible ontological categories are (arguably) not directly necessary for a theological system, then there is no reason to consider them. We might note, though, that this disclaimer effectively leaves open a large door for escape from criticism. Tillich clearly wants to expound philosophical ideas. However, if these ideas were attacked, an easy rebuttal to charges of methodological sloppiness would be to invoke this disclaimer. Tillich's system could conceivably be defended against most philosophical criticism by answering that a particular point under attack was not explicated in as great detail as would be necessary from a philosophical point of view because the point is not essential for a theological system.

freedom to the same sphere as mechanistic determinacy (as its polar opposite), which is to limit it to the world of *things*. This is not the proper sphere in which to analyze an ontological concept of freedom, and we see that the free will vs. determinism argument was resting on a ground that always provided a tautologous argument supporting determinism (“a thing is a thing”). (p. 183). A mechanistic ontology, or one based on viewing the world and people as objects who behave in this or that way, presupposes determinism and renders discussion of free will meaningless.

In Tillich’s view, freedom is not a function of humans, but an essential element of existence. Freedom is not created and exercised by some agency of free will, rather, it is manifest in all parts of existence and all activities of humans. Curiously, Tillich describes all of this without telling us of what “freedom” consists. Assuming that we may regard his ontology as similar to the existentialist ontologies of Heidegger and Sartre, this seems to be a major oversight. Sartre in particular presents a lengthy and detailed analysis of ontological freedom. Tillich does not, at least not in this work. Somewhat ironically, he is presenting an existentialist analysis of the world without presenting human examples of the consequences of his philosophical ideas. We will have to turn back to *The Courage to Be* before the notion of freedom takes its important shape as courage in relation to human activity.

What Tillich does say about freedom in the *Systematic Theology* involves one’s *experience* of it. He states that “Freedom is experienced as deliberation, decision, and responsibility.” (p. 184). He presents an etymological analysis of these states of freedom and shows that his notion of freedom centers around decision and action, as we might expect. He notes that “a decision [and hence freedom] cuts off possibilities, and these were real possibilities ...” (p. 184). We may elaborate upon this and try to determine what he is saying here. This reading once again draws from Sartre; Tillich’s work on these issues resembles Sartre’s quite strongly. Freedom is apprehension of the ontological existence of various possibilities for ourselves in decision. Until we make a decision, some part of ourselves exists as the possible self in each possible outcome of the decision we have to make. All of these possible selves are ourselves, as the selves which we *are* in the mode of nonbeing. We are them in so far as they are what we are *not*. Thus, this is a manifestation of nonbeing in freedom. Once a decision is made, this particular manifestation of nonbeing shifts and is now the nonbeing of the possibilities we once had but which now are *not*. Our freedom is the freedom to choose among these possibilities. Once we

have chosen, our freedom, in relation to that choice, disappears.

Possibly this elaboration of the notion of freedom in Tillich is the best one to be made. For Tillich, freedom is not absolute but rather exists on the ground of our destiny. “Our destiny is that out of which our decisions arise ...” (*ST:1*, p. 184). This destiny is formed by “the communities to which I belong, the past unremembered and remembered, the environment which has shaped me, [and] the world which has made an impact on me.” (p. 185). This would suggest that Tillich’s idea of freedom (like Sartre’s) rests upon taking action in relation to one’s existential situation.

However, there are two problems with this reading. First, Tillich says that freedom is based on one’s possibilities, and that it arises from one’s destiny. We may conclude that one’s possibilities are created by one’s destiny. One’s destiny determines what one’s possibilities are. But Tillich does not say this, probably because it veers too near the realm of determinism. Yet no other relation can be made between one’s possibilities and one’s freedom, if we are to understand Tillich in any way similar to the existentialist reading given above.

The second problem is that Tillich’s concepts of freedom and of destiny seem to reside on different “levels” or different “orders of existence” despite his concern to present them as opposites on the same plane. If freedom is understood as the freedom to choose from among various possibilities, then this freedom is seemingly not on the same ontological level as the destiny which gives rise to the freedom and to its possibilities. Freedom arises from destiny and depends upon it. Tillich argues that the two lie on the same plane because each depends upon the other. Even granting that destiny depends upon freedom (which is one of the central issues at stake here since destiny not dependent upon freedom is once again – despite Tillich’s attempts to deny this option – deterministic) this does not mean that destiny is not ontologically prior to freedom. Destiny may very well be prior to any notion of freedom, since it provides the possibilities for freedom, according to Tillich. It does not affect this logical priority that destiny can only exist in relation to freedom. Consider, for example, Tillich’s notion that humans are an essence in existence. Here, essence depends upon existence for manifestation, and existence depends upon essence, yet essence is still ontologically prior to existence.²⁹

29. One interesting note, incidental to our primary discussion but related to the theoretical interaction of Tillich’s thought with psychoanalysis, is that Tillich’s description of freedom and destiny as polar elements suggests a greater position for the play of destiny in the expression of human choice than we find in classical existentialist

Now this example itself hints at a fact that may help us around some of these problems: Tillich is not a pure existentialist. If we separate his analyses of ontology and of existence, we find that his picture of human activity, psychology, and daily existence is definitely existentialist, but that his fundamental ontology of human existence and of anxiety is actually essentialist. In other words, Tillich's concern with actual human existence in the world is heavily influenced by the work of such people as Kierkegaard, Jaspers, and Sartre who are generally discussed as existentialists; however, the ultimate grounds for this existence are to be found in some sort of eternal nature: in the essence of human being.

In *The Courage to Be*, we can see an essentialist trend in Tillich's thought through his concern with estrangement and separation. Tillich presents the human self as being estranged from itself in existence. "Man is estranged from what he essentially is. His existence in a transitory world contradicts his essential participation in the eternal world of ideas." (1952, p. 127). Every person, by virtue of existing, is estranged from his or her true, ideal self. Such an ideal self could be construed in two ways: either as an ideal *material* self or as an ideal *metaphysical* self. Analysis of material estrangement could take us to a Marxist analysis of alienation in history and society, or to a so-called atheistic existentialism such as those found in the early Heidegger and Sartre. Tillich does not proceed in either of these directions of materialist analysis.

The concept of metaphysical estrangement, however, is evident in Tillich. One of his sermons collected in *The Shaking of the Foundations* (1948) is entitled "We Live in Two Orders." He presents the unique position of humankind as being cognizant of its participation in the historical order and in the eternal order. The "eternal order" is symbolic, which for Tillich means (in part) that it points to something beyond itself. It would be possible to interpret the "eternal order" in a primarily materialistic way, as the eternal progression of humanity and

ontologies. This allows us to read freedom and destiny in Tillich in a way that is closer to psychoanalytic understanding than strict existentialism will allow. Sartre, for example, had to reject the Freudian notion of an unconscious mind as untenable within his phenomenological, consciousness-based existentialism. Freedom for Sartre is conscious freedom, even if it is not reflectively apprehended as conscious. Accepting Tillich's view, however, allows us to retain the unconscious as a component of one's destiny, and as the ground from which freedom can arise. Freedom in this view would not have to be conscious, even non-reflectively. It is merely the expression of deliberation, decision, and responsibility, whether conscious or not. Thus we could conceivably have freedom in the unconscious. This sort of ontology helps reduce the concern with determinism in psychoanalysis.

human history. However, if this were the correct interpretation of the “eternal order” Tillich would have no need to contrast it with the historical order. The eternal order is an ontological category, a metaphysical notion distinct from the concrete or existential concept of the human historical order. The separation between the historical order and the eternal order is fundamentally the division between the existential and the essential dimensions of human existence.³⁰

In *The Courage to Be* Tillich says that he presents an existentialist analysis of human being in the world because of human estrangement from the essential realm of ideal being, or from full participation in the eternal order; an essential analysis of being is impossible. The state of humans in existence is that they have lost their connection with eternal truths. “Man in the existential situation of finitude and estrangement can reach truth only in an existential attitude. ‘Man does not sit on the throne of God,’ participating in his essential knowledge of everything that is. Man has no place of pure objectivity above finitude and estrangement.” (p. 126).

This separation between the essential and the existential arises as a result of the distinction in reality between the possibilities of being and non-being. If non-being were not possible then there would be no existence and no consciousness. In this case, all possibilities of existence would be purely potential, that is, they would be purely formal or essential. Once there are actual expressions of existence the possibility of non-existence is salient to a person; anxiety then arises and detaches the person from the mode of purely existing and forces recognition of the possibilities of life. At this point the person is no longer a pure essence because his or her identity is, in fact, not self-identical insofar as it is composed in part by various alternative possibilities. Finally, it is only in relation to these possibilities, in relation to the potential for deciding which of one’s possible selves one chooses, that the capacity for freedom arises. Thus we see that the structure of anxiety at the foundations of the self-world ontology creates the possibility for the expression of freedom, and that this possibility only arises in relation to a being estranged from its own essential nature.

30. We never become completely clear as to exactly how we should understand this essential human nature. However, it is possible to argue that we cannot become clear on it precisely because we are estranged from this essence. In any case, this is a philosophical problem we cannot consider in depth here.

The Courage to Affirm Being

The condition of estrangement from one's essential being is fundamental to human existence, and it is the precondition for the expression of freedom, but this does not mean that our usual experience of estrangement and anxiety is the best possible condition for human life. Also fundamental to our structure is that we try to overcome this anxious state. Living in anxiety is not a pleasant state but neither is it always a pathological state; as an ontological condition for humans it is not permanently escapable.

Tillich criticizes doctrines, especially medical and psychological disciplines, which assume that anxiety is pathological. According to these disciplines, "Healing consists in removing anxiety altogether, for anxiety is sickness, mostly in a psychosomatic, sometimes only in a psychological sense. All forms of anxiety can be healed, and since there is no ontological root of anxiety there is no existential anxiety." (*Courage*, pp. 70-71). These disciplines are mistaken when they overlook the fact that anxiety is built-in to the human condition; it could not arise in pathological forms if it were not already a potentiality in human being. "The psychiatrist who asserts that anxiety is always pathological cannot deny the *potentiality* of illness in human *nature*, and he must account for the facts of finitude, doubt, and guilt in every human being; he must, in terms of his own presupposition, account for the universality of anxiety." (p. 71). Pathological anxiety is thus similar to cancer in its ontological status. Cancer arises as a possibility from the mechanism of cell growth and reproduction; it occurs when this normal growth mechanism goes awry. Likewise, pathological anxiety, according to Tillich, is possible only because the human condition includes anxiety as an ontological element. Realization of this structure of human existence is necessary for a full picture of pathologically anxious states. "The medical faculty needs a doctrine of man in order to fulfil its theoretical task; and it cannot have a doctrine of man without the permanent cooperation of all those faculties whose central object is man." (p. 71).

Humans want to escape anxiety; this much is evident in the fact that the situation is anxious. It heralds danger and possibilities of self-annihilation, complete non-existence at the ontological level of negating one's being. Humans attempt to escape from particular situations of anxiety, but they also try to escape from anxiety in general through "projects," in Sartre's terminology. A project consists of a fundamental choice of how to orient oneself in relation to one's own being and to the ultimate being-itself; this orientation affirms being and thus lessens

the grip of non-being, i.e., it helps reduce the ontological pressure of anxiety. Tillich calls such self-orientation in the face of ontological anxiety *courage*. One can face fear through definite action because fear has an object. But anxiety has no object; it simply *is*. It can only be met through the attitude of courage. Courage affirms one's existence over and against the threatened meaninglessness of anxiety. Tillich writes, "Courage is the affirmation of one's essential nature, one's inner aim or entelechy, but it is an affirmation which has in itself the character of 'in spite of.'" (1952, p. 4). Tillich outlines what he sees to be the two general varieties of such courage.

First is the "courage to be as a part." This is the affirmation of oneself as a member of a community, and entails the responsibility – the courage – to accept one's commitment to the community. Such participation in society can give meaning to one's life, can place one within the broader sphere of human activity and relieve the experience of isolation and possible eternal negation felt in ontological anxiety. "[B]eing as a part points to the fact that self-affirmation necessarily includes the affirmation of oneself as 'participant,' and that this side of our self-affirmation is threatened by nonbeing as much as the other side, the affirmation of the self as an individual self." (*Courage*, p. 89). But there is a danger if being-as-a-part is emphasized as the only way to cope with one's existential situation. Being-as-a-part is necessary, but it cannot suffice as the total answer to the existential situation because it affirms only the value of the individual's relationship to the community and not the value of the individual himself or herself. Exclusive affirmation of individuals as part of a society leads to collectivist social structures. Tillich argues in chapters four and five of *Courage* that history shows that these collectivist structures, to be successful, must enforce the loss of the individual self, the total subjugation of the individual and even of individual consciousness to the group. This denial of the individual is historically not feasible, and it also violates what Tillich sees as the essence of the individual, as we will see.

The second type of courage is the "courage to be as oneself," or individualism. This is the romantic affirmation of oneself as a unique and important individual. Tillich radically dissociates this from participation in the community: "Individualism is the self-affirmation of the individual self as individual self without regard to its participation in the world." (p. 113). It was generally assumed in societies where this individualism predominated that the individual acting in his (or occasionally her) best interest would serve the needs of society as well through some sort of natural "harmony." The rise of a free market economy, democratic forms of government, and scientific progress

“seemed to confirm this view.” (p. 115). Soon, however, romanticism elevated the stature of the individual even farther, making creativity and difference the hallmarks of self-worth. “[T]he danger is obvious. The romantic irony elevated the individual beyond all content and made him empty: he was no longer obliged to participate in anything seriously.” (p. 117). Ultimately such an attitude culminates in what Tillich calls the *existentialist attitude*, or extreme existentialism, which he differentiates sharply from his existentialist ontology. Extreme existentialism proclaims the complete freedom of the self, the isolation of each individual in a world where no meaning and structure of life exists except what the individual creates for itself.

[O]ne must ask: What is this self that affirms itself? Radical existentialism answers: What it makes of itself. This is all it can say, because anything more would restrict the absolute freedom of the self. The self, cut off from participation in its world, is an empty shell, a mere possibility. (*Courage*, p. 151).

Tillich criticizes this position because it forgets that human freedom is limited freedom based on the structure of human nature. People cannot create themselves and must take account of their possibilities in relation to human nature.

Existentialism, on the basis of the message that God is dead, gives man the divine ‘a-se-ity.’ [sic; aseity is the nature of the divine as self-creating or self-existing.] Nothing shall be in man which is not by man. But man is finite, he is given to himself as what he is. He has received his being and with it the structure of his being, including the structure of finite freedom. And finite freedom is not aseity. Man can affirm himself only if he affirms not an empty shell, a mere possibility, but the structure of being in which he finds himself before action and nonaction. Finite freedom has a definite structure, and if the self tries to trespass on this structure it ends in the loss of itself. (p. 152).

There is a possibility beyond these two forms of courage. It is the unification of the courage to be as a part and the courage to be as oneself. It is also the transcendence of the two. Both the courage to be as a part and the courage to be as oneself are manifestations of the essential possibility of relating oneself to *all* being; they are particular manifestations of being in general, of *being itself* or the ‘Ground of Being,’ in Tillich’s phrase. Only participation in this ultimate form of being is full and beyond the possibility of nonbeing. “Courage needs the power of being, a power transcending the nonbeing which is experienced in the anxiety of fate and death, which is present in the

anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness, which is effective in the anxiety of guilt and condemnation. The courage which takes this threefold anxiety into itself must be rooted in a power of being that is greater than the power of oneself and the power of one's world," i.e., a power that transcends both individualism and collectivism. (p. 155).

This grasping towards the higher, the ultimate being, is essentially religious. Only the root of all being can give our courage its ultimate foundation if it is to overcome the threat of nonbeing. Tillich says, "There are no exceptions to this rule; and this means that every courage to be has an open or hidden religious root. For religion is the state of being grasped by the power of being-itself." (*Courage*, p. 156). This state of being grasped by being itself is not primarily mystical, although mystical realization may display the state temporarily. Mysticism takes less of an active stance in relation to all reality than being-itself demands; it focuses on particular ecstatic experience, and loses the essence of the individual through identification with the divine. Mysticism is an important element of the relation to being itself but does not encompass the complete relationship.

Being-itself, for Tillich is best expressed by the symbol *God*. God is the ultimate source of all there is, the power behind all existence and all life. This may seem to be a rather impersonal characterization of God, but that is precisely why it is the necessary notion of God, according to Tillich. More concrete notions of God end up as being idolatrous. Tillich outlines three ideas of God: 'unspecified theism,' or an emotional reference to god, found in rhetoric such as political admonitions to express the 'Glory of God'; 'personalistic theism' which emphasizes a person-to-person relationship to God; and 'theological theism,' or conception of God as some being whose existence must be probed, understood, or proven. All three forms of theism must be overcome.

Now theism in the first sense must be transcended because it is irrelevant, and theism in the second sense must be transcended because it is one-sided. But theism in the third sense must be transcended because it is wrong. It is bad theology. The God of theological theism is a being beside others and as such a part of the whole of reality.... As such he is bound to the subject-object structure of reality, he is an object for us as subjects. At the same time we are objects for him as a subject. And this is decisive for the necessity of transcending theological theism. For God as a subject makes me into an object which is nothing more than an object. He deprives me of my subjectivity because he is all-powerful and all-knowing.... God appears as

the invincible tyrant.... This is the God Nietzsche said had to be killed because nobody can tolerate being made into a mere object of absolute knowledge and absolute control. (*Courage*, pp. 184-185).

In the experience of what Tillich calls 'absolute faith' all of these notions of God fade away. God is revealed through faith as transcendent Being beyond all categorization. God cannot be understood on the basis of any hierarchy or set of criteria derived from our experience with objects or philosophical concepts that treat God as an object. This God prior to all being and to all thinking is what Tillich, in an attempt to avoid terminology such as "being-itself" and to defuse the mistaken notions of the word *God*, calls the "God above God."

But it is also a mistaken notion to suppose that this God above God exists so as to relieve human anxiety, though the search for such relief drove us through this analysis. Promoting God as a tool for anxiety relief would be a cheap notion open easily to the Freudian criticism that religious ideas are wish fulfillments. No, the true answer to be found in this higher God is more difficult than believing and feeling good for ever after. This God above God provides us with the basis for the "courage to accept acceptance," the courage to live with anxiety as part of our condition in the world.

What is this "courage to accept acceptance?" The phrase is best analyzed by proceeding right to left. "Acceptance" is given to us by God, by being-itself. We are accepted by being-itself and on this account we see that there is no ultimate ground for our guilt and anxiety; there is no ultimate judgement which we must fear. Guilt is resolved through the acceptance of our actions, and anxiety is resolved through the acceptance of our lives themselves and of our existence, of our being. By being accepted by being-itself, we are not threatened by non-being.

Now this "acceptance" is purely ontological; it does not solve our existential problem until we have realized or "accepted" it. To "accept acceptance" is to realize the fact that we are accepted by being-itself. As such, it can give us psychological freedom from anxiety. However, it is not a simple matter of intellectual decision; this acceptance, like all other human activity is beset with anxiety and doubt. As soon as we are sure of this acceptance a new wave of doubt may shake us; perfect, easy complacency would again point to simple fantasy or wish fulfillment.³¹

31. Tillich does not present a full 'program' which could help us to understand the expression of this courage in practice. We might be justified in asking, "What is this courage? How do I achieve it?" These questions probe to the heart of Tillich's

To overcome this situation, we must have the *courage* to accept it. Since humans cannot be perfect in their existential situation, we can never have perfect courage, can never realize perfect acceptance of ourselves in being-itself, and can never completely conquer anxiety. The best we can hope for is the strength to manage it, to accept it. Being-itself gives us this strength but grasping it is not a simple matter for humans. Yet, in accepting this grace, this possibility of courage, we achieve the most freedom we can hope for, the best situation from which to make sense of our condition, our destiny, and our anxiety. Thus, the “courage to accept acceptance” expresses not only the strength to realize our acceptance by being-itself but also the strength to accept our imperfect state, to continue to live in anxiety. Anxiety and doubt cannot be abolished; we must be strong enough to live with them, with the help of faith in being itself. Tillich closes *The Courage to Be* with the provocative sentence, “*The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt.*” (p. 190, Tillich’s italics).

theology. In this essay we must be content with understanding such courage as at least a possibility even if we are not sure how to obtain it.

Chapter VI. The Dialogue between Freud and Tillich

Tillich's theology, as outlined in the last chapter, points to several areas for reconsideration of the psychoanalytic understanding of religion. The first of these areas concerns the idea of anxiety; the other issues derive from that discussion. The outcome of this discussion is that Freud's psychology must grasp the concept of anxiety as one fundamental element of its understanding of religion. Paul Tillich's theology shows us one way in which anxiety may be viewed as the ontological condition motivating religious expression.

Freud's concept of anxiety as a signal of danger shows anxiety to be a fundamental, necessary, and ultimately unavoidable condition for human life. Without the signal of anxiety to the ego, an organism could not respond to external or internal threats. Anxiety, in Freud's theory, serves as the spark that triggers the ego's mechanisms of adaptation and of behavior in general.

Freud's concept of a 'danger situation,' of which anxiety is a signal, only becomes meaningful on the basis of some ontological possibility of being threatened, i.e., of having one's own being in jeopardy – which raises the possibility of having one's self extinguished in non-being. Speaking ontologically, dangers do not simply *exist*; they must be apprehended as possible changes to something or to oneself. This basic perception of danger must have the fundamental structure of allowing for the apprehension of non-being, else an organism could not perceive any change or possibility of change at all. This does not mean that only a self-conscious organism can react to danger; clearly, non-conscious organisms have evolved which are able to respond to environmental threats. In non-conscious organisms apprehension of danger is instinctual. However, in order to become reflectively *aware* of the existence of such danger situations in general, and to theorize about them, we must have a concept of difference. Any concept of *difference* inherently includes the ontological structure of being (non-difference or fullness) and non-being (the possibility of difference). In this sense the theory of anxiety includes the ontological possibility of non-being.

Tillich's ontology of anxiety can perhaps serve as a metaphysical basis for Freud's empirical understanding of anxiety. Tillich argued in his critique of the medical doctrine that all anxiety is pathological that anxiety in the realm of psychoanalytic thought must refer to some possibility of nonbeing. In order for psychoanalysis to make complete sense of the notion of anxiety it needs an ontology, a foundation for

reference to the basic structure of human existence. Medical disciplines may function well without consideration of their philosophical roots but that does not show that those roots are unimportant. When psychoanalysis attempts to penetrate into areas such as religious experience it must first be philosophically clear about its own foundations. Cogent criticism cannot grow from an unclear position.

This grounding of the psychoanalytic theory of anxiety in ontology connects with Tillich's analysis of anxiety as an inescapable ontological fact of human existence. In both theories anxiety is a fundamental condition of existence. I do not want to equate the positions of the two theorists, nor do I wish to claim that the position of one is essential for the other. Freud's concept of anxiety is principally mechanical or empirical while Tillich's is metaphysical. Each doctrine functions well within its own limits. However, when Freud attempts to move beyond the realm of psychoanalysis *per se* into criticism of fields with different philosophical bases, such as religion, then the fundamental philosophy of psychoanalysis must be examined. Obviously Tillich's philosophy cannot ground all of psychoanalysis, but his doctrine of anxiety as a human condition can provide a starting point from which to become clear about the philosophical meaning of anxiety in psychoanalysis.

We may, however, be concerned that the two thinkers use the word *anxiety* in different ways. This is true. Freud refers to a psychological state of awareness of some danger; Tillich refers to awareness of a kernel of non-being that threatens us. However, we may argue, as I did at the end of chapter four, that Freud's concept of anxiety is sufficiently broad that it includes experiences similar to those concerning Tillich. The fact that Freud's understanding is psychological rather than ontological is the problem we would address by using an ontology similar to Tillich's in the philosophical foundation of psychoanalysis.

We saw in a psychoanalytic case study that it may lead to more fruitful discussion for psychoanalysis to consider religion as a response to some fundamental anxiety rather than a system of wish fulfillment. Viewing religious belief and behavior as derivatives of infantile wish fulfillment may be correct also but gives us little more than a generic, schematic understanding of real human situations. In Tillich's thought, anxiety drives us to find some way to overcome it. The best solution to this is to realize one's ultimate grounding in being-itself, in the 'God above God.'

The Freudian critique of religion cannot respond to this understanding of God. Let us cover this claim in greater detail.

I suggested in the analysis of Freud's position that we must

understand religion from a pragmatic point of view rather than an empiricist framework concentrating on scientific proof. This raises the important issue of how we should understand truth in relation to the pragmatic status of beliefs, an issue which is too difficult to consider here. I do not mean to portray Freud as a pragmatist. He thought that religion was wrong simply because it is false; if it is false, it cannot be pragmatic. However, he *also* gave a purely pragmatic argument that religion is invalid because it keeps people content with being the victims of ignorance and oppression. Today, Freud's empiricist argument that religion is simply false is somewhat outdated. He primarily addressed religion from a literal reading and his criticism from that perspective cannot address symbolic understandings of religion. Yet his pragmatic criticism of the ability of religion to help people *can* address non-literal theologies.

Freud's pragmatic criticism centers on his concern to lessen the social oppression that he understands as the essential function of religion, since religion exists to make people content with their place in an oppressive society. He wants to replace religious means of providing for people's happiness with more rational means. These rational means would involve some restructuring of society along more egalitarian lines, and would exalt science as the proper arbiter of progress. The God who supports religion and its promises is the infantile God created by and attached to remnants of the childhood picture of one's parents as omnipotent beings; Freud wants to do away with this sort of religion. There are really two parts to his argument. First, the notion of God is false and therefore cannot help us to understand the world. Second, religion in general serves as a drug to keep the masses happy in their oppression. Thus, religion eventually fails the pragmatic test of helping people in their orientation to life. Religion cannot make people as happy as could a rational structure of society that did not rely upon keeping many people ignorant.³²

Tillich rejects an empirical or literal understanding of religion. He explicitly opposes materialist understandings of the self and the subject-object distinction in our understanding of God. And if God is not an object, God cannot be examined by science. Tillich is concerned to 'transcend' notions of God which place emphasis on God's role as a

32. We may notice here that Freud presents knowledge as a goal in its own right; it is possible that awakening people from their religious dreams would not make them any happier, but they would be better able to interact with the real world. Thus we see that the pragmatic goal, for Freud, is not of happiness but is very much the goal of adaptation to the demands of reality. However, such proper adaptation to the world is the best basis for achieving true happiness.

provider, or as any sort of being alongside ourselves. His 'God above God' replaces the idolatrous concrete God found in much religious tradition and speculation.

Here we see the most important conflict between the two thinkers. Freud rejects God on the pragmatic grounds that all Gods are infantile fantasies; Tillich proposes a cleansed notion of a truly transcendent God, a God who is beyond the fantasies of gratification. This God is the 'Ground of Being' beyond theism.

Is Tillich's God able to help humans in their situation with respect to anxiety, to finding an ultimate meaning for life? Can his God meet the tests of Freud's pragmatism? Freud would answer that such a Tillichian God beyond theism could not conceivably help humans in the real world. Freud accuses philosophers who propose new concepts of God of clouded thinking that borders on intellectual fraud. Such thinkers, Freud would argue, realize that the concept of God is outdated and possibly even ridiculous but they cannot detach themselves from their emotional ties – their infantile ties – to the idea. They must create a new intellectualized God to take the old God's place.

In other matters [besides religion] no sensible person will behave so irresponsibly or rest content with such feeble grounds for his opinions and for the line he takes. It is only in the highest and most sacred things that he allows himself to do so. In reality these are only attempts at pretending to oneself or to other people that one is still firmly attached to religion, when one has long since cut oneself loose from it. Where questions of religion are concerned, people are guilty of every possible sort of dishonesty and intellectual misdemeanour. Philosophers stretch the meaning of words until they retain scarcely anything of their original sense. They give the name of 'God' to some vague abstraction which they have created for themselves; having done so they can pose before all the world as deists, as believers in God, and they can even boast that they have recognized a higher, purer concept of God, notwithstanding that their God is now nothing more than an insubstantial shadow and no longer the mighty personality of religious doctrines. (*The Future of an Illusion*, 1927, p. 32).

This passage shows Freud's outrage at philosophical theologians; if this had been written two or three decades later we might suspect that Freud was taking direct aim at Paul Tillich.

Freud believes that such an insubstantial shadow of God can play

no part in assuaging the emotional demands which people place upon their concept of God. We would not misrepresent Freud if we applied to this concept the same rebuke that he gave to Vaihinger's philosophy of 'As if,' of acting 'as if' religious doctrines were true for pragmatic reasons: "A man whose thinking is not influenced by the artifices of philosophy will never be able to accept it ..." (*Future*, p. 29).

This philosophical God must be rejected, according to Freud, because it is meaningless on empirical grounds. However we may again extend his criticism to be pragmatic rather than empirical. We may begin with the criticism that such a God is a weak, insubstantial shadow and remember Freud's own experience as a child going to mass with his nanny and then preaching about God almighty. It is this God almighty of childhood, the omnipotent oedipal God modeled after one's parents, who provides the affective basis of religious belief. Religious needs are derivative from infantile needs; without the powerful God-image of infancy these needs cannot be met. An impersonal God of Being cannot meet the needs of our infantile pattern.

However, this analysis rests upon Freud's view that religion serves as a system of desire gratification, that the role of God in one's mental economy is to promise happiness and fulfillment after death. If this is what we expect from God, then Tillich's notion of God as being-itself is indeed quite insufficient.³³ Tillich in fact believed that the very notions of God making people happy and of a blessed afterlife were harmful distortions of the true Christian message of a proper orientation to the ultimate ground of life.

I believe we must shift the emphasis of Freud's psychology of religion away from desire gratification and begin to understand religion as a response to anxiety. When Freud first wrote on religion, the concept of wish fulfillment was very much the essential foundation of his theory. He was able to view religion as an irrational wish fulfillment and equate it with neurosis. This same essential view persisted in his later writings even after the importance of wish fulfillment was reduced and the concept of anxiety became critical. Freud did not connect his anxiety theory with his psychology of religion. Yet if we reexamine religion from a psychoanalytic point of view concentrating on the experience and manifestations of anxiety, then analysis of the impersonal God as insufficient is no longer so compelling as it is under

33. Tillich was aware of this problem and his *Systematic Theology* attempts to provide a basis for understanding the important and more personal theological concepts of Christ, atonement, and so forth. However, I think it is just to say that his system ends up being impersonal and that he believes it must be so (cf. my argument in Chapter 5).

the view that religion is pure wish fulfillment. Now we must at least *entertain* the idea that an essentially impersonal conception of the divine could provide a meaningful basis for human orientation, that such an orientation would not fulfill our infantile needs for a strong parental figure but might help us to deal with our fundamental anxiety over the questions of existence.

Freud does not consider this possible grounding of religion and its hermeneutic function at all. He worked entirely within the framework of a scientific world-view. To some degree his presentation of psychoanalysis as a scientific system was metaphorical, but his biological 'mode' of thinking was never absent. This empiricist train of thought is especially pervasive in his writing on religion in *The Future of an Illusion*. It prevented him from realizing the full impact of his shift in the theory of the neuroses for an understanding of religion. It is also possible that Freud simply did not wish to reexamine religion. He had long since formed his argument that religion functions as desire gratification and he did not need to reconsider it. We find he writes to his friend, the minister Oskar Pfister, of his new book *The Future of an Illusion* and says that it expresses his "completely negative attitude to religion, in any form and however attenuated ..." (Freud/Pfister, 1963, p. 110).

We may wish that Freud had addressed the issue of anxiety in relation to religion but he did not. If he had done so, he could have formulated a stronger critical approach to theology such as Paul Tillich's. As it is, his criticism of such impersonal theology ultimately rests on the pragmatic grounds that these theologies are not powerful enough to meet human desires. The concept of responding to anxiety is missed.

Tillich and his God of Being-Itself narrowly escape from Freudian criticism.³⁴ Tillich may perfectly well answer that his theology is not designed to meet the need of a person to find a replacement image for his or her parents. His theology grows out of the need to find an orienting response to anxiety. Freud's criticism, based on the idea that religion is a wish fulfillment, cannot respond. If, however, psychoanalysis were to examine the importance of anxiety as a motive for religion then it could better understand positions such as Tillich's.

Freud's criticism of an impersonal God comes very close to achieving the pragmatic criticism that would be needed to attack Tillich

34. This is to view Freud's criticism in a prospective sense, as challenging later theologies as well as ones prior and contemporary to his time. Historically, of course, Freud could not have directly criticized Tillich.

but in the end it is based on the faulty assumption that religion serves only as a means of satisfying infantile desires and promising happiness. Freud may very well be correct in arguing that a God like Tillich's ultimately cannot help people. Around the world many people are apparently reacting to various forms of liberalization or depersonalization of religion and are emphasizing conservative, literalist religious traditions. This may not mean that the bases of theology such as Tillich presents are not able to meet people's needs, but it does indicate that something in the liberal traditions is unsatisfactory. Perhaps it is the case that most people seek religion as an opiate, that they desire the sort of easy gratification that Freud denounced and are uninterested in any other sort of religion. However, Freud's argument only covers part of the issue and we cannot make a final judgment from his theories of religion as wish fulfillment alone.

To progress farther we need to undertake a new psychoanalytic look at religion thoroughly based on an understanding of religion's relation to anxiety. Paul Tillich's theology suggests one way that this approach to anxiety could begin: anxiety must be considered as a fundamental condition of human existence. This idea is supported metaphysically in Tillich's ontology and empirically in Freud's psychoanalysis. This connection between theology and psychoanalysis needs further exploration. The concept of anxiety might serve as one bridge between the psychoanalytic psychology of religion and the self-conscious understanding of anxiety found in theologians such as Paul Tillich.

Conclusion

I would like to highlight one last point: the ultimate position of both Freud and Tillich, despite their disagreement over the nature of God, ends up being essentially stoic. In Freud, this stoicism is part of his general world-view; in Tillich it is part of the nature of being religious.

Tillich presents God as the source of all being. Religion consists in the acceptance of our relationship to this Being, the overcoming of anxiety through the courage to accept ourselves and to accept the fact that we are ourselves accepted by being. This courage is not easy to attain and it would hardly be exaggerated to say that Tillich occasionally indicates that we may perhaps judge how truly we hold to the God above God by the very degree to which we feel doubt and uncertainty, for these indicate being in touch with our essential and existential nature.

Absolute faith, or the state of being grasped by the God beyond God, is not a state which appears beside other states of the mind.... It is the situation on the boundary of man's possibilities. It *is* this boundary. Therefore it is both the courage of despair and the courage in and above every courage. It is not a place where one can live, it is without the safety of words and concepts, it is without a name, a church, a cult, a theology. But it is moving in the depth of all of them. It is the power of being ...

One can become aware of it in the anxiety of fate and death when the traditional symbols, which enable men to stand the vicissitudes of fate and the horror of death have lost their power.... The Stoic courage returns but not as the faith in universal reason. It returns as the absolute faith which says Yes to being without seeing anything concrete which could conquer the nonbeing in fate and death. (*Courage*, pp. 188-189).

Ernest Jones says that Freud was not a pessimist although he was sometimes mistaken for one. “[T]he proper word,” he says, “is certainly ‘realist,’ someone free of illusions. It is true that he considered life to be inherently hard rather than easy.... If one was successful in doing so there was plenty in it to enjoy ... [but] it was something primarily to be endured.” (Jones, 1961, p. 373). Freud’s call for reliance upon the rational plan operating in science in guiding our future represents not so much blind faith in the abilities of science, but rather the more sober belief that only strictly rational means can overcome human

unhappiness. But the ultimate expression of Freud's view of life came in the years he struggled with painful cancer of the mouth. He was not afraid of death and he did not take pain medication to ease his suffering. "Freud, like all good doctors, was averse to taking drugs. As he put it once to Stefan Zweig, 'I prefer to think in torment than not to be able to think clearly.'" (Jones, p. 529).

In the last published letter written before his death, Freud summoned up his final resolve and wrote to a poet friend, "I am more than eighty-three years old, thus actually overdue, and there is really nothing left for me but to follow your poem's advice: Wait, wait." (Freud, 1960, p. 460). Three days later, Freud asked his physician to overdose him with morphine. He lapsed into sleep, and died a few hours later.

Bibliographic Note

In addition to the works cited in the text, I found the following to be particularly helpful in my background reading and preparation for this essay.

Erich Fromm's *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950) and W.W. Meissner's *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* (1984) helped me to frame some of the questions relevant for my discussion here. Fromm is useful for his analysis of Freud's psychology of religion in comparison to Jung's; I agree with his conclusion that Jung seems more friendly towards religion but is ultimately somewhat condescending: Jung reads religion solely as a psychological system and explicitly ignores its truth claims. Meissner, a Jesuit priest and a psychoanalyst, concentrates largely on the phenomenological aspects of psychoanalytic understanding of religion. His position that psychoanalytic understanding of religion is highly incomplete and needs a great deal of further exploration ends up being similar to mine in the present essay.

Peter Gay's three lectures, *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis* (1987) are full of interesting discussions of writers who have commented on Freud's psychology of religion. Ultimately, however, they do not convince me of the thesis that psychoanalysis was necessarily developed by an atheist. Gay is perhaps too eager to read Freud as having views on religion nearly identical to thinkers of the European Enlightenment. Freud certainly identified with Voltaire, *et al*, but the German naturalist position of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had somewhat different emphases than the Enlightenment.

Gay's biography of Freud, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (1988) contains tantalizing bits of information on Freud's attitude towards religion but Gay does not make these into a major theme of the book. The eighth chapter of Philip Rieff's fascinating and packed book on *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (1961) contains many interesting observations on Freud's psychology of religion. Rieff champions a critical analogue to what Paul Tillich called the "Protestant Principle;" Rieff's criticism of Freud does circle around Freud's seeming neglect of social factors for individual psychology but rather criticizes Freud for being *too* sociological in his analysis of religion.

A very valuable influence was a course at Harvard College led by Philip S. Holzman on "Psychoanalysis as a Psychology," in which I participated during Spring 1988. Holzman's vast knowledge helped us to understand in depth the essentials of Freud's various theories,

including the difference between the 1900 and 1926 theories of anxiety.

Familiarity with Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) proved to be valuable for understanding Tillich's ontology, and I recommend it for its extensive discussion of many of the points that Tillich only briefly touches, especially the relation between consciousness, perception, and the ontological structure of reality. L. Gordon Tait's book, *The Promise of Tillich* (1971), provided a detailed outline of the Tillich's *Systematic Theology* that was also helpful in assimilating Tillich's theology.

Peter Homens's *Theology After Freud* (1970) contains an analysis of the relation between the theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Tillich and psychoanalysis. Homens argues that theology needs to move to a God beyond the Oedipal complex; Freudian criticism must be taken seriously as a call for reformation of theological thinking. In the end, however, the book seems to peter out without delving deeply enough into the issues raised.

Gordon D. Kaufman's *Essay on Theological Method* (1979) and his essays on *The Theological Imagination* (1981) have helped me to think about the problems connected with analysis of the concept *God*.

John M. Perry's *Tillich's Response to Freud: A Christian Answer to the Freudian Critique of Religion* (1988) is useful for its summary of the positions of Freud and Tillich and for its outline of the points at which they agree and disagree. Perry argues that Tillich agrees with Freud's analysis that literalistic religion is infantile. Perry's approach is more epistemological than my textual or hermeneutic argument. Unfortunately the book is short and does not present the extensive citation and analysis of Freud's and Tillich's writings that would make it more persuasive and more valuable. As it stands, Perry's conclusion that Tillich gives a nearly perfect answer to Freud's critique is not convincing.

Finally, Rollo May's book, *The Meaning of Anxiety* (1977), is an illuminating discussion of the idea of anxiety. May is a psychotherapist and a former divinity student of Paul Tillich. He wrote the first version of this book as a doctoral student in psychology at Columbia University in the late 1940s. Tillich served as one of his advisers. While the book merges psychological and philosophical discussion of anxiety, I have not made use of it here because its central goal is to present May's work on anxiety and it does not address Freud or Tillich in any sustained fashion.

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