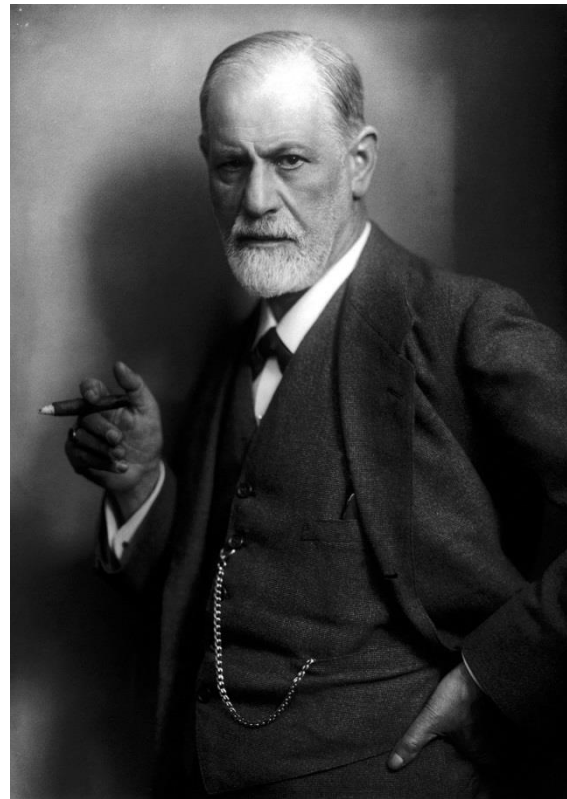


Theme 2 – Letter D – Religious Belief as a Product of the Mind



Spec Check – Component 2: Philosophy

Theme 2: Challenges to religious belief

AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding

D: Religious belief as a product of the human mind – Sigmund Freud

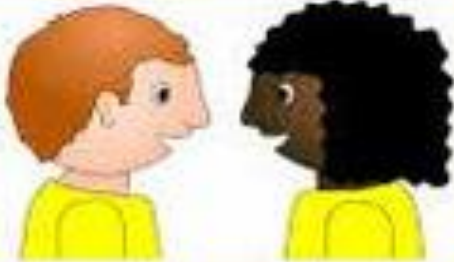
- Religion as an illusion and/or a neurosis with reference to collective neurosis; primal horde; Oedipus complex; wish fulfilment and reaction against helplessness.
- Supportive evidence to redirection of guilt complexes and reference to instinctive desires deriving from evolutionary basis (Charles Darwin).
- Challenges including lack of anthropological evidence for primal horde; no firm psychological evidence for universal Oedipus complex, evidence basis too narrow.

Starter

Think



Pair

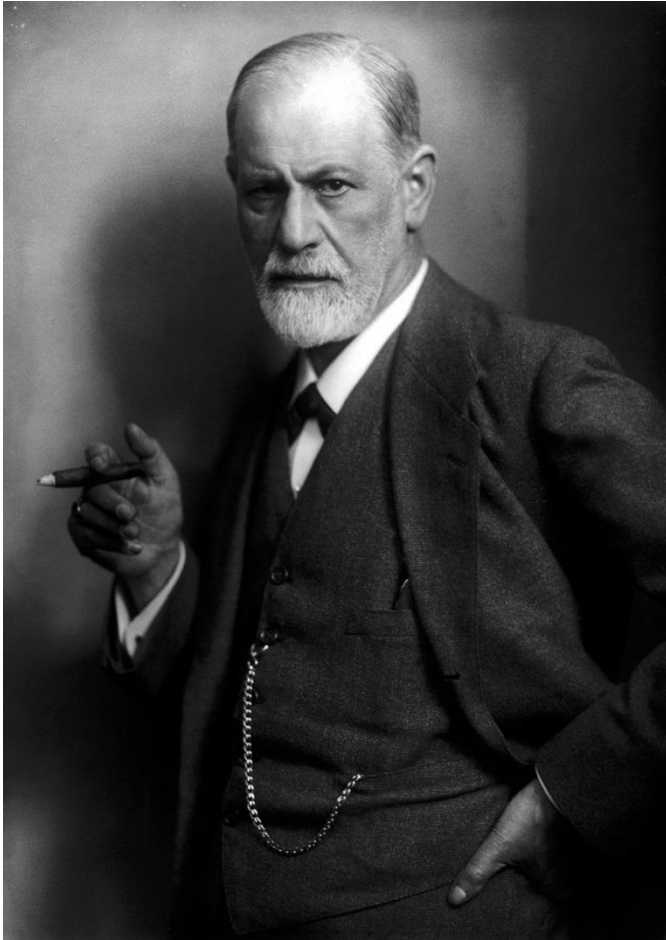


Share



- What does it mean to say that 'religious belief is a product of the human mind'?
- Do you agree with the statement? Why/why not? Examples/evidence?
- If religious belief is a product of the human mind, how does this pose a challenge to religious belief?

Sigmund Freud



- 1856-1939
- Austrian
- Neurologist
- Founder of psychoanalysis
- Atheist

Freud – Religion as a Collective Neurosis

- Believed that the psyche is separated into the; id, ego and super-ego
- **Id** = primitive section
- **Super-Ego** = moral section
- **Ego** = the conscious self which has to deal with moral conflicts that express themselves in dreams and neurotic behaviour
- **TASK:** Draw Freud's model of the psyche as found on page 6 of your textbook
- **TASK:** Make notes about of these [strange religious rituals](#)
- Do you agree that some religious people display neurotic behaviours? What other, more common, examples can you think of?

Religion as a Collective Neurosis

- In his paper *'Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices'*, Freud compared people who have **OCD** with people who are **religious**.
- He stated that religious people understand why they have to complete ritual (to please God), but claimed that **both are neurotic**.
- Stated that neurosis stems from **repressed instinctual impulses** which leads to feelings of guilt
- Humans then **project this guilt** onto another object
- For Freud, religion is a universal obsessional neurosis, known as a **collective neurosis**
- Which objects do you think religious people may project their guilt onto?

Religion as a Neurosis: The Primal Horde

- So where did this collective neurosis originate?
- **TASK:** Read page 8 of the EDUQAS textbook on 'The Primal Horde'
- Make notes about the primal horde referring to:
 - **Alpha-Male**
 - **Totem**
 - **Darwin's 'primitive hordes'**
 - **Ritual killing**
 - **Christianity**
 - **Atonement**



Religion as a Neurosis: The Oedipus Complex

- As we have learnt, Freud concluded that religion was a form of neurotic behaviour, caused by trauma buried deep within the psyche (mind).
- Freud believed that the trauma in question was invariably sexual in nature.
- “At the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood.” (*The Aetiology of Hysteria, 1896*)
- This was because the sexual drive, or libido, was the body’s most basic urge and, as such, the one most capable of causing psychological problems within the development of the individual.
- The trauma that lies behind neurotic behaviour results from problems in the sexual development of the child, primarily the **OEDIPUS COMPLEX** ...

The Oedipus Complex

- Watch this short video on the [Oedipus complex](#)
- What is the **Oedipus complex**?
- There are 3 ways in which Freud believes that young boys develop an unconscious anxiety, or even a castration complex.
- **1. Weaning**
- **2. Exploration of body parts**
- **3. Discovery of bodies without a penis**
- **TASK:** Use page 9 of your EDUQAS textbook to write more about these 3 stages
- *Q. How do you think this could be used as a theory to undermine religion?*



The Oedipus Complex

- “We recognise that the roots for the **need for religion** are in the **parental complex**” (Freud)
- For Freud, religion is a product of the mind. It is a neurotic psychological invention which is a by product of the primal horde and the Oedipus complex.
- Relate Freud’s ideas to:
 - The idea of ‘God the father’
 - The Theology of atonement
 - St Theresa of Avila’s mystical experiences



Religion as a Wish Fulfilment

- In *'The Future of an Illusion'* Freud stated that **religion is an illusion**
- It is an illusion of the yearnings and longings of the **ideal-ego** aspect of the **super-ego**
- God is merely a **projection** of the mind
- The origin of religion rests in our **deepest desires**; i.e. a longing for justice and a fear of death
- **Religious doctrines** fulfil these wishes, and this is what makes them appealing

Religion as a Reaction against Helplessness

- **Task:** Read the paragraphs on 'Religion as a reaction against helplessness' on page 10. Paraphrase in your own words.
- Freud stated that humans feel **helpless** against nature
- **Religion** creates a sense of **security** as it offers a sense of control
- Religion also helps us **control our basic instincts**; our primitive urges (violence and sex)
- **Religion** therefore is a **childish delusion** and atheism is grown up realism

Supporting Evidence: Redirection of Guilt Complexes

- **TASK:** Each pair will be given a separate case study to read. Make notes to share with the class.
 - **i) Daniel Schreber**
 - **ii) Little Hans**
 - **iii) The Wolf Man**
-
- Charles Darwin's theory of **evolution** can be used also as supporting evidence. Freud saw evolution as central to his psychoanalyst theories as it states that all behaviour is based on **primitive behaviours**. The **survival gene** was passed on by those with a high sex drive, therefore the sex drive has become **central to human behaviour**.



Challenges to Freud

- There are 3 challenges on the Spec for Freud:
- **Challenge 1:** A Lack of anthropological evidence for the primal horde
- **Challenge 2:** No firm psychological evidence for a universal Oedipus Complex
- **Challenge 3:** Freud's evidence base was too narrow

AO1 Skills

- **TASK:** Create 3 AO1 questions that could be asked about Freud

AO2 Skills

- “Religion is a neurosis”. Discuss this view (30)
- “Freud’s explanation of religious belief is wholly accurate”. Discuss this view (30)