



'Religion should be regarded as a neurosis'. Assess this view (30)

I would argue that Freud is naïve to suggest that religion is a neurosis.

Some may argue that religion is a neurosis because there are many parallels between religious people and mentally ill people **which suggests that there must be a similar cause for both of their actions**. Freud himself noticed this when he saw that religious people crave Eucharistic routine just as his mentally ill patients crave a strict routine for brushing teeth. However, this doesn't seem strong enough evidence to suggest that this means that religious people are neurotic. It seems that Freud is too reductive in his approach of analysing religion as a neurosis. **There are many people who aren't religious who are neurotic, moreover there is evidence to suggest on the contrary that religious people are in fact LESS likely to form mental illnesses**. Freud would of course respond to this in saying that the lack of mental illness could be due to religion being a normalised outlet for neurosis which then prevents mental illness but he still fails to acknowledge that there is much more to religion than obsessive ritual and his theory doesn't explain other elements of religion such as justice, hope and love.

Others would argue that religion isn't a neurosis because there is no scientific or anthropological evidence to suggest that the Oedipus complex is universal OR that the primal horde ever existed. Freud would disagree with this as he believed his theory was a science and therefore based on empirical fact. For Freud, it is more sensible to accept psychiatry as a truth over God's existence. However, it would seem that Freud here is hypocritical in the sense that there is little empirical evidence for either God's existence OR religion originating as a neurosis from the primal horde. Anthropologist Malinowski reminds us that not all tribes had totem poles, moreover, some early tribes were led by matriarchs. Moreover there is no scientific evidence that the guilt of the primal horde murder is passed on through the unconscious NOR is there any scientific evidence that the Oedipus complex is universal. This leads us to reject the idea that religion as a neurosis is scientific proof and therefore makes us less likely to accept Freud's claim.

A final reason why people believe religion is a neurosis stems from that fact that many religious people do behave in an odd way. This behaviour is then normalised because the behaviour is performed in groups. For example, some charismatic evangelical churches such as the Toronto Church see the congregation rolling on the floor laughing hysterically. When looking at such practices objectively, it is not hard to see why people may believe this is a neurosis. However, Freud's theory falls short in suggesting religion is neurotic because his theory is essentially patriarchal and seems to neglect women in the guilt of the primal horde and the Oedipus complex. Freud's theory doesn't really explain why many woman may crave obsessive routine. Moreover, how can the behaviour be a neurosis when the majority of people in the world are religious so this would arguably be the 'norm' (it could even be suggested that the non-religious people are neurotic?). Furthermore, many religious people do not crave such systematic routine and focus more on the ethical codes of their faith.

Overall, it seems that Freud is wrong to suggest that all religion should be regarded as a neurosis. It is clear that there are elements of religion which seem obsessive, but this isn't looking at religion as a whole. I would suggest that Freud doesn't understand the true nature of religion enough to claim it is all a neurosis.