



The Influence of Feuerbach on Freud's Philosophy of Religion: A Psycho-Anthropological Analysis *

KİBAR GÜRBÜZ

Şırnak University

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Abstract: This article analyzes the influence of Ludwig Feuerbach on Sigmund Freud's understanding of religion within a psycho-anthropological framework. By interpreting theology as the "externalization of human essence," Feuerbach conceives God as the exalted symbol of human qualities such as love, justice, and wisdom; thus, religion emerges not as a supernatural but as a human phenomenon. Freud translates this framework into psychoanalysis: God becomes the unconscious projection of the father image and repressed desires from childhood; religion is "an illusion grounded in wish-fulfillment" and a cultural defense mechanism. From the totemic triad of guilt-prohibition-sacredness to the fear of death and longing for justice, many of Freud's central themes appear as clinical counterparts to Feuerbach's anthropological intuitions. Both thinkers acknowledge the historical and functional significance of religion, yet they diverge in locating its source: Feuerbach emphasizes conscious projection, while Freud focuses on unconscious dynamics. Freud's theory of religion transfers Feuerbach's anthropological core onto a psychodynamic plane, reducing modern humanity's relationship with God from metaphysics to psychology.

Keywords: Philosophy of religion, Feuerbach, Freud, religion, anthropology.

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Introduction

In the history of modern thought, approaches to the phenomenon of religion have evolved from theological debates seeking to prove or refute the existence of God, to anthropological and psychological analyses that question how and why human beings produce religious beliefs. The critical turning point in this transformation emerged in the nineteenth century with Ludwig Feuerbach's anthropological conception of religion. Feuerbach argued that God is not an independent reality existing apart from humanity but rather a projection of the human essence itself. Thus, religion ceased to represent a transcendent realm of truth and became understood as a psychological and cultural phenomenon generated within the human mind.

Feuerbach's thesis constitutes not only a critique of theological dogmas but also profoundly influenced the secularization process of Western thought. He interpreted God not as a transcendent being but as a symbol through which human beings externalize their own desires, fears, and ideals. By relocating the source of religion from the supernatural to the human, this approach transforms the object of theology into the subject matter of anthropology.

At this point, Feuerbach's understanding of religion appears as a philosophical expression of human self-alienation. The love directed toward God is, in truth, the love one bears for one's own being; the sublimity found in God is the idealized image of the human self.¹ However, since the human being remains unaware of this act of projection, they conceal their own essence behind the idea of God and transfer their potential to a transcendent power. In this way, religion becomes a mode through which humanity forgets its own true nature.²

The resonance of Feuerbach's thought can be traced not only in theology and philosophy but also in modern psychology and cultural theory. Karl Marx inherited from Feuerbach the notion of religious alienation, which leads humanity to perceive the world in an inverted

¹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Hristiyanlığın Özü*, Tr. trans. Doğan Bulut (Ankara: Öteki Yayınevi, 2004), 43-44.

² Frederick Copleston, *Felsefe Tarihi: Nihilizm ve Materyalizm*, Tr. trans. Deniz Canefe (Ankara: İdea Yayınevi, 1998), 59.

form; Nietzsche, by proclaiming the death of God, described the ultimate stage of this alienation; and Freud interpreted belief in God as the unconscious reflection of repressed desires and childhood fears. Within this continuum of thought, the most systematic formulation of the view that conceives the idea of God as a psychological process appears in Freud. Indeed, at the roots of Freud's analysis of religion lies though not explicitly acknowledged-a distinct Feuerbachian legacy.

The aim of this study is to systematically examine the influence of Feuerbach on Freud's philosophy of religion. Although Freud's understanding of religion appears, on the surface, as a scientific psychology, it is underpinned by a profound anthropological continuity. Feuerbach's notion that "human beings seek their own essence in God" is transformed in Freud's thought into the idea that "human beings sublimate their childhood desires in the figure of God." This transformation shifts the human-divine relationship from a metaphysical framework to a psychological one, redefining the basis of modern humanity's engagement with the concept of God.

Accordingly, this article will proceed along three main axes: the anthropological foundations of Feuerbach's conception of religion, the theoretical and psychoanalytic background of Freud's understanding of religion, and the thematic traces of Feuerbach's influence within Freud's philosophy of religion.

1. Feuerbach's Conception of Religion: Anthropological Foundations

Feuerbach represents a turning point in modern philosophy of religion. With the theory he developed, the traditional conception of God (theocentric) was abandoned and replaced by an anthropocentric perspective one that places the human being, rather than God, at the center of religious understanding.³ In his seminal work *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), Feuerbach articulates the statement that encapsulates the core of his philosophy: "Theology is, in fact, anthropology." This assertion conveys that God is not a being independent of humanity but rather an intellectual construct through which the human

³ Mehmet Sait Reçber, "İslam, Din, Çağdaş Durum," *İslâmiyât* 4, no. 1-4 (2006), 434-435.

being elevates and idealizes their own essence.⁴ This statement conveys that God is not an entity existing independently of humanity but an intellectual construct through which the human being exalts and idealizes their own essence.⁵ Feuerbach interprets the origin of the concept of God as a reflection of human consciousness and emotion. Human beings project qualities inherent in their own nature-such as love, wisdom, and justice-onto God; thus, God becomes the idealized image of the human self.⁶

Within this framework, religion emerges as a consequence of humanity's alienation from its own essence. In attributing its values to God, the human being simultaneously becomes estranged from itself, having transferred its own qualities to a transcendent being. Feuerbach describes this process as "the objectification of the human essence." God is a projection of the human inner world. Consequently, knowing God is tantamount to knowing oneself.⁷

Feuerbach's philosophy of religion emerged as a response to Hegel's idealist system. In Hegel, God represents the self-consciousness of the Absolute Spirit; in Feuerbach, this spirit is identified with humanity itself. Consequently, anthropology replaces metaphysics, and the study of humans supplants theology. It is not God who creates humanity, but rather God is a creation of humanity.⁸ This perspective initiated a radical transformation in nineteenth-century thought: religion ceased to be the study of a supernatural reality and became, instead, an object for the examination of human nature.

Feuerbach contends that through religion, humans come to know their own essence but in a distorted manner. Religious consciousness represents an attempt to recognize one's own nature; yet this awareness is inverted. Humans attribute their own nature to God and then confront this God to acknowledge their own insignificance. This inverted consciousness accounts for both the power and the tragedy of

⁴ Feuerbach, *Hristiyanlığın Özü*, 12.

⁵ Feuerbach, *Hristiyanlığın Özü*, 12.

⁶ Feuerbach, *Hristiyanlığın Özü*, 38.

⁷ Feuerbach, *Hristiyanlığın Özü*, 51.

⁸ Feuerbach, *Hristiyanlığın Özü*, 65, 301.

religion.⁹ According to Feuerbach, religion arises from the projection of fundamental human emotions-such as love, hope, and fear-onto a transcendent object. Faced with the forces of nature, humans experience fear; this fear, combined with the search for security, gives rise to the idea of a “protective being.” God becomes both a beloved and feared figure as a result of the fusion of these emotions. In this way, religion represents the cultural expression of human emotional life. At this point, Feuerbach maintains that religion is based not on cognition but on emotion. Religious belief is not a form of rational knowledge, but an expression of human longings. At the center of religion lies the heart, not reason. The proposition that “God is love” demonstrates that God reflects human emotions. Consequently, Feuerbach defines religion as a projection of humanity’s own heartfelt feelings.¹⁰

Feuerbach’s understanding of religion exerted a lasting influence on many thinkers after the nineteenth century. Marx’s theory of “alienation from one’s own labor” can be seen as a socio-economic adaptation of Feuerbach’s concept of “self-alienation.” Nietzsche’s proclamation that “God is dead” represents the nihilistic culmination of Feuerbach’s human-centered thought. Freud, in turn, extends this line of thought into psychological depth: God becomes the unconscious projection of human repressed desires and childhood fears.

Feuerbach’s anthropological theology acquires a psycho-anthropological dimension in Freud. The anthropological origins of religion become not merely a conscious reflection but the symbolic expression of a repressed desire.

2. Freud’s Theory of Religion and Its Psychoanalytic Background

Freud’s theory of religion emerges from the internal logic of his psychological framework; religion is a phenomenon arising from the complex interplay of biological, social, and unconscious forces within the human psyche. Freud approaches religion not through a metaphysical or theological lens, but as an expression of psychic dynamics. Accordingly, he explains religion at times as an obsession, at times as

⁹ Feuerbach, *Hristiyanlığın Özü*, 284.

¹⁰ Feuerbach, *Hristiyanlığın Özü*, 81.

an illusion, and at other times as rooted in the emotions and desires experienced during childhood.¹¹

In a 1918 letter to Pfister, Freud describes himself as “not an enemy of religion, but someone attempting to understand it psychologically.”¹² This statement indicates his approach to religion as both reductionist and analytically distanced: religion is not to be eradicated but understood as a distinct psychic form.

Freud’s philosophy of religion is constructed around three major works. In *Totem and Taboo* (1912–1913)¹³, he examines religion through a historical and anthropological framework. In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927)¹⁴, he argues that religious consciousness is essentially a form of neurosis. His final work on religion, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939)¹⁵, revisits the themes of the previous two books and additionally analyzes the three major monotheistic religions from this perspective.

Together, these three works approach the origins of religion as both a historical-anthropological and a psychic-psychodynamic development. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud locates the origin of religion in totemic consciousness, where primal guilt, taboo, and the sacred are intertwined. *The Future of an Illusion* explores the individual psychic foundations of religion, while *Moses and Monotheism* investigates the cultural evolution of monotheism. In this way, Freud examines the phenomenon of religion at the intersection of neurosis, culture, and history.

Freud’s epistemological skepticism rests on the unverifiable nature of religious claims. Religious teachings offer explanations about nature, history, and morality, yet they do not fall within the domain of

¹¹ Robert W. Crapps, “Psikanaliz ve Din: Freud, Jung, Fromm ve Erikson’un Görüşleri,” Tr. trans. Ali Ayten, *Din Psikolojisi: Dine ve Maneviyata Psikolojik Yaklaşımlar*, ed. Ali Ayten (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2017), 65.

¹² Narrator: Ali Köse, *Freud ve Din* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2000), 13.

¹³ Sigmund Freud, *Totem ve Tabu*, Tr. trans. Hasan Can (Ankara: Tutku Yayınevi, 2014).

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, Tr. trans. Aziz Yardımlı (İstanbul: İdea Yayınevi, 2000).

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Musa ve Tek Tanrılı Din*, Tr. trans. Oya Kasap (İstanbul: Say Yayınları, 2012), 113.

scientific knowledge. Freud identifies three reasons that sustain the persistence of these beliefs: the faith of ancestors, the claim that evidence exists, and the prohibition of questioning.¹⁶ The last of these, in particular, represents the strongest defensive reflex of dogma. The prohibition against questioning a doctrine indicates the absence of a rational justification for it. Consequently, for Freud, religion becomes an emotional construct that, while not claiming truth, possesses a compelling persuasive power.

Freud's understanding of religion can be explained on two levels: the historical-social and the psychological-individual. On the historical level, religion represents the institutionalized form of primal guilt and repression. In the totemic father myth, the sons kill the father and, driven by guilt, substitute him with a totem, thereby accounting for the origin of religion.¹⁷ On the psychological plane, this model is repeated within the individual's inner world: the child experiences both love and hostility toward the father simultaneously; this conflict is repressed and transforms into the image of God.¹⁸ In this conception, religious obedience constitutes the reenactment of repressed guilt.

Freud's Oedipus Complex¹⁹ is central to explaining the unconscious foundations of religion. The Oedipus myth illustrates how the father-authority figure is internalized as both an object of fear and desire. According to Freud, belief in God serves as the cultural symbol of this repression: humans have figuratively "killed" the father and, driven by guilt, subsequently elevated him. In this way, religion represents a restructured form of repressed desire. For this reason, Freud characterizes religious experience as "a collective obsessional neurosis."²⁰

The neurosis analogy plays a decisive role in Freud's analysis of religion. Just as a neurotic individual expresses unconscious desires through symbolic forms, humanity transforms repressed emotions

¹⁶ Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, 28-31.

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Psikanalize Giriş Dersleri*, Tr. trans. Selçuk Budak (İstanbul: Öteki Yayınevi, 2018), 253-255.

¹⁸ Köse, *Freud ve Din*, 29-32.

¹⁹ See Freud, *Psikanalize Giriş Dersleri*, 253-255.

²⁰ Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, 35.

into cultural forms via God and sacred symbols.²¹ Freud employs the concept of “illusion” as a key term here: an illusion is a belief that, though unsupported by evidence, satisfies human desires. Accordingly, religion constitutes an “illusion,” but not a mere error; rather, it represents a realized form of human wishes.²²

The centrality of fear, hope, and obedience in religion points to the immature psychological structure of humanity.²³ According to Freud, just as a child seeks refuge in the father, humans turn to God for protection. This dependency, while upholding moral order, becomes a structure that limits free will. Religion inhibits individual autonomy, continuously binding humans to an external authority. Yet Freud does not view this entirely negatively; throughout history, religion has restrained instincts and contributed to the establishment of civilization.²⁴ However, he argues that this function of religion is historically approaching obsolescence, as reason and science are now capable of maintaining social order.²⁵

One of Freud’s most striking observations is his assertion that “in every age, immorality has derived no less support from religion than morality has.”²⁶ Religious prohibitions preserve social order but also dull individual conscience. Freud views religion here as a dual regulatory system on one hand controlling society, and on the other perpetuating repressed guilt.

In Freud’s thought, belief in God constitutes a stage in humanity’s confrontation with its own psychic history. Turning toward God is, in fact, a turning toward one’s own unconscious. Accordingly, Freud’s analysis of religion is less a metaphysical inquiry than a psycho-anthropological reading. Religion represents a means by which humans make sense of their fears, desires, and guilt.

²¹ Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, 23.

²² Freud distinguishes between illusion and error. According to him, an illusion refers to a belief primarily motivated by the satisfaction of desire. Such feelings arise from human wishes and cannot be empirically verified. Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, 36-37.

²³ Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, 39-45.

²⁴ Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, 50.

²⁵ Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, 66.

²⁶ Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, 45.

3. Thematic Traces of Feuerbach's Influence in Freud's Philosophy of Religion

Many of the foundational elements in Freud's understanding of religion can be read as implicit dialogues with Feuerbach's theological anthropology. Although Freud cites Feuerbach explicitly only sparingly, the conceptual parallels within the underlying framework are both pronounced and continuous.²⁷ The historical evidence for this relationship does not rest solely on thematic similarities; it also draws on his youthful reading practices and on probable textual engagements that, due to his later destruction of personal notes, cannot be directly verified but are highly plausible.²⁸ Moreover, the accessibility of Feuerbach's works in the intellectual milieu of the time should be noted as additional evidence reinforcing the likelihood of Freud's intensive engagement with them.²⁹

Feuerbach's formula that "God is the exalted projection of human essence" is translated into psychoanalytic terms in Freud: the idea of God represents the unconscious projection of repressed desires, the need for protection, and the childhood image of the father.³⁰ The key shift here is the move from philosophical projection to clinical projection: where Feuerbach speaks of "self-projection," Freud analyzes the same pattern through the triad of desire-illusion-repression. While Feuerbach conceives God as a reflection of human essence, Freud argues that this projection operates at an unconscious level. In this way, Freud transposes Feuerbach's philosophical anthropology into a psycho-anthropological framework. God is no longer merely a product of thought, but a father figure constructed by the unconscious.³¹

In the contemporary period, P. Tillich, influenced by Feuerbach, advises anyone rediscovering Freud's theory of projection to return to

²⁷ Cyril Levitt & Anouk Turgeon, "Sigmund Freud's Intensive Reading of Ludwig Feuerbach," *Canadian Journal of Psychoanalysis* 17, no. 1 (2009), 16.

²⁸ Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *The Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 131-134.

²⁹ Levitt & Turgeon, "Sigmund Freud's Intensive Reading of Ludwig Feuerbach," 16.

³⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Faith According to Luther*, trans. Melvin Chernob (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 109.

³¹ Köse, *Freud ve Din*, 29-32.

Feuerbach, since, according to Tillich, Feuerbach was the first to develop a genuine theory of projection.³² Nevertheless, the approaches of Freud and Feuerbach to religion and God differ significantly in methodology. Freud's intellectual breadth and depth do not match Feuerbach's. Although Freud drew on Feuerbach's theories of religion, his critiques of religion are notably harsher and at times even sarcastic, prioritizing a confrontational stance over analytical resolution. For this reason, defining Feuerbach solely through Freud's interpretations, or claiming that both share the same purpose, constitutes an anachronistic approach that obscures the historical and intellectual reality. From Freud's perspective, God appears not as a transcendent being but as a father-authority figure shaped within the dramatic stage of the unconscious. This can be related to the relationship between Feuerbach's image of the Father and God, as well as to the processes underlying the formation of the superego:

God is man's father. The father is that which the child is not. He is for the child what the child cannot be for himself. The child is dependent, not free, and lacks the capacity for self-care and self-protection.³³

The relationship that Feuerbach and Freud establish between the God and father figures is closely tied to the Christian Trinity doctrine, which lies at the center of both of their critiques, particularly the Father-Son bond. He seems to anticipate Freud's later formulation of the Oedipus Complex, which would become highly debated; he expresses his views on this matter through the figure of the Virgin Mary:

The son's love for his mother is his first experience of love toward a woman. A man's love for a woman, his youthful affection for a virgin, and the first sacred veneration in religion all find their expression in the son's love for his mother; the son's love for his mother is the man's first desire for a woman-it is the first instance in which he thinks of another before himself.³⁴

³² Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, ed. Carl E. Braaten (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1968), 435.

³³ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Faith According to Luther*, 109. For a similar statement, see Feuerbach, *The Essence of Faith According to Luther*, 111.

³⁴ Feuerbach, *Hristiyanlığın Özü*, 99.

Freud's frequently cited reversal "man created God in his own image" replaces the theological claim of the creation narrative with an anthropological-psychological explanation. This inversion represents the psychoanalytic version of Feuerbach's analogous judgment in his critique of Christianity. What makes this reversal possible is humanity's tendency to idealize its own needs and aspirations: God is the symbolic sum of the desire for protection, the expectation of justice, and the longing for immortality. While Freud emphasizes that this sum operates according to "wish fulfillment" rather than a "reality test," he systematically transforms Feuerbach's dream metaphor into a full-fledged "theory of illusion."³⁵

Feuerbach's dream-religion analogy becomes more concrete in Freud, as he interprets dreams as the language of the unconscious: just as desires achieve fulfillment in symbolic dream-scenes, religion organizes a similar symbolic gratification on a collective scale. Therefore, the focus should be on the "psychic function" rather than the "reference to reality" of religious images; Freud relocates the claim to truth from the domain of epistemology to that of psychodynamics. What Feuerbach calls "the self-externalization of human consciousness," Freud terms "the return of the repressed"; repressed conflicts return elevated in the form of the God-image.³⁶

The "Father-God" axis constitutes a central motif in both thinkers. Feuerbach links the conceptualization of God with paternal qualities to human dependence and the desire for protection, whereas Freud grounds this dependence clinically within the Oedipal structure of childhood conflicts. The child experiences both admiration and jealousy toward the father; when these ambivalent feelings are repressed, a glorified father-image (God) is established through guilt and identification. Through this theory, Freud explains why God appears in the figure of the father and how this relates to religion.³⁷ Thus, Feuerbach's human-centered insight becomes an element within Freud's

³⁵ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Klasik, İbraniye ve Hristiyan Antik Çağının Kaynaklarına Göre Tanrıların Doğuşu*, Tr. trans. Oğuz Özügül (İstanbul: Say Yayınları, 2018), 235.

³⁶ Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, 53-64.

³⁷ Micheal Argyle, *Din ve Psikoloji*, Tr. trans. Hatice Büşra Gök (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2022), 134.

understanding of neurosis. According to Freud, religion is a universal obsessional neurosis that allows repressed desires to reemerge in a sacred form.³⁸

Freud's debt to Feuerbach is also evident in the domain of death anxiety and the desire for immortality. Feuerbach interprets the idea of immortality as an attempt to compensate for human helplessness in the face of death; Freud translates this trajectory into a clinical language, framing death anxiety as investment in belief in God and the afterlife. The underlying continuity lies in the transformation of fear into a design for "transcendent security": consciousness, unable to cope with mortality, establishes emotional equilibrium through concepts of the otherworld and ultimate justice. Freud's observation that "unrealized justice will be compensated in the afterlife" represents a psychologized reinterpretation of Feuerbach's immanent understanding of the relationship between morality and religion.

Freud's historical-cultural explanation similarly aligns with the Feuerbachian perspective: totemic prohibitions, the inviolability of the sacred, and the experience of guilt account for the social origins of religion. This triad is linked to the institutionalization of guilt following the "killing of the father" through law and taboo. While Feuerbach interprets this process as "man's alienation from himself through the externalization of his own essence," Freud situates its clinical counterpart in the "conflict between the self and the drives." Consequently, religion both contributes to the establishment of social order and, by perpetuating the repression-identification cycle, can delay individual maturation.

Freud advances the theory of illusion by transforming the critical insight he inherited from Feuerbach into psychoanalytic precision. After grounding the origin of the idea of God and religious beliefs in illusion and human emotions, Freud acknowledges that this perspective was not unique to him but had been articulated earlier by other thinkers.³⁹ He states that his own contribution is the addition of a psychological dimension to these approaches. Although Freud does not

³⁸ Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, 52.

³⁹ Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, 42.

explicitly name him, the influence of Feuerbach is clearly discernible in the background of these reflections on the origins, nature, and consciousness of religion. Indeed, Feuerbach anticipated the arguments that Freud would later develop nearly seventy years earlier. As Küng puts it, “the grandfather of Marxist atheism and Freudian atheism” was Feuerbach, who was once a theologian, then a Hegelian, and finally an atheist philosopher.⁴⁰ According to Küng, the foundational basis of Freud's atheistic thought is nourished by Feuerbach.⁴¹ However, an illusion does not have to be false; what defines it as an illusion is that it is based on the satisfaction of desire and enjoys a persuasive force without the necessity of evidence.⁴² Therefore, the classification of religion as an “illusion” does not reduce it to the level of an ordinary error; on the contrary, it explains the source of its psychological power. Feuerbach's dream imagery similarly illustrates the emotional and symbolic nature of this power. In his work *Theogonie*, Feuerbach emphasizes the significance of dreams and explains, with examples, the influence of certain mental mechanisms and the desires that guide them on the dream processes as follows:

Miracles are embodied dreams, and dreams are mental miracles, for dreams are the creators of miracles. (Lucian, *Somn.*14) Dreams satiate the hungry without food, heal the sick without medicine, and release prisoners without means of liberation; dream wands work wonders, transforming them into snakes, humans into birds, deserts into paradises, food and drink into nectar and ambrosia. Dreams even awaken the dead from their graves, presenting them to us as vividly as if they stood bodily before our eyes.⁴³

In Freud's theory, the call for the inheritance of reason (*logos*) functions as the psychological counterpart to Feuerbach's proposition of “anthropology in place of theology”: the immutability of sacred prohibitions produces stasis in historical progress, whereas reason, as a

⁴⁰ Hans Küng, *Freud and the Problem of God*, trans. Edward Quinn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 3.

⁴¹ Küng, *Freud and the Problem of God*, 75.

⁴² Freud, *Bir Yanılsamanın Geleceği*, 36-37.

⁴³ Feuerbach, *Klasik, İbranice ve Hristiyan Antik Çağının Kaynaklarına Göre Tanrıların Doğuşu*, 235.

flexible and regulating principle, can establish both individual autonomy and social order more effectively. This proposition is not merely a moral guideline but also carries a therapeutic dimension, for the overcoming of neurosis becomes possible through the recognition of what has been repressed and the guidance of critical reason. Thus, Feuerbach's humanist critique evolves into a clinical humanism in Freud.

The father-God image, the dream-illusion nexus, the compensatory dynamics along the axes of death and justice, and the totemic triad of crime-prohibition-sacred-all of these constitute the principal loci where Feuerbach's philosophical schemas find their clinical counterpart in Freud. Freud's thesis of the "universal obsessional neurosis" is the psychoanalytically encoded equivalent of Feuerbach's assertion that "man exalts himself in God." In other words, the backbone of Freud's critique of religion can be read as the psychodynamic translation of Feuerbach's theological anthropology. This translation is evident not only at the level of content but also methodologically: Feuerbach's intuitive-philosophical analysis is mapped onto Freud's clinical-case logic, and the categories of "human nature-essence" are recast into the triad of "drive-repression-identification."

Conclusion

Feuerbach and Freud represent two complementary dimensions of modern criticism of religion. Both contend that religion is not a transcendent truth but the outcome of human existential needs. On this shared ground, religion emerges as a symbolic condensation of fear, hope, the longing for justice, and the desire for protection. The distinction between them lies in the depth of explanation: Feuerbach grounds projection at the level of consciousness, while Freud relocates it to the unconscious, anchored in the father-image, repression, and guilt.

For Feuerbach, emancipation begins when human beings recognize in themselves the qualities they have attributed to God; ethics is thus withdrawn from a theological and placed on an anthropological foundation. Freud, on the other hand, seeks to uncover and dissolve

the neurotic patterns that sustain religious dependence. Although religion once functioned as a formative discipline in the evolution of civilization, it should, with maturity, give way to science and critical reason.

Within this framework, Freud transforms Feuerbach's maxim "theology is anthropology" into "theology is psychodynamics." The idea of God becomes the cultural symbol of repressed desires and paternal authority. Religion is neither wholly false nor wholly beneficial; it fulfills a historical need but recedes as humanity discovers its own autonomy and rational potential.

In this sense, Freud's philosophy of religion renders Feuerbach's anthropological insight with clinical precision. "Finding man while seeking God" summarizes Feuerbach's contribution, whereas "explaining God by deciphering man" captures Freud's. Together, they chart the intellectual trajectory of the modern subject's transition from external authority to inner consciousness, a passage from the sacred to the self-aware.

Thus, while Freud examines religion from a psycho-pathological perspective, Feuerbach approached it from a psycho-anthropological angle. Despite all the similarities, the most significant distinction lies in Freud's use of his theories to radically reject religion. Indeed, commentators who overlook this difference have sometimes misinterpreted Feuerbach by reading him through the lens of Freud and his theories.

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