

Freud, Sigmund. *The Future of an Illusion*. Translated by W. D. Robson-Scott. Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1927.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939 A.D.) was an Austrian neurologist who specialized in treating mental illness. Freud founded psychoanalysis, which was a comprehensive theory of human psychology and psychological pathology. His therapeutic work grew from the technique of free association. Freud's innovative work spawned a host of competing theories.

Chapter 1. Very few individuals can offer a global cultural critique. Ignorance of the past and present make one's predictions of the future less reliable. Human culture consists in the ability to take resources from nature and the program by which these resources are distributed. Cultural progress depends upon coercion and instinctual renunciation. This is so because every individual has culturally destructive tendencies. The majority is lazy and unintelligent, unresponsive to reason. Human instinct, shaped by early childhood experiences, sets the course of human behavior.

Chapter 2. Culture causes opposition from those on whom it makes its demands. All members of a society have rebellious and destructive passions, and culture frustrates human instincts, creating privation by means of cultural prohibitions. Neurotics are persons who react asocially to cultural frustration. The sphere of cultural prohibitions and cultural compensations for enduring their frustrations is the "psychical sphere" of culture. As external cultural compulsion is internalized, the super-ego makes a child a moral and social being. But most obey only to the extent of external force, so long as they fear consequences. A person's moral level is determined by his or her degree of cultural internalization. Cultural ideals allow members to despise those of other cultures, which despising is a compensation for wrongs suffered within one's own culture. Art is another compensation, but is unavailable to the exhausted and uneducated masses.

Chapter 3. What is the value of religious ideas? Abolishing cultural prohibition leads to anarchy and tyranny. In humanity's natural state, *sans* culture, nature restricts by destroying. Culture exists to defend humans against natural destruction. Culture does not defeat nature. The elements mock human control: earthquakes, floods, storms, diseases, and ultimately, death itself. Life is hard to endure. Culture tames nature's threats by "humanizing" them. Culture makes natural forces into human actors of a sort, and tells us to appease their angers as do we other humans: appease, bribe, rob them. Culture psychologizes nature. The gods exist to exorcise the terrors of nature, to explain fate, and to compensate for the privations of culture. These religious ideas grow from the human need to ameliorate the helplessness of man, and are built from memories of the helplessness one experienced as a child and infant. So arises the theology of modern Western Christendom. Gods are collapsed into the one God, and paternal intimacy emphasized. Theodicy is achieved in final judgment. What is the value of these ideas?

Chapter 4. Freud considers objections to his views. 1) The way you express your ideas sounds strange. Answer: that is because mine is a non-religious account of religious ideas. 2) Primitive thought was natural, not psychological. Therefore, your explanation is superfluous. Answer: Primitives projected their earliest, infantile experience, that to survive one must establish relations with dangers and influence them. 3) Your current explanation of religion, as infantile projection, contradicts your earlier explanation of religion as son-father projections. Answer: The explanations are complementary. The child learns he will be a child forever, endangered by great powers. The child, mankind, creates gods, then propitiates them.

Chapter 5. Religion consists in dogmas outside individual experience conjoined with a claim one should believe those dogmas. Non-religious dogmas make claims to credence, but then explain how you as an individual might verify the claim. Religious dogmas forbid such investigations and claim authenticity on the basis of the antiquity of the dogma. This makes religious dogmas suspect. The ancients were ignorant, as compared to us, and the texts from which the dogmas derive are themselves suspect. So, religionists cast about for rational justifications of their ideas. Spiritualist, anti-rationalist (Anselm's *credo quia absurdum*) and modern philosophical "as if" theory are each sub-rational. Nevertheless, despite this sub-rationality and suspiciousness in religious dogma, these religious ideas exercise the very strongest influence on mankind, Why?

Chapter 6. Religious ideas are illusions of wish-fulfillment. Illusions are not merely error, but are rather beliefs strongly motivated by wish-fulfillment that disregard their relation to reality. Reason cannot address the issues raised by religious illusions. So, why not believe? Tradition, broad acceptance, and consolation argue we should. Freud counters that ignorance is just ignorance, and does not entitle the ignorant to believe anything in particular. False reasoning and intellectual insincerity are rampant in the religious thinkers.

Chapter 7. The “illusion” critique may well apply to other areas of life: politics, gender, sex. Those are discussions for others to pursue. Freud answers objections: 1) Society is premised on religion; to deny religious truth is to threaten societal stability. Answer: Our religious attitudes are a greater danger than their disruption. Freud may be harmed by this book, but he cares little. Psychoanalysis may be harmed, but it is only a method of investigation. Religion has long-influenced human culture. But it has not reconciled men to their civilizations. Men are neither happy nor moral. Religious belief has declined because the upper classes have embraced the scientific spirit. As the scientific approach grows, religious belief declines. The uncomprehending masses become a danger as religious restraints decline. We must suppress the masses, or prevent their awareness of the illusory nature of religious dogma, or fundamentally revise the relation of culture to religion.

Chapter 8. How can the relation of culture and religion be revised? Consider the murder prohibition. It has a rational basis, but we add “God’s opinion” to that reason. This ultimately weakens the prohibition, causing the murder prohibition to be questioned because the view of the divine is dubious. Religion derives from Oedipal drives. Religion expresses a ubiquitous “obsessional neurosis.” It derives from repressions; rationality should supercede those.

Chapter 9. Freud considers objections. 1) Freud contradicts himself. The masses are irrational, but his program would have them be rational. His program is dangerous not only to himself and psychoanalysis, but also to the masses unleashed by his thought, which could destroy civilizations. The French and Russian revolutions were of Freud’s sentiments. Freud acknowledges that religion is more than neurosis, but then wishes to do away with it as though it were only neurosis. Answer: Religion retards healthy intelligence. Education at present aims to inculcate religious doctrine and stymie sexual development. The human psychological ideal is the primacy of intelligence. Women have weaker minds. Freud admits he may be chasing his own illusions, and religion is not so bad as it seems to him. We need an “education to reality” which is a non-religious education. Advocating this “education to reality” is the purpose of Freud’s book.

Chapter 10. Freud consider further objections. Some argue Freud’s program merely replaces a familiar and tested illusion with an untested and unfamiliar one. Answer: Freud’s view may be an illusion, but it is subject to factual verification and disproof, and is not, therefore, delusional. Freud’s position is just Freud expressing his “however-inadequate” opinion. Reason is a quiet voice, but more powerful than the opponents believe. Religion and science both seek reduction of suffering and the brotherhood of man. But religion is less patient, more demanding and selfish than science. If a religionist’s god is discredited, that religionist loses all interest in life. The scientist’s expectations are less extravagant and more realistic. Complaints about science are unfounded. Science’s process approximates truth and progresses. The human senses tell important, if not ultimate, information. Science is not illusion. What it gives, we cannot get elsewhere.