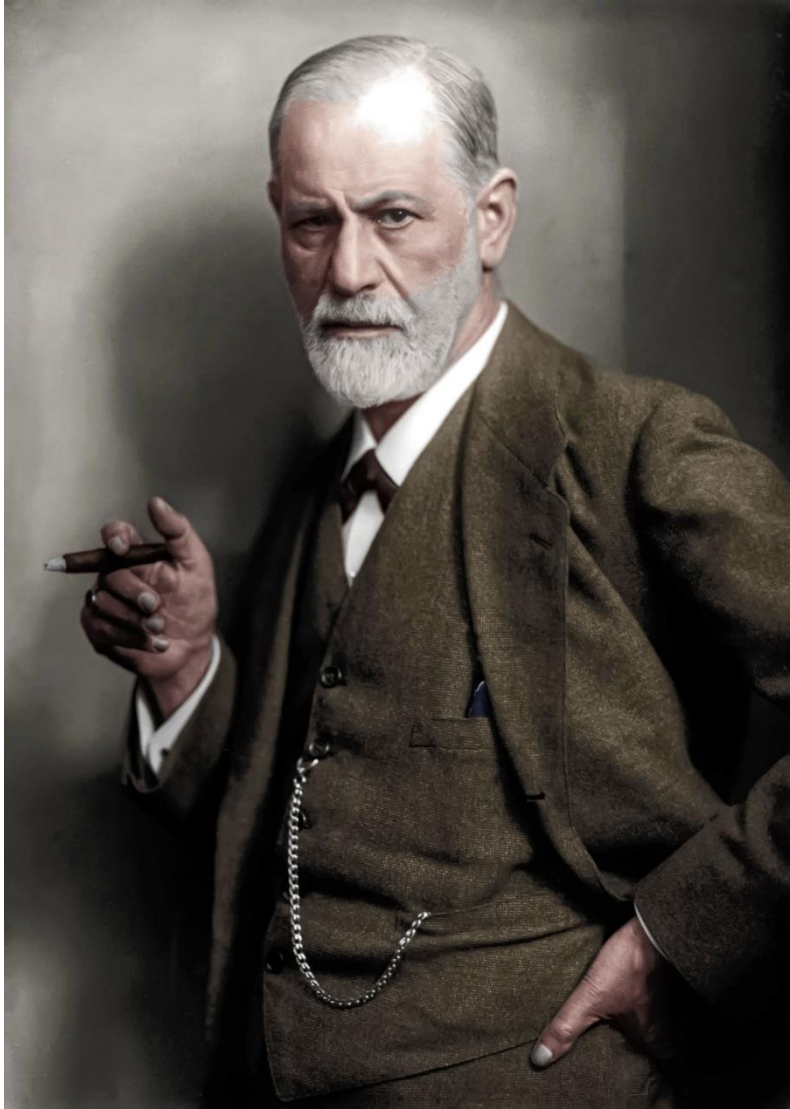


# THE CONCEPT OF RELIGION ACCORDING TO SIGMUND FREUD

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## 1.2. ACCORDING TO SIGMUND FREUD

Freud characterizes religion as a neurosis<sup>1</sup> and an illusion. Claiming that man's beliefs are created by man himself, he says that they stem from man's neuroses. He developed a theory of religion in relation to his own theory of human psychodynamics. In this theory he argues that religious beliefs are reflections of psychic tensions, conflicts and complexes. According to this theory, gods or spirits are defined as ancestral figures developed by people with ambivalent feelings and are the common shared fantasies of society. As a result, religion is characterized as a common neurosis. According to Freud, religion, as Marx thought, has a function of distracting society. However, unlike Marx's social evaluation of this situation, Freud evaluates it as a problem of personality. He claims that religion is a game that people resort to in order to solve their personality problems. In this regard, Freud goes back to the childhood of the individual and mentions that the first stage in the evolution of personality is the child's feeling of complete powerlessness in a realm that he does not understand in any way. He states that in the face of this powerlessness, the parents, who are a kind of omnipotent absolute who fulfill the wishes of the child, appear. Later on, when his beliefs take a more formalized form, when he encounters other situations that remind him of his childhood, he easily adapts himself to his childhood situation. He becomes ready and willing to rediscover the omnipotent absolute that he has longed for since time immemorial under a different form. Religion, he says, is precisely a structure that fulfills this longing. Let us further elaborate on Freud's theory by quoting Erikson: "Parental faith, which supports the trust that emerges in the newborn child, has throughout history found its institutional guarantee (and sometimes its greatest enemy) in organized religion. Trust, the result of protection, is the touchstone of the reality of any religion. Common to all religions are: a sometimes childlike surrender to the Creator or Creators who bestow spiritual health, as well as worldly blessings; a diminutive or humble attitude that reveals human insignificance; a confession of bad behavior, evil thoughts and intentions through prayer and song, and a heartfelt plea for inner peace through divine guidance; finally, the need for individual trust to be a common faith and individual insecurity to be a common conceptualized evil. On the other hand, it is also common for the individual to find the source of his recovery in the rituals in which the majority participates and which become a sign of trust in the community."<sup>2</sup> In sum, Freud basically says that Freud's childhood psychology and the search for shelter and protection similar to parents in the face of natural phenomena later led him to God or gods, and that this was the origin of religion. According to him, this universal obsession of man will disappear with the growth of the child, that is, with the scientific progress of humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> Neurosis is a mental illness that arrests social attitudes and behavior and is accompanied by the awareness that the person is mentally ill.

<sup>2</sup> Mardin, *a.g.e*, s.43-44.