

# Summary of Challenge to Religion posed by Psychology

Thinker	Main ideas	Challenge to religion	Some responses from religious viewpoint	Quotes
<b>Ludwig Feuerbach</b>	<p>God is</p> <p>a projection based on human insecurities</p> <p>an idealisation of human desires</p>	<p>God is explained away as simply a product of psychological hopes and fears</p>	<p>Explaining a psychological need for God ≠ explaining away God</p> <p>The two are separate questions</p> <p>Feuerbach's explanation does not account for <i>via negativa</i> (apophatic) understanding of God</p>	
<b>Sigmund Freud</b>	<p><b>On morality</b></p> <p>Notion of the cultural super-ego and the individual super-ego</p> <p><i>Microcosmic level</i></p> <p>Conflict between urge for personal happiness and the urge for union with other human beings</p> <p><i>Macrocsmic level</i></p> <p>Analogous conflict between aggressive tendency and development of culture</p> <p>Community evolves a super-ego to oversee development of culture &amp; great spiritual leaders set cultural super-ego in same way as significant others set individual super-ego</p> <p>Cultural super-ego sets strict (unrealisable) ideals e.g. 'Love your neighbour as yourself'</p> <p>Results in a kind of cultural neurosis</p> <p><b>On religion</b></p> <p>Religion is a psychological product made up of</p> <p>A response to a frightening world &amp; relation to Father figure (cf. Feuerbach)</p> <p>Sublimation of inner tensions</p> <p>A guilt-reflex relating to parricide in the primal horde</p>	<p>1 Greatest command in Christianity is reduced to an unrealisable ideal within the cultural super-ego ∴ promoting 'as much unhappiness as aggressiveness itself'</p> <p>2 On the level of the individual, the faculty of conscience as God's interior law is explained away as simply the super-ego</p> <p>3 F rejects the 'ought implies can' approach of Christian ethics (and other ethics) – he sees irreconcilable tension between Christian ethical demands and the abilities of humans to meet them</p> <p>As in Feuerbach, God is explained away as simply a product of psychological hopes and fears and guilt</p> <p>F believed that the religion would disappear once psychoanalysis had shown it to be an illusion</p>	<p>1 Christians would obviously object: the Great Commandment is the medicine not the disease; any good that has been done in the world is because of its embodiment in practical actions</p> <p>2 How, then, would F explain the 'counter-cultural' or 'prophetic' aspect of conscience? Conscience does not merely conform to the past; it sometimes challenges it and looks for new solutions (cf. Anti-slavery movement, US Civil Rights, Apartheid, etc.)</p> <p>3 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' is an unrealisable ideal until grace (God's life within) operates in the soul. Besides, any person knows what it is to think of others before self – this is the <i>agape</i> ideal.</p> <p>1. No evidence of a primal horde from ethnology or anthropology</p> <p>2. Ignores the importance of the mother figure &amp; not all religions have a central Father figure</p> <p>3. Most religious teachers would agree that religion meets psychological needs- but that does not mean it is untrue</p> <p>4. The untruth of religion is assumed, not proven</p> <p>5. Are Freud's theories science? He believed in science and yet it is not certain that his own theories are either rational or scientific</p> <p>6. ...</p>	
<b>Carl Gustav Jung</b>	<p>On the face of it, 'friendlier' to religion than F</p> <p>Rejected F's belief that libido ('desire energy') was at root sexual – believed instead that it was a 'great river of energy' that was not exclusively sexual in origin</p> <p>He turned to the theory of <b>archetypes</b> to explain dreams, these being 'religious' in a broad sense and stemming from the collective unconscious</p> <p>Highlighted the need for <b>individuation</b> &amp; religion has an essential role to play in this – psychotherapist and clergyman should join forces</p> <p>Stressed the empirical approach to spiritual matters</p> <p>In later life, thought that the psychological God- experience could not prove the existence of God though it did provide evidence</p>	<p>Promotes the instrumental value of religion (in helping a person attain individuation or wholeness) possibly at the expense of its truth claims</p> <p>Empirical approach tends to see different religion in terms of functional aspects – tendency to <b>syncretism</b></p> <p>Was <b>heterodox</b> on some fundamental points of Christianity:</p> <p>Thought that traditional explanation for evil as a privation of the good inadequate to explain empirical reality of evil</p> <p>Rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and replaced it with a doctrine of the 'Quaternity' where the fourth person was evil itself</p> <p>Had little time for intellectual approach (i.e. development of doctrine) in religion</p>	<p>1 Major religions stake their claims firstly on the truth value: i.e. they claim that this is the way things are</p> <p>2 Hence they reject the syncretistic tendency to see all religions as essentially boiling down to the same thing (except possibly Hinduism)</p> <p>3 Christianity would obviously uphold its central doctrines about the nature of God, the Holy Trinity and the nature of evil</p> <p>4 Some Christians would also hold that 'the intellectual approach' whilst not being the be all and end all of religion is nonetheless an important aspect of it; 'faith seeks understanding' in Anselm's phrase; reason can and should be a companion to faith</p>	