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Magis God Wiki: Can Atheism be Rational?

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Introduction

We must first discuss whether the existence of God can be disproved. As will be seen, this is not possible because the three modes of obtaining publicly accessible evidence (a-priori, a-posteriori, and a combination of both) cannot be used to support the non-existence of a transcendent being (see Unit F Section I). In view of this, atheism cannot in principle be, a rational enterprise. We must then look into the most common reasons for atheism, and respond to the choices and the agendas that most frequently underlie the claim of atheism. Some of these claims may be classified as follows:

1. Personal reasons:

- a. "I don't think an all-powerful all-loving God would permit my or others' suffering."
- b. "I do not want to be accountable to or responsible to a transcendent entity."
- c. "If God exists, then I can't be absolutely free and absolutely responsible, but I am; therefore God doesn't exist for me."
- d. "All religion is wishful thinking (a projection of a good God to assuage my feelings of fear and loneliness), but I can take the truth; therefore I choose not to believe in God."

2. Atheism which is really against religion (but not against God).

- a. "Religion has done more harm than good throughout history (torture and wars). Therefore, religion must be suppressed in our society."
- b. "Religion is the opiate of the people, and as long as people think about the next life, they will not engage in revolution or any other social upheaval necessary for social change; therefore, religion should be suppressed in our society."

These opinions need to be responded to, because they are only partially valid, and sometimes quite misleading and incorrect. Section 2 will briefly redress some of the problems in the above contentions. Special consideration will be given to the frequent objection that belief in God is mere wishful thinking (Section 3 because this objection attacks the integrity, authenticity, and courage of believers, and, as a consequence seems to unconsciously undermine faith in young people. (Section 3).

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The Impossibility of Disproving the Existence of God

It may be thought that the existence of God can be disproved. One obvious difficulty with this contention is that it would entail the denial of the two proofs given in MOERF – God, Units F&G, and in NPEG Chaps Three through Five, which, in turn, would entail a myriad of intrinsic contradictions and denials of fact (including the denial of one's own existence). But there is a more sweeping problem with this contention, namely, it cannot be accomplished in principle because the unrestricted nature of God renders all methods of disproof fruitless. This can be shown by referring back to the three ways of proving the truth or falsity of claims. Recall from MOERF - God, Unit F that a claim may be considered reasonable and responsible if:

1 it can be affirmed by rigorous public corroboration, or

2 its denial leads to an intrinsic contradiction, or

3 its denial leads to a contradiction of fact (a rigorously corroborated state of affairs).

None of these methods can be used to prove the nonexistence of God. The following will make this clear.

The first method (rigorous public corroboration) is quite useful for proving the existence of a reality, but useless for proving the nonexistence of a reality. If, for example, I wish to prove the existence of dogs, I need only experience one, and have other people corroborate that experience. However, if I wish to prove the nonexistence of, say, phoenixes, I would have to experience everything that there is to experience, be certain that I had exhausted the entire range of possible experiences, and notice that phoenixes are not there. This would seem to be a rather daunting prospect.

Proving the nonexistence of God by this method is even more daunting, for God, as defined (the absence of intrinsic or extrinsic parameters which make realities accessible to human sensation, imagination, and understanding), is, in principle, beyond human experience. If God were to be experienceable, God would have to make an aspect of Himself accessible to us (such as an

experience of His love or beauty (as in mystical or religious experience).^[1] Therefore, the first method of disproof cannot be applied to an unconditioned, unrestricted being (God).

The second method (proving falsity through intrinsic contradiction), is equally fruitless. As noted above, contradictions arise out of the exclusionary properties of boundaries or restrictions (e.g., the boundaries of square exclude the boundaries of circle, or the boundaries of proton exclude the boundaries of electron, such that one cannot have a square-circle or a proton-electron in the same respect at the same place and time). An entity without any intrinsic or extrinsic boundaries or restrictions (i.e., an absolutely simple Reality) would be purely inclusive, and therefore, would not exclude anything extrinsically (from Itself) or intrinsically (“within” Itself). If there are no exclusionary properties intrinsic to “absolutely simple, unrestricted, unconditioned Reality,” then there can never be a basis for intrinsic contradiction. If there is no boundary or restriction, there is no basis for contradiction.

The third method (proving nonexistence through a contradiction of fact) is also fruitless for a similar reason. If a reality is to be proven contradictory to fact (i.e., to be a contradiction of a publicly corroborated state of affairs), it must be capable of being contradicted. For example, if I am to prove that an electron does not exist at a particular coordinate (x, y, z), then all I need do is prove that there is a proton (or some other contradictory particle or state of affairs) at that coordinate (x, y, z) in the same respect at the same time. The contradictory properties of electron and proton make this kind of disproof possible.

However, as noted above, contradiction is based on the exclusionary property of boundaries or restrictions. Now, if an entity has no intrinsic or extrinsic boundaries or restrictions (as has been defined of God), it does not exclude any bounded or restricted being from itself; it does not extrinsically exclude anything. Therefore it cannot be contradicted by any bounded or restricted being. Thus, one cannot say, “If protons exist, God cannot exist,” for the boundaries of protons will never exclude the boundarylessness of God. Similarly, one cannot say, “If squares exist, God cannot exist,” for the boundaries of square do not exclude the boundarylessness of God. The same holds true for all finite realities. The boundaries of a finite thing cannot exclude the boundarylessness of God. Therefore, nothing finite can ever be used to contradict the existence of God. This means that nothing finite (and therefore nothing in our world) could ever be the basis for disproving “God” (as defined).

Inasmuch as these three methods exhaust the scope of formal proof or disproof, it follows that the existence of God cannot be disproved in principle. Thus, given the above definition of “God” (i.e., as absolutely simple – without intrinsic or extrinsic boundaries or restrictions), it would seem that atheism could not be a rational enterprise in the same way as theism.

The Tenuous Rationality of Atheism

As will be shown, atheism frequently arises out of definitional problems. The most prominent ones throughout history are restricted and inadequate definitions of “God,” “love,” and “evil.” We will consider each in turn.

(1) Restricted Definition of God.

At this juncture, the reader might ask, “If the existence of God cannot be disproved, what is the foundation of atheism?” The brief answer is that it cannot be grounded in a formal argument based upon the definition of “God” given above (“absolutely simple” or “unrestricted,” or “infinite” – in the sense of an A-infinity). If a proof against the existence of God is to be formulated, it would have to have an alternative definition of God which introduces exclusionary properties, restrictions, or finitude into the definition.

For example, if one defines “God” as a being which would necessarily interfere with human freedom (which would be contrary to the purely inclusive properties of perfect love and perfect goodness/justice, etc.), then one might be able to formulate an argument which says, “If human beings are absolutely free,^[2] then ‘god’ (defined as necessarily interfering with freedom) cannot exist.”

But the definition of God in this argument is arbitrarily restricted (and contradicts the absolute simplicity and unrestrictedness of the unconditioned Reality -- see Encyclopedia Units E-F). Furthermore, if one understands a purely inclusive God to be perfectly loving and good, one would have to say that God helps human freedom in every way possible to be complete and perfect, and therefore, would not undermine human freedom.

(2) Suffering and “Love.”

One might have had a terrible experience of suffering or grief, and think to oneself, “How could God allow this to happen? My grief is incompatible with a perfectly loving God!” One might go on to think that this is a disproof of the perfect love of God which might suggest that God is not purely inclusive or that pure inclusivity does not include love; and if pure inclusivity does not include love, and God is not perfectly loving, then there is no point in affirming His existence.

There can be little doubt that the primary reason for atheism is the inability to answer the question of human suffering. The importance of this question has led me to write yet another volume entitled *Suffering and the God of Love*. For the moment, I will endeavor a brief answer, though this is quite dangerous because the superficiality intrinsic to brevity may cause resentment on the part of readers who have suffered greatly. Nevertheless, I will proceed in the hopes that the reader will forgive this unavoidable flaw, and direct attention to my other volume on suffering for a lengthier treatment.

Once again, atheism arises out of an assumed definition – but this time it does not arise out of a definition of “God;” it arises out of a definition of “love” which is attributed to God. The effect

is essentially the same because when the inadequate definition of love is attributed to God, it seems to mitigate the perfect inclusivity of God. So, what is this so-called inadequate definition of “love”? It is one that holds that love is incompatible with suffering. In my view, this definition is overly simplistic for several reasons. I will mention only two of them here.

First, the above definition does not consider the interrelationship between freedom and love. If our love is to be our own, then we must be free to do acts of unlove (which could cause great harm, suffering, or evil). Stated conversely, if we are not free to do anything but love, then our love is not our own. It is merely a program of behavior that has nothing to do with our choice. Our love would not be self-initiated. Thus, if God wants to create loving creatures (in imitation of His perfect love), God has to create free beings who can cause suffering and evil in the world by their choices. The dynamics of love and freedom require that God allow us the latitude to grow in love through our human freedom. God’s only alternative to allowing free beings to choose unloving acts is to completely refrain from creating loving creatures. Is that something that perfect Love would do?

The second problem with defining love as incompatible with suffering is that it does not allow for suffering to purify freedom toward love. I will speak solely for myself, here; but often I have contented myself with an incredibly superficial view of life’s meaning (e.g., material well-being, ego-satisfactions, status, etc.) and incredibly superficial views of human beings (as material beings instead of transcendental beings; as problems instead of mysteries) during the “good” times. It was only when I was challenged by real suffering that I began to ask more probative questions, to search for deeper purpose in life, and to let go of what was then manifestly superficial (underliving my life).

These moments of suffering led me to the discovery of love as the purpose of life – to the enjoyment of others’ companionship and friendship, to the recognition of the goodness and lovability of others, to the depth of empathy and compassion; indeed, to the discovery of my heart. I do not think I could have let go of my more superficial, materialistic, egocentric views of happiness and meaning without having experienced suffering, deprivation, and need for others.

Furthermore, I do not believe that I would have discovered my own transcendental identity without this same deprivation and need. Much like Saint Augustine, my contentment with material and ego-satisfactions distracted me from noticing that I had desires for perfect and unconditional Truth, Love, Goodness/Justice, Beauty, and Home (See Encyclopedia Unit C). Though I went to church and had some religious sensibility, I tended to live life on a material-ego level. Suffering not only led to a discovery of my heart, but also of my transcendental desires; and this discovery, in turn, led not only to a discovery of my transmaterial being (what might be termed my “soul”), but also of my yearning for unconditional Love – my yearning for God.

In retrospect, I am grateful for the suffering that led me to the discovery of love, my heart, my soul, and the loving God. I did not like my suffering while I was experiencing it, but the journey – the journey in freedom – that led to the discovery of what is truly pervasive, enduring, and deep, made the suffering worthwhile; for it led to an eternity’s worth of purpose, a true respect for the transcendent other, and the discovery not merely of my heart, but of my transcendent heart and my call to unconditional Love. No, for me, suffering was not incompatible with love. Suffering was the instrument of Love.^[3]

(3) Inadequate Definitions of Evil

Another issue has recurrently emerged throughout the history of philosophy, namely, the problem of evil. It would seem that if God is perfect Goodness and Love, He would not permit evil in the world; and furthermore, it would seem that anything evil should be excluded by God (who was defined above to be a perfectly inclusive Reality). Again, the seeming incompatibility between a perfectly good God (a perfectly inclusive God) and evil arises out of an assumed definition. This time, the definition of “evil” seems incompatible with perfect Goodness and inclusivity. Since evil seems to be evident, it seems to mean either that God is not perfectly good or that a perfectly good (perfectly inclusive) God does not exist.

Let us consider the first point, namely, that if God is perfectly good, He would not allow evil in the world. This contention has already been addressed above with respect to the definition of “love,” so I will only briefly repeat the germane point: if God were to disallow all human evil, then God would have to disallow the free choice to act in an evil way; and if God disallowed the free choice to act in an evil way, He would not allow our good actions to be self-initiated. He would essentially have programmed us for good behaviors, but not allowed us to choose good behaviors over against the option of choosing evil ones; therefore, He would have foreclosed the possibility of our good actions truly being self-initiated, and therefore truly being our own.

Furthermore, acts of human evil can purify our freedom toward perfect Love, for when evil actions are perpetrated against us, we are challenged to respond with a gift of self (love) in forgiveness, mercy, and compassion. These selfless actions (which are frequently undeserved by the perpetrators) are the highest manifestations of human generosity and love. Ironically, they are elicited by evil. The story of my life, as well as world history and literature, are replete with examples of how forgiveness of evil has led to the intensification of goodness and love. Would Europe be the same without the Marshall Plan in which America forgave the debt (and built up the economies) of the nations with whom it had been at war?^[4] Would Viktor Hugo’s hero, Jean Valjean, have existed without the forgiveness of the priest from whom he had stolen the candles?^[5] Would the great ideas of human rights and economic rights have occurred without the forgiveness of centuries of oppression? The list goes on and on.

Evil elicits vengeance, and vengeance begets vengeance, unless a free agent intervenes and lets go of the just offense in a recognizable act of compassion. This act not only stops the cycle of

vengeance begetting vengeance, but also calls collective human consciousness to a higher ideal, a higher sense of collective self, which is at once intrinsically beautiful, while allowing the real possibility of peace. Ironically, this greatest of human choices can be induced by evil.

We may now proceed to the second point of tension between God and evil, namely, that if God is perfectly good, He must exclude evil (which seems to contradict His pure inclusivity). Again, the problem is definitional, for the definition of “evil” seems to get in the way of God being both perfect goodness and perfect inclusivity. However, the definition of “evil” which does this views “evil” as something positive – as something existing in itself.

A brief summary of the volumes which have been written on this since the time of Plato shows a more comprehensive view of “evil” which does not view it as something positive or existing in itself. In this view, evil is seen to be a negation of a free being’s power to love. Obviously, the free being exists, and his power to love exists (and is positive). But evil does not exist apart from this free being and his positive capacity to love. Evil occurs when the existing free agent negates (ignores or undermines) his positive power to love.

Now, these evil actions could have, say, angry feelings embedded in them. But these feelings are not identifiable with evil itself; they are the result of evil (that is, a free agent’s choice to ignore or undermine his capacity for love). Furthermore, destructive (evil) behaviors may come from this free agent, but these behaviors are also not identifiable with evil itself; they are the result of evil (i.e., a free agent’s choice to ignore or undermine his capacity for love). Thus, the occurrence of evil is not something which exists in itself; rather, it is the result of a free agent’s choice to ignore or undermine the capacity for affection, empathy, compassion – love.

In sum, evil can occur through an existing free agent, and it arises out of the ignoring or undermining of an existing capacity for love. It can give rise to feelings and destructive behaviors which have ontological status. However, the evil of the free agent, of the feelings, and of the destructive behaviors does not exist of itself. It occurs through the negating of the positive power to love in the free agent. If this definition of evil is correct, then it is not excluded by God; for it has no existence which can be excluded. God’s perfect goodness and perfect inclusivity remain completely compatible.

There are other kinds of atheism not connected to the notion of “God,” and therefore not concerned with incompatibility between God and a particular phenomenon (say suffering or evil). For example, socio-political atheism generally tends to be more irreligious than atheistic. It objects to religion because it is, say, an “opium of the people”^[6] (a distraction from needed socio-political change). Philosophers who proffer these claims frequently do not offer any argument against the existence of God, but rest their case on their sense of religion as antithetical to human progress.

Many such philosophers frequently ignore the fact that religion is responsible for social progress in many arenas, such as the initiation and advancement of laws, legal systems, social welfare

systems (through, say, prophets who exhorted the populace to care for widows and orphans), schools and educational systems, hospitals and health care systems, etc. This makes those philosophers' selective view of history quite suspect.

I would like to conclude this section by returning to an important point made earlier – namely, that I do not want my brief treatment of suffering and evil to convey in any way a disregard for the true suffering that so many have endured in their lives. Grief at the loss of a loved one, debilitation at the loss of one's faculties, indignity at the hands of callous individuals, should never be underestimated. My sole purpose in treating the above topics was to show how careful we must be in our definitions of "love," "evil," and "God." As we attempt to translate our deepest emotions and experiences into concepts, we will want to remember that the more nuanced and complete the definitions, the more they will correspond to the truth; and the more they correspond to the truth, the more they will present the path to healing and deliverance within the horizon of unrestricted Love, Goodness, Justice, Beauty, and Home.

We are now in a position to objectively and comprehensibly consider the age old objection to theism that belief in God is near wishful thinking.

Is Belief in God Mere Wishful Thinking?

Even though many of us believe in a beneficent God, we are hesitant, if not fearful, about manifesting this conviction in public. We then find that this absence of public conviction redounds back to us. We begin to be reticent about believing what we do not declare in public, and this reticence turns into interior doubt, and then we find ourselves declining in hope and subtly inclining toward skepticism and even cynicism. Thus, we may find ourselves taking on a perspective which is opposed to our beliefs and convictions. Why would we do this?

After 35 years of teaching university students, young adults, and business leaders, I have come to the conclusion that the reason we do not publicly declare our belief in God is because of our fear of being branded as "naïve optimists," "dependent on a crutch," "too weak to face reality," or "ignorant fools." Readers familiar with the history of modern philosophy will recognize the ghosts of Ludwig Feuerbach, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx in these brands.

First, with respect to Freud, I think it is fair to say that secularists have brought Freud's rejection of religion as mere "projection," "wish fulfillment," and illusion to a significant level within popular culture:

To assess the truth-value of religious doctrines does not lie within the scope of the present enquiry. It is enough for us that we have recognized them as being, in their psychological nature, illusions. ... We know approximately at what periods and by what kind of men religious doctrines were created. If in addition we discover the motives which led to this, our attitude to the problem of [the truth of] religion will undergo a marked displacement. We shall tell ourselves that it would be very nice if there were a God who created the world and was a benevolent

Providence, and if there were a moral order in the universe and an after-life; but it is a very striking fact that all this is exactly as we are bound to wish it to be. And it would be more remarkable still if our wretched, ignorant and downtrodden ancestors had succeeded in solving all these difficult riddles of the universe.^[7]

Freud derives this argument almost completely (and unquestioningly) from Ludwig Feuerbach, a German philosopher and anthropologist (1804-1872)^[8] who held that in every respect, God corresponds to some need in human nature: “If man is to find contentment in God, he must find himself in God.” Thus, for Feuerbach, God is an outward projection of our inner world.^[9] Freud condenses Feuerbach’s argument by essentially holding that a benevolent God is the sole result of wishful thinking.

The popularization of this declaration has caused fearfulness about public disclosure of belief in God and eternal life. Most college students and college-educated adults are aware of the “crutch argument” which they have received from popular culture and even some teachers. No one wants to be accused of relying on a crutch, or of naively refusing to face reality which implies being either a coward or a fool, or both; and if they are not intellectually prepared to challenge the factual or logical adequacy of Feuerbach’s and Freud’s claim, many prefer to hide their beliefs or to pretend that they have opposite beliefs from the ones they really hold. The desire for acceptance by the supposed intellectuals and sophisticates of the culture is so strong that they mask their true inclinations, intuitions, and identity in favor of platitudes given them by pseudo-intellectuals. This causes the slow erosion of hope (and the subtle increase of skepticism and cynicism described above).

The truth is that Freud’s claim is logically inadequate and factually inaccurate. We may begin with its logical inadequacy. Prima facie, Freud’s argument cannot be proven, and that is why it must remain arbitrarily asserted and a leaping non-sequitur. The argument runs as follows: “Since my ‘wretched, ignorant, and downtrodden ancestors’ could not help but believe in a God that would protect them from the forces of nature, they invented a benevolent God.” Freud presumes we will conclude from this that God does not exist. Even if it were true that our ancestors invented a benevolent God (which it is not – see below), it does not follow that God does not exist.

Just because I want something to be true does not mean that it is not true. I would like the day to be warm and sunny outside as I rise in the morning; this does not necessitate a cold and gloomy day. I would very much like to complete this book and see it published; this does not mean that it will not see the light of day. I think it would be wonderful if a striped horse-like creature existed; this does not eliminate zebras from the realm of possible existents. So also I would like God to exist; this does not necessitate His nonexistence. Indeed, if God existed, why wouldn’t He give me some clues to His existence that I might be aware of Him and even seek Him? Alister McGrath notes in this regard:

Freud's theory concerning the origins of religion in the individual is, like that of Feuerbach, generally incapable of being tested. It is a hypothesis, not a fact. Freud could be said to lend psychoanalytical support to Feuerbach, but not to provide the crucial experimental data which would convert a hypothesis into a fact. On the relatively few points at which Freud's hypothesis is capable of being tested experimentally, it is generally accepted that it is wrong. ... Freud's psychoanalytical atheism must now be regarded as a hypothesis that has not been, and indeed cannot be, proved.^[10]

There is a tremendous body of evidence from contemporary physics and philosophy validating a creation of the universe and the existence of God about which I and many other authors in the late 20th and 21st centuries have written (see above Encyclopedia Units A-H).^[11] There is also a significant body of historical evidence supporting the historicity of Jesus' resurrection^[12] (see Encyclopedia Units K-L), as well as experientially verifiable evidence based on near-death experiences (see Encyclopedia Unit B) and rational evidence based on human transcendental desires (see Encyclopedia Unit C). In view of this evidence, Freud's declaration is revealed to be not only arbitrary and unprovable, but also invalid. But the problems with Freud's declaration do not end here. He grounds his invalid argument in the proposition that our "wretched, ignorant, and downtrodden ancestors" invented a benevolent God to assuage their fears of the uncontrollable forces of nature. This contention is not factually accurate.

Mircea Eliade, after an exhaustive study of world religions,^[13] found that religion is grounded almost universally in a sense of the sacred which is not reducible to a mere subjective projection. Rather, the sacred is a source or cause of human striving to live in a spiritual and transcendent domain. This domain is not a sterile concept, but rather is filled with transcendent awareness and emotion frequently resembling what Rudolf Otto terms the sense of "creatureliness," "mysterium tremendum," "awesomeness," "overpoweringness" (or "majesty"), "energy" (or "urgency"), "fascination," and "transcendent otherness."^[14] Our awareness of the sacred must be symbolically expressed because symbols point beyond themselves, and the sacred is precisely beyond the ordinary world. As such, it moves us to our most pervasive, enduring, and deep principles, ideals, meanings, and beliefs.^[15]

Four points are significant here.

First, Eliade's assessment of religion is grounded in much, much more data than Feuerbach's or Sigmund Freud's.

Secondly, it suggests that religion was not motivated by our need to alleviate fear moving us to invent a benevolent God. As Otto (and, by implication, Eliade) explain, there is a sense of "creatureliness," "tremendum," "awesomeness," "overpoweringness," and "transcendent otherness" embedded in the sacred. The experience of these transcendent phenomena are as likely to cause fear as alleviate it. This could lead as easily to thoughts about non-benevolence as much as benevolence in the sacred domain (and in the deity). This makes Freud's contention of

God being a result of wish fulfillment to be unlikely. Furthermore, the idea that God was invented by humans to control the seemingly uncontrollable natural forces is also unlikely, for the sacred could be just as uncontrollable as nature – perhaps more.^[16]

Thirdly, the sense of the sacred seems to have a source outside of ourselves, for it gives rise to a sense of transcendent otherness, overpoweringness, and creatureliness. This seems to fly in the face of Feuerbach's contention that God is a projection of man's powers, needs, and desires. How does the idea of transcendent otherness, awesomeness, and overpoweringness come out of a projection of my own powers, needs, and desires?

Fourthly, Feuerbach's and Freud's contentions do not account for the human strivings borne out of the sense of the sacred, such as sacred duties, self-sacrifice for a transcendent good, the desire to order society according to sacred principles, the urge to develop religious symbols, art, architecture, music, and ritual, etc. Do these elements of virtually every tribe and civilization really come from the desire to alleviate fear, or rather out of a striving to be closer to the domain of the sacred, or to be closer to a God who is the highest principle, highest law, highest beauty, highest harmony, and highest unity? The sense of transcendent otherness (with its accompanying awareness of mystery, sacred duty, sacred principle, and awesome majesty) seems in many respects to be unrelated to the projection of human needs and powers, and the alleviation of human fears. Indeed, it appears to be the very converse of these Feuerbachian/Freudian constructs, and as such, is not reducible to them.

Eliade goes on to explain that this sense of the sacred seems to be irreducible to any social, historical, or cultural conditioning. Though it is true that religion involves "the social man, the economic man, and so forth...all these conditioning factors together do not, of themselves, add up to the life of the spirit."^[17]

Eliade's significant study of particular religions in particular cultures and times^[18] led him to the conviction that humanity has a general sense of the transcendent/sacred beyond any particular culture, society, or historical epic. He notes that human consciousness transcends its historical and cultural conditioning,^[19] and that it has at least a tacit awareness of certain universal images and symbols.^[20] Eliade's critics claim that this contention is difficult to prove (even though Eliade assembled a considerable amount of data to support it). Eliade responded by noting that his "historicist" critics' position (reducing religion to historical-cultural conditioning) was equally, if not more difficult to prove than his own, because it requires disregarding the remarkable unity (amidst exceedingly diverse cultures and times) of human consciousness of the sacred. Whatever one may think about the verifiability of Eliade's position, the mere existence of the debate between Eliade and his critics reveals the position of Feuerbach and Freud to be lacking in empirical data and incredibly naïve.

Therefore, religion was very likely not an invention of our ancestors to alleviate fear. Neither was it a mere projection of our ancestors' innermost needs, nor a product of mere social-

historical-cultural conditioning. It seems to be a consciousness – perhaps an altogether irreducible consciousness – of its own. So what can we say about contemporary belief in God – especially the Christian belief in a God of unconditional love? Is belief in this benevolent God simply a crutch? The answer to this question would have to be “no” (even if the alleviation of fear is involved in some people’s belief in God) because religion is very likely our response to our awareness of the sacred or spiritual. This awareness awakens within us both fear and the alleviation of fear, evil and good, cosmic evil and cosmic good, guilt and the alleviation of guilt, creatureliness and transcendence, God’s call to responsibility and God’s promise of love. If anything is clear from the considerable data assembled by Eliade and others, religion is a remarkably complex phenomenon and certainly cannot be reduced to the alleviation of fear or to a “crutch.” It involves self-awareness, courage, a sense of co-responsibility and duty, humility and self-sacrifice, principles, ideals, and love. In many of these respects it is the precise antithesis of a crutch or fear-alleviator, calling forth from us the very highest commitment of ourselves and our character. Believers should have no fear about being accused of fearfulness, for the very accusation is groundless and ignorant.

Footnotes

1. ↑ It should be noted that not even God can make his entire essence – an unrestricted act of understanding – understandable to a subject without the capacity to understand it (e.g., one capable of only restricted acts of understanding). As with a square-circle, this is not a deficiency of God’s power, but rather a deficiency solely attributable to the excluding boundaries of a partially simple being. Since humans are capable only of conditioned acts of understanding, God cannot force us to understand what we are in principle incapable of understanding (i.e., unrestricted understanding).
2. ↑ The notion of absolute human freedom implied in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* is a very disputable claim, but this is not the point of our discussion, which is concerned with the definition of “God.”
3. ↑ In *Suffering and the God of Love*, I have adduced several deeper correlations between suffering and love. Hopefully, the above is sufficient to reveal the superficiality of a definition of “love” which is incompatible with suffering.
4. ↑ This was done in contradistinction to the Treaty of Versailles which left Germany destitute amidst its war reparations after the first world war. Many believe that this act of “justice” (or perhaps better, retribution) led to the rise of national socialism (the Nazi party) in Germany, and eventually to the second world war.
5. ↑ *Les Misérables*
6. ↑ Marx 1970.

7. ↑ Freud 1927, Vol. 21, p. 33.
8. ↑ Interestingly, Karl Marx (the other popular atheist of the 19th century) also relied unquestioningly upon Ludwig Feuerbach's analysis, "With regard to religion, Marx fully accepted Feuerbach's claim in opposition to traditional theology that human beings had created God in their own image..." (Wolff 2008, Sec. 2.2).
9. ↑ See part 1 of *The Essence of Christianity*, which was first published in 1841. For the English translation, see Feuerbach 1893.
10. ↑ McGrath 1992.
11. ↑ See, for example, Spitzer 2009: *New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy*, and the dozens of references to physicists and philosophers in it (e.g., Adler, Barr, Carter, Craig, Davies, Eddington, Gingerich, Gordon, Hoyle, Jastrow, Lonergan, Penrose, Penzias, Plantinga, Polkinghorne, Ross, Stoeger, and so forth).
12. ↑ See, for example, Spitzer 2010: *Jesus-Emmanuel: Evidence of the Divinity of Christ and the Unconditional Love of God*, and the dozens of historical references in it (particularly N.T. Wright 2003 and 1996, Meier 1994, Brown 1994, Dunn 1985, Habermas 2006, Stewart 2006, and also, Fitzmyer, Fuller, Funk, Jeremias, Johnson (L.T.), and many others)
13. ↑ Eliade was editor of the 16-volume *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Religion*. See Eliade 1987.
14. ↑ See Otto 1958, chapters 3-6.
15. ↑ See Eliade 1996.
16. ↑ The Christian revelation that love is the highest commandment and that God is unconditional love is virtually unique in the history of religions. There is an awareness of God's love in many world religions, but love is not considered to be the defining essence of God. In Christianity, God's unconditional and saving love is always freely offered, but it can be freely rejected by human beings (which would lead to emptiness, alienation, and loneliness). See *Encyclopedia Units P and Q*.
17. ↑ Eliade 1991, p.32.
18. ↑ See his 16-volume *Encyclopedia of Religion* – Eliade 1987
19. ↑ Eliade 1991, p. 33.
20. ↑ Eliade 1991, pp. 16-17.