



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Anthropomorphism of Belief

An Attempt based on the Works of Feuerbach, Freud and Guthrie

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Kjartan Þór Ingvarsson

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore the anthropomorphism of belief. The main questions are: Is a theory explicating religion on the grounds of anthropomorphism possible? How could one explain the need for belief and where it comes from? How does religion mirror fundamental aspects of being within the world? Theories explaining religion as anthropomorphism have been proposed, most noticeably and comprehensively, by Ludwig Feuerbach in his books, *The Essence of Religion* and *The Essence of Christianity*. Sigmund Freud, mainly in his works *Totem and Taboo* and *The Future of an Illusion* also claimed that religion is anthropomorphism. Recently, the anthropologist Stewart Guthrie proposed a theory of all religion as anthropomorphism in his book *The Faces in the Clouds*. Feuerbach suggests that humans project their attributes outwardly, which then comes to form religion. These attributes can be everything from personality, emotions, symbolism and particular qualities and forms of consciousness. Freud emphasizes that the need for religion stems from the longing for safety and protective comfort of childhood and respectively the child's contradictory feelings towards his father as a figure of fear and protection. In this thesis the idea is proposed that the maternal womb as the source strong enough to justify the need which gives rise to belief. Guthrie focuses on the structures of perception and the way that the mind is based on patterns which it seeks in the phenomenal world. The intention here is to show that the mind reacts to patterns in a phenomenological way and that it is the form of the womb which the individual projects and comes to form a relationship with. In other words how the emotional connection to the womb is lost and sought for through a recreated form of the womb. In this thesis this form will be called the *integument*.

*Oceans and flowers, alpine mountains and the stars
in the sky derive what we call their value entirely
from their reflections in subjective souls. As soon as
we disregard the mystic and fantastic
anthropomorphizing of nature, it appears as a
continuous whole, whose undifferentiated character
denies its individual parts any special emphasis, any
existence which is objectively delimited from others.
It is only human categories that cut out individual
parts, to which we ascribe meaning and value.
Ironically, we then construct poetic fictions which
create a natural beauty that is holy within itself. In
reality, however, nature has no other holiness than
the one which it evokes in us.*

- Georg Simmel

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Preface

Anthropomorphism has been used conceptually and polemically within philosophy and theology as a critique directed against religion for roughly two millennia. Or since Xenophanes first accused the ancient Greek polytheistic religion for being anthropomorphic. Although it seems there is no general accord on what can be rightly defined as anthropomorphism and what not. Are there aspects of religion which can be considered conspicuously anthropomorphic while other elements of religion and belief escape this definition? Or is anthropomorphism an inseparable facet of all religion, presupposed by the very function of belief? Establishing a rigorous definition of anthropomorphism might be an impossible task, the concept is implicitly vague since it suggests the very way in which humans engage with and project themselves onto the world and can therefore be affiliated with literally any human activity. Anthropomorphism is ubiquitous and it seems especially so within religion since belief entails some form of meaningful association between humans and the objects of belief. If anthropomorphism is taken seriously as a plausible explanation of the way humans engage with the world and if anthropomorphism is inevitably entwined with religion, is not a theory explicating religion on the grounds of anthropomorphism possible? How could one explain the need for belief and where it comes from? How would that result in humans forming religion and religious systems? And how does religion mirror fundamental aspects of being within the world? The aim of this thesis is to explore these questions.

Theories explaining religion as anthropomorphism have been proposed, most noticeably and comprehensively, by Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72) in his books, *The Essence of Religion* (2004, originally 1846) and *The Essence of Christianity* (1989, originally 1841) where he asserted that religion is a projection of human nature. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), mainly in his works *Totem and Taboo* (1946, originally 1913) and *The Future of an Illusion* (1970, originally 1927), also claimed that religion is anthropomorphism, a human invention resulting from certain psychological antagonisms a child has towards his father. Recently, the anthropologist Stewart Guthrie, proposed a theory of all religion as anthropomorphism in his book *The Faces in the Clouds* (1993), or that religion is a consequence of an implicit perceptual strategy to interpret humanlike phenomena in the varying patterns of nature. The above posed questions will primarily be explored through the theories of Feuerbach, Freud and Guthrie.

First, what Feuerbach offers is the idea that humans project their attributes outwardly, which then comes to form religion. These attributes can be everything from personality,

emotions, symbolism and particular qualities and forms of consciousness. What is missing from Feuerbach's ideas is the lack which constitutes the basis for the need which gives rise to belief. This can on the other hand be found in Freud's theories of religion. Secondly, Freud emphasizes that the need for religion stems from the longing for safety and protective comfort of childhood and respectively the child's contradictory feelings towards his father as a figure of fear and protection. Essentially, Freud's view of religious belief is grounded in a lack. Freud has been critiqued by feminist theorists, for example by Kristeva (1994), for overemphasizing the role of the father as a protective figure. In this thesis, along the lines of feminist theorizing, the emphasis will be directed towards the maternal womb as the source strong enough to justify the need which gives rise to belief. Thirdly, Guthrie focuses on the structures of perception and the way that the mind is based on patterns which it seeks in the phenomenal world. Guthrie bases his analysis largely on the phenomenological theories of Merleau-Ponty and the thesis here advanced is also influenced by the Merleau-Ponty's approach. According to Merleau-Ponty (2006, p. 171), the individual and his external world are connected together in intricate and inseparable ways with the result that the world is never entirely subjective and never completely objective. What Guthrie adds to what is missing from Feuerbach and Freud however, is that the mind is structured to react to patterns and *forms* of the external world which could help to explain the way *projection* works. However, Guthrie does not explain the emotional motivation which is central to belief. The intention here is to show that the mind reacts to patterns in a phenomenological way and that it is the form of the womb which the individual projects and comes to form a relationship with. In other words how the emotional connection to the womb is lost and sought for through a recreated form of the womb. In this thesis this form will be called the *integument* as will now be briefly explained.

The claim in this thesis will be that the integument can be seen as a "simulation" of the womb, it seeks signification of the primary totality which produced it, but is never so, since it is constantly referring back to the womb as the ultimate criteria of fulfillment. The integument as it is projected onto the external world becomes the anthropomorphism of belief which forms the basis of religion, or in other words, the integument, as form, comes to be signified by the objects of religion. The integument is lack which stems from a slowly progressing departure from the comfort and safety of childhood. This has been suggested before, indeed, Freud's theory of religion traces the need for religion to the child's relationship with the father both as an individual offering protection and to the father as a symbolic figure representing

guilt resulting from the murder of the “primal father”. The idea of the father as source of the concept of God is more the consequence of the patriarchal structure of Western culture than the father being an actual representative of safety within the family. What if the father is never fully satisfactory as a protective figure?

Maybe the emphasis should rather be on the unconditional care of the mother, but it will be held that even the mother’s care is not quite adequate; the protective comfort of parental care is always lacking. The true comfort is the womb of the mother. The emphasis on the womb and a child’s connection to its mother has been proposed by many feminist thinkers. This includes Julia Kristeva’s idea of the *chora*, which can be said to be a phase of a child’s life before it learns language and is completely dependent on the mother: “*Chora* is derived from the Greek word for womb. Although the *Chora* is in no way reducible to the womb ... the womb ... is a place of absence – the absence of social structures of language – and always ... of loss: the loss of the peaceful, asocial unity with the mother” (Adams, 1994, p. 22). The totality and the omnipresent comfort and safety of the womb, it will be here claimed, results in the creation of an “ontological integument”, so to speak, which is a “representation” of the original position in the womb. The integument is essentially *felt*, as it is in a way a recreated womb; but is never the womb as it can never offer the ubiquitous protective shield which it was in its primacy. Is the idea of the integument a convincing conception of religion as anthropomorphism?

The essay will be structured as follows: In the first chapter Guthrie’s theory will be introduced and anthropomorphism as a concept will be elucidated. Anthropomorphism will be explored in contrast to the related concepts of animism and personification. Finally, a definition of anthropomorphism as the projection of form will be introduced. In the second chapter, Ludwig Feuerbach’s critique of religion will be discussed and analyzed in detail and his idea of projection scrutinized and connected with Guthrie’s idea that the source of religion stems from a perceptual strategy to interpret forms in the natural world. In the third chapter, the idea of the “ontological integument” will be put forward and contrasted with Sigmund Freud’s contentions that religion is rooted in childhood. Finally, in the conclusion the abovementioned integument will be further discussed.

1. Anthropomorphism

1.1 Anthropomorphism as a Theory of Religion

Since Kant's epistemological revolution, "... or what Kant calls the 'Copernican turn' in philosophy" (Critchley, 2001 p. 17), regardless of whether his theoretical edifice is accepted or not, it seems almost irrefutable that humans, as beings within the world, somehow affect the way in which the very world appears to them. Can the phenomenal world be comprehended, grasped or even perceived without something human commingling with that very engagement and perceptual appropriation? If anthropomorphism is an unavoidable consequence of humanity's being in the world, to what extent is their activity anthropomorphized? Can it be that *all* religion is anthropomorphism – and if that is the case, how does anthropomorphism present itself as religion?

Stewart Guthrie in his book, *Faces in the Clouds* (1993), will be repeatedly returned to in this essay as a source of reference. Examples of anthropomorphisms in Guthrie's book are abounding, where he justifiably, also discerns varying degrees and forms of anthropomorphism as they appear in the diversity of human activity, observation and artistic representation. He endeavors to create a new theory of religion where he claims that "religion *is* anthropomorphism" (Guthrie, 1993, p. 185) and the reasons he gives for why humans anthropomorphize are "because guessing that the world is humanlike is a good bet. It is a bet because the world is uncertain, ambiguous, and in need of interpretation. It is a good bet because the most valuable interpretations usually are those that disclose the presence of whatever is most important to us. That usually is other humans" (Guthrie, 1993, p. 3).

Now, despite its explicative force regarding the ubiquity and universality of anthropomorphism within human thought, it can be stated that Guthrie's theory fails to account for why and how something resulting from anthropomorphism can be organized into a complex, institutional system like for example the Christian or Catholic Church. It seems true that despite the complex historical development of the multitudinous forms of religious practice, whether institutionally organized or not, and despite the baffling diversity of the objects of such religious systems, they undeniably all share at least one single element: that of anthropomorphism. The objects of religion, in one form or another, all implicate phenomena restrictedly human or objects pertaining exclusively to human existence. Guthrie's claim is convincing that human perception is grounded on pattern recognition and schemata; on forms, allowing humans to simplify the absorption of the diversity and complexity of perceptual

signals of the phenomenal world which allows a systematized and organized comprehension, that "...at the lowest level of perception, our visual system seem preattentive, or keyed, to motion and ... at a higher ... level, we are keyed to objects, and need only the most fragmentary evidence" (Guthrie, 1993, p. 100). It is also convincing that perception is interpretive on an unconscious/preconscious level or that "...perception is interpretation" (Guthrie, p.98); that the world is always already interpreted by humans before higher degree, conceptual judgments enter into experience. The last claim points towards a phenomenological immediacy bound to human experience. In very general, simplified terms, phenomenology can be taken to denote the complex and intimate relationships a subject has with his immediate phenomenological horizon, the phenomenal world as it appears through perception and further; how the way phenomena external to the subject *appears*, effects the subject on a cognitive and emotional level.

An argument against Guthrie's theory is that he avoids including emotive motivation in religion and fails to explain how it can persist and is not disregarded as a superfluous perceptual error, regardless of whether anthropomorphism is of contextual, biological or evolutionary practical value. If it is only a question of pragmatism, then anthropomorphism would be arbitrary, fixed to whatever context where it presents itself, and discarded as soon as the utility reached exhaustion. It must be noted that Guthrie does include an element of emotional motivation for anthropomorphism, when he says that it discloses "...the presence of whatever is most important to us" (Guthrie, 1993, p. 3), i.e. other humans, but this still remains within the periphery of the practical, since it results from a strategic reaction of external stimuli, and he does not elucidate more deeply these motivations; and refrains from proceeding further than this in explaining the subjective *need* inseparable from religion which is powerful enough to form what is perceived as humanlike into a systemic religious edifice.

Even though Guthrie claims to have found a theory on religion general enough to encompass the entire scope of religious practice; that religion is systemic anthropomorphism hitherto lacking an explanation and that his "...book provides the missing explanation" (Guthrie, 1993, p. 3), his account is nonetheless insufficient. What could be the solution to the problem of the lack of consensus within religious theory? What could provide the missing shortcomings? An analysis of the religious criticism in the work of Ludwig Feuerbach and Sigmund Freud might provide hints which might explain some of the emotive dimensions that lead to anthropomorphic manifestations of the religious need. Firstly, anthropomorphism as a concept needs to be explored and explicated in a general sense and some preliminary, implicit

problems elucidated. Following this, anthropomorphism will be contrasted to personification and animism.

1.2 What is Anthropomorphism?

Anthropomorphism, in the broadest sense of the term, signals a tendency to ascribe human qualities, attributes or any forms of exclusively human-related elements to something which is not human. The concept of anthropomorphism is relatively simple to grasp and define in a general way but in light of the fact that it can be associated with practically any phenomena humans engage with, subjective and objective alike, it escapes a strict theoretical definition. In consequence, an inevitable conceptual vagueness presents itself once an attempt is made at establishing a line of demarcation separating what can be pinpointed as anthropomorphic and what not. Anthropomorphism has been addressed as a theoretical problem within philosophy and theology for over two millennia in diverse ways. Typically, Judeo-Christian theologians tend for example to deem pagan deities of ancient Greek, Roman and Teutonic mythologies as being anthropomorphic. Adorno and Horkheimer, in their book *The Dialectic of Enlightenment (Dialektik der Aufklärung)* (2008), where they aim to reverse the traditional historical conception of Enlightenment rationality and uncover the implicit mythological structure of the Enlightenment and the development of bourgeoisie capitalism, make the following comment:

“Enlightenment has always taken the basic principle of myth to be anthropomorphism, the projection onto nature of the subjective. In this view, the supernatural, spirits and demons, are mirror images of men who allow themselves to be frightened by natural phenomena. Consequently the many mythic figures can all be brought to a common denominator, and reduced to the human subject” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2008, p. 6).

Today, the debate on the anthropomorphism of religion continues within various disciplines such as theology, ecology, ethics, ethnology and the philosophy, sociology and anthropology of religion. The site of debate is still marked by questions relating to what the extent of anthropomorphism is present within religion, on how to rightfully discern which elements of religion can rightfully be attributed as being the consequence of human creation, or as the anthropologist Fiona Bowie asks, in her book *The Anthropology of Religion*: “Are religious motivations and impulses a response to external spiritual energies and revelations, or the result of a deluded mind and false consciousness” (Bowie, 2000, p. 1-2)?

1.3 Xenophanes's Critique of Religious Anthropomorphism

In the preserved fragments of the Greek thinker Xenophanes (570-480 BCE) anthropomorphism becomes an object of philosophical reflection. "Xenophanes is the first to level the charge of anthropomorphism..." (Wilbur and Allen, 1979, p. 51), and his accounts are one of the first critiques and theoretical analyses of the way humans effect and shape the objects which are seemingly external to their own subjectivity or the superfluous, whimsical assumptions of the group or the particular culture which the group is composed of. The following two fragments are particularly illuminating and instructive regarding Xenophanes's view on the anthropomorphic nature of the idols of religious reverence and belief:

(Frg.15) But if the Oxen (and horses) and lions had hands or could draw with hands and create works of art like those of men, horses would draw pictures of gods like horses, and oxen of gods like oxen, and they would make the bodies (of their gods) in accordance with the *form* that each species possesses.

(Frg.16) Aethiopians have gods with snub noses and black hair. Thracians have gods with grey eyes and red hair. (Wilbur and Allen, 1979, p. 51. Italics mine).

Xenophanes accuses the Greeks for attributing human characteristics to their gods and conditioning the nature of the gods to conform to the subjective caprices of man. The gods of ancient mythology were suspiciously similar to humans and in the case of the Greek religion, the gods had a palate for precisely the things which defined Greek culture and was not a cultural emphasis of nations external to the Greece. The gods of mythology mirrored acutely the cultural self-characterization of the ancient Greek people; they revered in the gods what they revered in their own culture. The gods also displayed signs of anger, incontinence, lust, envy; they were vindictive and eligible to make mistakes. They ate, slept, procreated and enjoyed wine, precisely the way humans do, although, with a degree of divinity to their actions which was limited to the gods and excluded from human activity. In many cases the gods impregnated women and had offspring revered as demigods. In Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, it reads on the incontinence of Phoebus (Apollo) when he falls in love with a river god's daughter named Daphne: "Phoebus is lovestruck; having seen the girl, he longs to wed her and, in longing, hopes; but though he is the god of oracles, he reads the future wrongly" (Mandelbaum, 1993, p. 22). Xenophanes mainly accuses the Greeks of attributing forms of personality to their gods and failing to understand the truly theological consequences; the *logical* theological implications of such views as the Greeks held of their divine figures. The

theological logic holds that if the gods are to be what they by definition are, i.e. divine, immortal, eternal, immaculate and so on, they cannot share the same qualities as mortal, imperfect and finite beings. This is indeed what Judeo-Christian theology emphasized (and still does) and led them to constructing theories which separated pagan, polytheistic and anthropomorphizing mythology of the ancients from the theological doctrines of the church.

1.4 Anthropomorphism, Animism and Personification

Before proceeding further a semantic delimitation should be made between anthropomorphism on the one hand and personification on the other, though the former encompasses the latter. In addition, the two abovementioned concepts will be separated from animism, where both personification and anthropomorphism can, though not without exceptions, presuppose animism. Animism is sometimes also presupposed in anthropomorphism and personification. The terms have varying degrees of expansion, and this suggests a semantic hierarchy depending on what objects are under scrutiny at a given time. Personification usually is taken as assigning personal human characteristics to things which are not human, in the sense of *personality* and is generally taken in the same sense as anthropomorphism, which although can have the effect of dramatically constricting the broad semantic scope which anthropomorphism signals. Personification is better understood as an artistic tool or literary trope; metaphor, simile, synecdoche, and other means of literary animation when used in conjunction with attributing human personality to non-human events or phenomena.¹ In Guthrie's view, anthropomorphism does not necessarily have to involve animism, and the reverse: "we often animate and anthropomorphize at the same time. We animate but do not anthropomorphize, for example, if we say an automobile purrs like a kitten, and anthropomorphize but do not animate if we speak to our pet turtle. If we speak to the automobile, however, we both animate and anthropomorphize" (Guthrie, 1993, p. 39-40). If the object anthropomorphized is inanimate it necessarily entails animism, i.e. if an object is viewed as having human attributes, it automatically presupposes that the object is living, if the object on the other hand is already alive, then according to Guthrie, no such presupposition is

¹ Pablo Neruda personifies his dog in the poem *Dead Dog (Un perro ha muerto)*: "There are no good-byes for my dog who has died/and we don't now and never did lie to each other" (Neruda, 1988, p. 150), and attributes truthfulness, an obviously human personality trait to the animal. Needless to say, personification can be found throughout the history of poetry and prose fiction, it is almost inescapable as mechanisms of vivacious, literary means of expression, and the same holds in an even more expansive sense, for animism. Animism means the "tendency to regard objects as living" (Piaget, 1964, p. 170), and consists in viewing anything inanimate as animate. The third stanza of Rainer Maria Rilke's poem *Before Summer Rain (Vor dem Sommerregen)*, illustrates the use of animism where Rilke is describing how walls move with caution: "the walls, with their ancient portraits, glide/away from us, cautiously, as though they weren't supposed to hear what we are saying" (Rilke, 1989, p. 35).

made. If the relationship is reversed, animism does not necessarily have to involve anthropomorphism; an object is viewed as being alive without adorning it with human characteristics. This does not mean that the human subject that anthropomorphizes or animates *believes* that the object is living, or that the subject believes the object has linguistic or symbolic capabilities. Anthropomorphism is here taken in the sense of a gesture, although once belief or conviction regarding the humanlike attributes of the anthropomorphized object is established the relationship is drastically changed, and in consequence the object seen in a completely new light.

1.5 Problems of Anthropomorphism, Animism and Personification

In regards to the abovementioned triad of personification, animism and anthropomorphism, found in Guthrie's work, the following points can be deduced:

1. Animism is inanimate made animate. If the object or event in question is also given human characteristics, it follows that the object/event is also anthropomorphized.
2. If an object is already animated/living and is given human attributes, it is simply anthropomorphized.
3. Personification presupposes anthropomorphism, whenever an object is attributed human personality traits it is inevitably also anthropomorphized. Personification is a subcategory of anthropomorphism.

The reason why these delimitations are made is to illustrate the varying degrees of signification. Personification narrows the sense of anthropomorphism by its reference to human personality. What escapes the concept of personification, but anthropomorphism retains, are the abstract phenomena of human subjectivity. These phenomena can be sensations, emotions, forms, shapes, patterns or inter-subjective phenomena like the patterns and structures of geometry, mathematics and physics.²

Another understanding of animism, the religious understanding, is that animism is the "general belief in spiritual beings" (Tylor, 2002, p. 24), or that objects of the natural world are or have spirits. A question immediately presents itself: is animism, understood in the religious sense, not simply another name for anthropomorphism? Spirit can usually be equated with

² Personification is best understood as an artistic device or a literary trope, aimed at an aesthetic effect and a deeper understanding; where the act of personification is not meant literally, where there is no belief present as to the whether the object personified is actually human or holds in reality any humanlike characteristics. If a belief regarding the object is present, then it always involves anthropomorphism.

soul, which is an exclusively human term, but even if it is not, the spirits are adorned with other human attributes, such as will or intentional, malevolent and/or benevolent, behavior. When it is not just a question of a superfluous judgment or a fleeting perceptual error, and the phenomena in question becomes an object of belief or conviction; it *inevitably is or becomes anthropomorphism*.

A further step can be taken and a question posed regarding the interrelation of the triad and the world, namely: as humans, who perceive, grasp, comprehend and interpret the world, as the world is seen in and by human eyes, is not anthropomorphism an inevitable consequence? When an object is grasped there is always involved something exclusively human, something uniquely pertaining to human existence which is mingled in the absorption of the phenomena which is grasped. In the case for example of animism, an inanimate object is animated by means, or thanks to, a specific “mechanism” which is exclusively human and allows the object to be seen in a given way. Anthropomorphism has already taken place before an object is comprehended/seen/grasped. Thus, and by way of analogy it can be claimed that an act is performed against a background of an anthropomorphized phenomenal horizon, the world in its totality and constituent parts, as perceived, are always already anthropomorphized.

1.6 Anthropomorphism as Form

Anthropomorphism is a Greek composite word consisting on the one hand of *ἄνθρωπος* (ánthrōpos), which means “human” and on the other, *μορφή* (morphē), which means “form” or “shape”. What the etymology of the term reveals is precisely the broad scope which escapes the concept of personification and emphasizes the semantic expansion in regards to its signification of human activity in its totality: “... because human manifestations vary widely, and because a human presence is so important, we superimpose widely different human forms on widely different phenomena” (Guthrie, 1994, p. 140).

Form, in itself, is a term which refers to something which has universal applicability and involves elements encompassing the entire range of human activity. The term also signifies the very arrangement, by virtue of which, a thing is the way it is so conceived or constructed. For the sake of elucidation, *form*, refers to the following: shape, pattern, structure, external surface appearance, order, set, frame, model, way of organizing material, particular kind of arrangement, etc.

In light of this, the definition of the term anthropomorphism can be modified and taken to mean the tendency to attribute human *form*. What anthropomorphism then signals, is the way in which humans, as *ánthrōpos*, *project* (to anticipate Ludwig Feuerbach's terminology) *morphē* into the world which then turns into *ánthrōpos* and the very process of so doing, is in itself *ánthrōpos*. In other words: humans project themselves into the world as *form*, which in virtue of mechanism of human perception also becomes human. It is a question of forms of human experience; forms which precede those very experiences and determine, condition how the phenomenal world appears, and therefore, what the experience of the world consists of. To conclude the discussion on the relationship of anthropomorphism, animism and personification it could be claimed that against a background of an anthropomorphized phenomenal horizon, the triad is "superimposed" on that horizon where it plays out in the aforesaid interrelations and varying degrees of representations of human activity.

2. Anthropomorphism of Religion: Ludwig Feuerbach

2.1 The Feeling of Dependence in Man is the Source of Religion

Ludwig Feuerbach in his polemical works, *The Essence of Christianity* (*Das Wesen des Christentums*) (1989) and *The Essence of Religion* (*Das Wesen der Religion*) (2004) wrote a critique of religion as anthropomorphism (Christianity in particular). His claim is that religion is wish-fulfillment; "...wish is the origin. The very essence of religion—the essence of the Gods is nothing but the essence of the wish" (Feuerbach, 2004, p. 33). He also claims that religion is essentially self-consciousness and a projection of the essence of human nature outside the limited boundaries of subjectivity. In religion, man posits the incomprehensibility of his own nature, and the nature of the external world, as a means of comprehension:

For man thinks intellect and will to be the cause of Nature where the effects defy his own will, and surpass his intellect, where he explains things only through human analogies and reasons, where he knows nothing of the natural causes, and therefore derives also the special and present phenomena from God (Feuerbach, 2004, p. 13).

In *The Essence of Christianity* (1989) Feuerbach's critique, as the title suggests, is turned towards Christianity exclusively while in *The Essence of Religion* (2004), he addresses religion in a more general, cross-culture way and attempts to trace the origin of religion to the dependency humans have on nature. In light of the citations above some remarks should be made regarding the seemingly contradictory assertions of these two works. On the one hand Feuerbach holds that God is a consequence of deprivation, a lack; God is the essence of the wish, humans in need posit God as the fulfillment of the lack which the need generates. This hints towards the general interpretation of Feuerbach's claim that God is self-consciousness extended outside subjectivity and externalized; God is essentially subjectivity or a projection of an imperfect subjective mind which mirrors itself in the perfections of his species cloaked as God. This is indeed the central concern of Feuerbach's treatment of the Christian religion and the monotheistic God found in *Essence of Christianity* (1989). On the other hand, Feuerbach clearly states that humanity creates God – or the source of the need for a God – lies in the deficiencies of the relationship of humanity with nature. In other words, nature in its threatening complexity, does not itself suffice mans speculative thirst for answers and naturally, neither does nature provide the protection appropriate to the dangers found within the natural world. This seeming disparity stems partly from the fact that *Essence of Religion* (2004), was written after *Essence of Christianity* (1989), but deals with religion as it formed

historically prior to the formation of Christianity. Now, is the source of God, an objective one; reaction to the dependency humans have on the objective, material world? Or is the need entirely subjective in origin, is "... religion being identical with the distinctive characteristics of man ... identical with self-consciousness" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 2)? Feuerbach explains this with the claim that the relationship of the objective and subjective complements each other; originally religion sprang from the objective causes which then as religion and civilization developed became subjective. Feuerbach is aware of the paradoxical relationship of subjectivity and objectivity, of the individual, particular mind and the external world. His solution is that they reciprocally affect one another, both the individual mind through his immediate world and the individual through other humans:

My fellow-man is my bond between me and the world. I am and I feel dependent on other men, because I first feel myself dependent on other men. If I did not need man, I should not need the world ... (o)nly through his fellow does man become clear to himself and self-conscious; but only when I am clear to myself does the world become clear to me ... (t)hus man is the God of man. That he is, he has to thank Nature; that he is man, he has to thank man... (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 82-3)

It is clear from this passage that Feuerbach sees the origin of religion as a primitive relation of dependency of humans to one another which in turn is also dependency to nature. Self-consciousness springs forth in and through a relationship to other men and from a mutual relationship of dependency of man to men and man/men to nature. In reaction to these interrelationships, self-consciousness generates the need which is fulfilled by the idea of God. Feuerbach's contention here is that from nature, humans acquire their dependency which becomes the dependency to God. Nature supplies the original *want*, the overwhelming need which a dependency on physical nature creates. This is originally in the form of strictly material elements like food, shelter and reactions to physical threats, which evolves into a deeper need since nature can never supply humans with that which humans desire and is a result of nature itself. It could be said that the secondary nature, the one resulting from the need, is nature turned inwards which, according to Feuerbach, becomes the very nature of man. Following this process, and through other humans, man acquires self-consciousness; and it is not until man acquires self-consciousness that he transfers his need into the sophisticated system of belief, and "...by elevation into consciousness and imagination ... it becomes religion" (Feuerbach, 2004, p. 2). The inward nature is here in reality man's own nature, it is appropriated and brought into consciousness but it is not until man projects himself

outwardly, outside himself, that he learns to comprehend himself; his own nature. The trajectory of Feuerbach's "consciousness-coming-to-religion" could be explained as the follows: nature turns inward as a result of a dependency man has towards it – nature develops into self-consciousness – man projects consciousness or his nature externally which manifests itself as a primitive form of belief – finally, man re-appropriates his own nature in the outwardly projected nature-turned religion. It is in this last phase that belief begins to develop into a more sophisticated form of organized religious system.

2.2 Marx's Critique of Feuerbach

Feuerbach has been critiqued for his focusing on self-consciousness in favor of material and different historical conditions. Karl Marx, in his *Thesis on Feuerbach (Thesen über Feuerbach)* (1978), criticizes Feuerbach's explanation of religion on the grounds of self-consciousness for being idealistic and metaphysical: "Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the *human* essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations" (Marx and Engels, 1978, p. 122). Marx claims that religion *and* self-consciousness are conditioned by the totality of social circumstances at any given historical time; consciousness is a result of the material, socio-political and economic conditions which an individual finds himself in. Marx reproaches Feuerbach for viewing this relationship as being the opposite and therefore attributing to self-consciousness far too much authority in regards to the ability it has in determining its material environment. In Marx's view, Feuerbach "...does not see that the "religious sentiment" is itself a social product, and the abstract individual whom analyses belongs to a particular form of society" (Marx and Engels, 1978, p. 122). The reason why these points are brought to light, namely, the absence of socio-political explanations of the construction of religion and self-consciousness in Feuerbach's doctrines and the role of material nature in those very same ideas, are to emphasize the importance they when analyzing religion. The consequences of this can be summarized in the following two points:

1. Phenomenal nature/world plays such an integral part in the understanding of religion and the objects of belief that religion will simply not be understood to any degree without it. Nature is the primary criteria of any religious system; sometimes directly as in various forms of paganism or pantheism, or as the object of contrast; of testament to Gods qualities as in monotheistic religions. Or as in some forms of Buddhism, the world negated as illusory or, "... the existence of suffering as the accompaniment to the perpetual change of things" (Durkheim, 1946, p. 30), and so

attachment to worldly phenomena should be abstained from. In the monotheistic sense, nature is transcended by God and nature is created by God, etc. In short: nature is the quantitative and qualitative criteria for God's positive elements. The phenomenal world understood in the phenomenological sense, as it *appears* to the subject, has the effect of accentuating the convictions of the subject in regards to his beliefs. Given the tendency of humans to see meaningful forms within the structures of the phenomenal world, by virtue of pattern-recognizing mechanisms of perceptual faculties of the mind, the world appears to correspond to the subject in a meaningful way; the world affirms to a certain extent the subject's belief that he shares a meaningful relationship with it.

2. Marx's materialistic position on society conditions religion and subjectivity cannot be ignored. Although, ideas which dictate that religion is *entirely* a product of society seem inadequate. What is missing from these ideas are the psychological/subjective conditions which give rise to belief. Following Marx's critical tradition, sociologists of religion have held that belief can be explicated solely on the grounds of the role it plays within society and culture, that "... religion is eminently social. Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities" (Durkheim, 1964, p. 10). It could rather be said that in culture and society a subject comes to find symbols through which the objects of belief are signified. Each individual "finds himself" in a particular historical cultural environment which regulates to large extent how he comes to view the world. But the symbols of each culture need to "harmonize" with subjective conditions of each individual. There needs to be a certain psychological homogeneity between the subject and the symbols of culture which cannot be explicated simply as a social construct.

These points are very condensed, but they are emphasized for the sake of clarity. The aim of this essay is not to explain the way religion functions within individual cultures. It is presupposed here that religion is a universal, cross-cultural phenomenon. Another point, though, should also be made concerning the relationship of society and religion. Many traditions, elements and objects of religion can be explained strictly on a cultural basis without having to connect it to psychological conditions to justify them. If religious systems are organized into powerful political and economic institutions affecting the entire network of society, vast amounts of elements enter into them which have little or nothing to do with the

belief in objects thought fundamental to the religious system. On a microcosmic level, this applies especially to monetary issues and the various compromises that have to be made in order, for example, to finance and operate a church or a temple. On a macrocosmic level, though, when complex societies are taken into considerations, the elements effecting the way religious objects are conceived become too numerous and intricately intertwined to enumerate: "... the growing differentiation in the sociological, political and cultural structure of society" and "... differences in property, occupation, and rank also favor corresponding variations in religious thought, action and organization" (Wach, 1962, p. 109).

A religious system in its fundamental principles remains homogeneous with the needs that produce belief even though particular contingent elements, characteristic of the idiosyncrasies of a given culture, enter into it. On a more symbolic level, there are also elements within religion which neither lend themselves to a consistent explication on the grounds of culture nor individual belief towards the symbolic paradigm of that religion. How is the Holy Trinity to be viewed and analyzed? To some, the trinity represents a bridge between polytheism and monotheism, "... Christianity, with its Trinity, is a compromise with polytheism" (Zizek, 2006, p. 1): where the idea of multiple gods and a single God are resolved symbolically. Feuerbach sees the trinity as the missing feminine principle from the patriarchic Christian doctrine: "The son implicitly urges upon us the need of a real feminine being" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 71).

This might appear as a digression from Feuerbach's ideas on religion, although, Feuerbach himself suggests the interconnectedness of the subject and his external world. Society and culture can be said to be the signifiers of religion. In it, a subject learns to mediate his belief, where to direct his subjective needs. Ritual, liturgy, mythology, narratives and scripture for example, are all processes and exchanges of religious culture through which a subject accesses the symbolic material that conforms to his need for belief. Society gives "... the individual these ideas, for he finds them there already; they are presented to him ready-made and he would not be able to discover them for himself" (Freud, 1970, p. 17).

Feuerbach also rightly addresses dependency and need/wish as one of the major conditions of belief and this point will be addressed in more detail below. As far as anthropomorphism goes, Feuerbach and Marx disagree on where the anthropomorphism of religion originates; in society or subjectivity/self-consciousness. It is clear that Feuerbach appreciates the cultural importance of religion in its regulative moral form and, along the lines

of Xenophanes's and Hume's critique, he views the religious anthropomorphisms of a given culture as an exemplifier and a reflection of that same culture's ideal self-characterization: "As soon as a man from a merely physical being becomes a political one ... distinguishing himself from Nature ... his God is also changed from merely physical being into a political one" (Feuerbach, ER, p.39). The development of religion is this process of moving away from nature and each stage expresses the given historical and cultural circumstances, where "... man is in mere state of nature, so long is his god a mere nature-god ... (w)here man inhabits houses, he also encloses his gods in temples" (Feuerbach, EC, p.20). Feuerbach also poignantly addresses how each culture views their religion as being non-anthropomorphic and how they label preceding religious practice as being mere anthropomorphism:

Hence the historical progress consists of this: that what by an earlier religion was regarded as objective is now recognized as subjective; that is, what was formerly contemplated and worshipped as God is now perceived to be something *human*. What was at first religion is now idolatry; man has given objectivity to himself, but has not recognized the object as his own nature... (Feuerbach, EC, p.13).

This touches directly upon what was discussed above in regards to what could be justifiably considered anthropomorphism in religion and what not; in light of the modified definition of anthropomorphism as the projection of *form*, the distinction is not so recognizable, indeed, under the heading of *form*, all religion could be claimed to be anthropomorphism. It is no longer only human characteristics and personified attributes which can conspicuously be determined as anthropomorphism; but also predicates relating to *forms* of mental activity. In addition, it also concerns forms, shapes and patterns that humans interpret in the phenomenal world which conform to the mental activities. Finally, these elements taken in conjunction, as will be shown, with the *form* pertaining to the condition of belief. For elucidation, this needs to be connected with the idea of *projection*. To return to Feuerbach's central concepts in his analysis of religion: what is man's nature which he invests in religion and what exactly, does Feuerbach mean when he says that man *projects* his nature?

2.3 God as the Projection of Man's Nature

It can be said that Feuerbach means by self-consciousness, *reflective* consciousness or thought turned towards the nature of man and the nature of the world. In other words, man has access to all the elements concerning his existence in thought, abstraction and speculation, but the average individual does not practice speculative contemplation, and therefore is not conscious

of the totality of qualities which define his species. Nature provides man with the preliminary speculations which evolve into a more sophisticated, reflective self-consciousness. The first speculations which emerge when consciousness is turned towards nature are for example primary causality: Who/what created nature? There are also questions about qualities that are transferred to God such as limitlessness, eternity etc. Initially, then, "...qualities or definitions of God which make him an objective being ... are only qualities *abstracted from Nature*" (Feuerbach, 2004, p. 23). These qualities are at the same time qualities of self-consciousness; limitlessness of abstracted nature is also the limitlessness of imagination, it is "... impossible to feel feeling limited, to think thought limited" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 6). The idea of a primary causality stems from a similarity of a thought process, namely, a thought springing seemingly from nowhere within mind, and therefore without an original cause. It should be noted that these qualities of thought are strictly formal elements of thought, and that concepts such as limitlessness, omnipresence, omniscience and infinity are consequences of the idea of *totality*. Limit and finiteness cannot be thought of otherwise than as something lacking, missing completion, and hence, these elements are prescribed to God, to the cosmos, the One, and so on: "The infinity of God in religion is quantitative, for the distinctions of the imagination are only quantitative. The infinity of God in religion is quantitative infinity; God is and has all that man has, but in infinitely greater measure ... God sees all sensible things at once ... all temporal things in untemporal manner" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 214-5). The limits and finiteness experienced in the sensible world are heterogeneous with the limitlessness of thought which seems to be able to expand the objects of the senses once they are brought into thought; they can always somehow be enlarged and extended, and so thought forms a "... confused conception of the whole of things ... which exalts ... beyond the limited standpoint of the senses" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 215). These qualities or predicates, in Feuerbach's thought, determine man's nature or come to mean the sum of all the predicates of man's nature in the total of his potentiality.

Feuerbach does not mean instincts or primal drives when he talks about man's nature, but rather, those qualities which distinguish man as the being he is; the totality of qualities which characterize man, not singularly as an isolated individual, but as the total of the species. The individual has access to the nature/essence of man through speculation and reflection, but instead of being conscious of the qualities which define him as a member of the species, he attributes them to a divine being external to himself, in the form of God/gods – or the highest being(s) which represent the given individuals religious paradigm. So, according to

Feuerbach, man is his own object but is not conscious of it. The qualities of the being he posits as the supreme/highest, are in reality man's own qualities:

In the object which he contemplates ... man becomes acquainted with himself; consciousness of the object is the self-consciousness of man. We know the man by the object, by his conception of what is external to himself; in it his nature becomes evident; this object is his manifested nature ... (t)he absolute to man is his own nature (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 5).

The individual subject, instead of being conscious of the positive qualities which characterize his essence as a human, invests them in a higher being in order to revere himself, and religion becomes an indirect way an individual glorifies his own nature as a man. The seeming contradiction of man and his God is based on an illusion; in reality, the contradiction is not between individual man and his God, but the individual and totality of qualities which determine man's nature as a whole. Feuerbach's idea is that in order not to be crushed under the weight which can follow from the comparison of being an individual against the daunting potential of the positive qualities of the entire human species, he needs a God. In God he finds himself and reveres himself from a distance. To understand himself, man has to externalize himself and create objects of belief outside his subjectivity. Once he finds himself externally, he can, though unconsciously, appropriate it as his own nature: "when religion – consciousness of God – is designated as the self-consciousness of man, this is not to be understood as affirming that the religious man is directly aware of this identity; for ... ignorance of it is fundamental to the peculiar nature of religion ... religion is man's earliest and also most indirect way of self-knowledge" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 13).

The essential point is that man is not aware of his own formative power in religion. That God is nothing but man himself posited in a superlative sense; God is a collection of man's highest aspirations and therefore man's ideal, "highest" qualities. There is a sense in which man alienates himself in religion from his own positive qualities, "... (m)an denies as to himself what he attributes to god" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 27); what man renounces, he enjoys in God, and in proportion to the way the qualities "heighten" God, they are mitigated in man. Although, this is only a certain false humility since the individual can revere what he renounces by way of God. Paradoxically, man suppresses his own positive elements in order to invest them in God and enjoy them in mediated form and so renounces them in order to appreciate them as his own. Feuerbach sees this as the danger of religion, that man abstracts

from himself his greatest potentiality which fall victim to an illusory and misguided religious system of belief instead of man appreciating his qualities as his own potential directly.

Feuerbach's claim is that religion is a *projection* of man's nature. Feuerbach seems to apply the term *projection* partially as an analogy and partly literally, as a functional mechanism of man's being. One can view projection as a transferring or ascription of internal qualities, outwardly, past the limits of subjectivity. Man creates an "image" of something which he comes to believe is actually outside him, that the imagined phenomenon is actually a functioning objective agency:

Man – this is the mystery of religion – projects himself into objectivity, and then again makes himself an object to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject; he thinks of himself is an object to himself, but as the object of an object, of another being than himself. Thus here. Man is an object to God (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 30).

This passage requires clarification: Man creates an image – which is essentially a culmination of his own qualities – posits its existence as being outside himself – he proceeds to conceive himself as being an object of association of the created image; the image is viewed as a subjective agent of its own. In other words, man mistakenly conceives something which is essentially himself, as something alien which in turn is able to have man as an object. Feuerbach expresses the same sentiment in a more figurative form elsewhere in *Essence of Christianity* (1989): "Religion is human nature reflected, mirrored in itself ... God is the mirror of man" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 63). So, in a sense man projects an image which reflects his own being, but the reflected image is somehow veiled and obscured, concealing its true origins. Maybe the above used terminology, "creates an image", is misleading. Firstly, the verb 'create' gives the impression that the process of projection is an intentional act, and secondly, 'image', attenuates from the object projected its status as an operating and objective agent, able to exert influence in a seemingly autonomous way. In *Essence of Religion* (2004), Feuerbach connects the act of projection to man's relationship to nature: "... belief that in Nature another being is manifested, distinct from Nature herself ... that Nature is possessed by a strange, spiritual being ... but this spirit is the spirit of man, his imagination ... which he transfers involuntarily into Nature and makes her a symbol and mirror of his being" (Feuerbach, 2004, p. 7-8). Here it becomes clear that projection is an unintentional, unconscious act and also, what is projected can also be seen as something which becomes communicable in the form of symbolism or language.

2.4 Feuerbach on the Predicates of God

Another approach of Feuerbach, no less poignant, is the way he criticizes the logical and linguistic/semiotic side of theology and religion which is central to its justification and communicability. Feuerbach's contention is that predicates are what determine a given subject; without predicates, the subject which they supposedly describe does not exist, to "... deny all the qualities of a being is equivalent to denying the being himself" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 14). What religion *says* about its objects of belief is in reality all that is involved in the objects, the object is nothing beyond its descriptive predicates. Feuerbach advances this argument specifically in reaction to a tendency of religious thought to regard the objects of belief as something beyond language, something altogether incomprehensible as a way of avoiding the anthropomorphisms which the descriptive language of theology uses to communicate the nature of the divine: "... it is admitted that the predicates of the divine nature are finite, and ... human qualities, but their rejection is rejected..." (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 17-16). Feuerbach sees positing the incomprehensibility of God as a way of rejecting him, because if his nature is unknowable and beyond communication, he is indeed literally *unknowable*; there is nothing to which man can relate. Attributing incomprehensibility is still within the periphery of language, what is done here is that the *paradoxes* resulting from contradictory propositions of the linguistic approach to the objects of belief are attributed rather than single assertions. The paradox itself is revered as the nature of the divine. An attempt at understanding the objects of belief without anthropomorphism leads to the aforementioned idea of the utterly *unknown*, in which case the idea of for example God collapses since the idea is in itself grounded in communicable definitions which are altogether anthropomorphisms.

Feuerbach's approach is not quite sufficient, though, the fact that something is not predicated does not necessarily mean that it does not exist; it can simply be un-predicated, something yet to be discovered, and once it is found, can be appropriately described. The crucial point here is that conceptions of God or any other objects of belief have always been centered on language or symbolism in general, "... the word is the light of the world ... the word guides all truth" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 78). Religion is mediated through the use of signs, revelation is through language, or as the anthropologist Clifford Geertz puts it, religion "... *is ... a system of symbols*" (Geertz, 2002, p. 63). The varying approaches in all religious thought are, essentially, logical explorations of metaphysical questions with varying conclusion adopted as the fundamental doctrines of the respective religious system. Exploration of the

world by means of humanity, in search for *meaning*, and religion presupposes a meaningful relationship between the subject and the object of his belief. The anthropomorphism of religion is largely man's impressions of the world and his being within it, articulated into a network of symbols which are revered as divine.

2.5 Feuerbach: Interpretation

The various assertions of Feuerbach concerning the anthropomorphism of religion can be mapped as the following four points:

1. The essence of religion is wish
2. Religion is self-consciousness
3. Religion is man's dependency on (external) nature
4. Religion is a projection of man's nature

To this list can be added Feuerbach's suggestion regarding the emotive basis of the anthropomorphism of religion; they way he connects the abovementioned elements of religion to *feeling*: "Longing is the *necessity* of feeling, and the feeling longs for a personal God. But this longing after the personality of a God is true ... only when it is the longing for one personality, when it is satisfied with one. With the plurality of persons the truth of the want vanishes" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 146). Feuerbach emphasizes here a factor too often omitted from the critical discourse on religion; that of the subjective, emotional dimensions of belief "necessary", as Feuerbach points out, to justify it. The four elements already mentioned, taken in conjunction with *feeling* necessary as the grounds for their justification and their sustainment as belief, form Feuerbach's explanation of religion as anthropomorphism. In short, and inevitably simplified terms: dependency creates wishes/needs which are so profound that man projects himself outwardly, creates objects of belief as a mechanism through which he can understand and gain emotional fulfillment in light of the moral indifference and physical dangers of the world.

Projection is a useful term when it comes to understanding how humans engage with the world and how the consequences of that engagement are transferred to form religion. Projection can be seen as something which extends out from beyond man, as something which man "emits" from his being, or rather; as a consequence of man's being within the world he unconsciously, automatically emits certain phenomena which come to form the objects of belief. Projection can be seen as an excess of being; a certain ontological excess resulting from man's inability to cope with the world. Is this a satisfying explanation? If not, how can

this phenomenon be explained? If Guthrie's theory on how all religion is anthropomorphism, is recalled, and his premises, that "... perception is interpretation and all interpretation follows a pattern (Guthrie, 1993, p. 90) are taken seriously, an explanation might be possible. The human mind is physiologically constructed as to allow humans to simplify the absorption of the complexity of the phenomenal world by virtue of pattern recognition. Speaking about the interpretive mechanism of perception, Guthrie says that these:

... interpretations are choices made by the criteria of coherence (fit with existing information) and significance ... we scan what registers at lower levels of complexity and integration (for example, dots and lines) with models from higher levels (for example, edges and objects) applying first the models we find most important. The higher the level of model we can apply, the more meaning we generate (Guthrie, 1993, p. 43).

What this means is that the phenomenal world is always already interpreted before specific focus and attention is brought towards something. Perception is inherently interpretive and it searches cognitively for and interprets patterns, forms, shapes and organizes the sensuous objects, by virtue of schemata, into systemic information which simplify the comprehension and perceptual appropriation of the complexity of objects which the phenomenal world is composed of. Perceptual faculties of mind are *a priori* structured to interpret forms of the phenomenal world which conform to patterns and forms of those very same perceptual mechanisms. In other words, the human mind partakes in shaping the way in which the very world *appears* to it. The following is not Guthrie's claim, but it can be held that this is how projection functions on a physiological level. Guthrie, as already mentioned, sees religion stemming from man's tendency to interpret the forms encountered in the external world as humanlike. This, indeed, is not a sufficient explanation, but experiencing humanlike phenomena in the forms of the external world, on the other hand, contributes to the religious experience by complementing and enriching the symbolic material of religious systems. Obviously though, in varying degrees depending on historical context and on the given religious system's chosen objects of belief. Witnessing a spectral humanlike scene of the dusk shadows in the midst of a forest would perhaps affect a pagan religious culture more than a Christian one. What is crucial here, on this perceptual, phenomenological level, is that the world invites meaning; it somehow affirms that a meaning is to be found by conforming to mechanical cognitive and perceptual faculties. In other levels of consciousness emulates the abovementioned physiological projections. The idea of projection seems difficult to explain

the way Feuerbach espouses it but through Guthrie's idea it can be seen how humans relate to forms. Since humans project forms and patterns on a physiological level and react to them in mechanical ways, but also in more meaningful ways, it seems like humans might react to forms projected on "higher levels" of consciousness. In for example, imagination, memory and intuition and come to believe that what is projected is actually external. In both cases what is projected is fundamentally unseen given that it is purely formal.

From a Marxian point of view, the flaws of Feuerbach's reasoning are his emphasis on *nature, essence* and *self-consciousness*, "... human essence is no abstraction inherent in each individual..." (Marx and Engels, p. 122), positing a human essence is ambiguous at best when viewed in light of overlapping cultural idiosyncrasies within the historically ever-changing social and cultural circumstances that a human finds himself in. There is a certain aspect central to Feuerbach's polemic which is questionable. Does man invests his highest aspirations in God? God in the Hebrew Bible is vindictive, spiteful and brutally violent. It is not simply God's conspicuously malevolent behavior which testifies to the ambiguity of Feuerbach's claim. God's brutality can be justified as an act of incomprehensible love. Rather, it is the consequence of positing God as the highest ethical principle. God does not answer prayers and God does not come to man's aid during suffering and so on. Given the contingent felicity of people, a suffering person cannot simply express his bitterness towards God's favoritism, but he has to somehow pacify his suffering with the idea that his pain is a result of an inexplicable benevolence. The reason why Feuerbach's ideas do not hold concerning this is not because God is something entirely else than man's highest aspirations, but for the very reason that religion is anthropomorphic. If religion is a human projection, then religion also mirrors man's ethical paradoxes, his contradictory moral struggles. This is seems to be a result of the divine being at the same time metaphysical; a consequence of purely formal, logical explorations of the world, and as Feuerbach notes, personal: "feeling longs for a personal God". The divine is at the same time a personified phenomenon and constituted by various forms and attributes of other levels of mind. This, of course, is true of mainly the Judeo-Christian God as far as the personal aspect goes, with the inclusion of the logical elements it coincides also with Islam and Hinduism, and in general any religion which has personified deities as their central objects of belief.

With some modification of Feuerbach's theories, they can be made to address religion in general as anthropomorphism. True, his theory seems restricted to the Judeo-Christian tradition, with the exception of his ideas as they appear in *Essence of Religion* (2004), which

can encompass all religious ideas which posit their deities amidst nature, or are pantheistic. The poignancy of Feuerbach's conceptual approach to religion is precisely his focus on the rhetoric of religious discourse; it is through religious discourse of a given culture that the anthropomorphism is discovered and unveiled and from there it can be traced to the emotive grounds on which the discourse rests. What if it is the *form of consciousness* that in reality man projects outwardly? Can for example the idea of infinity or omnipresence be considered a *quality* of thought? Could it not possibly be the case that it is rather a form of thought – or the form of consciousness? In *Essence of Christianity* (1989) there is a passage where Feuerbach explores these ideas and rhetorically addresses questions to theologians and philosophers:

God is immaterial essence, intelligence, spirit, pure understanding. Of God as God no image can be made; but canst thou frame an image of mind? Has mind a form? Is not its activity the most inexplicable, the most incapable of representation? God is incomprehensible; but knowest thou the nature of intelligence? Hast thou searched out the mysterious operation of thought, the hidden nature of self-consciousness? (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 35-6).

God is seen to *precisely* mirror consciousness – and if Marx's critique is kept in mind – what essentially varies within differing religious paradigms is exactly *the content* of consciousness; the content, the ideas, the ethical contemplations etc. is what is culturally conditioned. This includes even *formal* aspects concerning the spatial “texture” of the God for example which seem to parallel the same formal elements within consciousness. An example of this could be the 28th fragment of the Greek philosopher Empedocles: “... he (God) is equal in all directions to himself altogether eternal, a rounded Sphere enjoying a circular solitude” (Wilbur and Allen, 1979, p. 147). What is central to religious thinking is that the world is expected to “behave” in the very same way as the human mind does. As stated above, what the fundamental principles concerning a religious system are, depends entirely on what logical conclusions are adapted – and this indeed depends on the various contextual factors of any given culture – and hence the differing cultural manifestations of religion. What is central to religion, even more important than the figure of the divine as a being, is the conclusion drawn from the varying impressions appropriated from being within the world. It is quintessentially a question of *meaning*. The conclusions to be drawn from man's being within the world are not exhaustive and so are the consequential meanings – what is essential though, is that the meaning appropriated harmonizes to a large extent with emotive subjective conditions.

Buddhism is a religious system that has sometimes been considered non-anthropomorphic and non-theistic. The sociologist Emile Durkheim, in his book *The Elementary forms of the Religious Life* (*Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*) (1964), claims that "... there are great religions from which the idea of gods and spirit is absent, or at least, where it plays only a secondary or minor role. This is the case with Buddhism" (Durkheim, 1964, p. 30). As Durkheim points out, various forms of Buddhism do have some form of minor deities, spirits or ghosts and in some cases the Buddha is revered as God – but the theistic side is not central to the Buddhist doctrines, on the contrary, it is possible to claim that the doctrines of Buddhism are entirely atheistic. If this is true, then Buddhism in its integral principles is essentially philosophical and could simply be regarded as philosophy; but why is Buddhism then considered a religious system, with millions of practitioners and believers? Buddhism would be entirely philosophical, that is, if it was not for the ideas of reincarnation and *nirvana* – enlightenment. The Buddhist doctrine promises meaning to life in this twofold way; firstly, an answer to man's finiteness as reincarnation. Secondly, it has an implicitly teleological focus – that of nirvana. If the principles of Buddhism are followed, a goal is to be strived for in the form of enlightenment which means bliss/serenity/peace and the eradication of suffering. Common to many cultural varieties of Buddhism, is a logical edifice built on its own conclusions regarding the metaphysical impressions of the world. This conclusion is reached from logical speculations regarding the structure of the world based on metaphysics of being as becoming and transience. In very simplified terms: the phenomenal world is ever-changing – illusion. As a reaction to the illusory nature of the external world, and in reaction to the suffering consequential of being within the world, nirvana promises a kind of peace. Essentially, that of meaning, *truth and totality*.

Meaning, truth, and pacification of suffering are aspect all of which seem ubiquitous within all religious thought. What if meaning and truth are seen as ways of expressing totality, completeness and omniscience? On a physiological level, this resonates with the cognition and perception. They too, search for and are grounded on patterns, systems, organization, simplification, order and in short, *form*. Somehow, then, humans have an emotive relationship with abovementioned structures of their mind and the phenomenal world. Religious experiences cannot be reduced to the physiological aspects of mind. They are indeed irreducible but function congruently in intricate ways. If we return to the discussion of Feuerbach's conception of self-consciousness, it can be asserted with Feuerbach that, whilst aspects of consciousness have form, consciousness as whole does not in a strict

sense. Although, consciousness is somehow *felt*; it is sensation. To a certain extent the same can be claimed about the phenomenal world, it's not only tangible, heard, smelled, and seen; it is also *felt*. The philosopher Merleau-Ponty made this point in his book *Phenomenology of Perception (Phénoménologie de la Perception)* (2006), where he holds that the subjective and objective "worlds" are interwoven and difficult to separate. According to this view it would seem difficult to determine where the individual's consciousness ends and his objective, external world begins, and that "... the spatiality of the thing and its being as a thing are not two distinct problems" (Merleau-Ponty, 2006, p. 171).

It can also be said that the objective, phenomenal world *feels* meaningful, and further, that the *forms* of the phenomenal world are felt by the subject experiencing it. Given that consciousness is not form and that it is not consciousness per se, as a whole that is projected as to form religion, could it be something else which is projected – a *form* profound enough to explain the religious experience - something so ubiquitous that envelops consciousness and being?

Dependency of an individual towards nature and other men and wish/need are Feuerbach's emotional motivation strong enough to substantiate belief. Dependency calls for needs, both intellectual and emotional, which are unfulfilled by the indifference of the world – and so; man posits God in an attempt to fulfill those very needs: "God is the love that satisfies our wishes, our emotional wants ... the wish exalted to the certainty of its fulfillment ... certainty is the highest power of man" (Feuerbach, 1989, p. 121). The need which is transferred to religion is the result of excessive unreciprocated dependency, but what if the need, the lack which is projected and actualized in religion, originally had an object? That the need stems from an originally fulfilled state of being?

3. Religion is Projection of Lack

3.1 On Psycho-Analysis

I agree with the basic idea of Freud's understanding of lack as motivation for a religious need. Religious belief is produced as a result of a *lack* which stems from a slowly progressing departure from the comfort and safety of childhood or rather pre-childhood. This need had an original object and that is the maternal womb. The totality and omnipresent comfort and safety of the womb produce an *ontological integument*, an all-enveloping layer that is to some extent a simulation or emulation of the original, textural and sensuous feeling of being enveloped by the womb. The integument is pure *form* – essentially empty form – awaiting signification. In order to better illustrate this, the analysis will be briefly linked to Freud and his ideas on his theory that the need for belief is rooted in childhood.

Sigmund Freud developed the theories and practice of psycho-analysis - which in simplified terms – studies the consciousness and the self (the “I”). The self is understood as an inherently split phenomena composed of the triad of *the id*, *super-ego* and *ego*. The motivations and thoughts of humans are mostly unknown. According to Freud, motivation consists of varying factors. Some are conscious, and others have their origin in the unconscious part of mind. The *id* and *superego* are aspects of the unconscious. The *id* is composed of primal instincts and drives and so is the *libido* as a force which resists the laws and *de facto* rules of culture and society. The *superego* can be seen as a culmination of the ethical commandments of society and family and the coinciding psychological burden of contrast and comparison since the individual cannot fulfill the standards expected of him. In psycho-analysis the self is radically de-centered and the psychology of humans is seen as a dynamic struggle between the conflicting forces within the person. In his lectures on psycho-analysis Freud explained his discovery of the unconscious as the following:

An exploration through hypnosis has brought to light, what at first seemed almost incomprehensible, that mental phenomena of one and the same individual are organized together in various ways. Such ensembles can be more or less independent of one and other or “known nothing” of each other (Freud, 1976, p. 52).³

Certain events, specifically traumatic ones, and thoughts are repressed according to Freud's tools for diagnosing neurotic features of his patients. The mental antagonisms appear

³ The quote in Icelandic: „Könnun á dáleiðslufyrirbærum hefir leitt það í ljós, sem í fyrstu virtist nær óskiljanlegt, að sálarþættir eins og sama einstaklings geta skipað sér saman með ýmsu móti. Slíkar samsetningar geta verið meira og minna óháðar hver annarri, „ekkert vitað“ hver um aðra...”

through narratives, memory, fantasies, dreams, desires, free-association and various forms of symbolic material articulated as a means to bypass the unconscious or relieve repressed psychological factors. In an effort to unveil the hidden unconscious motivation in a patient's life, a symbolic and meaningful narrative is created by means of memory. Memory-gaps consequential of repression are connected and a trajectory traced backwards to childhood. Sexuality and guilt dominate the Freudian paradigm. Sexuality "pours" into and affects the entire mental spectrum and begins in early childhood where the parents are the original object of the child's affection: "... parents play a leading part in the infantile psychology of all persons ... falling in love with one parent and hating the other forms part of the stock of the psychic impulses which arise in childhood" (Freud, 1997, p. 155).

3.2 Sigmund Freud: Oedipus vs. the Integument

This paradoxical love/hate relationship with the parents results in the formation of the *Oedipus complex* – the unconscious desires of a child towards a parent of an opposite sex. At the heart of Freudian psycho-analysis is a certain moral struggle between the drive of love, *Eros*, and the drive for destruction and death, *Thanatos*:

Whether one has killed one's father or has abstained from doing so is not really the decisive thing. One is bound to feel guilty in either case, for the sense of guilt is an expression of the conflict due to ambivalence, of the eternal struggle between *Eros* and the instinct of death. This conflict is set going as soon as men are faced with the task of living together (Freud, 1969, p. 69).

Freud's point here is that culture is a suppressing force in an individual's life, the cause of his alienation and repression in light of the fact that the individual cannot find articulation for his desires and drives within it. Society is a conditioning and regulating authority as the pleasure principle and the reality principle are in constant struggle with. The above cited passage illustrates Freud's central concerns which forms the basis of his theory of religion. The basis is the contradictory emotions towards the father and the ensuing guilt which find expression in the idea of God. Freud traces the need for religion to the child's relationship with the father both as an individual offering protection and to the father as a symbolic figure representing guilt resulting from the murder of the "primal father". These two positions to a large extent overlap in Freud's thinking but they can, ultimately, be considered independently of one and other. What the idea of the Oedipus complex and its connection to religion points out, is exactly what was missing from Feuerbach's contention that in religion man registers

only his highest ideals; Freud, on the other hand, shows that religion is paradoxical by virtue of the fact that consciousness is based on paradoxical, bidirectional struggles and nature of this struggle is largely unknown to the subject in question. The idea of the killing of the “primal father” is demonstrated in Freud’s work *Totem and Taboo* (1946), where he studies the rituals and religious practices of totemic tribes and the resulting social taboos. The respective totem animal represents the father symbolically in the form of guilt from the original killing of the father and the reverence which the guilt inevitably commands. In short; at an indefinite pre-historic time, a band of sons who resented their father’s power and sexual control, gathered their strength and collectively murdered him and “... in the further development of religions these two inciting factors, the son’s sense of guilt and his defiance were never again extinguished” (Freud, 1946, p. 196).

In his book, *Future of an Illusion (Die Zukunft einer Illusion)* (1970), Freud explores the topic of religion as the symbolic manifestation of the Oedipus complex and the regulatory effect religion has on individuals within society. Religion’s ethical role and its function as panacea against anxiety and as a fulfillment of needs stems from a dependency on the protection of the father. According to Freud, culture protects man in general from the natural world, its “... principle task ... is to defend us against nature” (Freud, p. 11). Within the family, the father plays a similar role towards his children. Culture suppresses the force of man’s desires but is at the same time a protector of man from nature. Similarly, the child has contradicting emotions towards the father since he is both the protector and an individual whom the child fears. As a result, fueled by guilt, fear and longing, the child needs and seeks an authority figure, both politically and religiously. In light of “... man’s helplessness ... along with it his longing for his father”, the gods have a “... threefold task: they must exorcize the terrors of nature, they must reconcile men to the cruelty of Fate, particularly as it is shown in death, and they must compensate them for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on them” (Freud, 1970. p. 13-14). These ideas partially echo Feuerbach’s thoughts in *Essence of Religion* (2004), the dependency of man on nature and in consequence to its overwhelming power, the excessive needs it creates within man. With of course the addition of the ambiguous relationship man has towards his seeming benefactors and protectors:

“When the growing individual finds that finds that he is destined to remain a child for ever, that he can never do without protections against strange superior powers, he lends those powers the features belonging to the figure of his father; he creates for himself the

gods whom he dreads, whom he seeks to propitiate, and whom he nevertheless entrusts with his own protection” (Freud, 1970. p. 20).

The idea of the father as source of the concept of God is more the consequence of the patriarchal structure of Western culture than the father being an actual representative of safety within the family. It is wholly a result of a particular culture’s ideological and political structure. Even more so than Feuerbach’s idea, Freud’s theory of God as a representation of the father simply is not adaptable to the ideas of the divine in religious systems outside the Judeo-Christian tradition. Slavoj Žižek makes this point in his book, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (2008):

In contrast to both Judaism and Christianity, the two other religions of the book, Islam excludes God from the domain of the paternal logic: Allah is not a father, not even a symbolic one – God as one is neither born nor does he give birth to creatures: *there is no place for a Holy Family in Islam* (Žižek, 2008, p. 114).

What is essential to Freud’s thinking is his emphasis that the need which is at the root of religion has its origins in childhood. The father is never fully adequate as a protective figure and representative of safety. A child does not comprehend the scope of situations which the father should protect it from. Such scenes are judged from the vantage point of adulthood, where the concept of danger and threat is much more realistic. This is then projected back into childhood, and used as a referential point to judge, in view of preconceived conceptions of masculinity, the father’s protective power. In my view, the emphasis should rather be on the unconditional care of the mother. The mother’s care is not quite satisfactory either because the protective comfort of parental care is never perfect. The lack is essentially its ultimate point of reference. The true comfort is the womb of the mother and the initial time spent away from the womb in the arms of the caregiver regardless of whom that caregiver might be. Traditionally the mother has been the prime caregiver of the infant and small children. It is not claimed that parents do not provide protection and comfort. On the contrary, in most cases they do provide the child with the comforts they are able to offer. Parents simply do not represent the unconditional safety which the child unconsciously seeks. The integument requires as its criteria of fulfillment things which are never completely adequate. An infant’s passage into the world is painful, to which the infant finds momentary pacification in the embrace of the mother – but her embrace is *not* the state of being from where the infant came, i.e. the omnipresent safety of the womb.

4. Conclusion: The Integument and the Anthropomorphism of Belief

The ontological integument can be seen as a “simulation” of the womb, it seeks signification of the primary totality which produced it, but is never so, since it is constantly referring back to the womb as the ultimate criteria of fulfillment. The integument as it is projected onto the external world becomes the anthropomorphism of belief which forms the basis of religion, or in other words, the integument, as form, comes to be signified by the objects of religion. What is project by humans is the integument, an enveloping layer which comes to correspond with the totality of the phenomenal horizon which the external world consist of. Although as a “simulation” it is always somehow lacking. The phenomenal horizon *appears* to be a totality – a seamless whole – but like consciousness it does not quite have a particular form. It has a certain locality but beyond that it seems to expand indefinitely. So, perceptually, the mind seeks to unify and systematize a constantly changing horizon – on this level the integument emulates the perceptual faculties; it tries to achieve signification of totality. Perception and the integument both seek totality even though the world is never completely so and hence the integument transcends the world. In other words, the world always *feels* lacking, as it could always expand beyond its appearance. Like Freud’s super-ego the integument is not independent of a human’s psychological structure, but it has in some sense a dynamic vigor of its own. In a sense, the integument is ontological; it envelopes our entire being within the world – but at the same time it is on a certain level felt - and is in that case phenomenological, and is, then, to a certain extent onto-phenomenological. The integument echoes to some extent Heidegger’s *Da-sein* and the way being is unveiled through particulars moods:

This possibility of the mood ... discloses the burdensome character of Da-sein even when it alleviates that burden. Mood makes manifest “how one is and is coming along.” In this “how one is” being in a mood brings being to its “there” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 127).

For Heidegger, in very simplified terms, being is brought to light through anxiety (Angst); being somehow shows itself through the force of anxiety. The integument, on the other hand, could be said to be called for during states of deep panic, anxiety or nausea. There are moments, for example, where a person begins to pray or call for some indefinite power (for a religious person it could be God) to come to its aid. Other occasions the integument finds momentary fulfillment as in the way religious revelations, trances, psychedelic experiences or epiphanies are described; where individuals experiences an overwhelming sense of totality, singularity or “oneness” in their relationship to the world. In more moderate

situations people seek a comforting arrangement of their environment, that their environment feels securely structured in a complete way. People's homes are probably the best example of this or an individual's own private comforting space within their home. In other cases it can be by virtue of the fact that the world is confusing, diversified, painful and complex, that an individual comes to believe that "somewhere else" there exists order, totality and completeness.

The integument is *felt*, as it is in a way a recreated womb; but is never the womb as it can never offer the ubiquitous protective screen which it was in its primacy. This integument is *pure form* which is essentially lack awaiting signification. Since the world is essentially split, differentiated, humans seek the same from its parts as from the whole, indeed, the caregivers of childhood are usually two (father and mother, or more), and so the caregivers become the initial signifiers of the lack, the primary substitutions of the true comfort of the womb. The integument seeks signification, both partially and wholly, but always as some form of totality and ubiquity. As an individual develops, the criteria for safety and what is comforting alters and it becomes intellectual. Contextual safety of an environment comes to change into ideological safety; that the knowledge that a person has *is actual, has meaning* – that it, ultimately, is *true*. It should be noted that an individual's yearning for his knowledge to be true sometimes contradicts his actual belief about the possibility of whether what he knows is actually true. The integument calls for this even though the individual "knows better" about the truth or actuality of any given state of affairs. A part of oneself attempts to make a certain judgment about things – doubt or the idea of the multiplicity of things then enters into judgment through contemplation of whether the given judgment is actually the case or not – and contradicts the certainty of a single, exhaustive judgment.

What is also interesting is the paradoxical nature of *need* and *longing*; humans simply do not know what it is that can satisfy their *ultimate* need, or what can unconditionally pacify their suffering; the need which is at the basis of belief, is somehow *pure want* – it longs for – even though, that which it longs for will impossibly be fulfilled. This is because the need originally had an object which fulfilled it – and as a result – what the need longs for, what the desire is lacking; *is totality, ubiquity, the ultimate*, etc. The integument longs for something that can possibly simulate that which was lost and can represent in any way the state of being that was departed from.

In light of the anthropomorphism of belief, it seems possible to state that all religion is inherently anthropomorphic. It seems inevitable, that if you seek meaning outside the human periphery of concepts – you will only see the fragmented reflection of yourself; “... if you wish for a being without any anthropomorphism, without any human additions, be they additions of the intellect, or the heart, or of the imagination, then be courageous and consistent enough to give up God altogether, and to appeal only to pure, naked, godless nature as to the last basis of your existence” (Feuerbach, 2004, p. 48). What are the possible consequences of this analysis – if there are any such conclusions to be drawn? If religion is anthropomorphic – a spectral mirror of humanity seeking signification of their being – it expresses those very elements which are fundamental to our being; it is humanity itself that man strains to achieve a deeper understanding of through religion – a mirror of our struggle to comprehend.

Freud considered the longing for the womb to be a sign of mental regression. A person seeks the comforting safety of the mother when he is unable to cope with a given situation and this need is sometimes articulated through dreams: “... whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before', we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body” (Freud, 2004, p. 224).⁴ In Freud's view religion was a “delusion” (Freud, 1970, p. 26), a regressive, puerile state which humans have to develop out of. Firstly, it should be illustrated, that there is a sense in which the integument is a trace of an individual's being or an excess. It develops along and through an individual's life and it remains for the most part unconscious. It is not here suggested, along with Freud, that an individual literally longs to return to the womb – the individual has no memory of the being in the womb. An individual's life proceeds seamlessly through multiple transformations and through each stage the integument also alters – but what it requires, fundamentally, remains the same. Kierkegaard's struggle with belief in some ways is the opposite of the protective comfort and safety which the womb offered and the integument seeks to simulate. Kierkegaard fought the ethical and existential consequences of religion which culminated in his idea of the *leap*: “He who whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy ... freedom succumbs in this dizziness. Further than this, psychology will not go. In that very moment everything is changed, and freedom ... sees that it is guilty. Between these two moments lies the leap” (Kierkegaard, 1980, p. 41). The

⁴ The quote in Icelandic: „... hvert skipti sem einhvern dreymir stað eða land og segir við sjálfan sig í draumnum: “Þennan stað þekki ég, hér hef ég verið áður” – getum við gert ráð fyrir að staðurinn sé sköp eða líkami móðurinnar.“

leap, according to Kierkegaard, is taken when an individual “throws” himself into the uncertainties of true belief. An individual does not know what will lie beyond this leap, or what kind of existence will take the place of the previous one from where the individual leaps; for Kierkegaard there is only one way to find out.

Belief, as a result of the integument, proceeds unconsciously, naturally as an inevitable consequence of being in the world. The integument is not seen as a regressive or infantile longing as Freud viewed religion. The integument underlines a fundamental need of humans, regardless of their particular environment and cultural idiosyncrasies. Something that seeks certainty, comfort and totality, a position that has to be leapt from in view of the “true” consequences of belief if Kierkegaard’s conception of religion is taken into account. But, ultimately, the integument will follow the individual to whatever existential state he leaps. In view of the integument as a something which develops analogously to the individual, as something which adapts, something which is a process; it can be seen as a creative force. And as such, it testifies to the very way in which humans need to confront the world.

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