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Psychoanalysis' Look into Fetishism, Philosophy, and Religion

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Psychoanalysis' look into fetishism, philosophy, and religion is a combination which seems to be a little bit unusual for the general observer but not outrageous. Philosophers in earlier centuries like Descartes, Spinoza, and many others were defender of their faith and combined philosophical theory with religious belief. But there is also a scientific side to philosophy and that goes into the area of natural science, philosophy of the mind and psychology developed out of it. Psychology is based on research and facts alone and philosophy is more hypothetical thinking and argumentation which can be very heated sometimes. Psychoanalysis is a area of psychology what became famous with the psychologist and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Freud was famous for his theory of the unconsciousness and his view on the Oedipus-Complex what is a part of a fetish disorder. Since he was a man of science only, his view on religion differed from that of the philosophers already mentioned. The focus of this essay is going be on Freud and his religious view, but also about fetishism and philosophy because fetishism is not always sexual based but can be also a part of faith and philosophy. The references, I'm going to be using, are articles by Richard Tuch and Gideon Lev, and they based on psychoanalysis with the connection to religion, philosophy, and fetishism.

Fetishism is seen mostly as a sexual obsession or in a more severe form as disorder which can be repressed childhood memories or a disturbed relationship to parents or other caregivers. The Oedipus-Complex is a mental disorder where the person has an usual love for the parent of the opposite sex and a hate for the parent of the same sex. The hate of this comes from the fear of castration and supposed to be for both sexes, male and female. "In Freud's thinking, something that was missing (the woman's penis), the fetishistic object is seen as the thing itself and not a substitute for, or symbol of, something else" (Tuch, 2018). Means, women are jealous of not having a penis and that results of hating the male caregiver. Some feminist philosophers would be arguing against it because Freud was mostly trained in seeing women as biological objects. It is more an opinion based on subjectivity, but it makes sense and should be taken in consideration.

The term fetishism can be found in religion and also in philosophy, but it is more argumentative

for philosophy and has a theological, spiritual background for religion. Karl Marx's idea of fetishism was based on the worshiping of capital which is a theory in philosophy and social research. “In Marx's thinking, the fetishization of commodities” (Tuch, 2018) which explains how society is dependent and obsessed with money and property and doesn't care how to get it. In my opinion, it can turn into a mental obsession for some individuals what can be very concerning for them and their environment around them. The fact is, if it touches the individual, it can touch the whole society.

Primitive religions are full of fetishistic objects which are being worshiped in rituals where the worshipers directly communicate with their gods. In colonial Africa, Europeans saw those religions with a feeling of fear of the unknown and called them dangerous. Everything what was different and didn't fit in their European view of religion had to be fought of, destroyed, and replaced by something more advanced and abstract which could be worshiped without engaging in primitive desires and habits. “Drawn chiefly from European conclusions about the fetishistic religious practices of Africans” (Tuch, 2018).

Sigmund Freud and his view of religion was of secular nature. Psychoanalysis should be free of religion and superstitious belief what shows the rational nature of it and the scientific approach to the healing of the mind which was totally new. Before that people believed, if someone was mentally ill, an evil spirit possessed them and those poor creatures were victims of dubious religious rituals to get rid of those spirits and be healed (Exorcism). “The ritualistic religious preoccupation was compared by Freud to an obsessional neurosis” (Lev, 2018). To compare religion with a neurosis is a very harsh opinion of something which is maybe not free of mistakes, but can give comfort in a different way through spiritual guidance. For practitioners of religion that point of view is hard to understand and difficult to cope with, if psychoanalysis is their treatment and Freud is their psychologist. This attitude could put their medical healing process into danger. In my personal opinion. I like psychoanalysis, but I'm also a person who listens to spiritual advise and Freud would have scared me personally through his opinion of religion. “It is quite common to find analysts such as Fenichel proudly writing now, as their

patients progressed in their analyses, their attachment to religion has ended” (Lev, 2018).

Freud claimed that religion was a product from early childhood on and society did their part to strengthen any religious belief. He described the father of the family as real authority person and God was created in that image. The father figure was to Freud's time the head of the household and the person who made all the decisions pertaining to other family members. His ruling was law in people's personal life, almost like God who creates and rules over us. “This is how man creates God-not in his own image, but in the image of his dad” (Lev, 2018). His next criticism went to society where children, according to Freud, were being forced to learn about religion in a way to control their sexual phases and educate them according to society rules. Children were condemned to suppress their feelings and had no opinion of their own. Many families in society treated their children like little adults where being a child was totally ignored and he claimed religion was the cause of all that. Freud also claimed that people were ignorant and behaved like little children, if it came to faith. “The whole subject of religion is so patently infantile” (Lev, 2018).

Freud's theory about childhood dreams is important to an adult who suffers from anxiety because many fears are buried in the unconsciousness and dreams can bring them out. Our unconsciousness is a part of long term memory and is sometimes suppressed by us and we can't remember what actually happened because we feel overwhelmed and maybe threatened by unwanted memories. Psychoanalysis treats the person in an more unconventional way because the unconscious mind cannot be researched and the practitioner has only that what the patient is telling him. That could be the cause why most psychoanalyst won't give the impression, religion is a part of it. In one of his articles, Freud mentioned the “Uncanny” what sounds to some of his colleagues strange. He is talking about hidden desires that we are afraid to express because society could see us as not normal and we also afraid, we actually have those desires. Since religion is part of society and most of the time conservative, psychoanalysis was probably seen sometimes as an outlet to live out those urges and the practitioner was considered as a tool for the patient.

In the United States, the psychoanalysis community tried to move towards scientific and medical treatments and give the profession, in their opinion, less spirit what is actually more philosophical than religious, since we are talking about psychology. Philosophy is the cradle of psychology and spirit/soul means in philosophy mind, I would say, it is more a philosophical problem than a religious one. Like already mentioned in the beginning, many of the Christian philosophers had no problems to combine their religious believes with natural science. Maybe unbelievable for members of the scientific community but a very common practice. Even Freud didn't believe in the practice of medicine, if it came to psychoanalysis, I guess it was for him to scientific. "He specifically wrote that psychoanalysis is not a specialized branch of medicine and that he cannot see how it is possible to dispute this" Lev, 2018). It is also a common practice to interchange philosophy with religion, even that philosophy is based on rational thinking and religion is based on faith. They can exist beside each other without a problem, but they are not interchangeable. Means, even Christian philosophers were rational thinkers.

The difference between religion and philosophy is mostly based on general understanding what each topic means. For the general population, it is maybe easier to grasp in their mind what religion means because most of us grew up with it and were confronted with it, like Freud said, from childhood on. On the contrary, philosophy is something that is hard for many people to understand and to appreciate because only people who are actually studying can see the meaning of its theories. Maybe, the rational nature of philosophy lets many people think what is it good for, it doesn't show much care or empathy towards other people, but it encourages your mind to think and make rational decisions. Many famous personalities trough history studied philosophy and had no problems keeping their religious faith and spirit. For example, Dr. Martin Luther-King was highly regarded as a minister and philosopher. One of the first presidents, Thomas Jefferson, studied philosophy because to his time the humanities were highly regarded. Psychologists, philosophers, and people of faith are all breathing the same air.

“Psychoanalysis, which is highly sensitive to changes in society and culture, seems to be responding to this shift or perhaps is even part of it. This was enabled by the general nature of the cultural shift, which had to do with the common pattern of faith, which is no longer institutionalized religion but personal spirituality. This new pattern of religiosity, Charles Taylor wrote, is a shattering development” (Lev, 2018). Religion developed from going to church and consulting a priest for spiritual advice to personally discovering one's believe in God. More and more people refuse to follow old church traditions, like going to church every Sunday. Before religion was part of every day life in society, it turned into someone's own private worshiping of God without any obligation to a religious institution. So psychoanalysis participates in this movement of being more open to religion and even mentions that patients could actually profit from it in a way what was seen before as a cause for concern, spirituality.

When I was reading those articles, I directly notice that psychoanalysis has a lot of elements from philosophy. But the philosophical part of the articles should have been done by philosophers, specially in the article by Richard Tuch. For example, he uses the philosopher Heidegger to explain infant behavior. Heidegger is more specialized in abstract ideas of existence which involve objective encounters. The article by Gideon Lev was much better because he seem to have a lot of knowledge about religion and talked more about psychology and psychoanalysis what he actually specializes in. But I must say, both articles were very informative and well written.

References

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