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Dracula and the Afterlife: A Psychological Explanation

Cover Page Footnote

Dr. Maser, Professor of Psychology, Department of Psychiatry, UCSD, has published numerous scientific articles and edited nine books. He previously taught at Tulane University and worked at NIH

***Dracula* and the Afterlife: A Psychological Explanation**

Jack D. Maser

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Until relatively recently, the primary psychological approach to understanding Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and the folklore of vampires has been psychoanalysis. Maurice Richardson asserted in 1956 that *Dracula* must be seen from a Freudian standpoint, since "from no other does the story really make any sense" (427). However, the psychoanalytic approach shares little with modern, scientifically based psychology. Fascinating though it may be, psychoanalytic theory has almost no measurable attributes and may itself be as mythical as vampires and an afterlife. Rather, psychoanalysis is a creative theory of human cognition and behavior that can be neither proven false, objectively replicated, nor used to predict novel, testable insights. As Clive Leatherdale, having presented such a reading of *Dracula*, concedes, "psychoanalysis has been to some extent dismissed as a literary fad whose time has come and gone" (190 n1).

This paper presents an alternative psychological theory that explains how vampirism has captured the imagination of so many people in so many cultures. This theory is called Existential Projection to an Afterlife (EPA) and it incorporates a number of well-studied psychological factors: Object constancy, generalization, fear and conditioning. Some background is needed to see how EPA theory provides a psychological mechanism for humans to reduce existential terror when contemplating death, i.e., non-existence of the self and nothingness. Fear is reduced by the comforting illusion of an afterlife.

Leatherdale states that "The concept of the vampire is founded upon two precepts: the belief in life after death, and the magical power of blood" (13). This paper will address both precepts, but with the major focus on the psychology of belief in life after death. Neither belief in vampires nor belief in an afterlife has any basis in objectively observed fact, yet belief in an afterlife is essentially universal in human society and belief in vampires is well established in the folklore of many cultures. The former is related to a deep need to perpetuate the self when the body dies, the latter to a method of doing so. The notion of an afterlife is linked to concepts of religion, God, good and evil, and while not all are related directly to EPA theory, this paper will touch upon those links.

1. The Self Concept

To have the mental capacity of reflecting on one's own thoughts, to be aware of being aware, is to have a concept of self. Not all species are capable of self reflection, and they manage to survive quite well. However, for a species that has this ability many possibilities emerge. Two clear realities emerge in humans: belief in a God or gods, and belief in a continued existence after death of the corporeal self, of that entity that reflects on our own thoughts. We shall call that entity the "self." Although we may be sure that this entity is not a little homunculus, its nature is poorly understood. Religions often speak of the soul, but that concept is even less well defined than the self, and it is not clear if they are equivalent concepts.

While no data exist on the number of people who believe that the self continues in existence after the body dies and decays, the number probably includes most of humankind. Nor is there data on my informal observation that when asked, "What if there is no afterlife?" the response is often that life would be meaningless or that this just can't be all there is. Most often the respondent falls back on religious teachings and faith. In nearly all societies, organized religion has co-opted the afterlife notion, primarily

by taking on the role of gatekeeper. If you are a member of a religion and follow its doctrines, continuation of the self in some form is said to be possible. Although no method of inquiry has proven that any form of an afterlife exists, religion has become the accepted pathway and has filled a powerful need in our species.

It can be argued that the vampire legend has resulted at least in part from the same psychological needs and underpinnings as religion. Vampirism is an alternative to the afterlife that religion provides and even might be considered a competing concept. It can also be expected that religion and vampirism are not merely competitive but hostile toward each other.¹ The need for self-continuation is so strong that it finds expression in folklore and numerous aspects of culture (e.g., vampire stories, ancestor worship, guardian angels, gods, ghosts, belief in mediums), literature (e.g., *Carmilla*, *A Matter of Conscience*, *Lovely Bones*, Dante's trilogy, *Interview with the Vampire*) and movies (e.g., *Nosferatu*, *The Sixth Sense*, *What Dreams May Come*, *Heaven Can Wait*). The fact that books and movies on the subject continue to make money for their producers reveals that the afterlife is a theme that people can and will buy into. Moreover, the belief that dead relatives watch over the living may be a precursor to ancestor worship, a practice that is common in Chinese and Japanese cultures as well as some African tribes and Pueblo Indians, to name a few. If one merely wishes to honor one's ancestors an afterlife is unnecessary, but if one worships an ancestor, that entity should exist in some form somewhere.

2. Self-Awareness in Others: Theory of Mind

Given for a moment the fact of self-awareness, humans rapidly intuit that others of their species have the same ability, even though no proof exists to confirm that suspicion. For example, I know that I am aware of my own thoughts, but I do not actually know if readers of this paper have the same or even a similar ability. Nevertheless, I assume you do and with that assumption a wide range of behaviors that few other species appear to possess become possible: bluffing at poker, humor, deception, counter-deception, empathy, bargaining, sympathy, sorrow, role playing and "putting myself in your shoes." There is no sense in my bluffing in a poker game unless I believed that you would react to my bluff in a particular way. A good bluffer "reads" the mental state of those on the other side of the table. Of course, the person being bluffed is also trying to place himself in the mental state of the bluffer and may move to counter-deceive. Similarly, telling a joke would make little sense if I did not think that you would see the humor as I do. Not only is timing important to a joke-teller, but so also is an accurate estimate of the mental state of the person being told the joke.

The psychological principles underlying the belief that other organisms and entities have a self-concept are those of generalization and object constancy (OC). "Response generalization" can be defined as follows: After an organism learns to respond in a particular manner to a stimulus (his own thoughts in his body), other stimuli (i.e., other living beings with attributes similar to his own) are effective in eliciting similar responses. Thus, at some point in infancy we learn that we can think about our own thoughts (response) and begin to transfer that ability to other organisms and entities (stimuli with similar responses). "Object Constancy" is learning that the essence of objects does not change even when beyond the immediate perception of our senses. "Projection" is a psychodynamic mechanism in which one's own thoughts, beliefs and abilities are attributed to external persons or objects. "Anthropomorphism" is a form of projection in which we attribute human-like behaviors and their causes to animals.

In effect, generalization of the self-concept means that you are able to use your experience to model the mental state of another person. If I see you in a situation that I have encountered previously, I am

¹ For a more complete discussion of the relationship between Christianity and vampirism through the centuries, see J.Gordon Melton, *The Vampire Book*, 117-119.

likely to assume that your subjective experience will be similar to mine. Self-awareness opens the door for us to infer knowledge about the mental states of others; inferences that we make about what other people may (or may not) know or what they intend to do presupposes a comparable mental states in others. Psychologists refer to this ability as “theory of mind” or “social intelligence.” In terms of evolutionary theory, a self-concept allows you to use your knowledge and experience to relate more effectively to others and use introspectively based social strategies to compete with them for resources. But for many there is a dark side to having a self-concept: It opens the door to existential fear of death, i.e., the obliteration of this inner essence that we identify as “self” and is with us constantly.

3. Demonstration of a Self-Concept

To the extent that soul and self are similar entities, most religions have declared the self a non-material entity, and if they are valid on this point, the self cannot be demonstrated or understood scientifically. However, in a series of papers, G.G. Gallup, Jr. has objectively defined self-awareness in three species: humans, chimpanzees, and orangutans.² The simple laboratory test is whether or not an organism can recognize itself in a mirror. If it can, then by definition, it is self-aware.

The method used was as follows. Nine chimpanzees occupied nine separate rooms for ten days. Included in the rooms with each chimpanzee was a full-length mirror. At first the chimps treated the image in the mirror as another chimp, but around the third or fourth day their behavior began to change. Instead of treating the image in the mirror as another chimp, the primate began looking at parts of its own body that it had never seen before (e.g., inside the mouth, the forehead) and manipulating those parts while looking in the mirror. It appeared that the animals now realized that their behavior was the source of the behavior of the image in the mirror: they were looking at themselves, and by definition, they had a self-concept.

Still, a problem remained: How to show experimentally that Gallup’s inference about the chimpanzees’ behavior was not merely anthropomorphism or a result of bias. An objective test of self-recognition was needed, and the methodology that Gallup devised was quite ingenious. On the tenth day each chimpanzee was anesthetized and removed from its cage. Using a bright, red, odorless, non-irritating dye, Gallup painted the uppermost portion of an eyebrow ridge and the top half of the opposite ear. Without the aid of a mirror these parts of the chimp’s body could not be seen. The chimp was then placed back in its cage and allowed to recover fully from the anesthesia. The mirror was not in the room during recovery. Once dry, the paint was without olfactory or tactile cues.

When the mirror was re-introduced, Gallup counted the number of times that the chimp touched the painted area of his head compared to other places. All of the chimpanzees not only looked in the mirror and then touched the painted areas, but they often attempted to smell the finger that touched the paint. Moreover, upon recovery from anesthesia, the chimps spent three times as long looking at the mirror than prior to anesthesia. This test demonstrates that under controlled conditions chimpanzees recognize themselves in a mirror, and thereby, can be said to have a self-concept.

Can the same demonstration be made in other species, including humans? Subsequent to Gallup’s demonstration, various studies have used comparable procedures (e.g., a preferential looking test) with human infants.³ These findings converge to reveal that the ability of children to correctly decipher

² See G.G. Gallup Jr., “Chimpanzees: self-recognition,” *Science* 167 (1970): 86-87; “Do minds exist in species other than our own?” *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 9 (1985): 631-641; “Self-awareness and the emergence of mind in primates,” *American Journal of Primatology* 2 (1982): 237-248. Also see S.D. Suarez & Gallup, “Self-recognition in chimpanzees and orangutans, but not gorillas,” *Journal of Human Evolution* 10 (1981): 175-188.

³ For example: M.L. Howe & M.L. Courage, “On resolving the enigma of infantile amnesia,” *Psychological Bulletin* 113: 305-326; M. Nielsen, C. Dissanayake & Y. Kashima, “A longitudinal investigation of self-other discrimination and the emergence of

mirrored information about themselves appears between 18 and 24 months of age, with about 65% passing the mirror test by 24 months. Positive results using similar tests demonstrate that the orangutan has a self-concept, but experiments fail to reveal self-awareness in gorillas.⁴ Once established in chimpanzees and humans, the self-concept is quite stable until advanced senility⁵ at which time the ability of self-recognition can show marked decline. Stability of the self-concept in the orangutan has not been studied.

Localization of the Self and its Anthropological Origins.

One might also ask the following: If the self can be demonstrated, if it is a material entity, where is it housed in the body? and at what point in evolution did the self-concept emerge along with its attendant need for self-perpetuation? In answer to the first question, it is plausible that the self is located in the brain and emerges as an aspect of the brain's function in coordinating bodily activities. While we are not certain of exactly where that capacity resides in the brain, some evidence points to the frontal lobe region.⁶ In the Great Apes and human beings the frontal region is highly developed. It may be that the brain's self-representational capacity arises from neural networks that monitor the body's functioning and activity on a moment-to-moment basis. The self seems to be a component of the physical brain that has a representational capacity of the body as a whole.⁷ Location of the self in the brain places the theory in a monistic rather than a dualistic tradition, and the physical nature of the self confirms its reality rather than lessens it.

As to that point in our evolutionary history when the self-concept emerged along with a felt need for its continuance beyond death, we can only speculate. Anthropologically, the idea of dying – yet continuing to exist – is probably older than *Homo sapiens* as a species, since Neanderthal man buried food and tools with his dead. In the recorded history of our species we know that Egyptians went a step further by burying slaves with their leaders to serve them in another existence. Hindus practiced suttee, in which the living wife was cremated along with the body of the husband. Suttee was probably assimilated into Hinduism from a more ancient source; there is evidence that the Thracians, Scythians, Scandinavians, Chinese, and peoples of Oceania and Africa also followed suttee. In each case there is an expectation that the individual would need the wives, slaves and other items in the next life.

You may now notice that I misspoke when I earlier said that I could only assume, but not be certain, that any of you have a self-concept. Except in certain rare cases of neurological disorder, I am confident that you would pass the mirror image test and I would have objective proof that you too had a self-concept.

mirror self-recognition," *Infant Behavior and Development* 26.2 (2003): 213-226; and P. Rochat, *The Self in Infancy: Theory and Research* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1993).

⁴ See D.J. Shillito, G.G. Gallup Jr. & B.B. Beck, "Factors affecting mirror behaviour in western lowland gorillas," *Animal Behaviour* 57.5 (1999): 999-1004; Gallup, "Absence of self-recognition in a monkey (*Macaca fascicularis*) following prolonged exposure to a mirror," *Developmental Psychobiology* 10.3 (1977): 281-284; and Gallup, L.B. Wallnau & S.D. Suarez, "Failure to find self-recognition in mother-infant and infant-infant rhesus monkeys," *Folia Primatol* (Basel) 33.3 (1980): 210-219.

⁵ F. Biringer, J.R. Anderson & D. Strubel, "Self-recognition in senile dementia," *Experimental Aging Research* 14.4 (1988): 177-180; M.W. De Veer, Gallup, L.A. Theall, R. van den Bos & D.J. Povinelli, "An 8-year longitudinal study of mirror self-recognition in chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*)," *Neuropsychologia* 41 (2002): 229-234.

⁶ J.P. Keenan, M. Wheeler, G.G. Gallup, Jr., & A. Pascual-Leone, "Self-recognition and the right prefrontal cortex," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 4 (2000): 338-344; D.T. Stuss, G.G., Gallup, Jr., & M.P. Alexander, "The frontal lobes are necessary for 'theory of mind,'" *Brain* 124 (2001): 279-286.

⁷ P.S. Churchland, "Self-representation in nervous system," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*. 1001 (2003): 31-38; M. Jeannerod, "The mechanisms of self-recognition in humans," *Behavioural Brain Research* 142 (2003): 1-15.

4. Pathway to an Afterlife

With this description as background, Maser and Gallup realized that generalization and projection of self-recognition was a route to explain how humans can conceive of God. In 1990 they published an evolutionary account of theism.⁸ At the theory's core is the brain's innate awareness of itself. [A diagram illustrating how it works appears in the Appendix at the end of this essay.]

As described in EPA theory, the role of OC (explained below) is that of leading us to believe that self-awareness has always been and always will be with us. The behavioral law of generalization leads us to presume that our own self-awareness exists in others. Moreover, humans exhibit anthropomorphism when they attribute human-like characteristics to their pets, other animals and even inanimate objects. Projection of our thoughts does not end with others of our species and our pets or even other living entities (e.g., trees). Humans project their self-awareness onto non-living entities such as geologic formations (e.g., Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh in Vietnam), the sun (e.g., Apollo, the sun god), wind (e.g., Hopi Indians), and thunder (e.g., the Teotihuacan's state deity).

A variety of powers are attributed to dead humans and to their representations (e.g., Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, Icon of Our Lady of Tikhvin, and various saints through their relics and statues). Entities such as sacred rivers, the Wailing Wall, the Temple Mount and houses of worship (churches, mosques and synagogues) are not only places to participate in religious ceremonies and commune with God, but are often worshiped for themselves. Generalization of self-awareness has led to the sense that dead relatives watch over us. We visit their graves and monuments (e.g., Vietnam Memorial in Washington) often with the dual purpose of honoring them and with some expectation that those being honored will take note of the visit.

It now becomes only a short step from relatively abstract entities (e.g., the wind and the dead) to believe in a total abstraction, a god, with human characteristics but magnified into omni-attributes (omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence). In every case, the abilities of these gods – mythical, representational or abstract – have extensions of human attributes. Jealously, strength, envy, love, aggression, hate, reason, irrationality, and of course, self-awareness have all been attributed to gods and lesser beings (e.g., angels) by every culture. Christianity, for example, speaks of three gods in one (Father, Son, Holy Ghost). Philo of Alexandria referred to the Logos as Divine Reason, the model of the universe, and the first-born Son of God.⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that it was the Father's infinite capacity *to see Himself* that brought forth the logos. In summary, with these few examples, every culture has created its gods, some more abstract than others, but all with human attributes, including self-reflection. It is a natural part of our being, and when humans create a god, we do so in our image.

We now have half the equation: a means by which humans have the psychological capacity to conceive of God. But why does our species cling so tenaciously to that belief? Why does it have such a strong hold on so many of us, and why does this belief not simply extinguish in the absence of evidence or of reinforcement? These questions bring us to the second half of the equation. Death and decay are observable facts of existence, and we deduce that it will happen to us. But what happens to that inner self? Does it too cease to exist? It would appear that we find total extinction of the self abhorrent and the source of considerable anxiety. Philosophers such as Sartre have written books on the topic, and an early proponent of Theosophist movement, Annie Besant has discussed the issue with simple examples.¹⁰

Religious thought has merged fear of nothingness and total self annihilation with the concepts of God and an afterlife. While the body may decay, the self is said to move on to another life form. With

⁸ See Maser & Gallup, 515-532.

⁹ See F. Funk, "My fundamental assumptions and beliefs" (1996): <http://web.engr.oregonstate.edu/~funkk/Personal/beliefs.html>

¹⁰ J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1993); A. Besant, [pamphlet 1886]. *A Second Anthology of Atheism and Rationalism*, ed. G. Stein (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1987).

variation, Christian religious doctrines state that if you follow their tenets you will be resurrected (uncorrupted) from the dead sometime in the future, similar to the ascension of Jesus. In the meanwhile, you are housed in an extraterrestrial locale such as heaven, hell or purgatory or even on earth in some other life form (e.g., Hinduism). Knowing that the self is safe from existential annihilation reduces the fear, and fear reduction acts to strengthen our continued belief in God, the mediating role of religion and linkage to an afterlife. That is the EPA explanation proposed here.

Object Constancy.

A psychological principle that plays an important role in EPA, is called “object constancy (OC).” A technical definition of OC is “the capacity to see an object as being of constant size and shape despite variation in retinal position and distance from the observer” (Harnad, website). Early in life we learn that most objects have permanence, a constancy that we can count upon. The 19-inch screen TV does not change its size overnight; our house is in the same location at night as when we left for work in the morning; and when Mother has left the room she will re-appear. That is, even though the mother is out of sight and her image no longer occupies a place on our retina, the baby learns that she returns in the same physical shape and of the same essence as when she left. She may disappear, but she still exists. Constancy of objects is the norm and the practical implication is an expectancy that significant things in our world exist even when they are unseen. When something we expect to be constant does change, we often express surprise.

It can be argued that OC explains why humans expect the self to live on after the body has died, independent of the EPA explanation. Once the self-concept has developed it is always there, and we expect it to be there forever. The move from constancy of existing things to their continuing existence after removal – even removal by death – does not require a great cognitive leap. In pre-recorded history humans probably observed rituals to appease their prey or their ancestors because these objects retained some degree of constancy even when dead and/or unseen. In other words, it seems plausible that these practices are based on a generalization from well-entrenched OC expectation to expectation of some form of continued life after death. Certain practices are plausibly explained as motivated by fear that even after death some things experienced in life are potentially harmful and need to be reckoned with in another form of existence. Self-aware humans realized then and now that life is precarious, and as a constant in our lives, this precariousness carries over into the afterlife. The constancy of life’s dangers and uncertainties may have motivated the ancient Egyptians and others to make elaborate arrangements for the dead in the afterlife.

The doctrines of organized religion regarding the immortality of the soul probably come into the picture as an important derivative development. In the context of society, they provide a sanctioned, institutionalized method for consolidating beliefs in continuing life after death. But religion as we understand it today is not the original source of these beliefs. The presence of a self-concept and the EPA explanation are most likely the original sources. The assumption of our continuation after death has further implications for our conduct, especially if we make the additional assumption that after death our continuing spirits are not only potential dispensers, but also recipients, of rewards and punishments. The latter could be elaborated into constructs of hell and heaven. These elaborations seem to flow from fear of extinction of the self, i.e., the EPA explanation, and less from object constancy.

Object constancy appears to explain why we have come to believe in an afterlife. However, this argument ultimately is incomplete. While good evidence exists that monkeys have OC, there is no evidence that monkeys have mirror-image self-recognition.¹¹ By the operational definition used here, they

¹¹ See L. Ungerleider, L. Ganz, & K.H. Pribram, “Size constancy in rhesus monkeys: effects of pulvinar, prestriate, and inferotemporal lesions,” *Experimental Brain Research* 27.3/4 (1977): 251-269.

do not have a self-concept. Thus, OC may be a necessary condition for self-recognition, but it is not sufficient. The theory proposed here is that the concept of an afterlife follows from mirror image recognition and not just object constancy.

5. The Afterlife in Folklore: Vampires and Christianity

With this background, we can now understand where vampirism fits into folklore. The desire for immortality, ignorance, fear, vampire bats sucking the blood of cattle and a good imagination might easily produce vampire stories. Even the term “undead” is a way of saying that the self continues its existence. From the perspective of Christianity, in spirit and apparently in body, Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus becomes undead and by acceptance of Him as a “savior,” others may join Him in everlasting life. Without this premise, it is not clear that Christianity would have attained its position among worldwide religions.

As an afterlife form, vampires have numerous characteristics of living human beings. If they did not, vampires would be killing machines only, and have little psychological interest for us. What holds our interest are their human attributes, the resurrection of self with attributes that we can recognize easily as aspects of our own inner lives. Literary works present the undead as thinking, having various sensations (e.g., pain, fear, desire, touch) and with the potential to fulfill that strong human desire of living forever. Interesting variations on vampirism such as changing into bats or other life forms, sleeping in coffins, not being seen in mirrors, fear of the cross as a symbol of Christianity, great physical strength and other attributes are further extensions of human needs and the fertile imagination of multiple storytellers. At the heart of the matter, however, is the fact that the undead have achieved what the living desire: immortality.

At one level Christianity considers vampires evil because they kill innocent folk; at the level of Christian theology, however, taking a life is the least of it. From a theological perspective, the vampire defies God’s law and will: the creature lives forever. Of course, the prudent vampire must avoid garlic, a stake through the heart, and a few other potentially lethal situations, but under normal conditions the undead need never suffer total annihilation. Moreover, vampires can create their own life form, other vampires. In both cases – the avoidance of death and the creation of a new life form – the vampire has co-opted powers that heretofore were reserved for God. That the vampire may live forever and yet never pray, never be subject to God’s vengeance (and forgiveness), not follow the church’s rules and dogma, and not tithe, yet somehow avoid heaven, hell and purgatory, all run counter to a Christian, indeed probably any religious view, of what is acceptable and good. Is it any wonder that some believe that the mere sight of a cross makes a vampire cower? The means by which garlic keeps vampires at a distance is less clear, unless the undead also have a good olfactory sense.

6. Light and Blood: Symbol and Rite of Passage

Light and the sun are usually identified with safety and god across much of recorded human history, just as darkness and night have been identified with danger and evil. The cyclical nature of light and dark controls the rhythm of our lives, and without the sun there would be no life at all. It is not surprising that light and the afterlife have close linkages in human needs and beliefs. Apollo, the golden-haired son of Zeus and Leto, was worshiped by the Greeks as the Sun God. Shu, the ancient Egyptian god of dry air, wind and the atmosphere was also considered an aspect of sunlight. As with other protector gods, Shu had a dark side as a god overseeing punishment in the Land of the Dead.

Christianity frequently related creation, heaven and Jesus to light. On the first day of creation, God is said to have separated darkness from light and saw that light was good (Genesis 1:1-5). Heaven is nearly always imaged as bright and filled with light; hell is portrayed as shadowed and devoid of light. Jesus’s

disciple John has much to say about light: “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:2, also see John 9:1-7, 12:34-36, and 12:44-46). One more example comes from the solar image revealed by the Monstrance or Ostensorium in Catholicism. The Monstrance is a vessel used to display the host or body of Christ, and it often has a sun-like shape with the orb and rays made of silver.

God is equated with light, danger and death with darkness and shadows (e.g., Psalm 23: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil”). Generalizing from this equation, good equals Light/God/life and darkness equates with nothingness/absence of life, death, and the devil. Vampires, by extension, become associated with darkness and are often seen as instruments of the devil. Like Shu, as a protector God, Jesus too has a dark side. Failure to follow the dogma of “His” religion may result in everlasting punishment.

Vampire lore is not static. Stoker’s *Dracula* is an excellent example of a literary adaptation from folklore, but other writers and other media, such as the movies, are continually extending the popular image of vampires. A good example of this is the use of sunlight. While vampires are generally nocturnal, preferring to carry out their activities at night, the concept that sunlight can destroy a vampire is found neither in vampire folklore nor in Stoker’s novel. The motif of destruction by sunlight made its first appearance in the 1922 movie *Nosferatu* (Miller 128). Perhaps the most familiar use of the sunlight motif can be found in Anne Rice’s ground-breaking novel *Interview with the Vampire*, later adapted as a movie. Here we have a vivid scene in which the sun destroys two vampire women, reducing them to dust. Thus the movies have been responsible for introducing into popular western culture a new twist to the vampire myth: exposure to the sun means annihilation for the vampire. If this imagery of sunlight destroying vampires (evil) is to become a dominant feature of current folklore, it should relate to symbolism or the mythology of an afterlife, and so it does. When the evil of vampires is set against the combination of sunlight, sun worship and the concept of God being associated with light, we are well prepared to believe that a creature of the night can be destroyed by the sun.

The second significant symbol is blood. As gatekeepers to the afterlife, religions have set up various rites of passage, among which are circumcision, sacraments, baptism, confession, attending church, participating in the Mass including partaking of the Eucharist, and last rites. Failing to participate in these rites may deny access to immortality or heaven. Ceremonial blood is an important component of rite of passage into the afterlife. It is no coincidence that Christianity and *Dracula* have this point of contact, since blood relates to birth and life, and in its absence, to death. Blood is meaningful to us, realistically and symbolically. In pagan times and in some cultures today, drinking or draining blood was part of warfare and religious activity. Many see this behavior transferring to Christianity through the drinking of Christ’s blood during the Eucharist, for at the moment of consumption, the wine is held to be the blood of Jesus. Similarly, it is blood that conveys life and/or the essence of life to the undead. When Mina drinks Count Dracula’s blood from his breast, she takes a fatal step toward becoming one of the undead.

7. Summary

This paper has offered a psychological explanation for the widespread belief in an afterlife. The vampire myth is one means of achieving immortality and this theme has penetrated the folklore of many cultures. Fear of death is a primary reason that vampires and *Dracula* continue their hold over our imagination, and given its greater social acceptability, most people participate in religious activities for much the same reason. The mechanism underlying the strongly held belief in life after physical death is based on awareness of self and may evolve and be maintained by standard psychological principles. This mechanism is described by the EPA theory. Object constancy plays a role, but by itself OC is an inadequate explanation. Vampires have taken the powers of life and death away from God, reason enough for Christianity to see vampires as evil. Nevertheless, symbols of light and darkness, good and evil, blood

and an afterlife and the fact that both Dracula and Jesus have risen from the dead are ties that bind folklore and Christianity. Rooted in human psychology and culture, such ties are not easily broken. As long as humans fear non-existence, religion and the legend of the vampire are safe from falling into obscurity.

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APPENDIX

EXISTENTIAL PROJECTION TO AN AFTERLIFE (EPA) EXPLANATION

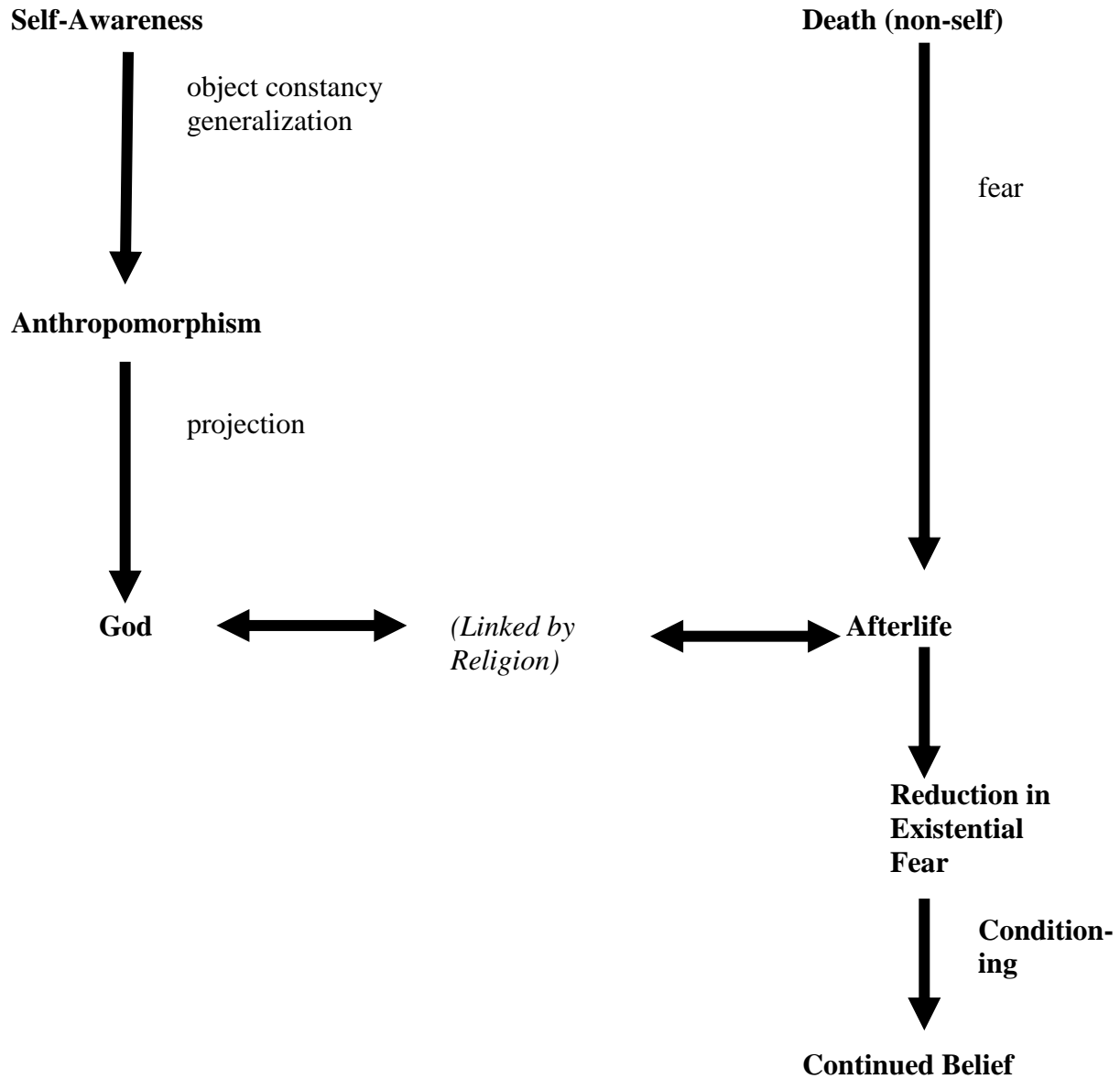


Figure 1. Object Constancy and generalization are cognitive processes that lead to our belief that others of our species have this ability, and since it has been with us always, it will always be with us. By the process of projection we anthropomorphize self-awareness to other objects and abstractions, such as God. This mechanism is maintained by fear of death. The promise of religion is that belief will allow entrance to an afterlife, thereby diminishing fear of non-existence. Fear reduction reinforces and strengthens the belief in an afterlife.

