

## **A Critical Analysis of Sigmund Freud-Mircea Eliade-view-of the relationship between religion and reality**

Throughout world civilizations, the support and negate of religion, the organization of life around the depth dimensions of experience—varied in form, completeness, and clarity in accordance with the enviroing culture,<sup>1</sup> have been the prolong debates among many philosophers, theologians, historians, and others because it is a main force that provides the lifetime norms and powers. In deed, at the beginning of the twenty century, two well-known scholars, Sigmund Freud<sup>2</sup> and Mircea Eliade<sup>3</sup>, in the fields of psychological and religious fields respectively had provided different or rather an opposite perspectives about the needs of religion in modern age. Therefore, this paper is going to provide a critical analysis of their polar viewed approaches about the religion and modern age's reality to see whether it is worthy to support and maintain the religion, generally. Before going to discuss their approaches in details, let's us review Sigmund Freud's and Mircea Eliade's important works that relate to this topic.

Sigmund Freud's famous book that negates the necessary of religion is "The Future of an Illusion." An atheist and lifelong critic of religious belief, in 71 page text, Freud used scientific analysis of religion to present a father-child model of religion due to "a store of ideas is created, born from man's need to make his helplessness tolerable and built up from the material of memories of the helplessness of his own childhood and the childhood of the human race."<sup>4</sup> In fact, according to Freud, humanity's developed religions, worshipping gods or divines, initiated and condensed within the ideas of the intimate relation between the child and the father; namely during childhood, one looks up to the father to provide the protection and support; likewise, in dealing with unpredicted natures of life, man looks up to the superior intelligent and benevolent

Gods to offer the safeguard from all terrors, evils, sufferings, hardships, as well as the reward of good and evil, and of life after death. Explicitly, he foresees no future for religion because it is just an illusion of mankind's wishes and expression psychologically and biologically. In the meantime, Freud also acknowledges that widespread atheism could undermine social stability even he wants to restructure the interplayed relationship between religion and civilization, including material, economic, social and mental factors.

Conversely, Mircea Eliade's work on the book, "The Sacred and The Profane" takes into the accounts of every symbol, rite, and myth that could be his microcosmic sacred place, time, and space. Because man is a descendant of homo-religious people, throughout time he cannot cut off his inescapably religious root however unmindful and irreligious he is in the modern time; namely, he still holds to "pseudo religions and degenerated mythologies;"<sup>5</sup> because regardless things he does, he always expresses the sacredness of all things about him. In short, according to Eliade, man has religious or sacred heritage since birth inescapably.

Looking at Freud's and Eliade's works above, we see that they convey two opposite perspectives about man's religion. Let's us analyze in details these works to recognize how much relevance their views of religion and reality in the modern age.

In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud connects psychology together with religion by using psychological factors of reduction to elucidate the origin of primitive religion. In deed, his reduction ideas of religion as unreal and illusion base on human's wish-fulfilled motivation, "we may call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfillment is a prominent factor in its motivation, and

in doing so we disregard its relations to reality, just as the illusion itself sets no store by verification.”<sup>6</sup>

Then, according to him, religion is an unreal and illusion of an infantile prototype of mankind; explicitly, in resolving the childhood’s terrifying and helplessness, one is in submission and dependence on a stern father who provides the protection and care; likewise, human’s responses to the threatening and hostile forces of natures of earthquake, hurricane, or physical and mental weaknesses, is through a creational illusion of a paternal and mighty God for seeking the similar protection and love. Consequently, that type of humanized God in turn generates dogma, war, conflict, and other side effects psychologically and sociologically to humankind that obstructs our civilization seriously. Therefore, according to Freud, we need to replace it with a real source, scientific work, because it can lead us to knowledge of reality outside ourselves, or no illusion.<sup>7</sup>

Explicitly, scientific work or psychoanalysis is Freud’s religion of wish-fulfillment. Particularly, in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, he says,

The obscure recognition ... of psychological factors and relations in the unconscious is mirrored-it is difficult to express it in other terms, and here the analogy with paranoia must come to our aid-in the construction of a supernatural reality, which is destined to be changed back once more by science into the psychology of the unconscious. One could venture to explain in this way the myths of paradise and the fall of man, of God, of good and evil, of immortality, and so on, and to trans-form metaphysics into metapsychology.<sup>8</sup>

Since Freud uses his psychoanalysis to view religion as a projection of psychology, a scientific method of knowing the mind, it is better to reconstruct or translate religious mythology back into a psychology, namely transforming metaphysics into metapsychology. The transformation from mythology to psychology, from metaphysics to metapsychology, is a process of demystification and an internalization of origins.

Another Freud's explanation to religious function is to help men escaping the natural disasters, resolving the fate, and compensating him for social injustice. "The gods retain their threefold task," Freud writes. "They must exorcise the terrors of nature, they must reconcile men to the cruelty of fate . . . , and they must compensate them for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on them."<sup>9</sup>

In addition, concerning about the childish attitude toward life that base on the Father-Child relationship of religion, Freud explains and defines the meaning of religion:

When the growing individual finds that he is destined to remain a child forever, that he can never do without protection 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. Thus his longing for a father is a motive identical with his need for protection against the consequences of his human weakness. The defense against childish helplessness is what lends its characteristic features to the adult's reaction to the helplessness which he has to acknowledge—a reaction which is precisely the formation of religion"<sup>10</sup>

Since a child is a person and religion is a phenomenon, we cannot compare a biological factor of father-child to a phenomenon of man-god. Also, in dealing with religion, besides the psychological factor we need to put the historical and sociological aspects into consideration. For instance, according to Freud, psychologically religion is universal neurosis whereas in Marx's perspective it is the opiate of the people, sociologically.

In addition, since religion and its experience are quite different from that of "Food satisfies hunger", Freud notion of "religion fulfills infantile and unconscious needs" may not be true. Namely, we cannot compare the biological need to that of the spiritual necessitate.

In summary, although Freud just provides narrow and bias views about religion that base on the biological and psychological aspects of the Father-Child vs. Man-God models, his psychoanalysis approach could be a good model for the later scholars to follow and explore deeply various religious characteristics in the field of social science, history, theology, and others in order to recognize the religious influence on human's life and mind to determine its future of existence.

Concerning about Eliade's work of "The Sacred and The Profane", he emphasizes that throughout time, regardless of being mindful or unmindful about religion, man has religious or sacred heritage since birth inevitably. In fact, at any given time, at any place he lives, and at any types of natures he encounters, he would come across the sacredness externally and internally. Namely, there are sacred space, sacred time, sacred nature, and sacredness within oneself. Regarding about the sacred space, Eliade's system of the world are as followings<sup>11</sup>: Sacred space disrupts ordinary space; that breaking in space symbolized by an opening; then, there is communication with heaven through *axis mundi*<sup>12</sup>, the connection between earth and heaven and

symbolizing by holy mountains at the center of the world, at the highest point, and closest the heaven such as Jerusalem, Ka'bah in Mecca, and Shiz in Iran<sup>13</sup>; and the world lies around the cosmic axis.

Temples are built in the high places because of the sacred mountain's symbol ideas so that the image of the cosmic mountain could be transferred to the temple to serve as the connection between earth and heaven such as the temple of Ziggurats, Babylonian sanctuaries, or temple of Borobudur in Java.<sup>14</sup> Within the temple's structure, the microcosmic world controls the chaos and the temple's gate is the mouth of death passing back into chaos.<sup>15</sup>

It is believed that the religious man's world is always at the center on the three scales: Country, city, and a sanctuary. Hence, Palestine, Jerusalem, and the temple were built because they represent the *imago mundi* or Center of the World.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, since the Center of the World or 'the navel of the earth' is the Holy land which cosmos spreads out from the center, the religious man builds new constructions outwards from a central point; then, from a crossroads outwards develops a new village having four zones; that new constructions, an *imago mundi*, represent the cosmos on the ground.<sup>17</sup>

In general, settling a territory by establishing an axis mundi, building a village at the crossroads, constructing the sacred construction at the *center of the world* or *imago mundi*, and building the cities are the archetype of human's creation of the world regardless the place of reference.<sup>18</sup> Then, Eliade wraps up: "In extremely varied cultural contexts, we constantly find the same cosmo-logical schema and the same ritual scenario: *settling in a territory is equivalent to founding a world*".<sup>19</sup>

To maintain the cosmic order or certain type of civilizations, man needs to defeat the destructed enemies such as dragons, darkness, death, and chaos which exist in language and culture of nonreligious man even he does not recognize these immemorial heritages.<sup>20</sup>

A house, “A machine to live in”<sup>21</sup>, belongs to nonreligious people, whereas it is a model of cosmic axis (axis mundi), center of the world (imago mundi), divines’ original victory over the forces of chaos, a primordial slaying, or the wife of the master mason for religious people<sup>22</sup>. In short, depend on the cultural background, the religious people have obvious and deep communality of experience of sacred space which is determined by these sacred countries, cities, temples, and buildings that the nonreligious people may not have, as Eliade says “this religious nostalgia express the desire to live in a pure and holy cosmos as it was in the beginning, when it came fresh from the Creator’s hand.”<sup>23</sup>

In addition, to have periodical experience with the mythical moment of Creation, religious man needs sacred time.<sup>24</sup> Participating in religious festival can help religious people stepping out of the ordinary time and get into the sacred time. For example, the sacred time in cosmos is refreshed once during New Year’s Day.<sup>25</sup>

To regenerate the creation of the world, religious people access *illud tempus*, the original and sacred time of the world’s creation, through reciting the cosmogonic myth<sup>26</sup> that also may heal the sick because of being taken ritually to the original time.<sup>27</sup>

It is possible to have sacred time if religious people access to it periodically even through ordinary life such as having sexual unions between men and women which follows and goes back to the original time of god’s and goddess’s union.<sup>28</sup> However, Participating in ritual festival

to get back the original time does not mean escaping, but it is a positive engagement in the cosmos.<sup>29</sup>

The function of the myth, recording of how and why cosmic events came into existence, was to preserve all rituals' and crucial human activities' paradigms such as replaying the role and behavior of gods or semi-divine hero figures to remain in the sacred time, to sanctify the world,<sup>30</sup> or even to become a truly man.<sup>31</sup>

To make sure the agricultural crops continue to flourish, religious people do human sacrifice and ritual cannibalism to regenerate the *illud tempus* of god's permission to prolong human mortality, sexuality, and work.<sup>32</sup>

The regenerating of sacred time and the imitation of the gods at the annual religious festivals in the less developed civilized religion cyclically and repetitively was the cause of optimism.<sup>33</sup> Conversely, in some more developed civilized religions, people lost their touch with sacred cosmos, and they had terrifying vision of the cosmos which is destroyed and recreated cyclically and eternally. In fact, modern historicist and existentialist philosophies had come to see historical time in a terrifying light, the way the ancient Indians and Greeks saw the eternal return, namely leading unpredictably to death.<sup>34</sup>

Concerning about the sacred natures, Eliade includes sky due to its height, remote gods due to their withdrawing since agricultural civilization, the water due to its formlessness and creation and birth, the earth due to its ground where birth taking place, trees due to their cosmic and sacred symbols, stone, moon, and sun due to their hardness and permanence.

For the sacred self, Eliade sees body as a sacred value, the house as a religious symbolism such as god's home or center of the microcosmic world, the bridge as the symbol of

danger or death, initiation as revelation of religious idealism, women's initiation as the fertility and childbirth, and death as a sacred level of existence.

For Eliade, because of widespread of superstitions, taboos, religious or magical in structure, disguised religious myths, and debased religious ritual, that exist in films, movies, or novels, modern or nonreligious people still have not yet free themselves from their religious ancestors. Also, while adapting to the new reality of modern age, religion still tries to preserve its ancient or sacred form, similar to that of many different new cults or political movements. According to Eliade, religious people would generate religious solutions to 'existential crises'<sup>35</sup> to the modern collective unconscious and nonreligious people its structure and content continuously.

In summary, Eliade structures the religious analysis by comparing two modes of human's existence: the sacredness and the profane, through four chapters: the sacred space, the sacred time, the sacredness of nature and cosmic religion, and human existence and sanctified life. He begins with the discussion of sacred space and time that bestow references' points for all space and time because the only real space and time are the sacredness of space and time. Namely, at certain ritual places and moments, the profane space and time are regenerated into the sacredness. For example, when religious people do their prayer at their church, they regenerate the sacred moment and place of god's creation originally through their spiritual experiences. Even in the pre-modern cultures, the seasonal cycle of planting, growing, harvesting, and resting all becomes the regeneration of the "sacred genesis".

Also, he takes one example of why celebrate New Year is considered as sacred history. The sacred calendar of New Year periodically regenerates time, because it makes that special moment coincide with the primordial time that is sanctified by the presence and activity of the

gods. So, whoever participates in the New Year celebration would become contemporaries of the gods<sup>36</sup> and recognize life is real.

Then he mentions about the presentation of religious value through “cosmic symbolism”—water, earth, the sacred tree, the body, the home, that are gods’ creation; this approach could help the religious and non-religious people understanding sacred meaning and seeing the preciousness of nature, of the universe. To convince the modern nonreligious man recognizing the sacredness in nature, Eliade further explains that even man doesn’t accept any humanistic model because of self projected paradigm, truly he won’t be free until they kill the last god.<sup>37</sup>

Almost to the end of his book, Eliade emphasizes again that majority of men “without religion” still holds to pseudo religions and degenerates mythologies because the profane man is the descendant of homo religious and he cannot wipe out his own history, the religious inheritance from his ancestors. More truly, the great part of his existence is fed by impulses that come to him from the depths of his being, namely the “unconscious” zone.<sup>38</sup>

In general, Eliade wants to point out clearly that the nature of universe is filled with sacredness throughout time and place of human existence. Namely, for Eliade religion is a reality of life whether people have more religious or nonreligious inclination or not.

By using social-psychological approach and creating a universal structure for religious analysis, Eliade compresses many distinctive elements of the religious complexity that could not truly and completely encompass humanistic needs for spiritual life.

In short, to compare Freud’s refutation of religion as an illusion which bases on his psychoanalysis with Eliade’s strong preference of religion as real life which bases on his social-psychological approach, we can see that both of them have strong persuaded points in rejection

or preference of religion, but neither of them could provide a broaden and deepen view and explanation of why people do and don't need religion. For example, Freud's religious approach is based on the Father-Child model to explain God-Man model of psychological need. Namely, the atheists would applause him because of having the reason to reject religion.

On the other hand, Eliade's religious approach is based on the notion of god who solely provides that sacredness; namely without god's creation, there is no sacredness. Indirectly, he thinks that human should be depended on god regardless of having the faith or not. By this way, the religious people have more reasons to keep their faith because it is real life inescapably.

In a pure Buddhist approach, we neither reject nor accept religion because the sacred and profane ideas of religion, which bases on the Father-Child or Man-God model, only come from our thoughts' projection. Namely, if we have a polluted and impure mind, everything would be secularly ungodliness, or we would need to depend on god because of our unconsciousness or unawareness of life. Conversely, if we keep and instill a pure and clean mind, there is no need of an illusory or projected god because of the sacredness, the wholesomeness, and the gorgeousness of life existing every where in the universe.

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<sup>1</sup> King, Winston L. "Religion [First Edition]." *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Ed. Lindsay Jones. Vol. 11. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. 7695. [Gale Virtual Reference Library](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/start.do?p=GVRL&u=uwest). Gale. University of the West. 20 Sept. 2009 <<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/start.do?p=GVRL&u=uwest>>.

<sup>2</sup> an [Austrian neurologist](#) who founded the [psychoanalytic school](#) of [psychology](#).

<sup>3</sup> a [Romanian](#) historian of religion, fiction writer, philosopher, and professor at the [University of Chicago](#).

<sup>4</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *The Future of an Illusion*, W.W. Norton & Co. (September 17, 1989). P.14

<sup>5</sup> **Mircea Eliade: *The Sacred & The Profane***. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (October 23, 1987). P.209

<sup>6</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *The Future of an Illusion*, W.W. Norton & Co. (September 17, 1989). P.27

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> **Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, in standard edition (1960), 6:258-59.***

<sup>9</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *The Future of an Illusion*, W.W. Norton & Co. (September 17, 1989). P.22

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30

<sup>11</sup> **Mircea Eliade: *The Sacred & The Profane***. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (October 23, 1987). P.37

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39-40

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40-41

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.42

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43

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- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 44-45  
<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.45  
<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.47  
<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.50  
<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.50  
<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.54-55  
<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.65  
<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.65  
<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.69-73  
<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 80  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.82  
<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.87-88  
<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.93  
<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.99  
<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.100  
<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.103-104  
<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.105-106  
<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.113  
<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.210  
<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.105  
<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.203  
<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.209