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In *The Future of An Illusion* and elsewhere,[1] Freud argued that, in light of what is known about the primitive origins of religious beliefs and the parallel phenomena of infantile neuroses, religion ought to be viewed as a 'neurotic relic' of ancient times, prompted by fear of powerful natural forces, and reinforced by the frustrations of life within civilized society. Freud characterized these beliefs as 'illusions', and distinguishing between illusions and errors, argued that, irrespective of their truth value, they were beliefs in which wish-fulfillment was a prominent motivating factor (pp. 48–49). Yet the availability of genetic explanations of religion like that of Freud and others[2] poses a general philosophical problem for the assessment of religious belief: to what extent would the accuracy of these genetic explanations render religious belief unacceptable?

I

Freud admitted that his 'discovery' of the psycho-analytic significance of religion "strongly influenced his attitude to the question which must appear to many to be the most important of all" (p. 52), and he speaks on occasion as if he had succeeded in showing religious belief false.[3] It is however erroneous to infer from the characterization of a belief as 'first propounded by primitive, superstitious men', that the belief is either false or probably false. Our 'ignorant, enslaved ancestors' held, no doubt unwittingly, a number of demonstrably true beliefs about themselves and the world (e.g., the curative powers of various plants, heliocentric conceptions of the universe), and if there is merit in coining the label 'genetic fallacy', it is perhaps as a caution against inferences of truth value based on the primitive and undistinguished origins of doctrines and beliefs.

Since the appropriate basis for accepting or rejecting some claim is (as Freud would agree) the amount and quality of evidence for or against

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its truth, the probative value of psycho-genetic explanations ought to lie in their ability to provide evidence for or against religious belief, and it is worth noting that they are not wholly incapable of doing so. At least some of the arguments given for theism rest on psychological evidence (the argument from universal consent, the presence of 'oceanic experiences') and the accuracy of Freud's account would refute the contention that such phenomena were explainable only on the assumption of some divine being or agency. It is difficult to see however how psycho-genetic explanations of belief will undermine other traditional arguments: that someone has concocted the Ontological Argument to rationalize what he would have believed anyway because of his desire to believe, would not have the slightest tendency to show that the inference from 'perfect essence' to 'existence' was fallacious, nor would it aid us in determining the degree of probability with which the intricate order of the universe points to intelligent design.

But there is one line of argument employing the psycho-genetic explanation which would avoid these difficulties. If it were true that religious beliefs are caused by reason-irrelevant psychological conditions (fears, frustration, neuroses of various sorts), then no matter what quality of evidence or reasoning were available, it would follow that no religious belief was ever reasonably adopted, i.e., adopted as a consequence of a rational consideration of reason-relevant considerations. Further, since it is a condition for knowledge that one's beliefs be based on the relevant evidence, it would follow that religious knowledge was a fiction; no one ever has knowledge of the truth of any religious doctrine. The conclusion of this argument would not, it is true, undermine the importance of religion or religious belief, and a number of philosophers have subscribed to this position (e.g., Kant and Kierkegaard for very different reasons), and insisted nonetheless that we ought to subscribe to many religious doctrines. Still, the argument would be at odds with traditional attempts to show that we can reasonably adopt religious views, and it would make psycho-genetic explanations relevant to the debate.

I do not think this argument succeeds (even assuming the correctness of the psycho-genetic explanation) but its assessment requires an examination of some widely held, and I believe mistaken, assumptions about the relations between the reasons for, and causes of believing, and the relations of each of these with knowledge.

II

The first defect in the argument, at least when directed against claims of religious *knowledge*, is its assumption that all knowledge is 'inferential', i.e., that whenever we know that *p*, we do so in virtue of our knowledge or belief that *q* where *q* supplies evidence sufficient to justify our belief that *p*. But 'direct' or non-inferential knowledge seems possible, even if its analysis is hard to accomplish.[4] Since the prime candidates for non-inferential knowledge have been thought to be cases of perceptual knowledge (that something feels hot, or looks red) this opening might be thought to be of limited value to defenders of religious knowledge. Yet there are serious difficulties in construing our knowledge about other persons as inferential[5] and many persons have had experiences which seem to them to be authentic encounters with a divine person or spirit. Thus whatever might be shown about inferential religious knowledge, the argument would not of itself undermine claims to religious knowledge of a direct or non-inferential sort.

Even within the limits of inferential knowledge, difficulties remain. The argument assumes that if a belief has arisen due to the presence of some psychological condition like wish-fulfillment, then it cannot be a consequence of a rational assessment of the evidence. But this causal picture is too simple. Beliefs may be due to a combination of factors and it is surely incorrect to infer from the fact that *S* believes *p* because of *X* that *S* believes *p solely* because of *X*.[6] Hence what one needs to know, in oıder to measure the epistemic value of the genetic explanation, is how far that account goes toward *excluding* the possibility of other factors being present and instrumental in bringing about the belief. If for example one's belief in the fidelity of his wife is generated by several factors, one of which is observation of all the actions relevant to the question of her fidelity, the presence of other factors (for example, that one was also influenced by his affection for his wife) need not exclude the possession of a well founded and reasonable belief in her fidelity.

Freud's account here, as on other points, is ambivalent: "we call a belief an illusion when wish-fulfillment is a prominent factor in its motivation, while disregarding its relation to reality, just as the illusion itself does" (p. 54). Wishful thinking is mentioned as a *prominent* factor, thus leaving open the possibility that other factors may have given rise to religious belief, *but* illusions, as such, 'disregard' their 'relation to reality', thus suggesting that a rational assessment of the available evidence for the truth of those beliefs cannot be one of the causes of belief. But once having opened up the possibility of multiple causes of belief, how do we justify immediately discounting one particular kind of causal determination? It is possible to argue that the presence of these deep-seated wishes and needs excludes a rational assessment of the evidence but Freud never argues in this vein, even though the language of 'obsession' and 'neurosis' might lend themselves to this treatment. In short, Freud assumes throughout that the possession of a belief which stems in part from deep-seated needs and wishes excludes a 'scientific' attitude toward what one so believes, but in the case of the epistemic use of the genetic account, that is precisely the question; we cannot deny the possibility of religious knowledge unless the exclusivity of this particular genetic account is assured.

Alston[7] has provided two lines of argument for demonstrating the absence of rational considerations in particular cases (assuming the accuracy of the theory) and for showing the absence of rational considerations in principle. Alston concedes that Freudianism might establish that in some particular case, reason-irrelevant considerations were sufficient to produce belief, but that this would have "little or no tendency to show that the belief is false, unlikely to be true, or not worthy of serious consideration." However, "Of course it follows that anyone whose belief is produced in this way lacks any sound basis for the belief" (p. 91). But this does not follow. Alston's conclusion rests on the assumption that if a reason-irrelevant set of conditions were sufficient on some occasion to produce belief, then reason-relevant considerations could not have been involved, but this is mistaken. There may in general be more than one set of causally sufficient conditions which were present and responsible for some causal consequence. The analysis of such 'over-determined' causal situations is problematic, but there is no reason to doubt that such situations occur. In the case of belief, it may be that someone's belief is 'over-determined' to occur by sets of reason-relevant and reason-irrelevant conditions. It is therefore a mistake to think that sufficiency of reason-irrelevant considerations ensures the absence of reason-relevant considerations in particular cases.

Alston claims that some 'enriched form' of Freudianism might show that no reason-relevant considerations could in general be given, although he doubts that any evidence has or could be given for this strengthened version of the theory:

> ... suppose we understand our imaginary enriched Freudianism to put forward its factors as both sufficient and necessary for religious belief. Then it follows that no adequate reasons could be given. For if there were such reasons, the grasp of them by a rational man would itself be a sufficient condition of his accepting the belief (p. 90).

Although Alston speaks of this conclusion as following from taking the reason-irrelevant conditions to be *both* necessary and sufficient, the sufficiency condition seems irrelevant, since it is already clear that the causal sufficiency of reason-irrelevant conditions to produce belief would not show that no adequate reasons could be given. If we take the necessary condition as the relevant feature, the argument proceeds as follows:

1. Assume that reason-irrelevant factors are necessary conditions for religious belief.
2. If reason-irrelevant factors are necessary conditions for religious belief, then any set of conditions sufficient to produce religious belief must include reason-irrelevant factors.

∴3. No set composed solely of reason-relevant factors could be sufficient to produce religious belief.

4. If there were adequate reasons for religious belief, there would be a set composed solely of reason-relevant considerations sufficient to produce religious belief.

∴5. If reason-irrelevant factors are necessary conditions for religious belief, there can be no adequate reasons for religious belief.

(3) is justified by the assumption and the logic of necessary and sufficient conditions, but (4) is dubious. Why should any set of adequate reasons for religious belief be *sufficient of itself* to produce the belief? Clearly, reason-relevant considerations could be *part* of a set of conditions sufficient to produce belief even if reason-irrelevant conditions were necessary conditions for the belief. Thus, even given an enriched Freudianism, which held that reason-irrelevant factors were necessary conditions for religious belief, a person could have adequate reasons for believing. All that we need to accept is the possibility that the evidence and argument given

to justify religious belief is not sufficiently persuasive of itself to induce individuals to believe, and this view (as Pascal held)[8] is quite compatible with holding that such reason-relevant considerations do exist.

Thus, Alston is mistaken in holding that the causal sufficiency of reason-irrelevant factors in a particular case precludes the presence of reason-relevant considerations in that case, and he is mistaken in thinking that if reason-irrelevant factors were necessary in every case of religious belief, then there could be no adequate reasons for such beliefs.

Suppose however that the Freudian thesis were not that reason-irrelevant factors were both necessary and sufficient conditions for religious belief, but that reason-relevant factors could never be even partial causes of religious belief. It is difficult to see how psychogenetic explanations of religion could ever supply evidence of the sort needed to justify a claim of this magnitude, but it is worth seeing whether the accuracy of this explanation would have as a consequence that none of our religious beliefs were based on rational considerations, and hence that no religious doctrine could be known to be true.

III

So far we have assumed that the importance of the psycho-genetic explanation for the acceptability of religious belief resides in its capacity to establish the presence or absence of certain sorts of causal conditions for belief: if reason-irrelevant factors have been wholly responsible for belief, or if reason-relevant factors have been shown not capable of functioning even as partial causes, then religious belief will have been shown to be either in fact unreasonable or incapable in principle of being adopted on reasonable grounds. It is now necessary to question the assumption underlying this inference: *r* is one of *S*'s reasons for believing *p* only if *r* is a cause of *S*'s believing *p* (or *S*'s awareness of *r* is a cause of *S*'s believing *p*). If, as I will argue, this assumption is false, then no matter how enriched a version of the psycho-genetic explanation we adopt, since it will be possible for one's belief to be based on reason-relevant considerations even though it is not caused by them, no causal analysis will be sufficient grounds for rejecting the adoption of the belief as unreasonable.

But it will take a considerable amount of argument to overthrow the assumption; it will certainly not suffice to say that reasons are one thing and causes another, or to invoke the notion of 'logically different realms'. As Alston, who accepts the assumption, argues:

Of course a reason cannot be a cause, nor can a cause be a reason. They exist in logically different realms. But that does not mean that a statement about reasons cannot have implications concerning causes and vice versa... to say that *A*'s belief that there exists an omnipotent personal Being is *wholly* due to cultural conditioning in early childhood plus a projection of an unconscious father-image onto the Being envisaged in that cultural training is to deny that he has any reason for the belief. For if he had a reason, the psychological processes involved in becoming aware of the considerations involved in the reason, and in connecting them to the belief in question, would be at least part of what led him to have or retain the belief" (pp. 90–91).

Two points need to be clarified before the counter-argument is made. First, Alston's example is poorly suited to make the general point: it does not at all follow from the fact that the *A*'s belief is due wholly to cultural conditioning (plus projection) that he has no reasons for the belief, since it might have been part of the cultural conditioning process itself to inculcate reasons for believing as well as the belief. Thus the thesis needs restatement in the following form: if *A*'s belief is due wholly to reason-irrelevant factors, then *A* lacks any reasons for his belief. Second, we must segregate considerations about acquiring a belief from those about retaining it. Even if *A*'s belief is due wholly to reason-irrelevant factors – i.e., *A*'s initial acquisition of the belief – it would not follow that *A* (now) has no reasons for his beliefs, since (even assuming that reasons must function as causes) other factors may have arisen which reinforce the belief. This second distinction does not of itself undermine the assumption that reasons must function as causes but it does reveal the enormity of the task for the psycho-genetic account if it is to have any import for the reasonableness of adopting religious beliefs; not only must the explanation hold true for primitive man, and for modern man in his infantile period, but on *every* occasion on which someone is led to adopt some religious doctrine or to have some previously held view reinforced by other considerations. Failing this, the psycho-genetic explanation might be preserved as a piece of information in historical anthropology, or child psychology, but it would no longer be the basis for a philosophical critique of religious belief.

Clearly, Alston gives us no *argument* for the crucial claim. His conclusion rests on the assertion that becoming aware of the considerations involved in the reason (and connecting them with the belief) will be a partial cause of believing, but this is just the issue at question: must reasons always be causes of belief?

Gilbert Harman has provided an argument which, if sound, would show that reasons cannot ever be the causes of belief, and *a fortiori* that it is false that reasons must always be causes: one believes for certain reasons only if one believes as the result of certain reasoning, but since the relevant description of one's reasoning entails that one believes the conclusion, we cannot cite one's reasoning as a causal condition for the belief consistent with either Hume's principle that the cause must be (logically) distinct from the effect or the covering law theory of causal explanation.[9] While it is true that the *process* of coming to believe *p* by reasoning from some evidence (of which believing *p* is the last stage) cannot be cited as the or a cause of believing *p*, what must be shown, in order to show that reasons for believing cannot be causes of believing, is that it is impossible to cite one's reasons for believing *p* without entailing that one believes *p*. Now it is true that if one believes *p* for certain reasons, then one believes *p*, but believing for certain reasons is not the same as having certain reasons for believing. The latter, unlike the former, does not entail that one believes what he has reasons for believing. I may have one or several reasons for believing *p*, but nevertheless fail to believe *p*. Just as I may have several reasons for firing an employee and yet do not do so (e.g., I might also have reasons for not doing so), so I may have several reasons for believing that an employee is incompetent without actually believing that he is. In short since having certain reasons for believing does not entail believing, it does not entail believing for certain reasons; nor does it entail believing as the result of certain reasoning. Thus Harman's argument fails to show that the reasons for which one believes cannot be causes of one's believing, and we have as yet no good reason for thinking that there might be at least some reasons a person has for believing which are not causes of his believing.

Keith Lehrer's famous case of the gypsy-lawyer touches, in different terms, on this issue, and his counter-example to Harman offers the prospect for a counter-example to the assumption that the reasons for which one believes must be causes of one's believing.[10] Lehrer's 'case of the gypsy-lawyer' depicts a man whose belief in the innocence of his client is a result of his consulting the cards, but as a result of this conviction is led to re-examine the evidence and discovers a valid line of reasoning from the evidence to the innocence of his client. Although he claims this reasoning gives him knowledge of his client's innocence, he is himself unaffected by it; indeed without the testimony of the cards he would believe his client guilty. Nor does the discovery of the line of reasoning strengthen his belief: 'he was already completely convinced by the cards'. Here, what leads a man to believe (and what sustains his belief) are distinct from the reasons he has which fully justify his belief.

It seems clear that the lawyer's belief in the innocence of his client was not caused by the line of reasoning which justifies his believing it, at least his initial adoption of the belief was not caused (even in part) by it. But we have already seen that the causes of adopting a belief can be complemented by factors which reinforce the belief at some later time, and it is in this latter respect that Lehrer's example is unsatisfactory. We can concede that the discovery of the justifying line of reasoning does not *increase his conviction* in his client's innocence (since he was already completely convinced) but we cannot conclude from this that this discovery is not therefore a partial cause of his continuing to believe. It would be a mistake, as we saw earlier in Alston's argument, to claim that because a set of factors was sufficient to produce the belief, no other conditions could have been causally relevant to the belief. Nor can one infer from the fact that the lawyer would not have believed his client innocent without the testimony of the cards that the lawyer is unaffected by the discovering of the exonerating line of reasoning. That fact would show only that the testimony of the cards was a necessary condition for his belief in his client's innocence, and hence that the discovery of exonerating evidence was not of itself sufficient for it. Thus, as was found earlier in Alston's argument, one cannot show that someone is unaffected by certain factors simply on the grounds that some other set of factors was both necessary and sufficient to produce his belief. There are however some cases which make the assumption linking reasons and causes dubious. If, as Alston holds, becoming aware of the considerations involved in the reasons for our beliefs must be part of what causes us to have or retain our belief, it could never happen that being aware of these considerations led to our rejection of the belief. But one familiar pattern of psycho-therapy is just this: leading the patient to an understanding of his reasons for acting, fearing, desiring, or believing as he does, as a means for changing his behavior, attitudes or beliefs. A person who suffers from some form of paranoia may believe that he is the object of a plot to kill him, and be led through reflection on the reasons for this belief, and a recognition of their true psychological significance, to give up this belief, and to lose his suspicions about others. Here the awareness of his reasons for believing and acting as he does is an essential member of the set of conditions which brings about the rejection of those beliefs and actions.

Outside of the context of psycho-therapy, there are other cases in which reflection on the considerations involved in our reasons for believing may not have the consequence of adoption or retention of our beliefs. A lawyer may believe that his client is in fact innocent of any crime, but after reflection on his reasons for believing this, may conclude that the evidence which is available, though it is substantial and provides some reason for the belief, fails to assure his client's innocence, and leads him to give up his initial confident belief. Alternatively, we can easily imagine a case in which the lawyer's antecedent conviction about his client's innocence causes him to misconstrue the significance of the available evidence, and 'rationalize' his belief by finding exonerating evidence even where there is none. In this case his original belief seems properly cited as the cause of his having the reasons he possesses for that belief, and since the causal relation cannot be symmetrical, the possession of those reasons cannot be a cause of his belief in his client's innocence. While his having these reasons may in turn re-inforce his original belief, the important point is that there is at least some time at which he both believes and has reasons for his belief, but the former of these is the cause of the latter, and not the other way around. *Showing* these particular causal connections to hold in particular cases would of course require greater knowledge about the psychological make-up and background of the individuals involved than has been given here, but it is sufficient for our purposes that the general possibility of such cases be made credible, and that they should serve to refute the thesis that whatever serves as a person's reason for believing must serve also as at least a partial cause of his adoption or retention of that belief.

The parallel in the case of religious belief is obvious: the reasons for which a person espouses some religious belief may on occasion serve as sustaining causes of his belief, but it may also happen that his awareness of the considerations involved in those reasons may lead him to regard his belief as insufficiently grounded by the evidence to warrant retention, or it may happen that it was the antecedent religious belief which induced him to think that there was good reason to adopt it. In either event, an account of the causes of his adoption or retention of the belief could not be assumed to serve equally well as an account of the reasons he might possess for that belief. Thus, even if it could be established that a person's religious convictions were caused wholly by reason-irrelevant factors, it would not follow that he possessed no reasons for believing as he did, nor that he lacked knowledge in this instance.

To conclude, genetic explanations of religion which attribute religious belief to reason-irrelevant psychological conditions suffer from the following limitations: showing that such causes were sufficient to produce belief would not show that they were necessary in every case, showing that they were both necessary and sufficient conditions for belief would not show that reason-relevant factors were absent, showing that reason-relevant factors were absent in the adoption of a belief would not show that they were absent in the continued retention of the belief, showing that reason-relevant factors were absent in the adoption and retention of a belief would not show that there were no reasons available which would justify the belief, and, finally, showing that reason-relevant factors were not causes of a person's adoption or retention of a belief, would not show that he had no reasons for his belief nor that it failed for this reason to qualify as knowledge. Given these limitations, and given the difficulty of determining, even in individual cases, exactly what it is that causes us to believe what we do, it appears likely that we will profitably discuss the acceptability of religious belief by attending to the reasons which can be given for and against it, rather than by speculating about its causes.

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NOTES

[1] Freud's study of religion and the related notions of 'taboo', 'oceanic experiences', etc., is contained in several of his later writings: *Totem and Taboo* (1913), *The Future of An Illusion* (1927), *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1939), and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Excerpts from *The Future of An Illusion*, which appear here are from the translation by W. D. Robson-Scott, Doubleday & Co., 1961.

[2] Cf. Feuerbach's explanation of theistic belief as a (mistaken) projection of human attributes on an independently existing being in *The Essence of Christianity*; the Marxist account of religion as a reflection of the economic structure of society; or the view of Durkheim and Swanson that religion is a projection of the general structure of society.

[3] In *The Future of An Illusion* he claims only that it would be 'very striking' and 'remarkable' if the universe had exactly the religious significance we would like it to have, but in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, he holds that religion is 'foreign to reality' and 'not tenable' (p. 21).

[4] The most recent attempt being that of D. M. Armstrong in *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, 1973, pp. 162–197.

[5] See, for example, Austin's 'Other Minds' in *PAS* XX (1946).

[6] 'because of *X*' should be read in this context as '*X* is the or a cause of *S*'s believing *p*' rather than '*X* is *S*'s reason for believing *p*'. The inference would however be erroneous on either reading.

[7] William Alston, 'Psychoanalytic Theory and Theistic Belief', in John Hick (ed.), *Faith and the Philosophers*, St. Martin's Press, 1964, pp. 63–102.

[8] "And so our proposition is of infinite force, when there is the finite to stake in a game where there are equal risks of gain and loss, and the infinite to gain. This is demonstrable; and if men are capable of any truths, this is one... [since reason brings you to this and yet you cannot believe] Endeavor then to convince yourself, not by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement of your passions... taking the holy water, having masses said, etc." Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts*, trans. W. F. Trotter, New York, 1910, p. 233.

[9] In 'Knowledge, Reasons, and Causes', *The Journal of Philosophy* LXVII, (1970), 846–847.

[10] 'How Reasons Give Us Knowledge, or the Case of the Gypsy Lawyer', *The Journal of Philosophy* LXVIII (1971), pp. 311–313. Lehrer's counter-example was directed toward Harman's claim that justifying reasons must potentially *explain* his belief, rather than that they must *cause* his belief. Harman explicitly disavows claiming a *causal* connection between beliefs which qualify as knowledge and the reasons which supply it. He holds instead that persons can be properly viewed as nondeterministic automata, and that the reasons which supply knowledge must be part of an explanation (causal or otherwise) of why a person believes as he does (*ibid.*, pp. 848–855). The relevant feature of Lehrer's example, for our purposes, is that while the lawyer believes the evidence justifies his belief, he has such a superstitious mentality that he is unswayed by such considerations and is moved to belief by other factors.