

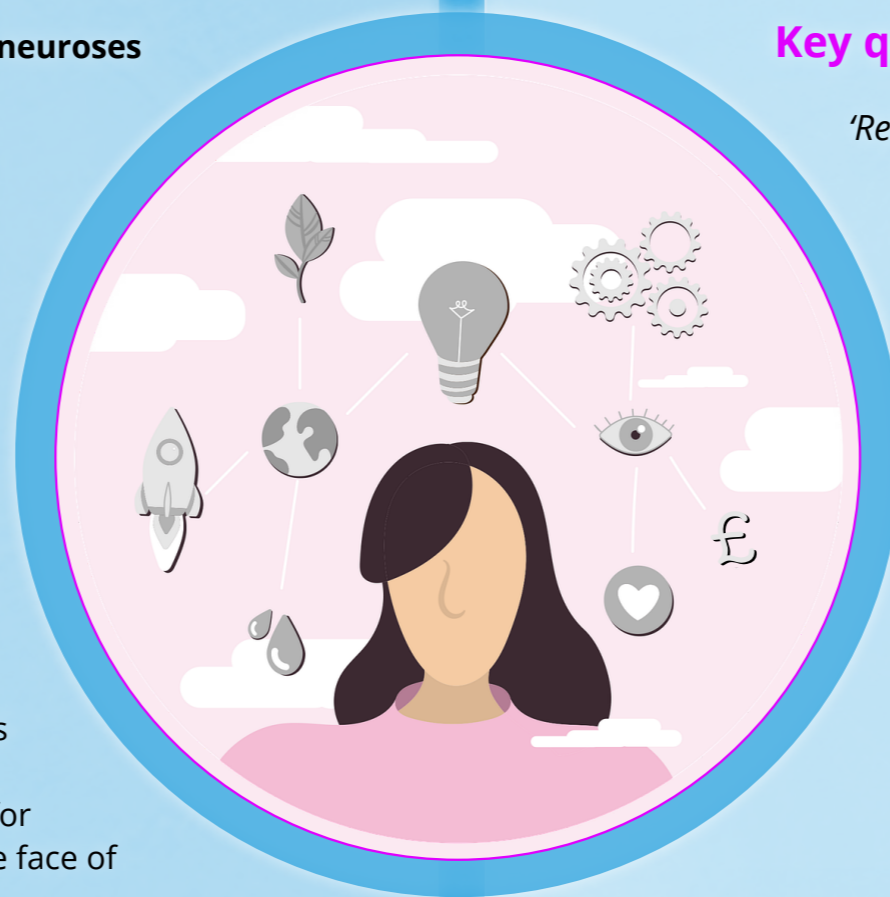
Key concepts

- One challenge to religious belief is that it is produced by our minds, not derived from any objective, external reality.
- Freud claimed that religion is an **illusion** (a false idea or belief) that stops us thinking critically and rationally.

There are three parts to the human **psyche** (the structure of the mind):

1. **Id** – innate, natural unconscious desires that are not always pleasant
2. **Super ego** – unconscious controls ingrained in us by society
3. **Ego** – our conscious mind, that tries to balance the super ego and the Id

- Desires from the Id may conflict with our superego. People develop **neuroses** or mental illnesses and severe stress if the conflict is unresolved.
- Illusions like religion are an attempt to resolve unconscious conflict. They cannot be trusted because they are derived from uncritical human desires.
- Religion is a **universal obsessional neurosis** or **collective neurosis** meaning that it is a mental illness that affects everyone.
- This collective neurosis originated in the **primal horde** (the original primitive ancestral group); whose dominant male was killed so that the sons could gain access to the females. This resulted in guilt that was expressed in **totemic rituals** where a plant or animal was used to symbolise the father and idolised.
- The experience of the primal horde is inherited by every male. This neurosis known as the **Oedipus complex** is the root of religious belief and behaviour.
- The superego represses desires in male children, for their mother, causing conflict in the unconscious mind and emerging as a neurosis – religion.
- Religion is **wish-fulfilment** originating from an unconscious desire for protection from the father and a reaction against helplessness in the face of worldly struggles.
- Freud used supportive evidence from his patients suffering from neuroses that he thought were derived from repressed sexual feelings. E.g.
 - Little Hans was a 5-year-old boy who was afraid of horses – Freud theorised that the horse symbolised his fear that he would be castrated as punishment for desiring his mother and wanting to kill his father.
 - Wolf-Man was an adult with depression, and an obsession with religious ritual. As a child he dreamed of a tree filled with white wolves – Freud theorised that this was from the trauma of seeing his parents have sex when he was young.
- The primal horde was based on Freud's understanding of Darwinism.
- He understood that evolution meant that inherited characteristics could be acquired during ancestral life events as well as through genes.
- Darwinism was evidence that all human behaviour is produced by natural selection, including inherited guilt and fear.



Challenges:

- There is a lack of **anthropological** evidence for the primal horde: Other primates have a variety of social systems and the idea that acquired characteristics can be inherited is a misunderstanding.
- There is no firm psychological evidence of the Oedipus complex: Bronislaw Malinowski found no evidence of the Oedipus complex in religious societies in New Guinea and no evidence of inherited guilt complexes.
- There is a narrow basis of evidence for Freud's theories: He did not consider religions based on female deities or no single deities. He generalised from a small selection of unwell people to the whole of humanity.

Key quotes

'Religion is a mere illusion derived from human wishes' (Freud)

'Religion(s)... doctrines carry with them the stamp of the times in which they originated, the ignorant childhood days of this human race.' (Freud)

'To the strange superior powers of nature, the adult lends the features belonging to the figure of his father; he creates for himself the gods.' (Freud)

Key words

illusion	psyche	id	super ego
ego	neuroses	universal obsessional	neurosis
collective neurosis	primal horde	totemic rituals	Oedipus complex
wish-fulfilment	anthropological		

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Whether Freud's ideas can be universalised from a sample of sick patients
 What Freud's work means for the usefulness or meaningfulness of religion
 Whether the Oedipus complex is the only, or the most powerful complex humans may possess.

Key questions

Is religious belief the same as a neurosis?
 Does religion need to be cured?
 Does Freud's theory make it impossible or unlikely that God exists?