



Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism

By Paul C. Vitz

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Starting with Freud's "projection theory" of religion-that belief in God is merely a product of man's desire for security-Professor Vitz argues that psychoanalysis actually provides a more satisfying explanation for atheism. Disappointment in one's earthly father, whether through death, absence, or mistreatment, frequently leads to a rejection of God. A biographical survey of influential atheists of the past four centuries shows that this "defective father hypothesis" provides a consistent explanation of the "intense atheism" of these thinkers. A survey of the leading intellectual defenders of Christianity over the same period confirms the hypothesis, finding few defective fathers. Professor Vitz concludes with an intriguing comparison of male and female atheists and a consideration of other psychological factors that can contribute to atheism.

Professor Vitz does not argue that atheism is psychologically determined. Each man, whatever his experiences, ultimately chooses to accept God or reject him. Yet the cavalier attribution of religious faith to irrational, psychological needs is so prevalent that an exposition of the psychological factors predisposing one to atheism is necessary.

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Editorial Review

Review

Vitz (psychology, New York U.), an atheist himself until his 30s, exposes atheism to the same psychological analysis atheistic apologists have used to debunk religious belief. Beginning with Freud's notion that belief in God is a product of humanity's desire for security, he argues that psychoanalysis is actually a better explanation for denial of God, concluding that the absence of a good father is at the core of militant atheism. Surveys of the leading intellectual defenders of atheism and Christianity, show that the atheists had "defective fathers" while the believers did not. Vitz does not intend to suggest that atheism is psychologically determined, but rather hopes to counteract the idea that irrational psychological factors lead one to believe in God. Annotation c. Book News, Inc., Portland, OR (booknews.com) -- *Booknews*

From the Publisher

PAUL C. VITZ, a professor of psychology at New York University, was an atheist until his late 30s. He earned his bachelor's degree at the University of Michigan and his Ph.D. at Stanford. Professor Vitz is the author of *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship*, *Modern Art and Modern Science*, and *Sigmund Freud's Christian Unconscious*, as well as numerous articles in professional and popular journals. He and his wife, Evelyn Birge Vitz, also a professor at NYU, raised their six children in a faculty apartment in Greenwich Village.

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