

## The Origins and End of God: An Essay Exploring Man's Power over God

*This paper argues that God exists, but only as a social construction through the use of human projection, collective recognition, and reflective consciousness. Drawing on Ludwig Feuerbach's theory of religious projection, Georg Simmel's analysis of social abstraction, and Ibn 'Arabi's mirror analogy, this paper reframes God's divine authority as relational to human consciousness and not absolute. God, therefore, is reimagined as a socially constructed form of authority: real and powerful, yet entirely dependent on human recognition. This paper utilizes the theme of beginnings and endings by tracing how divine authority originates in human psychology, is maintained through institutional reinforcement, and faces potential unravelling when belief fades. The paper then considers a potential counter to this claim, brought forward by Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, who defends divine independence through his light metaphor. The paper finally concludes that divine authority lacks metaphysical autonomy and is best understood as a social phenomenon, reframing God as a product of social processes rather than an eternal and independent being.*

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Abrahamic religions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, describe God as the universe's creator. God is depicted as an omniscient and omnipotent being, who possesses divine justice and whose existence is independent of human thought or action. In this view, God is the foundation of morality, law, and

meaning, and exists before humanity, unchanged by its culture or belief. However, modern philosophy and social theory have raised several challenges to this idea. Rather than treating God as omnipotent, some thinkers have argued that God's Divine authority comes not from God Himself, but rather from human social practices and culture. Religion, in this view, is not a discovery of a higher reality but a social construction that becomes institutionalized and treated as objective.

This paper argues that God exists through human projection, collective recognition, and reflective manifestation, drawing on Ludwig Feuerbach, Georg Simmel, and Ibn'Arabi to support the claim that God is more like socially constructed realities, such as money, than an independent being. This challenges the traditional idea of God's ontology. The paper then considers the Illuminist response of Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, who defends God's independence through the metaphor of light. However, it will be argued that Suhrawardi's view does not fully explain how divine meaning and authority depend on the human ability of recognition. Ultimately, this paper presents God as being dependent on human consciousness and culture for continued existence.

### **Feuerbach and the Origin of God**

Feuerbach's theory of projection states that religion is a human construction. In *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach argues that God is the externalization of human essence. Human beings experience themselves as finite, vulnerable, and limited, yet they

also possess “perfect” ideals of reason, love, and power. This causes tension as humans believe their actions cannot live up to their ideals. Religion attempts to resolve this tension by attributing these perfect ideas to a higher transcendent being, therefore relieving the psychological pressure these ideals bring on humans.

### **Argument 1: Projection**

P1: Humans possess ideals of perfection

P1.1: Humans subconsciously believe they cannot fully realize these perfect ideals

P2: These ideals are externalized and personified

P3: This externalization results in the concept of God

P3.1: God can possess these perfect ideals

C: God originates in human self-projection

According to Feuerbach, divine attributes are magnified versions of human capacities. Omniscience reflects ultimate human intelligence, omnipotence reflects ultimate human power, and divine justice reflects ultimate human reasoning. This account establishes the psychological origin of divinity. Following this account, God did not create human consciousness, but rather, emerged from it.

Feuerbach’s account explains how religious ideas arise in the human mind, but does not fully explain how they become stable, idolized, and shared by a culture. This limitation is addressed by Simmel’s theory of social abstraction.

## **Simmel and the Maintenance of God**

Simmel's money analogy provides a powerful model for understanding how human creations become autonomous. In *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel argues that money has no value on its own. Its power arises entirely from the collective recognition of its value. Once institutionalized, a man-made concept can begin to dominate and control the life of its creator.

### **Argument 2: Social Abstraction**

P1: Money has no value on its own (it is just paper)

P2: Its value depends on collective belief

P3: Money can become socially authoritative

P4: God exhibits the same structure

C: God is a socially maintained construction

Money appears independent of man, though it is created by man. It regulates behaviour and structures social relations and status. Yet its power only exists because people collectively accept and value it. Divine authority functions in the same manner. Once stabilized, God can appear external, and his value becomes unquestionable. Simmel thus explains how Feuerbach's projections become socially entrenched and how psychological imagination can become an institutionalized reality, therefore maintaining a concept through culture.

### **Ibn 'Arabi and God's Vulnerability**

While Feuerbach and Simmel analyze religion in psychological and sociological terms, Ibn 'Arabi develops a metaphysical account which argues that God is understood as an absolute reality that manifests Himself through his creations. Central to this claim is Ibn Arabi's mirror metaphor. In *The Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn 'Arabi explains that for God to have complete knowledge, he must be able to view himself. Since he is unable to do this on his own, humans function as a mirror in which God reflects Himself. As humans experience the world and learn of God's power and wisdom through the Cosmos, God subsequently learns about himself. Without humans operating as mirrors, God's divine attributes remain hidden to himself.

### **Argument 3: Reflective Manifestation**

P1: God possesses infinite attributes

P2: Attributes require manifestations to be meaningful

P3: Manifestations occur through human consciousness

C: God requires human reflection to appear.

Although Ibn 'Arabi maintains that God exists independently, he also describes how creation exists so that God may become visible to Himself through human awareness. This suggests that God is reliant on human beings to possess a portion of his knowledge; without human mirrors, divine reality remains unexpressed and incomplete. Ibn 'Arabi thus supports the idea that divine reality is relational rather than absolute.

## **God as a Social Construction**

Combining the thoughts of Feuerbach, Simmel, and Ibn 'Arabi helps create a unified account of divine construction. Feuerbach states that God originates in human projection, Simmel argues that culture institutionalizes and supports these projections, and Ibn 'Arabi circles back to Feuerbach by concluding that divine attributes in these projections rely purely on human action. Therefore, the notion of God held in Abrahamic religions can be asserted to be created through human relations and social structures, similar to the process of the empowering concept of money.

## **Suhrawardi in Defence of God**

Suhrawardi's illuminationist philosophy offers a powerful alternative. In *The Philosophy of Illumination*, Suhrawardi uses the metaphor of lights to refer to knowledge. In his philosophy, pure lights make themselves and everything else knowable, while other objects require light to illuminate them and consequently make them knowable. He views God as the "light of lights," the ultimate source of all illumination. God is compared to the sun: He shines regardless of whether anyone perceives him, and humans are compared to normal objects, in that they need God to manifest themselves.

## **Objection: Divine Independence**

P1: Light exists independently of human consciousness

P2: God is Pure light

P2.2: In the sense that God makes everything knowable

C: God exists independently of human consciousness

In this view, human perception merely receives divine illumination. God's existence and activity are not dependent on social or psychological conditions. Suhrawardi, therefore, offers a unified challenge to projection, social construction, and reflection theories posed by Feuerbach, Simmel, and Ibn 'Arabi, respectively. By situating God as the ground of understanding itself, he denies that divine authority originates in human psychology, collective recognition, or reflective manifestation. God is not produced by humans, rather, the notions which they perceive and seemingly "create" are made possible by God.

### **How Suhrawardi Counters Feuerbach**

The illumination framework directly challenges Feuerbach's projection theory. Feuerbach maintains that God originates in human psychology, arising from the externalization of perfect ideals that humans cannot fully attain. On this account, religious belief begins with human insecurity and ends in the projection of perfection onto a divine figure. Suhrawardi reverses this order. For Suhrawardi, human cognition itself is made possible by divine illumination. Rather than humans creating God, God enables humans to think, know, and understand.

Projection, therefore, presupposes intelligibility, and intelligibility presupposes light. If illumination is the condition of knowledge itself, then God cannot be a product of human imagination. Feuerbach's theory, therefore, becomes circular, since it attempts to explain the source of knowledge in terms of a consciousness that already depends on that source.

### **How Suhrawardi Counters Simmel**

Suhrawardi's position also challenges Simmel's account of God as a social abstraction. Simmel treats divine authority as comparable to money, an entity whose power arises through collective recognition and institutionalization. From this perspective, God has no intrinsic authority apart from social contexts. Suhrawardi rejects this view entirely. For him, meaning, value, and intelligibility do not originate in social interaction but in metaphysical light. Society does not generate divine significance; rather, divine illumination makes social meaning possible. If God is the ultimate source of intelligibility, then social systems cannot be foundational. God, in this view, cannot be reduced to a construct sustained by belief, since belief itself depends on divine illumination.

### **How Suhrawardi Counters Ibn 'Arabi**

Suhrawardi's illuminationism stands in tension with the relational theory posed by Ibn Arabi. 'Arabi emphasizes divine self-disclosure and argues that God becomes manifested

through human “mirrors”. Divine attributes, on this account, require reflective consciousness in order to appear. Suhrawardi rejects this dependence.

Light, he insists, shines by its own nature and does not require an observer to exist. Reflection is secondary to illumination. God, therefore, does not need human consciousness in order to be real.

### **Reply in Defence of God’s Limits**

Several replies may be given regarding the Illuminist counter: The first reply would highlight Suhrawardi’s miscategorization. While physical light is measurable, divine “light” is metaphysical and symbolic. The sun’s existence can be verified through causal effects (i.e., we can *see* it). God’s existence, however, is accessible only through interpretation and tradition. Treating a divine being as a physical phenomenon commits a category mistake.

Second, even if divine light were independent, this would not establish authority in a meaningful sense. Authority requires recognition, interpretation, and influence. A law that exists only on paper but is never enforced, for example, has no real power. Similarly, a God who exists without believers issues no commands and inspires no worship. Without collective recognition, divine authority lacks practical presence.

Lastly, even when utilizing the pairing of the sun and God, dependence can still be highlighted. Even if the sun can shine without any observers, it is its light hitting our eyes that allows

us to perceive it. This claim can tie well into Ibn 'Arabi's theory: Divine attributes without mirrors remain unexpressed, light without reflection similarly remains unseen. Humans, therefore, function as a reflective medium for both the sun and God, fortifying the claim that divine presence is relational and not absolute.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that divine authority emerges through human projection, social construction, and reflective consciousness. Feuerbach explains the psychological origins of God, Simmel clarifies the institutionalization of abstraction, and Ibn 'Arabi reveals the relational nature of divinity. Together, these thinkers support a model in which God exists as a socially constructed phenomenon rather than a self-existing being. Suhrawardi's illuminationist defence of divine independence fails to account for relational conditions. Light without reflection lacks presence; similarly, divinity without recognition lacks power. God, therefore, is a human creation that acquires independence through collective belief. Recognizing this trajectory reveals that humanity is the ultimate source of authority, and not a higher being.

### References

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