
Summary: Freud's View On Civilization and The Individual

During the early 19th century, rationality, order, and civilization & progress, were three certainties that were disrupted by world war one, and led to a sense of unease amongst the people. These certainties were key features during the Enlightenment period, which drove European society in politics, and assumed that the world should be a well organized, and well ordered place. Many believed if humans were left to dictate based on reason, an ideal human society would be created that would meet these assumptions, leading to a perfect civilization. Sigmund Freud attacks the premise that human reason motivates human action in his paper *Civilization and its Discontents* by explaining how individuals strive to achieve happiness, but often times sacrifice everything to do so. Freud's definition of civilization that a society is united through common beliefs is related to his theory that human instincts is to be aggressive and the individual psyche which makes it difficult to give up your instinct.

Freud begins his paper by raising the question many people question during this period, which was on the purpose of life. He concludes that the only answer to what the purpose of life is can be seen based on religion. He says we all strive to achieve happiness, which includes the absence of pain and strong feelings of pleasure and would do anything to achieve it. "The programme of becoming happy, which the pleasure principle imposes on us, cannot be fulfilled; yet we must not- indeed, we cannot, -give up our efforts to bring it nearer to fulfillment". This quote proves how one would be willing to sacrifice everything in order to achieve what society has made us want to achieve is happiness. All individuals share this quality of wanting to achieve happiness, which is what makes up a civilization. Primarily understanding Freud's definition of civilization is essential in order to relate it to the individual and its instincts. Freud's definition of civilization is very specific in terms of including society and its expectations. According to Freud, civilization is "... a cultural community.... [that is] connected with one another through the bonds of common work and common interests". In other words, civilization is made up of a group of individuals with similar points of views that make up their social norms and assumptions. Furthermore, "... it aims at binding the members of the community together in a libidinal way as well and employs every means to that end". This means that the aim in the process of civilization is to create a unity out of the individual human beings.

Essentially like every other concept in this world, conflicts exist that test such notions. In his paper, Freud considers the pressing problem in civilization being "... how to get rid of the greatest hindrance to civilization- namely, the constitutional inclination of human beings to be aggressive towards one another...". This is because men are instinctively aggressive and know nothing else but to be aggressive. So, Freud's introduction of the commandment to 'love thy neighbor as thyself' is essentially the "... strongest defence against human aggressiveness and an excellent example of the unpsychological proceedings of the cultural super-ego". In addition, "obedience to high ethical demands entails damage to the aims of civilization". Therefore, the strive to achieve happiness lives in all individuals as they aim to successfully gain happiness. This disturbs the aims of civilization to create unity.

As a solution, techniques for fending off suffering are introduced. For instance, "employment of displacements of libido which our mental apparatus permits of and through which its function gains so much flexibility". Explain libido? Freud relates his explanation of civilization to the

theory of human instinct using examples proven by intuition. "Satisfaction of instinct spells happiness for us ".In his paper, Freud explains why he believes the commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" should be turned into "Love thy neighbour as thy neighbour loves thee" . He says man's primary instinct is to be aggressive, which is difficult to ignore for the individual. This does not allow a man to be loving towards thy neighbor because it is their instinct to be aggressive. Accordingly, he notes that aggression forces civilization into a high expenditure of energy and the consequence is disintegration. "Civilization has to use its utmost efforts in order to set limits to man's aggressive instincts and to hold the manifestations of them in check by psychical reaction-formations.

Historical events also serve to support this claim that this commandment goes against male instinct through historical events that challenge this commandment. For instance, the mass killings and casualties of world war one proved that the man is capable of torturing and killing other men during war as a result of aggressive tensions between them. Therefore, "...to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction."

Freud goes on to relate civilization and the individual human psyche by stating "it is clearly not easy for men to give up the satisfaction of this inclination to aggression. They do not feel comfortable without it. The advantage which a comparatively small cultural group offers of allowing this instinct an outlet in the form of hostility against intruders is not to be despised." Basically he is says that it is difficult for one to give up their instinct of aggression and civilization offers this instinct by allowing hostility against intruders by not despising such action. Two urges are presented that "... must struggle with each other in every individual". These are the urge to achieve personal happiness and union with other human beings."The community... evolves a super ego under whose influence cultural development proceeds" "the super-ego of an epoch of civilization has an origin similar to that of an individual. It is based on the impression left behind by the personalities of great leaders..". Three psychological entities in dynamic interaction within every individual: Id, Ego, & superego. Writing influential enough to undermine confidence in human reason.

"If civilization imposes such great sacrifices not only on man's sexuality but on his aggressivity, we can understand better why it is hard for him to be happy in that civilization". Due to the fact that civilization causes one to sacrifice so much on things valued, it is difficult to achieve a state of contentment, thus relating to the title of this paper Civilization and Its Discontents.