



There's something unbelievable about Freud. If he was some ancient Greek or Medieval thinker, his ideas might not seem as strange. But the man was a contemporary of Albert Einstein, John Maynard Keynes, and F.D.R. He lived through the Great Depression and died during World War II—two events that continue to haunt the present day. Yet his theories seem so remote from our positivistic era that it can be difficult to even take them seriously.

Nonetheless, he remains one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century. In their diluted form, his ideas have pervaded our culture to the extent that we do not even realize that we are drawing on them. His name is just as recognizable as Einstein's, or Darwin's. Yet both of those thinker's ideas are still held in high repute—more, they established the entire paradigm for their fields. Meanwhile, Freud's ideas are only taken seriously in the dark recesses of literary or cultural criticism.

Pondering this, I came upon a realization, which I am sure many have had before. Freud's system is a bizarre version of Christianity. Instead of a soul experiencing the temptations of the body, we get the ego experiencing the temptations of the id. Instead of Original Sin, we get the Oedipus Complex. Instead of confession and atonement, we get psychotherapy. Replace the Virgin Mother with the mother as an object of lust. Replace the Heavenly Father with the father as an object of jealousy. And replace Jesus with Freud.

By now I'm convinced that the erstwhile popularity of his ideas was a product of this confluence. It is an entire secular religion. His ideas are so appealing, that some people have become enthralled enough to apply them to nearly aspect of human life. The whole sexual liberation movement drew inspiration from this sexually repressed Austrian. Strange. But I am rambling now, let me get to this book.

It strikes me that *Civilization and its Discontents* is Freud's sequel to Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morality*. The two works tackle nearly identical issues: the origins of religion, of good and evil, and of the guilty conscience. And both give historical answers. Nietzsche believed that the guilty conscience was an outgrowth of the creditor/debtor relationship; Freud, on the other hand, believed that guilt arose as a result of a historical act of aggression towards a father. But most psychologists nowadays, I suspect, would find it quixotic to look for a historical origin to an emotion.

It seems hardly worth the time to criticize Freud's ideas, but here is just a bit. When trying to grapple with something as abstract as a mind, it seems that thinkers resort to an analogy. The central analogy of Freud's thinking is pneumatic. He believes we are motivated by "drives," which build up pressure when not satisfied. These drives can be diverted and redirected, like a stream of water. While this analogy seems viable when thinking about sexual desire or hunger, it is useless when thinking of questions like language acquisition. Moreover, Freud places sexuality in the center of his system. Yet this makes just as much sense as placing the urge to eat in the center of a theory of human nature. Human behavior is complex. Reducing it down to the satisfaction of one or two drives is beyond simplistic. It's stupid.

But enough of these criticisms; let's look at the positives. Freud was one of the first intellectuals (though by no means the first) to place the emotional life in the center of human nature. As far back as Plato, philosophers have tended to think that rational theories were fundamental to our thinking. Witness Socrates, asking logic-chopping arguments about the nature of religious worship in [Euthyphro](#), apparently oblivious to the emotional side of religion. This tendency to see human life as attempts at rational explanations extended all the way down to Freud's day. In [The Golden Bough](#), the anthropologist James Frazer, a contemporary of Freud's, explained religion as a kind of proto-science. Compared with this, I think Freud's notion that religion is a satisfaction of an emotional need is a real insight.

Not only that, but Freud made clear the extent to which self-knowledge is almost impossible. Much of our motivations, he pointed out, stem from unconscious sources. While these motivations are not the river-like drives that he posited, he was at least correct in his supposition that the brain's activities are not all conscious. In my opinion, this was a definite advance over thinkers like Locke, Hume, or Kant, who believed that they could get to the bottom of human thinking simply via introspection.

Regardless of the extent to which he was correct, Freud's influence is undeniable. So it's worth the time to wade through his books, however bizarre they seem.

In a wider sense we can see that mental illness can have a social component, and that in such cases it is society which is making us sick, if running off to some other society might offer a cure, Freud does not go so far as to suggest, although some have tried that with variable success.

I think from this I had a sense of how scandalous Freud was in his day, equally how far his vision of Viennese society - repressed, sexual double standards, the scandal of people in pursuit of their own desires: Colonel Redl, Egon Schiele, Alma Mahler - is now our dominant vision that that society, how far that is fair, just, and reasonable I don't know. The introduction points to the USA where apparently abstinence only education on questions of sexuality and sexual activity is apparently increasingly prevalent, something in the writer's opinion which will guarantee the continuing relevance of Freud as future generations will endure the same miseries as his contemporaries.

Anyhow that was the younger Freud in 1908, making an effort to get his voice heard.

Civilisation & its discontents is a very different piece, it is unhurried and self-assured, there is no sense of urgency to save the world from muddled thinking, this is the voice of the man confident that he has a following and that there is some respect and acceptance of his vision, it is above all deeply pessimistic about society and culture, but in a surprise twist not about human history.

Freud is a gregarious author - which I had forgotten, but here as in [Die Traumdeutung](#) there is a reference to a friend and their experience in this case of how the friend's yoga practise gave them the Oceanic feeling which Freud imagines is the emotional experience that becomes rationalised into human religion. But I sense in this not Freud the cultural critic out on a limb (or two) on his own, but the friendly Freud, the man in the convivial circle of his fellows.

Reading this essay for the first time it struck me as significant that Freud and Marx were Jews, it is from the later Temple period of Judaism that a conception of history as purposive emerges, which historically is pretty unusual, it is the idea that history has meaning - specifically one created by God. History has a beginning and an end, and in the end God has decreed that there will be Peace, Justice and Good times, Freud and Marx both create secular versions of this, for Marx these ends will be achieved through social and economic developments for Freud through the interactions of basic human drives, he asserts that of the two primary forces - one destructive and anti-social, the other social bonding through love, that love will win through and humans will form a world community in which everybody is tied together in mutual re-enforcing bonds of friendship. Freud doesn't seem to quite believe himself, as he also sees the potential for humanity to self-destruct in an orgy of mutual slaughter. In an aside Freud looks at Communism, a flawed project in his view because for him tensions in human society don't come from an unequal division of property but from the psychological state of man. There is a destructive drive that is in contention with a constructive drive (view spoiler).

Freud's vision of man in society reminded me of the opening scene of the film *Cool hand Luke* - drunken Paul Newman chopping off the heads of parking meters (view spoiler), that is Freudian freedom, freedom is quite

negative in its manifestations in Freud's view, it is the freedom to please yourself by harming others. Civilisation is repression and so in Freud's view a rather good thing. Sickness is the price we pay for social living. For Freud - as we say about ageing - this may not be good, but it is preferable to the alternative. This means as a consequence we are all somewhat repressed and frustrated, and it follows that this is why people were in Freudian talking therapies for ever - there can be no cure, only adaptation, and the marker of a mature well adjusted person is a certain melancholy, if not a persistent low level depression. Freud is distinctly not impressed by his own essay, and we are not surprised by his persistent cigar smoking. Given his views, the need for comfort and reassurance was sufficient for him to smoke himself to death.

Again because this is a late essay, and perhaps one reason why Freud sees it as unoriginal is that it feels like a medley of his greatest hits - Man creates God in his own image, specifically of an angry Father, the brothers overthrow the father, but internalise him as conscience. This Freud describes as history, it is interesting (for me at least) to see that if he starts by destroying the myths of the society in which he lived in that he quickly comes to create a new set of myths or 'Just So Stories' to explain why we are the crazy mixed up creatures that we are.

Still the unavoidable awfulness for which we are all responsible, the lingering painful consequences of economic growth and development, our Kafkaesque guilt - it works for me, or doesn't maybe. I had the sense that if Freud had not existed, it would have been necessary to have invented him as a cultural and social critic, poking beneath the surface of our accepted realities, an example [here](#). It is a version of Enlightenment thinking that has limited faith in the goodness of human nature in a Darwinist world - everything is subject to the powers of reasoned analysis and observation, but what people say and believe about themselves must not be taken at face value - just look at the self-destructiveness we see in figures in public and private life. Finally Freud looks forward to the possibility that we will be able to analyse entire ages and historical societies "*one day somebody will venture upon such a pathological study of cultural communities*" (p.117)

In passing Freud seems to use man to mean man rather than people, so this is openly and confidently a one sided perspective. Also there are some great footnotes.

'Civilization and its Discontents' is Freud's miniature opus. It is a superficial masterpiece that stretches further than any of his other works; he is reaching for an explanation for human nature in terms of the id-ego-superego structure of the individual as he exists in civilization. For Freud, human beings are characterized by Eros (Sex Drive) and Thanatos (Death Drive), which remain in opposition to one another. This small book is filled with as many interesting ideas as any work of modern philosophy. Freud adopts (perhaps a bit hastily), a Nietzschean position with regard to the role of religion and institutions of social morality which curb and shape primordial human drives. As a result, human beings, and civilizations as a whole remain unsatisfied and suffer from neuroses. He concludes with a discussion of human aggression, which manifests itself in the form of communalized human aggression. He wonders as to whether or not human beings will be able to overcome this drive. It seems to me that this question remains the most important for human beings in the 21st century. Will we be able to overcome our Thanatos and survive the destructive powers that we have created? I suspect that Freud will be better remembered as a thinker and philosopher than as an analyst or doctor precisely because he asks the questions that remain relevant for civilization today, and are likely to remain imperative in the future.

Undoubtedly, Sigmund Freud is a classic. Consequently, he shares the fate of any classic: everybody knows of and few read him anymore. After all, what is to discover we didn't already learn? That he explained every evil or deviation in human behaviour by some repressed sexual urges generated mainly by the Oedipal complex. That he founded the science of psychoanalysis, but many of his theories and methods are obsolete today. That he influenced the Modernist movement, especially regarding some famous techniques such as introspection, psychological analysis, stream of consciousness, involuntary memory and so on. Things we've learnt in school, while studying more or less some excerpts of his books.

But when you finally make up your mind and read it, you realize he is definitely worth it. That he is always relevant, and in no way a mere fossil frozen in time to remind of obsolete periods in our culture.

In this context, *Civilization and Its Discontents* is a revelation. Its main theme: civilization as a source of unhappiness for the individual, is not new (Rousseau's good savage comes easily to mind, not to say that it is a problem debated since antiquity), but the development he chose to give it is seductive and pertinent.

The premise is simple and difficult to argue with:

...what decides the purpose of life is simply the programme of the pleasure principle.

This pursuit of happiness is prevented by at least three factors: our own body, the external world and our relations with the others. Therefore, whenever life becomes too hard to bear, man resorts to palliative measures: "powerful deflections, which cause us to make light of our misery; substitutive satisfactions, which diminish it; intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive to it." An example of deflection could be the scientific activity. Art, with its refuge in the phantasy can act as a substitute. Drugs, alcohol etc. – as an anaesthetic.

But why is man unhappy with himself and the world? Because, Freud says, man is basically an aggressive being whom civilization keeps in check through two "weapons": Ananke and Eros, that is, "the compulsion to work, which was created by external necessity, and the power of love". However, the love instinct (used by the society to keep its members together) is counteracted by the aggressive instinct. (I liked, even I wasn't convinced of, the reference to the Oedipal complex as illustration for this problem: the aggressive instinct dictates the killing of the father, whereas the love instinct stops it).

The struggle between Eros and Thanatos (with the continual repression of the death instinct dictated by society) leads to a sense of guilt which, although the most important problem in the development of civilization bringing with it the loss of happiness, usually remains in subconscious, being experienced rather as a sort of malaise, of anxiety. Moreover, the super-ego, which is the consciousness, penalizes the ego either with remorse or guilt, for sins committed or only thought of.

The book ends with two presumptions: on one hand that beside an individual super-ego there could also be a "cultural super-ego", thus viewing the society as a huge organism that developed its own consciousness, and on the other hand, that the battle between Eros and Thanatos is not only eternal but also unpredictable, thus throwing a pessimist shadow over the future. And he was unfortunately right. The World War II was just around the corner.

While reading a different book, it just dawned on me: this book excessively echoes the centuries of the Western hatred of the self. The book is haunted by the ghosts of not only Hobbes and Augustine but also Thucydides and Hesiod. The role of culture is to suppress and/or sublimate the pre-social animalistic nature of human beings. The primitive anti-social instincts of the child are put down by a super-ego representing a father and more largely a civilised society --- taking a distinct form of Augustinian or Hobbesian contours of the sovereign domination of the individual's anarchic impulses. Marshall Sahlins, an anthropologist, mentions that the infant's grasping of "reality" through experiences of pleasure and pain is a virtual replication of Hobbes' empiricist epistemology in the opening chapters of *Leviathan*.

I have only recently begun to notice that the deeper you dig into Western philosophers/theorists, the older and less original their theories get. It's amazing how blood-sucking systems like capitalism is an acutely Western phenomena --- predicated entirely on the "selfish gene" aspect of humanity, that philosophers/thinkers, including the whole system of Freudian psychoanalysis, partook in. Arbitrary satisfactions of bodily desires were mystified as universal rational choices. Ontologies and Theologies of an irredeemable materialist aspect were furnished. A whole cosmos was fashioned in the image of the "I am the Species" tendency of the West. If humans really have an anti-social animal disposition, how have these ethnic groups and tribes not discovered their animality and bestiality living so close to nature?

Civilisation and its Discontents is a testimony to this perverse idea of human nature that the West has unleashed upon the rest of the world.

The Price of Civilized Security

"Civilized man has traded in a portion of his chances of happiness for a certain measure of security."

Sometimes it is worth reading the original source of an idea that now should be taken for granted in our culture. Not this time. While there are a few gems in this work, I am mainly reminded why Freud is no longer taken seriously. Here we receive his view of an entire civilization based on his experience with those few neurotic patients who can afford his services. And have you noticed that he is rather obsessed with sex?

Freud deserves credit for recognizing a few fundamental truths: Unconscious processes motivate much of our behaviour, and sex plays an important role. And in this book, repression is an essential part of civilization. It is in

pursuing the details that he often departs from scientific method, and sometimes from reason itself.

Religion and Universal Love

Freud was not exactly a fan of religion:

"Religion interferes with this play of selection and adaptation by forcing on everyone indiscriminately its own path to the attainment of happiness and protection from suffering. Its technique consists in reducing the value of life and distorting the picture of the real world by means of delusion; and this presupposes the intimidation of the intelligence. At this price, by forcibly fixing human beings in a state of psychical infantilism and drawing them into a mass delusion, religion succeeds in saving many of them from individual neurosis."

Religious people believe that they increase the value of life, and some religious practice may be based on sound psychological principles that Dr. Freud ignores because they are not sex. But he has a good point about universal love:

"It is always possible to bind quite large numbers of people together in love, provided that others are left out as targets for aggression... After St Paul had made universal brotherly love the foundation of his Christian community, the extreme intolerance of Christianity towards those left outside it was an inevitable consequence."

In modern society there is a new God:

"Man has become, so to speak, a god with artificial limbs. He is quite impressive when he dons all his auxiliary organs, but they have not become part of him and still give him a good deal of trouble on occasion... Let us also remember that modern man does not feel happy with his god-like nature."

Death, Fire and Sex Objects

We are not happy because our tendency for violence and sex must be suppressed for civilization to work. Writing after the shock of World War One, Freud invented a death instinct to explain why it happened. This makes no evolutionary sense. Steven Pinker in [The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined](#) makes a much better case for the importance of suppressing our natural tendency to violence. Unfortunately, Freud sees sex behind everything. Seriously, this is his version of how humanity learned to use fire:

"Extinguishing a fire by urinating on it was therefore like a sexual act performed with a man, an enjoyment of male potency in homosexual rivalry. Whoever first renounced this pleasure and spared the fire was able to take it away with him and make it serve his purposes. By damping down the fire of his own sexual excitement he had subdued the natural force of fire. This great cultural conquest would thus be the reward for forgoing the satisfaction of a drive. Moreover, it is as though the man had charged the woman with guarding the fire, now held prisoner on the domestic hearth, because her anatomy made it impossible for her to yield to such a temptation."

Silly me. I thought it had something to do with fire being warm. But along with the irresistible male urge to piss on every phallic flame he sees (if I don't feel that way it must be because I am repressed), we can see a certain view of the relationship between men and women.

"Hence, the male acquired a motive for keeping the female or – to put it more generally – his sexual objects around him."

This may remind one of The Donald's locker room talk. But Freud was a keen (if sexually obsessed) observer of human nature, and other parts of the book seem quite sensitive to the (mainly sexual) needs of women. It is hard to tell here if that is his personal view, or he is guessing about attitudes in primitive society (like towards the fire), or if it reflects what he learned from his male patients.

Neurosis, Civilization and Free Love

We are constantly reminded that the cause of neurosis is suppression of the sexual drive. In the 1960s we tried to solve that problem with free love, as part of a general campaign against the perceived ills of civilization, or against civilization itself. Freud himself knew better than to dismantle civilization:

"It is contended that much of the blame for our misery lies with what we call our civilization, and that we should be far happier if we were to abandon it and revert to primitive conditions. I say this is astonishing because, however one defines the concept of civilization, it is certain that all the means we use in our attempts to protect ourselves against the threat of suffering belong to this very civilization."

Good point. I would add that one of those things that civilization tries to repress is violence, including violence against those women who are reduced to sex objects. Maybe we should think first before we tear something down.

Today we can do something conspicuously lacking in Freud's work – look for evidence to test the hypothesis. So does all that free love at least reduce neurosis? It seems every university reports that today's liberated generation needs ever-escalating mental health support. This suggests that while some sexual freedom may be beneficial, more is not necessarily better.

Sex as Distraction, Diversion and Dope

We are told there are three kinds of palliative measures to help us endure life: *"powerful distractions, which cause us to make light of our misery, substitutive satisfactions, which diminish it, and intoxicants, which anaesthetize us to it."* In other words, Distraction, Diversion and Dope. I suppose in his sex-starved society he never imagined sex itself filling these roles, especially the role of intoxicant. Fuelled by unlimited pornography, sex has become, in the words of his fellow intellectual luminary, an opiate for the masses. See [The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science](#) for what a modern psychiatrist has to say about that.

Let me suggest my own hypothesis that should, at least in principle, be testable. An obsession with sex, as opposed to being part of a relationship between people, necessarily leads to an objectification of the partner, the meaning of Freud's "sex objects". When a person is seen as an object, the inhibition to using coercion to achieve the goal is reduced. I am drawing a direct connection between sexual "liberation" and the result we now call "rape culture", in contradiction of the popular ethic that anything goes as long as it is consensual.

Something to Talk About

I don't apologise for throwing my own opinions in here, because I see that as the only possible value of this book: as a stimulus to discuss the role of repression in maintaining civilization, and in particular the consequences of too much or too little sexual repression. I cannot recommend this book for any other purpose than to start such a discussion.

A tedious read, Freud's essay is mundane at worst, general knowledge at best.

Freud had this tendency to make pretty obvious and minor premises and then jump to big and somehow unrelated conclusions depending on said premises.

It's already known that Freud and his disciples were treading a deserted land which is psychoanalysis in their times, which calls for far more caution and far more-in this case, very welcomed-pedantry.

Nevertheless Freud writes with uncalled for confidence, mixing facts with personal views with no impartial evidences to stand on, he even admits it more than once in this particular book.

All in all, I didn't come out with anything new, all I had were "Oh yeah? I think so too" moments which are not my expectations whatsoever from this book.

At one time it was wrongly believed that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny (i.e. the embryonic stages mirrors the development stages of the species). Similarly Freud thinks the phases that an individual goes through mirror the same phases that civilizations have gone through. Freud uses that theme to explain his psychoanalysis in describing individuals and the societies in which they live as mirror images of each other.

Yes, Freud does believe some weird things and he restates them in this book such as the early infant's whole world is the mother's breast and thus we end up fetishizing the breast when we grow up, our time in the womb means we always are looking to return to an abode of some kind, something about the anal fixation and how it never leaves us and unrepressed sex desires lead to our anxieties and other such things that sound weird to our modern ears. But those distractions don't necessarily mean that this book is not highly engaging and worth reading. I'll challenge you

to read any recent biography because you'll almost always see the author slip into Freudian speak (e.g. I'm currently listening to "The Purple Diaries: Mary Astor", and the author says that her father was strict and controlling and that made Mary Astor not trusting of men and unwilling to share her feelings with others particularly men, a very Freudian interpretation). It's not a bad way of seeing the world. It's how we understand our selves or others. Now days, we just don't add on the word neurosis or repression, but it's how we cope with the nature within ourselves and others.

I like this book for the same reason I liked Nietzsche's "The Genealogy of Morals". I don't agree with what they are saying, but they provide a narrative that is compelling. Matter of fact, you can tell that Freud is really influenced by Nietzsche within this book. Freud will say something such as the "conscience of the individual gets repudiated by the instinct leading to an anxiety that gives a person guilt" and that leads them to the wanting of taking away of the power of the father. (I don't have the quote exactly, but I think its fairly close to what he was getting at). Nietzsche's "will to power" at it's most basic cries out for how the community takes away our primal instincts, takes us away from "man's instinct to freedom". What Freud does within this book is argues Nietzsche's viewpoint with the emphasis slightly different. Freud states that our conscience gets perturb from within the family and by extension within the community leading away from our authentic (not a Freud word, but I feel comfortable using it here) selves.

As I was listening to this I had to pause to see what year he wrote this book. I noticed it came before Heidegger's "Being in Time". Heidegger had a long section on 'conscience', and seemed to conclude that the conscience is the cause of itself. Freud does a similar thing (if you take his complete statement on the topic within the book and you relate it to the father of the individual as he does or as he does latter on in the book to the sacrifice of the Messiah on the cross, he makes it a complete circle thus giving itself as its own ground (I think)). "Will" is defined as it's own cause by St. Thomas Aquinas thus giving our conscience its primal place in his theology and leading to free will such that God can judge us for our moral acts in a necessary universe but which was contingently created by God exercising His will. Freud is giving us our conscience as a thing in itself and thus we can be blamed for who we are or became (even if we are schizophrenic, autistic, or predisposed to alcoholism by genetics, or whatever).

The conscience leads to guilt because of our repressed neurosis (he'll say). Nietzsche will say the guilt is not real, Heidegger says it is because of the debt we owe to the future because of the one absolute truth we always know (our own impending death), and Freud says we have the guilt always but we repress it thus leading to our neurosis. (I love using that word 'neurosis'. It's totally void of meaning and I think the DSM V doesn't use it at all as a category for that reason). All three are trying to return to us our authenticity which has been taken away from us by civilization (and the family).

Freud in this book also lays out a defense for the importance of character, community, and science and aesthetics in the development of the individual and the functioning of civilization as a whole. He dismisses religion. The neurosis (there's that word again) that exist in the individual also exist within the civilization as a whole (he'll say). By character he is getting at blaming the victim. It's the values that the individual (and species) are not learning properly from their community and will later on allow for 'refrigerator mom's' to be blamed when their child is schizophrenic or have autism. He'll even say that civilization as a whole is currently (1920) suffering from neurosis.

Freud lays all of this stuff out in this book. Do I agree with any of it? Not at all. But, there is a narrative that Freud uses that is fun to follow. I liked this short book so much, I'll probably buy "The General Introduction to Psychoanalysis" by Freud that audible offers which I would guess will cover most of this stuff in deeper detail.

Most people do not really want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility."

Civilization and Its Discontents, written in 1929, is an important work within the range of Modern Psychology. Freud, in this book, explores the conflict that exists between the individual and society. In the first part of the book, it's presented how Religion affects different pathological and healthy states of an individual. If the "purpose of life is simply the programme of the pleasure principle", then, seeking gratification, avoiding suffering, and securing happiness are objectives that can be undermined due to society's restrictions. Freud claims that individuals have certain features that can't be changed, such as the desires for sex, violent aggression, instant gratification, and so on. Based on those immutable characteristics, society represses part of one's individual freedom and primary primitive instincts, in order to achieve well-being between the individual and the collective. Consequently, according to Freud, there's a sort of discomfort on the individual when those primary urges are repressed.

Throughout the book, it's analysed the sources of guilt on the individual, Freud's investigations into narcissism and sadomasochism, the development of Freud's concept of libido, and the development of the super-ego as a singular conscience.

According to Freud, if we want to live harmoniously, we are compelled to have our primitive urges repressed. It's an essential price to pay, no matter what. If we were roaming hopelessly without laws and order, the super-ego would be nonexistent and, consequently, the well-being between Humans would be chaotic. On the other hand, if there's order, neurotic repression of instinct is a collateral price to pay. However, Human psychology is way far too complex to be resumed on primitive urges, even if they are immutable and strong. On that point, it's important to highlight that societies (in every aspect) are becoming more complex. For that reason, the range of choices of an individual gets widely spaced. If societies are becoming more complex (especially in an intellectual point of view), then, the "conscience" of the super-ego increases.

Nevertheless, the eternal battle of the individual/collective is a relevant dilemma that will follow mankind. If we want to progress as a whole, part of our "primitive liberty" must be repressed. But that comes up with a personal price: Responsibility and commitment.

Overall, "Civilizations and its discontents" is, without a doubt, a great step on the study of the individual and his clash against society.

You can't really make a workable model of human personality with his building blocks any more, can you? I heard once that scientists have started to think of the psyche as more like the British Parliament- contending constituencies which have more on the table than just a-fuckin' and a-fightin'. But, since we're on the topic, let's not neglect the, er, pervasiveness of these rather fervently observed pastimes...it's well-nigh Schopenhauerian, isn't it? Hmm...come to think of it, there really was some bad faith on Freud's part when it came to naming formative influences. Suuuure he never found out about Nietzsche before he started writing his key works, whaaatever...

I like this very much and it explains how not a single practicing psychologist I've ever queried has ever said that his thinking still reigns supreme in psychological circles. Apparently he's more of a know-it-to-know-it kind of thing. The study of the mind has gone past him now, so much the better.

Psychology's loss is philosophy and literature's (philology's?) gain- it's no wonder that theorists of language and thinkers of man's place in the social sphere still pay homage. I thought this would be one of the texts which would offer his *pensees* (pun intended, if you're wondering) but either I missed something completely here or he did.

Maybe it's better, taking these dubious observations to heart, that the literary are keeping him going. What more was he, really, than an explicator of mythos? (Think Oedipus, Karamazov, his razor-close reading of Shakespeare, the aforementioned Existential forerunners, etc)

Freud is a fascinating and provocative philosopher. I believe, in attempting to understand him, it is correct to regard him as a philosopher while it is an error to regard him as a scientist--and this is an error which he seems to have made several times himself. Freud seems to have greatly influenced my own thinking, and I believe he has also significantly influenced human culture so that his ideas are not easy to escape. This book in particular, it seems, contains many profound probable truths, which are likely intermingled with several falsehoods, spurious conclusions (or semi-open-ended, tentative conclusions), and perhaps some misguided speculations. Nonetheless, I won't stop reading Freud or being influenced by him. His ideas require the reader to go beyond comprehension, to avoid too-easy acceptance, and to grapple with them skeptically. To merely know what he thought is relatively simple, e.g. he thought civilization requires the ego to be restrained in order to promote a communal bond, and this sets up a conflict between contrary instinctual urges and a resulting anxiety and obstacle to happy fulfillment, which has a parallel in the psyche of the individual whose superego punishes and controls the ego, turning its aggressive impulses against itself. As compelling as Freud's ideas are, the two criticisms I would level at him are: 1) His compulsion to whip his ideas to make them fit a systematic understanding is itself never entirely fulfilling, it results in an incomplete, slightly nebulous picture that is more conditional than he is sometimes willing to admit (not so much in this book, but elsewhere his drive to reach absolute understandings can carry him away), and 2) Despite his best efforts, and despite the revolutionary nature of some of his ideas, he still seems to be limited at times by his own inherited cultural prejudices, such as concepts about gender relations and those about differences between civilized and primitive cultures. Yet, it is always hard to be strongly critical of Freud, because he usually anticipates all objections and gives evidence that he has taken those objections into account.

So, yes, this book is to be recommended, and I hope to hear what you, as a reader, take away from it. I believe your reading will be rewarded if you use it as a tool to provoke your own thinking into new directions, even if you diverge from Freud in various places. Freud seems to use his own writing as just such a tool--his writing is an

analytical process, more so than it is a thesis--or such is the way I choose to approach it.

Here one can bring in the interesting case in which happiness in life is sought mainly in the enjoyment of beauty, wherever it presents itself to our senses and our judgement—the beauty of the human forms and gestures, of natural objects and landscapes, of artistic and even scientific creations., this aesthetic approach to the purpose of life affords little protection against the sufferings that threaten us, but it can make up for much. The enjoyment of beauty has a special quality of feeling that is mildly intoxicating. Beauty has no obvious use, nor is it easy to see why it is necessary to civilisation; yet civilisation would be unthinkable without it.

Our attitude to the third source of suffering, the social source, is different. We refuse to recognise it at all . . . much of the blame for our misery lies with what we call our civilisation . . . and it was inferred that a suspension or a substantial reduction of its demands would mean a return to the possibilities of happiness.

The views I have developed here were at first put forward only tentatively, but in the course of time they have taken such a hold on me that I can no longer think in any other way. In my view they are theoretically far more serviceable than any others one might entertain; they produce what we strive for in scientific work—a simple answer that neither neglects nor does violence to the facts.

Some good and very interesting thoughts on civilisation, and, being Freud, sexuality.

*What did convulse our being, Freud suggests in *Thea* astonishing footnotes on the first and last pages of section IV, was the experience, or rather the smell of sex before we adopted an erect posture. But our sexuality fell when we stood up. Both anal eroticism and olfactory stimulation were subjected to what Freud calls 'organic repression'; the result of this 'repression' is our horror of excrements and, at least according to Freud, a repugnance at sex, a shame provoked in us by our genitals and a disgust at genital odours which is so strong in many people that it 'spoil[s] their enjoyment of sexual intercourse'. And what a loss this was! By the end of the last footnote in section IV, Freud has transformed man's depreciation of the sense of smell in sex into the repression of 'the whole of his sexuality'. Nothing is stranger in *Civilisation and Its Discontents* than the erotically confessional footnotes—that is, those moments when the distinguished anthropological imagination of the text depends into. Footnote where it enjoys the fantasy of a mythic, prehistoric convulsing of our physical being in the passionate sniffing of a male on all fours . . . we are, both ontologically and phylogenetically, 'coded' for pleasures we can no longer legitimately enjoy.*

Civilisation and Its Discontents

It is impossible to resist the impression that people commonly apply false standards, seeking power, success, and wealth for themselves and admiring them in others, while underrating what is truly valuable in life.

One may be inclined to suppose that these great men are appreciated after all only by a minority, while the great majority have no interest in them.

Another of my friends, whose insatiable thirst for knowledge has driven him to conduct the most extraordinary experiments and finally made him virtually omniscient, has assured me that in practising yoga one can actually arouse new sensations and universal feelings in oneself by turning away from the outside world, by fixing one's attentions on bodily functions, and by breathing in special ways. Such sensations and feelings he would interpret as regressions to ancient conditions in the life of the psyche that have long been overlaid.

We achieve most if we can sufficiently heighten the pleasure derived from mental and intellectual work. Fate can then do little to harm us . . . at present we can only say, figuratively, that they seem to us 'finer' and 'higher', but their intensity is restrained, when compared with that which results from the sating of crude, primary drives: they do not convulse our physical constitution. The weakness of this method, however, lies in the fact that it cannot be employed universally, as it is accessible only to the few. It presupposes special aptitudes and gifts that are not exactly common, not common enough to be effective.

. . . the house a substitute for the womb—one's first dwelling place, probably still longed for, where one was safe and felt so comfortable.

The benefits of order are undeniable; it enables people to make the best use of space and time, while sparing their mental forces.

Not all human beings are worthy of love.

No person has unlimited quantities of psychical energy at his disposal, and so he has to accomplish his tasks through an expedient distribution of the libido. Whatever energy he expends on cultural aims is largely denied to the opposite sex: his constant association with men and his dependency on this association even estrange him from his duty as a husband and father. The woman therefore sees herself forced into the background by the claims of civilisation and adopts a hostile attitude to it.

In addition to the tasks involved in restricting the drives—for which we are prepared—we are faced with the danger of a condition that we may call 'the psychological misery of the masses'.

'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness

I will take from it only what I need as a starting point for my own contribution.

Characteristic features of the civilized sexual morality that dominates us are for him the extension of the demands made on women to the sexual life of men and the prohibition of any sexual intercourse outside monogamous wedlock. Of course, regard for the natural differences between the sexes makes it necessary to punish men's lapses less rigorously, and so to admit a double standard for them. Yet a society that entertains such a double standard cannot carry 'love of truth, honesty, and humanity' beyond a certain narrow limit; it cannot help teaching its members to cloak the truth, to gloss over things, and to deceive themselves and others. Civilised sexual morality produces still more harmful effects by glorifying monogamy . . .

*At the same time the individual's needs have grown; demands for the enjoyment of life have increased in all strata of society, and a degree of luxury hitherto unknown has spread to classes that were previously untouched by it. Irreligion, discontent, and covetousness have proliferated in broad sections of the population. The enormous expansion of communications, due to the world-wide telegraph and telephone networks, has entirely transformed the conditions of trade and commerce. Everything is done in haste, at a fever pitch. The night is used for travel, the day for business; even "holiday trips" put a strain on the nervous system. Great political, industrial, and financial crises carry this excitement into ever wider areas of the population than ever before. Interest in political life has become universal: tempers are inflamed by political, religious, and social struggles, party politics, electioneering, and the immense growth of trade-unionism; people are forced to engage in constant mental activity and robbed of the time they need for relaxation, sleep, and rest. Big-city life has become increasingly sophisticated and restless. The exhausted nerves seek recuperation in increased stimulation, in highly spiced pleasures, and the result is even greater exhaustion. Modern literature deals predominantly with the most ticklish problems, which stir up all the passions and encourage sensuality, hedonism, and contempt for all ethical principles and ideals. The reader is presented with pathological characters and with subjects that involve psychopathic sexuality, revolution, and other problems. Our ears are excited and over-stimulated by large doses of noisy, obtrusive music. Theatres captivate all the senses with their sensational productions. Even the plastic arts turn by preference to the repulsive, the ugly, and then exciting, and do not hesitate to place before our eyes, with revolting realism, the most hideous sights that reality has to offer. —W. Erb, *Über die wachsende Nervosität unserer Zeit*, 1893*

The sex drive—or more correctly, the sex drives, for analytic research shows that the sex drive is made up of a number of components or partial drives—is probably more highly developed in human beings than in most of the higher animals. It is at any rate more constant, having almost completely overcome the periodicity to which it is subject in animals. It puts huge amounts of energy at the disposal of cultural activity; this is a consequence of one particularly marked characteristic—its ability to exchange the originally sexual aim for another—which is no longer sexual but psychically related to the first—is called the capacity for sublimation.

It may be said that the task of mastering such a powerful impulse as the sex drive otherwise than by satisfying it is one that can call for the whole of one's powers. Only a minority succeed in mastering it by sublimation, by directing the instinctual forces away from their sexual aim and towards higher cultural goals, and even this minority probably succeeds only for a time, and least easily during the period of ardent youthful vigour.

For all the means of contraception that have been invented so far reduce sexual enjoyment, disturb the finer sensitivities of both partners, or are even direct causes of illness.

Freud's brilliant (if anything underrated) investigation of the conflict between the desire for individuality and the expectations of society.

The essay represents a long form exploration of the tension between the needs of the group (promoted via civilization) and the needs of the individual, which for civilized people plays out in a conflict between survival and sex drives.

Freud's primary claim, in a nutshell is, people need civilization to keep from ripping each other to shreds, but it's also a total buzz kill, because they end up fucking a lot less.

And....well....you go ahead and argue that point if you want, but I'm going to sit that one out.

I mean, don't get me wrong, I'm with Steven Pinker in the pro-civilization camp.

But I can't really argue with Freud's terse little observation. I don't actually think they contradict. And I'm quite sure those two would be bros if they lived in the same time.

As evidenced by the fact that Freud begins this very essay with an all out assault on religiosity.

Freud opens his argument by taking down his then pal C. G. Jung, by doubting the efficacy of Jung's seemingly benign proto-new-age notions of 'oceanic awareness' as the fundament of religion.

It's obvious that there was something REALLY important that Freud just didn't get, that Jung clearly did.

But still.

The argument is sobering and counters the sloppy brand of spiritual thinking Jungian's commonly try to pass as not just true but 'so true'.

As in \"that's so true man\".

In short, Freud employs the 'explain it to me like I'm a dummy' technique in regards to the oceanic experience, and in the end, shrugs it off by essentially saying that he doesn't get it.

Touché

I'm quite sure Freud did understand what Jung was getting at. If only because Freud discusses adopting a diffused, global witnessing ego in the practice of psychoanalysis.

I think Freud was simply rejecting the religious aspects of Jung's claim, and challenging Jung for a kind of clarity that Jung legitimately did not possess.

Freud soon leaves Jung behind and takes aim at Judeo Christian (J/C) ethical precepts.

Freud takes particular umbrage with the J/C injunctions to be nice to your enemies and don't have sex.

Again. Freud plays dumb and playfully asks why one would ever do such a thing.

He expands the argument by deconstructing the \"infantile\" father figure deity as a 'sky daddy' (my language not his) defense against life's inevitable anxieties, particularly those concerning death.

Then he shifts gears into what is, in my opinion, a really darn compelling argument for the existence of a death instinct.

Which from the outside, not having read the source text, always seemed ridiculous to me, but after reading Freud's humble (yes humble) and highly persuasive handling of the idea.

I have to say.

It's a useful construct.

The death instinct may not literally be 'true' in an objective, falsifiable sense, but it certainly seems to be extant in a

subjective, functional sense.

The trans-cultural fascination with death and violent imagery seems at least as present and powerful as sexual and erotic imagery.

When understood as the impulse to aggression, you simply can't deny the construct.

When understood in terms of suicidal ideation and behaviors, in the form of the passive 'desire to cease to exist', or in the the literal drive to end ones own life, if for no other reason than to end the pain.

Again.

There is no lack of compelling evidence for all of this.

Anyway.

All that atheistic death talk really turned my crank.

And considering the text in it's historical context, i.e. it was written by a Jew, in Germany, in 1930, just makes you say WOW!

Now that's what I call a transgressive text.

Remember, they didn't have 'safe spaces' back then.

Like WAY not.

Finally.

This is a dense, sometimes confusing read.

So.

Much if not all of what I have to say here may be incomplete and/or completely off base.

There is much about this text that would take seriously rigorous scholarship to fully understand.

And I'm simply not the one.

That being said.

After reading it.

I'll At minimum, I'm left with a deepening respect for Freud's genius, charm and lasting influence.

Most people do not really want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility.

Except some of his biased ideas, Freud was really a revolutionary figure. And if we read any of his works, then we should keep in our mind the understanding of three major concepts like: Id, Ego and Super-Ego. Though there are some more complex ideas of Freud such as Pleasure principle, Oedipus complex, Libido etc. So reading Freud isn't just a matter of skimming through the lines, we really have to study some of his major ideas beforehand which I have shown above. And I think Civilization and its discontents is his most important work. If you question why? Then I would say the title really explains why. It is a book where he gave his value judgement on the future of humanity by carefully explaining the underlying problem of human nature. How did this civilization arise as we now see it? How our moral instinct developed into a cultural instinct? And how this society traps us despite of giving protection from natural forces? Pondering through all these questions Freud generally gave us a pessimistic view regarding our individual life. First of all, civilization is a result of our survival instinct and self-preservation—it came out as it is from the basic need of communication. And why did this need of communication arise within us? Probably it was

because of our need for love. And why did we, animals, suddenly had an urge for love? It is perhaps because of our sexual need had been modified into a larger existential feeling. Our striving for our love object was the basic leap from a biological animal to a social animal. So if we are safe and have got what we have wanted by building up civilization, then why are we lonely and unhappy in the midst of so many people? Because it doesn't matter how much we have been civilized, we are still prone to our ancestral instinct—our need for violence and sexual pleasure. And how much we tell ourselves that we are civilized, still we are just like those tamed animals, except in our case we have tamed ourselves. Civilization actually suppressed huge amount of our instinct that we don't have enough necessary channels to sublimate those instincts. As a result, we have been internalized in a way that we are the punisher of ourselves, even the intention of doing a so called evil action make us guilty. Yes, according to Freud, the reason we have bad conscience is because of our being suppressed by the force of society and mostly it is a sexual suppression. So I can't say that Freud was really authentic in his line of thought, because most of those ideas I have read in Nietzsche's book. Like how our lack of externalizing the inner instinct made our own instinct turned into ourselves and how for this reason we are guilty animal. Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy of morals I had the understanding of the history of morality and human civilization, so comparing to those ideas of Nietzsche to Freud I feel like Freud was really influenced by him, as *Genealogy of morals* were written 40 years before this book was published. But Freud really made some strong points and I can't disagree with those.