Sigmund Freud
_Civilization and its Discontents_


**Freewriting prompts:**
- Starving artist stereotypes?
- Can a narrative talk about how it is narrating?
- Freedom and Desire...

**Background:**
- Sigmund Freud lived from 1856-1939. Consider what this time period encompassed:
  - The rise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire
  - The transition from the “Victorian” era (note he’s not British) to the Modern era.
  - The second Industrial Revolution (The Technological Revolution) from 1820–1914, which saw the centralization of factory-based production and the remaking of the working class (and a challenge to the upper classes)
  - The Russian Revolution and the rise of Communism as a political philosophy
  - Bear in mind that he’s following just after the July Revolution in France (1830) and the French Revolution of 1848. Rapid reconstruction of society and the frailty of social controls was a known fact of Freud’s period.
  - World War I (1914–19) and World War II (1938/9–1945)
- Freud contributed to psychology the notion of structures of the psyche from which many modern theories developed. This began in his first period with:
  - The Unconscious (unrecuperable), the pre-conscious (recuperable with exertion), and the conscious mind
- This led Freud subsequently to his more elaborate model of the mind:
  - The Id, the Ego, and the Superego
  - Das Es (the IT – taken from Georg Groddeck to represent the unknowable spiritual/libidinal forces of the living
creature); Der Ich (the “I” literally); and Der Über-Ich (the
“Over-I” or the “Super-I”)

- **Id** – all the unconscious materials and drives that are not
  normally accessible to the conscious mind. This is where
  human life begins before we differentiated our drives from
  ourselves, as well as our sensations from the external
  world. The Id remains, and the Id doesn’t forget – notably,
  Freud postulated that the Id did not distinguish between
  reality and fantasy, so an imagined evil is just as bad for
  the Id as a real one.

- **Ego** – this is the whole area of the conscious mind and its
  capacity for rational / Enlightenment projects. In many
  respects, the Ego must make sense of the drives and
  wants of the Id, which is must explain but cannot prevent.
  One might want something one does not “want” to want –
  the Ego must rationalize all of this, but it leaves the
  drives (by definition of the Ego’s own existence) frustrated
  and Id unhappy.

- **Super-Ego** – this is the “conscience,” but it also carries a
  societal association of imperatives, guilt, rules, and
  demands. The super-ego doesn’t accept the Id, and the
  Ego must also accommodate itself to the Super-Ego,
  which can leave the Ego in impossible situations between
  desire and guilt. The Super-Ego is built from the
  internalization of requirements or external demands, but
  it’s also perverse – you cannot want what you want...

- **Definition:** “Unconscious” is in German the “Unbewusst”
  or literally the “Un-be-known” or what I do not know have
  “knowing” access to by the conscious mind. The Id is the
  “Unbewusst” that I cannot gain access to, even though it
  drives me to want and desire in ways I cannot
  comprehend or prevent, even if they cause guilt or
  suffering in the materials world. The Ego’s job is the
  manage the “Unknown” against reality.

- Psychoanalysis is the discipline Freud developed from this theory. It
  began when he was treating patients with psychosomatic illnesses
  (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, anxiety, non-physical paralysis,
  memory loss, etc...). He found that patients were exhibiting physical
  symptoms based on psychological problems – think of how we may
Freud’s career went through three distinct stages:

- **Early Freud** – creating the theory of psychoanalysis and formulating the notions of repression and the unconscious. This began with his dream work in 1899 and lasted until the First World War.
- **Middle Freud** – He increasingly tried to align psychoanalytic treatments with social pressures, such as the pressure to conform to social obligations for romantic or sexual relations, etc. He also became increasingly interested in the anthropological origins of different behaviours.
- **Late Freud** – he became, in the context of the wars, interested in the pathologies of social conduct as a subject of psychoanalytic analysis. This led to the psychoanalytic origins of the impulse for religion, violence, greed, aggression, etc...

**Timeline:**

- **1899** – Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The remarkable features of this book were that it:
  - refuted the notion that images carried fixed meanings for different people
  - it saw dreams as a function of the Unconscious (Unbewusst), and hence an expression of what was wanted but was censored by the Super-Ego. Dreams were, hence, a disguised and transformed style of wish-fulfillment.
  - It posited a rich dream life for everyone, regardless of class, race, ethnicity, religion, and so on – everyone has a complex and rich psychological life...
- **1914–19** – writes *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and anticipatory works. This changed his previous theories:
  - He’d previous posited the existing of a “pleasure principle” (humans seek pleasure but often need to substitute for it or redirect this desire because it runs contrary to the social norms of the society, and hence causes guilt)
  - He posited the existence of a “reality principle,” which sought to shape and redirect the desire for pleasure in
order to “regulate” or “discipline” pleasure so as to intensify or prolong it – one might save the best tasting food on the plate across the whole and eat it as the last bite rather than eat it all at first. One might save food rather than eat ALL the cotton candy and get sick from it... One might delays obtaining pleasure in order to make that pleasure more intense, etc... The point is that the reality principle regulates the pleasure principle. We can never get what we want in the way that we desire it... Hence, desire is never actually fulfilled; it’s always thwarted, even if only to get better pleasure.

- 1923 – publishes *The Ego and the Id*. This works revises the previous notion of the Conscious and Unconscious with the more nuanced 3-part structure of the psyche.
- 1927 – publishes *The Future of an Illusion*, which is about religious faith (the illusion). Freud asks how religious faith functions with regard to delaying pleasure in order to obtain and even better pleasure later – does this ultimately make people ill psychologically? If so, can this “illusion” (faith) continue to exist for much longer if its repression of desire makes people experience great pain and often great illness?
- 1930 – *Civilization and its Discontents*. This book obviously arrives at a complex time in Freud’s works as well as a complex historical period after World War II, the rise of literary Modernism, and in anticipation of the kinds of social and economic upheavals that put the Nazis into power in Germany in 1933.

**Basic Questions:**

- The individual versus societal regulations, or more broadly the competing tendencies in all humans between individuality and sociability.
- What is the “cost” of civilization that we often overlook? Is it worthwhile? If so, is mental illness the cost of the pleasures and ease of being socialized / civilized?
- Can we create a “healthy” civilization?

**Suppositions:**

- Human desires and sociability, at their most basic levels, conflict with each other. We cannot be both socially adapted to our communal interactions AND fulfilling our desires. Sociability is, then, fundamentally a way of controlling and disciplining desire.
Sociability grants to the members of society the fulfillment of desires and can prevent fear and suffering (shelter, protection, reliable pleasure, etc...), but in doing so it must regulate desire as such.

Regulating desires causes fear and suffering. Therefore, civilization itself creates neuroses and illness as the price of civilization and the regulation of higher levels of pleasure.

Into the Text:

- pp. 3-4 24 (1-2) – “Oceanic feeling” is a sense of ‘oneness’ with the world or universe. Freud casts this as a religious impulse and hence as a regulatory function of the Super-ego. People might (p. 4, par. 2; p. 24-5, par. 2 (p. 2 par. 2) choose death, which ends all pleasure, as a way of obtaining this symbolic form of pleasure in ‘oneness’ with the world.
- pp. 4-5 25-6 (p. 2 par. 3 – p. 3 par. 2) – bottom par. of p. 4 enters into the terms for the structure of the psyche. Sketch it out to show them how this means things.
  - “Normally we are sure of nothing so much as a sense of self, of our own ego. This ego appears to us autonomous, uniform and clearly set off against everything else. It was psychoanalytic research that first taught us that this was a delusion, that in fact the ego extends inwards, with no clear boundary, into an unconscious psychical entity that we call the id, and for which it serves, so to speak, as a façade. And psychoanalysis still has much to tell us about the relation of the ego to the it.” (pp. 4-5; pp. 25-6)
  - “Normally, there is nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of our self, of our own ego. This ego appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else. That such an appearance is deceptive, and that on the contrary the ego is continued inwards, without any sharp delimitation, into an unconscious mental entity which we designate as the id and for which it serves as a kind of façade – this was a discovery first made by psycho-analytic research, which should still have much more to tell us about the relation of the ego to the id. But towards the outside, at any rate, the ego seems to maintain clear and sharp lines of demarcation.” (pp. 2–3)
  - “There are cases in which parts of a person’s own body, indeed parts of his mental life – perceptions, thoughts,
feelings – seem alien, divorced from the ego, and others in which he attributes to the external world what has clearly arisen in the ego and ought to be recognized by it. Hence, even the sense of the self is subject to disturbances, and the limits of the self are not constant” (p. 5, mid-page; p. 27, top). “There are cases in which parts of a person’s own body, even portions of his own mental life –his perceptions, thoughts and feelings – appear alien to him and as not belonging to his ego; there are other cases in which he ascribes to the external world things that clearly originate in his own ego and that ought to be acknowledged by it. Thus even the feeling of our own ego is subject to disturbances and the boundaries of the ego are not constant.” (p. 3, mid-page) ie: do we ever “project” our desires onto other things?

- P. 6 28 (4) – Pleasure Principle (top of page onwards) vs. the Reality Principle (middle of page). Simply put, (A) we desire pleasure and want to get pleasure, whether that’s sex, food, rest, warmth, or more symbolic versions of pleasure. (B) in order to get pleasure in the real world, we cannot just succumb to the unconscious “want” and do anything – we need to “govern subsequent developments” (6; 24) (“dominate future development” (4)) in order to get pleasure. Want sexual pleasure? Attract the right mate in the right social pattern… Want food? Don’t eat all of it or you’ll go hungry tomorrow… Want to see a good band? Don’t buy tickets for this week and not the rest of the month… Want to taste pleasurable food? Don’t eat too much of it or you’ll get sick and feel bad…

- P. 6 28 (4–5) – (bottom) Freud suggests that there’s nothing more the to the religious experience of the “Oceanic feeling” than this interaction between the Pleasure Principle and the Reality Principle.
  - The Oceanic Feeling is the remnants of a stage of the Ego’s development in which there isn’t a reliable distinction made between “I” and the “World out there” (when babies can’t distinguish between their own hand and someone else’s).

- P. 7 – nothing is ever fully forgotten. Once something takes shape in the mind, it cannot be destroyed (in normal circumstances). You might not recall it consciously (repression), but it’s still there… One can then feel guilt over things one does not remember or that were never even real.
Pp. 13–14 40–1 (12) – enumerate on the board. This section defines important ideas. Follow the enumeration in the book and the margins in order to explain the whole marked passage – don’t be shy about reading the whole thing aloud. How do we deal with the inevitable pain life places on us (while confronting the drive for Pleasure and avoidance of pain)? We do three things, generally:
- 1) powerful distractions / deflections
- 2) substitutive gratifications / satisfactions
- 3) intoxicants

In the above, what role does religion play? 1, 2, or 3? Which is alcohol? Which is sex, success at work, professional success, winning a sports event or competitive game? What is art?

Pp. 13–14 41–2 (12–13) – use the bottom paragraph on p. 13 41 (12) (read aloud) as a question that lead us to the “THEREFORE” answers in the whole of the 2nd paragraph on p. 14 41 (13).

Pp. 16–17 47–51 (15–17) – repeats the same enumeration, so use to this drive the point home for students.
- The last 4 lines of the middle paragraph are an example of (3) in the above list. (bottom of p. 15 last 2 lines & onto p. 16)
- (1) in the above list – the middle of the first paragraph on p. 17 outlines the “reality principle”: “Control [of the libidinal drives of the ID] is then exercised by the higher psychical authorities, which have subjected themselves to the reality principle. At the same time the aim of satisfaction is by no means abandoned; a certain protection against suffering is obtained” (17 16)
- Opening of the last paragraph on p. 17 (16 bottom) gives (2) in good example. “Another technique for avoiding suffering makes use of the displacements of the libido that are permitted by our psychical apparatus... Here the task is to displace the aims of the drives in such a way that they cannot be frustrated by the external world. Sublimation of the drives plays a part in this” (17). This is art and intellectual work.
- Let’s use an example. You want to be lovely and attractive to the opposite (or same!) sex in order to get pleasure. Getting sexual pleasure from a mate isn’t always socially allowed, so we get pleasure from attracting a mate without consummation. But being attractive means (in
the West) being thin, and that means foregoing the pleasures of some foods. We also want to do well in school in order to achieve symbolic success. So – you end up late one night studying and want to reward yourself for enduring the pain of studying that leads to the pleasure of success, so you reward yourself with a food treat (a cookie for staying focused on studies). BUT, the cookie has to be moderated, so you each only a part of it in order to stay skinny, in order to have the substitute for sex: being desired by others. We rapidly find that we achieve NONE of our main desires and endure much pain in order to achieve substitute gratifications – to keep ourselves on track for that, we employ distractions and powerful intoxicants... (COMPARE to pp. 18 [bottom] (18 middle) onto p. 19 19 [top]).

- P. 24 23 – repeat the 1, 2, 3 enumeration as above (top of the first paragraph, as marked in the margins – read aloud)
- P. 24 23-4 – how do we moderate the SOCIAL sources of suffering? We regulate other sources of suffering (illness, stomach aches from overeating, avoiding obesity and the raw bed sores that come with it...). Yet, how do we regulate the forms of suffering that are created by the apparatus of regulating desires? LOOK AT and READ the bottom of the first paragraph, the top of the second (onto the next page) and the end of the second paragraph on p. 25 24 (all as marked in the margins). Civilization regulates our desires in order to give us more pleasure and minimize our suffering, BUT doing this causes suffering all on its own – we are then in an impossible problem. We must give up some pleasures and embrace some suffering in order to avoid the pain caused by civilization, BUT that leaves us again suffering and getting less pleasure...
- P. 30 29 – compulsion to repeat. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, this notion is tied to the Death Drive. (see passage marked in the margin). This idea was developed by Freud as he treated shell-shocked soldiers from the first world war who were mentally ill. He found that they would always return, obsessively, to the moment of injury
or horror, despite the pain it caused – he saw two reasons for this: (1) repetition developed symbolic mastery (I made it myself and hence have control over it) or (2) we are driven to pursue our own termination, and this is an instance of the death drive.

- p. 32 31–32 – **communal life vs. freedom. The individual vs. the state.** Look to the passage marginally noted on pp. 32–33 (31–32). The Community gives us pleasure and protection but severely regulates our desires. In order to pursue the desires of our individual liberty, we surrender liberty to the state in order to be guided in managing desire and suffering.

- P. 34 33–34 – **SUMMARY.** Using the 1–3 types of accommodations, how do we discipline the drives. READ ALL OF THIS ALOUD. Sublimation is the key here. Civilization is necessary, yet its founded on the non-satisfaction of our most elementary drives and desires – this leads us to deep dissatisfaction with life in civilization, which erupts in hostility and depression.

- P. 37 37 –The “aim-inhibited impulse” (definition given just as you turn over onto p. 38 38)

- P. 48–49 70–73 (49–50) – **Freud vs. Marx.** Obviously, Marx doesn’t see the same deep psychological structures as Freud. Bottom of p. 49, Freud argues that correcting property relations will do nothing to solve the problems of unhappiness because it doesn’t correct the fundamental flow of civilization itself.

- P. 50–51 (51) – the relationship between authoritarian power in society and the psychic conflict between the Pleasure Principle and the Reality principle, which is the conflict between anti-social and social impulses (Freud, Marx, and the Anarchists).

- The Great Question: p. 81 (83) final paragraph.