

Good civilization and its discontents by sigmund freud compared research paper ex...

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Being contemporaries and rivaling each other in their researches, Fromm and Freud cannot but have common observations that imply years of studying and working together. Even though Freud and Fromm's professional relationship are disrupted by ideological disagreements, they still remain focused on similar subjects and ideas. In the books we compare, both Freud and Fromm stress on boundaries the Western civilization sets on individual development. Freud's dissection of social mechanisms is specific to his work in general. He sets the trend to see civilization as the main cause for the inability of individuals to reach their potential. Fromm adopts Freud's observations and goes a step further as to suggest a solution on how an individual could succeed in his struggle for personal fulfillment and freedom. Fromm's book complements Freud's philosophy by offering a vision for a positive solution of an already existing problem, previously defined in Freud's book.

FREUD'S PHILOSOPHY IN CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Freud is considered a classic writer and culture analyst of the 20th century. His book *Civilization and Its Discontents* from 1930 still enjoys a broad interest and has a renewed contemporary edition. This book is a milestone in Western culture content analysis and requires being re-read and approached again in the light of new decades to come. The reason why Freud's work is indispensable is that it addresses the clash of individual interests with general demands imposed by society that put pressure on personal development. Freud claims that when we observe the personal development of an individual, we can draw conclusions and recognize parallels with the

development of our civilization. Freud sees the role of civilization as oppressor that hinders the individual drive to live freely (Siegel 1).

Freud's work disregards the role of the individual in the process of creating culture. He sees the individual rather as a victim of the culture, which is driven by its own laws, prohibiting individual aggression and self-fulfillment (Siegel 1). Freud refers in his work to "poets, playwrights and novelists from his own and earlier periods" like "Goethe, Heine, Romaine Rolland, Mark Twain, John Galsworthy and others" (Siegel 1). For Freud people who represent authority, like religious, political and military figures, have adopted roles offered them by the culture they live in. Such culture representatives are not working to fulfill their potential, but rather to serve a civilization that limits them. They are blinded and unable to see their entrapment in the civilization they live in (Siegel 2). We have to bear in mind that Freud created this book in the middle of anti-Semitic outbreak in Europe in 1929, while at the same time suffering from a fatal cancer condition (Siegel 2).

HOW CULTURE AFFECTS THE INDIVIDUAL

Freud, according to his writings, created in such a tumultuous period in his life, sees the existing conflict between the individual and the social milieu as one potentially always existing and not as singular incident referring to then contemporary anti-Semitism. Freud continues his reflection from previous works saying that civilization has always suppressed individual sexual instincts (MacDonald 308). Freud tries to offer a plausible description of his statement by observing the evolution of human society. It stresses on the importance of creating a family where members help one another to survive

and this makes sexuality more of a tool to keep a man and a woman together. In Chapter IV, for example, Freud points out that men sees their females counterpart as sexual objects, while females need the strength and support offered by males, in order to raise children that in young age require a lot of support (MacDonald 308).

DESTRUCTIVE INDIVIDUAL TENDENCIES

In his observations Freud additionally includes the factor of love connected to sexuality in Chapter IV of his book (MacDonald 313). Confusing love for sexuality is the essence of the oedipal complex, because the motherly love for her children is the “ basis of civilization” (MacDonald 313). Freud stresses that civilization depends on both love and suppression of sexuality. Social union is based on the psychic energy released by suppressed sexuality of individuals that form friendships and steer their libido into the purpose to serve social conventions, claims Freud in Chapter V (MacDonald 313).

Freud underlines that this is necessary, because human beings carry a lot of aggression within themselves expressed in wars, rapes, exploitation of others or conflicts (Sigmund Freud 111). When individuals have their instincts directed outwardly toward the external world, those instincts are expressed in violent and destructive impulses (Sigmund Freud 119). Once focused on the outside world, human relationships are threatened with disruption, since the content of love-based internal social bonds are at risk of being destroyed (MacDonald 313).

Freud claims that individuals feed on narcissist elements in their desire to die in order to achieve their “ old wishes for omnipotence” (Sigmund Freud

121). For Freud the ego-driven individuals re-direct this desire to gain satisfaction toward the outside world, which gives them a sense of hegemony over setting (Sigmund Freud 121). The purpose of a well-advanced social mechanism is to regulate primal sexual instincts and to re-configure them into a less destructive energy. That is how the superego serves undermining the individual's ego- driven desires for fulfillment (MacDonald 314).

A SANE ALTERNATIVE

Erich Fromm in his book *The Sane Society* reminds that Western society with its norms and conventions has set a pattern for normality that is unhealthy and difficult to conform to (Tillich 13). The typology of normality alienates individuals from the Western civilization and from their democratic ideal. Western society has forgotten natural laws and mechanism that allow individuals to live in a basic state of happiness and contentment (Tillich 13). Just like Freud in his book, Erich Fromm exercises a sharp critique on Western culture, that undermine the laws of natural selection and represses individuals' sexual desires. Fromm warns us about the trap of Western civilization and its tendency to force individuals into becoming something they do not feel naturally inclined to be.

Erich Fromm alludes to fundamental Christian ideals and in addition focuses on existentialistic problems. He claims that religion in general offers solutions to difficulties coping with regular life (Tillich 13). Fromm claims that the essence for " mental health" is the " ability to love and to create, the liberation from the ties of the clan and the soil, the development of

objectivity and reason” (Tillich 14). Those are the criteria for healthy living of an individual governed by the positive impulse of his nature.

It seems that while Freud observes phenomena and makes conclusions, Fromm offers solution by creating an image of a healthy norm that is achievable within democratic political setting. Fromm, even though not able to see the norm achieved at his present moment, at least sees democracy as a chance for this ideal to be reached in future generations. His approach is much more holistic in terms of finding a solution to existing restrictions that have resulted in socially disfigured conventions of normality. Individuals gradually have to overcome them in order to reach their potential. “ Fromm has great trust in the basic goodness of free man” (Stoop). He believes that humans are thrown into existence and need to undertake the role of creators of their own destinies in order to leave behind old destructive habits of humanity and achieve self-realization (Stoop).

CONCLUSION

Both Freud and Fromm observe common phenomena of civilization restricting individuals in their personal development. Freud sees this restriction as positive in the sense that it prevents individual destructive energies from ruining society. However, it also gives individual a sense of discontentment and leads to the desire to die in order to reach one’s potential. This is the result of living in a restrictive society not offering alternatives for change and development. Fromm believes that social changes are possible and individual freedom is achievable in the foreseeable future, as long as one adopts positive attitudes giving individuals the

opportunity to be in the role of creators of their destinies. In general, Freud focuses on the problem and mechanisms creating it, while Fromm, in addition to re-confirming the existing problem, offers a solution. Both books complement each other thematically.

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