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NEWS ABOUT CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS. ON OUR DEBT TO FREUD.

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ABSTRACT

This article is a special intervention in LAPSO's issue devoted to the *Obscure Gods*. The author analyzes the contributions made by the text *Civilization and its Discontents* written by Sigmund Freud in 1929. It is known that the main Freudian legacy of this work is that there is no full satisfaction of the drive, but the author isolates other contributions that are not less transcendental to interpret phenomena such as segregation and violence.

KEYWORDS

uneasiness/malaise in culture | superego | feminine position | segregation

On May 6, 1856, Sigmund Freud was born; he was called schlomo-shelomoh, thus honoring the patriarch of Tysmenitz.

The pseudo-scientific conception of race was gradually taking place, and with it the segregating ideological shift from anti-Judaism to anti-Semitism.

It is about the framework of the period between 1815 and 1933, when Jean Claude Milner locates temporary space in the so-called *Mitteleuropa*; it is about the development of the figure of the Jew of knowledge. Freud, a *Jew of knowledge* who names the intersection of *Jew and knowledge*, and who takes the German language as that supposed to know.

The year 1933 marks for Milner the decline of that unprecedented experience with the rise of Nazism.

It was in 1930 that Freud published *Culture and its Discontents* (Freud, 1929 [1979]), adding the last paragraph in 1931, when, according to his principal biographer, Hitler's presence was already a notorious threat.

The text and its legacy should be read in that light. How did Freud, the interrogator of the nocturnal face of the soul, watch against rationalism, intellectualism, and classicism, as the great Thomas Mann postulates?

I postulate that the main—and crucial—legacy for our times is that there is no full satisfaction of the drive through internal obstacles, therefore, not through prohibition, but as a mode of the impossible.

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How can we think about human beings and culture from that impossible which is not historical, which does not depend on each culture or each human being?

The whole text *Culture and its Discontents* is an unprecedented effort to account for what can be done with that impossible. For this reason, the so-called auxiliary constructions and stiff drinks—the exaltation of the technical object nowadays—are necessary.

That is why the program of the pleasure principle is not feasible.

Happiness, in the reduced sense in which we recognize it as possible, is a problem of the economics of the individual's libido. There is no golden rule which applies to everyone: every man must find out for himself in what particular fashion he can be saved. (Freud, 1929 [1995], p. 83)

Unique and modest solution.

The provisions of the WHOLE (which he writes in block capitals) are unrealizable.

In Freud's view, it is religion, in principle, which affects the choice everyone makes, since by presenting itself as a WHOLE, "it imposes equally on everyone its own path to the acquisition of happiness and protection from suffering."

What for Freud has more power in order to try to suppress, to tame that impossible of total non-satisfaction, are intoxicating and toxic substances, since they influence our body by altering its chemistry and causing egoic grandeur.

In a perspective, this is our time: generalized addiction and ego omnipresence. Certainly, the third is intimacy as a spectacle and the elevation of the traits of *jouissance* to the dignity of collectivizing SI.

What is a second legacy of this text? The place of women, or more clearly stated, the feminine position.

Women get into hostility with the demand of the superegoic imperative of culture. It is not hysterical hostility, that which Freud speaks about in *The Taboo of Virginity* (1918 [1979]), and Lacan in *Seminar XVII* (1992), but toward the imperative of *jouissance*.

It is a hostility in favor of the desire-jouissance-love knot.

Freud says:

What he [a man] employs for cultural aims he to a great extent withdraws from women and sexual life. His constant association with men, and his dependence on his relations with men, even estrange him from his duties as a husband and father. (Freud, 1929 [1995], p. 101)

That which is feminine responds at this point to the question of the father as a model of the function, revealing here what he formulated in the last chapter of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (Freud, 1921 [1995]) with respect to the fact that love for women, like the symptom, has both a dispersing value of the crowd effect and the highest value in human existence, as it breaks through all the ties of national divisions, of origin, of religions, etc.

The other great contribution is that referred to the commandment *love your neighbor as yourself*. The paradoxes of this commandment will lead him to formulate both the dimension of man as a wolf to man and his debate with communists and socialists. With regard to the former, he debates the conceptualization that private property corrupts human nature, but at the same time Freud states that "the ownership of private wealth gives the individual power, and with it the temptation

to ill-treat his neighbor, while the man who is excluded from possession is bound to rebel in hostility against his oppressor” (Freud, 1929 [1995], p.109).

And with regard to socialists, I quote the following paragraph:

I too think it quite certain that a real change in the relations of human beings to possessions would be of more help in this direction than any ethical commands; but the recognition of this fact among socialists has been obscured and made useless for practical purposes by a fresh idealistic misconception of human nature. (Freud, 1929 [1995], p.139).

The socialist misconception is to believe that this change in relation to the question of property would eliminate obscure passions. But this idea referred to by Freud in his writing does not invalidate the question that the change in property relations would be more effective than an ethical command.

Freud says that, at the same time, there are people who “habitually allow themselves to do any bad thing which promises them enjoyment, so long as they are sure that the authority will not know anything about it or cannot blame them for it; they are afraid only of being found out” (Freud, 1929 [1995], p.121). These men, in Argentina, are called *disappearers* and torturers.

Culture does not solve obscure passions. The Germany from which Nazism emerged was the most cultured society in the world.

Even Freud will formulate that forcing individuals to be better than what their nature allows them leads to the worst.

No education in solidarity will eliminate the death drive. Moreover, forcing anyone in that sense will only harbor the Kantian categorical imperative and lead to the worst.

It is my point of view that it comes down to creating inhibiting social conditions that do not make it possible for obscure passions to be carried out in the world under the mode of cruelty, torture, murder.

A more just, democratic society, with a full development of the functions of the State, guaranteeing health care, education, housing, employment and facilitating the construction of individual and collective projects makes it possible to symptomatize the modes of drive satisfaction.

A society where citizen rights are not guaranteed, where the figures of the cynic and the rogue, captured in the iron law imposed by the relationship of the law of the market with scientific and technological development, does not make way for symptomatization but promotes the direct practices of *jouissance*, without the operation of symbolic and imaginary resources, to deal with the real of the drive.

A bureaucratic and totalitarian society where that which is different is taken as hostile, as an enemy, imposing a uniformity that crushes that which is singular and makes a push to the crowd becomes a cruel nightmare.

Finally, the other great contribution. A fundamental answer to the first: to the total non-satisfaction through internal obstacles, the impossible.

That contribution is the superego.

The paradox of the superego in that the greater renunciation of the drive satisfaction, the greater increase in superegoic severity.

This formula, perfectly observable in certain clinical phenomena and social behaviors, draws on the first theoretical construction of the question that says: the renunciation of the drive creates moral conscience.

But the second formula tells us about the renunciation of an aggressive, vengeful satisfaction.

“The authority now turns into his superego and enters into possession of all the aggressiveness which a child would have liked to exercise against it [the father’s authority]” (Freud, 1929 [1995], p. 125). It is the suffocation of an aggression, not of a libidinal motion.

This second formula is more in line with our present times, since the first one has burst into the air from the neoliberal imperative of *jouissance*. The current one is an imperative without debt and without guilt. It is a correlative imperative to the decline of the Name-of-the-Father.

But what is the aggressive energy that this superego houses in its second formula? Aggressive energy directed against that inhibiting authority, says Freud. It is not about the father anymore. So? It is a superegoic aggressive energy against the impossible, but anxiety remains bearing witness to it.

Finally, regarding the last paragraph of the text: dear Sigmund Freud, unfortunately, cultural development has failed to master “the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction” (Freud, 1929 [1995], p.140).

But his legacy, psychoanalysis, presents itself as that which reveals that the psycho-political pretension of intervening into the depths of our psyche and exploiting it stumbles on the impossible.

In addition, his desire has come to take the place of the cause, for me and my fellow psychoanalysts. Finding his word gave a decisive turn to my life and prevented the passage to the act of my push to the militant sacrifice. Dear Sigmund Freud, I am very grateful to you.

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