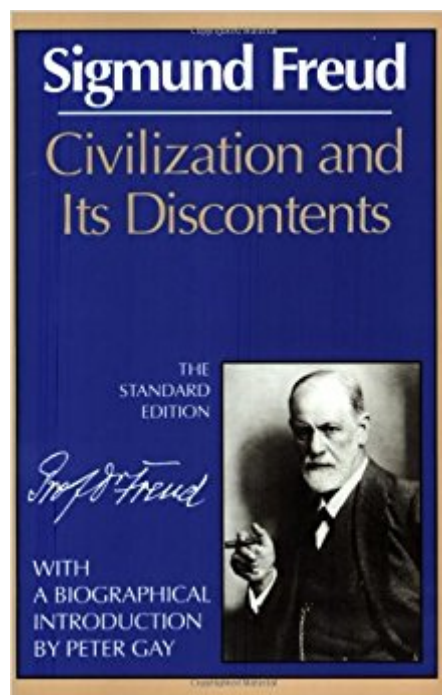




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# Civilization And Its Discontents (The Standard Edition) (Complete Psychological Works Of Sigmund Freud)



## Synopsis

During the summer of 1929, Freud worked on what became this seminal volume of twentieth-century thought. It stands as a brilliant summary of the views on culture from a psychoanalytic perspective that he had been developing since the turn of the century. It is both witness and tribute to the late theory of mind—the so-called structural theory, with its stress on aggression, indeed the death drive, as the pitiless adversary of eros. *Civilization and Its Discontents* is one of the last of Freud's books, written in the decade before his death and first published in German in 1929. In it he states his views on the broad question of man's place in the world, a place Freud defines in terms of ceaseless conflict between the individual's quest for freedom and society's demand for conformity. Freud's theme is that what works for civilization doesn't necessarily work for man. Man, by nature aggressive and egotistical, seeks self-satisfaction. But culture inhibits his instinctual drives. The result is a pervasive and familiar guilt. Of the various English translations of Freud's major works to appear in his lifetime, only one was authorized by Freud himself: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud under the general editorship of James Strachey. Freud approved the overall editorial plan, specific renderings of key words and phrases, and the addition of valuable notes, from bibliographical and explanatory. Many of the translations were done by Strachey himself; the rest were prepared under his supervision. The result was to place the Standard Edition in a position of unquestioned supremacy over all other existing versions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Newly designed in a uniform format, each new paperback in the Standard Edition opens with a biographical essay on Freud’s life and work along with a note on the individual volume” - Peter Gay, Sterling Professor of History at Yale

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is one of the twentieth century’s greatest minds and the founder of the psychoanalytic school of psychology. His many works include *The Ego and the Id*; *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*; *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*; *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*; *Civilization and Its Discontent*, and others. Peter Gay (1923–2015) was the author of more than twenty-five books, including the National Book Award winner *The Enlightenment*, the best-selling *Weimar Culture*, and the widely translated *Freud: A Life for Our Time*.

The book was in great shape when it arrived. Also, if you are interested in critical theory, or getting to know the underpinnings of continental thought this is a good basis outside of his opus.

Being a “physical science” scientist, I’ve always had an affinity for testable hypotheses, solid facts and irrefutable conclusions. Therefore I was under the impression that psychology (at least at its birth) was some kind of mystical discipline that identified certain patterns which made sense only a fraction of the time because the human mind is extremely complex. So I started reading this book expecting to hear a fairytale about how we will never be happy, and I said “why not read it, I’d like to hear someone else’s crazy opinion about my own sadness and dissatisfaction”. And instead, I found very methodical and scientific ideas elaborated on basic evolution and the limited knowledge on human behavior at the time. Remarkable stuff! A lot of this applies today like our search for constant gratification which can only be the result of slight dissatisfactions a perfect description of social media today. Or how creating prohibitions just makes the person want it even more a mirror of gun and drug laws nowadays. Or even the need for a common enemy. But most of all I was very fond of his metaphors and euphemisms such as the mind being a city where you can still see ghosts of every building as it once was even if it was torn down or remodeled. Or how humanity is in such a childish state. Side

note: Einstein aptly called war "an illness of childhood" • reading this book I found that religious extremism, intolerance, and repression of opinions are too. From this book (my first one from him so far) I got the impression that Sigmund Freud was stepping into a fresh field which allowed him to speculate a little • and he did • in my opinion chapter 4 and chapter 6 are inaccurate and boring (hence the subtracted stars). But nonetheless he proceeded with the right scientific mind and the proper caution. I think it is very unfortunate that he lived only at the birth of psychology, because he could have been so much more than just its father had he lived in the 21st century.

Hitchens' Introduction is hardly worth the new edition. It is neither controversial nor especially insightful. So, any edition of Strachey's translation will do. I find that my students have a difficult time distinguishing whether Freud is being prescriptive or descriptive herein, which is interesting because they are predisposed to detesting Freud, both because they tend to like religion and because Freud has a bad rep in the popular Imagination. I see shades of Foucault's Discipline & Punish in so much of what he discusses here. In fact, you can see what Foucault thought of Freud in his essay, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," which lays out an anti-phenomenological trajectory in the study of human societies, and gauge the importance of Freud's contribution to this philosophical tradition. This is, to my mind, the work of Freud everyone interested in post-structuralism should read. Freud is amazingly clear and easy to read; Strachey is a cut above other translators of Freud.

A little hard to take in and I had to reread it several times to understand. Freud's manner of speaking is a bit different than the way that people talk nowadays. Still, it is a great insight into one of psychology's best psychoanalytical thinkers.

Freud brings some interesting perspectives to the reason behind the beginnings of civilization. He delves into why it was actually a selfish need (keeping groups together to satisfy sexual needs) but at the same time, how similarities between the formation of civilization and the conscience formed. Did we form a system of laws based on our conscience because we needed to protect the structure of civilization, or did the system of laws give rise to the conscience, instilling an internal authority figure so that we act morally? Freud raises some questions (per usual) but also adds some observations that I would not have thought about alone.

This is probably one of my favorite books, one that is still relevant today. Freud's analysis of human

condition and its never ending quest for explanations can be applied today to the modern man/woman. Despite our high level of civilization we are still primitive; we haven't overcome our anxieties.

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