

THE ROLE OF IDEALS IN FREUD'S THEORY OF CIVILISATION

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In *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud takes up the problem of the status and function of ideals in human life, which he first broached in a fragmentary way in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. It was inevitable that Freud should have addressed the issue of what makes civilisation possible and approached it in relation to the meaning of ideals, because the ideal is a peculiar product of thinking which both refers in some way to concrete and sensuous experience, and transcends that experience. For any theory such as Freud's, which attempts to derive thought, its rules, and its concepts from an experience which itself is not cognitive, some account must be given of why ideal standards arise and what function they perform. Freud was troubled by the problem of ideals because he held them to be necessary to the constitution of civilisation, but not to the nature of the individual human being. Civilisation from his viewpoint was inherently precarious because it had no essential relation to the fundamental structure of the self. Unlike Hegel, who staked his entire interpretation of history upon the necessary unfolding of the idea of freedom, Freud affirmed the contingency of ideals. Against the dogmatism of absolute idealism, he offered a sceptical theory of civilisation which is ultimately grounded in a dogmatic naturalism.

The importance of Freud's theory of civilisation for contemporary political and social philosophy lies in its attempt to defend and vindicate civilised life while avoiding the idealist assumption that ideals are immanent and necessary to history. The problem of civilisation and the speculative response to it, the philosophy of civilisation, are creations of idealist philosophy rooted in Kant's transcendental idealism, which transfers the interest in ultimate meaning from an intelligible reality set over and against concrete and imperfect existence to the world itself, particularly the cultural world created by human thought and action. From the standpoint of the philosophy of civilisation, Kant attempted to demonstrate the function that ideas which have no object in any possible experience perform in the perfection of human life. The hallmark of civilisation from the Kantian perspective, is the acknowledgment of and commitment to ideas which do not constitute but regulate human pursuits such as science, art,

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and the creation of community life. In Hegel's philosophy, the regulative ideas of Kant become ideas constitutive of the development of human history. The reaction against absolute idealism in the West, which began in the nineteenth century and of which Freud is a part, generally took a sceptical form and was based on the thesis that ideals are in some way distorted expressions of specific practical interests, whether economic, vital, sexual, or other. The reduction of ideals to natural impulses throws civilisation itself into question, because it deprives it of any objective ground. Hence, Freud's attempt to defend civilisation evinces an appreciation of the dangers of scepticism and an awareness of the need to ground civilisation philosophically. Such appreciation and awareness is rare and noteworthy among partisans of the sceptical reaction, who, for the most part, were naive about the consequences of their position or were consistent foes of civilisation.

The following discussion will outline and assess Freud's effort to defend and vindicate civilisation on naturalistic grounds. The aim will be to show that civilisation is not intelligible when interpreted from the Freudian perspective, but that many of the concerns and observations which Freud brings forward provide a corrective to the dogmatic assertions of absolute idealism. The critique of Freud will be performed, from a Kantian perspective and will be based on the argument that Freud confused constitutive with regulative ideas, essentially the same mistake made by absolute idealists, but in a different form. Freud was correct in that civilisation is not historically necessitated by the development of an idea immanent to social existence, but incorrect in that the idea regulating civilisation is contingent upon an empirical balance of instincts. As a contribution to civilisation, his psychoanalytic method is only possible if it is grounded in the idea of rational freedom, which is the regulative idea of civilisation.

The Idea of Perfection

Freud's initial critique of rational ideals is performed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where he devotes an extended paragraph to the impulsion towards perfection. He comments that it may be difficult for many people "to abandon the belief that there is an instinct towards perfection at work in human beings, which has brought them to their present high level of intellectual and ethical sublimation and which may be expected to watch over their development into supermen".¹ He declares that he has "no faith" in the existence of such an instinct and argues that the drive towards perfection, which is manifest in a minority of individuals, "can easily be understood as a result of instinctual repression upon which is based all that is most precious in human civilization."² Yet the "untiring impulsion towards further perfection" differs

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from the other results of repressed instincts because, "no substitutive or reactive formations and no sublimations will suffice to remove the repressed instinct's persisting tension." Freud attempts to explain this anomalous impulse by postulating a "difference in amount between the pleasure of satisfaction which is *demandea* and that which is actually *achieved*". For those who seek perfection, the "backward path that leads to complete satisfaction" of the instinct is blocked by resistances, the only alternative is "to advance in the direction in which growth is still free — though with no prospect of bringing the process to a conclusion or of being able to reach the goal".³ Freud compares the impulse to perfection to a "neurotic phobia", which results from an attempt to flee from the satisfaction of an instinct.

Although Freud does not identify the repressed instinct of which the impulse towards perfection is a symptom or manifestation, he observes that "the efforts of Eros to combine organic substances into ever large (*sic.*) unities probably provide a substitute for this 'instinct towards perfection' " and that this "supposititious" instinct can be explained by Eros "taken in conjunction with the results of repression".⁴ Freud also notes that the *dynamic* conditions for the impulse towards perfection are universally present, but that the *economic* situation favouring its appearance only occurs in rare cases.

Freud's fragmentary discussion of the impulse towards perfection provides a starting point for the critical analysis of his theory of civilisation. It must first be noted that, in sceptical fashion, Freud does not address himself to the *idea* of perfection, but to an impulse or a supposed instinct. Thus, he adopts a psychologistic line of argument, in which he does not consider what perfection means, whether it is the same as or different from any other meanings or objects towards which individuals direct their activity, or even whether it can be defined at all. Freud's notion of perfection lacks any positive meaning, not only in the sense of an end that might be actualized, but also in the sense of a criterion of judgment or critical standard. Perfection is defined negatively by Freud as a substitute for pleasure which has the characteristic of *not* being able to be specified in terms of any particular reactive formation or sublimation. It is as far as the discussion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* goes, an empty concept or, in Kant's terms, a concept without any correlative intuition.

If, however, as Freud argues, the impulse towards perfection has helped to create "all that is most precious in human civilization", its object, perfection, cannot be empty because if it were empty, then those who are impelled to perfect culture, social relations, and themselves would have no grounds to be dissatisfied with what they had created. It does not help to explain the impulse towards perfection in terms of an imbalance between the amount of pleasure demanded and the amount of pleasure achieved, because, even in Freud's account, perfection cannot be measured and the impulse towards it is not, at least directly, an impulse towards pleasure, but, on the contrary, is often an

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affirmation of sacrifice, suffering and, at least, deferred gratification. Even if the hidden dynamics guiding the impulse towards perfection were economic, the conscious expression of these dynamics would take the form of overcoming the pleasure principle. Freud's discussion of the impulse towards perfection in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is contradictory, because if perfection is an empty concept, then the striving for it is either a striving for nothing or a random struggle. If the impulse towards perfection aims at nothing or anything, then civilisation itself has no ground and the motive that is supposed to create it is inadequate to it.

Perhaps Freud's discussion could be improved by arguing that the concept of perfection, considered apart from any instance of perfection which appears in experience, is empty, but that the impulse towards certain orders of perfection, such as scientific theory or ethical conduct, is explicable in each case in terms of some repressed desire. Were Freud to argue in this way, however, he would contradict his definition of the impulse towards perfection, the essence of which is to be free from any reactive formation or sublimation. It is clearly perfection itself which Freud addresses, and if the concept is vacant, then the impulse itself is impossible. Yet Freud explicitly acknowledges the impulse and is troubled enough to make a special attempt to account for it within the terms of his system.

Freud's hint that Eros, taken in conjunction with the results of repression, can explain the impulse towards perfection is taken up and made the basis of a defense of civilisation in *Civilization and its Discontents*. In this work Freud again states that he has been "careful not to fall in with the prejudice that civilization is synonymous with perfecting, that it is the road to perfection pre-ordained for men".⁵ He holds, instead, that civilisation is "a special process, comparable to the normal maturation of the individual".⁶ He approaches the discussion of this process in three different ways, each one grounded in an idea of perfection which is not so acknowledged. Freud's unwillingness to acknowledge that his analysis of civilisation is dependent upon rational ideas renders his argument dogmatic, because instead of using the ideas as criteria and attempting to clarify and relate them to one another, he makes them constitutive of life.

Each of Freud's discussions of civilisation as a process sets up a tension between two demands, the ideal reconciliation of which is the norm of civilised conduct. Hence, the very form of his analysis presupposes ideal criteria, although his naturalistic theory of instinct denies them. The three tensions and the three consequent ideals exposed by Freud are different and contradictory, and he makes little effort to compare them and clarify their relations with one another. Yet each of the ideals is dependent upon the notion of perfection, in particular the perfection of social life, and is unintelligible without it. The

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logical ground of Freud's use of ideals, although his theory denies any regulative status to them, is embedded in the notion of process itself. If civilisation is a process constituted by opposed demands, then that process must be structured by a norm prescribing the harmonization of those demands, because the notion of demand presupposes the notion of satisfaction, which is a finalistic and not a mechanistic concept. Logically, Freud's discussion is either grounded in a rational norm or is merely an expression of his repressed desires. Since Freud does not merely state that civilisation is a result of repressed desires, but inquires into the structure of civilisation, it may be assumed that he meant to offer objective claims and not merely express his personal feelings.

Freud's initial discussion of the dialectic of civilisation appears in the third section of *Civilization and its Discontents*, where he opposes freedom to justice. He notes that "the element of civilization enters on the scene" with the first attempt to regulate social relations "which affect a person as a neighbour, as a source of help, as another person's sexual object, as a member of a family and of a state".⁷ Freud sets up his discussion in a classical rationalist manner, reminiscent of Hobbes's argument in *The Leviathan*, by claiming that in the absence of a collective definition of "right", social relations are determined by the "arbitrary will" of the strongest individual. The "decisive step of civilization" occurs when the individual's power is replaced by that of the community, "when a majority comes together which is stronger than any separate individual and which remains united against all separate individuals".⁸

The principle of the majority's union is justice, "the first requisite of civilization," which Freud defines as "the assurance that a law once made will not be broken in favour of an individual".⁹ Freud clearly states that justice is merely a formal principle and implies "nothing as to the ethical value" of a law. Yet he concludes his discussion by arguing that the "final outcome" of civilisation "should be a rule of law to which all — except those who are not capable of entering a community — have contributed by a sacrifice of their instincts, and which leaves no one — again with the same exception — at the mercy of brute force."¹⁰

Just as Hobbes argued in *The Leviathan*, Freud also claims that liberty "was greatest before there was any civilization, though then, it is true, it had for the most part no value, since the individual was scarcely in a position to defend it."¹¹ Even after civilisation has appeared, the urge for freedom persists and may take the form of opposition "against some existing injustice" or the form of hostility to civilisation itself. Freud remarks that revolt against "particular forms or demands of civilization" may "prove favourable to a further development of civilisation," while, of course, revolt against civilisation itself destroys its object. He finally claims that "a good part of the struggles of

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mankind centre round the single task of finding an expedient accommodation — one, that is, that will bring happiness — between the claim of the individual and the cultural claims of the group.’¹² He remains uncertain about whether such an accommodation is possible.

Aside from any criticism that might be levelled against Freud's appeal to the Hobbesian argument and its implied dualism between nature and convention, Freud's discussion suffers from a serious internal defect. He derives the passage from individual liberty, which is defined as the freedom to satisfy one's desires without normative constraint, to civil society from a will of the majority. Yet, to use Rousseau's terms, the majority's will is not particular, but general. It is not the will that certain individuals be protected from certain others, but the will that all be subject to the law regardless of their particular relations to one another. However, this universal principle cannot be derived directly from its supposed origin because it presupposes the rational norm of justice that each one is entitled to protection by virtue of the sacrifice of natural liberty to the community. This universal principle of justice, the basis of social contract theory, is regulative over any specific determination of positive law with regard to particular interests. Were civilisation to be derived merely from the accidental will of a majority it would not be possible, because law would merely reflect the majority's interest at a certain time and would not create a community "which remains united against all separate individuals". At best, the majority would be united against the minority, but not against any of its own members, who would be united only by their own interests. Under such conditions, there would be no community but merely mob rule. Social contract theorists, particularly Rousseau, understood that the creation of a civil society presupposes a rational norm of justice which transcends any particular interests. This is not to say that actual civil societies ever realise the norm of justice, that they leave no one "at the mercy of brute force" or, for that matter, at the mercy of other forms of social control such as bribery, fraud, flattery, and appeals to guilt. It is, however, to argue that without the idea of justice as a regulative principle, which can be derived only from reason and not from interest, civilisation is unintelligible.

The preceding analysis reveals that the root tension in Freud's initial discussion of civilisation is not, as he claims, that between individual liberty and group will, but that between the idea of justice and particular interest, whether group or individual. There is indeed a tension between individual and group, but this has nothing to do with civilisation. If we dispense with the fiction of a state of nature and instead presume that human beings are social from the start, civilisation is not the protection of the group from the individual, but primarily the defense of the individual from coercion by the group. Under this interpretation, civilisation is a regulative idea prescribing

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that each person be treated as an end, never only as a means. Freud, however, was constrained by his naturalism to deny the autonomy of reason as a source of ideals and he could not conceive of a regulative idea. Instead he argued that the "course of cultural development seems to tend towards the universal rule of law." Hence, he made civilisation a *constitutive* idea of cultural development, but had no ground for his notion but a seeming tendency. Were Freud to have begun his discussion of civilisation not from the abstract desirous individual of classical rationalism but from the fact of human sociality, he might have understood that the essential tension is between societies united by non-rational conceptions and civilised societies. Civilisation, then, is an idea towards which any empirical social processes may or may not be directed.

Freud's second and third discussions of civilisation as a process may be interpreted as attempts, of which he did not appear to be self-conscious, to rectify his initial approach to the problem. In the sixth section of *Civilization and its Discontents* he recalls his first discussion and states that he "may now add that civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of mankind."¹³ He notes that we do not know "why this has to happen", but that we can be sure of the purpose. Yet Eros is not free to do his work, but is opposed by Thanatos, the death instinct, which is overtly manifested as the "hostility of each against all and of all against each". Freud concludes that, "the meaning of the evolution of civilization is no longer obscure to us: It must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species."¹⁴ This struggle is "probably irreconcilable".

Freud's second discussion of civilisation must be paired with his third, which appears in the eighth section of *Civilization and its Discontents*, if his full solution to the problems in his initial treatment is to be understood. He begins by reiterating the theme that in the process of civilisation "by far the most important thing is the aim of creating a unity out of the individual human beings." This aim, which is not alien to the individual's erotic instincts, runs parallel to and often conflicts with the individual's desire for happiness, to the point that "it almost seems as if the creation of a great human community would be most successful if no attention had to be paid to the happiness of the individual."¹⁵ Yet the "urge" towards personal happiness cannot be detached from that towards union with other human beings and, so, "the two processes of individual and of cultural development must stand in hostile opposition to one another and mutually dispute the ground."¹⁶ The new "struggle between individual and society," however, is not derivative of the contradiction between Eros and Thanatos, but is "a dispute within the economics of the

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libido" which "does admit to an eventual accommodation in the individual, as, it may be hoped, it will also do in the future of civilization, however much that civilization may oppress the life of the individual to-day."¹⁷

The second and third discussions of civilisation must be taken in conjunction because they represent a splitting of the unity which characterized the first discussion. In the first discussion the apparent opposition set up by Freud is between natural liberty and group control. Yet as the argument is developed, liberty within civilisation can be exercised against civilisation itself or against particular forms of civilised life. It appears that in the second and third discussions these two forms of the exercise of liberty are separated from one another, the first being identified with the death instinct and the second with Eros. While in the first discussion Freud was unsure whether the tension between liberty and control could be resolved in principle, in the second discussion he is certain that the conflict between Eros and Thanatos cannot be harmonized, and in the third discussion he is certain that the opposition between individual development and cultural development can be reconciled in principle.

Freud is able to separate the two forms of the exercise of liberty from one another only by drastically transforming the ideal of civilisation. No longer as in the first discussion, is universal justice the ideal of civilisation, it has been replaced by the libidinal unification of humanity. Libidinal unification, however, is not a rational idea gained from reflection on the meaning of persons as ends-in-themselves, but an impersonal dynamic characterizing life as such. It contends with an equally impersonal death instinct, which provides the grounds for Freud's proclaimed dualism. This dualism, however, is no less dogmatic than Hegel's monistic idealism, in which absolute spirit strives for self-realisation against its own negativity. Monistic idealism, however, at least had the advantage of guaranteeing an ideal of civilisation, while Freud's vitalistic metaphysics undercuts any such ideal. The struggle between Eros and Thanatos cannot be as equal as Freud seems to claim. Eros is successful only on the condition that Thanatos is repressed, but according to Freud, death is the necessary fate of life and thus can never be totally repressed. Thanatos must ultimately triumph over Eros, making the third solution of reconciling individual development with cultural development spurious, because it depends upon the victory of Eros. In his second and third discussions of civilisation, Freud destroys the grounds for civilisation—making it a futile gesture. It is futile because the most fundamental instinct of the organism is to die in its own fashion (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). Returning to the earlier discussion of the impulse towards perfection, it is clear that the instinct which is repressed by this urge is Thanatos. This impulse, which so troubled Freud, is not expressed in reactive formations or sublimations because it is the most complete expression of the struggle of Eros against death.

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Freud's second and third discussions of civilisation do not resolve the problems of his first treatment, but only transfer them to a metaphysical plane. The individualism of the first discussion is not replaced by an acknowledgement of fundamental human sociality, but by an immanent and impersonal vitalism in which the reality of the person is entirely lost within the struggle of conflicting instincts. While in the first discussion Freud at least provided a rational criterion for social relations, although he did not acknowledge it as such, in his second and third discussions he renounces reason altogether by appealing to an instinct. The opponent of Eros, Thanatos, is quite explicable: it is the tendency of the organic to return to the inorganic and mechanical.

Putting aside any of the inherent contradictions in Freud's metaphysics, the erotic ideal defined in his second and third discussions does not even refer to civilisation. Libidinal unification, when it exists at all, does not exist among members of secondary groups, whose members are linked by symbolic mediations, but among intimates within primary groups. On the basis of Freud's own theory of sexuality the libido is cathected to specific individuals with whom there is a direct physical relation. Only in a very attenuated and sentimental sense is it possible to think of libidinal ties to races, peoples, and nations, not to mention mankind. As Hegel pointed out, bonds of feeling belong to the family, not to civil society or the state. The erotic ideal is utopian, in the sense that it refers to a return to Eden, which is, perhaps, an object of individualized conscious life, but which is not the ideal of civilisation. Civilisation, as Freud acknowledged in his first discussion, is grounded in justice, not in love. By grounding it in love in his second and third discussions, he made it a utopian conception and not a regulative ideal. In summary, if large numbers of people are to relate to one another on some basis other than control grounded in particular interest, those relations must gain their principle from universal and rational norms.

Civilisation as a Regulative Idea

In his third discussion of civilisation Freud remarks with some surprise that "it almost seems as if the creation of a great human community would be most successful if no attention had to be paid to the happiness of the individual." This observation is neither surprising nor paradoxical for a philosophy of civilisation which acknowledges the autonomy of reason with regard to the creation of normative criteria for social relations. In the analysis of Freud's first discussion of civilisation some suggestions were made about the way a rational defense of civilisation might proceed.

In his first discussion of civilisation Freud defined the ideal as a "rule of law

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to which all — except those who are not capable of entering a community — have contributed by a sacrifice of their instincts, and which leaves no one — again with the same exception — at the mercy of brute force.” Here civilisation is neither a positive ideal of libidinal union nor the imposition of the majority’s will over a minority, but a rational ideal of respect for the individual. The only problem with this ideal is that it is too limited, because it is based on the tacit assumption that the only way in which people are denied their dignity by one another is through the use of arbitrary force. The restriction of uncivilised treatment to the use of force results, from a theoretical viewpoint, from Freud’s rejection of any positive conception of persons as ends-in-themselves. At bottom, Freud’s only positive conception of the good is sheer physical survival, which might just as well apply to animals lacking civilisation. Freud assumes, for the most part and in contradiction to the primacy of Thanatos, that life is good, but not that there is a good life. Why any form of life should not be brought under “the rule of law” is only explicable in terms of species chauvinism, not in terms of the ability of human beings to think the concept of law.

One might argue that our entire critique of Freud’s theory of civilisation, which culminates in the judgment that Freud undermines the possibility of civilisation because he has no positive conception of the good, is based on a misuse of logic. Just because Freud does not explicitly define the content of the idea of perfection or of the good life, we are not justified in claiming that he fails to imply some positive content for these conceptions. After all, Freud was a therapist who tried to help human beings live better. In his practice he was not concerned merely with sheer physical survival, but with mental health. Further, Freud might acknowledge concrete standards of perfection while claiming that these standards originated in repressed instinct. He could vindicate civilisation without claiming that its ideals are autonomous.

No doubt, Freud did have his personal ideals which led him to pursue ends beyond physical survival. However his theory had to contradict the validity of any positive normative conceptions. The root of the contradiction in Freud’s theory of civilisation is his failure to conceive of the idea of persons as ends-in-themselves, or, even more deeply, his failure to conceive of any ends transcending instinctual gratification which are not substitutes for such gratification. Freud, in fact, acknowledges the absence of any positive notion of ideals in his thought at the conclusion of *Civilization and its Discontents* when he remarks that he is “certain” that “man’s judgements of value follow directly his wishes for happiness — that, accordingly, they are an attempt to support his illusions with arguments.” Freud claims to be “impartial” about the value of civilisation and to have guarded himself against the “enthusiastic prejudice” that “our civilization is the most precious thing that we possess.” If ideals are

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interpreted as illusions, they may indeed perform a function in life, but they cannot ground collective life. Yet they only perform their function of limiting aggression if they are believed to ground community. Freud's theory, then, is not impartial with regard to civilisation because by declaring its founding ideas to be illusions he destroys belief in them when such belief is a requirement of their being able to serve their function. Hence, Freud's theory undermines civilisation.

The reason why Freud, despite his intentions, must become an enemy of civilisation is his fundamental commitment to scientific rationalism which has as its counterpart moral irrationalism. For Freud, the ethical component of the self, the super-ego, is defined as a "reaction formation". In other words, the commitment to ideals is the result of repressed aggression against others which appears consciously as aggression against the self and affirmation of the rights of others. Thus, one's moral acknowledgment of the other, in the Freudian scheme of things, is never positive, but always based upon an underlying hatred. Morality is not grounded in reason, but in repressed irrational impulses, although their origins can be explained according to a mechanistic rational model. From the viewpoint of scientific rationalism the object of science must not be intrinsically purposive; final causes must be excluded from inquiry. With regard to physical nature the exclusion of final causes does not lead to irrationalism but merely to suspension of judgment. However, when an attempt is made to explain the self, which expresses purposes, through the categories of natural science, the exclusion of final causes does imply irrationalism, because apparent purposes must be reduced to efficient causes. In particular, the notion of the person as an end must be discredited by showing moral experiences, such as trust, loyalty, and sacrifice, which are meaningful only with regard to a realm of persons, to be illusions.

The existence of a moral dimension of a human being, to which such experiences as loyalty, trust, sacrifice, responsibility, and guilt apply, certifies the idea of a realm of persons who are capable of such experiences, the idea of an ethical community which is the foundation of civilisation. It is not possible to make sense of the moral dimension from the perspectives of idealism (dogmatism) and naturalism (scepticism). For absolute idealism the ethical community is already constituted in, by, and for the Absolute. Belief in idealism destroys the moral dimension by making the collaboration of human beings unnecessary to the achievement of ethical life. For the consolation of theodicy the idealist must surrender the struggle against evil which constitutes the moral life and the idea of the person as an end which regulates that life. The naturalist or, better, the scientific rationalist must claim that the moral dimension is an illusion. This claim, like that of the idealist, destroys ethical life by breaking the tension between the ideal and the actual. While the

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idealist absorbs the actual into the ideal, the scientific rationalist reduces the ideal to the actual. The autonomy of the ideal is secured by the double acknowledgment that we require ethics only because we do not treat one another as ends-in-ourselves, but that we are capable of the ethical life because we are ends-in-ourselves. Were we to treat one another as ends-in-ourselves spontaneously, we would not partake of ethical experience because we would be automatically trustworthy and responsible, in which case we would not even understand the concepts of trust and responsibility. On the other hand, if we did not acknowledge ourselves and one another as intrinsically worthy, we could make no commitments to overcome our limitations. Ethical experience in a collective context, in civilisation, depends upon the struggle against the systematic use of some human beings by others. Hence, the idea of civilisation is an idea of justice based upon the forbearance from the imposition of social-control mechanisms.

The possibility of a rational idea of civilisation depends upon the broadening and enrichment of the idea of justice to include not only protection from arbitrary force but from any exercise of social control except that which hinders the domination of other human beings. Domination has many forms which are distinct from the use of force, but nonetheless do not acknowledge human beings as ends-in-themselves who are capable of defining their own situations and of acknowledging and respecting that capacity in others. Bribery, flattery, fraud, and appeals to guilt are all ways in which people are stripped of their dignity by others who attempt to use them as means to extrinsic ends. A just society, which is the content of the idea of civilisation, would be one in which each would mutually forbear from using others as means to particular ends detached from the relation itself. This idea of justice is, of course, merely regulative, because it does not define which particular ends people should pursue, but only that they pursue those ends without exploiting others. Put another way, the idea of civilisation is the imperative that persons do not take advantage of one another by concealing their ends from one another and substituting for the open declaration of those ends extrinsic influences, whether seductive or coercive. The ideal of civilisation, the transformation of social control into self-control, presupposes the freedom of each one to express a definition of the situation and to honour the same freedom in others. Practically, it means sufficient forbearance by each one to allow the others to determine their lives.

It is not the purpose of this discussion to assess the practical possibility of the achievement of civilised societies, but merely to define the rational criterion for civilisation. Previous discussions of civilisation, both idealist and naturalist, have been flawed by a failure to understand the distinctiveness of their object. For Hegel, as for Freud in his first discussion, civilisation is defined in terms of

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politics and its hallmark is the state. For Freud in his second and third discussions civilisation is defined in terms of feeling and its goal is an Edenic utopia. In both cases, however, the foundation of civilisation, civil society, disappears. In Hegelian absolutism civil society is absorbed into the state while in Freudian vitalism it is absorbed into an enormous family. Yet the perfection of civilisation would be the abolition of the state and respect for particular intimacies. Were human beings to refrain from taking advantage of one another they would not need the state, and were they to honour one another's intimacies they would not need to look beyond them to pseudo-*gemeinschaft*. They would neither impose public duty on private relations nor would they displace private affect on public objects. They would neither use love as the state's instrument nor seek love in the state.

The ideal of civilisation, the treatment of persons as ends-in-themselves, never as means only, is a regulative idea of the rational perfection of social relations, grounded in the acknowledgment of each person as an autonomous source of a knowing response to life. It stands above any particular desires, prescribing the way those desires should be satisfied and prohibiting the satisfaction of those desires which contradict its principle. The ideal of civilisation is neither immanent to history nor a result of repression, but an idea of reason. Perhaps some of the discontents of civilisation are due to the failure to understand what it is. The other discontents are, of course, rooted in the reasons why the idea of civilisation is not actualized. Those reasons are bound up with the problem of evil or why human beings take advantage of one another. That problem, however, is not the problem of civilisation but the problem of society itself, for which civilisation supplies the only rational remedy.

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Notes

1. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. New York: Bantam Books, 1959, p. 76.
2. *Ibid*, pp. 76-77.
3. *Ibid*, p. 77.
4. *Ibid*, p. 78.

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5. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1962, p. 43.
 6. *Ibid*, pp. 44-45.
 7. *Ibid*, p. 42.
 8. *Ibid*
 9. *Ibid*
 10. *Ibid*
 11. *Ibid*
 12. *Ibid*, p. 43.
 13. *Ibid*, p. 69.
 14. *Ibid*
 15. *Ibid*, p. 87.
 16. *Ibid*, p. 88.
 17. *Ibid*
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