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Sigmund Freud

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In this seminal book, Sigmund Freud enumerates what he sees as the fundamental tensions between civilization and the individual. The primary friction, he asserts, stems from the individual's quest for instinctual freedom and civilization's contrary demand for conformity and instinctual repression. Freud states that when any situation that is desired by the pleasure principle is prolonged, then it creates a feeling of mild contentment. Thus our possibilities of happiness are restricted by the law. Many of humankind's primitive instincts (for example, the desire to kill and the insatiable craving for sexual gratification) are clearly harmful to the well-being of a human community. As a result, civilization creates laws that prohibit killing, rape, and adultery, and it implements severe punishments if such rules are broken. This process, argues Freud, is an inherent quality of civilization that instills perpetual feelings of discontent in its citizens. Freud's theory is based on the notion that humans have certain characteristic instincts that are immutable. Most notable are the desires for sex, and the predisposition to violent aggression towards authority figures and towards sexual competitors, which both obstruct the gratification of a person's instincts.

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