The Freud-Einstein Correspondence (1931-32): “Why War?”

• Einstein to Freud:

• I admire your thinking

• But why haven’t great thinkers liberated humans from the horrors of war?

• “Irresponsible political rulers”

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<tr>
<th>Intellectual Elite</th>
<th>Political Rulers</th>
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<td>• Not influential, not unified</td>
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<td>• Can we co-operate?</td>
<td>• Power from election by the masses or the use of force</td>
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Einstein’s ideas on “Why War?”

- The International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation
  - Part of the League of Nations

- “This is the problem: Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war?”
Einstein’s ideas on “Why War?”

- E says the League of Nations (LON) can’t enforce its ideas.
- E thinks psychological factors inhibit success of LON.
  - 1.) “craving for power which characterizes governing classes”
  - 2.) war profiteering
- E says the governing class is small and asks why the masses, who have much to lose, support the rulers?
- E answers that it “has the schools and press, usually the Church as well, under its thumb”
- E thinks there’s another reason: “man has within him a lust for hatred and destruction” which can be raised to the level of a “collective psychosis”
Einstein’s question, revised and repeated

Einstein then asks Freud this:

“Is it possible to control man’s mental evolution so as to make him proof against the psychosis of hate and destructiveness?”
**Freud’s ideas on “Why War?”**

- Freud is surprised by the question and says, “I reminded myself that I was not being called on to formulate practical proposals but, rather, to explain how this question of preventing wars strikes me as a psychologist.”

- He agrees with Einstein’s ideas and says that violence is a basic and primitive mode of conflict resolution, as evidenced by animals. Freud adds that brute force can gain power from superior brains. He says killing has the power of putting the enemy “out of action” and his fate “deters others.”
Freud’s ideas on violence and law

- Freud says violence exists in primitive conditions, but a “path was traced that led away from violence to law.”

- Due to common interests, brute force gives way to unions and community sentiments. Individual desires give way to the well-being of the larger group.

  - But inequalities among people create instability
    - Sometime rulers want more power
    - Sometimes those being ruled want more power
    - Both can lead to war
      - changes in law and shifts in culture can help, though
Freud’s claim that violence isn’t a lasting solution

- Freud admits that wars can lead to peace, but Freud says such peace is “short-lived” since there is “no true cohesion between the parts that violence has welded.”
Freud’s ideas about what prevents war

- To Freud, war is prevented by two things:
  - “violent compulsion” (central authority with executive power)
  - “ties of sentiment” (a deeply rooted sense of unity, shared by all)

- He concludes,
  “Thus it would seem that any effort to replace brute force by the might of an ideal is, under present conditions, doomed to fail. Our logic is at fault if we ignore the fact that right is founded on brute force and even today needs violence to maintain it.”
Freud’s ideas on “Why War?”

- Freud agrees with Einstein that “it is so easy to infect men with the war fever.”

- He sees many motives for war—both “high and low”—and says, “the ideal motive has often served as camouflage for the dust of destruction.”

- He believes there is a destructive instinct (“death drive”); he thinks some people direct it inward more, and some outward more.

<table>
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<th>Inward aggression</th>
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<td>Human conscience</td>
<td>Human violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Punishing” the self</td>
<td>“Punishing” others</td>
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Freud’s Solutions: *All You Need Is Love*

- Freud sees no way to rid mankind of aggression.
- He suggests “diverting it into a channel” other than war.
  - (sports, arts, or one’s work could be examples)

- He says *love* (*Eros*), the counterpart of hate and destruction, “must serve us as war’s antidote.”

- “Ties of sentiment”
  - The religious injunction “Love thy neighbor as thyself”
  - Identification by way of resemblance
Freud’s ideas about pacifism

• Freud asks Einstein why they protest war and others accept it.
• Freud thinks their minds have been transformed by culture.
• He says the process may be “likened to the effect of domestication on certain animals.”

• He thinks he and Einstein are less instinctual, more intellectual, and are more introverted in their aggressions than their forefathers—“a disposition imposed on us by the growth of culture.”
Einstein?

Freud?

NERDY CAT
has too much brainz

SOPHISTICATED
is sophisticated

CLASSY CAT IS EVEN CLASSIER

I should buy a boat.

Einstein?
Freud’s ideas about the future

- Freud asks Einstein, “How long have we to wait before the rest of men turn pacifist?”

- Freud ends on a hopeful note: “Meanwhile we may rest on the assurance that whatever makes for cultural development is working also against war.”
What Einstein did after the letters to Freud

• Einstein, a Jew, left Germany in 1933 as the Nazis began to rise to power and deprive Jews of their rights.

• In 1939, Einstein wrote to President Roosevelt, warning him that the Germans were working on an atomic bomb.

• Einstein’s letter prompted the Manhattan Project, allowing the US to produce the atomic bomb first, which was used on Japan, killing hundreds of thousands of people.

• Before his death, Einstein said, "I made one great mistake in my life — when I signed the letter to President Roosevelt recommending that atom bombs be made; but there was some justification — the danger that the Germans would make them..."