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A Freudian Analysis of *Kokoro*

In his book, Civilization and its Discontents, Sigmund Freud poses this question: What method does civilization use to diminish or destroy the aggressiveness of the individual that opposes its basic desire for communal life (Freud 51)? He states the most important device is the forced internalization of aggression. Society imposes certain standards on its inhabitants, thus restricting one's behavior to that which will benefit the group. The instinctual aggressions not allowed under society's stipulations, first posed by the ego, are internalized. They are placed into the super-ego that has broken away from the ego. The super-ego, or conscience, directs these aggressions against the ego. The ego dreads the response of the conscience, which results in a sense of guilt, or tension between the ego and super-ego. This tension manifests itself as the ego's desire for punishment. Since the super-ego is an omniscient conscience, guilt may result either from aggressions turned inward or from a wish to commit a certain act (Freud 51). If aggressions are turned against others, however, remorse, not guilt, will trouble the aggressor (Freud 58).

In every individual, Freud states that there are two conflicting trends: the desire for personal happiness and for unity with humanity (Freud 63). The creation of conscience and guilt detracts from personal happiness in an attempt to benefit society. The problems for an individual that result from this conflict are exemplified by Sensei's predicament in Natsume Soseki's *Kokoro*. As Sensei begins his testament to the narrator, he claims he suffered because he was a coward, unsure whether to live as if he was dead or to physically end his life (Soseki 125). From Freud's psychoanalytic perspective, the cause of Sensei's suffering is not his cowardliness, but the internalization of aggression. Standards imposed by society regarding proper behavior prevent Sensei from acting according to his instinctual desires.

Freud contends that every individual is driven by the pleasure principle and will therefore act in a way to provide happiness for one's self (Freud 11). One method to ensure this happiness is through sexual gratification. Yet Sensei, who feels great desire for Ojosan, deprives himself of this happiness by not acting upon his instinctual inclinations. Sensei's love for Ojosan is more than obvious in the novel. When he is first introduced to Ojosan, he is filled with a new awareness of the opposite sex (Soseki 148). He often speaks of his affection for this new found beauty,

indicating it is clear to him that Ojosan is no longer a child and that his love for her is more than the excitement of bodily passions. It is comparable to a religious experience (Soseki 150, 155). Sensei declares his "mind was full of Ojosan" and admits he is very jealous in his love for her (Soseki 180, 199). Even though he lusts after Ojosan, he makes no move to fulfill the desires of his libido. On page 200, the reader is given a clue as to why Sensei denies himself the chance for obtaining sexual gratification. He states he ignores opportunities to tell Ojosan about his true feelings for two reasons: he feels not only would it be a "flagrant breach of Japanese custom," but he also worries that Ojosan may reject his proposal. Thus, the Japanese culture keeps him from expressing his true feelings. The culture designates certain rules to allow equal opportunities for all suitors, maintaining a positive outlook for the group while raining on the parade of the individual.

Furthermore, Sensei makes no move to remedy his jealousy of K in his friend's relationship with Ojosan. There are many examples of this hidden jealousy in the text. Sensei comes home to find K and Ojosan talking and sitting together in K's room. He is uneasy about the situation, and is perturbed that Okusan has left them alone together since she had never left her daughter alone with him. Sensei wants to question Ojosan and K about their actions but states he does not have the right since he is only a boarder in the house (Soseki 182). Soon after this incident, Sensei admits he is already somewhat jealous of K (Soseki 184). He catches his rival and his true love alone together, yet again at home and also while taking a walk through town (Soseki 195, 198). Following the latter event, Sensei once more comments on "the presence of great jealousy in my love for Ojosan" (Soseki 199). Finally, when K surprises Sensei by admitting his agonized love for Ojosan, Sensei is shocked and says, "I felt as if I had been turned into stone by a magician's wand" (Soseki 204). Instead of destroying the cause of his jealousy and pain, K, Sensei turns his feelings inward, causing himself to feel angry and restless. Freud contends that this denial of instinctual response, due to particular social mores, adds to Sensei's guilt.

Sensei expresses neither his love for Ojosan nor his anger towards K. These instances of repression add to the strength of Sensei's conscience. The more righteous an individual the

stronger is his super-ego (Freud 53). Sensei is brought up an ethical man, so his conscience is strong from the start (Soseki 128). This already strong conscience is made even stronger with the external deprivation Sensei incurs upon himself, as evidenced by the examples above. With such a tremendous super-ego, even the slightest straying by the ego will result in severe guilt for the storyteller.

As the story progresses, Sensei's dislike of K intensifies. While on vacation, Sensei loses his composure, grabs K, and nearly throws him in the sea (Soseki 186). Then, Sensei states he hates K (Soseki 187). Finally, he declares he "would feel like hammering a hole somewhere in his [K's] head" (Soseki 188). Laws imposed by society forbidding violence prevent Sensei from displaying his aggressions towards K. These aggressions are internalized and become part of the conscience that torments the ego and causes Sensei to feel guilty. This guilt is evident, for Sensei is in "great torment," he feels "regret," and wants to "inwardly apologize" to K (Soseki 188).

When they return from their jaunt down the coast, Sensei cannot tolerate K and Ojosan being together. He wants to ask K to leave, but it would be "unprincipled" for him to ask (Soseki 196). He sees K as a "confounded nuisance," but will not tell him, justifying himself in that "I could hardly say it to his face" (Soseki 202). Civilization's insistence that individuals live as a community, that people get along, causes the individual to sacrifice his designs for the good of others. Namely, Sensei must hide his hatred of K so he does not hurt his companion.

At last, however, the temptation to exert his pent-up aggressions over K becomes too strong and Sensei succumbs to his instinctual urges. He decides, "Now is the time, I thought, to destroy my opponent. I waited no longer to make my thrust." Sensei uses K's own words to humiliate him and wants to destroy any hope K might have extracted from his love for Ojosan (Soseki 214). While on a walk, Sensei takes advantage of K's weakened mental state. As he begins a painful conversation, K asks him to drop the subject, then pleads with him not to talk about it, but Sensei persists in his cruelty. He remarks, "The wolf jumped at the lamb's throat," emphasizing his animal-like, instinctive behavior (Soseki 216). Even though Sensei acts upon his

feelings and prevents guilt, psychoanalytic theory would insist that his conduct, condemned by society, will later haunt him as feelings of remorse.

Sensei finds temporary relief from his agonizing relationship with K immediately following his plea to Okusan to let him marry Ojosan (Soseki 223). However, Sensei goes for a walk and upon returning home, his guilt begins to take hold of him (Soseki 224). This is the first time he feels guilty; earlier, he is surprised his conscience caused him no worry. He wants to beg for forgiveness as his conscience tells him to (Soseki 225). This act of begging for forgiveness would be humiliating for the ego, which is a way to satisfy its masochistic tendencies, reducing anxiety about punishment it knows is inevitable. Sensei, however, does not want to cause a scene in the house, as society frowns upon embarrassing situations. Thus, the guilt remains untapped. Then, Sensei makes a comment with which Freud would be apt to disagree; he claims the "impulse of my natural self" wanted to be true to K. The father of psychoanalysis would argue that the true self would actually want to destroy K because of its natural aggression.

After K's death, Sensei's conscience forces the ego to apologize to Okusan and Ojosan (Soseki 232). This is a method for punishing the ego, which in turn relieves some of the built up tension. For the rest of his life, Sensei experiences guilt. The guilt stems from his intention to apologize to K. Since he did not reconcile his feelings with his friend before K's suicide, these intentions are directed to the super-ego and are redirected against the ego as guilty feelings.

He also experiences remorse, which Freud differentiates from guilt. When actions are carried out that society deems "bad," meaning that they will cause a loss of love, remorse is the ensuing reaction (Freud 58). Sensei states, "I did not cease to blame myself for K's death" (Soseki 236). Since he carried out hateful actions that contributed to K's mental breakdown and eventual suicide, he develops remorse in addition to his guilt.

In ending his analysis, Civilization and its Discontents, Freud states, "The fateful question of the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent the cultural process developed in it will succeed in mastering the derangements of communal life caused by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction" (Freud 70). In Sensei's case, these cultural norms may help

society, but they eventually destroy him. He is a righteous man with a strong conscience, so even a small breaking of the rules causes him to experience great guilt. In his conflict with K, society's rules do not allow him to vent his anger. When he is about to explode from the build-up of mental anguish, he unleashes some of his anger. In the end, he feels guilty because he intends to right his wrongs but does not, and he experiences remorse because his actions are of the type to cause a loss of love. The restrictions on an individual necessary for the continuation of civilization cause Sensei to contribute to two deaths -- K's and his own.