

## LETTER TO EINSTEIN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

**RAJ KISHOR SINGH**

Assistant Professor, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

### ABSTRACT

Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud wrote the letter with a response to the question raised by the physicist Albert Einstein. That's the reason the letter contains two different approaches- psychology and science- to the subject "war". As the letter is from the psychologist, there are minute observations of every element that is effective for war. His minute observation has reached at the highest level when he discusses two fundamental and natural human instincts: Love and Hate. We cannot avoid any one of them. War causes destruction: war is for development and prosperity. Nobody likes war but nobody can avoid it.

**KEYWORDS:** War, Peace, Love, Hatred, Reason, Instinct, Physicist & Psychoanalyst

### INTRODUCTION

Sigmund Freud was an Austrian physician and neurologist. He founded a literary theory and philosophy-psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a process of analyzing the human mind and behavior. He developed a new system for treating behavior disorders. He systematized the study of the human mind. It is a body of thought of great subtlety, complexity, interest and tragic power. Freud's contribution and discovery is the use of scientific methods for the study of the unconscious. The present text is a response to a letter from the physicist Albert Einstein, who acting on a proposal from the League of Nations, invited Freud to offer his views on the causes of war.

### CRITICAL APPROACH TO THE TEXT

#### Question of Public Interest

Einstein asks what can be done to free mankind from the war threat.

Professor Einstein invited him to offer his views upon the subject which was (and is) of public interest- war. Most usually this subject is approached from different angles. Physicist, psychologist, and others have different views upon this subject but at last, all meet on the common ground. The question asked by Einstein was what can be done to free mankind from the war threat. It is in fact, a politician's subject of study, a matter of practical politics. However, Einstein was a lover of mankind. He was responding on behalf of League of Nations. Freud was not asked to make any practical proposals. He was asked to explain with his opinion all about the ways to prevent wars from the perspective of a psychologist. On behalf of the League of Nations, Einstein requires his views, and so Freud does respond to him with a review of historical and present causes of war, advantages, and disadvantages of war and some possible solutions of the war.

#### Might and Right/Historical Review of Causes of War

Might is power, and power is always supposed to be right whenever there is a conflict. The usual saying that "might is right" is apt to describe here. Freud replaces the term "might" with an undesirable word "violence" in the context

of war. ‘Right’ and ‘violence’ are conflicting and antonymous. One evolves from the other, and vice versa.

In principle, every conflict is resolved by violence. The conflict between or among animals is also solved by the same process. Man is savage like animals but he has reasoning power. He can give an opinion to settle the conflicts. In the beginning, brute force, animal-like violence, is used to settle questions of ownership or will. Later physical force weapon was implemented. One, who had a better weapon, used to be a victor. With the development of weapons, they came up with superior brains. In any case, the substance of conflict is still the same- establishment of ownership or will.

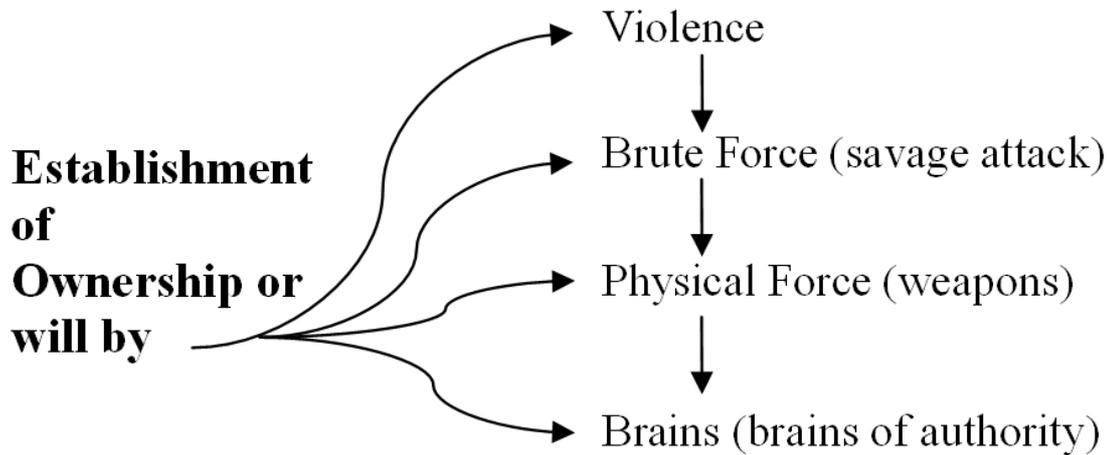


Figure 1

Result of the conflict is the same that one of the parties is injured or his power is damaged and the party abandons his claim or refusal. In fact, the party is seen claiming something or refusing something. He may be claiming land or refusing to let you use it. The purpose of the violence is to defeat the party. The purpose is more effectively gained if the opponent is cleared away or killed forever. This process has two advantages- (a) enemies will not develop the sense of hostility, and (b) others will not dare to follow the same path. (Freud & Einstein, 2010) Another possibility is of taking the opponent for servile tasks when he surrenders. Though his life may be spared, he will become subject of life-long suffering because of the cruelty done by the victor in revenge.

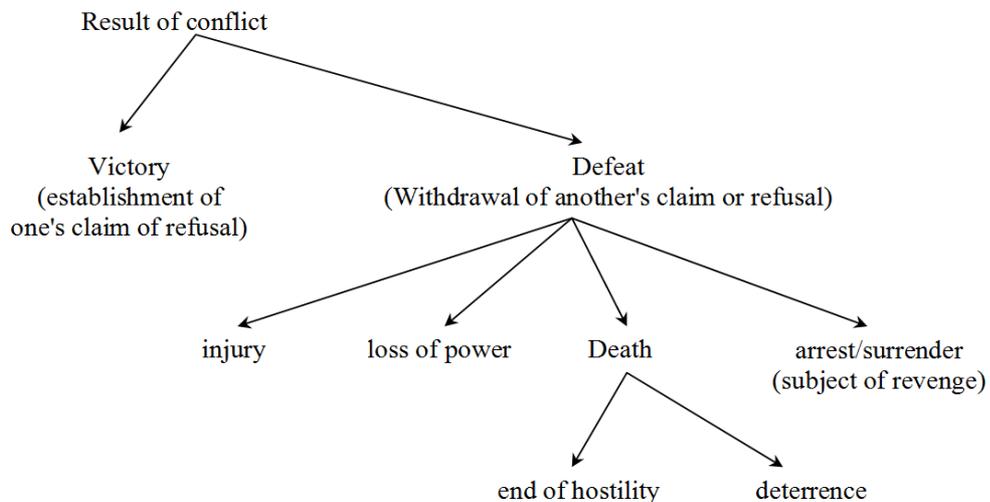


Figure 2

### Origin of Law as Cause of War

There are two forces working in a conflict: superior force and force of inferior people. The superior force is a brutal force which works by arms - that governs everywhere. This is the conflict of the two forces that makes a way to law, too. The superiority of one powerful man can be overcome by a group of weak people. The union or the group can prove its "right" by "might," but this "might" is also violence. The difference is that violence by the force of the inferior people is far better than that by the superior force of one strong man. This communal violence is better in the sense of the rule of law. The rule of the majority is a democratic pattern. Psychologically, all are under the effect of the welfare of all. By the way, the rule of the majority should be regular and tolerable because a superior power, from outside or inside the union, may break away and rule over the majority with the previous violence. Thus, the organization of the people is necessary to be strong and regular. This union must make rules or laws that can manage the risk of possible revolts. These laws must be observed and carried out recognizing the communal interests so that, for communal strength, they will have a feeling of unity and mutual dependence.

Such a community can live longer until all individuals of the community are equal in power. These laws can determine personal freedom, the right, force applied for violence. It will confirm the security of the people in practice. Such a union is not possible because there are always some elements of unbalanced power. There are men and women, elders and children. There are again two classes – rich and poor, winners and defeated, masters and servants - and that bring division between the rulers and the ruled, the rulers having more privilege than the ruled. Laws are often made by rulers for themselves for their own benefit. They do not give the lower classes many rights. Therefore, there are two factors working for legal continuation. The same factors help for legislative evolution, too. Members of the rulers make efforts to keep themselves above the laws. Likewise, those who are ruled also make a constant struggle to extend their rights and change the rulers frequently. This continuous conflict provokes a war, and Freud says that the war results again with the cultural development of the people. Freud argues that world history shows a continuous series of conflicts between one and another group or unit. Naturally, one wins and another loses the conquest of one class and in the downfall of the loser. The historical records show us that war is destructive (war between the Mongols and the Turks) as well creative (the Roman conquests). Though it sounds very controversial, we know that war serves in both ways- violence and peace. War can create a new empire: war can destroy a big empire. Therefore, it is a usual phenomenon that a vast unity or empire is broken by violence and united again by war and its consequent laws.

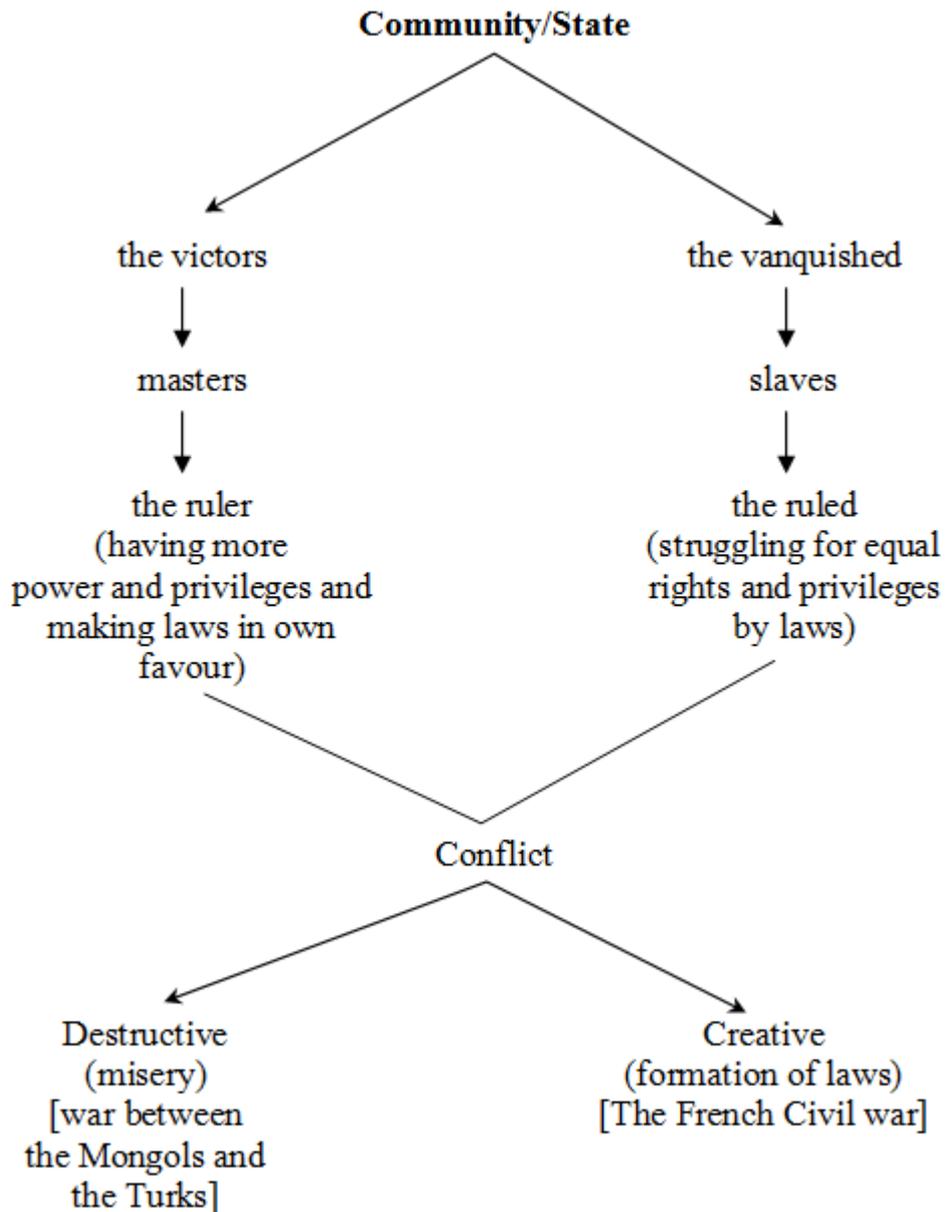


Figure 3

### Establishment Ends War

Freud says that, for the establishment of law and order for securing equal rights for all, Freud says that the rule of the law of the majority should be regular and effective. In his opinion, the union must be built on the common sentiments of all members connecting each other. Yet practically it is not possible because within the union there are elements of unequal power. Naturally, the conflict continues resulting in destruction or creation (e.g. law). However, the destruction is not tolerable and the conflict or the war must be ceased. Everyone expects so. Freud argues further that establishment is only a sure way of ending the war.

Freud makes reference to the League of Nations. It is true that if the second requirement (adequate executive force) is not fulfilled, the first becomes helpless. The League of Nations acted as an international court which fulfilled the first requirement, yet it did not help with the second. League of Nations was founded with a hope that international

conflicts would be solved by common consent. It acted out as central control. Unfortunately, it did not have executive force. It could decide the cases of conflicts but it was difficult to administer the decision. Therefore, the central body of the United Nations did not have any control. It could not command for resolution of any conflict. Establishment of central control is required for peace and order. Common consent is base of such establishment. I think that it is possible on the international level, but on the national level, it is hardly possible. In any level, there are still two classes at least- the ruler and the ruled. Naturally, prejudices and unequal power we can experience in any cases. At present, there is executive force- NATO. Neither the secretariat nor the Security Council is working on its own but is working on the interest of few powerful nations, especially America. There is always fear that some superior force will emerge, for own benefit, and subdue the common interests of others. Therefore, it comes to be necessary to maintain good understanding and relationship among the people in such a way that if one becomes inoperative the other may still tie up the group. Those who have been trying to settle conflicts by religious and nationalistic ideals are also a failure because they also reach to the same means of violence. Violence can be avoided by good understanding and relationship.

### **Human Instincts: Love and Hate**

Man is easily infected with war intensity. Every human being has a sense of love and hatred. He is easily influenced by such stimulations. Psychologists, as Freud says, assume that human being has a sense of conserving and unifying something and also of destroying. The former is called "erotic" or "sexual". The meaning of "erotic" has been referred to *Eros* by Plato in his *Symposium*. "Sexual" is the popular connotation of "Eros". (Reeve, 2016) The second kind of instinct is aggressive or destructive instinct. Therefore, they are in binary opposition- Love and Hate, attraction and repulsion, good and evil. It seems that both are blended with a certain dosage. Both work simultaneously. They must be recognized with equal importance.

If we have booked a table in a restaurant, we expect that no one will seize it from us. In case someone does so, we will take action or fight to preserve it within our possession. Similarly, if we want to buy land, we go through certain procedural to prove that we have the intention of buying it. While buying it, we wish that concerned person must abandon his or her right. Though we don't notice, it is a true fact that it is very difficult to work by only one instinct.

An action hardly works with only one motive. For an action, many motives may be found working. Professor G. C. Lichtenberg remarks that all common motives are action-oriented. He writes that food can be a motive for working for fame, or fame can be a motive for acting for food. Though it is difficult to find out what motive a person has behind an action. The result after the action can determine the motive. All kinds of destructive impulses are encouraged by some kinds of idealism. The sense of love develops the impulses. The ideal motive (e.g. appeal to war for nationality) has often served for the lust of destruction.

Freud calls the destructive instinct by "death instinct". He prefers the erotic instincts to death instinct. Sense of love guarantees the efforts for survival. He says that the destructive sense has both advantages and disadvantages. It has an advantage if the instinct has been diverted for a better purpose. The death instinct is directed to external objects for destruction with hands or legs. Meanwhile, every living makes effort to destroy enemies for the purpose of self-defence. It is a psychological fact that, whenever a person is in deep sorrow, he must cry; otherwise his heart might break. Similarly, if a person is extremely angry, his anger must come out in any form so that his disturbed mind can be calmed. These facts have been explained on the biological ground and justified. A living being cannot suppress their aggressive tendencies.

There never can be any races living in a community without carrying aggressive tendencies. It would be far better to divert the aggressive tendencies for ideal purposes.

Combination of sentiments among people will naturally serve as an element to calm down any kind of war. These sentiments are love and identification. Religious books also emphasize on love for humane purpose. By identification of common interests, men can live being united on the strong foundation of the voice of humanity.

### **Ideal Community- Dictatorship of Reason**

The ruled class has an enormous majority. They can be controlled only with a dictatorship of reasons. They can follow without any objection. The subordinates can be dictated by the means of reasoning. In any way dictatorship of reason can bring better mutual ties of sentiments, with immediate and effective results.

### **Hated of War- Why?**

We have a sense of hatred against any war though it cannot be stopped entirely. It is inevitable. It is a true and practical fact that any war behavior should be stopped by mutual understanding and consent because modern wars, that people hate so much, are not heroic and ideal in anyways. Besides, modern arms have been given so high perfection that modern war can destroy totally one of the combatants, if not of both. War meant in past conduct of showing heroism and gaining high honor being participated, but it is not so now. Modern war has been more destructive than before. Therefore, it becomes natural to hate war.

Freud raises the question- can wars be stopped? He gives a response with negation. Some forms of wars can be condemned but all forms of war cannot be ceased. This is not possible because there are nations and empires, which are well equipped with war weapons. Each works callously to exterminate its rival. We hate the war but yet we live with it.

### **Cultural Development of Mankind- a Means of Avoiding War**

The cultural development of mankind has been progressing all the time since ancient time. We do have better comforts and facilities as well as great human suffering. Both are certain. There is a very comprehensive cause behind human suffering. In the present world, the uncultured units like the uneducated, the uncultured races and the lower classes are increasing rapidly more than the cultured elements. This weakens the human relation. Civilization is an organic process. Many people do not understand that. The psychic or mental development goes along with the process of cultural change but that is not in progress as that was expected. Sensations of hunting, of exploration, of killing, etc. do not delight us today as they delighted our forefathers. Our ethical and aesthetic ideals are changing because they are organic.

Cultural and psychic development makes us bound to hate war. Culturally developed people naturally find it utterly intolerable. Therefore, Freud says that men's culturally developed disposition and sense of fear of the war will certainly end the tendency of war. He strongly believes that cultural development itself will work against war.

### **Possible Ways of Eliminating War**

In summary, we can enlist the following possible ways of eliminating war that has been discussed by Freud in the text:

- With the enactment of a law to be administered over common interests of people, states, nations, etc.
- By the strong establishment of law and order for securing equal rights for all within a union or a state;

- By the foundation of community or union by linking up its members with sentiments love and identification;
- By applying love as an antibiotic against the destructive instinct hatred;
- By the establishment of an ideal community with a dictatorship of Reason,
- By organizing a central institution or control that will have the last word in every conflict, and
- By cultural development of humankind and *evoking* (producing) fear of destruction of war.

### Rhetoric

He has applied usual literary (or rather essayistic) rhetorical device- defining and making an analysis. He defines the terms "Might", "Violence", "Right", "Eros", "Hatred" and others, and then goes on making an analysis of elements how they are effective in war. His analysis involves rather historical and journalistic approaches- What happened? Why happened? How happened? What result? He relates cause with an effect like a scientist and then suggests how to avoid the cause. Most often he is seen as a humanist talking about the betterment of human beings. However, now and then he becomes paradoxical and uncertain, too. He talks now about the foundation of a community of sentiments, and then he becomes uncertain at his own thought saying that it is hardly practical in real life situations. He suggests that the central power of people must have mutual understanding and consent in every conflict. Then he talks about the League of Nations that is acting as an international court and fulfills the first condition the international court of judicature but it does not fulfill the second (execution of power). He talks elsewhere how to avoid a war, but he himself raises question paradoxically why we protest so vehemently against the war when we know well that it is an essential part of life.

### REFERENCES

1. Betts, Richard. (2016). Conflict after the Cold War. 4th ed. Routledge. pp. 179-178.
2. Bottomore, T. B. (1975). Sociology as Social Criticism. Routledge.
3. Breust, L. H. (2006). Einstein and Freud: War and Peace in an Interdisciplinary Dialogue. Thesis. Mackenzie Presbyterian University.
4. Freud, S. & Einstein, A. (2010). Why War? 1932. Pamphlet. Sequoia Free Press.
5. Reeve, C. D. C. (2016). Plato on Friendship and Eros. Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. [//plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-friendship/](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-friendship/)

