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**CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY AND THE PARADOX OF EXISTENCE:
AN ANALYSIS OF ERICH FROMM'S CONCEPT OF THE
ALIENATION OF MODERN MAN.**

**A Dissertation
Presented to the Graduate School
of Duquesne University**

**As partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

**by
John S. Gasiorowski**

June 9, 1969



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MASTER'S THESIS

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It can never be too strongly emphasized that the crisis which western man is undergoing today is a metaphysical one; there is probably no more dangerous illusion than that of imagining that some readjustment of social or institutional conditions could suffice of itself or appease a contemporary sense of disquiet which arises; in fact, from the very depths of man's being.

___ Gabriel Marcel

Better authority in security than freedom
with fear

___ Paul Tillich

Mass society does not result from a plot by a little group of conspirators; it is not a consequence of the moral decay of modern man; it is not an institution--it is a way of life that has become increasingly peculiar to modern man. As a way of life in which modern man orients himself toward nature and toward other men, the mass society represents a transformation in the structure of all major institutions.

___ Don Martindale

The theory of mass society no longer serves as a description of western society but as an ideology of romantic protest against contemporary life.

___ Daniel Bell



INTRODUCTION

This thesis is the result of an interest in the socio-psychological approach to man and his society and consequently in the man who exemplifies this method, Erich Fromm. Dr. Fromm has devoted his life not only to studying how man lives in society but also to studying the rationale and motivation of his activities; in short, Fromm concentrates on the "whyness" of man's being and existence. In his analysis he does not restrict himself to the discipline of social psychology but selects and integrates this with the findings of philosophy, history and political science. Therefore in order to understand Fromm, one must broaden his scope by interrelating Dr. Fromm with students of socio-political man and his environment. Consequently before discussing Fromm's ideas and theories in detail, several forethoughts must be presented to provide a working framework. These introductory remarks are not intended to be a detailed exposition but instead their purpose is prefatory and a prelude to further developments, and more detailed investigation into both content and method. The question is: What is alienation? What are its symptoms causes and implications for man? And how does one study this phenomenon?

The concepts of mass society, dehumanization and alienation have become major topics for analysis, discussion



and debate not only among contemporary social scientists but also among men from all strata of our society. The importance of these subjects is heightened and emphasized by the apparent trends toward violence as a solution to political and social problems and also by the increasing overt rebellion against traditional standards and mores. Commissions gather together, reports are written, articles published--all in an attempt to understand what is happening to the man and his society.

Is America a sick and violent society? Does a vast, technological oriented nation such as the U.S. cause alienation, and anomie? Can an individual fulfill himself in our society or is he damned to frustration and a feeling of uselessness and superfluousness? Does modern man really control his life or is he merely a conforming, purposeless automaton whose real sensibilities and needs have been thwarted and quelled by the machinations of a mass society? Around these questions, inter alia, revolve a cluster of theories, opinions, attitudes and a formidable dictionary of terminology. Controversies rage around the various interpretations of the data as well as the posited consequences of each hypothesis. Writings on mass society and alienation travel the continuum from poetic protest to scientific quantification and measurement.

Because man is existence conscious of itself and also purposeful or teleological in will and action, he surveys past and present with a plan for the future. Furthermore, man asserts values upon his environment enabling him to select or reject alternatives. Any theory or study of aliena-



tion and mass society must begin with man. To write that man is alienated and that technological society destroys or inhibits his true development while refusing to confront the matter of human nature seems to be a questionable venture. To say that a man is lost presumes he has a home or to maintain that a certain environment encroaches upon man rather than permitting him real freedom carries the proposition far beyond the obvious implications. Perhaps the question can be traced back to the debate between the Sophists and Plato on the issue of physis (nature) and nomos (law). Is there (or should there be) a relationship between society and the nature of its inhabitants? Is the former an impediment for the drives of the latter or rather the framework within which man can truly experience his powers and potentialities? What precisely is natural for man? In other words what can be considered harmonious to man's nature?

Far too often the hyper-complexity of the dual connection between individuals and their society have been glossed over by single factor postulates. Men create institutions and forms of associations with other men and these in turn have certain reciprocal effects. But to apply monistic explanations to all these interaction phenomena simply undercuts the possibility of any comprehension about what is happening and, more importantly, why it occurred. The Greek city-states did not vanish because of their sexual mores anymore than Rome's decline can be explained solely in terms of her adoption of Christianity. Likewise the Nazi movement and the German acceptance of Hitler's leadership is understandable



in terms of anti-Semitism. These factors were important but not by any means the sole determinants for the ends for which they are credited. To fathom any of the above historical events one must link the aforementioned factors with many others. Hitler can only be explainable if one studies the historical, political and socio-psychological condition of Germany. Any theory which undermines these variables for the single factor sacrifices scholarship for simplification.

A more subtle but equally as faulty technique is the overdevelopment of a trend or tendency in society and attribution to it almost inevitable negative consequences for man. Such overemphasis often results from isolation of perspective or from a questionable generalization of the given phenomena. Minority movements are mistaken for revolts of the majority against a given traditional moral or rule. This mistake may be found among what we might call the "alarmist" school who usually see catastrophe on the horizon if current trends continue. They are opposed by the apologists of society who make the contrary error of diluting potential danger areas and by claiming that the country's health was never better. Their world view is generally optimistic granted the elimination of a few troublesome elements. The debate between these two factions revolves around the psychological health of the U.S. and the present condition of man. Unfortunately the canvas of presentation either is painted too large, hence its characteristics are often vague and obscure, or minor points receive too much gloss thus distorting the proper balance and proportion.



The easy accessibility of firearms in America, for example, does not of itself make the U.S. more violent than any other society. Nor does the wide distribution of questionable literature necessarily entail the downfall of our culture. On the other hand, the large number of church members need not entail the conclusion that our nation is religious or moral. What conclusions can one reach if he studies the rate and statistics of divorce, suicide and violent crimes in highly industrialized countries? Is there a cause-effect relationship or are there other factors which must be considered? Does technology and its accompanying entourage alienate and dehumanize man or might the thesis be that man throughout history has always boarded or lived in an alienated state but that now he aggravates this situation with the modern devices and tools of contemporary society? Was man created in virtue and goodness only to suffer a fall from grace? The answers to these questions will serve as partial guides in the development of this thesis.

A further query must be posed. How does one characterize a period in history? Can the essence or driving forces of a society be apprehended and analyzed without instilling it with a life or movement of its own which would transcend living beings and their actual life situation? For example, the classificatory phrases such as the Era of Good Feelings, the Dark Ages, the Age of Enlightenment are all quite familiar as useful labels or verbal condensations created by men who attempted to capture the essence of a temporal period. The social scientist must heed the Marxist's admonition concerning fetishizing either history or institutions. The title or name should serve only as a



beginning for social, political or historical investigation and not assume an identity of existence divorced from the concreteness of its constituent elements. Such designations usually contain connotations permeated with emotional overtones which are not always conducive to inquiry. The many Catholic scholars for instance have been quite susceptible to this erratum in their studies of the Reformation period and also in their assessment of contemporary philosophies and movements. In reference to our topic such misjudgments and misconstructions can be seen in the daily outpouring of alarm or defense found in popular magazines, newspapers or on television. America appears to be undergoing extensive (if not always effective) introspection and self analysis.

These studies of society can be reduced to basically three types of theories not necessarily contradictory or in opposition to one another; fundamentally these are the empirical, the ethical and the metaphysical. The first constitutes a set of generalizations concerning observable reality while the ethical theory usually expresses a degree of preference or distaste about reality in accordance with certain a priori standards of evaluation. The metaphysical theorists endeavor to discover the ultimate nature of reality transcending the observable. It must be stressed that these can be complementary and not contrary to one another; hence one might serve as a take-off stage for the others. In any case, all three posit certain terms, phrases or definitions which purport to explain the validity of the theory and its findings. The fundamental



task of the theory is to define, describe and explain the reality of its subject matter with its causes, motivations, implications consequences and to be able to verbalize the facticity of these existential realities with the proper terms or symbols. Therefore the definitions should be operational in that they can be adjusted to the dynamic nature of the phenomena they claim to describe or define. In other words, the theory and its component elements must have some sort of phenomenological consistency. Theories which cannot change with the modulations of man and his world turn into sterile caricatures. The heirs of Marx have painfully learned the dangers of dogmatized doctrine and the unyielding resistance of existents which do not fall neatly or willingly into their a priori prescription. The relationship between the facts (or data) and the theory cannot be tangential or circumstantial; rather there should be a interdependence with a cautious respect for the diversification and the permutation of the variables.

In our treatment of Fromm we shall encounter these questions and see if he overcomes the difficulties and problems they offer. Because his field of vision encompasses so much, his total perspective will not be evolved here. We will be mainly concerned with his theory of alienated man in contemporary society. However, several points of clarification must be made. Although Fromm has been called both a neo-Freudian and a Marxist, he personally disavows these labels. He readily admits that these two thinkers have greatly



influenced his ideas but he employs their thought as a starting point for his own criticisms of contemporary culture and society. If anything, Fromm considers himself a socialist humanist rather than a Freudian Marxist. His world is anthropocentric--man is the measure; his moral theory is rooted in man and not in the dictates of some transcendent being who issues laws to his creatures. He is quite suspicious of organized religions which compel man to worship a force higher than himself and thus one can readily see his debt to Feuerbach. The object of study for Fromm is the same as Aristotle: to find the good life. Dr. Fromm insists that ethics cannot be divorced from the social and political realm; only the good man is the truly happy and fulfilled man.

The empirical, ethical and metaphysical theories are combined and interwoven by Fromm albeit not always in an advantageous manner. He tries to mediate the idealist's "ought" with the realist's "is" through his critical analysis and recommendations. Fromm rejects an inevitable determination by maintaining that man change both himself and his situation once he realizes the realities of his predicament. The best possible world is not an utopian dream for him but, on the contrary, a distinct plausibility. Fromm has great faith in man's rational and spiritual powers, perhaps more than any contemporary social philosopher.

Dr. Fromm's affirmation of man is counter balanced by his lament that man not God is dead or at least in danger of losing meaningful existence. One of his basic theses is that man's primary potentiality for good cannot be experienced in



our society. Instead the emphasis on the material, the reliance on gadgets and the mechanical, the obsessive appetite for consumption and the neurotic desire to belong all transform the individual into a self-less automaton. His belief that man can overcome these obstacles and attain a significant life reminds Marx's hope that the proletariat will be able to rise above the misery of its conditions and assume history's designated role. Of course, Fromm does not select one class for any messianic mission; for him, all classes are trapped in the labyrinth of alienation.

Generally stated, Fromm's primary theme is that man is a creature with certain physical, psychological and spiritual needs and also motivated by a primary potential for good. Modern society with its technological emphasis and also with its overdependence on the mechanical does not provide adequate soil for man's growth. Hence man becomes alienated not only from his situation and his neighbor but also from himself. In other words, modern society deprives the individual of any opportunity for the good life. Only a radical change of institutions and attitudes will afford man with the fertile soil for growth and development.

Fromm's criticisms of the foibles and pitfalls of modern technology and mass culture are excellent; his recommendations are quite another matter. He also tends to overdraw or overextend a point thus finding laws where perhaps only tendencies exist. Dr. Fromm questions the psychological and spiritual health and stability of our times. He criticizes and censures much of what modern man values and he calls man to task for



his excessive reliance for meaning on objects and mechanical devices. He weaves his theory from the threads of social psychology, political science, philosophy, and related behavioral and humanistic sciences. It remains the task of this paper to discover if Erich Fromm was more critical than correct.



CHAPTER I

EMERGENCE OF MAN

....she gave some to her husband and he ate with her. Then the eyes of both were opened and they became aware of their nakedness
--Genesis 3, 7

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world, and all our woe, with the loss of Eden
--Milton, Paradise Lost

The history of man begins with an act of disobedience. Defiance of God's edict by Adam has a dual meaning for man: on one hand, it is the first act of human freedom and power of choice; but on the other, it destroys man's original union with nature and homo sapiens becomes aware that he is different and no longer united with nature, the animals and the earth. The original state of harmony has been eliminated and the history of man has begun. Rational man is the result and child of rebellion. Several points must be clarified here before continuing with Fromm's treatment of this parable. He does not accept the story of Adam as an actual historical fact, or as the scientific explanation of the birth of man. Secondly he carries the traditional Christian emphasis on the singleness of Adam's deed beyond its overt implications. For Fromm, disobedience was a necessary step in the evolution of man's reason and freedom. The myth of Eden explains the beginning of human history and not the reason



for man's proclivity toward sin and evil. In short, Fr. Fromm employs the story of Adam as a convenient poetic way of describing the evolution of man from a primordial, pre-conscious state to the level of conscious individuality with reason and freedom.

Man, in the biblical story, finds himself in a state of undifferentiated unity in the Garden of Eden. There is no consciousness, no differentiation, no choice, no freedom, no sin. He is part of nature and he is not aware of any distance between himself and nature. This state of primordial, pre-individual unity is disrupted by the first act of choice, which is at the same time the first act of disobedience and of freedom. The act brings about the emergence of consciousness. Man is aware of himself as he, of his separateness from the woman, from nature, animals and the earth. When he experiences this separateness, he feels ashamed.... He leaves the Garden of Eden and this is the beginning of human history.

Symbolically we see that Adam's existence in the Garden represents man in the pre-conscious stage of evolution. Man lives in and with nature and its creatures without realizing his specific differences. The act of disobedience symbolizes in a simple way that point in time when man attains those unique powers which separate him from the other creatures. Fromm like the author of Genesis is not writing a completely precise scientific treatise on the origins of man; in fact nowhere in his works does he attempt to do so. He utilizes the myth but only for its symbolic or allegorical connotations. What Fromm implies is that Adam (representing man) in saying no to God (or forces of nature) declares yes to those forces or powers which affirm his existence as a specific human individual

Erich Fromm, Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, (N.Y.: Grove Press, 1960), pp 128-9.



thus separating himself from the Garsen (union with nature). This noncompliance and its subsequent separation are necessary before true human history can unfold.

He acts against God's command, he breaks through the state of harmony with nature of which he is a part without transcending it.... from the standpoint of man this is the beginning of human freedom. Acting against God's orders means freeing himself from coercion, emerging from the unconscious existence of prehuman life to the level of man. Acting against the command of authority, committing a sin, is in its positive human aspect the first act of freedom, i.e., the first human act. In the myth the sin in its formal aspect is the eating of the tree of knowledge. The act of disobedience as an act of freedom is the beginning of reason. The original harmony between man and nature is broken. God proclaims war between man and woman, war between man and nature. Man has become separate from nature, he has taken the first step toward becoming human by becoming an individual. He has committed the first act of freedom.²

This dual aspect or paradoxical quality of man's first human act is an important idea for understanding Fromm's concept of man and his nature as well as his creations. Throughout his books, Fromm synthesizes paradoxes into apparent unities. John Schaar is quite correct in noting that Fromm is "something of a juggler" on his handling of often contrary or ambivalent principles.³ There lies within Fromm's writings a covert

² Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, (N.Y.: Avon Books, 1965), pp. 49-50. The story of Adam as one which Fromm returns to in several of his works especially with regard to his ethics as we shall see in a later chapter. The reader should consult Fromm's, Man For Himself (N.Y.: Harbinger, 1947), p. 22. Psychoanalysis and Religion (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press 1950), p. 42. WORKS OF ERICH FROMM: Religion and Other Essays (N.Y. Anchor Books, 1960), pp. 110, 204-213.

³ John Schaar, Escape from Authority, (N.Y.: Harper, 1964), pp. 6-7.



dialectic process of not only thought but perhaps even of reality which undoubtedly stems from his acknowledgement of Marxian sociology and sense of historical movement. Fromm repeatedly stresses the tension and dual consequences of ideas, movements and actions. Whether it be Adam's sin, the rise of capitalism, the need for relatedness or the tools of technology--all contain a two pronged effect for the individual. This point need not concern us here save as a reminder in our later development of his ideas.

Fromm switches from religious myth to a scientific exegesis on the birth of man as a unique creature. His explanation of evolution now revolves around the theory of instinctual dependence, that is, the explication of activity through the instincts. Fromm argues that at some point in animal evolution, the species we know as man began to rely on reason and intelligence and not instinctual adaptation. Man was transformed from a passive reactor to an active doer, and became life aware of itself.

At a certain point of animal evolution there occurred a unique break, comparable to the first emergence of matter, to the first emergence of life, and to the first emergence of animal existence. This new event happens when in the evolutionary process action ceases to be essentially determined by instinct; when the adaptation of nature loses its coercive character; when action is no longer fixed by given mechanisms. When the animal transcends nature, when it transcends the purely passive role of the creature, when it becomes, biologically speaking, the most helpless animal, man is born. At this point, the animal has emancipated himself from nature by erect posture, the brain has grown far beyond what it was in the highest animal. This birth of man may have lasted for hundreds of thousands of years but what matters is that a new species arose, transcending



nature, that life became aware of itself.⁴

There is no hint of any divine plan or intervention in this process but rather Fromm's picture of evolution seems to be a natural outcome. Unlike the biblical account which he has now dropped, no deity creates man for a supernatural purpose. Man arises from the natural progression of forces within nature not because of any divine spirit nor for any afterlife union with his maker. Nor does Fromm allow himself to get bogged in the metaphysical mire of Prime Movers or Uncaused Causes. He does not deny the possibility of a god creating man but he does not seriously confront this question. Instead his elucidation on man's parturition is founded on the theory of man's lack of dependence on instincts and its passive mechanisms. The key to this concept resides in what Fromm describes as man's biological weaknesses and lack of instinctual power to survive. Man qua man must be considered as an active and conscious modifier of his environment and not as a creature who can only react to situational stimulus by alternatives chosen not by conscious thought but predetermined by the animal's instinctual makeup. The animal can adapt itself to its environment by changing itself-- auto-plastically and not by altering its environment-- allo-plastically; it either fits in or dies out.⁵ Fromm explicitly outlines the trend of thought in his discussion of the history of man in its freedom from the instincts:

⁴ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1955), pp. 28-31.

⁵ Erich Fromm, Man For Himself (N.Y.: Rinehart, 1947), p. 48.



Man emerges from the prehuman stage by the first steps in the direction of becoming free from coercive instincts. If we understand by instinct a specific action pattern which is determined by inherited neurological structures, a clear cut-trend can be observed in the animal kingdom. The lower an animal is in the scale of development, the more are its adaptation to nature and all its activities controlled by instinctive and reflex action mechanisms. The famous social organizations of some insects are created entirely by instincts. On the other hand, the higher an animal is in the scale of development, the more flexibility of action pattern and the less completeness of structural adjustment do we find at birth. This development reaches its peak with man. He is the most helpless of all animals at birth. His adaptation to nature is based essentially on the process of learning, not on instinctual determination....

Human existence begins when the lack of fixation of action by instincts exceeds a certain point; when the adaptation to nature loses its coercive character; when the way to act is no longer fixed by hereditarily given mechanisms. In other words, human existence and freedom are from the beginning inseparable. Freedom is used here not in its positive sense of "freedom to" but in its negative sense of "freedom from," namely freedom from instinctual determination of his actions....⁶

Thus we see that the essential components for the definition of man are flexibility in action and a freedom from instinctual determination. It would therefore be the logical inversion of this thesis that the less a person exhibits these characteristics the more primitive he might be classified. Men in aboriginal tribes display low conscious adaptability and a marked incapability to alter their centuries old patterns of living. Of course, we are not using the term habit interchangeably with instinct. The decisive difference between a creature activated by instinct and a man motivated by a habit is that the latter can consciously

⁶Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, pp. 47-8; also cf. Fromm, Man For Himself, p. 42.



and willingly (albeit not always easily) temper, qualify or negate the effect of the habit. This contrast between instinct and habit, determination and flexibility can serve as an illuminatory standard, even though Fromm himself does not carry out the logic of his position.

Instincts, according to Fromm, entail a fixed response which does not presuppose an operation of forethought and weighing of consequences and alternatives. The animal cannot reason and here we shall use Fromm's definition: "reason is the ability to penetrate the surface grasped by the senses and to understand the essence behind the surface."⁷ The course of movement is plotted out by the biological laws of nature; hence flexibility or a consciously posited pluralism of possible different avenues is not available to the instinctual creature. Analogously habits impose a subtle restriction upon the adaptability potential of a person. Furthermore the operational power of a habit may very well continue even though its rationale has long been forgotten. Thus it would seem correct to postulate that the more flexible a person is and the less dependent on habits (or habit), there will exist a greater possibility of free, conscious deliberation and weighing of alternatives. The relationship between flexibility, conscious adaptability and rationality will be pursued further in our discussion of modern society. It will suffice here to say that Fromm does not explicitly carry out the logic of his position but that such a comparison is necessary especially in his ideas concerning man in a rapidly changing society.

⁷Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 30.



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Zevedei Barbu maintains that there is a necessary relation between flexibility, reason and a democratic way of life. For him the man who relies less on the emotions and instinctive functions in his adjustments and more on reason and intelligence possesses a mental structure which is more flexible and more adaptable to a rapidly changing environment.⁸

In summary, Fromm has set up a continuum of progression from the animal world to the emergence of rational, self-conscious man. In his construction he has selected two traits which characterizes man: flexibility and freedom from instinctual determination. These traits will become significant in our treatment of man in a highly complex and modulating society for the more an individual exhibits these points the better able will he be to adapt in a rational manner. Man's acquisition of rational powers raises him above the encasement of instinctual reaction and alters his existential situation in regard to his relationship not only to his environment and his neighbor but also to himself. Man has become life aware of itself.

Quite characteristically this thesis in Fromm's conception of the emergence of reason and self awareness contains an antithesis or negative consequence for man. As Fromm puts it:

Reason, man's blessing, is also his curse; it forces him to cope everlastingly with the task of solving an insoluble dichotomy. Human existence is different in this respect from that of all other organisms: it is in a state of constant and unavoidable disequilibrium. Man's life cannot 'be lived' by repeating the pattern of his species; he must live....
Self awareness, reason and imagination have

⁸ Zevedei Barbu, Democracy and Dictatorship, (N.Y.: Grove Press, 1956), p. 4.



disrupted the 'harmony' which characterizes animal existence. Their emergence has made man into an anomaly, into the freak of the universe. He is part of nature, subject to her physical laws and unable to change them, yet he transcends the rest of nature. He is set apart while being a part.... Cast into this world at an accidental place and time, he is forced out of it, again accidentally. Being aware of himself, he realizes his powerlessness and the limitations of his existence. He visualizes his own end: death. Never is he free from the dichotomy of his existence: he cannot rid himself of his mind, even if he should want to; he cannot rid himself of his body as long as he is alive and his body makes him want to be alive.

In essence, man is a superior misfit who is caught in a dichotomy between two realms: his original home within nature and his new transcendent existence. The definite world of instinctual determination, organic harmony and union has been replaced by an uncertain and open proposition. Once led from the cave of prehuman existence man cannot return but must seek a path congruous to his new nature.

Fromm's meaning can be made clearer if we focus upon the traditional definition of man, that is, that man is a rational animal. Man like the other animals is a product of the evolutionary processes but he is thrust above the sources of his physical being by his powers of reason. This disassociation or scission from the rest of nature creates a disjunction or contradiction within man. Reason has separated and insulated man from that which is not him; it has raised him unto a new plateau of existence but in doing so it has propelled man into

9 Erich Fromm, Man For Himself, p. 49. c.f. also Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 30-31.



the ultimate paradox for life has become for him a problematic question which requires an answer. Man must somehow find just the disturbed equilibrium and the rational intalance. He has lost his original home and now must seek to build for himself a new environment and he must establish a new relation to the world around him.

The emergence of reason has created a dichotomy within man which forces him to strive everlastingly for new solutions. The cynicism of his history is intrinsic to the existence of reason which causes him to develop, and through it, to create a world of his own in which he can live at home with himself and his fellow men. Every stage he reaches leaves him discontented and perplexed and this very perplexity urges him to move toward new solutions. There is no innate 'drive for progress' in man; it is the contradiction in his existence that makes him proceed on the way he set out. Having lost paradise, the unity with nature, he has become the eternal wanderer...he is impelled to go forward and with everlasting effort to make the unknown known by filling in with answers the blank spaces of his own being; he must give account to himself of himself and of the meaning of his existence. He is driven to overcome this inner split, tormented by a craving for 'absoluteness' for another kind of harmony which can lift the curse by which he was separated from nature, from his fellow man and from himself.¹⁰

The above quote contains several important points which call for careful inspection since it contains the foundation of much of Fromm's ideological edifice. First of all, the original sin of man was not disobedience but awareness and use of his reason which allowed him to disobey. Reason plays the dual role of protagonist and antagonist in Fromm's writing of history. Secondly the crucial dichotomy or salient contradiction resides

¹⁰Erich Fromm, Man For Himself, pp. 49-50; also Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 31.



with man and this divorce compels man to seek a solution to his problem. The unterbau of history for Fromm is not any innate drive for progress but rather man's constant attempt to erect an environment suitable and beneficial to his nature. human existence confronts man with the crucial question which he must answer in some way: How can we overcome the suffering, the imprisonment, the pain which the experience of separateness creates; how can we find union within ourselves, with our fellow men and with nature?¹¹ Although every question presumes an answer, it does not follow logically or ontologically that there is the one answer. Linked to this latter of answering the ontological question is Fromm's concept that only man can create true purpose and meaning for his life. This idea logically follows his view of man's birth in that if man owes his existence to no divine entity and if man is merely cast into being with no transcendental end, it would seem therefore that only he can infuse purpose into existence and history. The thought of a godless universe does not paralyze Fromm's individual who very often assumes the subtle identity of modern Prometheus. Instead Fromm agrees with Sartre who purports that although man is thrust accidentally into existence, he must form what he essentially is through choice. In other words we might say that man is conscious existence and this self-consciousness goes beyond the epistemological assertion of Descartes in that the existential approach implies a frightening responsibility.¹² This responsibility to

¹¹ Erich Fromm, Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis (N.Y.: Grove Press, 1963), p. 87.

¹² Harry Alocker, Thomism and Modern Thought (N.Y.: Appleton



create his own meaning by using his powers of reason and freedom places upon man a severe burden which he will not always accept. Perhaps this notion of dichotomy and its motivational impact upon man can be made more explicit if we discuss the two types of dichotomy: the existential and the historical.

The split in man's nature leads to existential dichotomies because they are rooted or are inherent in the very existence of man; he cannot rid himself of these but he can react to them in various ways.¹³ An essential part of what we call human nature therefore is this internal division which is the result of reason segregating the animal parts of man from his rational self. The most fundamental one is that between life and death--all men must die; but this should not mean that the thought of his own death should cripple or demoralize man. His ideas on death reflect those of Spinoza who wrote that "a free man thinks of death least of all; and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life."¹⁴ At first glance this proposition appears almost a tautological shibboleth but one must go beneath the surface and remember that all purpose and meaning for man must be had in this life. Fromm allows no post-mortem eternal state to make up for the shortcomings of temporal being. If man does not illuminate

Century Crafts, 1962), Chapter 5.

¹³ Erich Fromm, Man For Himself, p. 50.

¹⁴ Benedict Spinoza, Ethics, (N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1950), p. 232. Fromm greatly admires the philosophy of Spinoza especially in regard to his ethical system. This admiration will become obvious when we deal with Fromm's ethical humanism; however for a better understanding of the similarity between these two men, the reader should confer Part IV of The Ethics, "Of Human Bondage."



the darkness here and now, the world will remain a blank void. Fromm is quite insistent in this point and does not tolerate any Deus ex Machina to save the day. Man must either accept this fate and progress or refuse the challenge and suffer regression. Furthermore, Fromm does not always use the terms life and death in a strictly biological sense. While he agrees (again with Spinoza) that the first duty of an organism is to be alive, he quickly defines what he means:

To be alive is a dynamic, not a static concept. Existence and the unfolding of the specific powers of an organism are one and the same. All organisms have an inherent tendency to actualize their specific potentialities. The aim of man's life, therefore, is to be understood as the unfolding of his powers according to the laws of his nature.¹⁵

Briefly then, man must be what he is--a creature with specific and unique powers and potential. If he is to be alive, both in the biological and spiritual sense, he must develop his potentialities and in so doing he will infuse meaning and purpose into existence.

The second existential dichotomy also springs from the mortality of man in that the short span of one's life does not permit an individual the complete realization of all his human potentialities. According to Fromm, one's accidental existence in a certain period of the evolutionary process conflicts with his claim for the actualization of all his potential. In other words there is a gap between what man could realize and what

¹⁵ Erich Fromm, Man For Himself, pp. 29-30. For a more complete exposition of this point but one which remains essentially the same refer to Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1962), p. 190.



he in fact does accomplish. That men fall short of what they might be, that they do not do all that they possibly can, is an accepted phenomena but the extent and effect of this gulf does not lend itself easily to study. To say that each individual is the bearer of all human potentialities merely stipulates that he possesses those traits which characterize the species. In addition do all men really assert a claim to total realization of his forces? And in so doing, does he construct a hierarchy of values so that he can strive after what he considers the more important and dismiss those of lesser intensity? Are man's potentialities infinite in their possibility but limited by the actualities of the epoch in which one finds himself? The point of departure between the actual and the potential certainly succumbs to more complexity than Fromm suggests. In fact, Fromm's tendency toward oversimplification or generalization stems from his confusion of is and ought; ethical hopes often blur his epistemological vision.

The third existential dichotomy revolves around the thesis that man is related and alone at the same time. man cannot bear to be unrelated to his fellow man but yet is aware that he is a unique entity.¹⁶ For Fromm, as for the humanistic existentialists (e.g. Marcel, Camus, Jasper), there is never full communication between men; yet no man can come to know himself apart from other men nor develop his powers without them.¹⁷

¹⁶ Erich Fromm, Man For Himself, pp. 51-2.

¹⁷ Hazel Barnes, Humanistic Existentialism, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), p. 107. Chapter 11 of this book compares what she calls Humanistic Existentialism and Contemporary psychology by studying the relationship between Fromm



This need to be related shall comprise one of man's basic psychic requirements and failure to relate in a truly human way leads to psychological fragmentation. This dichotomy forms a cornerstone in Fromm's analytic science and it is one to which we shall return in our research, especially in regard to the various modes men choose to find union with their fellows. It suffices here to remark that man, according to Fromm, cannot bear to be alone and that his happiness depends on the solidarity he feels with his peers.

This contradiction as the other two are not accidental impediments on the periphery of man's essence but quite the contrary, they exist in and are part of his nature, thus constituting a major causal factor in his needs and actions. If these were radically altered or completely eradicated then man would undergo an intrinsic and fundamental metamorphosis. Fromm therefore, adds something to the definition of man as being a rational animal by injecting indelible tension between the two terms. Reason has caused these so-called contradictions and reason will be called upon to mediate their effects. Furthermore since there is no intentional aspect in the birth of man nor in his makeup, this entire process must be considered quite accidental. But he remains firmly persistent that it is a fact. He explains human progress by man's attempt to solve these (and the historical) contradictions for, as we have already noted, each attempt throughout history has left man unsatisfied and

Sartre and Camus. He proposes that Fromm is similar to Sartre in his critique of the human condition but finds the former thinker closer to Camus in his concept of human nature.



incomplete.

While we can grant that this hypothesis has its plausible elements, nevertheless we must seriously inquire whether or not Fromm has not confused the empirical with the normative. That his existential dichotomies exist in some fashion may be the case but Fromm offers sketchy evidence to prove his point. Fromm alas attributes to them a consequential power which calls for more empirical data. Alfred G. Meyer in his study of the Marxist systems made a cogent distinction between an hypothesis and an interpretation:

Hypotheses are subject to verification; interpretations are not. Hypotheses must therefore be modified or discarded altogether when it becomes clear that empirical observation belies them. Interpretations, however, may remain pitted against other interpretations without necessarily voiding each other. A history of mankind told in terms of the struggle for power is neither more nor less scientific than a view of history as the development of modes of production (or attempt to solve existential dichotomies). It is merely a different manner of interpreting the same process. The two views will yield two different stories with quite a different distribution of highlights and obscure spots. The data will be presented in completely different arrangements; and yet both stories may be entirely correct. Depending on the purpose, one may be more adequate or useful an interpretation than the other. But this is a pragmatic criterion which must not be confused with scientific verification. In the final analysis, all interpretations entail some arbitrary choice which cannot be defended on purely scientific grounds.¹⁸

Fromm dismisses any innate drive for progress theory as an explanation for civilization and substitutes a series of inherent contradictions. Either interpretation may draw upon the same data

¹⁸ Alfred G. Meyer, *Marxism*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), p. 41.



but neither can completely validate itself or totally disprove the other explanation as without merit. Fromm's dichotomies, especially the last, remind the social scientist in his study of human behavior but Fromm must offer more indisputable evidence if we are to accept the claims he makes for them.

Radically different, at least according to Fromm, are the many historical conditions in individual and social life which are not inherent in the human condition but rather are man-made, hence soluble.¹⁹ Unlike the former contradictions which remain permanently rooted in man's nature, these dichotomies result from his lack of courage and wisdom or from a misuse of his powers. The historical contradiction need not be but unfortunately men tend to confuse the two with far reaching implications. "Those who were interested in upholding the historical contradictions were eager to prove that they were existential dichotomies and thus unalterable. They tried to convince man that what must not be cannot be and that he had to resign himself to his tragic fate."²⁰

Fromm does not tell us who "they" are but the whole tenor of his thought might easily be converted into some sort of conspiratorial theory of history. Also the concept of justifying historical contradictions as existential very closely parallels Marx's development of the ruling classes exploiting the proletariat through the apparatus and ideology of the superstructure. Paradoxically the guardians and vanguard of

¹⁹ Erich Fromm, Man For Himself, pp. 52-3.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 53.



the proletarian, the Soviet Communist, have become masters at rationalizing the what is as the must be. The so-called laws of history or nature have been employed with brutal efficiency upon those unfortunate enough to live under the wave of the future.

Fromm offers two examples of this phenomenon: the institution of slavery in ancient Greece and the contemporary example of the contradiction between an abundance of technical means of production and the incapacity to use them exclusively for peace and public welfare. Schaar takes issue with the underlying implications of Fromm's examples and their meaning:

If Fromm means to say only something like 'it is unfortunate that we use some of our economic facilities for military rather than for peaceful purposes,' then his formulation is at least understandable: he is expressing a preference for one set of goals over another. But it is not enough just to assert the preference and to imply that men who disagree lack courage and wisdom. On the other hand, if Fromm means to say that there is something inherent in the structure of an advanced industrial economy that leads it to produce for war rather than peace, he has a very big job of analysis on his hands before we can accept his thesis.²¹

The Greeks justified slavery on the grounds of economic and political expediency--someone had to perform the menial tasks while others had the leisure to occupy political roles. Even a profound thinker such as Aristotle accepted (somewhat grudgingly) the institution, basing his argument on the sketchy grounds that some are born by nature to be slaves. This logic was successfully challenged by Rousseau who claimed that the philosopher mistook the effect for the cause.²² In any case,

²¹ Schaar, *op. cit.*, p. 55.



slavery in Greece was not simply the result of a failure of wisdom and courage; one need not condone an evil by understanding the causes of it. Similarly, in his remarks on the contemporary contrast between technique of production and the problems of peace and prosperity Fromm oversimplifies the crux of the enigma by terming it a historical contradiction. Although one can sympathize with his plea for a balance between productive capabilities and peace and well being of people, nevertheless, his analysis of the roots of the question are not entirely satisfactory. Advanced technological society does not necessarily require heavy spending for military hardware; it may be unfortunate that it does not spend as much for butter as for guns but the reasons for doing so are normative. One may prefer that it be otherwise but any explanation of why this is so must go further than Fromm ventures in his exposition. Furthermore, how does one differentiate between an existential and a historical dichotomy? Fromm tells us that there are three of the former but are there any more or can there be a multitude of variations on the basic triad? Schauer points to another difficulty in the relationship between the two contradictions:

What is the relationship between historical and existential dichotomies? It may be closer than Fromm would like to think. Existential dichotomies compel men to action. This action can take place only on the stage of history. So the existential dichotomies cause the historical actions which produce historical dichotomies. Seen in this light, it is not so easy to say that the historical dichotomies can be annulled if we apply enough courage and wisdom to them.

22 J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 171.



for a shortage of courage and wisdom is part of the very definition of the human condition. Man is limited. He makes mistakes. This conclusion is implicit in Fromm's analysis, but he dare not accept it. To do so would bring down the utopian aspirations of his thought.²³

In summary, Fromm lists three splits or contradictions which inhere in man's nature as a result of his powers of reason. These dichotomies (existential) cannot be dissolved by the individual although their effect can be modified or qualified. However, Fromm does not adequately demonstrate the empirical basis for his formulation nor does he explain why there cannot be more than the original trinity. Also he rejects a single factor thesis for history--innate drive for progress--but replaces it with these innate dichotomies. Why the latter has more validity than the drive for progress is never developed to any satisfactory degree.

Along with the existential contradictions there are what Fromm calls the historical dichotomies which are man-made and therefore soluble by the proper application of wisdom and courage. In this case Fromm does not conceive of a man-made difficulty which cannot be solved even if men honestly endeavor to alleviate the problem. Nor does he sufficiently cultivate and simplify the relationship between the two types nor does he indicate how one distinguishes between them. How does one discover which, if not both, are operative in a particular historical period? One also finds a subtle undercurrent of a conspiracy theory in his historical dichotomy albeit Fromm does not explicitly assert

²³Schaar, op. cit., p. 55.



this premise; he simply implies by his unqualified use of "they" or those to whose advantage it is to maintain the imbalance. We shall return to these dichotomies at a later point, especially in regard to man's need to relate and also in comparing Marx's concept of lag with Fromm's historical dichotomy.

Man, then, is a unique species sharing with the animal world its need for biological and physical satisfaction and yet rising above the lower animal forms in his psychic needs. Man must fulfill his physical needs—hunger, sleep, rest, sex, etc. But more importantly he must satisfy those precise needs which spring from his essence in order to live as a human being.

Fromm is emphatic in maintaining that man's specific needs are not to be grounded in his animal, instinctual drives. They are, rather, those needs which stem from the conditions of man's existence as man, as a being radically different from the lower animals. Man shares a number of biological needs with the other animals and it is clearly important that these needs be satisfied. But the problem that is specific to man is that of psychic well being, of sanity.²⁴

Basically then fundamental psychic needs are: the need for relatedness, the need for transcendence, the need for rootedness, the need for identity and the need for a frame of orientation.²⁵ If these needs are neglected or poorly taken care of, man suffers psychological sickness or death. Around them will form the core of man's essence and shall constitute the unchangeable elements

²⁴ Paul Kecskemeti, "The All-Powerful I", Commentary, (vol. 21, February, 1950), p. 177.

²⁵ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 30-66. These five needs will be summarized and treated briefly. Our intention at this point is merely to give a picture of man's nature and its needs. How these are manifested concretely in society will concern us in the following chapters.



of his nature. The five psychic necessities are interrelated within man.

Because man has been torn away from his prehuman identification with nature and since he is endowed with reason and imagination, he must form some picture or concept of himself: he must be aware of an identity. Man can say I but first he must be aware of this entity. He must also relate this identity in some meaningful way to the world outside of him; he must belong, he must form a union with nature and his neighbors; he must overcome the feeling of aloneness and separation that awareness of self as a unique being has brought to him. Allen Wheelis has outlined the problem for man in his study on the definition and quest for identity.

Identity is a coherent sense of self. It depends upon the awareness that one's endeavors and one's life make sense, that they are meaningful in the context in which life is lived. It depends also upon stable values and upon the convictions that one's actions and values are harmoniously related. It is a sense of wholeness, of integration, of knowing what is right, and what is wrong and of being able to choose.²⁶

The search for identity becomes an important factor in the concepts of conformity and alienation in that there are many ways an individual will seek to "find himself" and his place in life.

Man's greatest psychic need is to overcome his separateness and isolation for failure to do so leads to insanity.

²⁶Allen Wheelis, The Quest for Identity (N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1958), p. 19. C.f. also Helen Merrell Lynd's essay, "Clues to Identity" in Hendrik H. Ruitenbeek's (ed.), Varieties of Modern Social Theory, (New York: Dutton, 1963), pp. 5-55.



Man is torn away from the primary union with nature, which characterizes animal existence. Having at the same time, reason and imagination, he is aware of his aloneness and separateness; of his powerlessness and ignorance; of the accidentalness of his birth and of his death. He could not face this state of being for a second if he could not find new ties with his fellow man which replace the old ones, regulated by instincts. Even if all his physiological needs were satisfied, he would experience his state of aloneness as a prison from which he had to break out in order to retain his sanity. In fact, the insane person is the one who has completely failed to establish any kind of union with other living beings, to be related to them is an imperative need by the fulfillment of which man's sanity depends.²⁷

The need to relate, to belong, to find a new union are not trans-physical states of existence. A person may be alone in a physical sense yet totally in communion with the not I and on the other hand he may live among people and feel overcome by loneliness. In other words Fromm is talking about a moral aloneness which has lethal consequences for the individual.²⁸ Fromm's ideas here concerning a spiritual, or at least a non-physical relation, union or belonging, are supported by such diverse authors as David Reisman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Victor Frankl.²⁹

Arthur Koestler in his novel, Darkness at Noon, provides us with an excellent example of this awareness of self and the need to relate and to belong. Kubashov, the protagonist of the

²⁷ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 35-6. Also art of Loving, pp. 6-7.

²⁸ Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, p. 34.

²⁹ cf. David Reisman, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960). Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, (NY: Macmillan, 1955). Victor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning (N.Y.: Washington Square Press, 1963).



story, has been arrested by the very Party to which he has dedicated his entire being. While in prison, he becomes increasingly aware of the grammatical fiction--the I--but he cannot relate it to anything for he has submerged himself into the cause and has submitted his existence to its laws and dictates. To question the purpose of the Party would bring doubt upon his own identity for they had been joined together in a marriage of total and unflagging commitment.

Unless he belonged somewhere, unless his life had some meaning and direction, he would feel like a particle of dust and be overcome by his individual insignificance. He would not be able to relate himself to any system which would give meaning and direction to his life, he would be filled with doubt and this doubt eventually would paralyze his ability to act, this is, to live.³⁰

Kubeshov's psychological needs were fulfilled by service to the Party. Once his mission had ended and his liquidation a matter of time, Kubeshov struggled with his ego, his fiction. He had been cast from his harmony with the Party and groped to erect a new relationship to reality. His end was death and perhaps resignation.

In order to complete Fromm's portrayal of man we must depict his view of human nature, partly by summarizing what has already been developed at length and partly by the addition of his definition of what he means by the term human nature.

³⁰ Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, p. 76. Also Arthur Koestler, Darkness at Noon, (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1941). I do not know whether Fromm has read this novel but he has not mentioned it in any of his works. Despite this, there are possibilities for fruitful comparisons between the two authors, especially in regard to the matter of personal identity.



Dr. Fromm's concept of man's nature attempts to steer between the twin dangers of man being totally fixed and man being infinitely malleable. He also believes it the task of psychology to uncover this essence which is the product of both historical evolution and the result of its own inherent mechanisms and laws.

Human nature is neither a biologically fixed and innate sum total of drives nor is it a lifeless shadow of cultural patterns to which it adapts itself smoothly; it is the product of human evolution but it also has certain inherent mechanisms and laws. There are certain factors in man's nature which are fixed and unchangeable: the necessity to satisfy the physiologically conditioned drives and the necessity to avoid isolation and moral aloneness.....

....although there is no biologically fixed human nature, human nature has a dynamism of its own that constitutes an active factor in the evolution of the social process. Even if we are not able to state clearly in psychological terms what the exact nature of this human dynamism is, we must recognize its existence. In trying to avoid the errors of biological and metaphysical concepts, we must not succumb to an equally grave error, that of sociological relativism in which man is nothing but a puppet, directed by the strings of social circumstances.³¹

Fromm's theory cannot allow pure social determinism for this would destroy not only his arguments for man's freedom but also his ethical postulates, which like all systems of good and evil, presupposes meaningful and cognizant choice of alternatives. His picture presentation of the automaton who is alienated from himself also rests on the presumption that there is a self from which he has become estranged. On the other hand his theories are not compatible with the idea that man is a

³¹Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, p. 37, 316-7.



kaleidoscope of ever changing variables, for this would strike at the core of Fromm's purpose, which combines the roles of both a diagnostician and a physician of man and society.

If we assumed that there is no human nature (unless as defined in terms of basic physiological needs), the only possible psychology would be a radical behaviorism content with describing an infinite number of behavior patterns or one that measures quantitative aspects of human conduct. Psychology and anthropology could do nothing but describe the various ways in which social institutions and cultural patterns mold man and since the special manifestations of man would be nothing but the stamp which social patterns have put on him, there could be only one science of man, comparative sociology.³²

Fromm's conception of human nature approaches the Aristotelian framework of a principle of permanence and a principle of change; in other words both Fromm and Aristotle are essentialists to the degree that they affirm the existence of an ascertainable essence in man while recognizing that man can change himself or be altered to some degree. He believes that psychology must study the soul of man so that we can better understand the how and why of human actions. Once we have achieved this goal, then man can begin to build the proper environment and society harmonious with his essential needs. Here perhaps more than anywhere else in his works Fromm confuses, sometimes in a unique and subtle way, the scientific and the moral dimensions of his thought. He has set out "to understand the laws that govern the life of the individual man and the laws of society."³³ Unfortunately Fromm does not tell us what con-

³² Erich Fromm, Man For Himself, pp. 30-1.

³³ Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 10.



stitutes a law of man or society; he seems to imply that certain constants can be found throughout history and that these make up his laws. But are constants ipso facto a law? Is there a question of the degree and kind of constant that is under observation? He informs us for instance that

....the statement that man can live under almost any condition is only half true, it must be supplemented by the other statement, that if he lives under conditions which are contrary to his nature and to the basic requirements for human growth and sanity he cannot help reacting; he must either deteriorate and perish, or bring about conditions which are more in accordance with his needs.³⁴

One irreducible factor in Fromm's core of man's essence apparently is that man will react in some way in response to his surroundings. This finding is neither startling nor overly profound. Joined with the principle of reaction and adjustment comes the search for the proper answer to the questions posed with his existence. Although Fromm concedes that man is both passive and active, his emphasis lies with the latter for it is here that the dynamic quest for perfection resides. Dr. Fromm tries to find a compromise route between fixed human instincts and total cultural determination.

Man is not a blank sheet of paper on which culture can write its text; he is entity charged with energy and structured in specific ways which, while adapting himself, reacts in specific and ascertainable ways to external conditions. If man had adapted himself to external conditions autoplatically, by changing his own nature, like an animal, and were fit to live under only one set of conditions to which he developed a special

³⁴Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 26-7, 78.



adaptation, he would have reached the blind alley of specialization... If, on the other hand, man could adapt himself to all conditions without fighting those which are against his nature, he would have no history either. Human evolution is rooted in man's adaptability and in certain indestructible qualities of his nature which compel him never to cease his search for conditions better adjusted to his intrinsic needs.³⁵

Fromm's balance of the two forces of human nature-- adaptability and the hardcore--fails to satisfy the demands made upon it. It suffers not only from its vagueness but also from its inability to tell us what exactly comprises both poles of the balance. Fromm claims to present a scientific picture of what man is but social science, especially one which purports not only at understanding and explanation but also which serves as a base for ethical and moral standards, must transcend the a priori. Fromm's method which draws more from philosophy and theology than psychology generates conclusions which are highly speculative and largely incapable of verification or refutation.

Along these lines it is interesting that Fromm has neither seriously confronted nor challenged the work of the behavioral psychologists, especially that of one of its leading exponents, B.F. Skinner. For although Fromm mentions these schools and makes references to Brave New World and 1964, he does not squarely meet the contentions of Skinner or his predecessor Watson. This lack of attention is remarkable since Skinner and his theories strike out at the humanistic strains in Fromm's thought. Certainly one who says: "Of course pigeons are not

³⁵Erich Fromm, Man For Himself, pp. 31-2. Also Escape From Freedom, pp. 31-2.



people but it's only a matter of complexity. We are learning the differences now" should deduct some cogent remark from Fromm.³⁶ Furthermore Skinner has set out to turn the study of behavior of science into an objective science freeing it from the vestiges of metaphysics and philosophy. He does not restrict himself merely to studying human conduct but his ultimate purpose is to erect a form of control over man. Criticism does not deter Skinner for he believes that some form of control is inevitable; hence it had better come from scientists who know what makes man operate and behave. He answers his humanist critics by commenting:

These people are in love with the mental apparatus. They like to believe in free will, and accident, for then they can get credit for controlling themselves. This is absurd. If behavior is determined by genetic endowment and environment-- and it definitely is--then man can take no credit for his own actions. Besides we are being controlled anyway--by parents, teachers, advertising, government--but in an inefficient manner by people who have no idea of what they are doing. The guidelines of control must be designed by the scientist.³⁷

Why Fromm has answered these propositions with relative silence is disappointing for his own theorems are stacked against formless enemies who quickly melt away before his arguments. Fromm, in fact, does not really pose his theories against the many schools

³⁶ Berkley Rice, "Skinner Agrees He is the Most Important Influence in Psychology", N.Y. Times Magazine, (March 17, 1958, p. 27).

³⁷ Ibid, p. 112. Undoubtedly the most controversial statement of Skinner's thesis is in his Golden Two (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1945), which unlike Huxley's Brave New World, is in serious earnest. cf. also S.F. Skinner "Freedom and the Control of Men," The American Scholar, (vol. 25, Winter 1955-56, pp. 47-65).



of social-psychology and psychoanalysis, save his comments on Freud. He also fails to cope with the discoveries of cultural anthropologists such as Mead and Malinowski whose findings, along with many others, may have either confirmed his own interpretation or forced him to change some of his positions. In short, Fromm's use of the interdisciplinary method has much to be desired in his picture of man's nature and his needs, especially since he professes to offer a scientific mosaic of man's nature and essential needs. Schaar sums up this aspect of Fromm in his comments on the basic psychic needs:

It is clear at the outset that Fromm did not find the five needs by following the method of his own proposed science of man, that is, by observing the reactions of men to varying situations and from these observations inferring the core qualities of the being who reacts. He found them in the pages of a number of philosophers and moralists and in his own brief analysis of the human condition. They are philosophical postulates, not empirical findings. That does not destroy the value of the constructs, but it does remove them to a realm beyond the reach of "merely" scientific and empirical criticism.²⁶

How then does Fromm define or describe the nature of man? Actually we have already seen his definition under many guises and his precise explanation comes as a rather anti-climactic event. Succinctly man's essence is a contradiction between his sharing in nature but also transcending it, by being endowed with reason and self-awareness. This is all very familiar territory and consequently the conclusions should be rather obvious.

I believe that man is the product of natural evolution; that he is part of nature and yet transcends

38 Schaar, op. cit., p. 52.



it, being endowed with reason and self awareness.

I believe that man's essence is ascertainable. However this essence is not a substance which characterizes man at all times through history. The essence of man consists in the above-mentioned contradiction inherent in his existence and this contradiction forces him to react in order to find a solution. Man cannot remain neutral and passive toward this existential dichotomy. By the very fact of being human he is asked a question by life: how to overcome the split between himself and the world outside of him in order to arrive at the experience of unity and oneness with his fellow man and with nature. Man has to answer this question every moment of his life.³⁹

The essence of man then is not only those existential dichotomies but also the question they pose and the search for a solution. Fromm concedes that there are many answers to this question, some of which are injurious to man but any answer is better than none at all. Every answer, however, must fulfill one condition: it must help man to overcome the sense of separateness and to gain a sense of union, of oneness, of belonging.⁴⁰

Man then is a creature of evolution; a species of contradiction whose existence poses a question which must be answered. He must seek the solution to his enigmas in society where there are many possibilities but only one true avenue. This search of man and the various ways he seeks his goal by orientating himself to the world and his neighbor shall be analyzed in the following chapters.

³⁹ Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 189. also The Heart of Man, pp. 116-7, 120-1.

⁴⁰ Erich Fromm, The Heart of Man, p. 121. cf. too Guyton Hammond, Man in Estrangement, (Nashville: University of Vanderbilt Press, 1955), pp. 39-40. Hammond contrasts the thought of Fromm with Tillich, but does more justice to the latter. His treatment of Fromm tends to be too brief and in need of more development.