



CHAPTER II

MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO SOCIETY

Character is not cut in marble; it is not some thing solid and uniterable. It is something living and changing and may become diseased as our bodies do.

--George Eliot

The great hope of society is individual character.

--William B. Channing

The study of men, their types of character and the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the social environment in which he lives, works and plays, dates back to ancient Greece to such writers as Pythagoras, Hippocrates and Plato. In the Republic one finds an interesting study of comparison between the kind of state and the type of character which resides in the state. The view that the state is the individual writ large was not merely a methodological tool for Plato. Although Plato's characterologies and typologies predate scientific techniques in psychology, notable modern advances in depth psychology and psycho-analysis, his attempts somewhat parallel Fromm's own endeavors in this area. Both outlined a view of human nature with its specific needs: Both believe men are social animals: Both strive to make men good and, finally, Plato and Fromm judge the moral quality of a state (or society) by the criterion of whether it allows man to fulfill



his true nature. In fact, Fromm continues the train of thought which began in Greece that the core of the related pattern of man, society and the state is a moral or ethical one. Fromm, and many political and social thinkers, are moralists who not only observe but also critically judge in highly moralistic language. The same society is the good society, the just man leads the happy life and the individual who finds meaningful actualization of his potential shall be the truly human person-- all of these descriptions abide in a normative labyrinth. Fromm not only refuses to accept reality as the unalterable fate of man but he also professes to carry the message of hopeful and humanistic new world.

In the first section we said that man's existence, according to Fromm, has certain inherent unchangeable contradictions which pose a question for man which he must solve. Man must relate himself to the world and to his fellow man; he must belong; he must construct some sort of union. It should be quite obvious that man for Fromm is essentially a social being and that this quest for solutions to his existential situation will take place in society. In other words, man will carry out his search for fulfillment of his nature in a social context. Furthermore, as we shall note later in this chapter, man can either regress (and become less human) or progress to new levels of humanity. Man can only develop and increase his human powers in a society which is truly conducive to his specific nature. If it is not harmonious, man will fall into an alienated, regressive state of being. Man can only perfect himself in the sane society; a mentally unbalanced society will create serious psychological



imbalance in its citizens.

It is our purpose in this chapter to examine the relationship of the individual to his society, the two basic orientations of man and the concept of social character with its effect on the consciousness of man. Fromm's system cannot be properly understood unless his view of man's nature and the impact of society upon the individual are amplified. Modern man is alienated and dehumanized because the society in which he functions is in an asymmetrical relationship, with the needs arising from his nature. The forces of contemporary society force man into choosing the path of regression which stifles and denies him the solution to his basic psychic requirements. Fromm puts society on trial and the verdict, for the most part, is guilty. Before reviewing the evidence he produces against contemporary society, we must analyze the theory of necessary interdependence between the individual and society with its consequences for man and his pursuit for solutions to life's questions.

First of all, Fromm does not talk about society with a normless vocabulary: societies are either healthy and hence good for man or they are unhealthy and therefore bad for man. Here again we see Fromm following in the footsteps of Spinoza who defines good as that which helps man while he describes evil as that which serves as a hindrance or impediment.⁴¹ Secondly, he disagrees with Freud on the function of society by contending that society has both a furthering and an inhibiting function;

⁴¹Spinoza, Ethics, (Part IV), pp. 187-190.



it can aid man or it can cripple him: Thirdly, he does not see mental health in terms of the individual adjusting to society but rather, on the contrary, he views it as society reworking itself to the needs of man. Finally, he believes that the criteria for judging the psychic condition of a society can be arrived at through an objective study of the human condition and the needs arising from it.

Regardless of whether we speak of 'mental health' or of the 'mature development' of the human race, the concept of mental health or of maturity is an objective one, arrived at by the examination of the 'human situation' and the human necessities and needs stemming from it. It follows that mental health cannot be defined in terms of the adjustment of the individual to his society, but, on the contrary, that it must be defined in terms of the adjustment of society to the needs of man, of its role in furthering or hindering the development of mental health. Whether or not the individual is healthy, is primarily not an individual matter, but depends on the structure of his society. A healthy society furthers man's capacity to love his fellow man, to work creatively, to develop his reason and objectivity, to have a sense of self which is based on the experience of his own productive powers. An unhealthy society is one which creates mutual hostility, mistrust, which transforms man into an instrument of use and exploitation for others, which deprives him of a sense of self, except inasmuch as he submits to others or becomes an automaton. Society can have both functions: It can further man's healthy development and it can hinder it; in fact most societies do both and the question is only to what degree and in what direction their positive and negative influence is exercised.⁴²

Thus the ancient debate of nature (physis) versus convention (nomos) has been revived, although Fromm addresses himself more to Freud's position than that of Callicles, Gorgias or

⁴²Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 71.



Thrsynachus. While Fromm concedes that society can (and does) frustrate man's nature, he still maintains that this is not to be misconstrued as its moral or primary function. For there should be a complementary relationship between nature and convention. Society's role is to further man's fins and needs, not to increase or diminish them. He rejects Callicles' philosophy that physis and nomos are mutually antagonistic and that the latter merely acts as a bridle or curb on man's basic appetites. Freud updates the radical sophist by claiming that civilization holds a rein on man's libido and causes man to repress his instincts. Er. Freud seems to offer us civilization but with the consequence of a mitigation of instincts and its consequent neurosis. Fromm, quite to the contrary, asserts that man needs civilization to unleash his full potential as a human being. The continuum of opinion starts with Callicles who never ceased to reject the restraints of convention and who called for its destruction to Freud who accepts civilization with its restraining forces upon the libido and who appears quite willing to live with lesser freedom to Fromm who rejects the necessity of antagonism between man's nature and society; this may be the case but this has been the effect of the few holding sway over the many.

I believe that society has both a furthering and an inhibiting function. Only in cooperation with others, and in the process of work, does man develop his powers... But at the same time, most societies until now have served the aim of the few who wanted to use the many. Hence they had to use their power to stultify and intimidate the many (and thus, indirectly, themselves) to prevent them from developing all their powers; for this reason society has always conflicted with humanity, with the universal norms valid for every man. Only when society's aim will



have become identical with the aims of humanity,
will society cease to cripple man and further
evil.⁴³

The above contention has several difficulties within its structure. First of all, can the history of all societies be depicted as the reign of the few over the powerless many? This kind of argument requires a great deal of proof and historical data. Even if one grants this thesis, why could not it be construed as the enlightened minority ruling for the good of all, as has been argued by Ortega Gasset?⁴⁴ Secondly is there any logical compulsion that the cause of humanity be identified with the many as Fromm seems to imply? Most certainly, the standard for judging governments and societies has been the commonweal but the problems inherent in that term--common good--have challenged political and social thinkers throughout the centuries and Fromm's use of the phrase, the needs of humanity does not clear up the difficulties.

Dr. Fromm constantly admonishes the reader not to think of the relationship between society and the individual as the former merely influencing the latter to a greater or lesser degree. The interaction goes far deeper in that the "whole personality of the average man is molded by the way people relate to each other and it is determined by the socio-economic and political structure of society."⁴⁵ The social order determines which

⁴³ Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 193.

⁴⁴ Jose Ortega Gasset, The Revolt of the Masses, (N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1957). Gasset's thesis of history runs counter to this interpretation of Fromm. According to Gasset; it is because enlightened minority has been in control that humanity has been served.

⁴⁵ Erich Fromm, Man For Himself, p. 75.



potentialities of man shall become manifest in that temporal place in history. All men have certain fundamental strivings which result from the total existence of man and not from the socio-economic or political arrangement. But society, "determines which of the limited number of potential passions are to become manifest or dominant."⁴⁶

History makes but in turn is made by man in the process of fulfilling his powers. Society permits certain traits to come to the fore while denying life to others. Man's energies are somehow shaped into specific forms.

But man is not only made by history--history is made by man. The solution of this seeming contradiction constituted the field of social psychology. Its task is to show not only how passions, desires, anxieties change and develop as a result of the social process, but also how man's energies thus shaped into specific forms in their turn become productive forces, molding the social process. Thus, for instance, the craving for fame and success and the drive to work are forces without which modern capitalism could not have developed; without these and a number of other human forces man would have lacked the impetus to act according to the social and economic requirements of the modern commercial and industrial system.⁴⁷

What man is at any given period in time is largely determined by the structure and values of the society into which he has been born. Men are not born as saints or criminals but rather have dispositions for good and evil. Their fate is determined to a great degree by those influences which mold and form the given dispositions. Of course the most important factor for the

⁴⁶Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 22. Also Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 27.

⁴⁷Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 23-29, 122.



development of the individual is the structure and value content of his particular society.⁴⁸

The immediate response to all of this is: Has Fromm freed man from instinctual determination only to shackle him with social determinism? Fromm's meaning and intention at first glance appears to vacillate between an encompassing social determinism and a realm of autonomy for man. The possible inferences of his ideas are not satisfactorily answered by claiming that history makes man and man makes history. Nor can one be totally happy with his contention that social forces mold the man who in turn proceeds to have an effect upon the social processes. Several commentators, notably, Will Herberg, Henry Kariel, Paul Kecskemeti and John Schaar, are quite critical of Fromm's thinking on this significant point in that they maintain that Fromm leaves the individual with no real defense against society if society determines not only what traits of man shall be exhibited but also greatly influence whether he will be good or evil.⁴⁹ If their criticisms are correct then Fromm has made man a plastic creature whose form and direction hangs dependent upon the socio-economic and political forces of his situation. This conclusion, if valid, has tremendous and serious consequences for both man and society, one of the most important being that man's

⁴⁸ Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 192.

⁴⁹ Although we shall refer to these men again in this paper the reader should refer to: 1. John Schaar, op. cit., p. 45. 2. Will Herberg, "The Incomprehensible Monster, Man," Commentary, (Vol. 23, March 1957), p. 280. 3. Henry Kariel, In Search of Authority, (Glencoe: Free Press), p. 106. 4. Paul Kecskemeti, op. cit., p. 177-8.



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freedom and, therefore, responsibility would be immensely reduced if not completely diminished.

An insight into this perplexity might be gained if we remember Fromm's admiration and adoption of Marxian economics and sociology. Marx's economic determinism receives the same type of criticism that we find thrown against Fromm's theories: man, according to critics of both men, is reduced to an object whose mode of life is completely caused by the forces of history, economics or society. In order to reach any tentative conclusion we must first consider Fromm's view of reality and then discuss the important phrase--determination of character. Basically, Fromm's system is a teleological one in which man constantly endeavors to find a proper home or environment. The primary end of this on-going process is the development of a sane, healthy society; and therefore sane, fulfilled men. Fromm does not permit either a transcendent cause of evolution nor an other worldly end; the terminus a quo and terminus ad quem are rooted in this life. Man has certain basic physiological and psychic needs which thrust him through history. These existential dichotomies cannot be eradicated but can be modified to some degree. However society determines the mode of existence for the individual, or in other words, it defines the form while the basic matter or essence of man remains. For example, man must, according to Fromm, relate to his fellow man which is the matter or undetermined need. Now there are numerous ways one might attempt to satisfy this need and by choosing one of the alternatives, whether it be sadism, masochism or one of true human love, a definite form has been given the need. Although the actualization of the potential may be



negative and regressive, it does provide an answer if not the right one. The essential point is that the crucial factor in the equation of choice is the structure and value of the society in which the person belongs.

The social process, by determining the mode of life of the individual, i.e., his relation to others and to work, molds his character structure; new ideological--religious, philosophical or political--result from and appeal to this changed character structure and thus intensify, satisfy, and stabilize it; the newly formed character traits in their turn become important factors in further economic development and influence the social process; while originally they have developed as a reaction to the threat of new economic forces, they slowly become productive forces furthering and intensifying the new economic development.⁵⁰

Fromm's man-society relation is neither a totally mechanistic one in which cause and effect operate in a singular direction nor is it quite a functional one of interdependent variables which interact as a going concern but rather it seems to be a blending of the two into a cyclical interaction of men and social forces. This circular complex of factors often obscures Fromm's ideas and accounts for the contention that he has unknowingly become a social determinist.⁵¹ Fromm struggles, albeit not always successfully, to maintain a balance between man and the molding pressures of his environment. He cannot, if he hopes to retain his optimism, reduce man to a mere puppet of society for he must account for the fact of social change.

⁵⁰ Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, p. 122.

⁵¹ A typical example of such a charge can be found in Schaar, op. cit., p. 79.



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While it is true that man can adapt himself to almost any condition, he is not a blank sheet of paper on which the culture writes its text. Needs like the striving for happiness, belonging, love and freedom are inherent in his nature. They are also the dynamic factors in the historical process. If a social order neglects or frustrates the basic human needs beyond a certain threshold, the members of such a society will try to change the social order so as to make it more suitable to their human needs. If this change is not possible, the outcome will, probably be that such a society will collapse, because of its lack of vitality and its destructiveness.⁵²

The clue to Fromm's manipulation of an essentialist's concept of man balanced against a quasi-social determinism is found in his adaptive theory of character, especially the function of what he calls the social character. Man for Fromm is basically a trans-instinctual creature who rises above the prison of his animal drives and, contrary to Freud, is primarily a social being:

Freud's essential principle is to look upon man as an entity, a closed system, endowed by nature with certain physiologically conditioned drives, and to interpret the development of his character as a reaction to satisfactions and frustrations of these drives; whereas, in our opinion, the fundamental approach to human personality is the understanding of man's relation to the world, to others, to nature, and to himself. We believe that man is primarily a social being, and not, as Freud assumes, primarily self-sufficient and only secondarily in need of others in order to satisfy his instinctual needs.⁵³

Consequently, psychology for Freud is basically a study of individual psychology while for Fromm it becomes social psychology. Their differences on the nature of psychology also lead to their

⁵² Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 87.

⁵³ Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 290.



divergent opinions on character formation. Fromm also differs with those of the behaviorist school who consider character traits as synonymous with behavior traits.⁵⁴ But it is in his disagreement with Freud that Fromm fully develops his ideas on character, especially the concept of social character and it is here where we can find a loose end in Fromm's circle.

The fundamental difference between Freud's and Fromm's views reside in the latter's undermining the importance of Freud's libido organization within man. Secondly, Fromm's theory of character not only implies an on-going direction for individuals but also contains moral overtones. Furthermore, as will be shown, the character structure of man determines how man feels, thinks and acts; if therefore, this structure is largely influenced by the social processes and if man is alienated, then the culprit is not individual sickness but rather a social illness (which, in effect, shall be Fromm's diagnosis).

Fromm cites the main differences between his theory and Freud's are that

the fundamental basis of character is not seen in various types of libido organization but in specific kinds of a person's relatedness to the world. In the process of living, man relates to the world (1) by acquiring and assimilating things, and (2) by relating himself to people (and himself). The former I shall call the process of assimilation; the latter that of socialization. Both forms of relatedness are 'open' and not, as with the animal, instinctively determined. Man can acquire things by receiving them or taking them

⁵⁴Schaar, op. cit., p. 80; c.f. Fromm, Man For Himself, p. 67.



from an outside source or by producing them through his own effort. But he must acquire and assimilate them in some fashion in order to satisfy his needs. Also man cannot live alone and unrelated to others. He has to associate with others for defense, for work, for sexual satisfaction, for play, for the upbringing of the young, for the transmission of knowledge and material possessions. But beyond that, it is necessary for him to be related to others, one with them, part of a group. Complete isolation is unbearable and incompatible with sanity. Again man can relate himself to others in various ways: he can love or hate, he can compete or co-operate; he can build a social system based on equality or authority, liberty or oppression; but he must be related in some fashion and the particular form of relatedness is expressive of his character.⁵⁵

The manner in which man gives concrete expression to assimilation and socialization is dependent on his character structure. These two processes are related and have a number of forms as indicated by the following schematic outline.

ASSIMILATION	SOCIALIZATION	
I. Nonproductive orientation		
a) Receiving..... (Accepting)	Masochistic (Loyalty)	}
b) Exploiting..... (Taking)	Sadistic (Authority)	
c) Hoarding..... (Preserving)	Destructive (Assertiveness)	}
d) Marketing..... (Exchanging)	Indifferent (Fairness)	
II. Productive orientation		
Working.....	Loving, Reasoning	56

⁵⁵Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, pp. 65-7.

⁵⁶Erich Fromm, Man For Himself, pp. 116-7.



for our purposes we shall concentrate upon the marketing and productive orientations since they, more than the others, contain the avenues which man chooses to fulfill their needs in contemporary society but we must first return to Fromm's definition of character.

Fromm defines character as "(relatively permanent) form in which human energy is canalized in the process of assimilation and socialization."⁵⁷ This definition is clarified by relating it to analytic psychology and Fromm then states that it is "the specific form in which human energy is shaped by the dynamic adaptation of human needs to the particular mode of existence of a given society," and then says that "character in its turn determines the thinking, feeling and acting of individuals" (emphasis mine).⁵⁸ Man, therefore, must establish a pattern of life which will fit into the type of social, economic and political organization in which he finds himself. Different kinds of social arrangements affect different types of characters. For instance, the character of a man living in a highly technological highly industrialized society will vary greatly with that of a person who lives in a tribal, less advanced (technologically speaking) environment. Fromm follows Marx in believing that the economic system is a primary factor in determining the character formation of individuals. Man must work and he must produce in order to preserve his existence. The kind of economic system under which he fulfills these necessities will play a predominant

⁵⁷Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 59.

⁵⁸Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, pp. 278,305.



role in shaping his character.

...Man must eat, drink, sleep, protect himself against enemies... In order to do all this he must work and produce. 'Work' however is nothing general or abstract. Work is always concrete work, i.e., a specific kind of work in a specific kind of economic system. A person may work as a slave in a feudal system, as a peasant in an Indian pueblo, as an independent businessman in capitalist society, as a salesgirl in a modern department store, as a worker on the endless belt of a big factory. These different kinds of work require entirely different personality traits and make for different kinds of relatedness to others. When man is born, the stage is set for him. He has to eat and drink, and therefore he has to work; and this means he has to work under the particular conditions and in the ways that are determined for him by the kind of society into which he is born.....

Thus the mode of life, as it is determined for the individual by the peculiarity of an economic system, becomes the primary factor in determining his whole character structure....(emphasis mine).⁵⁹

Man must satisfy his physiological requirements by working within a society with a definite mode of economic production. The individual must adapt himself to this socio-economic structure and in so doing character formation takes place. This adaptation is always a dynamic process and in its turn it produces certain traits in men which can affect the social complex. As seen above, Fromm weighs the economic mode of production as a important factor in molding of character. Is Fromm therefore a socio-economic determinist?

First of all we must remember that Fromm is not talking in terms of a strict cause-effect relationship between man and

⁵⁹Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, p. 323, especially note his footnote #7; c.f. also Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, (N.Y.: Unger, 1963), pp. 17-18.



his environment. He does not set up any one to one mechanistic social apparatus. His system takes into account the multiplicity of variables within any social order but it considers the economic structure a major co-efficient in the equation. Fromm rather explicitly stands opposed to the single factor explanation or cause in historical movements and argues that man is a unit composed of many interrelated aspects and influences.

While the early 19th century was still prone to see the causes of all evil in the lack of political freedom...., the socialists, especially the Marxist, stressed the significance of economic factors. They believed that the alienation of man results from his role as an object of exploitation and use. Thinkers like Tolstoy and Burckhardt stressed the spiritual and moral impoverishment as the cause of western man's decay; Freud believed that modern man's trouble was the overrepression of his instinctual drives and the resulting neurotic manifestations. But an explanation which analyzes one sector to the exclusion of others is unbalanced and thus wrong. The socio-economic, spiritual and psychological look at the same phenomena from different aspects and the very task of a theoretical analysis is to see how these different aspects are interrelated and how they interact.⁶⁰

Fromm, therefore, does not espouse economic determinism, if by that term one means a direct and singular causal relationship between the mode of production and the type of character. For while he believes economic forms are a vital factor, and that they operate as a major variable in the total social and cultural matrix, they are not the sole cause of character--development. In short, Fromm is not proposing any economic monism but rather suggests that the economic structure must be looked at as a

⁶⁰ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 237-9. See also Fromm, Escape From Freedom, pp. 304-327.



crucial factor in a pluralistic system which includes the psychological, ideological, political, and religious elements.

The genesis of the social character cannot be understood by referring to one single cause but by understanding the interaction of sociological and ideological factors. Inasmuch as economic factors are less easily changeable, they have a certain pre-dominance in this interplay. This does not mean that the drive for material gain is the only or even the most powerful motivating force in man. It does mean that the individual and society are primarily concerned with the task of survival and that only when survival is secured can they proceed to the satisfaction of other imperative human needs. The task of survival implies that man has to produce... the method of production in turn determines the social relations existing in a given society. It determines the mode and practice of life. However, religious, political and philosophical ideas are not purely secondary projective systems. While they are rooted in the social character, they in turn also determine, systematize and stabilize the social character.⁶¹

Fromm has shifted his focus to what he calls the social character and upon this idea rests the ultimate answer to the question of man's relationship to society. It is within the idea of social character, especially in the enumeration of its function, that the nucleus of Fromm's thought may be found. Thus far he has told us that society forms the character of its members in the dynamic process of the latter to the mode of the socio-economic structure. We have also seen that Fromm is not presenting a mechanistic cause-effect relationship even though his accentuation of the mode of production would seem to suggest a form of

⁶¹ Erich Fromm, The sane society, pp. 77-8; For a stimulating discussion of the relationship between economic and character, especially in regard to affluence and the American national character see David Potter, People of Plenty, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).



economic determinism. Furthermore we have argued that Fromm's system is cyclical-functional in that it is made up by a complex of interdependence of fluctuating variables. It remains for us now to explore the implications of the social character and the correlation between the demands of society and the nature of man and his needs.

What is the social character and what is its function according to Fromm?

1 (Fromm) refer in this concept to the nucleus of the character structure which is shared by most members of the same culture, in contrast to the individual character in which people belonging to the same culture differ from each other. The concept of social character is not a statistical concept in the sense that it is simply the sum total of character traits to be found in the majority of people in a given culture. It can be understood only in reference to its function....

Each society is structured and operates in certain ways which are necessitated by a number of objective conditions. These conditions include methods of production which in turn depend on raw materials, industrial technology, climate, size of population, political and geographical factors, cultural tradition.... There is not society in general, but only specific social structures which operate in different and ascertainable ways. Any society can exist only by operating within the framework of its particular structure. The members of the society and/or the various classes or status groups within it have to behave in such a way as to be able to function in the sense required by the social system. It is the function of the social character to shape the energies of the members of society in such a way that their behavior is not a matter of conscious decision as to whether or not to follow the social pattern, but one of wanting to act as they have to act and at the same time finding gratification in acting according to the requirements of that culture.... It is the social character's function to mold and channel human energy within a given society for the purpose of the continued functioning of this society.⁸²

⁸²Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, pp. 83-85; for



A modern industrialized society, for example, requires a certain kind of social character if it is to continue to operate. In other words, while character individualizes people from one another, the role of social character is one of a cohesive, common standardization. The core of the social character may be found by reviewing the social mores and conventions. Our example of a contemporary technological society, for instance, needs, according to Fromm, men who cooperate smoothly in groups, whose tastes can be easily influenced, who fit into the social machine without too much friction and who want to consume more and more.⁶³ Individuals, of course, deviate from this common pattern but the crucial factor for the existence of that particular society is that all its members share in the core, or social character, to some degree. A social structure based on the values of a warrior class will confront extinction if its youth were educated under non-violent auspices because those character traits necessary for its duration as a warrior oriented society, would not be inculcated in its members.

The primary function of the social character is to insure that the constituents of a given society do all that is necessary for the perpetuation of that particular social organization. Since the emphasis is placed on duty to society and not primarily to oneself, deviants from the prescribed code (written or otherwise)

slight variations of this concept consult Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 70-7. Escape from Freedom, pp. 30-3, 311. Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, p. 203. "Individual and Social Origins of Neurosis," C. Kluckhohn and H. Murray (ed.), Personality in Nature Society and Culture, (N.Y.: A. Knopf Co., 1949), p. 409.

⁶³ Erich Fromm, "Our Way of Life Makes Us Miserable," Saturday Evening Post, (July 27, 1964), p. 8.



present a danger to the social order.

Any society, in order to survive, must mold the character of its members in such a way that they want to do that they have to do: their social function must become internalized and transformed into something they feel driven to do, rather than something they are obliged to do. A society cannot permit deviation from this pattern, because if this 'social character' loses its coherence and firmness, many individuals would cease to act as they are expected to do and the survival of the society in its given form would be endangered. Societies of course differ in the rigidity with which they enforce their social character and the observation of the taboos for protecting this character but in all societies there are taboos, the violation of which results in ostracism.⁶⁴

Its content for all social arrangements is the specific structure of the society and the function of the individual in that social structure.⁶⁵ It provides the society with the all-important crucial substance. A word of caution must be inserted at this point: the social character results from the dynamic adaptation of human nature to the structure of society; therefore changing social conditions result in changes of the social character. Fromm cautions his readers about viewing this interrelationship as a static condition. He considers static adaptation

⁶⁴Erich Fromm, Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, p. 103. The political implications of this concept are obvious but pregnant with meaning; for any comparisons between what might be loosely termed the open, pluralistic society and the closed, totalitarian societies. While both strive to obtain adherence and obedience, the methods vary radically. Many studies have been made but the following merit special attention. Zvezdel Barbu, Democracy and Dictatorship, (New York: Grove Press, 1950). Robert J. Milton, Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism, (N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1953); c.f. Part 3, Chap. 13, pp. 403-450. A. Brezinezinski and W. Huntington Political Power U.S.A./U.S.S.R., (N.Y.: Viking Press, 1965).

⁶⁵Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 89.



as one which leaves the whole character unchanged and implies only the adoption of a new habit. This type of adaptation does not arouse any new drives or character traits e.g. Chinese person eating with a western knife and fork.⁶⁶ Dynamic adaptation, however, has far more serious consequences:

By dynamic adaptation we refer to the kind of adaptation that occurs, e.g., when a boy submits to the commands of his strict and threatening father--being too much afraid of him to do otherwise and becomes a 'good boy'. While he adapts himself to the necessities of the situation, something happens in him. He may develop an intense hostility against his father, which he represses.... This repressed hostility, however, though not manifest is a dynamic factor in his character structure. It may create new anxieties and thus lead to still deeper submission; it may set up a vague defiance, directed against no one in particular but rather toward life in general. Every neurosis is an example of this dynamic adaptation.... (Erich Fromm, p. 31)

We have returned to Fromm's circular dialectic: Man adjusts to social conditions but in so doing creates new forces which affect the structure, altering it, and so on ad infinitum. In fact the social character is an intermediary force between the socio-economic structure and the ideas and ideals prevalent in a specific society; "it is the intermediary in both directions, from the economic basis to the ideas and from the ideas to the economic basis;" or in other words, "ideology and culture are rooted in the social character; the social character itself is molded by the mode of existence of a given society; and that in turn the dominant character traits become productive forces shaping

⁶⁶Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, p. 30.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 31.



the social processes.⁶⁸

Before commenting upon the concepts of character, social character and before we attempt to summarize the relationship of the individual and society (which should be obvious at this point), one further aspect of social character must be mentioned. We have already seen that man must be related to his fellow man in some way and that according to Fromm man cannot bear to be separated from his peers. In light of this, it follows that acting in tune with the norms and conventions of a social order (i.e., acting according to one's social character) means that the person has a bond of union with his fellowmen in that society. Everyone lives by the rules of the game. Staying within the boundaries of the mores affords one a sense of security and gives the feeling that one's actions make sense. Deviancy threatens not only the rhythm of social order but its very existence. Not only is deviant behavior or action verboten but also any ideas, thoughts or emotions which might be contrary to the patterns of life of that culture; therefore a person who contemplates "dangerous" thoughts must either stifle them or face the frightening prospect of ostracism. This social pressure operates on two levels: the conscious and the unconscious.

If individuals are to desire to act as they must in a particular society, then thoughts and experiences which run counter to this functioning must be prevented. Not only is the individual forbidden to act on these impulses, in most cases they cannot even be allowed to enter his conscious awareness. Such thoughts and experiences must be repressed. The individual permits himself to be aware of

⁶⁸ Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, pp. 93-4.
Also Fromm, Escape from Freedom, pp. 324-5.



thought or feelings, which are incompatible with the patterns of his culture and hence he is forced to repress them. To defy the culture is to run the risk of isolation and ostracism, a situation which for most men is unbearable.⁶⁹

We are rapidly approaching the heart of the matter in the interrelations between man and society. In his analysis of the effect of the social character on the actions of man, especially in regard to deviancy and ostracism, and, most notably, his dissection of the conscious and unconscious, Fromm reaches the quintessence of his thesis. This part of his work also unlocks the answer to the questions posed at the outset of this chapter: how society affects the individual.

The individual cannot permit himself to be aware of thoughts or feelings which are incompatible with the patterns of his culture and hence he is forced to repress them. Normally speaking, then, what is unconscious and what is conscious depends on the structure of society and on the patterns of feelings and thought it produces. As to the contents of the unconscious, no generalization is possible. But one statement can be made: it always represents the whole man, with all his potentialities for darkness and light; it always contains the basis for the different answers which man is capable of giving to the question which existence poses...man in any culture has all the potentialities; he is the archaic man, the beast of prey, the cannibal, the murderer and he is the being with the capacity for reason, love and justice. The content of the unconscious is neither good nor evil, the rational nor the irrational; it is both;

⁶⁹ Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 73; Also consult Richard Snyder and H.H. Wilson (ed.), *The Roots of Political Behavior*, (N.Y.: American Book Co., 1949), p. 3, 13, 14; Wheelis, *op. cit.*, p. 85; finally but perhaps most importantly, the reader should confer David Reisman, *The Lonely Crowd*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960). The character types and their relationship to society closely follow Fromm's development; in fact both men have an undisguised admiration for each and express an open mutual debt.



it is all that is human. The unconscious is the whole man minus that part of man which corresponds to his society. Consciousness represents social man, the accidental limitations set by the historical situation into which an individual is thrown.⁷⁰

The impact of society upon the existence of an individual in terms of both his external activities and his thought and motivational processes, assumes a prodigious importance for the fate of man. We have already remarked that man because of the uniqueness of his nature must find a new orientation with the world and with his neighbor to replace the original harmony broken by the emergence of reason and freedom. This need for a orientation exists on two levels: the most fundamental need is to have some frame of orientation even if illusory; on the second level there is a need to be in communion with reality by use of reason.⁷¹ The immediate deduction from this premise is that one can establish a relation to all that is not him (and with himself) that is subjectively satisfying, but contrary to the objective requirements of his nature. For example, many people in seeking a union with others totally immerse themselves in a group which, because of its all-inclusive demands upon its membership, results in the loss of personal identity. Man's existence confronts him with an existential problem which he must answer in one of two ways:

The question is always the same. However there are several answers, or basically, there are only two answers. One is to overcome separateness

⁷⁰Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, pp. 136-9; Fromm, Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, pp. 105-6.

⁷¹Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 64-5.



and to find unity by regression to the state of unity which existed before awareness ever arose, that is, before man was born. The other answer is to be fully born, to develop one's awareness, one's reason, one's capacity to love, to such a point that one transcends one's own egocentric involvement and arrives at a new harmony, at a new oneness with the world.⁷²

In short, man can either regress or he can elect to progress by using his unique human powers. He must satisfy not only his physiological needs but, more importantly, he must discover a solution to the basic psychic demands of his nature. Even if he were to satiate the former needs in a relatively complete manner, he would still remain the eternal seeker until he addressed himself to those needs rooted in his very essence.

Because man must adjust himself to the form of the outside situation, the kind of society becomes crucial to his maturation as a human being. Society determines not only how man shall act but how and what they can think or be aware of hence, determining the content of consciousness. Society requires both a social character and a social consciousness (or unconsciousness): One man or a whole group of men may be compelled to repress certain desires, ideas or thoughts because they may be incompatible with the mode of their social order. But repression does not mean destruction or elimination of those ideas; rather although the repressed thoughts are removed from the conscious awareness, they continue to operate and exercise a profound influence upon the person even though he is not aware of it. More dangerously, the repression of the awareness of facts must be supplemented by

⁷² Erich Fromm, Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, p. 27.
From ..., Beyond the Chains of Illusion, pp. 157-190.



the acceptance of many fictions which serve to fill the gaps which result when we refuse to see the realities around us: "If a person in a given society is not able to see the social reality and instead fills his mind with fictions, his capacity to see the individual reality with regard to himself, his family, his friends, is also limited. He lives in a state of half-awakenedness, ready to receive suggestions from all sides and to believe the fictions suggested to him are the truth."⁷³

The social character and the social consciousness are even more effective for they possess the threat of social isolation and ostracism--which strikes at the deepest need in man--to desire to be with others. A person may have to compromise himself in order to remain a part of the group but this concession is not merely one of an idea but rather goes to the very core of one's humanity. Societies acquire a life and character structure which prompt their members to believe that the mode in which they exist is natural and inevitable. They find it extremely difficult (if not impossible) to see other possibilities and usually have the belief that a basic change in their mode of existence would herald the end of their society.⁷⁴

Throughout the entire discussion of the demands of society runs the thread that these social requisitions may be in opposition to what man's real needs may be; consequently one may very well be a proper functioning member of a society but yet not

⁷³ Erich Fromm, Man For Himself, p. 229; Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, p. 104; Beyond the Chains of Illusion, pp. 95, 99, 135, 141-2.

⁷⁴ Erich Fromm, May Man Prevail, p. 3, 18.



attain the fulness of his being. This is precisely Fromm's point in saying that man is not only a member of society but also a member of the human race, i.e., he has needs which transcend the demands of a particular social organization, which structure might very well inhibit his growth. This is what Fromm means by declaring that society can further man's development or it can stifle it or do both. If the society is founded on principles or a mode of life incongruent with man's existential maturity and germination, then the individual will find it extremely difficult, if not practically impossible, to choose the path of progression. A sane or well balanced society, therefore, is one which "corresponds to the needs of man--not necessarily to what he feels to be his needs...but to what his needs are objectively, as they can be ascertained by the study of man(emphasis Fromm's)."⁷⁵ In most societies there is a discrepancy between the aims of the smooth functioning of society and the full development of the individual.

In summary, man has certain physiological and psychic needs which are the result of his unique being. His existence poses a question which man must endeavor to answer; he must seek a solution to the dichotomies inherent in his nature. There are two avenues open to man: progression or regression. Society influences the outcome of this pursuit in that man must adapt himself to the aims, goals and structure of the social order.

Once the primary bonds which gave security to the individual are severed, once the individual faces the world outside of himself as a completely

⁷⁵Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 23.



separate entity, two courses are open to him since he has to overcome the unbearable state of powerlessness and aloneness. In the course he can progress to 'positive freedom'; he can relate himself consciously to the world in love and work in the genuine expression of his emotional, sensitive and intellectual capacities.... The other course open to him is to fall back and to live up his freedom and to try to overcome his aloneness by eliminating the gap that has arisen between his individual self and the world. It is also characterized by the more or less complete surrender of individuality and the integrity of self. Thus it is not a solution which leads to happiness and positive freedom; it is, in principle, a solution which is to be found in all neurotic phenomena. It assuages an unbearable anxiety and makes life possible by avoiding panic; yet it does not solve the underlying problem and is paid for by a kind of life that often consists only of automatic or compulsive activities.⁷⁰

The kind of society constitutes the crucial, pivotal factor in which direction man ultimately selects as a solution to the questions posed by his existence. The pattern and organization of the social order strongly predisposes whether a person will assimilate and socialize in a productive (progressive) or non-productive (regressive) manner.

Fromm reaches his finest moments in this aspect of his work. His analysis of character, not only the social character, as well as society's influence on the consciousness, are brilliantly perceptive, albeit not without difficulties, as we shall soon note. Certainly no attempt can be made to understand why Fromm insists contemporary society for alienating man until he comprehends to some degree Fromm's theories of the interaction, and mutual influence of man and specific social structures. Above all else, Fromm stands as a moral reformer who calls for a re-

⁷⁰ Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom, p. 141-2.



evaluation of society, its trends, goals and values. This combination of the empirical with the etirical, however, often became the source of problems for his thesis and some of its postulates.

First of all there remains a residue of ambiguity and vagueness in his expositions of society's effect on the individual who in the process of adapting builds new social forms. For although he rejects monistic explanations of history, his own development has the appearance of falling precisely into that category, especially when he discusses changes in economic organization. His treatment of capitalism as the product of a middle class threatened by the decline of feudalism understates the complexities of history. Furthermore why did history move in this direction rather than another for certainly capitalism need not have been the only possible conclusion? Similarly, his use of the word determination tends to be loose and often misleading. There is a great gulf in meaning between the connotation of the terms "influence" and "determine" which Fromm seems to disregard. If the individual and the forces of society (ideological, political, social, economic, religious) all perform specific functions, it makes a difference if this interrelationship is cause-effect or one of variable interdependence. Fromm's oscillation on this point often dulls the sharpness of his points.

Fromm's comments on the possible conflict between the norms of a society and the principles of humanity is well taken but he does not realize that it rests on the assumption of a universal man. Man's requirements of love, productive work and



freedom have cultural components whose relationship to any trans-ethnic societies may be closer than Fromm suspects. Can we simply equate universal man with the cosmopolitan? Fromm writes as if the universal values were a fact of reality rather than an ethical postulate; in short he assumes the existence of some sort of natural law without realizing the difficulties inherent in holding that position. He confuses the "is" and the "ought" and acts as if the result were an empirical fact; the social scientist often plays the role of moral crusader without realizing that he has changed his academic clothes. To tell us that society must adjust itself to the true needs of man brings us no closer to practical reform until the latter are brought into better focus.

This discussion of deviant behavior and the necessity of society to have a cohesive ethic contains the germ of several important insights but it unfortunately remains relatively incomplete by not treating the various blends of societies and methods of obtaining the necessary consensus. A student of this phenomena might have desired a continuum ranging from an "open" society to a closed tightly knit "totalitarian" system. By contrasting these various social systems Fromm might have separated those techniques which are desirable and those which are repugnant to man. One further point--Fromm implies that once the demands of society are identical to the real needs of man the friction between the two ceases to exist. He has passed beyond the realm of social science and has drifted up into the effervescent atmosphere of utopia.

Despite these uncertainties, Fromm's treatment of man in



society ranks as one of the best elements in his analytic system. Fromm provides us with the bridge between his view of man and his picture of the automation of contemporary society. It remains for us in the next chapter to study how modern technological society alienates and dehumanizes the individual.



CHAPTER III

MODERN SOCIETY ON TRIAL

The production of too many useful things
results in too many useless people.

--Karl Marx

Machines should work;

People should think

--IBM slogan

And they bowed down and prayed
to the neon gods they made.

--Paul Simon

Erich Fromm combines the roles of a doctor, social scientist and a judge in his examination and analysis of man in contemporary society. He believes that modern man suffers from lethal doses of alienation, conformism and loss of identity and vigorously contends that the social order has made him so. The productive, loving, happily well adjusted person cannot exist in today's technological vortex because the socio-economic and the political milieu thwarts true self discovery and expression. The abstract theories of the absurd have been actualized and objectified in the realities of everyday life. Fromm puts modern society on trial and the jury of his research shouts guilty on all charges. Dr. Fromm clearly belongs to the alarmist school of social observers, who claim that man, if certain changes are not made, confronts the twilight of meaningful existence.



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There is no equivocation in his thesis that man is living through a crisis, the outcome of which could very well entail tragic proportions.

While the majority of people living in the West do not consciously feel as if they were living through a crisis of Western culture (probably never have the majority of people in a radically critical situation been aware of the crisis) there is agreement, at least among a number of critical observers, as to the existence and the nature of this crisis. It is the crisis which has been described as 'malaise', 'ennui', 'mal du siècle', the deadening of life, the automatization of man, his alienation from himself, from his fellow man and from nature. Man has followed rationalism to the point where rationalism has transformed itself into utter rationality. Since Descartes, man has increasingly split thought from affect; thought alone is considered rational--affect by its very nature, irrational; the person I, has been split off into an intellect, which constitutes myself and which is to control nature as it is to control nature. Control by intellect over nature and the production of more and more things, become the paramount aims of life. In this process man has transformed himself into a thing, life has become subordinated to property, 'to be' is subordinated by 'to have'. While the roots of Western culture, both Greek and Hebrew, considered the aim of life the perfection of man, modern man is concerned with the perfection of things and the knowledge of how to make them. Western man is in a state of schizoid inability to experience affect, hence he is anxious, depressed and desperate. He still pays lip service to the aims of happiness, individualism, initiative--but actually he has no aim. Ask him what he is living for, what is the aim of all his strivings and he will be embarrassed. Some may say they live for family, others 'to have fun', still others, to make money, but in reality nobody knows what he is living for: he has no goal, except the wish to escape insecurity and aloneness.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Erich Fromm, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 74-9. Some of these observers can be found in the bibliography which is in fact merely an indication of the library of books on this subject.



In short, Fromm depicts modern man as drifting in a rudderless boat caught within a whirlpool of meaninglessness. Man feels terrorized by the uncertainty, inconsistencies, the precariousness and the void of his world.

As Fromm has indicated, there is much agreement among certain groups of people that western culture lingers in the throes of a serious disease whose infectious germs permeate through the entire system. Terms such as "mass society," the power structure, "the establishment" and "identity crisis" are used frequently if not always with any degree of accuracy. The point of opinion runs the spectrum from philosophers such as Marcel Jaspers, trend or lecture to the romantic rhetoric of the protest movements of the so-called New Left. Many agree that something is amiss but its meaning, cause or possible consequences are the topics of heated debate. Most of these social commentators, however, have two things in common: they rarely talk or write in moderate tones and most view modern society in the rapid process of serious decay albeit they may disagree on the cause of this erosion.⁷³

⁷³cf. William Kornhauser, The Politics of Mass Society, (N.Y.: Free Press, 1959). This book ranks among the most lucid discussions of the phenomena and content of mass society. His comparison of societies as well as his differentiation between the aristocratic and democratic meritist is exceedingly helpful. However, this book requires supplementation in the area of the cultural variables for northwestern remains focused on the political realm for the most part. Another useful introduction into this field can be found in Bernard Rosenberg, Israel Deaver, P.M. Newton (eds.), Mass Society in Crisis, (New York: Macmillan, 1954), and Henrik Ronsbo, Varieties of Modern Social Theory, (New York: Basic Books, 1963).



The majority of these analysts center their attention upon the concept of alienation and its effects for modern man. In other words, they believe that the individual in today's complex societies cannot be himself and that he becomes estranged from not only himself but also his neighbor and the world about him. Man is a stranger in the world he has fashioned through his own efforts. It is not within the scope or competence of this paper, much less this one chapter, to deal with all the theories of alienation, its causes and effects, nor can we attempt an exhaustive analysis of contemporary society with its historical roots and potential for the future; but rather we shall try to select those aspects of modern society which Fromm feels have the most impact upon man, especially in regard to the phenomenon of alienation and the construct of what he calls the automation. We shall first allow Fromm to present the overview change and description of modern times and then we shall audit the evidence he offers to prove his case. Dr. Fromm has condemned society for not providing the proper environment in which man can truly fulfill himself. It is our role to review the trial, Fromm's assessment of the evidence and the validity of his verdict.

What does Fromm mean by the term alienation? Does his definition avoid the difficulty of painting so broadly that almost anything might be included within the frame? How does he arrive at his particular definition and does it afford us with a useful methodological tool which we might employ in studying alienation both in terms of the individual and of a society? How does his description of alienation compare with



those of other contemporary social scientists?

Fromm describes alienation in various ways but his two basic definitions encompass the core of his meaning:

by alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the center of his own acts--but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced; with the senses and with common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside productively.⁷⁹

The other definition may be found in Fromm's treatment of the humanistic elements of Marx's thought in which he accepts the Marxian interpretation of the alienated mode of existence.

Alienation or estrangement (for Marx) means that man does not experience himself as the acting agent in his world, but that the world (nature and others, and he himself) remain alien to him. They stand above and against him as objects, even though they may be objects of his own creation. Alienation is essentially experiencing the world and oneself passively, receptively, as the subject separated from the object.⁸⁰

The primary theme that Fromm asserts is that an alienated man has lost touch with not only that which exists outside of him but also is a stranger to himself. He has become objectified, that is, he has been transformed into an object or a thing.

⁷⁹ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 111.

⁸⁰ Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, p. 44. For similar definitions on this theme consult Paul Edwards (ed.), The Encyclopedia of Philosophy Vol. 1, (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1957), pp. 76-81.



We have already commented in our discussion of man's nature that the concept of alienation only makes sense if one posits some representation of what constitutes human nature. If man is estranged from himself, then logically this self must be something more than an idea or mental fabrication. The alienated person has lost himself in the process of life, or in other words, in the process of becoming or fulfilling himself, the alienated man has gone astray. The real self (or nature) has been usurped by an artificial pretender and this usurpation conficts a heavy psychological burden upon the individual. Unfortunately fromm has offered us a rather nebulous and highly debatable image of man's nature. Consequently any theory based on this indistinct and uncertain image of man has a questionable foundation and also certain quandaries.

One of these difficulties stems from the definition itself and its broad application. Definitions are several important functions which must be realized if they are to serve as viable methodological implemnts. One of the primary obligations of a definition is that it should narrow or circumscribe the area under discussion: it should separate and differentiate so that superfluous or excessive material does not obfuscate the issues. The term itself must mirror in some way the phenomena it purports or claims to describe or define; they must have some sort of phenomenological consistency. In short, in defining any situation there is a latent but crucial dilemma; the relation between the conceptual phase and the linguistic reiterations into verbal reality. In the developmental process from observation through description, classification and on



through to explanation and, possibly, prediction, the delicate points are often obscured by the types of words chosen to depict what is happening. One of the covert hindrances to any definition of contemporary movements such as alienation is the emotional and psychological environment which often encourages a priori statements to pose as proven laws. Fromm's defining of alienation encounters all of these problems and in fact his meaning remains trapped between a subjective, descriptive use of the term and an objective, diagnostic one: "Sometimes it is used to describe felt human misery and other times, it is postulated to explain unfelt anxiety and discontent."⁸¹

Because it is so important that we reach an operational understanding of what Fromm means and implies in his delineation and disposition of this term, we must enlist the services of other social scientists to illuminate the sense, the spirit or tenor of his interpretation. Fromm's handling suffers not only from a degree of ambiguity but also from a certain amount of presumption concerning the reader's personal knowledge and awareness which often leads him to underdevelop one area while overstressing another. By lightening the shaded areas in Fromm's picture we can obtain a more desirable perspective of his object.

Frederick Weiss sees alienation as the result of a central conflict between self realization and self idealization:

This central conflict is more or less identical with the existential conflict between being and becoming more and more oneself, gaining a growing sense of identity in freedom of choice and commitment and escaping further from oneself, from the burden of identity and commitment

⁸¹Schaar, op. cit., p. 204.



this subjective state is a delusive gloss which covers his objective condition. Fromm, therefore, has it both ways: a person can feel alienated and experience all the subjective consequences of that mode of being or he can feel comfortably satisfied although, in fact the myriad of activity which encompasses his life deflects his consciousness from the alienating factors caused by his existence. The unawareness of the latter, however, does not immunize the person from the effects of alienation; he simply deceives himself through the pursuit of what he erroneously conceives to be happiness and self-fulfillment. In short, his subjective strivings numb or mediate the psychological malaise of his objective condition of aloneness.

Our civilization offers many pallatives which help people to be consciously unaware of their aloneness: first of all the strict routine of bureaucratized, mechanical work, which helps people to remain unaware of their most fundamental human desires, of the longing for transcendence and unity. In as much as this routine alone does not succeed in this, man overcomes his unconscious despair by the amusement industry; furthermore by the satisfaction of buying ever new things and soon exchanging them for others..... Ken's happiness today consists in "having fun." Having fun lies in the satisfaction of consuming and "taking in commodities, sights, food, drinks, cigarettes, people, lectures, books, movies--all are consumed and swallowed. The world is one great object for our appetite, a big apple, a big battle, a big breast; we are sucklers, the eternally expectant ones, the hopeful ones and the eternally disappointed ones.⁸⁴

This kind of activity, then, serves as a mode of repression whereby a person can suppress awareness of his existential situation by submitting himself to a specific if not always rational pattern

⁸⁴Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving, p. 73; also Fromm, "Our Way of Life Makes Us Miserable," Saturday Evening Post, (July 25, 1964), pp. 8-10.



of life. However, since Fromm recognizes the role of the unconscious in motivation, this stifling of conscious awareness does not terminate the difficulties for man, but rather, it stages the drama on another level.

Thus far we have seen that the fundamental components in Fromm's concept of alienation are the deification of man, the separation between self and non-self, and the conscious-unconscious aspects of awareness. This last element would seem to lead to the conclusion that alienation as envisioned by Fromm pervades the totality of man's life, for even if a person disclaims the contention that he operates as an estranged individual and even if he points to his many roles or functions in society, one can always by employing Fromm's construct search for the unconscious motivational or causal origins of his activeness.

The dilemmas that confront the analyst because of this view can prove to be critically influential to his method and findings of his research. "Taking in" (to use Fromm's phrase) a movie, a lecture or a book of itself does not indicate alienated behavior and thus if a person does so for stated reasons of relaxing, must the social scientist begin to probe the ambiguous and obscure domain of the unconscious in search of the true explanations? This does not mean that the unaware or unconscious aspect of human behavior be dismissed but as it is utilized by Fromm, the field of vision opens into an unmanageable panorama. Furthermore such a system permits Fromm not only to view research evidence or data from any perspective but also use it to support his particular thesis. Fromm does in fact maintain that alienation encompasses all of modern society.



Alienation as we find it in modern society is almost total; it pervades the relationship of man to his work, to the things he consumes, to the state, to his fellow man, and to himself. Man has created a world of man made things as never existed before. He has constructed a complicated social machine to administer the technical machine he built. Yet this whole creation of his stands over and above him. He does not feel himself as a creator and center but as the servant of a Golem, which his hands have built. The more powerful and gigantic the forces are which he unleashes, the more powerless he feels himself as a human being. He confronts himself with his own forces embodied in things he has created, alienated from himself. He is owned by his own creation and has lost ownership of himself.⁸⁵

The basic theme of this passage not only expresses Fromm's view of alienation in a capsule form but it also suggests a latent analogy, which we might label the Frankenstein effect. Contemporary man, like the tragic scientist in Mary Shelly's tale of horror, has produced a creature who terrorizes his maker. The Golem (or monster) threatens the psychological and physical well-being of its creator while man's relationship to the world about him is radically disturbed. Dr. Frankenstein finally went mad and perished in trying to control his monster; Dr. Fromm apparently believes that men today must either again become master or sovereign of his life or suffer the fate of the fictional scientist. In both cases human intelligence and genius invented instruments that were designed for service but because of human failings were transformed into objects of worship.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 115 and Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 62.

⁸⁶ Fromm does not mention Shelly's novel in his works but it seemed to me to be a logical outgrowth of his theories. As in all analogies or comparisons, the reader should look for similarities which might aid in comprehension--not exact identities.



When discussing man's situation in the 20th century, Fromm writes with few, if any, qualifications on his conclusions. This tendency to fit everything into a comprehensive pattern betrays Fromm in his employment of supporting evidence for his theories. First of all, even though very little empirical research has been done in the area of alienation and its possible influences upon an entire society, Fromm acts as if it were an undeniable and dogmatic truth, rather than a tentative hypothesis which requires a great deal more study and verification.⁸⁷ The evidence found in most treatments should lead a diagnostician to limit seriously his opinions until the fragmentary pieces of data are supplemented by more research and investigation. Fromm's reforming humanism calls upon the authority of such men as Tolstoy, Spinoza, Marx, Schweitzer, Tawney, Mumford and Einstein but one must remember Dewey's admonition to the effect that the truth of a proposition does not depend upon the people who hold it to be so. Schaar makes an incisive and important point concerning this quoting of famous thinkers by noting that "there is a difference between evidence and illustration."⁸⁸ How Fromm confuses the two can best be seen by continuing in his development of the automaton in a technological society for here he not only mistakes example for data but also unfolds and amplifies the meaning of alienation.

⁸⁷ For one attempt at a quantified concept see Gwynn Nettler, "A Measure of Alienation," American Sociological Review, vol. 22, (December, 1957), pp. 670-677.

⁸⁸ John Schaar, op. cit., p. 206.



As stated earlier Fromm believes that modern man is alienated from himself, from his fellow man and from nature. It is worthwhile to recall that in the preceding chapter we saw that a specific type of society requires a distinctive kind of character which Fromm termed the social character. We also know that this character according to Fromm may not reflect the true nature and needs of the individual but that it may contradict and stifle true fulfillment of self thus having severe psychic ramifications. Every society, therefore, requires a certain kind of man in order that it might function smoothly. What kind of man does our society need--Fromm's response is both unequivocal and quite familiar:

It needs men who cooperate easily in large groups, who want to consume more and more and whose tastes are standardized and can be easily influenced and anticipated. It needs men who feel free and independent, not subject to any authority or principle or conscience, yet are willing to be commanded to do what is expected, to fit into the social machine without force, led without leaders, be prompted without an aim, except the aim to be on the move, to function, to go ahead. This kind of man modern industrialism has succeeded in producing; he is the automaton, the alienated man. He is alienated in the sense that his actions and his own forces have become estranged from him; they stand above and against him and rule him rather than being ruled by him. His life forces have been transformed into things and institutions which have become idols. They are experienced not as the result of man's own efforts but as something apart from him, which he worships and to which he submits. Alienated man bows down before the works of his own hands. His idols represent his own life forces in an alienated form. Man experiences himself not as the active bearer of his own forces and riches but as an impoverished "thing" dependent on other things outside of himself into which he has projected his living substance.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Erich Fromm, "The Human Condition," The Dogma of Christ



Alienation, then, is a form of idolatry in which man worships the golden calf of his own fashioning. This comparison of alienation to idol worship, especially its insistence that man bows down before his own powers (albeit in a distorted form), can be traced back to Feuerbach's The Essence of Christianity in which he argues that man applies his own qualities to a supposed being outside of himself, calls this creature god and kneels down before him. The more man relies on this god, the less he retains his unique humanness. Fromm not only agrees with Feuerbach's basic tenet but has adopted it as one of the keystones for his own thesis.⁹⁰

Man's development of technology, like his use of reason, is a blessing as well as a curse. Machines, organization and the communications media have freed man from the physical burdens of the past, they have opened up heretofore unthinkable horizons and these technical advances have helped man control the environmental forces of nature. On the other hand, however, man has lost himself in his achievements; the brilliance of his accomplishments has crippled him. Technology has benefited man but not without terrible consequences for his mental condition:

and Other Essays, pp. 100-1; also Fromm, The Art of Loving, pp. 72-3. The Sane Society, pp. 24, 196. Confer also Harrison Brown, "The Challenge of Man's Future," Man in Contemporary Society, (N.Y., Columbia University Press, 1956), pp. 40-64.

⁹⁰ Although he does not mention Feuerbach directly in his books, Fromm admits that he has been influenced by him, especially by the cited work, The Essence of Christianity. Private Conversation, April 1, 1967, Duquesne University.



we find then that the countries in Europe which are among the most democratic, peaceful and prosperous ones, and the U.S., the most prosperous in the world, show the most severe symptoms of mental disturbance. The aim of the whole socio-economic development of the Western world is that of the materially comfortable life, relatively equal distribution of wealth, stable democracy and peace and the very countries which have come closest to this aim show the most severe signs of mental unbalance.⁹¹

The severe signs, mentioned by Fromm, are the statistics on homicides, suicides and alcoholics which he believes are indices of stability within a society, and although he does not openly build a cause-effect relationship between advanced technique and mental disturbances, his position becomes clear behind the not too obvious veil of a question:

Could it be that the middle-class life of prosperity, while satisfying our material needs leaves us with a feeling of intense boredom and that suicide and alcoholism are pathological ways of escape from this boredom? Could it be that these figures are a drastic illustration for the truth of the statement that 'man does not live by bread alone,' and that they show that modern civilization fails to satisfy profound needs in man?⁹²

Fromm's approach here exposes itself to the precariousness and vulnerability inherent in statistical inference. That there exists a relationship between advanced societies (technologically speaking) and severe mental disturbance must stand as a hypothesis which requires more careful and precise exploration? Before one can accept it as an undeniable fact of life. Fromm's vision of a highly technological society is blurred by his characteristic confusion of is and should and his tendency to overstate his premises. His theories parallel and continue

⁹¹ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 17-18.

⁹² Ibid., p. 19.



the ideas of Marx, Weber and Mannheim in that they all fear that society and man have become like the machines and technicians they have employed to better their material conditions.

...the dehumanizing element is technology. The mass society is a mechanical society. Society has become an apparatus. The machine impresses its style on man, makes life mathematical and precise.... the regulated, functional man emerges as a new type, hard and ruthless, a cog in the technological process.⁹³

Fromm's anxieties and apprehension about technology must not be construed as some sort of appeal for pre-industrial methods, although he does not make this very clear. What pre-occupation Fromm is what he believes to be the transformation of man into another kind of machine--the automaton. In building a world of gadgets and highly complex technical devices man has lost himself by allowing the pattern and mode of life to be fashioned by the creature and not the creator. Technology has usurped the mould and a new type of being has emerged:

In a bureaucratically organized and centralized industrialism, tastes are manipulated so that people consume rationally and in predictable and profitable directions. Their intelligence and character become standardized by the ever increasing role of tests which select the mediocre and unadventurous in preference to the original and the daring. Indeed, the bureaucratic--industrial civilization... has created a new type of man; he can be described as the organization man, as the automaton man and as homo consumens. He is, in addition, homo mechanicus; by this I mean gadget man, deeply attracted by all that is mechanical.⁹⁴

⁹³ Daniel Bell, The Age of Technology, (New York: Free Press, 1962), p. 24.

⁹⁴ Erich Fromm, The Heart of Man, pp. 57-61 also Fromm, Creators and Destroyers, Saturday Review (Jan., 1964), pp. 22-27.



The age of the machine, the benefits of organization and efficiency, the pleasures of affluence have exacted a terrible price--man's human qualities. Life assumes a mechanical dimension which stultifies the individual's opportunities for nurturing his potentialities for human development.

Our approach to life today becomes increasingly mechanical. Our main aim is to produce things and in the process of this idolatry of things we transform ourselves into commodities.... People have mechanical gadgets more than living beings. The approach to man is intellectually abstract. One is interested in people as objects, in their common properties, in the statistical rules of mass behavior.... All this goes together with the increasing role of bureaucratic methods. In giant centers of production, giant cities, giant countries, men are administered as if they were things; men and their administrators are transformed into things and they obey the law of things.⁹⁵

The above paragraph is typical of Fromm's analysis: partial insights overwhelmed by excessive generalizations. That people often treat one another as typologies rather than as unique individuals and that they enjoy the pleasures and comforts that come with gadgets cannot be denied; but this is not the same as claiming that people love machines more than other human beings. That we produce material goods is one thing; that we do so under the spell of some sort of idolatry is quite another matter. Furthermore that life contains a certain degree of routine and habit, especially in regard to the work process, is this necessarily bad? What is the proper balance between habit and spontaneity? How much routine is required or how much is dangerous for the individual and society? For Fromm routine-ization not only does not seem desirable but, quite the contrary,

⁹⁵ Erich Fromm, The Heart of Man, p. 50.



appears as distinctive to individual growth. He makes no distinctions as to what areas of man's lives are patterned by the pace of a technological society and the scope of such regimentation is all inclusive:

Man becomes a 9 to 5; he is part of the labor force.... He has little initiative, his tasks are prescribed by the organization of work; there is little difference between those high up on the ladder and those on the bottom. They must perform tasks prescribed by the whole structure of the organization at a prescribed speed and in a prescribed manner. Even the feelings are prescribed: cheerfulness, tolerance, reliability, ambition and an ability to get along with others without friction. Man is regimented in a similar, although not quite as drastic ways. Books are selected by book clubs, movies by the film and theater owners....the Sunday ride in the car, the television session, the card game, the social parties. From birth to death, from Monday to Monday, from morning to evening--all activities are regimented and prefabricated.⁹⁰

Modern industries in producing the goods demanded and required in contemporary society are founded upon the principles of specialization of tasks (division of labor), bureaucratization, centralization and impersonalization of role playing. Jobs tend not only to become highly specialized but also monotonous and extremely repetitive. Even if the gigantic corporations are broken down into separate production units, within each of these divisions the worker's lot remains essentially the same. His task encompasses a small part of the large whole which is not only the end product but also its planning, manufacture and sale or as Meniston has phrased it: 'most work is not only specialized in terms of the worker's total talents but it bears a highly abstract and distant relation to the final use of

⁹⁰ Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving, p. 11; Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 102.



the product.⁹⁷ The worker is merely a necessary cog in the productive process but his work provides him with more not with a meaningful activity in itself. Both the activity of work and its end product stand separated from the worker whose role has been reduced to a tolerated functionary, or a high-priced semi-robot.

The industrial worker spends his best energy for 7 or 8 hours a day in producing 'something.' He needs his work in order to make a living...he fulfills a small isolated function in a complicated and highly organized process of production and is never confronted with his product as a whole, at least not as a producer, but only as a consumer, provided he has the money to buy his product in a store. He is concerned neither with the whole product in its physical aspects nor with its wider economic and social aspects. He is put in a certain place, has to carry out a certain task but does not participate in the organization or management of the work. He is not interested nor does he know why one produces this, instead of another commodity--what relation it has to the needs of society as a whole....He is part of the machine rather than its master as an active agent. The machine, instead of being in his service to do work for him which once had to be performed by sheer physical energy, has become his master. Instead of the machine being the substitute for human energy, man has become a substitute for the machine. His work can be defined as the performance of acts which cannot yet be performed by machines. (emphasis Fromm's)⁹⁸

The spectre of Marx has not been laid to rest. The general state of alienation from work is not restricted to the Blue Collar worker but extends, according to Fromm, to the manager, the industrialist and the bureaucrat or administrator. These men are also divided into sections and departments but differ from the worker in that their sphere of activity is human

⁹⁷ Kenneth Keniston, "Alienation and the Decline of Utopia," The American Scholar, (vol. 29, Spring 1960), p. 167.

⁹⁸ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 105, 115, 161 also Escape From Freedom, p. 130.



manipulation, usually termed industrial management or personnel control. They must arrange and co-ordinate men in the most advantageous manner so that their firm can maximize its output and optimize its profits. They look upon the worker as a required skill to perform a certain task and not as an individual person.

Bureaucrats are specialists in the administration of things and men. Due to the bigness of the apparatus to be administered and the resulting abstractification, the bureaucrat's relationship to people is one of complete alienation. They, the people to be administered, are objects whom the bureaucrats consider neither with love or hate but completely impersonally; the manager bureaucrat must not feel, as far as his professional activity is concerned; he must manipulate people as though they were figures or things.⁹⁹

This manipulation of men should not be confused with any cruel or senseless tyranny by some sort of aristocracy for their own personal whims: Because of the needs and demands of society and because of the nature and size of the modern technological corporation, specialization, functionalization and personnel management are the logical consequences of the principles inherent in these complex and often perplexing techniques.

Fromm believes that the large organizations and institutions set the mode and manner of existence for individuals who must conform to this pattern if they are to fit into the flux and conduct of contemporary affairs. Charles De Carlo concurs with Fromm in his judgment concerning the power of the technological and highly bureaucratic organization over the type of

⁹⁹ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 116, 211.



life which man fashion under its aegis: "In the modern world it is the large human organizations which shape the destinies of our time and through or against which the individual must establish his roles."¹⁰⁰ Thus Fromm contends that the structure and dynamics of a society is greatly determined by the way it is organized to produce the goods it requires. Modern society is based upon a heavily technological and bureaucratic system whose primary goals are the efficient output of articles necessary not only for the basic needs of man but also for satisfaction of all his desires and wants. If society determines the social character and if, further, the mode of production greatly influences the form of society, it would seem that a specific orientation must be adopted by man so that he can fit into modern society. We have already seen that man in Fromm's picture has become a thing, some sort of automaton. This general outline narrows into what he classifies the marketing orientation of contemporary man. Man is not only a golem but also a commodity whose value and worth depends upon the demands of the market.

In this orientation (marketing), man experiences himself as a thing; to be employed successfully on the market. He does not experience himself as an active agent, as the bearer of human powers. He is alienated from these powers. His aim is to sell himself successfully on the market. His sense of self does not stem from his activity as a loving and thinking individual but from his socio-economic role....If you ask a man 'who are you,' he answers, 'I am a manufacturer,' 'I am a clerk,' 'I am a doctor'....This is the way he experiences himself, not as a man, with love, fear, convictions, doubts but as that

¹⁰⁰ Charles De Carlo, "Perspectives on Technology," in Eli Ginsberg (ed.), Technology and Social Change, (N.Y.: Columbia Press, 1964), p. 13.



abstraction, alienated from his real nature, which fulfills a certain function in the social system. His sense of value depends on his success: on whether he can sell himself favorably, whether he can make more of himself than he started out with, whether he is a success. His body, his mind, his soul are his capital and his task in life is to invest it favorably to make a profit of himself. Human qualities ... are transformed into commodities, into assets of the 'personality package,' conducive to a high price on the personality market.¹⁰¹

The entire thrust or emphasis of the market personality moves toward a salability to others so that the person undergoes a metamorphosis from subject to complete object dependent upon the judgment of external factors. The individual who adapts to society through the marketing orientation sells his self to the devil of current demands; he is transformed into a selfless prostitute who must surrender dignity for accommodation. In speaking of this theme Ashley Montagu feels that commercialism brutalizes man and debases his human dignity: "Commercialism has dehumanized and brutalized man; it has made a commodity of him to be manipulated and disposed of at ruthless whim."¹⁰² In saying that the marketing man must sell himself, Fromm does not mean that the person is offering his true or real self but quite the contrary, he is merely offering a package of traits which he thinks are desirable. Nor is skill or professional training a certain guarantee for success and accomplishment. For although these cannot be completely disregarded, they are subsidiary to the requisite collection of personality traits.

¹⁰¹ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 129; also Man for Himself, p. 67; Escape From Freedom, p. 140.

¹⁰² Ashley Montagu, The Humanization of Man, (N.Y. World Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 56-57.



It is true, our economic system could not function if people were not skilled in the particular work they have to perform and were gifted only with a pleasant personality. Even the best bedside manner and the most beautifully equipped office on Park Ave. would not make a New York doctor successful if he did not have a minimum of medical knowledge and skill. Even the most winning personality would not prevent a secretary from losing her job unless she could type reasonably fast. However if we ask what the respective weight of skill and personality as a condition for success is, we find that only in exceptional cases is success predominantly the result of skill and of certain other human qualities on the one hand and personality on the other hand as prerequisites for success varies, the 'personality factor' always plays a decisive role. Success depends largely on how well a person sells himself on the market, how well he gets his personality across, how 'nice' a 'package' he is; whether he is cheerful, sound, aggressive, reliable, ambitious.¹⁰³

The individual, therefore, loses his true self in his attempt to define the proper role for the market. This creates a dichotomy between the original self and the pseudo self which eventually results in the predominance of the latter. This pseudo self may be described as the aggregation and miscellany of roles which the person must possess and employ in the social and business context, or, as Fromm puts it, "it is only an agent who actually represents the role a person is supposed to play but who does so under the name of self."¹⁰⁴ What roles, characteristics or qualities the person requires rest not with one's own personal initiative but rather rely upon what he thinks other people are looking for at any particular time or for any specific purpose. The source of direction is not within the person; it comes from reading the signals transmitted from the

¹⁰³ Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, pp. 76-7.

¹⁰⁴ Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 229.



external stimuli'. Interchangeability of qualities, not a definite, specific case stands as the hallmark of this orientation; the individual must be capable of adapting to the environment if he hopes to 'survive.' The promise of the marketing outlook is 'peripneity, the lack of any specific quality which could not be subject to change, since any persistent trait of character might conflict some day with the requirements of the market."¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the market man requires an approval and an acceptance by others which surpasses what Fromm considers normal boundaries. It is on this last point that the marketing orientation begins to blend with the "other-directed type" portrayed in Reisman's The Lonely Crowd. Although it would be an error to assume that the two are identical, the similarities can be noted for our purposes. What is common to all 'other-directed' types, according to Reisman is

that their contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual....This source, of course, is internalized in the sense that dependence on it for guidance in life is implanted early. The goals toward which the other-directed person strives shift with that guidance; it is only the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to the signal from others that remain unaltered throughout life.his need for approval and direction from others goes beyond the reasons that lead most people in any era to care very much what others think of them. While all people want and need to be liked by some of the people some of the time, it is only the modern other-directed types who make this their chief source of direction and chief area of sensitivity.¹⁰⁶

Or as Rollo May graphically reported: "I am just a collection of mirrors, reflecting what everyone else expects of me."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 85.

¹⁰⁶David Reisman, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 72-3.

¹⁰⁷Rollo May, Man's Search For Himself, (N.Y.: J.W. Norton,



This plasticity and multiplicity of roles, the transmutation of self into a commodity, the arrangement of one's powers and abilities results in a serious crisis of identity for contemporary man. Identity for the market man is constituted by the sum total of roles that he manages to act out in trying to sell himself for successful profit. The inevitable consequence of the marketing orientation is the anxiety of the alienated. Lack of self and the effort to manufacture a self on a pivotal "radar" system produces a high degree of tension, apprehensiveness and psychic anguish. Individuals try to offset these symptoms of estrangement by their endeavor to attain security, to eliminate doubts and fears.

If the modern age has been rightly called the Age of Anxiety, it is primarily because of this anxiety engendered by the lack of self, inasmuch as "I am as you desire me - I am not, I am anxious, dependent on approval of others, content only in trying to please. ... the alienated person finds himself the problem by conforming. He feels that he must conform as far as possible to his fellow man. He is afraid that if he is to be approved of by others, he must conform, that he may not be approved of if he is different, to find himself in a minority, that he may be ostracized, threaten his sense of security. He is striving for limitless conformity. If he is not conforming, his sense for security produces in him a constant, though hidden, sense of inferiority. ... the alienation from the pattern, any criticism breeds fear and insecurity; one is always dependent on the approval of others. 103

Men become performers rather than parts which are written by external forces: they must either fill the lines or confront the psychological pains of rejection with indifference

1953), p. 14.

103 Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 173, 175, 181.



brings with it. A secure conformity replaces loneliness and anxiety but this trade demands a high price--the loss of self. Acceptance by others overrides all other considerations or values and it is this desire to fit in that guides the conduct of the automaton. Man neglects his own inner powers and true needs by trading the insecurity which usually arrives with individual growth and development for the seemingly secure womb of being part of the crowd. Rollo May, one of Fromm's former students, in discussing social acceptance and surrender of self looks at the problem in this light: "Social acceptance, being liked, has so much power because it holds the feelings of loneliness at bay. A person is surrounded with comfortable warmth; he is merged in the group...He temporarily loses his loneliness but it is at the price of giving up his existence as an identity in his own right."¹⁰⁹

Modern man relates to the world through the mechanisms of conformity and role playing. He is separated from his work and its product, he is alienated from others and from himself but he cannot exist in the state of separateness and estrangement, a fact which compels him to find some sort of suitable arrangement or adjustment. Unable to cope with the pressures inherent in the search for self, he flies to the womb of the herd where he finds what he believes to be relative safety and security. We have already noted that alienation for Fromm operates on the conscious and unconscious level so that while a person may disclaim the impact of alienation in

¹⁰⁹ Rollo May, op cit., p. 33; Fromm, Escape From Freedom, p. 209.



his life, his objections may be met by probing the unconscious motivations for his actions. The same holds true for conformity: "Most people are not even aware of their need to conform. They live under the illusion that they follow their own ideas and inclinations, that they are individualists, that they have arrived at their opinions as the result of their own thinking-- and that it just happens that their ideas are the same as those of the majority."¹¹⁰ People want to possess a personality; instead of being a person: they want to have the right qualities or virtues; they long for a definite, fixed circumscribed personality. They want "to substitute a fixed, reified personality for the ongoing process of living, feeling, acting and thinking in which alone they could find themselves."¹¹¹

As a consequence of this equality has been given a new meaning at least in comparison to what Fromm maintains is the humanistic definition of the concept. The latter connotation can be identified as the Kantian maxim that men must be treated as ends and never as means. Of course, this interpretation recognized and even required that men differed from one another in many ways. According to Fromm this view of equality has been radically distorted in the 20th Century into a justification for a unequivocal levelling or mass sameness.

By equality one refers to the equality of automatons; of men who have lost their individuality. Equality today means sameness, rather than 'oneness.' It is the sameness of abstractions, of the men who work in

¹¹⁰ Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving, pp. 11-12.

¹¹¹ Ernest Schachtel, "On Alienated Concepts of Identity," American Journal of Psychoanalysis (Vol. 21, 1961), p. 127.



the same jobs, who have the same amusements, who read the same newspapers, who have the same feelings and the same ideas.... Men and women become like same, not equals as opposite poles. Contemporary society preaches this ideal because it needs human atoms, each one the same to make them function in a mass aggregation, smoothly without friction; all obeying the same commands, yet all being convinced that he is following his own desires. Just as modern mass production requires the standardization of man, and this standardization is called "equality."¹¹²

If modern man can be defined in terms of a machine or a commodity, if his "selfness" can be reduced to the sum total of roles, equality simply means that all are the same and if differentiation and uniqueness are considered dysfunctional to the social system, then the kind of relationships that exist between men would seem to be logically apparent. The conclusions which Fromm deduces from his premises are rarely obscure or subtle nor are they obfuscated by technical language. The relation between men today is one "between two abstractions, two living machines who use each other....everybody is to everybody else a commodity....there is not much love or hate to be found in human relations of our day....there is rather a superficial friendliness...but behind this surface is distance and indifference."¹¹³ Men do not rather than relate to one another; they are functional, abstracted, golems who manipulate one another for specific purposes or uses. People are

¹¹² Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving, pp. 12-13; also Man For Himself, pp. 21-2; The Wings of Desire and Other Essays, pp. 125-6. Two other authors who see the same adulteration in the concept of equality are Ortega y Gasset, Revolt of the Masses, (N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1957), and Gabriel Marcel, Man Against Mass Society, (Chicago: Henry Regner Co., 1965).

¹¹³ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 126-7.