



I

INTRODUCTION

Guyton B. Hammond: Man in Estrangement. A Comparison of the Thought of Paul Tillich and Erich Fromm. (Charlotte 1967)

Setting the Problem

STUDIES of human nature have been enriched in recent years by a renewal of communications between religious and secular evaluations of the human condition. In philosophy, the dialogue between theologians and the existentialists has been most interesting; in the area of the sciences of man, perhaps the conversations between theologians and the various schools of psychoanalysis have proved most rewarding. Although purists on both sides of these discussions fear the intrusion of alien elements, such dialogues promise to add significantly to man's self-understanding.

From the side of Christian theology, one of the foremost contributors has been Paul Tillich. The main thrust of Tillich's body of writings has been the effort to relate the Christian concept of man to interpretations of the human situation produced by modern culture. Indeed, Tillich has incorporated the principle of dialogue into a formal theological method, the "method of correlation." This methodological structure, upon which Tillich's systematic theology rests, represents an attempt to "correlate" certain contemporary analyses of man's predicament with the "answers" provided by "the symbols used in the Christian message." According to Tillich, the positive content of the Christian faith, though not derivable from an analysis of the human situation, must be formulated in a way that will provide answers to the questions actually raised in man's contemporary self-analysis.



The implementation of Tillich's method raises many issues of philosophical and theological interest. This study proposes to analyze the method of correlation through its application—to perform a concrete experiment in correlation. As the second party in the dialogue, representing a nontheological concept of man, Erich Fromm has been selected. Fromm's analysis of man, presented in a series of studies approaching systematic structure, incorporates psychoanalytical and sociological insights into a viewpoint which stands in the tradition of naturalistic humanism. He seeks to combine the "sciences of man" with a philosophical perspective that has its roots in Renaissance, Enlightenment, and nineteenth-century existentialist sources. Thus his work serves to represent effectively certain major currents of modern thought concerning man. Also, Fromm's interest in religious phenomena makes him an important contributor to the dialogue which we are investigating.

A study relating Tillich and Fromm proves especially rewarding because of certain similarities in their thought. These similarities, which will be examined in detail as the study proceeds, set into sharper relief the question of irreducible differences between a theistic and a nontheistic evaluation of man and the human predicament. Our study will be given structure, then, by our effort to discover what might actually be involved in a concrete correlation of Fromm's analysis of man with the "Christian message" as Tillich formulates it. Our final purpose, however, is to engage the two men in a critical dialogue—a dialogue which will illuminate their concepts, and, hopefully, through these concepts man himself, the ultimate object of our study.

The Concept of Estrangement

A careful examination of the method of correlation reveals that it is inseparable from a particular content which Tillich finds in many otherwise diverse analyses of human existence. This recurrent theme is the recognition of human "estrangement," of man's separation or "alienation" from something with



which he ought to be united. As our study will show, the method of correlation assumes that the fundamental discovery of modern man's self-analysis is the fact of his estrangement. No matter whether this concept possesses the universal significance which Tillich attributes to it, one cannot deny that it has figured importantly in the literature concerning modern man. We find that the concept of alienation occupies a central place in Fromm's analysis of man. Therefore, the effort to correlate the thought of Fromm and Tillich becomes, on the substantive level, a comparison of two concepts of estrangement or alienation, the one naturalistic, the other theological. We shall discover that correlation in Tillich's sense is actually a transformation of non-theistic ideas of estrangement. This concept is consequently the center of our own analysis. Before we proceed any further it will be helpful to suggest something of the philosophical background, the "family tree," from which this concept emerges.

Tillich and Fromm agree in viewing estrangement and alienation as synonymous translations of the German *Entfremdung* (Tillich prefers the former, Fromm the latter translation). Three significant denotations of alienation can be distinguished: (1) in property relations, "the transfer of the title to property by one person to another"; (2) in personal relations, "a withdrawing or an estrangement, as of feeling or the affections"; (3) in psychology, "a deprivation, or partial deprivation of mental faculties; derangement; insanity."¹

In modern philosophical usage, the origin of the term "estrangement" is generally attributed to G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831). The concept has a possible application in many areas. F. H. Heinemann refers to alienation as a "multidimensional phenomenon," citing the psychological, the psychopathological, the sociological, the religious, and the metaphysical dimensions.² Something of the complexity of the idea can be suggested here by a brief synopsis of Hegel's formulations and

1. *The Century Dictionary*, ed. William Dwight Whitney.

2. F. H. Heinemann, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament*, pp. 9–10.



of the reactions against Hegel's approach by Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx. In this study, the concepts of estrangement formulated by Tillich and Fromm will be viewed against the background of these three philosophers.³

An analysis of estrangement appears implicitly in some of Hegel's earliest works. In a broadly pantheistic fashion, Hegel conceives of an original unity of "life" (including God, nature, and man). This life loses its "immature" unity as it develops, becoming differentiated into various oppositions: between man and nature, subject and object, master and slave, duty and inclination, divinity and humanity. These oppositions persist as estrangements until life in the one discovers life in the other, through love. The final reconciliation Hegel finds in religion, as man shares in the life of God, as "finite life rises to infinite life." In these early writings of Hegel, one can discern the germs of all of the dimensions of estrangement delineated by Hegel himself, by Feuerbach and Marx, and later by Tillich and Fromm.⁴

In subsequent works, Hegel elaborates a rich concept of estrangement, the primary meaning of which might be termed "self-externalization." He comes to view the development of mind as "the process of becoming an other to itself, i.e., an object for its own self, and in transcending this otherness."⁵

3. It is unnecessary to debate here the relative influence of Hegel and F. W. J. von Schelling (1775–1854) in this area. Since Hegel and Schelling flourished in the same intellectual milieu, it is difficult to determine their relation to each other. Cf. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, translated with introduction and notes by Frederick de Wolfe Bolman, introduction, pp. 3–79; for Tillich's early analysis of Schelling, cf. Paul Tillich, *Frühe Hauptwerke*, I, pp. 13–108. Both men, in fact, influenced Tillich's thought; but the concept of estrangement had its major development in the Hegelian tradition. It is certainly this tradition which influenced Fromm's view, and we find no substantial reason to question Tillich's statement that Hegel's influence was decisive upon his own thought in this area.

4. Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate," "Love," and "Fragment of a System," in *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, trans. by T. M. Knox.

5. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. by J. B. Baillie, Preface, p. 96.



INTRODUCTION

7

concept Hegel employs in two significant areas: his philosophy of nature and his philosophy of history. Hegel posits a concept of nature as the externality of the Absolute (for Spirit). Here estrangement becomes a translation of a theological concept of the divine creativity into the secular concept of the divine self-externalization or self-division.⁶ In his philosophy of history, Hegel formulates a concept of world history as the process through which the universal externalizes itself in all of the creations of humanity. It is only as an object, outside itself in its creations, that it can come to know itself.⁷ In both of these formulations, the universal mind comes to self-consciousness and overcomes estrangement through the instrumentality of man. Theologically speaking, God comes to awareness of himself through man as the human mind is elevated to the divine. In these

Hegel conceives of the reconciliation as taking place in philosophy rather than religion.

Hegel's formulations of the concept of estrangement were extended in different directions by the young Hegelians. Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) viewed Hegel's work primarily as a creative effort to clarify and vindicate the traditional Christianity. Considering it from this point of view, Feuerbach discerns in the Hegelian analysis a hidden, as well as an explicit, theology. The true nature of man's estrangement, according to Feuerbach, is revealed when Hegel's metaphysical theology is erected to be anthropology. Inverting Hegel's dialectic of estrangement and reconciliation, Feuerbach maintains that man (nature, a natural being) projects his own essence into divinity and views it as God. Estrangement for Feuerbach is a movement within man's self-consciousness rather than God's. Philosophical criticism must reveal that Hegel's metaphysics of divine estrangement and reconciliation is really a disguised psychology of human estrangement and reconciliation.

f. Hegel, "The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences," ed. in *Hegel: Selections*, ed. by J. Loewenberg, pp. 176–185.
f. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, pp. 507–610.



tion. In the thought of Feuerbach, God's self-externalization in nature becomes, through inversion, man's projection of his own essence into an imagined objectivity.⁸

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was deeply influenced by Feuerbach's inversion of the Hegelian philosophy. Marx fully accepted Feuerbach's reduction of Hegel's theology to anthropology, but he was not satisfied with Feuerbach's treatment of human estrangement. Marx believed that Feuerbach had accurately reduced man's separation from God to an estrangement within man's own self-consciousness; but Feuerbach had stopped short of an analysis of man's estrangement in "real life," in his productive activities. Feuerbach had dissolved the gods into their human reality; Marx would expose the earthly idols as still more fundamental sources of alienation. For Marx, man's loss of himself in the objects which he creates is the primary alienation; religious estrangement is merely a reflection in consciousness of this alienation in real life. "Religious alienation as such occurs only in the sphere of *consciousness*, in the inner life of man; but economic alienation is that of *real life* and its supersession therefore affects both aspects."⁹ For Marx, Feuerbach's failure to detect the most basic form of alienation rendered his analysis abstract and ineffective.

Marx proposed a different kind of revision of the Hegelian dialectic. Feuerbach had inverted Hegel's idealistic philosophy of nature; Marx, however, was primarily interested in Hegel's philosophy of history (especially as it appeared in *The Phenomenology of Mind*). Marx seized upon Hegel's discovery that man actualizes himself in the process of human history through the objective embodiment of his "species-powers" in the creations of human culture. Hegel held that man becomes alienated

8. Cf. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. by George Eliot, pp. 226–231; this analysis of Feuerbach and subsequently of Marx is indebted to the illuminating exposition in Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, pp. 73–105.

9. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in *Marx's Concept of Man*, edited with introduction by Erich Fromm, p. 128.



INTRODUCTION

9

from these powers in the process of objectifying them. Man gives embodiment to his own nature in cultural creativity, and in so doing he becomes estranged from this nature.

Marx accepted this analysis of man's self-production, but he held that Hegel formulated the idea only in an abstract way. According to Marx, Hegel started with abstract mind or self-consciousness. The creations of mind were then viewed as thought products, states of consciousness. Alienation for Hegel, therefore, consisted only of a movement within self-consciousness, not a movement in real life.

For Hegel, *human life*, *man*, is equivalent to *self-consciousness*. All alienation of human life is therefore nothing but *alienation of self-consciousness*. The alienation of self-consciousness is not regarded as the *expression*, reflected in knowledge and thought, of the *real alienation of human life*.¹⁰

Marx's criticisms of Hegel and Feuerbach are essentially the same: both view estrangement abstractly as a movement within consciousness rather than concretely as a movement which has an objective reality. Marx accepts Feuerbach's inversion of the Hegelian theology. But inversion of the dialectical movement is not enough; it must be made to apply to "real corporeal *man*, with his feet firmly planted on the solid ground."

In Marx's account, then, man as a natural being "produces" his own nature or species-powers in history through actual labor, embodying these powers in material goods and in instruments of material production, as well as in social institutions and systems of ideas. In all products of his creativity, man objectifies himself; and in so doing he loses himself in estrangement. Alienation occurs in all production, but especially in material production, since man is first of all a material being. In Marx's view, then, the Hegelian metaphysics is an "esoteric economics" rather than as with Feuerbach, an "esoteric psychology."¹¹

Marx's concept of productivity requires further explanation.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

11. Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, p. 120.



In a sense, for Marx, man creates the world in which he lives; he “produces” nature itself. This theme can be viewed as another aspect of the transformation of theology into anthropology. Man, not God, is the creator. But man’s relation to nature is creation only in a modified sense, a kind of reproduction. There is an original objectivity of nature which is presupposed, a precondition for creativity. It is not this sheer objectivity of nature which constitutes alienation for Marx. Rather, the external world becomes alien to man when man’s own productive activity with regard to the world is alienated activity. Estrangement is first a quality of man’s activity, and only thereafter is it a quality of the world which he creates.

What, then, is alienated activity according to Marx? It is the state of affairs wherein a man’s labor is no longer within his own control. And since a man’s productive powers can be taken from his control only by another man, Marx sees the source of alienated activity in “the division of labor” and “private property”—that is, in the control of one man’s labor and of the products of his labor by another man. Thus the ultimate source of alienation in the Marxian analysis is the division between man and man (a division within the species “man”), appearing when one man produces and another controls his production.

Every self-alienation of man, from himself and from nature, appears in the relation which he postulates between other men and himself and nature. Thus religious self-alienation is necessarily exemplified in the relation between laity and priest, or, since it is here a question of the spiritual world, between the laity and a mediator. In the real world of practice this self-alienation can only be expressed in the real, practical relation of man to his fellowmen. The medium through which alienation occurs is itself a *practical* one.¹²

In summary, we have uncovered three distinct, though related, meanings of estrangement in the Hegelian tradition. (1) Hegel’s original conception was primarily metaphysical. He

12. Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” in *Marx’s Concept of Man*, p. 105.



INTRODUCTION

suggested that various forms of self-externalization are necessary for the full actualization of being. In his earliest writings, the self-separating reality is conceptualized as "life," a concept which can be interpreted in a naturalistic-patheistic fashion. Later, Hegel conceives of self-consciousness as the self-separating entity; estrangement is then conceived in idealistic terms as a movement within the Divine Mind. (2) Feuerbach reduced this metaphysical movement to a psychological phenomenon which can be described as "projection." In this interpretation of estrangement, man attributes his own essential qualities to an imagined external being; as a result, at least in his own self-consciousness, man does not see these qualities as inherent in his own nature. (3) Marx viewed both of these analyses of estrangement as abstract versions of the real phenomenon of alienation. For him, estrangement in the real world is that form of human activity in which spontaneous creativity is transformed into forced labor, so that self-production becomes self-loss. This occurs when one man controls the labor of another. Alienation in consciousness is a reflection of this alienation in "real life." We shall encounter all three meanings of estrangement in our study of Tillich and Fromm. Distinctive features of the three approaches should be kept in mind. Since they are sometimes woven together in an unclear manner, it will serve the end of clarity to be able to distinguish them.

In spite of these important distinctions, it is possible to identify essential features in all ideas of estrangement. If the following statement by Heinemann were extended to include the Divine Being as well as human beings, it might serve as a comprehensive description of these essential features:

The facts to which the term "alienation" refers, are, objectively, different kinds of dissociation, break or rupture between human beings and their objects, whether the latter be other persons, or the natural world, or their own creations in art, science and society; and subjectively, the corresponding states of disequilibrium, disturbance, strangeness and anxiety. . . . There is one point common to



all of them, i.e. the belief that a preceding unity and harmony has been transformed into disunity and disharmony.¹³

Existentialism, Estrangement, and the Method of Correlation

We are now in a position to examine Tillich's theological method in greater detail. We have noted that Tillich seeks to take seriously the nontheological analysis of man produced by modern culture. This means that in Tillich's view the analysis of the human predicament is a task for philosophy rather than theology, and that in this task the philosopher must draw upon interpretive materials from all realms of culture—art, literature, drama, etc.—as well as upon philosophical insight per se. This seemingly inexhaustible body of material concerning man is narrowed down, however, by the viewpoint which Tillich adopts toward it. According to Tillich, when man analyzes his own existence he inevitably deals with "existential" terms and categories. This type of analysis is to be found in all eras and cannot be exclusively identified with any one school of philosophy. In Tillich's view, however, it is especially characteristic of the contemporary movement known as existentialism. Tillich considers the literature of this movement (interpreted broadly to include psychoanalysis and "depth sociology") to be the most significant analysis of the human predicament to emerge in the modern period.¹⁴ Therefore, it is primarily this literature with which Christian theology must enter into dialogue.

Briefly stated, Tillich understands the main effort of existentialism to be "an analysis of what it means to exist."¹⁵ Human existence itself proves to be the problem which man must face—the question which demands an answer. This seemingly innocent definition leads Tillich to an important conclusion about existentialist analysis. Human existence not only raises certain perennial questions; it is itself the question which underlies all

13. Heinemann, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament*, p. 9.

14. Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II, pp. 26–28. In his discussions of existentialism, Tillich mentions Schelling, Feuerbach, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre, among others.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 25.



INTRODUCTION

13

others. If this is the case, then analysis of human existence is analysis of the *problem*, of the *question*. And one does not expect to derive an answer from an analysis of the question; answers are addressed to the question, not derived from it. Therefore, Tillich holds in principle that existentialism develops the question implied in human existence but cannot as such provide answers to it. Answers have many sources, but they do not come from existentialist analysis.

This methodological definition of existentialism is of limited value until it is combined with the specific content which Tillich finds in all existentialist analysis. This content is the understanding of existence as estrangement. To explain this aspect of existentialism, Tillich traces the origin of the movement to certain nineteenth-century protests against the Hegelian philosophy. The existentialists, according to Tillich, accepted Hegel's concept of estranged existence but rejected as premature and ineffective his efforts at reconciliation through thought.

The common point in all existentialist attacks is that man's existential situation is a state of estrangement from his essential nature. Hegel is aware of this estrangement, but he believes that it has been overcome and that man has been reconciled with his true being. According to all the existentialists, this belief is Hegel's basic error. Reconciliation is a matter of anticipation and expectation, but not of reality. . . . Existence is estrangement and not reconciliation.¹⁶

It is this understanding of existence as estrangement which explains Tillich's argument that for the existentialists existence itself is the human problem. His position is that the analysis of existence leads inevitably to the discovery of estrangement.

As the passage quoted above indicates, Tillich speaks of estrangement as the separation of a being from its "essential nature," as an alienation of existence from "essence." This terminology, reminiscent of Plato as well as Hegel, introduces new issues not immediately suggested by the term estrangement. By incorporating this distinction into the idea of estrangement, Tillich invests the concept with epistemological as well as

16. *Ibid.*



axiological and ontological dimensions. It might be observed here that although many existentialists do deal in some way with the problem of estrangement, it is not at all apparent that they are agreed in understanding it as “the separation of essence and existence.” Sartre, for example, is usually interpreted as having rejected the idea that man has a fixed nature.¹⁷ In a later section we shall develop Tillich’s answer to this criticism: his argument that the concept of estrangement necessarily involves the distinction of essence and existence and that Sartre and others make surreptitious use of the distinction while denying its validity. Our reconsideration of Tillich’s method in the next section will seek to clarify his position further by introducing the category of self-estrangement as another way of expressing his viewpoint.

We may now draw together the threads of our discussion up to this point. Tillich’s theological method seeks to correlate the “answers” of the Christian message with the “questions” posed by man’s contemporary self-analysis. This analysis is necessarily existentialist; it examines human existence itself. The consensus of existentialist insight, according to Tillich’s summation, is that existence is characterized by estrangement. This multidimensional category is identified in all dimensions as the separation of that which ought to be united. In Tillich’s formulation of the existentialist insight, this means the separation of existence from essence, of the estranged being from its own essential nature. This, according to Tillich, is the basic problem of man with which Christian doctrine must be correlated.

17. Cf. I. M. Bochenski, *Contemporary European Philosophy*, pp. 177–178.



II

the method RECONSIDERED

Criticism and a Proposal

TILlich's approach to the ideas of estrangement which he finds in existentialist literature involves an important assumption which must now be examined.¹ Tillich assumes that estrangement must mean total estrangement—total in the sense that every aspect of man's existence is affected by this condition. This is implicit in his contention that human existence is itself the question and that no answers can be derived from existential analysis. It is also implicit in his understanding of estrangement as the separation of essence and existence.

To take a specific example, Tillich at one point notes that some analysts view estrangement in modern society as the result of "the structures of industrial society," an understanding which leads them to hold that estrangement can be eliminated through a change in those structures. Tillich argues that it is a fallacious utopianism which holds "the belief that changes in the structure of our society would, as such, change man's existential predicament."² The point is that if estrangement is recognized only in some special area of human life (e.g., a particular social structure), then it can be eliminated by man through a reform of that area. This would mean that estrangement is no longer

1. With reference to the material in this chapter, cf. my article, "An Examination of Tillich's Method of Correlation," *The Journal of Bible and Religion*, XXXII (July 1964) pp. 248–251.

2. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II, p. 74.



First, Fromm's ideas of alienation and reconciliation will be examined in the context of his general perspective. After an introduction to Tillich's systematic structure from the point of view suggested here, we shall then consider what would be involved in "elevating" a concept of estrangement such as Fromm's to the point of self-estrangement, where no autonomous answer is possible. This investigation will serve two purposes: it will enable us to determine what kind of critique Tillich might bring to bear upon Fromm's perspective, and we shall be in a position to consider what bearing Tillich's criterion of self-estrangement has upon his account of the Christian answers to the problem of estrangement. This will involve an examination of the meaning of divine self-estrangement, the terminal concept in Tillich's system. It is thus hoped that an effective comparison of naturalistic and theistic ideas of estrangement will be achieved. To this dialogue we now turn.



III

ERICH f r o m m and his mentors

ERICH FROMM was born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1900. He received his education at the Universities of Heidelberg and Munich and his specialized training at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute and the Institute for Social Research of the University of Frankfurt. He also lectured at the two latter institutions. With the rise to power of Hitler in 1932, Fromm came to the United States, where he taught at several colleges. At present he is Professor of Psychology at New York University and Professor of Psychoanalysis at the National University of Mexico in Mexico City.¹

Fromm's thought is best understood initially as an effort to reconcile and synthesize the insights of Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxian sociology. This judgment, suggested by a close reading of Fromm's major works, is confirmed in his autobiographical essay, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud*. We shall begin, then, by showing how Fromm comes to terms with each of his mentors.

Fromm and Freud

Fromm is frequently identified as a psychoanalyst. The historians of psychoanalysis, however, distinguish his views from those of contemporary Freudians. Fromm is usually classified

1. For other biographical data, cf. Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, pp. 3–12.



as a “Neo-Freudian” or a “Neo-Freudian revisionist.” Herbert Marcuse, for example, places Fromm at the center of the spectrum of “Neo-Freudian revisionism.”²

The revision of Freud undertaken by Fromm (along with others similarly classified, such as Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan) is generally understood to be the attempt to show the relevance of social structures and relations to the psychoanalytic concepts. Karen Horney identifies Fromm as the first writer in German psychoanalytic literature to recognize the importance of cultural factors. Clara Thompson indicates that Fromm “retains a broad social perspective in studying psychological phenomena,” and that he sees the role of society “in creating man as well as controlling him.”³ On the basis of this emphasis, Marcuse places Fromm in a “cultural and interpersonal school” of psychoanalysis.

This classification of Fromm as a “Neo-Freudian revisionist” is challenged, however, in a recent full-length study of Fromm’s work. In his useful analysis, J. H. Schaar suggests that this classification of Fromm is misleading. With some exaggeration, he argues that Fromm’s attitude toward Freud’s work is that of opposition, not reform.

It is certainly true that Fromm has carried on a one-sided argument with Freud for something over a quarter of a century, but an argument which embraces values Freud shunned, starts from premises he rejected, accepts types of evidence unknown to him, employs methods he denied, and leads to different conclusions on all the basic issues ought to be called what it is—opposition and not revision, revolt and not reform. Fromm is a revisionist of Freud in about the same degree, if not in the same direction, that the Prince of Darkness was a revisionist of the Prince of Light.⁴

In my opinion, Schaar’s description of Fromm’s opposition to

2. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 238.

3. Clara Thompson, *Psychoanalysis: Its Evolution and Development*, p. 143.

4. John H. Schaar, *Escape from Authority*, pp. 7–8. In his recent work, *The Heart of Man*, Fromm himself rejects the label of “neo-Freudian.”



Freud, though overdrawn, does point correctly to a wide divergence between the thought of the two men. It is possible, however, to gain insight into the genesis and development of Fromm's thought by viewing it as a revision of the Freudian perspective. We shall, therefore, first approach Fromm in these terms, seeking to determine how far and in which directions he is carried in his revisions of Freud. When this has been done it will be clear that another major influence—that of Marx—must be acknowledged. We shall show that, although developmentally legitimate to view Fromm as a Freudian revisionist, any classification of his mature thought ought also to include reference to his Marxian roots.

The origins of Fromm's methodology can be found in his efforts to relate social psychology to psychoanalysis. In an early essay, Fromm suggests that the method of a "psychoanalytic social psychology" can, in most respects, be the same as that of psychoanalysis. It cannot take the social group as its object; rather, its proper concern is with the psychic attitudes of individuals—that is, those attitudes common to most individuals in a given society. It can be presumed that these common attitudes derive from common experiences rooted in the society's life patterns. Just as psychoanalysis studies the effect of childhood experiences upon the individual's psychic attitudes, so social psychology investigates "how certain psychic attitudes common to members of a group are related to their common life experiences."⁵

How, then, are these common attitudes, derived from the prevailing life patterns of the society, incorporated into the individual character structure? According to psychoanalytic theory, the matrix of character is in early childhood, the period of least direct influence from the larger society. Does the society then play no dynamic and formative role in individual character development?

To show that society does play a significant role in character

5. Erich Fromm, "The Dogma of Christ," in Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture*, p. 9.



formation, Fromm in this same essay speaks of a “repetition” in the adult of the “psychic situation of childhood.” Because of this repetition, psychic dependence is maintained through the same “mechanisms” which make the child psychically dependent upon his father. Here Fromm reflects the Freudian view that man’s relation to socially maintained authority figures represents a “transference” from the paternal relationship. In Freud’s expression, “that which began in relation to the father ends in relation to the community.”⁶ For Freud, the familial relationships are irreducible and primal; the society’s influence in shaping individual character is derivative and secondary.

The theory of repetition, however, leads to a dilemma. According to this theory, the individual must achieve a degree of maturity before becoming exposed to the psychic demands of the society. Fromm observes that the psychically immature person remains fixated in the situation of childhood; it is the normal person whose psychic attitudes are determined to a significant degree by “the socially conditioned life pattern.”⁷ This means that only those individuals who have overcome infantile dependencies are subject to a repetition of these dependencies in relation to socially defined structures of authority. The process of growth toward maturity in this account becomes self-defeating.

Fromm’s subsequent thought can be understood largely as an effort to describe (more successfully) the role of society in individual character formation. Fromm seeks to achieve this goal by developing two fundamental revisions of the Freudian perspective.

First, Fromm comes to reject Freud’s view that certain familial relationships are universal and independent of the social structure. Fromm reverses this position in his thesis that the family is “the psychic agency of society.”⁸ This means that for

6. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, p. 89.

7. Fromm, “The Dogma of Christ,” in *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays*, p. 9.

8. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 82. Fromm was influenced at this point, no doubt, by the early writings of Karl Marx.



Fromm the particular configuration of the familial relationships is largely derived from the general life pattern of a particular society. The family in a certain society tends to produce in its offspring a character structure desired or approved by that society. The society exerts a formative influence upon the child through parental influence.

This understanding of character formation is the basis for Fromm's concept of the "social character," that "nucleus of the character structure which is shared by most members of the same culture."⁹ This formulation recognizes that there are important individual character differences within a given culture; individual psychoanalysis is concerned with these. But Fromm maintains that the shared life patterns of a given culture produce a common core of character traits in its individual members, and it is this "social character" which is the proper concern of a psychoanalytic social psychology. This approach to social influence upon character formation avoids the difficulties connected with the theory of repetition described above. Here, the influence of the society through the agency of the family is a primary factor in forming individual character.

This revised approach to character formation has far-reaching consequences which will concern us throughout our study of Fromm. When the role of the society in character formation is emphasized, the attention of the social psychologist is turned from individual pathology to social pathology, or, more specifically, to the "socially patterned defect" in individual character structure. Fromm's work in contrast to Freud's is therefore characterized by a prevailing interest in social pathology and in the possibility of social health or "the sane society."¹⁰ Concepts which originated in the area of individual pathology now take on new meanings, and new concepts emerge which, in turn, require changes in individual psychoanalysis.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

10. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 12–21. Fromm has Freud's warrant for this investigation, although Freud himself did not undertake it. Cf. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, p. 104.



In considering society's role in shaping human character, Fromm does, in fact, arrive at a significant re-estimate of individual desires and passions—an approach which suggests a major change in psychoanalytic theory. Here we find a second fundamental revision of the Freudian perspective.

Freud consistently understood the multifarious desires and passions of men to be rooted in physiological sources. This is true, not only in Freud's analysis of libido development, but also in his treatment of ego maturation and the process of socialization. Freud traced the evolution of the sexual instinct through several stages of libidinal satisfaction (the oral, anal, and genital levels of libido fixation); he saw the development of the ego as a means of taking account of external reality, so that the individual may preserve himself and secure the greatest libidinal satisfaction possible.¹¹

The process of socialization was understood by Freud largely as a process of restraining, redirecting, and sublimating the physiological desires. The super-ego, which emerges as the product of parental authority, derives its power from the redirection of aggressive instincts toward the self. The aims of human culture and civilization can be achieved only through a sublimation of the libidinal instincts. Freud postulated that the demands of civilization function as a "cultural super-ego" in the lives of individuals.¹² Civilization for Freud thus rests precariously upon the basis of the redirected and sublimated physiological drives. In short, all of the various passions of men have a physiological root.

Fromm's analysis of the fundamental human desires and passions is not a denial of the factors which Freud identified; it is rather a major shift in emphasis which sharply reduces their significance. Fromm does not reject Freud's analysis of the evolution of the sexual instinct in the maturing individual; but

11. Cf. Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, pp. 287–312.

12. Cf. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, pp. 94–103.



he sees a far more important evolution which overshadows the physiological process: the evolution of consciousness. Freud acknowledged that the ego must go through developmental stages parallel to, but partially independent of, the libido development, although this process was not his main interest; but he retained the notion that this process could be analyzed in terms of physiological motivations. Fromm, however, maintains that the appearance of human self-awareness creates imperative new needs which have no physiological root. The quest for a satisfaction of these distinctively human needs initiates a new process of development, built upon the physical body but transcending it. It is at this point that Fromm makes his most radical departure from the Freudian perspective.

Fromm maintains that the distinctive characteristics of human existence appear when, in the course of biological evolution, man becomes aware of himself as a separate individual. This awareness leads to a sense of aloneness and to a compelling need to achieve "a new relatedness to man and nature after having lost the primary relatedness of the pre-human stage."¹³ This sense of aloneness constitutes the universal human predicament, although the ways in which the need is defined and the ways in which it is met are diverse. The drive for a new relatedness supplants the physiological drives as man's most intensive and dominant passion.

We observed earlier that it was Fromm's consideration of society's role in shaping human character which led him to re-estimate human needs and passions; we now see clearly his thesis that it is society's role in shaping the content of human consciousness which has a profound effect upon human character. Fromm holds the view, derived as we shall see from Marx, that consciousness is itself a social product. Through various means (discussed below), society determines to a large extent what is included in, and excluded from, consciousness. Fromm's

13. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. viii.



interest, then, is in the evolutionary development of consciousness (in the individual and in all humanity) and in society's role in fostering or retarding that development.

In tracing the development of consciousness, Fromm seeks to delineate identifiable stages in the process and its final goal. It is here that Fromm's work most clearly displays its composite character; for Fromm has sought to analyze this process in both Freudian and Marxian terms. The Marxian aspect will be analyzed in the next section.

As to the stages in the evolution of individual consciousness, or what he calls "orientations" toward reality, Fromm undertakes a "symbolic" interpretation of Freud's stages of libido development. Freud identified certain observable character types as representing progressive fixations of the energy of the sexual drive. He saw the normally developing individual evolving toward the primacy of the genital zone in achieving sexual satisfaction. Fromm does not deny that this physiological evolution takes place. However, he interprets the character types identified by Freud as types of relatedness, as ways in which *psychic* energy is "channelized." Thus they become types of "social character" which have no physiological root. The goal of the normally evolving individual is the "productive orientation," the type of character which is creative psychically as well as physically.¹⁴

This transformation of the Freudian categories turns our attention to the society which fosters or inhibits the development of productive individuals. A healthy society will tend to produce a healthy social character in its individuals. Fromm, following a suggestion made by Freud, postulates that there is an "obvious analogy between the evolution of the human race, and the evolution of the individual."¹⁵ Thus one may speak of human history in terms of an evolution from infancy to maturity. This means that a primitive society would tend to produce certain

14. For Fromm's description of Freud's categories and his transformation of them, cf. Fromm, *Man for Himself*, pp. 35-37; 82-107.

15. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 70.



infantile fixations (not necessarily physiological ones), while a mature society would tend to produce productive character types. The history of man is the story of his evolution toward maturity.

This effort to analyze human history in terms of a process toward maturity stands twice removed from Freud's description of libido development. The physiological categories were transformed into psychic concepts, then taken from man's individual growth and applied to his historical development. Further, Fromm does not seem to hold that the stages which Freud delineated (and which he interprets symbolically) fit the evolution of mankind in progressive sequence. For example, he finds two nonproductive character types combining in the twentieth-century social character of the West; and these in no sense represent a progressive development from the two equally nonproductive types which he finds in the nineteenth-century Western society.¹⁶ Indeed, one major form of the twentieth-century character type (the "marketing orientation") has no relation, even symbolically, to the Freudian categories.

We must conclude that the two fundamental revisions of Freud surveyed here represent a major reformulation of the entire psychoanalytic perspective. Fromm's developmental history of human relatedness cannot be viewed as Neo-Freudian revisionism if this means simply the extension of Freudian principles into virgin territory. Rather, Fromm's wide-ranging considerations carry him beyond the gravitational field of any Freudian school and into a new orbit—that of German idealism and the inversion of idealism in Feuerbach and Marx.

Fromm and Marx

Fromm's configuration of ideas concerning the social influence on the content of consciousness was decisively influenced

16. *Ibid.*, p. 136. In *The Heart of Man*, Fromm argues that neither Freud's libido fixations nor his own character orientations can be arranged in evolutionary order. Rather, within each category there can be a greater or lesser degree of pathology or regression. Cf. pp. 111–113.



by Marx's early philosophical writings. Marx postulated that the content of human consciousness is largely determined by the structure of his social existence; this structure is in turn determined by the "mode of production in material life."¹⁷ In other words, Marx held that man's conscious ideas in the areas of law, politics, philosophy, and religion (what Marx called "ideology") are to be understood "scientifically" in terms of their material basis in the "economic conditions of production." A change in the latter leads to a corresponding change in the former. Thus, for Marx, the history of man's conscious thought about himself and his world is determined in its general development by the evolution of the modes of material production and the control of production. This evolution, not the development of man's thought about himself, is the truly significant process.

In his interpretation of Marxian thought, Fromm attempts to correct what he takes to be a common misapprehension concerning Marx's "historical materialism." He argues that Marxism, contrary to the popular notion, is not a theory concerned primarily with the nature of human needs and motivations. It does not hold, for example, that the desire for material gain is the primary human motive. Rather, the theory is concerned with the "objectively given conditions" which give shape and direction to human desires. These conditions determine the mode of production; hence they determine man's understanding of his own needs. These conditions can determine man's conscious thought because his needs and drives (beyond certain fixed needs) are themselves socially produced and indefinitely flexible.¹⁸

In Fromm's account, Marx's materialism is not a psychological theory—the reduction of all human motives to a physical basis. It is rather a sociological theory—the explanation of man's cultural development and thought in terms of his total mode of life. This means to Fromm that Marx reached a uni-

17. Karl Marx, "Excerpt from *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*," in *Marx and Engels*, ed. Lewis S. Feuer, p. 43.

18. Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, pp. 12–14.



fied view of man which understands his consciousness as rooted in the conditions of his existence.

Marx, in his dialectic method, overcame the materialism of the nineteenth century and developed a truly dynamic and holistic theory based on man's *activity*, rather than on his *physiology*.¹⁹

Fromm admits, however, that the Marxian economic determinism is one-sided. Marx saw clearly man's "false consciousness"—the irrational self-understanding, the perverted needs and drives of men—but he held that these are caused solely by economic conditions. Therefore, he thought that man could be changed easily through a change in the objective economic situation. According to Fromm, Marx underestimated the force of the nonphysical needs of man which stem from the very conditions of human existence (which include self-awareness). These needs are served by the cultural and ideological factors. Without the development of a more productive satisfaction of these needs, a change in the economic conditions will, in Fromm's view, remain an inadequate solution to man's basic problems. History must be understood as the interaction of economic conditions and the fundamental needs of human nature which transcend the purely physical.²⁰

We find then that Fromm suggests a revision of Marx not unlike his revision of Freud. If (contra Freud) it is not the physiological libido which is responsible for the primary human passions, neither is it (contra Marx) the economic necessities which are the fundamental driving forces of human activity. Both types of physiological need are important, but they must be viewed in interaction with the distinctively human needs arising from self-consciousness. And it is clear that Fromm finally subordinates the former to the latter. Fromm holds that Marx is not blind to either type of need, although he tends to subordinate the nonphysical to the physical.

19. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 262. This means in modern terminology that Fromm interprets Marx as an existentialist.

20. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 261–265.



Marx's analysis of false consciousness centered in the concept of alienation which he inherited from Hegel and Feuerbach, as we have seen. In *The German Ideology*, Marx sought to show how alienation appeared in man's social evolution through the advent of the division of labor and private property. When he lost control over his own creative activity he became alienated from himself, his fellow man, and nature. This alienation will be overcome in man's historical development, according to Marx, when class divisions are eliminated and society as a whole controls production. In this society, the split within humanity (both in the individual and the society) will be overcome.²¹

Fromm's criticism of Marx's economic determinism can be applied in a similar fashion to his concept of alienation. Fromm argues that Marx is unduly optimistic in holding that man can be changed by a change in the external situation. According to Fromm, the structure of man's awareness of himself and his world is deeply affected by the state of alienation and is not easily changed.

The famous statement at the end of the Communist Manifesto that the workers "have nothing to lose but their chains," contains a profound psychological error. With their chains they have to lose all those irrational needs and satisfactions which were originated while they were wearing the chains.²²

Fromm, in fact, holds that the limitations and distortions of consciousness inflicted upon the individual by the society are the primary forms of human alienation. Alienation in awareness is for him more than a reflection of alienation in "real life"; it is the basic form of the problem. Marx is concerned with forced labor; Fromm's central concern is with forced awareness (and forced unawareness). Fromm agrees with Marx that both Hegel and Feuerbach deal with human consciousness only abstractly, not as the product of a particular society; but having learned

21. Cf. Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," excerpted in *Marx and Engels*, ed. Feuer, pp. 246-260.

22. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 264.



this from Marx, Fromm returns to the non-Marxian view that alienation is primarily a form of awareness or unawareness. The solution to the problem of alienation then will be a state of consciousness as well.

Fromm's position is indicated in his comparison of Freud and Marx on the matter of false consciousness. He holds that both Freud and Marx see man's consciousness as largely "determined by the objective forces which work behind his back." For Freud, these forces are "physiological and biological needs"; for Marx they are "social and economic historical forces."²³ Fromm suggests that for both men freedom from this determination (and the overcoming of alienation) is achieved through increased awareness. "[Man] can attain freedom (and health) only by becoming aware of these motivating forces, that is of reality, and thus he can become the master of his life (within the limitations of reality) rather than the slave of blind forces."²⁴ Alienation is basically a state of unawareness; productivity and health are achieved through increased awareness of reality within and outside oneself.

In Fromm's view, Freud saw the need for expanding consciousness; but his weakness lay in his failure to perceive that consciousness is shaped by social conditions. Marx saw that the expansion of consciousness can occur only in co-ordination with the achievement of a truly human economic and social order; in Fromm's account there is an interaction between the objectively given conditions of existence in a particular society and the way in which man understands his existence. A significant (or widespread) change in one must be co-ordinated with a change in the other. Fromm considers recognition of the social relativity of human consciousness one of Marx's greatest contributions.

This recognition of relativity did not lead Marx to the position that human nature is itself indeterminate or indefinitely

23. Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 106.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 112.



malleable (nor does it lead Fromm to this position). As the use of such terms as alienation and false consciousness suggest, Marx held that human nature has a certain determinate character which can be realized through the process of social evolution. This theme is prominent in the early writings of Marx; but Fromm maintains that the concept of an essential human nature is assumed throughout the Marxian corpus, although in the later works it is more implicit than explicit. Fromm sees the distinction between man's existence and his essence as a permanent Hegelian element in the viewpoint of Marx.

What Marx does reject is the essence which is a mere "abstraction"—a rootless ideal, a figment of the imagination. He criticized Feuerbach for viewing man's essence in abstraction from the process of history; rather, it is a potentiality in man which can be actualized historically. Fromm paraphrases Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* in this way:

The nature (essence) of man can be inferred from its many manifestations (and distortions) in history; it cannot be seen as *such*, as a statically existing entity "behind" or "above" each separate man, but as that in man which exists as a potentiality and unfolds and changes in the historical process.²⁵

This is an adequate expression of Fromm's own view as well. He too holds that man's essence is not identical with his existence but can be inferred from the study of man and his developmental history.

Fromm then is indebted to both Freud and Marx; but in the end the synthesizing process becomes one of incorporating Freudian insights into the general Marxian perspective, rather

25. Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, pp. 78–79. Here is Marx's statement: "Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the *human* essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence is consequently compelled: (1) To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment as something by itself, and to presuppose an abstract-*isolated*-human individual. (2) The human essence, therefore, can with him be comprehended only as 'genus,' as an internal, dumb generality which merely *naturally* unites the many individuals."



than the reverse. Of the two, Fromm considers Marx to be of greater “world historical significance.”²⁶ This is an unfamiliar Marx however: the Marx of the little-known (in America) *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of Marx’s Hegelian youth. Fromm holds that this Marx is as misunderstood in the Communist world as he is unknown in the West.

26. Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 12.



IV

FROMM: SCIENTIST OR PHILOSOPHER?

FROMM'S two mentors have an ambiguous status in the world of science. Marx and Freud had utmost confidence in the scientific method, and each placed his hopes for man's future in the hands of science. But neither has been accorded undisputed status as a scientist in the Anglo-American sense. It might be expected, then, that Fromm's position would be at least equally debatable. In fact, his position is clear enough, although Fromm makes some claims to the contrary: Fromm is a philosopher in the final analysis, albeit a philosopher who makes considerable use of various types of scientific evidence. This judgment is not an evaluation; it serves merely to shed some light on the kinds of data with which Fromm deals and the kind of conclusions which he reaches. Let us look at the problem more closely.

Fromm and the Science of Man

As we have already suggested, Fromm agrees with Marx that most of the observable drives and needs of men are socially produced and indefinitely flexible. Most of these psychic needs are not fixed drives rooted in the biological organism but are relative drives created by the society. Invariant human nature is not to be found in the "drives which make for the differences in men's characters, like love and hatred, the lust for power and



FROMM: SCIENTIST OR PHILOSOPHER?

39

yearning for submission, the enjoyment of sensuous pleasure and the fear of it"; all of these are in fact "products of the social process."¹

If these empirical data concerning men in particular societies are the only truths about man, no real science of man would, in Fromm's view, be possible. Psychology would be confined to "radical behaviorism content with describing an infinite number of behavior patterns." And since these patterns would be rooted in the social structure, "there could be but one science of man—comparative sociology."²

The ways in which different social structures shape individual character are a concern of Fromm's "psychoanalytic social psychology," as we have seen. This analysis, however, is only one pole in the study of man. It must be co-ordinated with the other pole, namely, research into the essential nature of man.

Fromm's opinion, no true science of man is possible unless man has a nature which can be discovered. "The concept of a science of man rests upon the premise that its object, man, exists in that there is a human nature characteristic of the human species."³

This essential nature is not observable as such; it is the task of the science of man to determine the human "core" in all of the various normal and abnormal "manifestations" of human nature. Thus the concept of man becomes a theoretical and ideal construction; but it exists as a real potentiality in man's evolutionary development. Unless this distinction is made, Fromm argues, it becomes impossible to distinguish between real human needs, rooted in the conditions of human existence, and false, artificially produced needs, which feel equally urgent but are in fact unnatural or inhuman.

Is it conceivable that a scientific model of human nature could be constructed on the basis of empirical data? If so, one could expect this construction to be founded upon carefully

1. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, p. 12.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

3. Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 20.



defined methods of procedure and modes of verification. Fromm, however, has devoted himself primarily to another type of substantiation: he has sought to show that the concept of essential man suggested by certain selected types of psychoanalytic and sociological evidence can be assimilated into the prophetic, Renaissance, and Enlightenment tradition of naturalistic and religious humanism. Indeed, he comes to hold that the vision of the fully "awakened" man is possible only as a philosophical and religious insight.

This radical aim can be envisaged only from the point of view of a certain philosophical position. . . . This aim could not be better described than has been done by Suzuki in terms of the "art of living." One must keep in mind that any such concept as the art of living grows from the soil of a spiritual humanistic orientation, as it underlies the teachings of Buddha, of the prophets, of Jesus, of Meister Eckhart, or of men such as Blake, Walt Whitman, or Bucke.⁴

Is there a reason for Fromm's tendency to gravitate toward philosophical and religious forms of discourse and verification? Fromm has come to feel that the basic method of science as usually understood is inadequate to the task of full awareness, although it is useful in practical pursuits. He views the detachment required by science as a form of alienation which must be overcome (although not eliminated). Man cannot be understood as an object; full knowledge requires participation in the being which is to be known.⁵ Science tends to make man into a thing,

4. Fromm, *et al.*, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 136.

5. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 134, and Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, pp. 149–151. Cf. also Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, pp. 116–119: here Fromm makes a distinction which had not been clearly made in his earlier work. He suggests a distinction between the *essence* of human nature and the *progressive goal* of human nature. Here he identifies the essence of man as "life aware of itself," man's self-consciousness and his need for some answer to the problem which this poses. If this distinction were consistently maintained one could say that science can discover the essence of man, but only philosophy and religion can deal adequately with the goals of human existence. In his major works Fromm does not preserve this distinction with any degree of clarity. On the contrary, the term *essence* connotes a normative concept, and Fromm's usage gravitates in this direction.



and this tendency is one of the great threats to humanism in our time. Thus knowledge of man's nature would be, in contemporary parlance, "existential" knowledge rather than knowledge from detached observation. Fromm has not fully abandoned the claim of being scientific in his methodology, but the contrary tendency is dominant.

Fromm and the Philosophers

Fromm most frequently identifies his position as "humanistic." In *Man for Himself* he associates his viewpoint with humanistic ethics, meaning that in value judgments man must be anthropocentric. He identifies his concept of the "sane society" as normative humanism. In *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* he seeks to elaborate a "humanistic psychoanalysis."

J. H. Schaar argues, however, that Fromm's humanism "is really naturalism in disguise."⁶ Noting that Fromm sees man as discovering the norms for human fulfillment in human nature rather than creating them for himself, Schaar maintains that he can best be described as a naturalist, not a humanist.

According to our analysis, Fromm seeks to overcome the tension between naturalism and humanism in a way fundamentally Hegelian and Marxian. According to Fromm, man is separate from, and opposed to, nature because he is alienated from it. At the same time, however, man represents a further development of nature. In the sane society, when man has become reconciled to nature (and himself), nature itself will have been elevated to a new level. We can look toward a day "when man will have become fully human, and when nature will be humanized as man will be 'naturalized.'"⁷ When man's full humanity has been realized, the tension between man and nature will be overcome.

Thus Schaar is correct in affirming that naturalism is Fromm's basic position; but his humanism takes its place within a broader

6. Schaar, *Escape from Authority*, p. 18.

7. Fromm, et al., *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 106.



naturalism. Man cannot be truly at home in nature until nature has been humanized. This development is possible in the Marxian tradition because of Marx's view that man in creating himself historically is creating "nature" (in the human sense) as well. The Hegelian theme of alienation and return ultimately lies behind Fromm's otherwise unexplained attempt to maintain both naturalism and humanism.

Fromm appears to stand somewhat apart from the mainstream of American naturalism. If, as J. H. Randall has suggested, naturalism is characterized essentially by a devotion to "scientific methods" of interpretation and analysis, it may be that Fromm's training in the social sciences (as they developed in Europe under the influence of Marx and Freud) sets him apart from American naturalism influenced by John Dewey, whose work was characterized by a "saturation in biological thought."⁸ His attempt to visualize man, a biological and psychic unity, as the proper object of the science of man leads Fromm to the quest for a "model of human nature." He criticizes Dewey for his failure to formulate such a model.

We have noted that this concept of human nature in Fromm's thought takes on an increasingly religious aspect, though in naturalistic form. A prominent American naturalist, Sidney Hook, has distinguished two types of "existential religion": a theistic existentialism stemming from Soren Kierkegaard, and a humanistic (or naturalistic) existentialism stemming from Ludwig Feuerbach. According to Hook, Feuerbach, unlike Kierkegaard, preserves Hegel's monism but "naturalizes and demythologizes" the Hegelian system. Hook notes that, although Kierkegaard's theism has become most influential in the twentieth century, Feuerbach "still awaits his proper recognition."⁹ It would appear that Fromm's work fits Hook's description of "existentialist religion" in the tradition of Feuerbach.¹⁰

8. J. H. Randall, Jr., "Epilogue: the Nature of Naturalism," in *Naturalism and the Human Spirit*, ed. by Y. H. Krikorian, p. 365.

9. Sidney Hook, *The Quest for Being*, p. 137.

10. Tillich, though strongly influenced by Kierkegaard, also preserves Hegel's monism. One of Tillich's major efforts is to overcome both



Further comments must be made concerning Fromm's relation to existentialism. In *Man for Himself*, Fromm remarks that his terminology is unrelated to the literature of existentialism, with which he professes little acquaintance. In *Marx's Concept of Man*, however, Fromm uses the term "existentialist" to identify the tradition within which Marx stands. "Essentially the whole existentialist philosophy, from Kierkegaard on, is, as Paul Tillich puts it, 'an over one-hundred-years-old movement of rebellion against the dehumanization of man in industrial society.'"¹¹ Marx's concept of socialism is identified by Fromm as an existentialist protest against alienation. It seems clear that Fromm conceives existentialism along the lines of Tillich's concept, described above; indeed, it is likely that Fromm's view was influenced by that of Tillich. It seems evident that Fromm thinks of himself as belonging to this movement also.

It is no violation of Fromm's position, then, to include him within the existentialist movement, as broadly interpreted by Tillich, and Fromm seems to agree that the concept of alienation is central in the thought of the movement, as Tillich maintains.¹² In this study, we shall, therefore, think of him as an existentialist in Tillich's sense.

One further relationship remains to be mentioned. There are some similarities between Fromm's work and recent elaborations of a "phenomenological" method by various European philosophers. This method consists in a focusing of attention on the structures of the "life-world," of conscious experience. In a recent essay, James Edie explains the main thrust of the movement in this way:

Phenomenology is neither a science of objects nor a science of the subject; it is a science of *experience*. It does not concentrate

naturalism and dualistic theism without reproducing Hegel's idealism. We shall seek to determine whether he has succeeded.

11. Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, p. 46. In *The Heart of Man* Fromm disavows any connection with Heidegger and Sartre.

12. Rollo May finds similarities as well as differences in a comparison of Fromm and Kierkegaard: cf. Rollo May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, pp. 44-45.



exclusively on either the objects of experience or on the subject of experience, but on the point of contact where being and consciousness meet.¹³

Insofar as Fromm concerns himself with the structures of conscious experience, it could be said that he adopts a phenomenological method. This method is implicit, for example, in his critiques of Marxian and Freudian materialism. The life-world, Fromm shows, has its own structures not reducible to physical quantification; but to the extent that Fromm seeks to develop a normative humanism or naturalism, it would appear that he abandons the descriptive and “radically empiricist” method of Husserl and his followers.¹⁴ Fromm, no doubt, could clarify his position further by commenting on his relation to the phenomenologists. We shall have occasion to comment further upon Fromm’s approach to consciousness in later sections of our study.

13. James M. Edie, “Introduction,” in Pierre Thevenaz, *What is Phenomenology?* ed. by James M. Edie, p. 19.

14. *Ibid.*



V

fromm's concept of human nature

FROMM's thought is given structure by his evolutionary approach to human nature. He sees man as emerging out of a primal unity with nature and moving toward the final goal of productive reunion with nature. Although our central interest is in the intermediate stage—the condition of alienation—this concept can be understood only in the context of Fromm's theories concerning man's origin and his destiny. We must therefore examine Fromm's concepts of the emergence of human nature with its consequent problems and of his solution to these problems.

The Problem of Human Existence: the "Break" with Nature

Fromm begins his analysis of the human situation with the assertion that man, by virtue of his very mode of existence, poses a problem for himself. Human life is not simply a fact to be taken for granted; it is a problem to be solved. The origin of this problem lies in man's original "break" with the unities and harmonies of nature. By beginning the process of becoming human, man has disrupted the harmony of the pre-human state and is now driven to seek new unities and harmonies with nature, his fellow man, and himself.



The problem of man's existence, then, is unique in the whole of nature; he has fallen out of nature, as it were, and is still in it; he is partly divine, partly animal; partly infinite, partly finite. *The necessity to find ever-new solutions for the contradictions in his existence, to find ever-higher forms of unity with nature, his fellow-men and himself, is the source of all psychic forces which motivate man, of all his passions, affects and anxieties.*¹

Fromm attempts no explanation of this original "break" other than the dynamic of the evolutionary process. He seems to view it as accidental, a product of chance. The break with nature has made man into a strange abnormality, into the "freak of the universe." At the same time, this break can be viewed as the birth of mankind, quite analogous to the birth of an individual man.

From all we know about the evolution of the human race, the birth of man is to be understood in the same sense as the birth of the individual. When man had transcended a certain threshold of minimum instinctive adaptation, he ceased to be an animal; but he was as helpless and unequipped for human existence as the individual infant is at birth. The birth of man began with the first members of the species homo sapiens, and human history is nothing but the process of this birth.²

It is apparent that the original break with nature was by no means abrupt. Man in the beginning was still closely bound to "mother nature," and eons had to pass before his distinctive human nature began to emerge. Though the break was not abrupt, it does prevent man from succeeding in any attempt to return to the "womb," to regain the purely animal harmonies.

Man's evolution is based on the fact that he has lost his original home, nature—and that he can never return to it, can never become an animal again.³

Fromm begins his anthropology, then, with the premise that man has evolved out of nature, out of an original unity and

1. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 25.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 25.



harmony that has been irretrievably lost. Once this break has occurred, the dynamic of human development arises out of man's quest for a new unity and harmony. He cannot remain in this state of separation and disequilibrium; he must seek to "find a new relatedness to man and nature after having lost the primary relatedness of the pre-human stage."⁴ Human history is a record of this attempt.

Fromm can speak strongly of the negative effects of this original separation.

[Man] is driven to overcome this inner split, tormented by a craving for "absoluteness," for another kind of harmony which can lift the curse by which he was separated from nature, from his fellowmen, and from himself.⁵

He can refer to it in the symbolic terms of "the fall" of man.

Man, who lives in the Garden of Eden, in complete harmony with nature but without awareness of himself, begins his history by the first act of freedom, disobedience to a command. Concomitantly, he becomes aware of himself, of his separateness, of his helplessness; he is expelled from Paradise, and two angels with fiery swords prevent his return.⁶

However, Fromm does not see only negative effects of this "fall," or separation. It is within man's capabilities to move forward toward a higher unity and harmony on a distinctively human level. The only real answer to the human problem is a progressive answer.

There is only one way he can take: to emerge fully from his natural home, to find a new home—one which he creates, by making the world a human one and by becoming truly human himself.⁷

Indeed, it is only by breaking with nature that man can begin to realize his humanity.

We have quoted Fromm as saying that there is only one real

4. *Ibid.*, p. viii.

5. Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 41.

6. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 24.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 25.



answer to the human predicament. In fact, however, he sees an torn between two apparent choices: the one, to progress to full humanity, the other, to attempt to regress into the natural harmonies.

we are never free from two conflicting tendencies: one to emerge from the womb, from the animal form of existence into a more human existence, from bondage to freedom; another, to return to the womb, to nature, to certainty and security.⁸

The latter alternative is appealing, but as a solution it necessarily fails. In a broad sense the two alternatives are life and death: to live, in the fullest sense, man must choose the progressive answer.

These alternatives, moreover, are present at every stage in individual or social development, not just in the early stages. A regressive answer is possible at any stage and can take many forms, as we shall see. However, Fromm is confident that, broadly speaking, the progressive tendency has gained the ascendancy in the history of the race.

Fromm makes a distinction between the regressive answer to life (which is his reinterpretation of Freud's "death-wish") and the *acceptance* of the fact of physical death. He holds that denial of the "tragic fact that man's life ends in death" is only self-deception or a false ideology. In fact, the refusal to accept the reality of death would have to be termed a regressive attitude, since it denies the truth about existence. Fromm seems to be saying that death is basically antithetical to life, and cannot be incorporated into a philosophy of life. Yet one who denies death does not really accept life. Though man must recognize the limits of finite existence, it is still possible to move forward toward the full realization of the "specifically human potentiality of reason and love."⁹ Fromm's interest centers on the removal of pathological blocks to this mature fulfillment. These, and not physical death, are man's "problem." These blocks can be re-

8. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

9. Fromm, et al., *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 94.



problem of physical death cannot be solved and thus a genuine problem. The problems connected with man's freedom from nature are apparently not, in his view, essential to the fact of physical death.

Clarification of the concept of the "break" with nature is necessary. Fromm holds that the break coincides with the emergence of self-consciousness.

Fromm said that man is asked a question by the very fact of his existence and that this is a question raised by the contradiction in himself—that of being in nature and at the same time free of nature by the fact that he is life aware of itself.¹⁰

Fromm makes a distinction, for which he gives credit to R. M. between "simple," or animal, consciousness, and human consciousness, which contains self-consciousness, man's "awareness of himself as the subject of his experience."¹¹ Fromm seems to use consciousness and self-consciousness interchangeably, apparently implying that self-consciousness is presupposed in all human awareness once it is achieved by the adult child. It is awareness of himself as a separate individual that lifts man out of nature into a new level of existence. This kind of consciousness is a complex phenomenon. Its emergence is contingent upon a social development, namely the development of a "conceptual system," a set of "categories." Fromm concedes that some of these categories may be common to all men, his emphasis is placed on the individual. The measure the conceptual system is the product of social evolution.

The conceptual system is in itself a result of social evolution. Society, by its own practice of living and by the mode of life, of feeling, of perceiving, develops a system of categories which determines the forms of awareness.¹²

Development of human consciousness and the role of society

¹⁰, p. 92.

¹¹, p. 98.

¹², p. 99.



in fostering the development and limiting the content of consciousness will be examined more closely in our analysis of alienation. Suffice it to say here that for Fromm the “birth” of man and self-consciousness cannot be separated from the “birth” of society, and that both of these births are gradual evolutionary processes.

Making the Unconscious Conscious

We have spoken of the break with nature and have identified it with the advent of self-consciousness. We turn now to a consideration of Fromm’s view of the “goal” of human nature. Though Fromm does speak of man as the “freak of the universe,” he takes the view that man has a potential human nature which can be realized, a realization toward which the break with nature is a positive step. We have seen that man’s birth prevents his returning to the pre-human unity with nature, except in insanity or death. This separation, however, is only in consciousness; by becoming conscious man has not lost the possibility of a new unity with nature. All levels of nature are still present in him, but they are simply below the level of conscious awareness.

But man, in any culture, has all the potentialities: he is the archaic man, the beast of prey, the cannibal, the idolater, and he is the being with the capacity for reason, for love, for justice. The content of the unconscious, then, is neither the good nor the evil, the rational nor the irrational; it is both; 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. Unconsciousness represents universal man, the whole man, rooted in the Cosmos; it represents the plant in him, the animal in him, the spirit in him; it represents his past down to the dawn of human existence, and it represents his future to the day when man will have become fully human, and when nature will be humanized as man will be “naturalized.”¹³

13. *Ibid.*, p. 106.



Thus the whole man is a microcosm containing all nature within himself.

But conscious man has become separated from these roots in the Cosmos. This separation results from the failure of certain feelings and experiences to emerge into consciousness (for various reasons, as we shall see). In Fromm's view, one way of expressing the goal of human nature, then, is the goal of making the unconscious conscious. Since this achievement is the goal of human existence, it is also the goal of Fromm's "humanistic psychoanalysis."

The most characteristic element in the psychoanalytic approach is, without any doubt, its attempt *to make the unconscious conscious* —or, to put it in Freud's words, to transform Id into Ego.¹⁴

According to Fromm, this goal had a limited function for Freud: the control of the repressed impulses of the unconscious by the ego. Fromm visualizes a broader application of the idea.

When we free ourselves from the limited concept of Freud's unconscious . . . then Freud's aim, the transformation of unconsciousness into consciousness ("Id into Ego") gains a wider and more profound meaning. *Making the unconscious conscious transforms the mere idea of the universality of man into a living experience of this universality; it is the experiential realization of humanism.*¹⁵

When full consciousness is achieved man experiences himself once again as in unity with nature; the "break" is overcome.

The Productive Orientation

Fromm describes the goal of human nature in other terms. His concept of the distinctive potentialities of human nature can best be summarized in his concept of the "productive orientation."

In discussing the productive character I venture beyond critical analysis and inquire into the nature of fully developed character

14. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 107.



that is the aim of human development and simultaneously the ideal of humanistic ethics.¹⁶

The “productive orientation” is a total configuration of character, a mode of relating to the world and to oneself which employs one’s inherent powers.

The productive orientation of personality refers to a fundamental attitude, a mode of relatedness in all realms of human experience. It covers mental, emotional and sensory responses to others, to oneself, and to things. Productiveness is man’s ability to use his powers and to realize the potentialities inherent in him.¹⁷

Fromm speaks of three “powers” or “modes of relatedness” which represent the realization of that which is distinctively human: reason, love, and creativity.

With his power of reason [man] can penetrate the surface of phenomena and understand their essence. With his power of love he can break through the wall which separates one person from another. With his power of imagination he can visualize things not yet existing; he can plan and thus begin to create.¹⁸

Thus the productive orientation in these three ways overcomes man’s separation from nature, his fellow men, and himself, and it is, at the same time, a realization of his inherent potentialities.

Since Fromm’s understanding of the power of reason will be discussed below, and since his concept of creativity is not well developed and is largely implicit in the broader concept of productivity, some comments might be made here concerning Fromm’s treatment of love.

Fundamentally, love is for Fromm the reunion of the separated, the overcoming of alienation.

The necessity to unite with other living beings, to be related to them, is an imperative need on the fulfillment of which man’s sanity depends. This need is behind all phenomena which constitute the whole gamut of intimate human relations, of all passions which are called love in the broadest sense of the word.¹⁹

16. Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 83.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

19. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 30.



Immediately, however, it is necessary to distinguish two basic types of reunion and, correspondingly, two types of love. There are first the regressive forms of reunion. Many of these forms appear to be relationships of love, but in reality they are types of dominance or submission, "symbiotic" relationships which do not satisfy man's real need. Genuine love is a form of union which preserves the integrity of the lovers. "Love is *union* with somebody, or something, outside oneself, under the condition of retaining the separateness and integrity of one's own self."²⁰ Genuine love, then, within the framework of our analysis, is progressive, rather than regressive, union. Fromm criticizes Freud for viewing all forms of union as regressive narcissism; he holds that union is possible on a mature level.

Our main interest here is in Fromm's concept of mature love. It would seem that in discussing "progressive" love Fromm alternates between two partially contradictory conceptions. On the one hand, as we have seen, progressive (as well as regressive) love springs from man's deep need to be reunited with the world and his fellow man. This understanding suggests that love presupposes alienation, that union presupposes separation.

On the other hand, Fromm describes love as a form of productivity. Love is self-giving, the highest expression of human potency.

In the very act of giving, I experience my strength, my wealth, my power. This experience of heightened vitality and potency fills me with joy. I experience myself as overflowing, spending, alive, hence as joyous. Giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is a deprivation, but because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness.²¹

Fromm understands the traditional concept of God's generous and overflowing love for man as a symbol for man's productive love.

The human reality behind the concept of man's love for God in humanistic religion is man's ability to love productively, to love

20. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

21. Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, p. 23.



without greed, without submission and domination, to love from the fullness of his personality, just as God's love is a symbol for love out of strength and not out of weakness.²²

In these descriptions Fromm seems to view love as arising, not from need, but from a spontaneous overflow of vitality or activity.

If our analysis of Fromm is correct, productive love in the sense just described must be the fruit of reunion, not its source. If love is a form of productivity, it is exactly the separated or alienated man who cannot love in the mature sense. He is severed from the source of such potency. On the other hand, the productive individual has no need for reunion; he has already achieved "a new relatedness to man and nature." He loves as an expression of his own aliveness, not out of any kind of drivenness or passion. It would appear that Fromm must choose between two concepts: love as need, and love as overflowing vitality. He cannot maintain both that the act of reunion is a productive act, and that productivity stems from a person who has achieved reunion.²³

In fact, it is doubtful that love is the primary path to reunion for Fromm, especially in his later work. In his developing perspective, as we shall see in more detail, the alienated man has lost touch with his own nature; the man who rediscovers humanity and nature within himself can then love humanity and life in others. This comes, not through love, but through "de-repression." The man who has overcome repressedness can say: "I am in touch with the deepest sources within myself, and that means with all of humanity. . . . inasmuch as I am not a stranger to myself, no one and nothing is a stranger to me."²⁴ Reunion for Fromm occurs first of all within oneself, and then with the neighbor. It is true that the rediscovery of self may be a form of self-

22. Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, p. 87.

23. We might say that Fromm has sought to combine two different motifs: the *erōs* motif and the *agapē* motif. It is doubtful that they can be combined in this way.

24. Fromm, *et al.*, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 127.



love, and this Fromm approves, so long as it is in correlation with one's love of his neighbor. However, this love must also be productive—and not narcissistic. The original motive to be reunited with the fullness of one's own nature must be for Fromm the inexplicable progressive impulse of nature to which we have referred, rather than love.

One other important characteristic of productivity in Fromm's account is freedom. Fromm distinguishes two ways of understanding human freedom: a negative understanding and a positive understanding, "freedom from" and "freedom to."²⁵ Fromm views the former as the release from natural and traditional bondages. Though he does not mention it here, the original break with nature, it would seem, could be considered the beginning of "freedom from." Fromm refers to being "freed from traditional authorities," apparently a reference to the authority of mother, father, clan, etc., over the not-yet-matured individual. History records the gradual emergence of individuality, as man frees himself from these traditional bonds (here again by analogy with individual growth and development).

But this state of negative freedom is an insecure and frightening condition which cannot long be endured.

At the same time [man] has become isolated, powerless, and an instrument of purposes outside of himself, alienated from himself and others; furthermore—this state undermines his self, weakens and frightens him and makes him ready for submission to new kinds of bondage.²⁶

This state is untenable, that is, unless it is accompanied by positive freedom, "freedom to." And this is none other than the power to express one's own nature, to realize one's inherent potentialities. "Positive freedom on the other hand is identical with the full realization of the individual's potentialities, together with his ability to live actively and spontaneously."²⁷

25. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, p. 32.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 270.

27. *Ibid.*



Thus freedom in the positive sense is equivalent to “productivity.”

We must now seek to show the relationship between the goal of “making the unconscious conscious” and that of the “productive orientation.” Fromm assures us that they are closely related.

The full awakening to reality means, again speaking in psychological terms, to have attained a fully “productive orientation.” That means not to relate oneself to the world receptively, exploitatively, hoardingly, or in the marketing fashion, but creatively, actively (in Spinoza’s sense). In the state of full productiveness there are no veils which separate me from the “not me.”²⁸

It must be admitted that although Fromm affirms the essential identity of these two concepts he nowhere establishes this identity through detailed analysis. It is, however, partly implicit in the concept of consciousness which he has elaborated in several works.

For Fromm, consciousness is a mode of relatedness, and hence a mode of activity (not simply receptivity). This active view of consciousness Fromm finds in the early Marx. “Consciousness,” said Marx, “can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life process.”²⁹ Both Marx and Fromm however must distinguish between true consciousness and false consciousness; Marx is willing to say in this same passage that man’s consciousness is determined by the modes of material production and exchange. When there is no forced labor, one might say, there will be no false consciousness. By the same token, for Fromm, when there is no forced awareness there will be no false awareness. Thus when consciousness is a self-activity, not a form of passivity, it will be both true and productive.

We have noted a certain similarity between Fromm’s thought and recent phenomenological research. This similarity is notable

28. Fromm, *et al.*, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 116.

29. Marx and Engels, “The German Ideology,” excerpted in *Marx and Engels*, ed. by Feuer, p. 247.



in Fromm's approach to consciousness. In comparing the pragmatism of William James with contemporary phenomenology James Edie writes:

The primacy of *action* as the fundamental category of early pragmatism gives us a notion of man-in-the-world, of an incarnate, unitary intentional consciousness continuous with the notion of an intentionality of consciousness which is the basic discovery of phenomenology. Consciousness is less a type of "seeing" than of "acting." It is *praxis* before it can become *theoria*.³⁰

It is clear that Fromm shares this general viewpoint.³¹ Thus the disparity between the concepts of full consciousness and productivity is reduced, if not entirely eliminated.

The goal of human nature, then, as we have seen, can be variously described as productiveness, full awareness, freedom, a new relatedness based on love, reason, and creativity. All of these qualities are simply aspects of the actualization of human potentiality. In fact, in Fromm's view, all genuine human "activity," stemming from the individual as "actor," leads toward this actualization. Fromm identifies his concept of activity with that of Spinoza.

One concept of activity, the modern one, refers to the use of energy for the achievement of external aims; the other concept of activity refers to the use of man's inherent powers, regardless of whether any external change is brought about. The latter concept of activity has been formulated most clearly by Spinoza. He differentiates among the affects between active and passive affects, "actions" and "passions." In the exercise of an active affect, man is free, he is the master of his affect; in the exercise of a passive affect, man is driven, the object of motivations of which he is not aware.³²

For Fromm all genuine "activity" is thus virtuous (produc-

30. Pierre Thevanaz, *What is Phenomenology?* ed. with introduction by James M. Edie, p. 35.

31. One important difference would appear to be that phenomenology is a "radical empiricism" and detects many different kinds of "life-worlds." Fromm holds that full consciousness discovers the one real world as it truly is. Perhaps at this point he is more Hegelian than Kantian.

32. Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, pp. 21-22.



tive). Evil is passivity, submission, “escape from freedom”; it is merely the absence of good, productivity.

We have shown that man is not necessarily evil but becomes evil only if the proper conditions for his growth and development are lacking. The evil has no independent existence of its own, it is the absence of good. It is the result of the failure to realize life.³³

Fromm suggests that in the humanistic religions God is a symbol for the full realization of human powers. Of humanistic religion, he writes:

God is not a symbol of power over man but of man's own powers.

.
in humanistic religion God is the image of man's higher self, a symbol of what man potentially is or ought to become.³⁴

Thus the goal of human nature is not an externally imposed standard but the fulfillment of the potentialities of man's own nature.

The Problem of Regression

One important question remains unanswered in this account of Fromm's concept of “productivity” or “activity.” In what sense are regressive impulses an original and permanent part of human nature? Would it be possible to speak of regressive “activity,” or can regression in fact always be understood as “passivity”? This question takes on some importance in Fromm's work, for if certain natural human impulses are incurably self-destructive, then they ought to be repressed and excluded from the conscious self, thus defeating the purpose of “making the unconscious conscious.” Fromm has apparently had some difficulty with this question, for different answers to it can be discerned in his work.

At times Fromm seems to hold that progressive and regressive impulses exist simultaneously in the individual. After stat-

33. Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 218.

34. Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, p. 49.



ing that “we are never free from two conflicting tendencies,”
Fromm in a footnote adds this comment:

It is in this polarity that I see the true kernel in Freud's hypothesis of the existence of a life and death instinct; the difference to Freud's theory is, that the forward-going and the retrogressive impulse have not the same biologically determined strength, but that normally, the forward-going life instinct is stronger and increases in relative strength the more it grows.³⁵

This same view, that man possesses two opposing “instincts,” seems to be supported in a later passage. After speaking of the role of society in encouraging repression (an idea which we shall examine later), Fromm writes of a different kind of repression:

We tend also to repress those strivings which are incompatible with the principle of structure and growth of the whole human being, incompatible with the “humanistic conscience,” that voice which speaks in the name of the full development of our person.³⁶

Regressive impulses, he writes, “are under no circumstances compatible with the inherent goals of the evolution of man's nature.”³⁷

If these statements represent Fromm's final position on this subject, it would seem that his view of productivity outlined above would have to be somewhat modified. Only the productive impulses can be permitted; others must be repressed. Repression is a necessary evil; and man remains a divided being, indeed, an alienated being, in Fromm's sense of the word. Nature itself (in man) is divided against itself. This view is more in keeping with that of Freud.

But Fromm seemingly does not consistently maintain this position. A major theme of his later work is the importance of complete “de-repression.”

To the degree to which repressedness diminishes, I am in touch with the deepest sources within myself, and that means with all of

35. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 27n.

36. Fromm, *et al.*, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 104–105.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 105.



humanity. If all repressedness has been lifted, there is no more unconscious as against conscious; there is direct, immediate experience.³⁸

In an earlier work, Fromm states his opposition to the split between reason and nature, a split which would seem in this passage to correspond to the later distinction between the conscious and the unconscious:

One premise for this spontaneity [i.e., productivity] is the acceptance of the total personality and the elimination of the split between "reason" and "nature"; for only if man does not repress essential parts of his self, only if he has become transparent to himself, and only if the different spheres of life have reached a fundamental integration, is spontaneous activity possible.³⁹

Also, Fromm explicitly rejects Freud's view that civilization is necessarily built upon repression.

In his discussion of destructiveness, which he understands as a form of regression, Fromm seems to suggest an alternative approach to the question. He here asserts that destructiveness (and hence, by implication, other regressive impulses) is a kind of secondary potentiality, which emerges only if the primary potentiality is thwarted. Man becomes destructive only if he cannot be productive; the two modes of life are mutually exclusive. "[Destructiveness] is only the *alternative* to creativeness. Creation and destruction, love and hate, are not two instincts which exist independently."⁴⁰

If we follow this approach, however, another question arises: whence comes the blockage which transmutes creativeness into destructiveness? The obvious answer is society, and there is some indication in Fromm's work that this is indeed his answer. Undoubtedly society for Fromm can, and frequently does, function in a repressive manner, causing such a blockage. We will want to examine this role of society in some detail later on. The question here is whether, in Fromm's view, regressive

38. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

39. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, pp. 258–259.

40. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 38.



society can be set over against progressive man in an unambiguous manner. Does Fromm hold that regressive impulses, which have no "primary" roots in human nature, can come to dominate a society?

It is true that Fromm's emphasis is upon the negative effect of society on the fulfillment of individuals. Will Herberg, in an analysis of Fromm, concludes on the basis of this emphasis that Fromm locates the source of evil (or regression) solely in society as an entity which stands over against man's true interests. Herberg writes:

Fromm's interest in history, like Rousseau's, is to lay bare the many ways in which evil institutions have corrupted man in the past, and to draw appropriate lessons from the story. . . . For him, "sin" is socially derived, and history is redeemable through human effort.⁴¹

It might be argued, however, that this is a one-sided interpretation of Fromm's work. We have noted (and will examine in more detail) Fromm's view that society goes through a course of development analogous to the growth of individuals. Societies can, like individuals, be infantile and regressive; indeed the development of sane and mature individuals partly awaits the achievement of the sane society. The achievement of the sane society, however, awaits the leadership of mature individuals. Fromm thinks of the founders of the great religions as the pathfinders for humanity. Men of vision can lead a society to break new ground in the direction of human fulfillment. On the other hand, individuals can become regressive against the dominant tone of the culture. After pointing out that a regressive religion may seem reasonable by being shared, he writes: "When it is not shared, when the regressive wishes are in contrast to consciousness and the claims of the existing culture, then the secret, individual 'religion' is a neurosis."⁴² It is fair to say that Fromm's

41. Will Herberg, "Freud and the Revisionists," in *Freud and the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Benjamin Nelson, pp. 156–157.

42. Fromm, *et al.*, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 91.



interest lies more in the analysis of the “socially patterned defects” than of the neurosis, but both are regressive. Fromm tends to think of humanity (or cultural segments thereof) as a growing organism; finally, the individual and the society cannot be separated. We must locate the source of regression in man, in human impulses, not in something which stands over against man. The blockage referred to earlier may be directly due to the influence of society on the individual; but society becomes regressive because this impulse is somehow rooted in human nature.

If we concede the original existence of regressive impulses, other alternatives for dealing with them appear in Fromm’s work. At some points Fromm seems to suggest that instead of repressing the regressive impulses they may properly be re-directed toward oneself. For example, concerning impulses to remain dependent upon father or mother, Fromm writes:

In the process of maturing, the conscience becomes more and more independent from these original father and mother figures: *we become, as it were, our own father and . . . mother, and . . . child.*⁴³

With regard to religion, Fromm suggests that one might experience “being God.”⁴⁴ Fromm seems to be alluding here to his view of man as a being who contains all aspects of nature within himself. However, the discovery of the fact of his “universality” occurs *after* the overcoming of narcissism, not before. A narcissistic or regressive return to the self would be destructive. This redirection of regressive impulses toward the self assumes that regression has, in fact, already been overcome.

Still another attitude toward regressive impulses can be discovered in Fromm’s work. At times he suggests the view that regressive impulses will wither away and die out as the progressive impulses are encouraged. In comparing the ethical attitudes of Zen Buddhism and humanistic psychoanalysis, Fromm writes:

43. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 47.

44. Fromm, *et al.*, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 92.



They do not tend to make a man lead a virtuous life by the suppression of the "evil" desire, but they expect that the evil desire will melt away and disappear under the light and warmth of enlarged consciousness.⁴⁵

It would seem legitimate here to identify "evil desire" with regressive desire. In speaking of the function of humanistic conscience (which Fromm interprets as knowledge of the goal of human nature), he writes: "His conscience ought to tell him which needs to cultivate and satisfy and which needs to let wither and starve out."⁴⁶ We might refer also to the passage which indicates Fromm's view that the progressive impulse is the stronger.

It would appear that Fromm as yet has no final answer to the question of the relation between regressive impulses and man's basic nature, although the one cited in the last paragraph is perhaps most in keeping with the basic structure of his work.⁴⁷ He is impressed with the recurrent strength of regressive impulses in human history at a stage when, according to his theory of historical development, they should have been overcome.⁴⁸ At the same time, he is confident that life actively lived is inherently progressive. The main tenor of his work seems to imply that the regressive impulse (or the "death-wish") is not an ineradicable instinct in human nature. It can be overcome, and perhaps eliminated, through the power of consciousness, through a social and historical process. Man becomes alienated, as we shall see, as a necessary consequence of the development of consciousness, through the instrumentality of society. Alienation can finally be viewed in Fromm's thought as a progressive, though frightening, step. It is a dangerous stage in human development, however, because it can lead to the regressive reaction which we have described. Since Fromm has not been com-

45. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

46. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 28.

47. This general view is restated in Fromm's *The Heart of Man*, pp. 121-123.

48. Cf., for example, his study of Nazism in *Escape from Freedom*.



pletely successful in explaining the power of the regressive impulse, he has not given a clear explanation of the circumstance under which alienation leads to regression; but it is clear that regression is a *reaction* to potential or actual alienation. To an examination of this concept we now turn.



VI

alienation

● **W**E HAVE discussed Fromm's view of man's original "break" with nature, and his understanding of human history as the process of "birth" of the human race, quite analogous to the birth of an individual man. History is seen as an extension of nature, moving through stages of growth toward the full realization of human potentialities. To achieve this realization, a negative possibility must be overcome: the possibility of regression toward the original state of unity with nature, a possibility which leads to "death" rather than "life."

● In Fromm's analysis, however, the growth of man toward the positive "goal" of human nature, either in an individual or in the race, is not a unilinear evolutionary ascent from a lower form of life. Man's unique nature is such that in order to realize himself fully as an individual he must first separate himself from nature and his fellow man, and in a real sense from himself. He must go out from his "home" in nature and see himself as a distinct and separate entity before he can be reunited with nature, his fellow man, and himself, on a higher, conscious level. He must, in a word, become alienated; full realization lies on the other side of alienation. Fromm states this most clearly in connection with his interpretation of progressive religions:

Unity is sought in all these religions—not the regressive unity found by going back to the pre-individual, preconscious harmony of paradise, but unity on a new level: that unity which can be arrived at only after man has experienced his separateness, after he has gone



through the stage of alienation from himself and from the world, and has been fully born.¹

Or again, in describing the view of Hegel and Marx, Fromm states: “Man has to become alienated in order to overcome this split in the activity of his reason. The same holds true for love.”²

In these passages, Fromm uses the term alienation to apply to a necessary stage in the movement toward maturity, involving one’s awareness of oneself as a separate individual. He emphasizes that this awareness, achieved through alienation, is not lost in full maturity and reconciliation.

Well-being means to be fully related to man and nature affectively, to overcome separateness and alienation, to arrive at the experience of oneness with all that exists, and yet to experience *myself* at the same time as the separate entity *I* am, as the individual.³

Alienation and Regression

We will want to examine this progressive view of alienation in more detail. It must first be noted, however, that Fromm does not always use the term “alienation” in this sense. In fact, the view described here seems to have clearly emerged only in his later work. In more recent writing he clarifies a distinction which he had not made clear earlier: the distinction between alienation as such and the regressive answer to the problem posed by the fact of alienation. At times Fromm seems to identify alienation with the regressive answer to alienation, though the latter is really a form of reunion. This inconsistency can best be illustrated in Fromm’s treatment of religion. He understands religions as attempts to answer the problem of human existence. “Religion is the formalized and elaborate answer to man’s existence.”⁴ However, religions may give two fundamentally

1. Fromm, *et al.*, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 94.

2. Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 57.

3. Fromm, *et al.*, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 91.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 91.



ALYENATION

57

different answers to man's problem: the progressive and the regressive answers.

But it is deceptive to think of religions as if they had, necessarily, something in common beyond the concern with giving an answer to the question of existence. As far as the content of religions is concerned, there is no unity whatsoever; on the contrary there are two fundamentally opposite answers.

One answer is to go back to prehuman, preconscious existence, to deal with reason, to become an animal and thus to become one with nature again.

The other pole of religion is represented by all those religions which seek the answer to the question of human existence by emerging fully from prehuman existence, by developing the specifically human potentiality of reason and love and thus by finding a new harmony between man and nature—and between man and man.⁵

Now it is clear in Fromm's account that idolatrous religion is one form of the regressive answer to the problem of human existence. Yet Fromm clearly identifies alienation and idolatry. In his fullest treatment of the idea of alienation he states:

The concept of alienation is a much older one: it is the same to which the prophets of the Old Testament referred as *idolatry*.⁶

Every act of submissive worship is an act of alienation and idolatry in his sense.⁷

Elsewhere, Fromm identifies alienation with authoritarian religion (as contrasted with humanistic, progressive religion). "The great fail of man is his alienation from himself, his submission to power, his turning against himself even though under the guise of his worship of God."⁸

It would appear that in Fromm's later work, alienation is

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-94.

6. Fromm, *The Same Society*, pp. 121-123.

7. Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, p. 53.



mainly identified with what Fromm earlier called “the problem of human existence.” In *The Sane Society* Fromm describes the human predicament in this fashion:

Man is torn away from the primary union with nature, which characterizes animal existence. Having at the same time reason and imagination, he is aware of his aloneness and separateness; of his powerlessness and ignorance; of the accidentalness of his birth and of his death. He could not face this state of being for a second if he could not find new ties with his fellow man which replace the old ones, regulated by instincts. Even if all his physiological needs were satisfied, he would experience his state of aloneness and individuation as a prison from which he had to break out in order to retain his sanity.⁸

This would appear to be an accurate description of what he later calls alienation. On the other hand, as we have seen, phenomena which are earlier termed alienation he now describes as regressive answers to the problem of human existence.

The relation between alienation and regression, however, is more complex than is immediately apparent. We have been speaking of alienation as equivalent to awareness of oneself as an individual, but self-awareness is itself a complex phenomenon. In order to clarify Fromm’s analysis, we might suggest a distinction between the form of consciousness (or abstract consciousness) and the content of consciousness. Man, because of the unique characteristics of his brain, has the formal or abstract capacity for consciousness. However, the actual content of consciousness (that is, how self and world are understood) is deeply affected by the type of society into which the individual is born. A regressive society, as we shall see, may force the individual to repress some aspects of his own self-awareness. As we have seen, it is the limitation of the content of consciousness that must be eliminated in full maturity. Since this limitation is due in large measure to the *repressive* effect of society on the individual, and since this in turn stems from *regression* in society,

8. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 30.



we can see that alienation and regression cannot be completely separated, though they must be distinguished.

It would seem fair to say that the term *alienation* is not best applied to the regressive answers, for these answers presuppose alienation as the human problem. We conclude that Fromm's late use of the term is more appropriate: the description of man's separateness and aloneness because of self-awareness. However, it is not self-awareness as such which represents alienation, but only a limited self-awareness. We must at this point describe in more detail the development of self-consciousness, as presented in Fromm's account.

Alienation and Self-awareness

We have spoken of man's "break" with nature and have identified it with the "birth" of the individual and the race. Fromm uses birth in a broader sense, however, than merely physical birth. The latter is only the beginning of human birth. The physical birth of an infant is not a radical break with the "pre-human harmonies." The newborn infant has no awareness of himself as separate and distinct from his environment.

For the infant shortly after birth, there is not even awareness of reality existing outside of himself in the sense of sense-perception. He and mother's nipple and mother's breasts are still one; he finds himself in a state *before* any subject-object differentiation takes place.⁹

To describe the process of achieving self-awareness we must distinguish three of its aspects. First we must trace two parallel but partially independent developments within the individual: the development of objectivity, or what Fromm sometimes calls "intellection," and the development of "overcoming narcissism." Then we must show the effect of society in limiting and/or distorting the consciousness of individuals.

We have already referred to the necessity of a "conceptual system," without which no experience can enter conscious

9. Fromm, *et al.*, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 89.



awareness. Even after the child has learned to make a minimal use of this system, he does not think of himself as separate from his experience.

For the new-born infant there is as yet no separation between the me and the not-me. This separation takes place, and the final achievement is expressed by the fact that the child can say "I." But still the child's grasp of the world remains relatively immediate and direct. When the child plays with a ball it really sees a ball moving, it is fully *in* this experience, and that is why it is an experience which can be repeated without end, and with a never ceasing joy.¹⁰

As the person matures and his intellect develops, he begins to see himself as separate from the world which he experiences. Fromm refers to this development as the "split between subject and object." He raises the question whether this achievement is the same as consciousness. He concludes that a kind of consciousness is possible which overcomes the subject-object split. Therefore, a distinction must be made between consciousness as such and "intellectual reflection."

Intellectual reflection is, of course, always conscious, but not all that is conscious is intellectual reflection. If I look at a person, I am *aware* of the person, I am aware of whatever happens to me in relation to the person, but only if I have separated myself from him in a subject-object distance is this consciousness identical with intellectual reflection.¹¹

Nonreflective consciousness appears on the far side of alienation and represents man's reunion with the world.

The development of intellectual reflection or the subject-object split is a necessary part of the achievement of rationality and, of course, is especially useful in scientific and practical pursuits. At the same time, however, it leads to alienation. Fromm states:

10. *Ibid.*, p. 128; as we shall see, Fromm takes this "pre-intellectual, immediate grasp of the child" as a model for the "enlightenment" experience which lies on the other side of "the full development of man's reason, objectivity, individuality."

11. *Ibid.*, p. 97.



To be aware of my breathing does not mean *to think about* my breathing. To be aware of the movement of my hand does not mean to think about it. On the contrary, once I *think about* my breathing or the movement of my hand, I am not any more aware of my breathing or of the movement of my hand. The same holds true of my awareness of a flower or a person, of my experience of joy, love, or peace.¹²

In intellection, experience has lost its immediacy.

Closely related to the development of intellection is the use of language. Experiences cannot usually emerge into consciousness unless a word is available to describe them. But as soon as an experience is reduced to words a separation occurs. Certain language styles may produce this type of alienated experience more than others.

This general process of cerebration is more widespread and intense in modern culture than it probably was at any time before in history. Just because of the increasing emphasis on intellectual knowledge which is a condition for scientific and technical achievements, and in connection with it on literacy and education, words more and more take the place of experience.¹³

What Fromm says here about language is apparently related to his view of the “conceptual system,” mentioned earlier. Experience can be organized and categorized in various ways, according to the culture. Some cultures emphasize “the purely intellectual side of knowledge” to the exclusion of the “affective” side. (This function of culture is related to but should be distinguished from the repressive function to be discussed.)

We might refer again to the distinction between the form of consciousness and the content of consciousness. Self-world awareness as such is not alienation; consciousness is not necessarily separation; but formal consciousness is not possible without specific content, and this content is organized by the “conceptual system” and by language. These two phenomena are cultural products. As such they may, while enabling men to be

12. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 109.



conscious at all, fail at the same time to bring certain aspects of experience into awareness, thus alienating men from the fullness of their natures and potential experiences. An intellectualizing culture, for example, may fail to develop ways for expressing affective experiences.

The second major aspect of the process of achieving self-awareness is the overcoming of narcissism. We have noted that the ability to view the world as separate from oneself develops only gradually. In the normally maturing individual this development is accompanied by the growing ability to accept reality as such, and not as one would wish it to be. This is primarily an emotional, or affective development, rather than an intellectual one.

In an *affective* sense, it takes the development of full maturity to overcome the narcissistic attitude of omniscience and omnipotence, provided this stage is ever reached. . . . In the normal development of the child this [narcissistic] attitude slowly changes to the mature one of being aware of reality and accepting it, its laws, hence necessity. In the neurotic person we find invariably that he has not arrived at this point. . . . He insists that reality must conform to his ideas.¹⁴

Fromm implies that one might have the ability of intellectual reflection fully developed, and yet remain emotionally dependent and infantile. Narcissism is closely related to regression, which we have already discussed. Perhaps a distinction could be made by referring to narcissism as pre-alienation, and regression as post-alienation in sequence. Narcissism is natural at an infant's stage of development but not for an adult. It might be noted that Fromm uses the term "maturity" in the above passage in reference to an alienated condition. The overcoming of narcissism leaves man mature in one sense, but separate and isolated unless he can move forward to a new unity on the other side of alienation.

The third aspect to be discussed in the process of achieving self-awareness is the role of society in determining the content

14. *Ibid.*, p. 90.



of consciousness. We have seen how the use of any language, while necessary for awareness of experiences, leads to an alienation from the immediacy of experience. Furthermore, the language of a particular society may lead to a greater or lesser degree of alienation, depending upon its emphasis on intellection. Beyond this, however, the whole mode of life and attitude toward life of a society has a great bearing on the content of consciousness.

Every society, by its own practice of living and by the mode of relatedness, of feeling, and perceiving, develops a system of categories which determines the forms of awareness. This system works, as it were, like a *socially conditioned filter*; experience cannot enter awareness unless it can penetrate this filter.¹⁵

This “social filter,” in Fromm’s analysis, has three components: the language of the society, the form of logic which it assumes to be valid, and the taboos which the society enforces. Each of these components has its effect in filtering out, or excluding from awareness, certain types of experience, and giving prominence to other types. Since both language and logic are the products of a particular society, the third factor, the influence of the “social premium” placed on some experiences and the taboo placed on others, becomes predominant in Fromm’s analysis.

Fromm elaborates upon the concept of social premium and social taboo in his analysis of the “social character.” The social character is the means by which a society instills in its members a desire to preserve the patterns of life of that culture. 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 cannot permit

15. *Ibid.*, p. 99. This passage suggests a kind of social determinism which seems to contradict Fromm’s concept of individual “productivity.”



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.”¹⁶ To defy the culture is to run the risk of isolation and ostracism, a situation which for most men is unbearable.

Not only is consciousness *restricted* by social taboo; it is also *distorted* and *falsified* by a society which cannot allow the full realization of human potentiality. With regard to the extent of falsification, Fromm states: “The average person’s consciousness is mainly ‘false consciousness,’ consisting of fictions and illusions, while precisely what he is not aware of is reality.”¹⁷

Thus Fromm concludes that the content of consciousness is in large measure socially determined. Much, therefore, depends upon the extent to which the society encourages “full” awareness, the extent to which the “social aims” coincide with the “human aims.” A society which fosters regressive answers to the human situation will force individuals to repress impulses which would lead them toward the fulfillment of the goal of human nature.

We have discussed three aspects of the process of achieving self-awareness: the development of intellection, the overcoming of narcissism, and the influence of society on the content of consciousness. It would seem that the first two lead necessarily to at least a temporary alienation; together they compose the basis for viewing oneself as a separate individual. The third factor, on the other hand, does not necessarily lead to alienation; in the “sane society,” no artificial restrictions or falsifications would be imposed upon human consciousness. In actual societies, however, the experience which is allowed to pass through the “social filter” is a limited segment of the totality of possible human feeling and experience. Whereas the first two factors necessarily lead to a sense of separation and aloneness, the “social character” of a particular society may tend to accentuate

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 105–106.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 108.



this feeling, or to diminish it, depending upon whether the tone of the society is regressive or progressive. On the other hand, regressive tendencies within an individual may counteract progressive social tendencies, retarding the elimination of narcissism or regression.

In any case, the maturing individual must go through a stage of alienation: the separation of a limited consciousness from the whole man, which, we have seen, Fromm identifies with unconsciousness.

Inasmuch as consciousness represents only the small sector of socially patterned experience and unconsciousness represents the richness and depth of universal man the state of repressedness results in the fact that I, the accidental, social person, am separated from me the whole human person. I am a stranger to myself, and to the same degree everybody else is a stranger to me. I am cut off from the vast area of experience which is human, and remain a fragment of a man, a cripple who experiences only a small part of what is real in him and what is real in others.¹⁸

The individual who is “cut off from the vast area of experience which is human” cannot live productively. The alienated person is separated from his own powers. He does not experience himself as an active, creative center.

Let us summarize the results of our discussion. For Fromm, alienation is awareness of oneself as a separate being, in both the intellectual and the affective senses—an awareness which has gone beyond the child’s immediacy of experience but has not yet reached that fullness which sees man as he truly is, rooted in and harmoniously related to the cosmos. The overcoming of narcissism and the achievement of the “subject-object split” are necessary, though painful, forms of separation. In the stage of alienation, the awareness of separation tends to mask one’s potentiality for a new relatedness through love, reason, and creative work. But the negative aspects of separation are overcome (without eliminating the separation) through the achievement of full consciousness.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 108.



Fromm applies this analysis both to the individual and to the human species. This means that alienation must be approached on two levels. In one sense, any physically mature person who has not achieved full consciousness is alienated. However, at the earlier stages of human evolution the objective conditions did not permit the achievement of the "sane society" or the realization of productive individuals in significant numbers. Speaking of all humanity, these stages represent infancy and adolescence and cannot be considered alienation in the fullest sense. In modern society, conditions permit the achievement of full consciousness and the sane society; yet they have not in fact been realized. Here is alienation in its most pernicious form, and it is this modern situation with which Fromm is primarily concerned.

The Question of Self-estrangement

A detailed critique of Fromm's view of alienation will be attempted in Chapter Nine from the theological point of view of Paul Tillich, employing the criterion of self-estrangement. Certain general comments might be made at this point. First, we conclude that for Fromm alienation and reconciliation are movements within nature. Though at one point Fromm speaks of man as "fallen out of nature," in his general perspective human potentialities are at the same time natural potentialities. Man transcends nature in order to fulfill and elevate nature, to "humanize" it. Human nature is one of nature's potentialities; it is derived from nature and therefore ultimately can be reconciled with it.

Second, human individuality and self-awareness, essential aspects of human nature, arise from the primal harmonies only through alienation. This means that alienation is a progressive, evolutionary step within nature, a necessary step toward the fulfillment of man (and thus of nature itself). Alienation is an aspect of the separation of man through self-consciousness from the primal harmonies.



Certain questionable consequences derive from this position. One consequence is that individuality and alienation appear to be, if not identical, at least interdependent in Fromm's account. But how then is individuality to be preserved when alienation is overcome? Fromm indeed affirms that man, through productivity, can be reunited with nature and himself without eliminating individuality. But this means that alienation and separation through self-awareness are not necessarily connected, that alienation somehow is a distortion of conscious separation. To use the philosophical terminology, there must be an essential separation (or individuality) as well as an existentially distorted separation. Fromm does not adequately preserve this distinction.

By the same token, Fromm's account through associating alienation with separation, fails to recognize that modes of separation and modes of union are interrelated. An individual in an alienated condition may submerge himself in some collectivity and still remain alienated. Distorted forms of separation and distorted forms of reunion are inseparable. Fromm sees that healthy self-consciousness is inseparable from healthy reunion, but he does not find this same interdependence in the alienated condition.

These lines of criticism suggest a critique of Fromm's understanding of the total self and its unity. It may be argued that the self is always individual *and* participant, even in its alienation. It reaches deeply into nature as well as emerging out of it. If its participation in various levels of reality, as well as its separation and individuality, may become alienated, then perhaps we have to do with a deeper alienation than Fromm acknowledges. If man's total being is alienated (if he is self-estranged), then nature, as well as man, will be affected. This at least is the Tillichian line of thought which we shall develop in Chapter Nine.



the divine life. Thus finite separation is good so long as it exists in union with the ground of being through love. It might be said that Tillich's thought sustains a tension between pantheistic elements and the more orthodox position that finitude is good even in separation from the divine life.



XII

summary and conclusions

AS WAS suggested in Chapter One, the purpose of this study has been twofold: to examine Tillich's method of correlation by actually attempting to use it in relation to the analysis of human existence formulated by Fromm and to examine the idea of alienation or estrangement in its historical development and in its usage by Fromm and Tillich. We find that these two areas are, in fact, interrelated; Tillich's method of correlation is based upon his understanding of the nature of estrangement. By seeking to show how Tillich's theological method might be applied to Fromm's thought, a critique of Fromm's concept of alienation has been carried out; at the same time, a comparison of Tillich's concept of estrangement with Fromm's naturalistic version of the same concept provides a perspective for a critique of the theological adequacy of Tillich's formulation. We are now in a position to summarize our conclusions.

We have been concerned in our study of Tillich primarily with three areas of correlation: the ontological analysis of essential finitude in correlation with the theological understanding of God, being-itself or the power of being; the existential analysis of estrangement in correlation with the theological understanding of the creation, the fall, and the New Being; and the analysis of the ambiguities of life by various philosophers of process in correlation with the theological understanding of the Divine Spirit, or unambiguous life. In our effort to determine the meaning of



estrangement, we have focused more specifically upon the separation of essence and existence and their possible reunion. The doctrine of creation proves to be the bridge between the ontological analysis of finitude and the existential awareness of estrangement. Finitude remains a question mark until essential finitude is understood theologically as finitude-in-unity-with-being-itself. The estrangement of existence from essence can then be understood as the estrangement of finitude from its unity with being-itself. Thus, if our analysis is correct, the primary separation in Tillich's thought, which makes the method of correlation possible, is the estrangement of man-in-his-world from being-itself, understood as a self-estrangement. The analysis of finitude undertaken by philosophy leads in two directions: to the quest for being-itself, in the light of which finitude can be understood; and to the recognition that actual existence is a distortion of true finitude, and hence to the quest for the New Being.

The primary focus of our study has been upon the possibility of correlation between the existential analysis of estrangement and the theological answers. We first sought to establish that Tillich's method actually consists of a form of "elevation" of existentialist ideas of estrangement and reconciliation, achieved by the application of the criterion of self-estrangement. That is, if estrangement can be shown to be total, an estrangement of man-in-his-world, then the only answer possible is the answer which comes to man from beyond his existence. Tillich seems at times to assume that all existentialists view man's existence as totally estranged; however, he also concedes that this is not the case and makes implicit or explicit use of the criterion of self-estrangement as an instrument of the theological critique of existentialist views of estrangement. We suggested that existentialism approached in this way may serve as a kind of natural anthropology for Tillich's theology.

Turning to the thought of Fromm, we showed that he can be viewed as an existentialist in the sense in which Tillich uses the term. Indeed, though Fromm stands in the psychoanalytic tradition he has received a decisive influence from Karl Marx, especially



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

173

the Hegelian elements in Marx. Fromm views man as emerging out of the natural harmonies through the advent of self-consciousness. The consequent separation from nature produces an alienation, a painful loneliness and sense of isolation, hence a sense of powerlessness. Nevertheless, Fromm views this alienation as potentially a progressive step. If man can move forward to a full consciousness of all aspects of nature (through “making the unconscious conscious”), he will become reunited with nature, his fellow man, and himself, now on a mature level. Indeed, reconciliation is viewed optimistically as the completion of the process which led to alienation in its initiation (the achievement of self-consciousness).

Having Fromm’s view of alienation before us, we turned to the question of whether Fromm’s description constitutes a self-alienation. We concluded that Fromm describes, rather, the alienation of the *ego*, or conscious self, from the *nonego*, or unconscious self, the subjective from the nonsubjective. This is a separation *within* the totality of the self, rather than an alienation of the self viewed as a totality. Man moves from a primal, unconscious harmony, through partial consciousness, to full consciousness where man is reunited with the All. Though this movement requires a social development, there is nothing inherent in man which prevents his reconciling himself through social and psychological growth toward maturity.

An attempt was then made to show how Fromm’s formulation might be pressed to the point where estrangement becomes self-estrangement. The question was raised whether lonely isolation is the only form of alienation. It was pointed out that Fromm sees the danger of regressive reunion, which is, in his thought, both a form of alienation and an escape from alienation. If alienation includes regression, then it can no longer be viewed as a progressive step, and Fromm’s evolutionary scheme is weakened. It was shown that Tillich might effectively argue that both submergence (or regression) and isolation are forms of alienation and that one drives toward the other. Loneliness breeds submergence,



and vice versa. This empirical observation, Tillich might maintain, necessitates a refinement in the understanding of alienation. Not only man's individuality (in whatever form), but also his participation (in whatever form) has become estranged; indeed, when one is estranged, so is the other, for they are polar characteristics in man. Man's separateness as such is not alienation, for he may be separate and a participant at the same time. In fact, it is of man's essence that he is the one because he is the other.

Tillich maintains that it is that complex entity known as the self which becomes estranged. The self has a world which it is in; it is both individual and participant; it is self-related. If proper or essential separation (solitude) becomes isolation, then proper or essential participation (communion) becomes submergence (or domination by the nonsubjective). If the *ego*-self is estranged, the world which it has, and is in, is also estranged; if consciousness is estranged, the unconscious is also estranged. Estrangement is not the separation of subject from object; this separation is rooted in the self-relatedness of being. The separation described as estrangement must be a separation of the self-in-its-world from its essential nature, rather than a separation *within* the self.

If the estrangement of the self is total, if the existence of the self-in-its-world is estranged, then that from which the self is estranged, and with which it must be reconciled, must be beyond existence. But if estrangement is self-estrangement, then that from which the self is separated must be, in some sense, identical with the self. Our analysis has sought to show how Tillich uses the "symbols of the Christian message," in both a mythological and an ontological form, to explain how man has become self-estranged, and may become reconciled. Tillich's analysis is rooted in his understanding of the divine as "life." Like all life, the divine has, according to Tillich, the characteristic of going out from itself in self-transcendence and creativity and returning to itself through love. The divine life is eternally creative, creating finite forms "within itself" in "inexhaustible abundance." The



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

175

mythological Adam and the ontological concept of finitude-in-unity-with-being-itself point to the reality of finitude within the divine life.

According to Tillich, finitude, in the power of being-itself, sustains itself against the threat of nonbeing through self-transcendence. Though characteristic of all finite being (and, symbolically, of being-itself), the process of self-transcendence reaches the point in man of self-consciousness and of finite freedom. Here the creature reaches the point of going out from its unity with the divine life. Since self-consciousness and freedom are involved, this act of separation must be chosen and affirmed consciously. It is not only an ontological movement, it is also a free decision. The actualization of finite freedom in the power of the divine life separates the creature from the divine life, and thus from its own essential finitude, in estranged existence. This existence, however, is at the same time full individualization (through self-consciousness) and is, as such, the completion of creation—the completion of the drive of being toward the greatest individualization and separation. This situation of estrangement is represented by the mythological doctrine of the fall of man and by the existentialist analysis of the separation of essence and existence (under the theological criterion).

Reconciliation, as Tillich understands it, is the reunion of existence with essential finitude, which means the reunion of existence with finitude-in-unity-with-being-itself. This, for Tillich, is not an evolutionary movement where alienation reaches its culmination in reconciliation. Reconciliation is rather the manifestation of finitude-in-unity-with-being-itself under the conditions of estranged existence. This manifestation is fragmentarily found in all human history and is fulfilled, according to Christian theology, in the New Being manifest in Jesus as the Christ. Here, in a concrete historical event, salvation and reconciliation appear in the manifestation of the eternal God-manhood, or finitude-in-unity-with-being-itself under the conditions of existence. This



actualization is not just a restoration of essential finitude; it combines the essential with “the positive which is created with existence.”

What conclusions can be drawn from this comparison of the thought of Fromm and Tillich? We might first consider the critique of Fromm’s analysis of alienation. We conclude that the Tillichian criticism of Fromm’s naturalistic version is basically sound. It seems legitimate to maintain that man, if alienated at all, is alienated as both individual and participant. Man is a unity, even in alienation. Hence, on the one hand, Fromm’s concept of man’s primal (and teleological) nature ought to provide a more secure foundation for man’s individuality; and, on the other hand, man’s alienation must be more nearly complete than Fromm recognizes. We conclude that Tillich’s description of the self as essentially both individual and participant provides a more nearly adequate basis for interpreting the data of estrangement, i.e., that man is estranged both from proper individuality and proper participation. On the level of the concept of selfhood and its estrangement we would thus be inclined to accept Tillich’s analysis. Fromm does not present an adequate picture of the total self-in-its-world.

Two points concerning Tillich’s relation to Fromm’s naturalism require further comment. The first is that Tillich seeks an ontological foundation for the self and its freedom, while Fromm confines himself largely to a history of consciousness (combined with a semiscientific concept of the essential nature of man). Tillich’s position in relation to that of Fromm is somewhat similar to the view adopted by Marx in relation to Hegel and Feuerbach. For Marx, alienation occurs in “real life”; alienation in consciousness is only a reflection of the real-life situation. It is true that in Marx’s view man through his “activity” constitutes his world either as an alienated or as a reconciled world, but activity for Marx is more than consciousness.

Similarly, for Tillich, estrangement in consciousness is a reflection of estrangement in being. The self in its totality is estranged,



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

177

not just in its consciousness. This view in Tillich's thought hinges on the understanding of human freedom, or free activity, as a movement in being (a separation from the Ground), not just a state of consciousness. Tillich, indeed, views this movement as a general structure of reality, the "self-relatedness of being," which is brought to fruition in man. Man is truly a microcosm for Tillich, even in his self-consciousness or self-relatedness. Perhaps Tillich's critique of Fromm might be summed up in this fashion: if man by becoming "subject" has become basically alien to nature, the objective world, then he cannot be reconciled with it. Only if man in his self-relatedness is rooted in the self-relatedness of being can he be reconciled. Man's self-relatedness cannot be derived from, nor reconciled with, objective nature. The power of man's being comes from being-itself, which is itself self-related, which is itself eternal life, combining subjectivity and objectivity.

This is an impressive, closely reasoned critique of naturalism. However, it raises an important issue concerning the relation of the divine life to finite life in Tillich's account. The question is this: is God's life in Tillich's view complete in itself or completed only through the life of the creature?

We have maintained that Tillich predominantly gives the latter answer. Let us review some of the consequences of this position. In this point of view, creaturely self-transcendence and freedom *is* the divine self-transcendence and freedom. And creaturely reconciliation with the Creator is the divine self-reconciliation. God thus creates himself through his creation of the world and reconciles himself through his reconciliation with the world. Here there is but one Life, poured into finitude, and transcending itself through human freedom.

This means, however, that the separation is within Life, rather than between the divine life and finite life. Speaking symbolically, man's subjectivity is God's subjectivity. On the level of the divine life, it would appear that self-estrangement must be conceptualized as the separation of "subject" and "object," the separation of the self-which-transcends from the self-which-is-transcended. On



the other hand, our analysis has shown that on the finite level Tillich does not consider the separation of subject and object to be the primary estrangement; and the naturalist view has been criticized for understanding estrangement as the subject-object split. Does Tillich reinstate on the divine level what he has rejected on the finite level? Does Tillich break with reductionist naturalism only to reinstate a “self-transcending” naturalism?

With regard to the most prominent aspects of Tillich’s analysis this question must be answered affirmatively. We have noted, however, that another form of dialectical process appears to be involved in the manifestation of the holy within existence and in the achievement of ecstasy. Here the power of the Divine Spirit is conceived as entering finitude, elevating the finite beyond its self-relatedness, beyond subjectivity and objectivity. This entrance is, in Tillich’s view, grace, not nature. But this means that the divine is free in relation to the world in a form other than man’s freedom. It means that the divine power can enter the finite in a form other than that of “natural” self-transcendence; and this would seem to imply that the divine life is in some sense independent of and complete apart from the life of the creature.

It would appear that this relationship could be symbolized in Tillich’s categories by referring to finite life as created “in the image” of the divine life, as empowered by the divine life to transcend itself, but in some sense an independent life, possessing its own separate subjectivity and objectivity. The resulting position would preserve the concept of estrangement as the separation of life (combining subjectivity and objectivity) from the unambiguous divine life. It appears that this view would provide a more effective critique of naturalism. However, this formulation breaks the continuity between the divine life and human life which forms the basis for the dialectical structure of self-estrangement.

If this modification is rejected (as it probably would be by Tillich) the alternative is to speak honestly of Tillich’s system as a self-transcending naturalism. Since this is a new form of naturalism (one might question the use of the term at all), it cannot be



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

179

viewed as necessarily inadequate for an expression of the Christian world-view. It is, however, clearly in conflict with traditional theism (which Tillich calls supernaturalism). Tillich's rejection of supernaturalism suggests a reconsideration on the part of Christian theology of its relation to various types of humanistic naturalism. Tillich has certainly made clear his view that the existence of a supernatural being is not the real foundation for Christian theology. This writer is in sympathy with the call for a reappraisal at this point, although it need not be assumed that Tillich has the last word on the subject.

Our second observation concerns the progressive, utopian aspect of Fromm's thought. Is Tillich's scheme really progressive and utopian also? It is possible to say for Tillich, as for Fromm, that the "fall" is also an advance, that it has a progressive aspect. Here, however, the similarity stops. For Tillich, the power of life which produces self-transcendence and alienation cannot of itself achieve reconciliation. Finite life is tragic; its greatness leads inevitably to its own disruption. Only the holy, the ecstatic, is beyond tragedy; this appears only when the world constituted by the subject-object split is "overcome."

Tillich therefore foresees no progressive realization of reconciled existence but only its fragmentary manifestation in moments of grace. His view of history is one of tragedy. Only those fragmentary moments of elevation beyond history are beyond tragedy. These moments do, however, in another sense, appear within history, but not in a progressive fashion. Christianity, with "daring faith," finds the full achievement of ecstatic reconciliation in the person of Christ. Here is provided a center and a criterion for the New Being within existence. But the beginning (essential finitude) and the end ("essentialization" in the Kingdom of God) are mythological-eschatological; life does not develop progressively from the one to the other. Here one finds a distinct parting of the ways for the theologian and the naturalistic-humanist on the matter of interpreting human history. This writer finds more realism in the Tillichian view, but the restraint which this view



exhibits concerning human potentialities requires perennial challenge from the side of Fromm's chastened optimism.

A word may now be said about the achievement of each writer. Fromm's major accomplishment would appear to be his analysis of the nature of human consciousness. Fromm illuminates the fact that man's self-awareness has its own history, rooted, to be sure, in the physical organism, but transcending it and going through its own process of development. Furthermore, the primary determining forces in this development are not understood to be the physiological drives but rather the social forces which shape conscious awareness. Fromm's major contribution appears in his delineation of the ways in which society, in the very act of fostering individual awareness, restricts the content of consciousness, thus alienating man from the fullness of his humanity. In this analysis, Fromm unites the Marxian concepts of ideology and false consciousness with the psychoanalytic ideas of rationalization and repression. This interweaving of two major intellectual traditions is an accomplishment of considerable importance.

With regard to Tillich, the great achievement of any comprehensive "system" is that of synthesis: the discovery of continuities and relationships among diverse regions of reality and diverse areas of human thought and action. Who can doubt that this is one of the essential functions of the intellect (though not perhaps the only one)? Tillich's achievement in this regard is undeniable. His system, for example, reverses the trend, characteristic of both liberalism and Neo-orthodoxy, toward a radical cleavage between man and nature. Rather, he sees human existence as the fulfillment of the drive of nature (indeed of all being) toward individualization and self-relatedness. This systematic construction brings Tillich's thought into contact with the sciences of physics and biology, as well as psychology and sociology. (Incidentally, the evaluation of the system is consequently not solely a theological and philosophical matter but involves physical, biological, and socio-psychological questions.)

Similarly, Tillich attempts to discover a positive relationship



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

181

between religion and culture. His standpoint as a Christian in relation to culture is conversionist rather than exclusivistic. As a result, Tillich can enter into appreciative dialogue with a wide variety of concerns manifested in modern culture: existentialism, psychoanalysis, modern art, non-Western religions, secular religions (such as Marxism), Western secular humanism, etc. (It is perhaps this aspect of Tillich's synoptic vision which is most responsible for the wide interest which his thought has provoked.)

Surely it is a daring enterprise which Tillich has undertaken, and one can only say that the product is vastly provocative. In this writer's opinion, those who argue (from the standpoint of linguistic analysis) that certain of Tillich's central categories are meaningless are refuted by the fact that a distinct world-view emerges from the pages of the *Systematic Theology*. Tillich presents a recognizable vision of reality with which one can come to grips with either a positive or a negative response. But the vision is there—a vision thoroughly steeped in the Christian and the Western metaphysical traditions. Tillich's contribution to constructive Christian thinking is unsurpassed in our time.

We must now conclude. Hopefully this comparative study has shed some light upon the two perspectives. And perhaps in some small way we can claim more than this: an illumination of certain aspects of man's universal predicament.