



## CHAPTER 5

# Theories of Transformation

## I *Alienated Man*

**T**HE THEME of alienation, write the editors of a recent anthology, “runs through the literature and drama of two continents; it can be traced in the content as well as the form of modern art; it preoccupies theologians and philosophers, and to many psychologists and sociologists, it is the central problem of our time.”<sup>1</sup> Fromm often had discussed alienation, in his analyses, for example, of millennialist futility among Roman subjects in the first century A.D. and of the psychic collapse of twentieth-century Germany. In 1955, in *The Sane Society*, he took “alienation” as his key to diagnose the “insane society” of his own time.

The “Neo-Freudians,” as they shifted from Freud’s focus on the instinctual bases of psychic tensions, had stressed the concept of “anxiety.” For Sullivan, anxiety was a “whip . . . that hurts more than any of the individual whips of the biological needs,” and he sought to chart its path through a net of relationships that subsumed a “self-system” and all the variables in an individual’s social “field.” Horney moved outside the arena of intimate personal relationships to identify the principal anxiety-breeding mechanism: modern competition. Abram Kardiner, a more systematic student of anthropology, was able to supply a historical, evolutionary framework to explain the disintegration of institutional and, consequently, individual stability.

The core of neurosis that these other revisionists had identified as “anxiety” was absorbed by Fromm into the larger sociological and philosophical category of alienation. His key sources were sociologists Georg Simmel, Max Weber, R. H. Tawney, and most particularly Karl Marx. It was Marx, says Fromm in *The Sane Society*, who “beautifully described . . . the alienating function of money,” and who also “gave a profound definition of the bureau-



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crat.” It was also Marx, incidentally, who wrote that “alienated labor separates man from nature and from himself. . . . It degrades all the life of the species and makes some cold and abstract notion of individual life.”

Now the question of “social” ills became paramount: could one legitimately apply the pseudopsychiatric term “insanity” to an entire society? Psychiatrist Gregory Zilboorg once opined that such a diagnosis was nonsense: “How could a culture suffer from paranoia, any more than a culture could have pneumonia?” Fromm’s position was, of course, rooted in his social character theory. If a society consistently bred pathology in its members, the society itself could be labeled “pathological.” A blunter term, and Fromm was not reluctant to be blunt, was “insane.”

To make the concept of “socially patterned defects” a feasible one, one needed a standard of measurement, a human “norm” that transcended history and culture. This norm Fromm had hypothesized in his description of “existential needs.” Now he presented a more inclusive definition. “Mental health is characterized by the ability to love and to create, by the emergence from incestuous ties to clan and soil, by a sense of identity based on one’s EXPERIENCE OF SELF AS THE SUBJECT and agent of one’s powers, by the grasp of reality inside and outside of our selves, that is, by the development of objectivity and reason.”<sup>2</sup>

Every term in this definition is loaded: Fromm has taken whole books to explain what he means by “love” and “self.” Brief comments on two other terms should exemplify what Gerald Sykes means when in *The Hidden Remnant* he refers to Fromm’s “deceptively simple” style. “Incest” is used here, as elsewhere in Fromm’s writings, in a sense that transcends its common, literal, sexual meaning. He is using the term very much as poet-critic Randall Jarrell does when he says, “The Son is pure liberation from the incestuous, complacent, inveterate evil of established society.” By “reason,” Fromm means the ability to see the why and how of things, their inner workings and meanings—as distinguished from “intelligence,” which he views as manipulative skill. David Hume made a similar distinction between “reason” and “understanding”; Rollo May seems to have grasped Fromm’s sense perfectly when he once commented that Fromm’s use of the word “reason” really is comparable to a kind of transcendent awareness similar to Spinoza’s “ecstatic reason.”



Fromm's definition of "mental health" is inherently neutral in the sense that responsibility can lie either with man and his own efforts or with the social circumstances that surround and partially create him. Clearly, though, Fromm is rejecting cultural relativism—which defines mental health as synonymous with successful adjustment to any existing culture. And implicitly the brunt of the burden is placed on society. Fromm, as someone has said, is a doctor who placed society "on the couch" for diagnosis and pronounced the patient very sick indeed.

The "human ethic," Fromm says, the ideal that society and economy existed for man and for the good of individual men, progressively weakened in the nineteenth century. Increasingly, the "market" became established as a self-regulating mechanism and its needs determined human relationships. The hub of economic activity under this system is competition, the aim is profit, and neither individual effort nor the social function of a product or process is any way paramount. The results are financial disproportion, an undervaluation of work, a feeling of powerlessness inside an abstract system.

Marx had located the crux of the central human conflict as between labor and capital, but Fromm subsumes this conflict under his vitalistic polarity: the greater conflict is "*between the world of things, and their amassment, and the world of life and its productivity.*" The dominant "character type," as we move from the nineteenth century to the twentieth, changes from the "hoarding" orientation, with its drive toward acquisition and possession, to the "marketing" orientation, with its insatiable lust for consumption. Citing Adlai Stevenson's warning that men are in danger of "becoming robots," Fromm insists that "in spite of material prosperity, political and sexual freedom, the world in the middle of the twentieth century is mentally sicker than it was in the nineteenth century. Obviously, evolution is not always progressive.

The basic economic feature of modern capitalism, to Fromm, is "quantification and abstractification." Most people work not for someone but for something. They buy, sell, exchange, and think not in terms of people or of social function but in the literal terms of paper and numbers. Even "belief" has been absorbed into the commodity category, as in the case of Billy Graham's theological hucksterism: "I am selling the greatest product in the world; why shouldn't it be promoted as well as soap?"



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As Fromm moves to the subject of alienation, his analysis begins to take on impressive proportions. Sweeping back through history, he finds "alienation" a venerable concept. It is, he says, what the prophets of the Old Testament meant when they denounced "idolatry." "Man spends his energy, his artistic capacities on building an idol, and then he worships this idol, which is nothing but the result of his own human effort. . . . *The idol represents his own life forces in an alienated form.*" The original monotheistic principle, he declares in an argument which he elaborates on in several subsequent books, had nothing to do with the *number* of gods, but only with the *idea* of God. God was conceived as infinite, indefinable, while man, "created in His likeness," was the "bearer of infinite qualities." But monotheistic religion "regressed into idolatry" by emphasizing authoritarian submissiveness toward external powers: "Every act of submissive worship is an act of alienation and idolatry in this sense."

Incorporating both this meaning of "idolatry" and the Marxian idea of alienation as a condition of man where his "own act becomes to him an alien power, standing over and against him, instead of being ruled by him," Fromm offers an encompassing definition: "By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts—but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person."<sup>3</sup>

The worker is alienated, says Fromm, because he has become "an economic atom that dances to the tune of atomistic management." The manager is alienated because he too deals with impersonal giants of colossal enterprise—with faceless armies of consumers and with a vast, sprawling, governmental apparatus. The owner is alienated because his "paper" ownership has left him with "no responsibility for the enterprise and no concrete relationship to it in any way." Such dehumanized acquisition is matched by dehumanized consumption: one buys for ostentation, prestige, or out of secret fears. Men "drink labels" and consume things "whose whole reality is mainly the fiction the advertising campaign has created." And men live in a world of things of which they are totally ignorant: complicated machines which are



“almost as mysterious to us as they would be to a man from a primitive culture.”

Fromm relentlessly scrutinizes the whole range of men's activities and beliefs. Men are alienated from one another, through the “commodity” concept of human relationships; and they are also alienated from themselves. They must “fit” into the social system, “invest” themselves with a hope of favorable return, and become a “personality package” on the “personality market.” Even the expanded democracy that capitalism helped to create has been illusory because the voter expresses his “will” in the same mindless, manipulated way that he “chooses” commodities. Men have more recreational time, and they use it in ways that are increasingly boring, increasingly passive, and increasingly tension-provoking.

Perhaps, Fromm speculates, the most fundamental loss in men's routinized lives is the “repression of the basic problems of human existence.” The aim of life should be to “love it intensely, to be fully born, to be fully awake.” Instead, men see life from the perspective of a balance sheet when “failure” in life is visualized as a business failure, then they become bankrupt—and sometimes they “quit.” Modern society breeds all of these negative values, and from a humanistic point of view this situation indeed constitutes insanity.

In the course of this massive indictment, Fromm turns directly on his own profession. The traditional function of psychology, he says, from the Delphic Oracle to Freudian psychoanalysis, was to discover the truth. But today “the function of psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis threatens to become the tool in the manipulation of men. . . . Their practitioners are evolving into the priests of the new religion of fun, consumption, and selflessness . . . into the spokesmen for the alienated personality.” Industrial psychology, to take one of the most blatant examples, treats its central subject—the worker—like “a piece of equipment.” What should be discussed is the “*‘industrial problem of human beings,’ rather than ‘the human problem of industry.’*”

And Fromm for the first time takes really sharp issue with Harry Stack Sullivan. Ever since their collaboration in the 1930's, Fromm had periodically cited Sullivan for a concept “similar” to his own, or had acknowledged a useful contribution—even while he had noted that their frames of reference were not precisely the same. Now, however, after the posthumous publication



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of Sullivan's *Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (1953), Fromm concluded that Sullivan himself was victimized by the alienating influences of society. Sullivan, he charged, had taken a symptom of the age and had assumed it to be part of human nature itself: "Sullivan took the fact that the alienated person lacks a feeling of selfhood and experiences himself in terms of a response to the expectation of others, as part of human nature, just as Freud has taken the competitiveness characteristic of the beginning of the century as a natural phenomenon."<sup>4</sup> Once again, Fromm was reasserting the significance of historical awareness, just as he did when he stressed the importance of "conventional symbols" in *The Forgotten Language*. It is one of his key contributions to the bridge between philosophy and social science.

Fromm's criticism of Sullivan isolated him from one of his staunchest admirers, Patrick Mullahy. Mullahy, who had been associated with Sullivan and with Sullivan's magazine *Psychiatry*, had reviewed Fromm very favorably in the past and had praised him highly in his own history of psychoanalytic theory, *Oedipus: Myth and Complex*. Now Mullahy wrote a scathing review, accusing Fromm as more orthodox psychoanalysts had done before, of substituting ethical concepts for valid clinically-derived data.<sup>5</sup> But if *Psychiatry*, as well as *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* and some other professional journals, attacked Fromm's ideas, a strong boost came from another source, *Pastoral Psychology*. "Pastoral psychology" was an outgrowth of increased clerical interest in psychoanalytic theory and practice after World War II. By 1955 the movement, like so many others, had its own organization and book club; and *The Sane Society* was its selection when Paul Tillich wrote a review for the magazine.

Fromm, he said, certainly did demonstrate a "pathology of normalcy"; and Fromm's over-all doctrine of man with existential dilemmas and normative needs was one with which Tillich largely concurred. His principal reservation, as one might expect, was that Fromm's concepts were humanistic but not theistic. For "alienation," Tillich would substitute "estrangement," a concept that transcends all societies and all of man's efforts, embracing a God that for Fromm was only symbolic. "One must ask," Tillich said, "whether man's power of love and reason is *his* in an ultimate sense."<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, for Tillich and for most reviewers of *The Sane Society*, Fromm's dissection of contemporary cultural failure was



powerful and persuasive. Tillich spoke of his “profound insight.” A reviewer in *Dissent* praised “Fromm’s mastery in the art of interweaving, juxtaposing and integrating several sciences to build up functional descriptions of collective disease.” *The New Statesman and Nation* considered his concept of “social pathology” thoroughly justified. Even his severe critic John Schaar wrote later in *Escape From Authority* that Fromm “is indisputably among the front rank of the analysts and critics of our cultural and moral crisis. He can make serious claim to being the foremost among them.”

## II *From Social Pathology to Social Therapy*

It almost seemed, from Fromm’s devastating criticism of the capitalistic landscape, that he was left with no way out at all. And Fromm admitted that he saw comparatively few signs of hope. But as the title *The Sane Society* indicates, Fromm did want to suggest an alternative, to go beyond a description of what is to a prescription of what ought to be. He is duly cautious, however, about the efficacy of his proposed remedies: his recommendations, he says, are not necessarily “right.” But he is certain about several things—first of all, that partial solutions are inadequate. One cannot simply patch things up here and there and expect to convert real sickness into real health. Furthermore, change has to be drastic and pervasive: “Progress can only occur when changes are made simultaneously in the economic, socio-political and cultural spheres.” Progress restricted to one sphere, he warns, is destructive to progress in *all* spheres.

This statement seems extraordinary, and Fromm may be overstating the case. As an evolutionary thinker, he had frequently pointed to advances in one sphere or another as history moved along. Two points might be made by way of explanation. The first is a reminder of Frommian dialectics. Each new form of “liberation,” he had said in his discussions of history, generated new hazards. (Carl Becker once remarked sadly that men yearn for both liberty and equality, but history shows that a gain on one of these fronts leads automatically to a loss on the other.) The second point is that Fromm felt men had reached a stage of desperation: the “brave new world,” replete with weapons of mass destruction that Huxley had never dreamed of, had arrived. Only a radical transformation could make the real difference now.



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Thus, as critics have said, Fromm took the leap into utopianism, into the idea of a perfect society. Purely inner renewal (a revitalized spiritual message) which ignores socioeconomic changes, or purely outer panaceas (Marxian Socialism) which ignore fundamental psychic needs, would not suffice. The only feasible cure for social pathology, he is certain, would be to reconstruct society in accordance with basic needs; simultaneously, man, the individual, has to come to grips with his own deepest self. The “outer” and “inner” approaches have to be blended into what Fromm calls “humanistic communitarianism.”

Fromm prefaces his own proposals with a discussion of the three basic alternatives that have frequently been proposed: totalitarianism, “supercapitalism,” and more or less traditional Marxian Socialism. Totalitarianism, in its Nazi, Fascist, or Stalinist forms, offers “refuge and security” for modern atomized man; but its price is brutal exploitation. By “supercapitalism,” Fromm refers to incentive-management or “profit-sharing” schemes like the one proposed by the Lincoln Electric Company. But these still enshrine competition as the god to be worshipped; man’s selfishness is assumed to be innate and ineradicable, and such a solution merely converts everyone into petty capitalists.

Socialism, he argues, sees life differently. It has consistently been advocated by theorists who began by believing in human capability and who envisioned a society in which man stands firmly at the center. The principles of most important Socialist theorists of the last two centuries, he says, have been secularized versions of the religious-ethical heritage of modern Western Europe, derivatives of the Age of Reason. He cites the “messianic fervor” of the Marquis de Condorcet; the visions of Charles Fourier (“individualism will combine spontaneously with collectivism”), Pierre Proudhon (we need an “integral revolution in the ideas and in the hearts”), and Prince Kropotkin, who stressed “the inherent tendencies for cooperation and mutual help present in man.”

And then there was Marx, who felt that harmony between men and between man and nature was the paramount goal. But Fromm, like Martin Buber, believes that Marx (and Engels too) was too enmeshed with contemporary ideology to clarify his own thinking on the question of political centralization, too sociologically oriented to recognize the psychological significance of the economic factor in men’s affairs, too optimistic on the efficacy





of purely economic transformation, and too naïve about the strength of irrational human passions. Marx neglected the necessity for a “moral re-orientation,” says Fromm, because he believed too implicitly in the goodness of man—especially of the proletariat. Marx mistakenly was convinced that “socialization of the means of production was not only the *necessary*, but also the *sufficient* condition for the transformation of the capitalist into a socialist co-operative society.”

Clearly, Fromm’s own sympathies for the reconstruction of society gravitate toward communitarian visionaries, to Fourier, Proudhon, and Robert Owen, to Edward Bellamy (Fromm has written an introduction to *Looking Backward*), and to a conception at least tangentially related to that of Martin Buber. Examining much of the same theoretical ground back in 1949, Buber had written: “So long as Russia has not undergone an essential inner change—and today we have no means of knowing when and how that will come to pass—we must designate one of the two poles of Socialism between which our choice lies, by the formidable name of ‘Moscow.’ The other, I would make bold to call ‘Jerusalem.’”<sup>7</sup>

But where Buber’s particular organic and religious predilections led him to find the most promising modern paradigm in the Jewish village commune (the *kvuza*), Fromm is most intrigued by Western European industrial cooperatives. In Fromm’s communitarian Socialism, “every working person would be an active and responsible participant...labor would employ capital.” To Marx’s brotherhood of work would be conjoined social and intellectual activities in all their varied forms. The community would thus fulfill the principles of mental health in complete outline.

Fromm tries to counter the familiar objections, the whole Hobbesian procession of human frailties, to socialized, cooperative activity. Is the profit motive, prestige, status, or power the principal incentive for work? He cites industrial studies to demonstrate that none of these is enough for conscious satisfaction, or even for a beginning in coping with unconscious needs. Is man inherently lazy? If one takes a good look, says Fromm, at childhood activity, one finds that the child never seems sated. Laziness is a very logical state of mind when people are not psychologically committed to activities. Isn’t the daydreaming of men who perform “mechanized” tasks a pleasant relief and a



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healthy form of relaxation? No, he declares, it is a purely negative “escape” from drudgery.

If, then, there are no “innate” obstacles to a cooperative society, is there a positive example, a model which can be studied? The nineteenth century witnessed the rise and fall of hundreds of miniature utopias, from secluded, ascetic German colonies to the innovative and singularly successful Oneida Community of John Humphrey Noyes in New York State. But Fromm spends no time on dead history; instead, he presents one detailed case in point: the Boimondau watch-case factory in France, one of a number of Western European “Communities of Work.”

At Boimondau, the workers inductively drew up a code of “natural ethics,” a decalogue which essentially recapitulated the moral injunctions of the Ten Commandments—love, self-respect, faithfulness, human dignity, and the rights of others. In principle and practice, Boimondau encouraged a wide diversity of activities, both inside and outside the work situation. It sought to expand cultural and practical interests and capabilities. Back-to-the-land vacation periods were ordained, so that ties to the soil could be maintained. A political structure was designed that would insure both efficient operation and active participation by members. Human relationships received considerable attention. Small “Neighbor Groups” were established to serve as “leaven” and “lever” at the most intimate level. Both technical and social activities were organized into varied “teams”; social teams, for example, engaged in spiritual, family, health, athletic, and artistic activities.

Boimondau is a provocative experiment, says Fromm, because it has worked seriously to meet the whole range of human needs, because it encourages the integration of varied life activities, and because it counteracts both the overspecialization and the alienation of our time. This community, he concludes, is “one of the most convincing empirical examples of a productive life, and of possibilities which are generally looked upon as fantastic from the standpoint of our present-day life in capitalism.”

Boimondau is, if not unique, certainly a rarity. But Fromm sees no reason why co-management and worker-participation plans cannot be achieved, and he cites suggestions from British and Continental Socialists. On a larger scale, one would need to reorganize certain basic elements in the economic structure: to



direct production toward the satisfaction of real human needs; to revise the conception of private property; to socialize some enterprises; to extend the social-security system in fundamental ways. And this early, in 1955, well before some American labor unions and Presidential aspirants took up the idea, Fromm made a good case for a guaranteed annual wage.

“Transformation in all spheres is essential,” Fromm had said; and he offers a long list of recommendations. Politically, he proposes a revival of something resembling the old town meetings, where relatively small groups can confront issues and each other directly, buttressed by an impartial organization which would serve as a fact-finding source. Culturally, he feels there is no need to formulate new ideals (“the great teachers of the human race have postulated the norms for sane living”), but we do need a realistic educational system. Such a system would teach and impress these ideals; end the artificial split between “theory” and “practice”; broaden and humanize the entire curriculum; make adult education an instrument for the enlightenment of the whole population. Fromm makes no attempt to spell out details for any aspect of his ideal educational system; but in another context he has written a highly approving essay about the principles and methods of A. S. Neill’s Summerhill school.<sup>8</sup>

Art and religion, too, have a place. “Art” would no longer be seen as the exclusive province of elite specialists but would be a basic activity to be enjoyed by all men. Society would have what he calls, for lack of a precise term, “collective art,” which would include such “shared forms of expression” as “a Gothic cathedral, a Catholic ritual, an Indian rain dance, a Japanese flower arrangement, a folk dance, community singing.” As for religion, he sums up previously expressed attitudes: it would be universalistic, humanistic, ethical, rational, with “new rituals and artistic forms of expression.”<sup>9</sup>

Fromm is not sanguine about prospects. Man’s current momentum seems to be propelling him toward atomic war, rather than toward social and human reconstruction. The most likely outcome of such a war, he says forcefully, is the “destruction of industrial civilization, and the regression of the world to a primitive agrarian level.” A possible alternative is a stalemate between the capitalist and Communist power structures—he finds the two structures proceeding in many ways along parallel lines, developing into remarkably similar managerial societies, and



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equally creating inhuman climates of mechanization and alienation.

“In the nineteenth century,” says Fromm, “the problem was that *God is dead*; in the twentieth century the problem is that *man is dead*.” The only rational alternative, and it must not be brought about by force, is to become fully human through a total transformation into humanistic communitarianism. “When things have truly become [man’s] servants rather than his idols, he will be confronted with the truly human conflicts and problems; he will have to be adventuresome, courageous, imaginative, capable of suffering and of joy, but his powers will be in the service of life, and not in the service of death.”<sup>10</sup>

The first thing that might be said about Fromm’s portrait of a sane society is that he should be admired for even making an attempt. In this era, it is far easier to construct an anti-utopia like that of Huxley’s *Brave New World* or Orwell’s *1984* or even Fromm’s dissection of the “insane society” than it is to describe, with any semblance of realism, an ideal world. Next, it might be remarked that Fromm sometimes does not distinguish clearly between capitalism and technology. Harry Wells says that he assaults capitalism so ruthlessly that he leaves himself no ground at all for reconstruction. Herbert Marcuse, who takes the opposite position, argues that capitalism is indeed a total failure and that Fromm is ingenuous when he tries to salvage anything. Fromm’s solutions, Marcuse snorts, consist of “more and better industrial management,” and in so doing Fromm himself is “partaking of alienation.”

Fromm *does* rely heavily on sources like Elton Mayo and Adolf Berle, who would seem to be rather dubious references for a total critique of the capitalistic ethos. And he surely is ingenuous when he cites with approval Benjamin Fairless of United States Steel about the possibility of that industrial mammoth’s stockholders “buying out” control in the corporation—recent efforts of that kind with the General Motors Corporation notwithstanding. Moreover, he refers uncritically to conclusions about the motivation studies in the famous Western Electric Hawthorne plant experiment, without indicating awareness that those conclusions have been challenged many times.

But it should be noted, too, that Fromm’s quotations from Mayo, Berle, and others do not indicate that he agrees completely or even in large part with the over-all positions of those “re-



formers” of capitalism. He is interested, as he makes very clear in his forthright condemnation of the methods of “industrial psychology,” in the implications of those studies—above and beyond questions of “morale” or employer-employee relations. Fromm’s tactic here, it seems, is to turn the very data of capitalism against its defenders; he wants to demonstrate how even inside observers can detect the larger human failures of the system.

More critics were dubious about Fromm’s recommendations for implementing the sane society. The theological viewpoint was expressed succinctly by Paul Tillich in *Pastoral Psychology*: “How can man’s alienation be overcome except by a power which transcends the law and gives what the law demands in vain?” Secularists argued—and Fromm surely is vulnerable here—that his analysis of what steps must, or might, be taken to bring about economic and political transformation is so sketchy that it appears to be little more than a set of hasty afterthoughts. How, in the face of a massively institutionalized web of political processes, does one move toward such a radical progression-regression as, for example, re-created “town meeting” Democracy? Similarly Fromm’s statement that economic changes of a quite drastic nature can be accomplished without much difficulty seems to ignore the naked facts of concentrated power in society—facts that Fromm, in other contexts, recognizes with great clarity.

Finally, there is the human problem of rebellion. “How,” asks Tillich, “can the ‘dead’ man of the 20th century revive himself?” Fromm does not, writes Asa Briggs in *New Statesman and Nation*, “throw any new light on how robots can revolt.” Fromm himself has confessed, as Thoreau did, that the truly free man is mighty hard to find. “Humanistic communitarianism” may well be an answer to many woes, but the road to a sane society is infinitely more tortuous than Fromm’s brief discussion suggests.

### III *The Mystical Union: Sex and Love*

The bricks of the sane society are economics and politics, but the cement binding them all together is love. To paraphrase Emerson’s “oversoul,” Fromm’s idea of love is that it comes from deep within man, and then runs through, between, around, and over him. It really is an almost transcendental conception that incorporates both sexual and nonsexual relations, and it merges



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imperceptibly into mystical experience. Martin Birnbach writes that all of the “Neo-Freudians” stressed the significance of love; perhaps, he says, they even overstressed it. But Fromm argues it is a measure of Sullivan’s alienation, that “interpersonal theory” ultimately dissolves love into an interlocking set of social “roles.” And a key difference between Kardiner’s “basic personality” theory and his own “social character” theory, he insists, is that Kardiner’s system allows no proper place for love.

Whether or not Fromm is just in these evaluations of others, there is no question of the powerful erotic orientation in his own writings. This orientation is not, however, the sexually charged eroticism of Wilhelm Reich, or the peculiarly ambivalent sexualism of Freudian libido theory. Fromm feels that Reich committed a fundamental error when he assumed that sexual freedom was synonymous with human freedom; both Nazism and modern capitalism have taken steps toward sexual liberation, he points out, but sexual liberation (as *Brave New World* demonstrates) is readily transformed by the authoritarian corporate state into a device for dehumanizing human relationships. And Freud, says Fromm, really was a “puritan”: “we notice in him a Victorian aversion against sex and pleasure combined with a sad tolerance for man’s weakness in this respect.”

Fromm’s longest single discussion of sex—in the article “Sex and Character” of 1943—is largely an attempted rebuttal of Freud’s unimpressive (except to men whose egos badly need bolstering) notions of female character formation. “Penis-envy,” Freud asserted in *New Introductory Lectures* (1933), was the basis of female psychology. The stunning discovery by the woman that she lacks the key organ “leaves ineradicable traces on her development and character formation.” Her vanity is thus inevitable, Freud continued, because women “are driven to rate their physical charms more highly as a belated compensation for their original sexual inferiority.”

Freud was echoed in these curious contentions, which had a presumed validity in the restricted Viennese world of his early observations, by most of his orthodox followers (including psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch). But opposition also mounted early and steadily; even Freud’s loyal associate and later biographer, Ernest Jones, expressed doubts in the 1920’s. The most militant and influential naysayer was Karen Horney, who argued that Freud ignored woman’s unique sexual *advantage*: she could



become a mother. This simple biological fact gave women “in-disputable superiority” in a highly significant way, and could well lead to pregnancy-envy on the part of males. Perhaps, she remarked wryly, men’s assiduous efforts at creative work represented compensation for what *they* lacked. (British psychoanalyst Ian Suttie, who arrived at an identical conclusion, supplied an apt term for such psychic compensation: “Zeus-jealousy.”)

Another probable influence on Fromm was Georg Simmel, who had noted what ought to be obvious, that many thinkers (or nonthinkers) tend to equate people-in-general with *male* people—and Freud certainly was guilty of this peculiar synonymy. Finally, a key source for Fromm was matriarchy mythology, as expounded in the writings of J. J. Bachofen and Lewis H. Morgan, about which, as indicated earlier, not only Fromm’s first wife, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, but Fromm himself had written extensively.

Rejecting Freud’s conjecture that women were anatomically “inferior,” Fromm nevertheless is not very happy with what he terms the “liberal” counterreaction to Freud because, while it presumably redressed the imbalance, he believes that it has gone to the opposite extreme by holding that there are no differences at all. Biological differences between the sexes can help to shape character, says Fromm, but not in ways that Freud believed, not to the extent that Freud believed, and not with the inevitability that Freud believed.

Fromm illustrates with one major example—the way in which character differences can partially derive from the nature of sexual intercourse itself. Man must have an erection and sustain it; thus he must “demonstrate ability,” and his failure to do so is manifest. The woman can yield, she can remain passive, she can encourage, she can excite, but she need not “demonstrate” anything in any comparable way. From these biological facts, says Fromm, distinctly male and female anxieties can develop. Man’s can relate to ego and prestige, while woman’s are rooted in dependency, in the fear of being “left alone,” in not being able to “control” events.

The anxious male seeks compensatory assurance in other activities, where strength and intellectuality can be dominant. He becomes a Don Juan, a hunter, a moneymaker. More limited in her alternative outlets, woman seeks reassurance in the kind of vanity which is centered on her need to attract and to be



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attractive. Social and cultural imperatives and assumptions will either exaggerate or minimize all these tendencies. (Bruno Bettelheim argues in an article, "Growing Up Female," that cultural pressures now increasingly force the girl also to "demonstrate [sexual] ability.") Sexual differences per se, concludes Fromm, can at most "color" one's personality, like "a key in which a melody is written—not . . . the melody itself." Neither vanity nor dependence nor the other allegedly sex-linked characteristics are innately sex-determined. They vary in different individuals, they are neither "good" nor "bad" in themselves, and their principal determinants are social and economic conditioning. There are more significant character differences, he says flatly, between people of the same sex than there are on the basis of sex alone. Finally, none of these sex-derived differences, when they do occur, imply, by any stretch of the imagination, inequality.

Fromm's usual approach to the topic of sex has been to fit it into the larger pattern of human relationships—to view it as one particular form of "love." To be sure, sex can take place outside of love; indeed, for Fromm its doing so is one striking symptom of our generally loveless world. But he insists that sex as a meaningful relationship, as an activity in which human beings are giving of themselves rather than converting themselves into "things," must be understood as deeper experience. This concept Fromm began developing in 1942 in his article "Selfishness and Self-Love." At that time he rejected Freud's quantitative "narcissism," the doctrine that "the more love I turn toward the outside world the less love is left for myself." Quite the opposite, Fromm argued: only as narrow self-interest recedes, can love emerge. As he phrased this idea in 1951 in his article "Man-Woman," "Love is the blending of intense closeness under the condition of complete independence and integrity of two people."

Fromm's *The Art of Loving* appeared in 1956 in a period when love manuals and sex manuals were rapidly flooding the market. But Fromm quickly warned away those who expected "easy instruction in the art of loving." This advice was sound; for the incautious surely were disappointed to open Fromm's pages and find themselves in the company of Maimonides, Lao-tze, and Meister Eckhart. Love, says Fromm, referring back to the existential dichotomies that for fifteen years had been the cornerstone of his ethical philosophy, is intrinsic to life itself. Having transcended purely natural adaptation, gifted and yet cursed by





the faculty of reason, man's consciousness of his separateness breeds anxieties and forces him to seek new harmonies. One method is through the intensity and violence of orgasmic experience—but the effect of this is transitory. Another is conformity, where "union" is achieved through sharing ideals and practices with a group of others; but this illusory "escape" achieves fusion at the sacrifice of one's personal identity. Another method is creative activity (such as the Freudian concept of "sublimating" erotic drives into art). This leads to unity, but with material things rather than with people: in an ultimate sense, therefore, it is inadequate.

The desire for interpersonal "fusion" is, Fromm declares, "the most powerful striving" and "the most fundamental passion" in man. In its immature form, it is "symbiotic," as manifested by the masochistic desire to submit and the sadistic desire to dominate. In its mature form, as love, it merges the individual with the "other." But, unlike the Sullivan "self," individuality is not swallowed up; it is retained, together with one's integrity. Mature love is seen as active too, not passive; it consists more of giving than of receiving; and one gives of oneself, not of material things. Who but Fromm would, in America in 1956, turn to Karl Marx for an appropriate quotation at this point? "Every one of your relationships to man and to nature must be a definite expression of your *real, individual life*. . . . If you love without calling forth love, that is, if your love as such does not produce love, if by means of an *expression of life* as a loving person you do not make of yourself a *loved person*, then your love is impotent, a misfortune."<sup>11</sup>

Of Fromm's four "components" of love—care, respect, responsibility, and knowledge—the last needs a brief explanation. Verbal knowledge ("knowledge in thought") is essential, but it alone is not enough: "The only way of full knowledge lies in the *act* of love; this act transcends thought." In part, Fromm means what one ordinarily thinks of as participation, experience. But he goes beyond the instrumental terms of John Dewey; Fromm's perspective glides over into what must be termed "mystical" experience. He goes outside Dewey's frame of discourse, and beyond traditional rationalism, with such ideas as "Only if I know a human being objectively, can I know him in his ultimate essence, in the act of love," or "We are all part of One; we are One." With such statements Fromm parts company with many



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modern thinkers. For empiricists, Fromm is aiming at the impossible union of two antithetical worlds. "Whatever else one might say about mysticism," writes John Schaar in *Escape From Authority*, "he should not confuse it with a rational enterprise." But Fromm insists that a unified view of man embraces both faculties.

There should be no question about the degree to which Fromm is attracted by mysticism, especially since he has specifically called himself a mystic. His youthful studies in mysticism made a deep impress, and the "God-intoxicated" Spinoza has been a source of numerous insights. Furthermore, in *The Art of Loving* and elsewhere, Meister Eckhart and Rumi, the Moslem poet and mystic, also figure prominently. And it is not just a matter of a "reference" here and there; mystical attitudes permeate Fromm's ideas on many subjects.

In all of his books Fromm has sought to reach laymen; the most treacherous footing for laymen, one suspects, is in Fromm's discussions of love. The love between men and women, Fromm says, has two aspects: "Above the universal, existential need for union rises a more specific, biological one: the desire for union between the masculine and feminine poles." This idea seems akin to the physiological conclusion reached by Freud that each person contains hormones of both sexes, but Fromm pushes it one step farther. Each person, he says, is also bisexual "in a psychological sense": he or she carries "the principle of receiving and of penetrating, of matter and of spirit." For materialist Harry K. Wells, Fromm is merely reviving an archaic theological and romantic theme. But for more sympathetic interpreters, this classical theme is of continuing, and profound, significance. Philip Rieff (*Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer*) and Norman O. Brown (*Life Against Death*) both suggest that a similarly mystical current runs all through Freud's own treatment of love and sexuality. If so (it is not always easy to tell because, as Rieff points out, Freud was incurably ambivalent on these matters), then Fromm's perspective is not so far removed from Freud's as one might believe. The blending of sex with mysticism also brings Fromm much closer to Jung than Fromm would like to believe.

Fromm does not pursue the "bisexual" conception into a theory bordering on omnisexuality, as Paul Goodman and others seem to have done. Instead, he accentuates the implications of the polarity



itself into the basis of all creativity. He surely could have quoted from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" on this point, but instead he turns to Rumi: "As God put desire in man and woman to the end that the world should be preserved by their union, / So hath He implanted in every part of existence the desire for another part."

This doctrine enables Fromm to draw an analogy between love and religion. The problem of knowing man, of reaching the "essence" of another person is, for Fromm (as it is for Martin Buber), "parallel to the religious problem of knowing God." Hence, by what one might call metaphysical determinism, he forges a causal chain. The mystical "experience of union with God," he argues, is not irrational at all; it is, "as Albert Schweitzer has pointed out, the consequence of rationalism." The analogy in exclusively human experience is that "the ultimate consequence of psychology is love." This last quotation alone would seem to supply a rationale for Fromm's belief that psychoanalytic therapy should be mutually involving.

Fromm is not quite so abstruse as he sometimes is made out to be. While he speaks of "capacities" for love, reason, and judgment, his analysis specifies that one's parents play a significant role in their formation: the "capacities" are not full-blown qualities inherent in an "indwelling soul." Additionally, he does not assume "mother-instinct" or "father-instinct" when he speaks of the ideal forms of parental love. Rather, in describing mother-love as unconditional affirmation, and father-love as conditional and as traditionally connected with the property concept, he points out that he is referring to "ideal types," principles "represented in the "fatherly and motherly person."

Fromm also emphasizes that love is an attitude, an "orientation of character," and not primarily any particular relationship. His seminal text for this belief is the biblical injunction, "Love thy neighbor as thyself"—a concept that Freud, with his narcissism-libido formula and his skeptical "realism" rejected outright. "Love thy neighbor," says Fromm, means brotherly love: the love one holds for any other human being simply because he too is human. As for erotic love, he says, it has sexual desire as a component, but it transcends sex. Truly erotic love, as distinguished from the demands of mere passion, assumes "love from the essence of my being." It goes beyond an emotional state;



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it is a “decision, it is a judgment, it is a promise.” Thus, presumably, rationalism is restored.

Finally, there is love of God; and Fromm, the atheistic mystic, is far more philosophical than theological as he moves into these murky waters. His evolutionary approach to religion, which probably owes a debt to Meister Eckhart, indicates that man evolved in religious belief from anthropomorphic conceptions of God to adherence to a monotheistic principle. From a despotic, arbitrary “tribal chief,” God has evolved into a “loving father” who counsels truth and justice, and then into “the symbol of the principle of unity behind the manifoldness of phenomena.” God’s “personal characteristics” vanish, and he becomes abstract, nameless, the Endless One. Freud’s attack on the idea of God, then, is regarded by Fromm only as a reasonable attack on the “middle stage of belief,” on the notion of God as “loving father.”

Fromm had said that mysticism was the logical consequence of theology. Now he supplies a missing link in the causal chain: theology logically leads to monotheism, which logically leads to mysticism (the abandonment of “knowledge about God”). He believes, therefore, that both strict monotheists and non-theists like himself have a meeting ground in “ultimate concern.” “Ultimate concern” is Paul Tillich’s term, but Tillich does not accept Fromm’s statement that “the logical consequence of monotheism is mysticism.” In a later book, *You Shall Be As Gods*, Fromm slips in a qualification: mysticism, he says, is a logical consequence of monotheism. Fromm does explain what he means by “logic” as he uses it here; his explanation is not terribly different from those offered by other writers who have some related perspectives—Norman O. Brown and Abraham Maslow, for example.<sup>12</sup> It is “paradoxical logic,” the logic of dialectics which is embedded in the reasoning processes of both Freud and Marx, and which Fromm describes as being as “natural” to Chinese and Indian philosophy as Aristotelian logic is to the West.

Aristotle’s logic is based on the “laws” of identity and contradiction (A is A, and A is not non-A). But paradoxical logic assumes that A and non-A do not necessarily exclude each other. Thus could Marx, building on the Hegelian dialectic, speak of socioeconomic systems containing the seed of their own contradictions. Thus could Freud appeal, as Philip Rieff says, “to a dialectical and reconciliatory notion of language (both yes and



no, either and or, true and false).” Thus could Fromm, when Herbert Marcuse argued in *Eros and Civilization* that love is impossible in an alienated society, reply that Marcuse had forgotten his dialectics: “The alienated society already develops in itself the elements which contradict it.”

The heart of paradoxical logic, says Fromm, is the belief that man “can perceive reality only in contradictions, and one can never perceive in thought the ultimate reality-unity, the One itself.” Thus, Fromm maintains that the contradictions refer only to thinking processes, to modes of perceptions; behind these, he says, there is a *unified* reality. This theory does seem to match up clearly with Oriental paradox; whether it accurately reflects the ideas of Marx and Freud is more conjectural. Freud’s disciple Sandor Ferenczi spoke hopefully of the possibility of “instinctual fusion,” but Freud expressed ambivalence about any ultimate resolution of his “dualisms.” As for Marx, the problem hinges, in part at least, on how thoroughly he rejected his own “idealism,” a matter Fromm attempted to grapple with in a later book, *Marx’s Concept of Man*. For now, it should be noted that some dialecticians who quarrel with Fromm’s interpretation take the position, for example, that “logical laws are reflections in the human mind of objective, existential laws”—therefore, the “unity” of nature itself is illusory.<sup>13</sup>

But Fromm finds no contradiction between the “paradox” of thought and the “unity” of reality. When thought is trapped in paradox, he says, it must yield to experience. As he interprets Spinoza, Marx, and Freud, all three moved from the verbal to the experiential world. Spinoza shifted his focus from the right belief to the right conduct of life; Marx, from interpretation to transformation; Freud, from psychoanalytic theory to psychoanalytic therapy. For all three men, says Fromm, self-transformation became the ultimate goal. He cites Meister Eckhart for the most radical formulation of this idea: “If therefore I am changed into God and He makes me one with Himself, then, by the living God, there is no distinction between us.”

This paradoxical foundation-stone is the methodological base of Fromm’s personal sense of unity. If details remain problematical, if the analogies are not always persuasive, and if “mystical” experience continues to be a dubiously vague concept for rationalists, Fromm’s exposition nevertheless does illuminate his own attitudes, and it explains why he feels it is possible to blend



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apparently antithetical epistemologies. It helps to explain how, as an ex-Talmudic student fascinated by humane prophecy in the Bible, he could find himself drawn to the labyrinthine workings of Marxian dialectics and also to the idealistic philosophers who preceded Marx; to theological communitarians like Buber and Tillich and their own predecessors, the Medieval mystics; to the Freudian concept of the unconscious mind; to such Oriental exotica as Taoism and Zen Buddhism. And steeped in contemporary social psychology, he argues that the principle underlying modern society and the principle underlying love are incompatible. So, he cautions, radical changes in the present social structure must take place; men must create the conditions necessary for the flowering of love.

*The Art of Loving* is a deeply “religious” book in several senses of that ambiguous word; it is far more intimate than, for example, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, and several religious thinkers responded to it with warmth. The Reverend Aelred Graham, for instance, said in *Commonweal* that he read the book with “a sense almost of envy, as well as admiration.” Perhaps the most insightful observations were made by Rabbi Jakob J. Petuchowski, who found *The Art of Loving* a modern “midrash”: a blending of “new insights with ancient wisdom,” often directly traceable to biblical texts, and sometimes both distinguished and extremely original. “Midrash” also contains ethical teaching and criticism, the rabbi continues; and *The Art of Loving* is of course steeped in both. Beyond this, the book is seen to fit “perfectly into the traditional Jewish scale of values.” A profoundly Jewish book, he feels, it is “moving within the traditionally familiar terms of reference.”

But the rabbi is always a rabbi, and he is troubled by Fromm’s non-theism. The Endless One concept is fine mysticism, he says; but there are other branches of mysticism, including “other aspects of God” and First Existence. While it is true that Fromm’s brand of mysticism has had good precedents in the West, the rabbi finds it closer in temper to Oriental thought. From the Judaic perspective, “if Fromm thinks that he has been able to ‘transcend’ the God concept, it is only because, as a scientist, he has to take the worm’s eye view of evolution: from the bottom up.” Furthermore, he admonishes, the Golden Rule not only says “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” but also “I am the Lord.” These latter words, says the rabbi, are “no afterthought.”<sup>14</sup>



#### IV *The Mystical Union: From Id to Satori*

The phenomenon of “depersonalization,” blood (or bloodless) brother to “alienation,” was very much on Fromm’s mind during the 1950’s. He believed that Freud had rendered a great service to the understanding of man by reaffirming the power of man’s reason and by extending its domain even over the shadowy world of the unconscious. But, simultaneously, Freud had denigrated the emotive aspects of man; even while psychoanalytic techniques could probe “inner man” in a new and dynamic way, Freudian theory reduced that same “inner man” to a play of mechanistic, primitively sexual forces. In reaction, Fromm was continually attracted back to Spinoza who, as Fromm understood him, had not only “intuited” the unconscious but had also never lost sight of man’s “wholeness.” As *The Art of Loving* tried to make clear, man was an interaction of rationality and affect.

“Man is not a thing,” Fromm had declared forcefully in *The Sane Society*, and he reiterated that point over and over in the 1950’s. Addressing physicians at Harvard Medical School in 1957, he warned of the dangers in compartmentalizing human concerns. Just as, in *The Sane Society*, he had charged that the very concept of “business ethics” runs counter to the humanitarian ideal, so he now insisted that “medical ethics” must always be subsumed under, and derive directly from, the ethical norms of man in general. The patient, he declared, is not merely a physiological “case,” not a collection of symptoms, not a malfunctioning organ, not a “thing.”

Physicians, he argued pointedly, are in a unique position to perceive the importance of the wholeness of man and to act upon that awareness. The doctor is an anachronism in that, unlike most men in this era, he still acts like an “artisan”: doctors “are the ones who see the patient and take the responsibility.” Thus, doctors have a greater opportunity than any other professionals to “help guide us to a new path of humanism, to a new attitude of understanding of men.”<sup>15</sup> At about the same time as this speech, Fromm published an article in *Saturday Review*, arguing essentially the same ideas; but he pointed his finger this time at those who worked in psychology and psychotherapy. Modern psychology, Fromm argued, had, like modern life in general, become too mechanistic, too cold-bloodedly empirical. Again he warned against contributing to the climate of



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alienation, and of the necessity for the therapist to relate himself in a fully “human” way to the patient. This article he bluntly titled with his overriding theme: “Man is Not a Thing.”

Fromm also elaborated on a concept that he had discussed briefly in *The Art of Loving* and in his address to the Harvard medical faculty: what he felt was the intimate relationship between emotion, mysticism, and experience. His position was in almost direct opposition to the empirical psychologists, who sometimes take the position that accumulation of quantitative data and more precise understanding of the neurological structure of the brain are the only sources of reliable knowledge about man. Fromm insisted that the knowledge that could be gained by psychology was inherently limited. To fully comprehend oneself or others, one must transcend formal techniques, conventional logic, even language. Complete rational knowledge is possible only of “things,” and, once more, “man is not a thing.”

What then is the legitimate aim of psychology? It is, Fromm argues paradoxically, “negative, the removal of distortions and illusions.” Man is knowable, but only in the positive sense by the path of love. In “the experience of *union* . . . I know . . . the only way in which knowledge of that which is alive is possible for man.” For theological counterparts of Fromm’s formulation, one might compare Gabriel Marcel’s *The Mystery of Being* or Martin Buber’s *Between Man and Man*. Fromm himself sounds Kierkegaardian when he remarks that “no amount or depth of psychological insight can take the place of the act, the commitment, the jump.” In his various sets of logical consequences, he now inserts the term “negative”: “Just as mysticism is a logical consequence of negative theology, love is the logical consequence of negative psychology.”

Inadvertently, argues Harry Wells, Fromm had brought the futility of psychoanalytic presuppositions full circle. “In essence,” says Wells, “all the possible logical inferences from the theory of psychoanalysis have been exhausted. . . . There is no further direction in which psychoanalysis can move.” There is no evidence that Fromm felt any such sense of bankruptcy in psychoanalysis itself, but there is evidence that he believed it could be enriched by infusions from other sources: from, in particular, the religious-philosophical tradition of both East and West.

This tradition, he felt, had run in two parallel lines, and the basic affinities were clear. He believed, for example, that his





own version of prophetic messianism, about which he had begun writing in 1927, was quite congenial with the theories of Zen Buddhism, with which he had come in contact in 1926. Carl Jung and Karen Horney, it might be noted, had also been attracted by Zen. But for some critics who seemed unaware of Fromm's lifelong involvement with mysticism, his revived interest in Zen Buddhism in 1960 was a new "flirtation," a participation in a dilettantish fad that was being popularized by such writers as Jack Kerouac and J. D. Salinger.

In 1960, Fromm contributed a testimonial to the ninetieth birthday celebration of Daisetz T. Suzuki, the foremost interpreter of Zen to the West. Zen, said Fromm, certainly could comprehend the central culminating message of the biblical prophets: "... their idea of the messianic time; peace between man and man and between man and nature ... the experience of true harmony and union ... the experience of 'at-one-ment' with the world and within oneself ... the end of alienation, the return of man to himself." A few years earlier, Fromm had met Suzuki at a conference on Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis organized by the National University of Mexico. About ten papers had been presented at this "workshop," including two on Sullivan's theories, two on Jung's, and one explicating Zen by Suzuki himself. Fromm had been the boldest of all: he presented a paper which attempted to draw direct comparisons between Zen and psychoanalysis. For publication, which came three years after the conference, Fromm did considerable revision because, he says, he greatly enlarged and revised his ideas about not only Zen, but also the theory and goals of psychoanalysis itself.

The book that emerged in 1960 consisted of three articles, Suzuki's "Lectures on Zen Buddhism," Fromm's comparative study, and "The Human Situation and Zen Buddhism," by Richard De Martino—and the last contributor acknowledged debts not only to Zen theorists but also to Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. Suzuki's "lectures" were largely impressionistic and anecdotal, and his audience obviously had difficulty with such abstract and elusive ideas. Listeners submitted a number of specific questions about Zen's concern for social problems, for emotional maturity, for the existence of criteria for differentiating between "genuine" and "hallucinatory" mystical experiences, and for family, education, and social responsibility.

Suzuki's response was another general lecture, in very much



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the same style as his previous ones. All the questioners, he said, had somehow missed the point: “Zen may occasionally appear too enigmatic, cryptic, and full of contradictions, but it is after all a simple discipline and teaching: / To do goods, / To avoid evils, / To purify one’s own heart: / This is the Buddha-way. / Is this not applicable to all human situations, modern as well as ancient, Western as well as Eastern?”<sup>16</sup>

By contrast, Fromm’s essay was his usual closely reasoned effort to make connections point by point, reflecting his customary acuteness at integrating complex ideas. Compared with Suzuki’s “lectures,” Fromm’s orderly, rationalistic approach seems like discourse from another world. Fromm is rightfully concerned about the inhibiting effects of language and about the way that conventional verbalism imprisons and distorts our feelings. But obviously he is not going to undertake, at least in public forums, a different mode of communication. That radical suggestion has been made by psychoanalyst Abraham Maslow, who in *Toward A Psychology of Being* counsels “gradually opening up our journals to papers written in rhapsodic, poetic or free association style. Some communication of some kinds of truth is best done in this way.”

Fromm’s thoroughly systematic exposition is based on the belief that Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis, in both their methods and their aspirations, reveal surprising similarities. The differences, he adjudges, are, ultimately, only “superficial.” He admits that Freud would have disagreed heartily and would have condemned all such “religious” and “antirational” systems as stages of illusion. But for Fromm, the key elements of psychoanalysis are that it aims beyond therapy, toward “human liberation”; that it seeks not just more knowledge, but “transformation”; that in probing the unconscious and pushing toward experiential awareness, it transcends rationalism; and that it features, following the example of Freud himself, the extraordinarily patient concern of man for man. Psychoanalysis seeks man’s well-being, he says; but to see this clearly, one “must transcend the Freudian frame of reference.”

Here Fromm recapitulates his theories about the nature of man: the dilemmas man faces because of his ambivalent relation to nature itself, his search to reestablish harmony. Man must undergo continual rebirth: “To live is to be born every minute.” Man must fully experience himself and the nature to which he is



intimately and irrevocably related. The incomplete man is one who, despite knowledge and worldly success, has not directly confronted the question of existence itself. He merely *“thinks of God, instead of experiencing being God.”*

What follows is the most careful explication Fromm has ever made of his version of the “unconscious.” Fromm and others sympathetic to psychoanalytic assumptions often have called Freud’s “discovery” of the unconscious his greatest single contribution to understanding man. (Behavioral psychologists, of course, insist that Freud merely “invented” it.) Through the theory of the unconscious, Fromm forges his most specific link between psychoanalysis and Zen. Freud, he says, sought *“to make the unconscious conscious... to transform Id into Ego.”* But Fromm feels that orthodox conceptions have limited the usefulness of this momentous breakthrough. “Consciousness” and “unconsciousness” must be thought of not as geographical entities but as relative states of awareness and unawareness—not as distinct absolutes, but as degrees. (Freud’s idea of the “pre-conscious,” incidentally, which refers to ideas on the “edge of awareness,” can provide a link in such a process.)

Furthermore, Fromm says both Freud and Jung took “one-sided” views of the unconscious. Freud viewed it as the “seat of irresponsibility”; Jung, as the repository of ultimate wisdom. The truth, says Fromm, is that man’s unconscious contains all that is fully human. Both consciousness and unconsciousness (to polarize them artificially) are “primarily” the products of social conditioning. But consciousness, he avers, primarily stems from the illusions propagated by the state’s power structure. Such illusions seek “to deny and to rationalize the dichotomy between the goals of humanity and those of any given society.” Thus, Fromm concludes, “The content of consciousness is mostly fictional and delusional, and precisely does not represent reality.”<sup>17</sup>

These are heady ideas, and Fromm tries to bring them down from rarefied atmosphere into practical application. The reality of the unconscious, he says, has to be brought into consciousness, to *“transform the mere idea of the universality of man into the living experience of this universality.”* The role of the analyst in therapy is to help effect this experiential transformation. Here the Ferenczi-Sullivan-Fromm alteration of the analyst’s role from neutral observer into “participant” is crucial. Self-awareness comes only when the patient has transcended the “frozen reality”



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of language, transcended conventional thought and logic, and has moved, through a shared experience with the analyst, into a truer realm of being. The process is mutual: “The analyst analyzes the patient, but the patient also analyzes the analyst, because the analyst, by sharing the unconscious of his patient, cannot help clarifying his own unconscious.”

The culmination of Zen is “satori”—enlightenment. This experience, Fromm confesses, he has not achieved. But from the available descriptions and explanations, he feels it is very similar to the ultimate goal of his own “humanistic psychoanalysis,” to the full attainment of what he has called the “productive orientation.” Zen’s goal is like Socrates’: “to know thyself.” But the method is like that of the mystics: to know from the inside.

Zen and psychoanalysis, Fromm argues, really have many similarities. Both seek freedom for the energies stored within man, energies which have become “cramped and distorted” by circumstances. Both are ethical systems, yet both really pursue characterological transformation. Both seek a full grasp of the world. Where psychoanalysis aims to “make the unconscious conscious,” Suzuki “speaks of the Zen-man as being ‘in direct communion with the great unconscious.’” Even the nature of the final experience itself is not unrelated: “the authentic psychoanalytic insight is sudden. . . . It starts not in our brain but, to use a Japanese image, in our belly.” To Fromm’s credit, he does not insist on translating the paradoxical Zen concepts into precise psychoanalytical equivalents—he admits that there are degrees of difference in not one, but dozens of places. As for ultimate experience—“satori”—he says that it may be almost as rare as full psychoanalytical insight. What he does believe, firmly, is that the two systems can learn from each other.

Whether Suzuki believes that Zen can learn anything from psychoanalysis is moot; in his lectures, Suzuki gives no such indication. And, of course, there are other questions and problems—more than one can raise in a short space. Fromm is, for example, almost totally uncritical of Zen; one would expect that his lifelong concern with social, economic, and political responsibility would lead him to considerable doubt about what appear to be essentially egocentric leanings in Zen. Doesn’t Suzuki’s reference to “The Great Unconscious” sound rather like the Jungian conception that Fromm rejects? And Fromm raises no questions at all about the real applicability of the system for the West—could it,



after all, be much more than an exotic fetish for a tiny minority of Westerners, given, as Fromm admits, the almost totally opposite direction of Western thought? And how can it fit into the larger therapeutic and communitarian considerations which Fromm views as matters of such urgency?

A particular puzzle is created by Fromm's comments on authority. He had long since argued for distinguishing between "rational" and "irrational" authority—and he makes the same distinction in the essay here. He refers to the Zen master's "rational authority," which is based on his superior experience and wisdom, and which in some ways is related to the psychoanalytic therapist's "rational authority." Fromm seems to be arguing that man should be mature and self-comprehending, responsible not because he is told to be, or because he thinks he ought to be, but because he feels part of the total human community. At one point Fromm specifically rejects both "irrational authority" and "laissez-faire absence of any authority." These positions seem reasonably clear, but Fromm also says that both psychoanalysis and Zen insist "on independence from *any* kind of authority." Is this carelessness on Fromm's part, does it suggest his attitudes are ambiguous, or are some critics correct in believing (in good Freudian fashion) that Fromm's *real* belief has slipped out? If one were to assume a properly paradoxical stance, one could say that all of these guesses are correct, with each containing a piece of the truth. And one might add that Fromm may really be referring to an ideal, the kind of man who has totally internalized the ethic of a utopian society.



## CHAPTER 6

# Freud, Marx, and the Cold War

## I *The Freudian Revival*

ONE SYMPTOM of post-World War I disillusion was the weltenschmerz of such American intellectuals as T. S. Eliot and the “Lost Generation” novelists, a melancholy spirit that was most lengthily and monolithically displayed in Harold Stearns’s symposium of 1922, *Civilization in the United States*. At the end of the decade, just as the Wall Street stock market was about to come tumbling down, Joseph Wood Krutch supplied the final gasp of disillusion. In *The Modern Temper* (1929), with appropriate mock-heroics, Krutch cried out: “Hail, horrors, Hail, / Infernal world! and thou Profoundest hell, / Receive thy new possessor.” The years following World War II witnessed a similarly somber mood. Politically, the new mood was characterized by “an end of ideology” according to sociologist Daniel Bell in a book by that title. In more general terms, Floyd Matson in *The Broken Image*, has described the era in this way: “The impulse to action became sicklied over with the recognition of complexity and ambiguity; and the cataleptic stance of brooding withdrawal once more came into fashion.”

During the 1920’s, the pessimism of Sigmund Freud also deepened: in fact, it contributed to the despair of such writers as Krutch. Freud had opened the decade with a tentative theory of the “death instinct,” and he closed it with *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Fittingly, the Cold War years witnessed, as Matson says, “a wholehearted resuscitation of the ‘night side’ of psychoanalysis,” with an emphasis on instinctual fatalism.

One of the first and most forthright of these “Neo-Instinctivists” (as Fromm and others have called them) was Herbert Marcuse, whose *Eros and Civilization* appeared in 1955. In the book’s epilogue, which was published first in the Socialist



magazine *Dissent*, Marcuse wrote: "Personality and its development are *preformed* down to the deepest instinctual structure, and this preformation, the work of accumulated civilization, makes the diversities and the autonomy of individual 'growth' secondary phenomena." In Marcuse's viewpoint (which included a reaffirmation of the "death instinct"), Sullivan, Horney, and Fromm had all borrowed indiscriminately from the social sciences. In so doing, he said, they had lost sight of the basic instinct-structure of man, and thus completely misunderstood the basic human dilemma. Freud's stress on "the fundamental role of sexuality as a 'productive force'" was radical social criticism, but Fromm had retreated to a "defunct idealistic philosophy." How could one practice such values within "the very conditions which betray them"? Fromm's "affirmation," he charged, "absorbs the critique."<sup>1</sup>

Although Fromm rarely engaged in debate through the magazines, he had little choice in this instance. He had known Marcuse since the 1930's, through the International Institute for Social Research; and he himself was a contributing editor of *Dissent* at this time. When he replied in the next issue, he denied that Freudian theory was radical in its criticism of contemporary society, and that his own theories were reducible to "adjustment to present alienated society." According to Fromm, Freud, who believed that man had an inherent desire for unlimited sexual satisfaction, "must arrive at a picture of the necessary conflict between all civilization and mental health and happiness." Freud's *specific* criticism of modern society, said Fromm, ignored socioeconomic structure; it was limited to denouncing repressions of sexual drives. As for Freud's theory of instincts being "radical," Fromm found it, instead, fitting comfortably into "nineteenth-century bourgeois materialism."

Was he himself preaching "adjustment"? "What Marcuse is saying here," he argued, "is that any person who has integrity and is capable of love and happiness, in present-day capitalistic society, must either become a martyr or insane." He refused to believe that anyone who sought to understand the meaning and failure of love in a capitalistic society and who sought to revive the idea of true love automatically became "a companion to Rev. Peale." To try to counteract alienation did not mean "preaching adjustment." Fromm called Marcuse a "human nihilist," and Marcuse accepted the designation. "Nihilism," he replied



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in still another issue of *Dissent*, “as the indictment of human conditions, may be a truly humanist attitude—part of the Great Refusal to play the game, to compromise with the bad ‘positive.’”<sup>2</sup>

Marcuse’s position actually represented only one branch of the “hard-line” psychoanalytic revival of the Cold War years. Any attempt to sort out the various categories is probably an impossible task, but several scholars have suggested that Marcuse, together with Norman O. Brown, Paul Goodman, Norman Mailer, and others, have more or less transmogrified Freud into the “holy sexuality” of Wilhelm Reich.<sup>3</sup> A larger group of contemporary intellectuals, including some literary scholars, identified themselves as orthodox Freudians. Pointing out that Freud himself was dubious about the efficacy of individual “cure,” their interest in therapy generally was negligible or nil; they were intrigued, rather, by the romantic mystery of the id and by the tensions in Freud’s “style.” And they observed, accurately, that Freud had received a Nobel Prize, not for medicine but for literature.

The literary scholars took an intense pride in their Freudian purism. Stanley Hyman, in “Psychoanalysis and the Climate of Tragedy,” probably felt that he was offering the highest praise when he noted that his compatriot, Lionel Trilling, “has been uniquely distinguished among modern literary critics by his defense of Freudian orthodoxy against bowdlerization and revision.” Scholars in other fields were not always so impressed by the apologies of literary critics. “Interest in Freud’s discoveries and theories,” Jacques Maritain has written, “seems to grow greater and more ardent as it extends to less competent groups. Literary men have played an enormous role in the diffusion of Freudianism.”<sup>4</sup> The new lay apostles of orthodoxy gave short shrift to the “Neo-Freudians,” and here, of course, they stood shoulder to shoulder with psychoanalysts who remained relatively strict Freudians. An important new study, for example, *A History of Psychoanalysis in America*, by Clarence Oberndorf, the former president of the American Psychoanalytical Association, offered brief mentions of Horney, Sullivan, and Thompson, and not a word about Fromm.

Undoubtedly, the major publication about psychoanalysis during these years was Ernest Jones’s monumental biography of Freud, which appeared in three volumes from 1953 to 1957,





and provided a wealth of detailed information. In 1956, the centenary of Freud's birth, Jones came to America to lead the celebration. Lionel Trilling, who had published an Anniversary Lecture, "Freud and the Crisis of our Culture," now interviewed Jones for television; and he subsequently coedited the one-volume abridgement of the biography of Freud. In conjunction with the centenary, Benjamin Nelson, historian and sociologist, edited a volume of essays, *Freud and the 20th Century*, with contributors from many different disciplines. Nelson was somewhat less than candid in his introduction when he remarked that all of the essayists, "it happens," preferred Freud to any of the many revisionists. With little effort, of course, spokesmen for revision could have been found. What was most striking in Nelson's book, however, was not the lavish praise of Freud, which is not altogether unreasonable considering Freud's extraordinary talents and accomplishments, but the virulence of the attacks on the "revisionists." Editor Nelson himself shared this tone, and suggested something about the mood of the time when he remarked on how different was "the temper of the 1950's from that of the 1930's and 1940's, when formless clichés concerning [Freud's] defects as man and scientist were on every tongue." Will Herberg, a well-known professor of Judaica and historian of religion, contributed an essay in which he took Fromm to task for failure to be religious enough. Fromm, he said, was a brilliant, even profound, social critic. But Fromm was also described as a thinker who had grossly overestimated the role of society and of harmonistic possibilities, tracing all of man's distortions to the "corrupting effects of the culture." If Freud had overstressed biology, said Herberg, he at least had seen that "the trouble lies deep in man," while Fromm, a "Rousseauian," was blind to the "hard wisdom" of original sin.

While Herberg found Fromm possessing some insights to counterbalance (at least partially) his "extreme Pelagianism," literary critic Stanley Hyman had no bouquets, only brickbats. Critic Richard Chase had once attacked the "Neo-Freudians" by making the bizarre observation that Freud had enabled men to differentiate clearly between mind and body (as though the obvious truths of psychosomatic connections were a species of witchcraft). Now Hyman, depicting Freud as a "humble therapist," classified Horney, Fromm, and Sullivan as "faith-healers, inspirational preachers, be-glad-you're neurotic Pollyannas."



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Hyman admitted he was not interested in psychoanalysis “as a medical phenomenon,” but perversely he was infuriated by the revisionists who denied “genetic and dynamic factors.” And how dare they abandon what Freud and Hyman both deemed an absolute truth—the universality of the Oedipus complex?

Hyman was a respected literary scholar; his animus on this subject is so fervent and so all-encompassing that a relatively temperate reader rightfully wonders why. Considering Hyman’s paean to orthodoxy, Gerald Sykes may have a point when he says that Fromm’s “analysis of ‘authoritarian’ rigidity may well have provoked certain overemphatic highbrow attacks on him, since the well-worn path of a number of highbrows has gone from one authority to another.”<sup>5</sup> However, one other explanation might be offered. Floyd Matson has aptly referred to these super-Freudians as essentially “belletristic” in their approach to these matters (which probably also accounts for Jung’s being held in high repute by literary scholars, while the vast majority of scientists and social scientists have long since rejected his psychoanalytic theories). As Hyman’s essay title, “Psychoanalysis and the Climate of Tragedy,” indicates, he is centrally concerned with literary implications. Freud, says Hyman, “showed us that human life was nasty, brutish, and short. . . . He produced a climate of opinion in which tragedy could again flourish.”

There probably is a measure of literary truth in this observation. The revisionists refuse to believe that people are irrevocably locked in libidinal conflicts, that every man is foredoomed to despair by the simple fact that civilization exists, or that every woman must sob her life out in the agony of penis envy. Followers of Horney are not likely to produce books like Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*; they are more likely, as Theodore Rubin of the Karen Horney Clinic has done, to write books like *Lisa and David*. Hyman’s response to Rubin’s book is not, as far as may be ascertained, on record; but he made his position clear in reviewing Thomas Pynchon’s novel *V*. In the course of this absurdist novel, in which Pynchon delivers a powerful indictment against dehumanization of the human spirit, a character insists on the need to love, to care. Such remarks, says Hyman, are only the “slogans of revisionist psychoanalysis.”

Not only Hyman but also Richard Chase, Alfred Kazin, and Herbert Marcuse (with his own penchant for such morbid metaphors as “sharpen,” “explosive,” and “mutilate”) are terribly



aggrieved by the “style” of the revisionists. Here the questions become far more complicated because they involve such thorny issues as ambiguity, the predilections of the reader, and the purposes of the author. Freud’s linguistic tensions are an important reason why every interpreter reads him a little differently and why his greatest award was literary rather than medical. The most elementary acquaintance with the writings of Horney, Sullivan, and Fromm should indicate why they cannot be lumped together indiscriminately; only Fromm of this group, for example, consistently employs paradox even while he is trying to minimize, for the purpose of clear communication, difficult ambiguities. There is much that is important about the modern, all-embracing concept of “style,” but there also are elements of pretentiousness and “public image” in it, as Christopher Lasch has pointed out in relation to the late President John F. Kennedy.<sup>6</sup>

## II *Fromm on Freud*

Ernest Jones’s biography of Freud, appearing in the midst of so much hostility to “Neo-Freudianism,” inevitably drew comment from Fromm. As Freud’s most faithful and unswerving disciple as well as an important contributor to psychoanalytic theory in his own right, Jones was in a position to provide much new documentation about Freud and also about the activities and vicissitudes of others prominently involved in the stormy history of psychoanalysis. Most observers agreed that Jones’s book was now the indispensable guide to the Vienna master; now, as Philip Rieff wrote, the public really could measure “the magnitude of Freud’s personal achievement.”

But could Jones, who *was* such a loyal disciple, so devoted to Freud and at the same time so enmeshed himself in bitter controversies (he had, for example, been sharply critical of Karen Horney), really have the last word? Fromm, for one, was skeptical, especially since so many reviewers praised Jones with little or no qualification. In an article, “Psychoanalysis—Science or Party Line?” Fromm charged that Freudianism had become a “movement.” Like religious and political bureaucracies, it had a hierarchy, membership rules, and a “secret committee” to guide it. This “party line” spirit, he said, had led Jones to deliver “grotesque posthumous attacks” on those who disagreed with Freud—notably Otto Rank and Sandor Ferenczi. In both instances,



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says Fromm, Jones's motivation seemed clear enough: the bureaucratic infighting and the personal enmities among those who were close to Freud. Jones "had been intriguing against Rank and suspecting him of disloyalty for many years," and "fantastic rivalries and intrigues between Jones and Ferenczi" had continued for an even longer time.

This pattern, Fromm believes, was symptomatic of what became a "fanatical movement." To explain its genesis, Fromm turns to Freud's own original motivation in Freud's own words: "In my youth I felt an overpowering need to understand something of the riddles of the world in which we live, and perhaps even to contribute to their solution." Now, Fromm in a different context has declared that he himself was motivated by an equally burning ambition. But he argues that Freud early identified himself with conquerors and benefactors of humanity, with men like Hannibal and Moses—identifications that continued all of his life. Originally, Freud had envisioned an International Fraternity for Ethics and Culture. When Jung expressed grave doubts about such an organization, the International Psychoanalytic Movement was founded instead. Fromm believes that Freud still aspired toward cultural-ethical leadership, still wanted to lead man toward salvation through "the conquest of passion by intellect." But "unfortunately," Fromm says, the movement took hold among the urban middle class and intelligentsia. Like Freud, they had lost their faith in radical philosophy and politics, and they adopted psychoanalysis as a substitute. These followers created their own orthodoxy and bureaucracy, and Jones's "'official' myth about Ferenczi and Rank serves to eliminate the only two productive and imaginative disciples among the original group who had remained after Adler's and Jung's defections."

If Jones, Fromm says, was unfairly critical about some of Freud's followers, he was far too uncritical about Freud himself. With rare, and brief, exceptions, Fromm's own criticisms of Freud previously had been directed toward ideas and not the person. But in this new climate of "hero worship" surrounding the publication of Jones's biography, he took a different tack. In his *Saturday Review* article he asserted that he had no intention of accusing Jones of "conscious insincerity"—but what about "unconscious strivings"? The time seemed ripe for Fromm to do what Jones had done only sparingly: to turn psychoanalytic



techniques upon the founder of the method itself. In *Sigmund Freud's Mission*, published in 1959, Fromm attempts precisely that.

Freud, he says, had enormous belief in the power of reason, and remarkable self-discipline. But he was essentially unable to be warm and loving with others on anything resembling an equal basis. The absence of these qualities, says Fromm, helped account for Freud's de-emphasis of feeling and affect, and for his corresponding overemphasis on a rationalistic approach to man. Accounts of these personal qualities, and their presumed origins and implications, dominate *Sigmund Freud's Mission*. An understanding of them, Fromm suggests, is useful to correct the one-sided uncritical portrait of Freud offered by Jones, and it also may lead to a more clear comprehension of Freud's major theories on human frailty, sexuality, and the discontents of civilization. In other words, Fromm seeks to place Freudianism in a personal context and, more briefly, in a socioeconomic context. The book cannot supplant Jones's, nor is it really intended to (it is only a little over a hundred pages long); but it provides, as Bruno Bettelheim and others have commented, a useful and provocative additional perspective.

Fromm begins, like any good Freudian, with a discussion of home and mother. In Freud's first great work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud supplied only two dreams about his mother. Judging from those and from Freud's autobiographical comments, Fromm sees no reason to doubt Jones's conclusion that Freud had deep love for, and great attachment to, his mother. But Fromm feels Jones was quite unanalytic about this relationship since he ignored the concurrent dependency pattern. This dependency, as well as insecurity, says Fromm, is revealed again and again in Freud's relations with his wife, friends, and followers. One key source for Fromm is the intimate letters that Freud wrote to his longtime friend, Wilhelm Fliess. These letters, as well as others subsequently published, have led some writers, including Philip Rieff, to question many of Jones's interpretations. In one letter to Fliess, for example, Freud expressed a desperate fear of impoverishment; in several others he spoke sadly of his "emptiness." Neither Freud's mother, nor his wife, for all the support they afforded him, could ever allay these gnawing fears—the kinds of fears that Freud himself had described as typical of the insatiable, oral-dependent character.



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Fromm argues that the insecurity cloaked an inability to love very deeply. Freud, he insists, had to maintain complete control in his love relationships. With his wife Martha, he was a jealous lover, going so far as to insist she withdraw affection from her own family. Autobiographical writings reveal that he always seemed too busy to spend time with her. Freud's rationalizations to cover both his domination over and his neglect of Martha were so obviously in the male egocentric pattern, says Fromm, that he finds it incredible that Freud and Jones remained so blind to them.

From Freud's letters and comments about his diminished or exhausted "libido," as well as his theories about the limited satisfactions of sex, Fromm concludes that inhibited sexuality in Freud's own life contributed to his broad, and biased, generalizations. In one of his articles, Freud made a rather typical—for him—comment, that after "three, four or five years marriage ceases to furnish the satisfaction of the sexual needs that it promised." And his attitudes about female sexuality betray an astonishing ignorance about women. Fromm quotes from a letter to Marie Bonaparte in which Freud remarks: "The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is what does a woman want?"

Repeating a comment he made in earlier writings but now placing it in context, Fromm says that the great spokesman for sexual liberation was essentially a puritan. Independently, Philip Rieff was arriving at the same conclusion: for Freud, he says, "pleasure is defined, after the manner of Schopenhauer, as a negative phenomenon." Rieff's view is that Freud "comes to the tacit understanding that sex really is nasty, an ignoble slavery to nature." Rieff is quite correct in saying that Freud's views on sex cannot simply be ascribed to his sharing the Victorian ethos, and he suggests more complex social and cultural determinants.<sup>8</sup> Fromm's evidence also moves in this direction in a later section of his book.

From Freud's dependency attitudes toward his mother and his wife, Fromm then considers, in an extension of his *Saturday Review* article about Ferenczi and Rank, Freud's relationships with colleagues. The pattern was always the same, says Fromm: an intense friendship, then a sudden break—often accompanied by outright hatred. It happened with Breuer and with Adler.



With Fliess and Jung, Freud suffered curious symptoms: amnesia, when Fliess complained that Freud had appropriated one of his ideas (bisexuality); fainting spells, when Jung's disagreements became too intense.

The compulsive need to be loved and to dominate fit together for Fromm into a pattern of authoritarianism. What was Freud's relation to his father?—ambivalent, marked by resentments that Papa Freud was not a greater, more significant person. Here then, says Fromm, are the classic elements of the Oedipus complex: excessive attachment to the mother, resentment and jealousy of the father as usurper. No wonder that Freud, from his own childhood experiences and from the reinforcing experiences of the Vienna middle-class neurotics who were his early patients, projected an Oedipal construct into the whole human situation. Jones, says Fromm, never seems to discern these things; but other analysts, such as Ferenczi and Hanns Sachs, sometimes did.

Fromm then develops the thesis made explicit by the book's title, *Sigmund Freud's Mission*. The boy who had admired Hannibal and political acquaintances who became powerful and committed leaders of German Socialism, later transferred his identification to Moses, the great messianic leader of the Jewish people. As self-styled "messiah," then, Freud helped create the psychoanalytic "movement." For details of this process, Fromm can rely directly on Jones. To insure tight control, especially after Jung's defection, Freud founded a secret international committee with six of his closest and most trusted associates. "It would make living and dying easier for me," Freud wrote to Jones, "if I knew of such an association existing to watch over my creation. First of all: This committee would have to be *strictly secret* in its existence and in its actions..." When the committee fully assembled a year later, each member received an antique Greek intaglio for mounting into a gold ring—like the ring Freud himself had long worn. And in later writings Freud employed political terminology to describe the movement, referring to the "motherland" and "colonies" of psychoanalysis and to the need to "fortify our dominion."

The final step, in Fromm's analysis, came when Freud's followers fully institutionalized the "movement" by adopting Freud's precepts as unassailable dogma (Fromm's own first article, back in 1927, supplied a nice example of the properly



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humble tone). These followers organized a “ritual” around the couch, established the specific time duration of analytic sessions, asserted the analyst’s imperturbable silence, and so on. And they submitted to “idolization of Freud’s personality” to complete “the picture of the quasi-political character” of psychoanalysis. It is a devastating, albeit somewhat comic and caricatured picture that Fromm draws. But anyone acquainted with orthodox psychoanalytic procedures recognizes certain elements of truth; Fromm might have mentioned here, although he doesn’t, that counterparts might be found in a wide variety of other social, religious, scientific, educational, and other “movements” in our corporate society. It is worth noting, too, that Fromm’s analysis of dogma, ritual, and idolization, all in ostensibly depoliticized forms, may help supply another explanation why certain scholars, especially those of the so-called myth-and-symbol persuasion, have been so committed to Freudian orthodoxy.

There is one more dimension to Fromm’s analysis: socio-economic context. Some years earlier, David Riesman, in *Psychiatry*, had perceived the similarity between Freud’s pleasure-pain conception and the “scarcity” theories of the classical economists.<sup>9</sup> Thinking along identical lines, Fromm suggests that a whole range of Freudian theories are not revolutionary at all; instead they are conservative reapplications of nineteenth-century capitalistic thinking (much as American Social Darwinists applied biological “laws” to social and political institutions). Freud’s doctrine of “sublimation,” for example, is seen as quite similar in structure to the middle-class myth about capital formation: “Just as wealth is the product of saving, culture is the product of instinctual frustration.” Again, the competitiveness and aggressiveness that were imputed to “human nature” by nineteenth-century tooth-and-claw theorists are neatly transferred by Freud to his analysis of culture: “Civilized society,” Freud said, “is perpetually menaced with disintegration through this primary hostility of men towards one another.” Freud’s libido theory, supposedly biological, has a curiously “economic” aspect. It is always a “fixed quantity” with absolute limits on expenditure.<sup>10</sup>

Fromm does not attempt in *Sigmund Freud’s Mission* to present the more dynamically positive side of Freud, the aspects of his thought that in so many ways have had revolutionary





implications for human conduct and understanding. The book is one-sided much of the time, and its brevity and repetitiveness suggest that it was put together rather hastily. But, although a more balanced picture would have made for a more impressive book, Fromm had a more specific objective. Clearly, his intention was to remove Freud from the pedestal on which his idolators had raised him, so that he might be recognized as a human being with very real weaknesses and limitations. An occasional reviewer recognized this. M. F. Ashley Montagu commented that Fromm's book was "admirable" and that it "helps the reader to a more profound understanding of Freud and the quasi-religious-political nature of orthodox psychoanalysis."

### III *On War and Peace*

After *Escape from Freedom*, all of Fromm's books had been published during the Cold War years—a period not yet past, of recurrent international crises, domestic witch hunts, and the ever-present threat of nuclear holocaust. This era surely tries men's souls; and, as the revival of Freudian purism indicates, it also tries the beliefs that man is essentially "good" and that a "sane society" remains achievable. No wonder, some writers suggested, that Fromm had moved increasingly toward religion and mysticism, had begun to stress the "limits" of reason. To grasp for the self-transformation of satori, said one critic, hints that Fromm may have despaired of the possibilities of social transformation. Fromm himself had argued in 1931 that when the revolutionary spirit of first-century Jews was crushed by Roman power, many had turned to "fantasy gratification," to the other-worldly redemptive promise of John the Baptist.

But Fromm, whose paradoxes have puzzled many readers, now presented another one to confound his critics. Soon after the publication of *Sigmund Freud's Mission*, and even as the work on *Zen* was appearing in print, Fromm forthrightly entered the public discussion of foreign policy. The paradox is more apparent than real: Fromm's diversity of interests has never really narrowed; he has always kept in close touch with contemporaneous events; and he has always been convinced that private and public worlds are intimately related.

After forty years of considering himself a Socialist but never committing himself to party affiliation, Fromm not only joined



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the American Socialist party, taking an active leadership role with Murray Kempton, Irving Howe, Upton Sinclair, and others, but he even wrote a “Socialist Manifesto” intended for a party platform. In articles and books over the next several years, Fromm’s emphasis turned sharply from a search for self-transformation to a militant call for social action. He still believed, he announced unequivocally, in the necessity of “ultimate concern,” because the robotized, bureaucratized society was still very much with us. But in 1960 the immediate threat was thermonuclear war, and the passions of bellicosity were accelerating all the worst tendencies of the insane society. Russians and Americans alike were locked in “frozen stereotypes,” prisoners of nonfunctioning ideologies that militated against any realistic interpretation of what the “other side” was like. In calling for drastic rethinking of American beliefs, Fromm antedated by some years the proposals of Senator J. W. Fulbright that Americans reexamine “old myths” in the light of “new realities.”

Recognizing that complete unilateral disarmament was clearly unacceptable at this time to most Americans, Fromm argued in *Daedalus* magazine for what Charles Osgood has called “graduated unilateral action” toward disarmament. Osgood had advocated a step-by-step policy, one widely publicized, which would clearly indicate America’s pacific intentions toward the Soviet Union. Such a policy would minimize the threat America posed to the Soviet and would, he hoped, induce reciprocal action. Fromm admitted the plan was inherently risky. But were the risks greater, especially in a “gradual” approach, than continuing the present suicidal course of the arms race?

America’s present foreign policy, he argued, not only brings the country to the abyss of total war; it is driving it ever deeper into dehumanization: “The real threat to our existence is not Communist ideology, it is not even the Communist military power—it is the hollowness of our beliefs, the fact that freedom, individuality, and faith have become empty formulas. . . . Instead of experiencing love of what we are *for*, we experience hate of what we are against.”<sup>11</sup>

The primary resistance to changing America’s course, Fromm says, springs from fear that the Soviet Union seeks to conquer the world for Communism. But, he insists, the monolithic view of Communism as a system of belief and practice that has



remained immutable through time and space is fallacious. Only the bare bones of Marxist-Leninist ideology remain intact: the Leninist vision of world “conquest” was abandoned in the early 1920’s. The Soviet Union in 1960, he says, is a conservative, class-ridden regime: “The ruling class of the Soviet Union is no more revolutionary than the Renaissance popes were followers of the teachings of Christ.” In fact, he argues, the security of the Russian ruling class is jeopardized by genuine revolutionary movements in other parts of the world; one day, Russia’s position vis-à-vis a “potentially expansionist China” might be very like the current American attitude toward Russia.

Of course, he concedes, it is *possible* that Russian leaders are irrational and are plotting to destroy American civilization by force or subversion—just as it is *possible* that a paranoid is correct in believing that his wife, family, and friends are conspiring to murder him. But is it sane to stake everything on this possibility, when so much evidence could be marshaled against it? If, says Fromm, Americans are going to deal in a sane and realistic way with personal affairs or public problems, they ought to be concerned with *probabilities*.

A year later, in 1961, Fromm expanded the themes from this article into a full book, *May Man Prevail?* As the interrogatory title indicates, Fromm poses a challenge in this work: are men able, are men willing, to examine in depth their cherished beliefs about capitalism, Communism, and war? Fromm once more is fusing two “disciplines,” this time along the line charted out by Harold Lasswell. Men’s political beliefs, Fromm argues, verge on pathology. They are victims, he says, of “projective” thinking; “the enemy appears as the embodiment of all evil because all evil that I feel in myself is projected on to him.” A cathartic function is served, but the pathological approach to political reality is a “dangerously explosive psychological mixture.” As in *The Sane Society*, Dr. Fromm’s patient is the public itself—and not only Americans, but all of the peoples caught up in the “common craziness” of the Cold War. People should pay attention, Stuart Chase said in a review, to Fromm’s “excellent” linkage of politics and psychology. If they would, he thought, “our chance of escaping Domsday would be markedly improved.”

Fromm insists that there are no insuperable barriers to communication and coexistence between America and the Soviet



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Union. Those who depict the nations of the “free world” as angels, and Communist countries as devils (or vice-versa) have no awareness of history and no operational sense of modern socioeconomic realities. Despite apparently antithetical ideologies, both America and the Soviet Union are essentially conservative, materialistic, managerial societies. And both are far more interested in achieving international stability than in promoting world revolution. Khrushchev, he says unequivocally, “neither needs nor wants war.”<sup>12</sup>

But of course, Fromm notes sadly, most Americans would disagree fervently and would label such comments “heresies, nonsense, or subversion.” They believe, as their ancestors did about witches, that there is ultimate—perhaps supernatural—villainy afoot. Modern man, smug in the hindsight of history and comfortable with the fruits of progress, recognizes that Medieval witch-hunters were pathological, that there really was such a phenomenon as an “insanity of millions.” But modern man exempts himself: he is convinced that his impeccable rationality immunizes him from such extreme psychic distortion.

As Exhibit A for those who doubt that men can conceal madness beneath the veneer of rationality, Fromm offers Her: an Kahn’s well-known study, *On Thermonuclear War*, with its balance-sheet approach to genocide. Kahn assures his readers that a pretty good percentage of people could survive an atomic attack; perhaps “only” five million deaths would occur if all precautions—fall-out shelters, tactical evacuation, and so forth—were taken. It should be difficult for any sane man, even without Fromm’s detailed indictment, to read Kahn’s book without revulsion. But Fromm does a thorough demolition job. He points out the unreliability of Kahn’s statistics; the naïve optimism that relies so heavily on the efficacy of “precautions”; the apparent unawareness that weaponry becomes increasingly more sophisticated and destructive; the psychological innocence that fails to question the effects of mass destruction even on those who manage to survive. Above all, Fromm stands “amazed” at the moral cretinism of the entire “genocidal” position. But Kahn is not unique. How many people, Fromm wonders, have descended to similar moral bankruptcy? He cites the familiar case of the “murderous bureaucrat,” Adolf Eichmann, and a newspaperman’s sudden recognition that in this creature who calmly signed the death warrants for countless innocent Jews,



“one suddenly hears speaking the faceless ‘company man’ of the oversized industrial organization, the alibi-ridden, buck-passing, double-talking, reading-by-ear personality who has been drained of native emotion and principle and filled with an unreal ideology.”<sup>13</sup>

For Fromm, the greatest obstacle to coexistence in 1960 was the question of German unification. The West argues that Russia has nothing to fear from a reunified Germany because the Germans since World War II have become peace-loving, democratic people. Fromm is as skeptical as the Russians are, because the same power structure that propelled the Kaiser and Bismarck backed Hitler and the Nazi party, and the same industrial and military potential is alive today. In addition, says Fromm, German nationalism persists; and it is fanned continually by the German political leadership, which waves “reunification” at the German population. The whole reunification question, he believes, is a sacred cow, and artificial to begin with: the unification of Germany is a recent invention, less than one hundred years old. To accede to it is to play the German game once again, as England and France did in the 1930’s with Hitler. There is only one road to German reunification, he says; and the Germans know it full well: war.

Failing to understand national differences led Americans, Fromm believes, to a disastrous attitude toward Castro’s “authentic Cuban revolution.” By stressing Castro’s Communism and isolating Cuba, this country forced him into hostility toward it and into alliance with Russia. American predictions about his Communism were almost classically “self-fulfilling.” America, says Fromm, must abandon clichés about East and West, accept the status quo, push for universal disarmament, and recognize the “neutralist” concept instead of the “you-are-with-us-or-against-us” mentality of the late John Foster Dulles. Fromm believes that America must grant the right of countries to create their own political structures—and give them the kind of economic and technical assistance that they need to do so. America cannot force its brand of “democratic capitalism” on underdeveloped countries who neither want it nor are capable of achieving it. But the time for such realizations is growing short, Fromm warns. He argues psychoanalytically that “unconscious defeatism . . . a lack of faith in the very values which we claim” lies deep-seated beneath present American thinking. “Unless



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we act soon . . . circumstances, institutions, and weapons, which we created, will take over and decide our fate.”

Fromm's proposals for a reorientation of American foreign policy were not dramatically original. But they were lucid; and, although one might quibble about particulars, they were eminently sane. Lucidity and sanity on these matters were rare qualities, even among the “experts,” in 1960. In his role as minor prophet he seems to have done rather well in predicting the take-over by “circumstances, institutions, and weapons”; apologists for America's frustrating involvement in Vietnam have, by hindsight, blamed precisely such “intangibles.”

### *IV Karl Marx and “Humanistic” Socialism*

In one of several documents Fromm wrote at this time for the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation, he cited the goal of nineteenth-century Socialists: to free man from economic bondage, and to enable him to function in a humane and dignified relation with his fellow man. But these purposes had largely been perverted, said Fromm, by Socialists who had gravitated toward statist, regimented social structures and by Socialists who had accommodated themselves to the various new faces of advanced capitalism. It was time, he said, to return to first principles. In a “Socialist Manifesto,” he offered his own list.<sup>14</sup>

The “supreme principle,” he argues, is that man, his life, his purposes, his work, and his creation must take precedence over things, goods, capital, and “circumstances.” Every man is responsible for all fellow men; therefore production, consumption, and political structure should all be directed by man's needs and man's purposes. Decentralization of activities, wherever possible, is imperative. Finally, economics should be “reduced to its proper role as the means to a humanly richer life.” As “intermediate goals,” Fromm urges not only participant control of enterprises but also central planning and nationalization of basic industries where socially useful. Incomes need not be equalized, but they ought to be leveled so that great disparities in “life experience” do not exist. National sovereignty and the armed forces should be abolished; racial and sexual equality (but not “sameness”) should be established; and critical thinking



should be encouraged through all of our cultural and educational media.

Darlington Hoopes, national chairman of the Socialist party, noted that Fromm's paper was greeted with enthusiasm by some and "a certain amount of dissent" by others. In the 1960 election, a tiny minority of the electorate voted Socialist. But change was necessary, Fromm believed; and he still had faith in the uses of history. At the conclusion of *May Man Prevail?* he remarked that "historical trends have to be understood and anticipated." Such a statement was, of course, very remote from the spirit of Sigmund Freud, whose approach to history was at best ambivalent and at worst, as Philip Rieff terms it, "disrespectful." Fromm's historiography has been in the line of Karl Marx, who argued that man was creator and created: man made circumstances and history, and circumstances and history made man.

Marx had always figured prominently in Fromm's thinking. As we have already seen, Marxian dialectics, Marxian class analysis, and Marxian socioeconomic reasoning had threaded their way through the fabric of Fromm's work for over thirty years. It was Marx's term "productive" that identified Fromm's single positive character type, and Marx's concept of "work" was embedded in that productive character. Marx's dynamic analysis of alienation was intrinsic to Fromm's own extended analysis of the sick, or insane, society.

But Fromm had quoted Freud far more frequently over the years; nearly every topic Fromm had discussed at length began with a résumé of Freud's contribution. Now Fromm's immersion in Socialist activity and his concentration on topical problems seem to have provided the impetus for him to organize systematically his ideas about Marx. In 1962 Fromm brought out two books. The first, *Marx's Concept of Man*, contained Fromm's long essay on Marx's ideals and ideas, published together with a large selection, newly translated by T. B. Bottomore, of Marx's not very well known *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and other early documents and letters. The second book, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, placed Marxian and Freudian ideas side by side for purposes of comparison, contrast, and synthesis.

*Marx's Concept of Man* was very different in its intentions from *Sigmund Freud's Mission*. In his study of Freud, Fromm had tried to undermine slavish devotion to orthodoxy by dissecting the motivations and the underlying ideological structure that



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helped to shape Freud's theories; he sought to demolish the myth that Freud had been almost devoid of personal limitations and immune to cultural pressures. The case of Marx was different. Fromm felt that Marx's ideas had been grossly misrepresented; his intention was to "rectify" widespread distortions about them. In no way was Fromm attempting a biographical sketch of Marx himself.

Marx, says Fromm, has been caricatured into a narrow "positivistic-mechanistic" social scientist, whose theories allegedly lent themselves to the regimentation, uniformity, and depersonalization of man. How ironic that such an interpretation should come from American readers, Fromm remarks, because "the very same reasons which are said to be proof that Marx's ideas are incompatible with our religious and spiritual tradition and which are used to *defend* our present system *against* Marx, are at the same time employed by the same people to prove that capitalism corresponds to human nature and hence is far superior to an 'unrealistic' materialism."<sup>15</sup> Fromm's argument is similar to the one Thurman Arnold had used a generation earlier in *The Folklore of Capitalism* to defend the allegedly evil governmental action of the New Deal against the allegedly noble behavior of unrestricted private enterprise. Fromm, like Arnold, is suggesting that fossilized ideologies and popular belief have little connection with social realities and even less with "human nature."

The real Marx, says Fromm, was neither a philosophical idealist like Hegel, nor a "vulgar materialist"; rather, Marx produced a new philosophical synthesis concerned with the *whole* man. Marx offered for the first time a "detailed analysis of institutions as being rooted in the mode of production and the productive forces underlying it." To this analysis, says Fromm, Marx coupled an all-encompassing vision of the relation between man and nature, with productiveness ("labor") as the mediating factor.

Fromm stresses two Marxian concepts that have been central to his own theories of man: productiveness and alienation. He argues that by productiveness, Marx means the "process of genuine activity," in which work is a means to an end (the product) and also an end in itself as a "meaningful expression of human energy." Capitalism is fundamentally wrong, therefore, not only because it leads to an unjust distribution of wealth





but because it perverts labor into meaningless activity and thus transforms man into a “crippled monstrosity.” Under capitalism, labor has become alienated: “work has ceased to be a part of the worker’s nature.” Things and circumstances, which man himself has created, become rulers over him. All man’s other achievements, including ideas and art, have become similarly perverted. Fromm agrees with the common charge that Marx failed to predict the astonishing growth of the “middle class,” but insists that this unexpected historical development simply lends *more* sweep to Marx’s basically correct diagnosis: Marx failed to “foresee the extent to which alienation was to become the fate of the vast majority of people, especially of the ever-increasing segment of the population which manipulate symbols and men, rather than machines.”

For Marx then, Socialism was not the goal but the means, not “the fulfillment of life, but the condition for such fulfillment.” In later years, Fromm admits, Marx changed some ideas and concepts (the newly translated manuscripts date from the 1840’s). Marx and Engels were well aware, he says, of how idealistic and religious terms could conceal economic and social realities. They abandoned terms like “species” and “human essence,” and Marx certainly became far more pessimistic as he grew older. But, Fromm insists, the basic affirmation of man remained intact; there was lifelong “continuity” in Marx’s fundamental beliefs.

That the early works of Marx conveyed these humanistic, even “idealistic” sentiments, no sophisticated reader can deny. But some Marxist scholars expressed strong reservations about Fromm’s book. One lengthy review, for example, appearing in *Studies on the Left*, questioned Fromm on three major points: that he misgauged his audience; that he underestimated the importance and depth of Marx’s development; and that, by stressing “idealistic” values, Fromm placed Marx in such uncongenial company as Paul Tillich, religious mystics, and Zen Buddhists. A. James Gregor, author of the review, felt that Fromm was attacking a straw man. Who could believe that Marx was a crude materialist, he asked, except “incredibly uninformed, impossibly naïve, or unredeemably biased” people? And such people, he argued, could hardly be influenced by such a book as Fromm had written.

Gregor seems off-base here. David Riesman, for instance,



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writing in *The American Scholar*, and James L. Adams, professor of ethics at Harvard, wrote of being struck by the “scope of the humanist side of Marx” and by Fromm’s “arrestingly fresh interpretation.” Not everyone interested in Marx is a scholar in depth; and the early manuscripts, which had not been published in English until the 1930’s, had never been widely circulated. As to education of the “uninformed,” Fromm had raised the question years before of just how many laymen, including educated laymen, really were “informed” about Marx. Fromm’s “educational” effort was another demonstration of his refusal to accept the belief that most people are “unredeemably biased.”

A potentially more valid reservation raised by Gregor was textual—how real was the “continuity” in Marx’s thinking? Fromm admits that Marx changed his mind on some matters after 1844 and that he wrote later of “settling accounts with an “erstwhile philosophical conscience.” Gregor argues that the mature Marx greatly modified his perspective, but really answers his own question by raising another one: “How and how much of this youthful sentiment infused itself in the later Marx is a problem which can only be carefully and laboriously explicated.”<sup>16</sup>

Fromm, by stressing Marx’s humane value system, hoped to add his own voice in advocacy of “humanistic socialism.” A considerable body of literature on this subject has been produced in the last decade, especially in Europe. In 1965, in fact, Fromm was to edit a volume of such writing, under the title *Socialist Humanism*. That it covered a wide range of perspectives was clearly demonstrated by the inclusion of an article by Fromm’s old adversary, Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse, who like Fromm has long been intrigued by the intellectual brilliance of both Marx and Freud, has attempted his own synthesis. So have many other scholars, despite the facts that Freud considered Socialism hopelessly idealistic and that Marx certainly would have branded psychoanalysis as bourgeois individualism.

The conflicts between the ideas of Marx and Freud are obvious, but so, too, for the careful reader, are important points of convergence. Having incorporated for years so many ideas from both men, “correcting” the limitations of each with insights from the other, and having written small books on both, it was entirely appropriate for Fromm to write a direct comparative



study. In *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, Fromm places the ideas of Marx and Freud side by side on topic after topic, very much as he had done with the ideas and methods of Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis.

Fromm's Marx is clearly the superior figure: Freud cannot even be compared in "stature . . . and historical significance." Marx's thought had far "greater depth and scope." In fact, Fromm always has been somewhat ambivalent in his estimate of Freud. In early writings, he hewed strictly to orthodox Freudianism. In the 1940's and 1950's, as one historian of psychoanalysis writes, it was easy to see where Fromm disagreed with Freud; the hard task was finding where he *agreed* with him. Another writer accused Fromm of having "a running feud" with Freud for twenty years. In his most recent writings, Fromm says he feels he has "moved closer to Freud." At one point in *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, he calls Freud a "liberal reformer" as contrasted with Marx, the "radical revolutionist." But on another page he calls Freud's system "radical" too, and "revolutionary" in the sense that it "opened up a new era of thought."<sup>17</sup>

But Fromm does find that Freud and Marx share many "common premises." Both shared a lifelong skepticism about "clichés, ideas, rationalizations, ideologies." Both were exemplars of the humanistic tradition, believing that each man represents all of humanity, with the concomitant motto: "Nothing human is alien to me." Both offered dynamic and dialectic approaches to reality—one by psychoanalysis, the other by socioeconomic analysis. Both felt that the prime forces governing man operated "behind his back," that observable phenomena were not only inadequate but often completely misleading.

Perhaps their fundamental source of disagreement lay in their notions of basic reality. For Freud, says Fromm, it was the individual's libidinous organization; for Marx, it was socioeconomic structure. Thus, Freudian man was a model constructed in the image of a machine; and Marxian man was a given potential, a product of history who could transform it and himself. Freudian man evolved individually through libido stages, and collectively into civilization through "sublimation." Marxian man evolved historically and dialectically; his individual evolution took place inside that historical process.

For Freud, "human nature" was essentially psychological, predicated on sexual release and repression or, in Freud's later



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theories, conflict between life and death instincts. "Human nature" for Marx was built around productivity, the practice of life rather than inner, relatively fixed psychological components. Their analyses of man's sickness and health revolved around the same constructs. Freud charted out Oedipal conflicts as the origins of neurosis. Marx had no systematic psychopathology but identified alienation from self and others as "the sickness of man." Freud pictured unrepressed primitive man as possessing precivilized health; adult, "genital" man was a shadowy conception, who actually seemed, says Fromm, "the concept of a well-functioning member of the middle class at the beginning of the twentieth century, who is sexually and economically potent." Marx took a Spinozan view, posing "activity" versus "passivity" as the criterion for defining mental health. Health is rooted in the act of self-creation, independence, productivity.

On close inspection, says Fromm, these apparently antithetical views are often mirror images of each other, almost metaphorically so: "Freud's independent man has emancipated himself from the dependence on mother; Marx's independent man has emancipated himself from the dependence on nature." Yet Fromm consistently implies that Freud's is the narrower view, that he, more than Marx, was circumscribed by the ideologies of his own age and by the limitations of his vision of man. Freud's dynamics had potentially universal implications, but they were highly individualized and mechanistically oriented. Marx's dynamics swept through evolutionary historical forces, socioeconomic processes, modes of activity, and the individual "practice of life."

Pushing beyond both Marx and Freud, Fromm summarizes his own views on existential and historical dichotomies, and how "social character" dynamically bridges the gap between culture and private belief. He is newly emphatic about the prime importance of the "socially conditioned filter" through which only certain kinds of experience can enter awareness. Through an array of linguistic and cultural mechanisms, social forces determine consciousness—and largely imprison men inside distorted, or false, understandings. Men intellectualize at the expense of feeling; they confuse words with the reality behind them. To these corruptions of truth, Fromm concludes, have been added the terrible effects of mechanization and militariza-



tion. But man's heritage is still available, he insists; and Marx and Freud remain guideposts for the searching, humanistic mind: "If we should all perish in the nuclear holocaust, it will not be because man was not capable of becoming human, or that he was inherently evil; it would be because the consensus of stupidity has prevented him from seeing reality and acting upon the truth."



## CHAPTER 7

# Toward a Synthesis of Idea and Action

### I *Critics and Doubts*

**B**Y THE early 1960's Fromm had written about a dozen books, many of which had sold widely; but one looked in vain for anything resembling critical consensus about his place and value in modern thought. Three lengthy critiques of Fromm's work were written between 1961 and 1963, each founded on a radically different set of assumptions.

Martin Birnbach's *Neo-Freudian Social Philosophy* (1961), to begin with, is moderate and pragmatic in tone. Birnbach discusses six figures in some detail, but Fromm comes in for the fullest analysis. Birnbach's book is impressive for its scope and care, and also because he manages consistently to remain dispassionate. Whatever Birnbach's personal predilections, he tries to understand Fromm and the others in their own terms, rather than to evaluate them against some arbitrary standard. His hesitancy about pronouncing final, sweeping judgments is a refreshing antidote to the dogmatic assertions that have marked so much criticism in these highly problematical areas.

Birnbach's over-all judgment of Fromm parallels his general estimate of the "Neo-Freudians." It is mixed—or perhaps the precise term is "balanced." He finds Fromm socially programmatic in ways and depth that are not characteristic of other "Neo-Freudians," but he believes Fromm's programs suffer from a lack of economic and political realism. Similarly, while Birnbach believes that Fromm may "exaggerate the value of love," this error ("if any") is "one of emphasis, not of direction." He finds Fromm too utopian, too "original," and too attached to natural-law philosophy to propose realistic solutions. But, at the same time, Fromm's assault on capitalist social institutions is seen as "cogent," an indictment convincing enough to justify



serious attempts at reconstruction. Birnbach believes that the methodological contribution of Fromm and the others (not so much the interdisciplinary approach per se as the insistence that people be the “ultimate subject matter of inquiry in the social sciences”) will have more impact on social thinking than their substantive ideas—but this belief is “tentative.”<sup>1</sup> Birnbach, then, is cautious; his yeas and nays often are succeeded by a “but, on the other hand—.” And the framework by which he judges ideas is somewhat circumscribed: the book gives practically no indication that Burckhardt, Weber, Rank, or Bachofen lay significantly in the background, or, for that matter, that biblical prophetic ideals and the mystical tradition have been major influences on Fromm’s conceptions of life, love, and the sane society.

By contrast with Birnbach, John H. Schaar’s *Escape from Authority: The Perspectives of Erich Fromm* (1961) suffers from little humility, false or otherwise. Schaar’s special expertise is in political and ethical philosophy, and he finds Fromm’s positions woefully inferior to his own. For Schaar, man is a slight creature; and while it would be nice to see his condition improved, one should not expect overmuch: “Men will be ruled. The majority of men lack the power to form their own conceptions of the real and the ideal.” Hence, leaders must formulate ideals and must impose “uniform and authoritative rules.” Fromm, of course, begins with an almost diametrically opposed assumption about men; his ideal of democracy consists of lifting man’s own capacity to determine the good, and to organize the conditions under which he lives. Schaar interprets this intent to mean that Fromm would dispense with *all* authority; hence he comments that “the greatest failure of Fromm’s thought is that he cannot see . . . that when authority is lacking fashion reigns.” For Schaar, such a situation means anarchy, chaos.

Schaar may have had one eye on Berkeley, where he has taught, and where campus demonstrations (about which he has written caustically) helped start a chain reaction in many other schools. At any rate, he has taken some aspects of Fromm’s thought, truncated them from the main body of thought, and equated them with the anarchist element that sometimes can be detected in New Left philosophy. By this distortion, Schaar arrives at the palpable absurdity that Fromm’s “productive man” may well be a “beatnik.” That Fromm’s “productive man”



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is, by definition, committed to meaningful *work* seems to have escaped Schaar's notice. The reasons are not hard to find. Schaar likes order; he is devoted to precise, fixed categories of thought. It is for him a "fact" that, while life and death represent a purely empirical question, living well or poorly suggests a purely ethical question. It is a "fact" that mental health is a purely moral concept. For Schaar, there is no breaching the boundary between ethics and esthetics: these are "different subjects, each with its own canons." He finds that Freud and Fromm have an "absolute" difference on the question of civilization and its discontents. Lines are always clear: Fromm *must* choose either this or that, *must* go "forward or backward."

For Schaar, also, the history of ideas is filled with absolutely closed issues: "Marx gave away the show . . .," or "Hume gave away the secret . . .," or "Hegel is right . . .," or "Esthetic criticism must start from the premise that . . ." With such a categorical approach to ideas, Schaar cannot really understand Fromm at all. Unlike Birnbach, Schaar never seems to understand the important role that "emotion" plays in Fromm's thought; he largely ignores the dialectical matrix in Fromm's outlook, and most of the psychological and psychoanalytic underpinning of Fromm's work. While Schaar continually argues that Fromm is unscientific, he accepts as uncritically as do some literary critics the essential soundness of Freudian libido-instinct theory. Unsurprisingly, the orthodox *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* was very pleased with his book, and convinced that "the psychoanalyst" would agree with Schaar's conclusions.

Schaar does raise a number of important questions about Frommian propositions which seem dubious and about Frommian contradictions which can be troublesome, especially in regard to the nettlesome concept of "self" and the weaknesses of the model "sane society." But even here, while Schaar acknowledges no previous critics of Fromm, these arguments had been made in substance years earlier by critics like Arnold Green, Henry Kariel, and Paul Tillich. Sometimes, even Schaar's phrasing sounds reminiscent of earlier writers.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the chief difficulty raised by the book, the factor that tends to undermine Schaar's more acute assessments, is one of temperament (Edgar Friedenberg has called the book "unbearably snide"). Rather than questioning Fromm's ideas, Schaar usually dismisses them. He finds Fromm's theory of love "wrong," Fromm's critical theory





“a failure,” Fromm’s utopianism “blind,” Fromm’s theory of work “inadequate,” Fromm’s notion of abundance “incomprehensible.” Fromm, he charges, “is a moralist with no conception of the moral life.” Schaar seems unable to recognize that there may be important truths in such statements as these by Edgar Friedenberg: “I think Fromm makes an unanswerable case for the existence in all men of very strong tendencies toward free and spontaneous growth.” Or, Fromm is “justifiably skeptical of both the power and the inclination of secular authority to further the ends of love and human justice.”<sup>3</sup>

Harry K. Wells, in *The Failure of Psychoanalysis* (1963), disagrees with Fromm as firmly as Schaar does, but from very different premises. Indeed, as a Pavlovian and strict materialist, Wells takes immediate and permanent exception to the idea that there is even such a thing as the “unconscious.” But, unlike Schaar, he recognizes the role it plays in Fromm’s thinking, he shares awareness of dialectical processes, and in some important ways he shares Fromm’s humanitarian (although not Fromm’s “humanistic”) ethos. The structure of Wells’s book follows what he might call the “internal history” of psychoanalysis. He begins with Freudian tenets and the dissemination of Freudianism; glances briefly at early apostates; moves on to “reformed” psychoanalysis (concentrating on Horney and Fromm); and then, in discussing “reconstruction” of psychoanalysis, specifically concentrates on Fromm’s theories of love and alienation. From Wells’s historical perspective, psychoanalytic theory had reached a hopeless impasse by the mid-1940’s, and Fromm was the principal spokesman attempting, futilely, to redirect it toward fusion with existential philosophy and the New Theology.

Wells’s argument is an articulate statement of the behaviorist position, or at least the Pavlovian branch of it; and it clarifies some important opposition to psychoanalytic theory. He insists that only historical conditioning makes scientific sense. The “heart of Freudianism,” as he sees it, is that Freud, at a time when cerebral physiology was floundering, postulated an “unconscious” to account for and accommodate the phenomena of blurred or lapsed memory. Unproved and unprovable, this theory, says Wells, has been undermined rapidly by the building of a “science of higher nervous activity.” The “labyrinthine” and “mythical” construction of innate racial memory and of the libido-instinct theory is no longer tenable in the light of what



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is now known scientifically: “The mind is the functioning of the brain, nothing else.” The conditioned reflex, the “cell” of mental activity, is the functional base on which “the entire complexity of animal and human activity is constructed.”<sup>4</sup>

From these premises, Wells finds to be futile not only classical psychoanalysis but all attempts to “reform” or “reconstruct” it. Reformers Horney and Fromm sought to inject a social dimension, to label the society itself “sick,” and thus to transfer the causative burden. But, says Wells, this attempt ends in a cul-de-sac, with no possibility of any rational and productive human beings being produced. All that is left of social-individual connections is “the pseudo-medical one of traumatic shock producing a neurotic condition.”

Fromm’s final leap, says Wells, was to reconstruct Freudianism on “humanistic lines,” to resuscitate “essential” qualities—inherent needs and abilities to love, rooted in the unconscious. As an alternative to the despair of his age, Fromm, like other “isolated” and forlorn humanists in theology and philosophy, returned to faith. But regression to the notion of an “indwelling soul,” whether in biological or divine terms, merely demonstrated the emptiness of the presuppositions of psychoanalytic theory in toto. Wells, incidentally, turns out to be more optimistic than Fromm. Where most of Fromm’s severe critics suggest that bleaker images of man are more “realistic,” Wells finds renewed hope in the dialectics of history. He would wish not for a purer Freud but for a purer Marx—of whom he is almost totally uncritical. As for the counter-critique of behaviorism by Fromm, this will be discussed in conjunction with *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, published in 1970.

But one point of convergence between Fromm’s theories and behaviorism might be observed, as it occurred in *The Heart of Man*, which Fromm wrote in 1964, a year after Wells’s study. Fromm is tussling, in one section of this book, with the hoary philosophical dilemma of choice and determinism. He concurs with William James that, while this conundrum may never be resolved, one still may profit by “deepening our sense” of it. One cannot, he argues, talk sensibly about “freedom of choice” between “good” and “evil” in *general*. One can only talk meaningfully about the individual man and about his “concrete and specific actions toward what is good [or] what is evil, provided good and evil are properly defined.” Further-



more, one is not dealing with an “absolute” question—the problem is one of the “conflict of inclinations and their respective intensities.” These in turn hinge on the individual’s character as it has developed until a given moment. So “freedom of choice,” as Fromm defines it operationally here, is in one sense an orientation rooted in character structure. In another sense, it is a capacity to make a choice between opposite, morally loaded alternatives.

The decisive factor in the choice, says Fromm, lies in awareness of what constitutes good and evil, of what is the appropriate means to the end, of the necessity for action. Only up to a certain point in the wish to stop smoking, in the course of a potential seduction, in a game of chess, or in war, are there “real possibilities” for moral choice. Since decision-making opportunities arise continually, Fromm points out, each individual choice can strengthen the character along positive or negative lines. Interestingly enough, Fromm’s careful explication of the *habit*-forming dynamics of man’s decision-making process is startlingly analogous—in different terms—to behavioristic theories of conditioning. The psychologies of Harry Wells and Fromm, beneath their layers of theory, may have more common ground than either antagonist can recognize or admit.

In 1964, when *The Heart of Man* was written, Fromm did feel that he was moving closer in mood to Freud. “As one whose views have been often misrepresented as underestimating the potential of evil within man,” he wrote wryly, “I want to emphasize that such sentimental optimism is not the mood of my thought.” In 1961 in *May Man Prevail?* he had deplored the increasingly pervasive “genocidal” mentality of the cold war era. That same year, in an address before the Seventh Inter-American Congress on Psychology, he began formulating a constellation of negative psychological traits. His topic was the “revolutionary character,” the truly free man, a dynamic version of the “productive character.” As opposed to the “revolutionary character,” who “loves and respects life,” Fromm mentioned briefly another type of personality, one attracted by “death, destruction, and decay.” Such a character, he said, “can be called necrophilous, to use [Spanish philosopher] Unamuno’s expression in his famous answer . . . to a Franco general, whose favorite motto was ‘Long Live death.’”<sup>5</sup> In 1963, in reviewing a posthumous work by Carl Jung, Fromm speaks of being “im-



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pressed by Jung's deep affinity for death, destruction, the past, the dark, ice, stones and everything that is not alive. Blood and corpses, skulls and murder are the repetitive theme of his dreams." Fromm notes that "this was not all of Jung," but the syndrome here represented a "necrophilous complex."<sup>8</sup>

These brief references first achieved a theoretical formulation in a short study Fromm wrote that year, under the working title "On the Psychological Causes of War." He argued that there is a "secondary" tendency in man, one he called "necrophilia," which works in destructive opposition to the primary tendency toward life-sustaining and life-expanding attributes, "biophilia." Actually a collection of syndromes based on traits that were rooted in lesser or greater degree in everyone's potential character, necrophilia, Fromm said, was more widespread and intense in the nuclear age. When Paul Tillich and Hans J. Morgenthau criticized this study, charging, respectively, that Fromm had overemphasized psychology and underestimated the crucial role of "power structures," Fromm denied that he had committed the "fallacy of psychologism"; he was trying, he said, to understand "the human factor . . . among the conditions which make war possible." Human destructiveness, he agreed with his critics, certainly was not *the* cause; and he changed the essay's title to *War Within Man: A Psychological Enquiry into the Roots of Destructiveness* for release in bound form.

Fromm's expansion of these ideas appeared in 1964, as the major section of *The Heart of Man*. Fromm still rejects the Freud-Menninger concept of the "death-instinct," a concept that anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer says "in part confirmed de Sade's pessimistic diagnosis of 'man's loathsome heart.'" Nevertheless, considering the mass brutality of the twentieth century, Fromm feels one should not underestimate man's "propensity of evil." Some "deep indifference to life," he suggests, lies in the "deeper layers of the personality." But if there is no destructive instinct, what then are the fundamental dynamics behind violence? Fromm theorizes a "syndrome of decay," comprising three orientations: "the love of death," "malignant narcissism," and a "symbiotic incestuous fixation." Pure character types are rare, he points out (Jung's impulses toward creativity *and* destruction represented a "peculiar balance"); but, still not



yielding to angst, Fromm continues to insist that the fundamental tendency of all living organisms is to live and to grow.

Love of death, the “necrophilous” orientation, is thus a secondary potentiality, a “malignant” phenomenon that arises when the specific conditions for human growth and freedom are absent or inadequate. A dialectic (on both economic and psychological planes) is played out between health and psychopathology, in the conditions of exploitation-equality, justice-injustice, concern-indifference, concrete living-abstractification and mechanization. Fromm agrees with Freud that narcissistic tendencies are universal, but he insists that there are both benign and pathological forms. An optimal amount, he says, serves a biologically useful purpose—survival—and, kept at a level compatible with social cooperation, narcissism can lead to interest in one’s own work, to a “self-checking dynamic,” to creativity. But narcissism can also reach pathological peaks, generating megalomania and xenophobia. Pathological “group narcissism,” as exemplified by Nazi attitudes toward Jews, or by the attitudes of poor whites toward Negroes, manifests an ideology of superiority that ultimately is destructive for everyone.

The final destructive orientation is “incestuous symbiosis.” In Freud’s interpretation of the Oedipal triangle, the boy’s sexual desires for his mother are repressed because of the father’s strength; the boy in turn identifies with the father. Fromm reverses the Freudian scheme, emphasizing the “natural” pre-genital needs for protection and unconditional love. Two polar tendencies are present from the moment of birth, says Fromm: to “emerge to the light” and risk independence, or to regress toward the securities of comfort, protection, and dependence. Some fearful and lonely people regress to cults: the Great Mother, the Virgin, or irrational patriotism. Like narcissism, regression has benign and malignant forms. Franklin Roosevelt, suggests Fromm, was “moderately mother-fixed” as well as “moderately narcissistic.” The deepest level of the mother-fixation is “incestuous symbiosis,” where a host-parasite or even a *folie à deux* relationship can ensue. When the various malignant forms of the three orientations are blended, we have the “syndrome of decay,” and the archetype is Adolf Hitler.

The opposite, healthy syndrome is the “syndrome of growth,” demonstrated by biophilia rather than necrophilia, love rather



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than narcissism, independence as against incestuous symbiosis. If one pieces together Fromm's varying interpretations and categories, the "biophilous" character seems like the "productive" character with, perhaps, "revolutionary" traits added. The "necrophilous" character has no precise antecedent, but it obviously is shaped out of Fromm's "nonproductive" traits and his "thing"-oriented mode of "assimilation." His discussions of negative human characteristics are provocative and systematic, and probably, to a degree at least, redress the imbalance of human character that "realist" critics called for. But there is a clinical dryness in *The Heart of Man* that is very atypical of Fromm's writing. In a way, these pages form a grim counterpoint to *The Art of Loving*, but the difference in tone is startling. One suspects that Fromm, unlike Jung, is not at all fascinated by morbidity, and his writing lights up as soon as he leaves the subject.

### II *From Tradition to Innovation*

If a new demonstration were needed that Fromm continued to trust the old humanistic values, it was provided by his next book, *You Shall Be as Gods*, in 1966. In general, the book's tenor is that of religious modernism, following the methods of symbolic interpretation and evolutionary theism that were first systematized by the Higher Critics of the Bible in the late nineteenth century. In this respect, as a reform rabbi commented, there was not much "new or revolutionary" in Fromm's study. But when before, the rabbi asked, had a psychoanalyst ever undertaken such a careful and sympathetic exegesis?

"Sympathetic" really is an understatement, for Fromm avers that the Bible is "an extraordinary book, expressing many norms and principles that have maintained their validity throughout thousands of years. It . . . has proclaimed a vision for men that is still valid and awaiting realization." So, for Fromm, traditional wisdom still finds practical application in the modern world. The Old Testament, he says, is, and remains, a "revolutionary" book. The biblical prophet as revolutionary is, of course, an old conception as Fromm himself points out. Among examples of modern literature, a work which make this point most explicitly, as well as paralleling such other Fromm themes as equalitarianism, an anti-war spirit, the ideal of "rebirth," and excitement in living



for life itself, is Clifford Odets's 1935 play, *Awake and Sing!* (The title itself is a quotation from Fromm's favorite prophetic figure, Isaiah.)

Fromm, the atheist, finds it imperative that the reader of *You Shall Be as Gods* understand his approach to "God." The concept of God, he says, "was a historically conditioned expression of an inner experience," a concept given to the "x-experience" (a Fromm neologism for theistic or nontheistic "religious" feeling) in many places around the world between 1500 B.C. and 500 B.C. It was the belief in a *ONE* who represented "supreme value and supreme goal for man." Fromm then recapitulates his arguments from *The Art of Loving* about the evolution of "God" from anthropomorphic being down to (or up to) the "nameless God" and the "negative theology" of Moses Maimonides; with that step, there is nothing one can say or think about *God* at all.

Man, imbued with "x-experience" (or "reverence for life," in Albert Schweitzer's term), can embody the humane attributes that, in an earlier age, he affixed to a literal God. He can become *like* God, but he can never *become* God. Human history recorded in the Bible follows, for Fromm, an evolutionary course parallel with that of the concept of God. It begins with the separation from home (Paradise), and it proceeds to the universalism implicit in such texts as the Book of Ruth. Never, says Fromm, does the God of the Old Testament impel the move toward man's freedom by "changing his heart," by intervening in history. Man must make his own history. Typically, Fromm offers two examples: one from the Book of Exodus and one from today's front pages. In Exodus, the miracles performed by Moses and Aaron could not change men's hearts; indeed, the Jews regressed to idolatry again and again. Today, says Fromm, the "free world" and the "Communist world" have so far restrained themselves. But they have not yet recognized that the threat of force will not guarantee peace and that force will not solve the real problems. Their joint suicidal course "only hardens man's heart more and more, until he arrives at the point where he ceases to care; at this point he will act as did Pharaoh, and perish as did the Egyptians."

As for the role of the Prophets, it is, says Fromm, to reveal truth, but not truth as an exclusively spiritual idea. The prophets operate inside history, for the "God of history"; hence they must be political men too; they *have* to be dissenters and revolution-



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aries. And they point toward the next step in history, the messianic time. Then man, left homeless after Paradise, will recover his home: the world itself. He will be “fully born.” He will end his struggle against his fellow men and nature, and establish a new and profound harmony. The Prophetic message is neither determinism (beyond man’s conscious control) nor pure will (totally within man’s control); rather, says Fromm, it is a realistic set of predictions based on close knowledge of how human hearts actually are or are not hardening. Fromm, in short, is applying the theory he had outlined in *The Heart of Man*, a fusion of determinism and free will to which he had given the unfortunately ungainly name of “alternativism.”

Near the end of *You Shall Be as Gods*, Fromm writes about the Sabbath, the anticipation of the messianic time, the symbolic liberation from the chains of time, and the moment of reunion between man and man, and between man and nature. Thus does Fromm in 1966 return to the Fromm of 1927, and to the very first topic he had ever written about, “The Sabbath,” and calls again for affirmation.

A sociopolitical context for reaffirmation appeared a few years later in the revolt against President Johnson’s Indochina policies and the vigorous grass-roots campaigns conducted for Senators Robert Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy. The signs of resurgent hope for change were “clearly visible,” said Fromm. He now wrote what was in effect a sequel to *The Sane Society*, a book titled *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology*.

Fromm’s updated critique of contemporary America was not essentially different from what he had written fifteen years earlier. We were facing, he said, the specter of total mechanization, in which “we will nothing, nor do we not-will anything.” He found himself in company with an old humanistic ally, Lewis Mumford, who in *The Myth of the Machine* defined the “megamachine” as the completely systematized, homogenized, and pervasive social system, and with the French critic Jacques Ellul, whose *Technological Society* was a devastating, although largely pessimistic, analysis of the same phenomenon. And Fromm renewed his assault on his old “emotion-free” bête noire, Herman Kahn. In *May Man Prevail?* Fromm had attacked Kahn’s balance-sheet approach to thermonuclear war. Now he attacks Kahn’s *The Year 2000* as “alienated megamachine” thinking. Readers,





he said, mistook “thousands of little data . . . for erudition or profundity. They do not notice the basic superficiality in his reasoning and the lack of the human dimension in his description of the future.”

According to Fromm, megamachine thinking, as symptomatized by Kahn but widespread across American life, centers around a narrow and crippling concept of “efficiency” which leaves out man himself and what he needs for healthy human functioning. Fromm cites such “pathogenic” symptoms as a blind belief in the efficacy of computerized planning, impersonal calculation of human needs, and the increasing popularity of social and biological scientists who overstress man’s animalistic propensities. In the last-named category he singles out Konrad Lorenz’s *On Aggression* and Desmond Morris’s *The Naked Ape*. Fromm is not unaware of the controversies concerning man’s evolutionary heritage, and the way they focus on the conflict between the neocortex and the more primitive “old” brain. He admits he can only “guess” at the truth, although he cites one scientific authority, Ludwig von Bertalanffy. Fromm’s feeling is that “particular relations between the large neocortex and the old brain are the basis for . . . specifically human feelings.”

Regardless of the biological truth about this question, Fromm argues that man the system, with his particularly human qualities, must be at the center of any social planning and organization. He draws on the structure he had outlined in *Man for Himself* and *The Art of Loving* to delineate his own conception of what man is and what man needs.

Grounds for hope always remain, Fromm says, as long as there are realistic possibilities. Certainly “hope” can be founded on illusion; he finds the term as paradoxical and complex as “faith” or “freedom.” Basically, he believes hope to be an “inner readiness, that of intense but not-yet-spent activeness.” In one of his more poetic passages, his naturalistic and mystical conceptions are neatly entwined: “We cannot say that the tree ‘hopes’ in the same way in which a man hopes, since hope in man is connected with feelings and awareness that the tree may [sic] not have. And yet it would not be wrong to say that the tree hopes for the sunlight and expresses this hope by twisting its trunk toward the sun. Is it different with the child that is born?”<sup>77</sup> There was dissatisfaction in the land in 1968, and some of it



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was channeled into what Fromm saw as important social and political protest. Realistic grounds for hope were present.

How can hope be put to work to achieve a more humane way of life? Fromm cites four “givens” which he insists must be taken into consideration: the necessity for much centralized enterprise, much centralized planning, cybernation, and a realistic appraisal of man himself. We must have a greater knowledge of what man is, we must have humanistic management of public concerns, we must have active engagement of people in all the processes which affect them, and we must recognize that there are no absolutes in questions of freedom versus control or centralization versus localism; experience and mutual intelligence can help us to find optimal measures.

More specifically, Fromm eschews violent revolution, sabotage, and words tossed into the wind; he rests his own hopes on face-to-face dialogue and democratic organization. He proposes as a basic mechanism for change an elaborate system of associations which vary in size, function, and scope. In some ways it is a political counterpart of the economic cooperative he discussed in *The Sane Society*, but more comprehensive. Boimondau, the economic cooperative, had been offered as a paradigm; now Fromm suggests a fully national network. He urges the formation of a national council of about fifty enlightened and responsible citizens to raise issues, gather information, and presumably lobby for legislation; a system of local councils to generate support and ideas; clubs to discuss issues and stimulate public activities; and “groups” to pioneer new styles of life and new philosophies. All of these associations would somehow interweave although they would not be formally bound together.

The “group” concept, he carefully notes, would represent a deeper, more committed way of life than might be found in an “encounter group” or a transient hippie commune. Yet a reader might be struck by the parallel between Fromm’s thinking and patterns of interaction that already had taken root by 1968. Similarly, John Gardner’s “Common Cause” resembles Fromm’s idea of a national council that acts as a broadly based American conscience, gadfly, and citizens’ lobby. The activities of Ralph Nader and of various voluntary and municipal consumer-action groups are at least steps in the direction of a “consumer revolution” which Fromm has urged, not only in *The Revolution of Hope*, but as far back as *The Sane Society*. In 1960 Fromm had



contributed to Socialist party efforts: in 1968, although he clearly still was committed to Socialism as an ideal, he sympathized strongly with the insurgency of Senator Eugene McCarthy inside the Democratic party. One of Fromm's associates, Michael Maccoby, took the biophile-necrophile hypothesis from *The Heart of Man* and applied it in a study of popular attitudes toward Presidential candidates. Using a random sample of 160 Californians, Maccoby reported that 77 percent of the McCarthy supporters exhibited "love of life" characteristics, compared with 46 percent of the Rockefeller partisans and a slender 27 percent of the Nixonites. The election results did not offer an encouraging diagnosis about the heart of the American people.<sup>8</sup>

### III *Character in Time and Place*

Among the principal charges leveled against Fromm's writing over the years were: (1) that his work lacked any strong empirical base; was too heavily built on unsubstantiated theory and speculation; (2) that his work was too cross-disciplinary; for while scholars may welcome insights from fields other than their own, depth in a single discipline is essential for a clear focus; (3) that he was too individualistic, refusing to pay serious attention to scholars who worked in allied or even identical fields. The first and last of these charges seem to have had some basis during most of Fromm's career. The second may never have had any validity; rather, it seems to reflect a bias that has less and less currency as old, artificial barriers between "fields of study" have broken down.

But a long-promised study by Fromm, finally published in 1968, offered a solid rebuttal to all three criticisms. In *Social Character in a Mexican Village*, Fromm demonstrated his ability to work collaboratively with a wide range of scholars, to incorporate substantial research including sophisticated statistical method, and to justify his cross-disciplinary approach if the intention was to investigate life styles in depth.

The study's basic intention was to test Fromm's "social character" theory, the comprehensive man-in-society formulation first presented in *Escape From Freedom*, and further developed through the elaboration of character types in *Man for Himself* and *The Heart of Man*. Secondary purposes were to apply



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psychoanalytic method to the testing of groups rather than individuals, and to seek clues for the planning of social change.

This ambitious project required a massive team effort, although the theoretical structure, with relatively minor additions, remained Fromm's. His principal collaborator, and the coauthor of the book, was Michael Maccoby, who shared Fromm's interests and perspectives, was trained by him in psychoanalysis, and subsequently performed other research in the area of social character. Fromm's original plan to investigate a Mexican village was conceived in 1957; Maccoby joined him in 1960; over the years, other assistance was afforded by psychiatrists, psychologists, anthropologists, statisticians, physicians, and a number of other specialists. The data collected and analyzed ranged through history, economics, social activities, health practices, personal attitudes, and, for depth studies, interpretive assessments of Rorschach tests, Thematic Apperception Tests, Anderson story tests, and dreams. For comprehensiveness, the book was like nothing else Fromm had ever published; it more nearly compares (even, in a curious way, in some of its final conclusions) with Robert and Helen Lynd's classic investigations of the 1920's and 1930's, *Middletown* and *Middletown in Transition*.

Fromm selected a village, unnamed (like "Middletown," which turned out to be Muncie, Indiana) but representative of many agricultural communities in southern Mexico. It was an *ejido*, a village founded in 1923 at the close of the Mexican Revolution, where the villagers were given small plots of land. From Fromm's perspective, it would be edifying to discover how this new economic structure, coupled with a general trend toward industrialization, affected peasant character; this is no small question in a world which even today is over 50 percent peasantry.

The *ejido* peasants were individualistic, conservative, and suspicious, like peasants in most places. Their small land plots made them relatively independent people, "dependent only on nature and the market." Fromm and his team found that the peasants also were dignified, concerned about their sense of self and about being good people. Their central conflict was "between cynicism and hopelessness on the one hand and faith, often a childlike faith, on the other." Industrialization had generated new pressures, not only for better techniques to work



the land more efficiently, but also a necessity for cooperative effort.

Most of the peasants were young because life was hard and health was poor; many were illiterate; and only a few had accumulated any money or possessions. As the *ejido* was a small community (792 in 1960), there was much communal discussion and decision-making, although a comparatively small number of more prosperous residents assumed a strong leadership role. Relatively clear class distinctions might be made, although all ranked far below an American median standard of living. The town's history was one of immigration of former residents and numerous migrants from elsewhere who came to the new town that had replaced the old authoritarian hacienda structure. Few ex-peons were prepared, in skills or attitudes, to cope with postrevolutionary society.

Aside from all the data gathered in more traditional ways, the key to the study was the application of psychoanalytic testing; through projective tests and interpretive questionnaires, measures of "social character" were determined. The questionnaires, which were refinements of the type Fromm and his associates had used in Germany in 1931, provided findings which correlated very well with results from the Rorschach and Thematic Apperception tests. Then the massive data, incorporating sixty-three variables, most of which were character traits (Narcissistic, Exploitative, etc.) were subjected to factor analysis.

From the tables and charts, which are accompanied by painstaking analysis that reveals the familiar Frommian blend of economic, anthropological, and psychiatric ingredients, three primary character orientations are identified. The single most frequent is the nonproductive-receptive and its sources are seen to lie in socioeconomic structure and family relationships. Both the Spanish hacienda system and the Aztec society which preceded it were hierarchal, breeding dependence in peons as similar societies did for slaves and serfs elsewhere. The Aztec society was essentially patriarchal but Mexican society since the conquest has been basically matriarchal: the home is dominated by emotional ties to the mother, and Mexican Roman Catholicism embodies the same principle: "It is no exaggeration," say Fromm and Maccoby, "to say that for the Mexican peasant, the Virgin of Guadalupe (and many other Virgins of local significance) is at the center of religious belief." Lacking a paternal principle,



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the male villagers tend to dependency, repressed violence, and alcoholism. Alcoholism is a problem of such extent that it receives a full chapter in the book.

The second most common character orientation is productive-hoarding, a type more nearly resembling the individualistic, stingy peasants of southern Europe. For Fromm and Maccoby, the explanation for this sizable minority in Mexico lies in economics: the productive-hoarding character seems to reflect the “peasant mode of production, which sometimes proves to be stronger than the general feudal influence, but *only* when the peasant possesses his own plot of land.”

Ranking third in frequency, and comprising about 10 percent of the villagers studied, is the dominantly exploitative character. These are prototypes of modern entrepreneurs, who have used to advantage the possibilities of the new capitalism.

All in all, Fromm and Maccoby conclude that the Mexican Revolution was not revolutionary enough to effect drastic changes in life style for most of the peasants, nor to have altered the majority of character orientations. When the Lynds returned to Middletown after a decade which saw the arrival of the Great Depression, they detected numerous changes in the way people lived but relatively few substantial changes in basic thinking. One suspects that Fromm and Maccoby’s kind of depth analysis, had it been applied to Middletown, would have underscored the Lynd conclusions, and for parallel reasons: the ideals and myths of opportunity and free enterprise in middle America were grounded too deeply and pervasively to permit a drastic alteration in character.<sup>9</sup>

More than material change and education are required for significant character change. To Fromm and Maccoby it was both “important” and “startling” that neither education nor literacy was correlated with material success. The nature of work had not changed enough to make advanced skills in reading and writing significant. Nor did new cultural stimulation achieve much response from the unproductive-receptive villager. These additives, as Fromm had argued years earlier, were not enough for transformation.

What might be done? “Culture,” education, more active entrepreneurs all bring little or mixed results to raising the general level of the population to more productive attitudes and lives. Based on experiences and experiments in the villages, the



brightest ray of hope lies in the creation of cooperative political, economic, and social activities in which a sense of individual worth and achievement simultaneously is maintained, and even strengthened. The village has been the site of agricultural cooperatives, as well as of a home for orphans organized on humanitarian and participatory lines. In the course of the Fromm-Maccoby study, a village boys club was formed, experimenting with modes of fostering cooperative activity, critical thought, and honest dialogue. The results achieved by all of these ventures offered encouragement that there were systems which might make a difference.

Fromm and Maccoby felt that the study confirmed the usefulness and validity of social character theory, and of the kind of methodology they employed. Finding and implementing methods for change represent a much more complex set of questions. Social character, with its accumulated methods, ideologies, and values, is built up over long periods of time: Fromm and Maccoby estimate that it took 300 years for a basic change in the European social character. On the other hand, they believe that a consumer character (an orientation totally absent from the Mexican villagers studied) was developed in the American middle class in a single generation. To digress to the Middletown parallel, one might infer that a social character analysis, or perhaps even one along the lines of the Lynds' sociological framework, might have yielded more dramatic results if the two studies had been conducted in Indiana just before World War I and after World War II; the intervening years witnessed the advent of the consumer society.

And those years also were the period of massive penetration of new advertising techniques, high-pressure persuasion on a national level, and burgeoning mass media. Fromm was hardly unaware of the power of propaganda in history, as shown by his studies of church doctrine, of Nazi persuasive appeals, and of the creation of the American "marketing character." But now he took special cognizance of the impact of television: "Never before had it been possible to reach and penetrate people of all ages so effectively as by the electronic media. . . ." He maintained the familiar humanistic skepticism about what might be accomplished, because the media were privately owned, represented the ethos of an "alienated society," and were dedicated to profit rather than social purpose. Further, because the media encour-



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aged passivity and mindlessness, it appeared that they could more readily change character for the worse than for the better.<sup>10</sup>

A few years later, Fromm examined connections between consumer culture and the development of matriarchal tendencies in the United States. He had argued in a number of articles and books over the decades that affirmation of matriarchal principles (universality, unity, peace) was urgently needed in Western culture. But in 1971 he finds the trend regressive rather than progressive: in the “consumer culture” vision, he says, “technique assumes the characteristics of the Great Mother, a technical instead of a natural one, who nurses her children and pacifies them with a never-ceasing lullaby” (in the form of radio and television).<sup>11</sup>

### *IV Convergence and Independence*

According to the introductory article in a recent textbook, *Readings in Psychology Today*, Fromm is “the outstanding advocate of a humanistic approach in psychoanalysis.” At this point it is worth examining the ways in which Fromm’s ideas coincide with—and diverge from—those of his contemporaries in behavioral studies. To begin with, Fromm has always considered his work “scientific,” although empiricists like Harry Wells and skeptical “realists” like John Schaar deny that Fromm’s theories are adequately grounded in scientific procedures. In the kind of formulation that drives Schaar and Wells crazy, Fromm once referred to his own efforts as “the applied science of the art of living.” In 1944 in “Individual and Social Origins of Neurosis,” he said that science had to be understood as a history of errors, that is, of “rational visions” which contained the “seed of truth.” This “seed” was temporarily veiled by the limitations of available knowledge at any given time.

A decade later, even as Patrick Mullahy was writing that Fromm had deserted empirical techniques for philosophy and moralism, Fromm turned up as a contributor to a volume of essays, *What is Science?* In the company of such renowned experts as Bertrand Russell, Julian Huxley, Jacob Bronowski, and Clyde Kluckhohn, he was selected to explain the scientific rationale for psychoanalysis. Fromm’s basic argument was that the inferential nature of psychoanalysis paralleled the recent approaches of the physical sciences:





In essence, this new principle was that not sensory experience nor common sense nor tradition is a guarantee of the truth; that to grasp reality—outside of man and within him—we must know the nature and direction of forces which are not directly visible, but which can be inferred from the visible phenomena they produce. . . . Freud taught man to be objective and to be humble; to be skeptical toward his conscious thoughts; to probe for the truth hidden in his unconscious, rather than to be satisfied with what he consciously believes to be true.<sup>12</sup>

Fromm spoke of the psychoanalyst's patient accumulation of data, his framing of hypotheses which might be rejected, altered, or confirmed, and so on. There is, of course, some substance in this methodological argument; and many observers would agree that scientific approaches can be utilized in this process, both in the formulation of general theories and in the therapeutic reconstruction of a life situation.

Nevertheless, many scientifically minded persons argue that the psychoanalytic method fails to live up to some traditionally basic criteria of "science." Logician Ernest Nagel has put the case succinctly. An empirical science, he says, must be able to "deduce determinate consequences" from its theoretical assumptions. And "at least *some* theoretical notions must be *tied down to fairly definite and unambiguously specified* observable materials, through generally accepted rules of procedure." Nagel's comments, incidentally, came in a symposium on psychoanalysis, philosophy, and science staged in 1959. The gaps between the participants' attitudes were sometimes profound; and, as several speakers noted, the whole enterprise came close to disintegration.<sup>13</sup>

Similar problems have sometimes occurred in the question of collaboration between psychoanalysis and the social sciences. Here, the record is far more mixed because points of convergence have been discerned frequently by scholars from the various fields: social psychology itself represents an important merger of "disciplines," and the whole thrust of "Neo-Freudianism" has been to effect a fusion. But stubborn resistance also has been common. Psychoanalyst Karl Menninger has argued that each specialist should stick to his own specialty, and the sociologist Arnold Green has taken essentially the same position. Fromm's arguments against psychoanalytic orthodoxy are clear by this point; as for social scientists, he has said that too many



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of them have slavishly and mistakenly imitated the methods of natural science. Arguing along lines resembling those of sociologist C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination*, Fromm charges that many social scientists have self-limited their research to problems that lend themselves to easy empiricism. They have refused, he says, to investigate the things that matter most: the crucial problems of “happiness, ethical motivation and destructiveness” in the contexts of character structure and social structure.

But there are other difficulties, some of which were highlighted by a conference in 1949 on “culture and personality,” in which Fromm, Kardiner, Sullivan, and a group of distinguished sociologists and anthropologists participated. Substantial agreement was evident that interdisciplinary approaches were valuable; psychoanalysts, anthropologists, and social psychologists all seemed familiar with one another’s concepts and methods, and many had collaborated on interdisciplinary studies. But the emphases of Fromm, Sullivan, and Kardiner diverged in important ways; and, as some observers of the conference noted sadly, the social scientists were in no position to choose among them.<sup>14</sup>

Behavioristic psychology, whether that of Ivan Pavlov or of his American counterpart John Watson, has consistently been hostile toward psychoanalysis; Harry Wells’s *The Failure of Psychoanalysis*, already discussed, is a typical perspective. Fromm has taken a quite tolerant view of behaviorism, saying that many of its studies “are sound and . . . enrich the science of psychology.” He objects when behaviorists “make claims which they cannot substantiate.” Psychoanalysts argue that Freud’s methods were as scrupulous, detailed, and “realistic” as those of the behaviorist, and that the psychoanalytic method is capable of pursuing elusive “truths” into far deeper areas of human experience.

Psychiatrist J. A. C. Brown remarks pertinently that terminology itself can prove the worst barrier between theorists: “Even behaviorism in its use of the conditioned reflex demonstrates that the subject of the experiment is responding, not to the immediate stimulus as such but automatically—that is in one sense of the word, unconsciously—to its past associations.”<sup>15</sup> In this context, two references to Fromm seem appropriate. One is a reminder of his own strong emphasis on the importance of the “filter of language,” which powerfully determines how one



thinks and communicates. Another is Fromm's suggestion that Freudian concepts might be considered metaphorically, and this could apply to the concept of the "unconscious" itself. The unconscious can be thought of, says Fromm, not as a region, but as a way of describing a continuously connected process, part of the whole realm of mental activity.

If practitioners of psychoanalysis and behavioristic psychology often tend to believe their fields are mutually exclusive, a different kind of convergence has been suggested. Harry Wells writes that Fromm may be the "most articulate and influential voice" of the humanistic currents of thought that seek a new direction out of a "wilderness of crass materialism and conformity in spurious values." Two anthologies from the 1960's pointed up the "influential" quality and the "new direction" to which Wells refers: *Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society* (1962), and *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary American Culture* (1964). In both books, selections from Fromm are the lead-off essays; in both, references to Fromm by other authors are extremely frequent; in both, the "suggested bibliographies" contain more recommendations for books by Fromm than for those of any other author. (Fromm is more modest, incidentally, in an anthology which he edited with Ramón Xirau in 1968, *The Nature of Man*; his selection from his own writings is brief, and his bibliography includes the sharpest criticism ever made of his work, John Schaar's *Escape from Authority*.)

*Man Alone* has a vast sweep, from Marx to Dostoevsky to a broad spectrum of modern selections from psychiatry, philosophy, and sociology—all revolving around the theme of alienation in its meanings, pervasiveness, and implications. *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary American Culture* has much the same focus: its reiterated concepts are alienation, anxiety, and loneliness. Repeatedly in these essays, one reads statements that strikingly resemble Fromm's. Carl Rogers writes that "to a degree probably unknown before, modern man experiences his loneliness, his cut-off-ness, his isolation both from his own deeper being, and from others." Rollo May writes on the incursions of phenomenology and existential psychoanalysis, and speaking for those who more or less share these positions, says that "our chief concern in therapy is with the potentiality of the organism. . . . the nature of man itself must be understood as a basis for our science and art of psychotherapy." The analyst,



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says May, must get to the root question, which is the patient's being able to experience fully that "I am I; I am this being with all the potentialities and possibilities that constitute this being, this I."<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the strongest affirmation of the ideal of convergence comes in Abraham Maslow's *Toward a Psychology of Being*. Maslow asserts that "Freudianism" and "scientific psychology" are meaningless terms, mere "loyalty-positions." He calls for enlarging "the jurisdiction of science so as to include within its realm the problems and the data of personal and experiential psychology." To find out what man is and can be, one must bridge the gap between the worlds of science and the humanities. Maslow is optimistic about what he feels is an informal "coalescence," an increasingly important "Third Force," which has emerged as a wedge between orthodox Freudianism and experimental-behavioristic psychologies. His roster of this group includes, among others, Adlerians, Rankians, Jungians, Neo-Freudians, Talmudic psychoanalysts, Gestaltists, Rogerians, existential psychoanalysts, general semanticists, and such mavericks as Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown.<sup>17</sup> Maslow's allusions to Fromm are all laudatory, and when he cites "basic assumptions" held by the "new point of view," they appear almost identical with Fromm's.

Equally striking as convergence is the way some novels of the 1960's centered on themes that have absorbed Fromm for many years—suggesting that people at least a full generation younger than Fromm have been struck by similarly responsive chords. Most relevant for novelistic themes have been the first section of *The Sane Society*, with its massive indictment of corporate institutions and values, and *The Art of Loving*, with its impassioned call for personal feeling and concern, and for deep human relationships. The "insane society" in its most blatant commercial aspects is scathingly satirized beneath the ebullient wit of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. The "insane society" in its most brutalizing psychological implications is condemned in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and Kesey's metaphorical setting is appropriate: a psychiatric institution where the keepers (who enforce "adjustment" in the name of "democracy") are far more mad than the inmates. And the "insane society" as a mechanistic, militaristic, dehumanizing monolith is portrayed in surrealistic, philosophical terms in Thomas Pynchon's *V*.



Heller's alternative is a recognition of the right of decent survival; Kesey's, a militant quest for freedom; Pynchon's, the capacity to care, to be "alive" rather than "inanimate."

Despite real parallels and talk of "convergence," it is not quite accurate to say that Fromm's belief system fits together comfortably with any of the various writers mentioned. Few of the psychoanalytic theorists Maslow cites, for example, match Fromm's strong emphasis on the weight of socioeconomic factors and of historical dialectics. Maslow speaks of the "total collapse of all sources of values outside the individual," and he says that "political democracy and economic prosperity don't in themselves solve any of the basic value problems." Certainly, in one sense, Fromm would agree; he concluded as much in *Social Character in a Mexican Village*. But despite his own emphasis on the "self," the "humanistic" conscience, and the failures of the affluent society, Fromm is too steeped in structural, institutional analysis and in the live crises of politics and war to abandon his concern for historical conditioning. At one time he categorized "existentialist psychoanalysts" as "superficial"; in the recent "Crisis of Psychoanalysis," he still does not seem terribly impressed.

Fromm also continues to point up differences between his own beliefs and those of his contemporaries. He is, for example, unhappy with Carl Rogers's term "client-centered therapy," because it seems to him that there isn't any other kind of therapy—the alternative is a "narcissistic analyst." He finds himself in disagreement with Martin Buber because Buber found Adolf Eichmann "totally alien." No, says Fromm, every human being shares every human characteristic: "I find Eichmann in myself because I find everything in myself—even, if you please, a saint." While he praises Erik Erikson's "significant contributions to the theory of childhood," he believes that Erikson "has not gone as far as he could have had he followed in a more radical way the consequences of some of his premises."

Fromm has problems, also, with many of the values and methods of the younger generation, even though they reject the "prefabricated society" and preach the virtues of love. The young, he says, have become "neomatriarchal" in their opposition to the state and to automatic obedience to elders and man-made laws, and in their vocal insistence on self-determination. But he feels that too often these attitudes are "mere negation of patriarchalism



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and a straight regression to an infantile pattern.” In several articles in the last few years, Fromm has accused his old adversary Herbert Marcuse of being the spokesman for this “infantile regression,” as well as for misunderstanding both Freud and the nature of freedom.<sup>18</sup>

Probably the principal point of difference between Fromm and many of today's youth is that in spite of his contemporaneity, Fromm stands solidly on the value of preserving the humanistic heritage. One suspects that neither the Talmudic nor the post-Renaissance Western traditions which are so fundamental to Fromm's thought—nor, for that matter, the Indian culture that lies back of Ravi Shankar—can mean much to the ahistorical “teenybopper” or the student militant who takes a leap into postliteracy without first having been nourished on those older, humane values. Fromm himself has made this distinction clear. He recently argued that “there must be no force to prevent people from the satisfaction of their desires, including drug addicts, or any kind of sexual activity, provided it does not do harm to other people.” But, he cautioned, protests are not enough; youth must establish a “frame of reference” on which to build a hierarchy of substantial, tenable values. There are ways, in short, in which Fromm seems relatively conservative. Playing devil's advocate, a magazine interviewer asked him, “Isn't the element of the marriage relationship that insists on fidelity—isn't that an example of hypocrisy?” and “Would you urge youngsters to have sexual activities before marriage?” Fromm's answers to both questions were flatly negative. When married people change sexual partners, he said, the probable result is a sacrifice of intimacy: “people are not all that secure.” As for “urging” youngsters toward premarital sex, Fromm's opinion was that “Nature urges them enough.”<sup>19</sup>

Conservative and yet still radical in many ways, Fromm obviously remains a hard man to classify. A colleague observes that Fromm “preserves a great independence (his friends have been known at times to think him a trifle too independent!) which serves as a relief and a gadfly in these days of radar-directed society.” But wherever he stands, Fromm continues to move, and to write. He is convinced that the central, all-subsuming, problem now is “the opposition between the love of life (biophilia) and the love of death (necrophilia),” and he has been preparing a book, *The Roots of Human Aggression*. As



always, he is ambitious; this forthcoming book is seen as only one volume of a comprehensive study of “humanistic psychoanalysis” which will deal at length with theory, behavior, techniques of therapy, and related matters. Such a work, if it fulfills his expectations, might serve as an antidote to the organizational difficulties that have plagued Fromm’s individual books through the years; he plans, additionally, to introduce more direct clinical material.

But it certainly is not too early to conclude that Fromm has been a most useful contributor to the humane values of his time—and at a historical moment when faith in man is desperately needed. Critics may quarrel, and sometimes justly, with the rigor of the “science” he has brought to bear on human behavior and institutions, and some humanists may legitimately have reservations about the validity of some of his humanistic “principles.” But there should be no faulting his integrity, his dedication to scholarship, or his commitment to the democratic ideal. At times, his reach may indeed have exceeded his grasp, but, as Browning’s Rabbi Ben Ezra remarked, that is what the human enterprise really is all about. In an age of violence and of despair about man’s present and future condition, Fromm has declared that man can still redeem himself. At the age of seventy, he wrote: “Who can give up hope as long as there is life? Who can be silent as long as there are billions of human beings, living, breathing, laughing, crying and hoping?”<sup>20</sup>



## Notes and References

### Chapter One

1. Unless otherwise noted, biographical comments on Fromm's youth and family life are from letters written by Fromm to the author in 1966 and 1967.

2. *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud* (New York, 1962), p. 5.

3. *Sigmund Freud's Mission: An Analysis of his Personality and Influence* (New York, 1959), p. 3. For a sampling of other interpretations of Freud's "Jewishness," see Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (Garden City, 1961), p. 325; Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (New York, 1957), III, 237-40; Sam Keen, "Man & Myth: A Conversation with Joseph Campbell," *Psychology Today*, 5 (July, 1971), 37-39, 86; David Bakan, *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition* (Princeton, 1958).

4. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions* (New York, 1953), pp. xiii-xiv, xix.

### Chapter Two

1. "Der Sabbath" [The Sabbath], *Imago*, XIII (1927), 223 (my translation). Almost all of Fromm's other publications in German have since been translated into English.

2. "The Dogma of Christ," in *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology, and Culture* (New York, 1966), p. 5.

3. David Riesman, "Freud, Religion, and Science," *Individualism Reconsidered* (New York, 1964), pp. 401-6.

4. In a "dynamic concept of ideology," says the later Fromm, we must recognize that "man has longings and passions that are deeply rooted in his nature and in the very conditions of human existence." *May Man Prevail? An Inquiry into the Facts and Fictions of Foreign Policy* (Garden City, 1961), p. 121.

5. Herbert Marcuse, "The Social Implications of Freudian 'Revisionism,'" *Dissent*, II (Winter, 1955), 224.

6. Martin Birschbach, *Neo-Freudian Social Philosophy* (Stanford, 1961).

7. See for example Walter T. James, "Karen Horney and Erich Fromm in Relation to Alfred Adler," *Individual Psychology Bulletin*, VI (1947), 105-16.

8. John R. Seeley, "The Americanization of the Unconscious," in





Charles Rolo, ed., *Psychiatry in American Life* (New York, 1966), p. 149.

9. Quoted in Richard Heffner, "An Interview with Erich Fromm," *McCall's*, XCIII (October, 1965), 216. For Freud versus Horney on "female" psychology, compare Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York, 1933), pp. 161-75, and Horney, *New Ways in Psychoanalysis* (New York, 1939), Ch. VI. On reciprocal influence between Horney and Fromm, compare Gerald Sykes, *The Hidden Remnant* (New York, 1962), p. 95, and Clara Thompson, *Psychoanalysis: Evolution and Development* (New York, 1950), p. 196.

10. See for example the discussion of Buber's ideas on "friendship" and "egoism and altruism" in Paul E. Pfuetez, *Self, Society, Existence: Continuity in the Thought of Martin Buber and George Herbert Mead* (New York, 1961), pp. 178-79.

11. "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology" (1932), trans. in *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (New York, 1970), p. 116.

12. *Escape from Freedom* (New York, 1941), p. 277.

13. Martin Birnbach, *Neo-Freudian Social Philosophy*, p. 81. For a miniature "debate" between Fromm and Kardiner on the respective merits of "social character" and "basic personality," see their separate articles in S. Stansfeld Sargent and Marian W. Smith, eds., *Culture and Personality* (New York, 1949), pp. 3-4, 64.

14. The quotations and descriptions of methods and conclusions in this unpublished study are taken from Fromm's recapitulations in "The Revolutionary Character" in *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays*, pp. 151-53; *Escape from Freedom*, p. 237; "On the Problems of German Characterology," *Transactions of the New York Academy of Science*, V, 2d ser. (1942-43), 83; and *Social Character in a Mexican Village: A Sociopschoanalytic Study* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1970), pp. 24-26.

15. Extensions of Fromm's psychoanalytic "history" appear elsewhere too, notably in *The Sane Society* (New York, 1955), where he examines the stages of capitalism.

16. *Escape from Freedom*, pp. 119, 132-35. There are obvious parallels in analysis and sometimes even in terminology with sociologically oriented studies that appeared a decade or so later: David Riesman et al., *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, 1950), and William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York, 1956) are the best known. Riesman argues that a new character type ("other-directed man") has emerged, and Whyte believes that a corporate-society "social ethic" has supplanted the Protestant Ethic. More recently, Charles A. Reich has suggested that all of these new character types, which he calls "Consciousness II," are being succeeded by still



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another, "Consciousness III" (*The Greening of America*, Random House, 1970).

17. Both later pieces sought to clarify the methods of "social character" analysis. In a review of Richard M. Brickner's *Is Germany Incurable?* (*Saturday Review of Literature*, XXVI [May 29, 1943], 10), Fromm attacked analysis-by-analogy as he had done in *The Dogma of Christ*. In an exposition of his own approach, he listed three cardinal principles: the necessary linkage of attitudes and character traits; a dynamic concept of character; environmental conditioning ("German Characterology," pp. 79-80).

18. Karl Menninger, "Loneliness in the Modern World," *Nation*, CLIV (March 14, 1942), 317.

19. Ruth Benedict, review of *Escape from Freedom, Psychiatry*, V (1942), 111-12.

### Chapter Three

1. John H. Schaar, *Escape from Authority: The Perspectives of Erich Fromm* (New York, 1961), pp. 63, 66.

2. *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (New York, 1947), p. 40.

3. *Man for Himself*, p. 45. The phrase "living productively," with all that implies for Fromm, is crucial. Political philosopher Henry Kariel ("The Normative Pattern of Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*," *Journal of Politics*, XIX [1957], 640-54) attacks Fromm's political theory largely on the basis that Fromm asserts that the "drive for self-preservation" is the "one primary and final need." Birnbach correctly observes that "Kariel...sadly misconstrues Fromm" in this matter.

4. Walker Percy, "The Coming Crisis in Psychiatry," *America*, XCVI (January 12, 1957), 417-18.

5. Schaar, *Escape from Authority*, pp. 18-24.

6. See for example Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Princeton, 1962), p. 147.

7. Harry K. Wells, *The Failure of Psychoanalysis—From Freud to Fromm* (New York, 1963), pp. 133-34, 171, 235-36.

8. J. A. Brown, *Freud and the Post-Freudians* (Baltimore, 1961), p. 15.

9. This discussion clearly presages key ideas of *The Lonely Crowd*. Fromm had known Riesman for some time, and he acknowledges Riesman's "many constructive suggestions" in the foreword to *Man for Himself*. Riesman acknowledges his own indebtedness to Fromm's writings in *Individualism Reconsidered*, pp. 40, 56, 345, 401-8.

10. Marcuse and Wells both make this point. So too does Arnold W. Green, in "Sociological Analysis of Horney and Fromm," *American Journal of Sociology*, LI (1946), 533-40.



11. "Discussion of Symposium," *Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress on Mental Health* (Mexico City, 1954), pp. 26, 28.

12. Patrick Mullahy, *Oedipus: Myth and Complex—A Review of Psychoanalytic Theory* (New York, 1948), pp. 332-33.

13. Review of *Is Germany Incurable?*, p. 10. On Freud's "reticent" and "therapeutic" moralism, see Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer*, esp. Ch. 9, "The Ethic of Honesty."

14. *Man for Himself*, pp. 167-71. *The Trial* has of course been worked over by myriad critics. A good summary of major interpretations, plus an esthetic theory that would enable Fromm's psychoanalytic exercise to fit alongside the others without necessarily contradicting any of them, is Joseph Waldmeir, "Anti-Semitism as an Issue of Kafka's Joseph K.," *Books Abroad* (Winter, 1961), 10-15.

#### Chapter Four

1. For good statements about the role of "faith" in psychology and psychotherapy see John R. Seeley, "The Future of Psychiatry," in Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek, ed., *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary American Culture* (New York, 1964), p. 425; and Walter Bromberg, *The Mind of Man: A History of Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis* (New York, 1963), p. 12.

2. Viktor von Weizsaecker, "Reminiscences of Freud and Jung," in Benjamin Nelson, ed., *Freud and the 20th Century* (New York, 1967), p. 72.

3. Concise accounts of the ideas of Liebman and Sheen and particularly of Peale, together with a careful historical examination of their American antecedents, are in Donald Meyer, *The Positive Thinkers* (Garden City, 1965).

4. Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," in A. A. Brill, ed., *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* (New York, 1933), p. 308.

5. *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales and Myths* (New York, 1951), p. 207.

6. See for example Ramón Sarro, "The Interpretation of the Oedipus Myth According to Freud and Heidigger," *Journal of Existential Psychiatry*, I (1961), 478-500, and Rollo May, "The Context of Psychotherapy," in Ruitenbeek, pp. 82-84. On a later occasion, Fromm was to reexamine Freud's famous case of "Little Hans," again challenging the Oedipal interpretation ("The Oedipus Complex: Comments on the Case of Little Hans," *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 69-78).

7. Fromm has tried to clarify the distinctions between him and Jung on this point. There is of course, he says, "only one ontological structure of the nature of man," so the idea of "universality" makes sense. But he feels that the fundamental questions posed by life are



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few, and so too are the possible answers man might give. Hence, the number of symbols which are really "universal" must be small. (Quoted in Richard Evans, *Dialogue with Erich Fromm* [New York, 1966], pp. 39-40.) For Joseph Campbell's most recent statement, see Sam Keen, cited, pp. 35-39, 86-95.

8. "Remarks on the Problem of Free Association," *Psychiatric Research Reports*, II (1964), pp. 4-5.

9. Quoted in "Discussion of Symposium," p. 28. For accounts of the changing attitudes toward transference, the role of the couch in therapy, and related matters, see Clarence P. Oberndorf, *A History of Psychoanalysis in America* (New York, 1964).

### Chapter Five

1. Eric and Mary Josephson, Introduction, *Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society* (New York, 1962), p. 10.

2. *The Sane Society*, p. 69.

3. *The Sane Society*, p. 120.

4. *The Sane Society*, pp. 143, 193.

5. Patrick Mullahy, "Philosophical Anthropology vs. Empirical Science," *Psychiatry*, XVIII (1955), 399-409.

6. Paul Tillich, "Erich Fromm's 'The Sane Society,'" *Pastoral Psychology* (September, 1955), 14-15.

7. Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (Boston, 1958), p. 149.

8. Fromm expressed agreement with most of Neill's "life-affirming" principles about growth, honesty, and independence. But he thought that Neill somewhat overemphasized "an artistic and emotional grasp of the world" at the expense of intellectual development, and also that his tendencies were too Freudian—with a consequent over-estimation of sex. (Foreword to A. S. Neill, *Summerhill* [New York, 1964], pp. ix-xvi.)

9. Is there really a basic human need for religion, in the Frommian sense? For a zoologist's affirmative response, see Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape: A Zoologist's Study of the Human Animal* (London, 1967), p. 181.

10. "God is dead" was, of course, Nietzsche's phrase. Fromm's application bears little resemblance to the God-is-dead controversy involving Joseph Altizer and others a few years ago.

11. Quoted in *The Art of Loving* (New York, 1956), p. 25.

12. See Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (New York, 1959), pp. 320-21; and Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 164.

13. See Harry Wells, *The Failure of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 187-88.

14. Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Erich Fromm's Midrash on Love," *Commentary*, XXII (December, 1956), 549.



15. "Medicine and the Ethical Problem of Modern Man," in *The Dogma of Christ*, pp. 190, 193-94.

16. D. T. Suzuki, "Lectures on Zen Buddhism," in Fromm, ed., *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York, 1960), p. 76.

17. "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism," in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 96, 98, 108.

### Chapter Six

; Herbert Marcuse, "The Social Implications of Freudian 'Revisionism,'" p. 224. For substantially similar reasons, Norman O. Brown calls "Neo-Freudianism" a "catastrophe," while Igor Caruso says that Fromm can't understand that psychoanalysis must function under the rubric of the prevailing cultural neurosis.

2. "The Human Implications of Instinctivistic Radicalism," *Dissent*, II (Autumn, 1955), 348-49; Herbert Marcuse, "Reply to Erich Fromm," *Dissent*, III (Winter, 1956), 81. In recent years, Marcuse has increasingly politicized his arguments; his audience has widened considerably, to the point where he has been called a major philosopher of the "New Left" (see Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* [Garden City, 1969], pp. 84-123). Fromm sees Marcuse's recent popularity as an unfortunate symptom ("Mother," *Psychology Today*, IV [March, 1971], 74-77).

3. See Philip Rieff, "The World of Wilhelm Reich," *Commentary*, XXXVIII (September, 1964), 55; and Leslie Fiedler, *Waiting for the End* (New York, 1964), pp. 93, 97, 99.

4. Stanley Edgar Hyman, "Psychoanalysis and the Climate of Tragedy," in Nelson, p. 182; Jacques Maritain, "Freudianism and Psychoanalysis: A Thomist View," in Nelson, p. 230.

5. Gerald Sykes, *The Hidden Remnant*, p. 88.

6. Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963* (New York, 1965), p. 311.

7. *Sigmund Freud's Mission*, p. 147. Further documentation defending Ferenczi is furnished by Fromm in *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 8-12. Fromm's comment about the absence of "productive and imaginative disciples" is not entirely fair, since Ernest Jones and Karl Abraham were of that group.

8. Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer*, pp. 170, 171. Rieff also remarks (p. 203) that Freud "achieved a notable repression" about his relationship with his mother—"a repression which Ernest Jones accepts without question in his life of Freud."

9. David Riesman, "The Themes of Work and Play in the Structure of Freud's Thought," *Psychiatry*, XIII (1950), 1-16.

10. Several writers have also remarked on the way Freud absorbed a mechanistic biology into his theories, based on his own late-nineteenth-century medical education. Fromm cites some of these



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writers in "Freud's Model of Man and Its Social Determinants," *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 31-33.

11. "The Case for Unilateral Disarmament," *Daedalus*, LXXXIX (1960), 1020.

12. The thesis that Soviet and American systems and attitudes are developing striking parallelisms is outlined explicitly in Urie Bronfenbrenner, "The Mirror-Image in Soviet-American Relations: A Social Psychologist's Report," *Journal of Social Issues*, XVII (1961), 45-46.

13. Quoted from the New York *Herald Tribune*, Apr. 23, 1961, in *May Man Prevail?*, p. 198. This concept is developed more fully, historically, and philosophically, in Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Study in the Banality of Evil* (New York, 1964).

14. *Let Man Prevail: A Socialist Manifesto and Program* (New York [1960]). Among the other Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation publications to which Fromm contributed at this time were *We Have a Vision . . . A Deep Faith* (arguments for joining the Socialist party), and *New America*, a Socialist magazine.

15. *Marx's Concept of Man (with a translation from Marx's Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts by T. B. Bottomore)* (New York, 1961), p. 4.

16. A. James Gregor, "Erich Fromm and the Young Karl Marx," *Studies on the Left*, III (1962), 92. One book-length study of the kind Gregor suggests does find contradictions of significance between the earlier and later views. The author concludes that Marx's "fundamental weakness" is a "failure to work out that distinction between freedom and servility in positive terms" (Eugene Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism* [New York, 1962]).

17. *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, pp. 26, 135-36.

### Chapter Seven

1. Martin Birnback, *Neo-Freudian Social Philosophy*, pp. 231-32.

2. Schaar speaks satirically of the "green and gentle lands of Frommian perfection." Stanley Hyman earlier had referred, in "Psychoanalysis and the Climate of Tragedy," to Neo-Freudians "lying down in green pastures beside Norman Vincent Peale." Schaar praises "the mystery and grandeur of human beings," while Will Herberg, in "Freud, the Revisionists, and Social Reality," earlier had observed that Fromm can't see man "in both his 'grandeur' and his 'misery.'"

3. Edgar Friedenberg, "Neo-Freudianism and Erich Fromm," in Ruitenbeek, pp. 383, 379. Friedenberg, incidentally, concludes that Fromm is a "Manichean," an attitude which he says requires great optimism about man's responsibility and nature, since God and Satan are evenly matched—but God ultimately must prevail.



4. Harry Wells, *The Failure of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 70, 210.
5. "The Revolutionary Character," in *The Dogma of Christ*, p. 163.
6. Review of C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, *Scientific American*, CCIX, 33 (September, 1963), 286.
7. *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology*, p. 13.
8. Cited by Lewis Chester, *Sunday Times* (London); reprinted in *Lansing State Journal*, August 4, 1968, B-4. For a critical account of Maccoby's study see Daryl J. Bem, *Beliefs, Attitudes, and Human Affairs* (Belmont, Calif., 1970), pp. 19-21. Bem's principal criticism is that the biophile-necrophile description is self-evidently biased, predetermining "good guys and bad guys." This criticism could also be applied to many of the categories in Fromm and Maccoby's *Social Character in a Mexican Village*, discussed elsewhere.
9. Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York, 1937), pp. 490-91. Similar conclusions, based on the assumptions underlying popular humor, were reached by Don Hausdorff in "Topical Satire and the Temper of the Early 1930's," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXV (Winter, 1966), 21-33.
10. The literature on the role of the media is, of course, immense. A good range of attitudes can be found in Floyd W. Matson and Ashley Montagu, eds., *The Human Dialogue: Perspectives on Communication* (New York, 1967).
11. "Mother," 76-77.
12. "Psychoanalysis," in James R. Newman, ed., *What is Science?* (New York, 1955), p. 363. On this basis, Fromm argues for example that love, or respect, is not just a "religious and philosophical idea. The study of neurosis proves empirically that they are the necessary condition of sanity."
13. Ernest Nagel, "Methodological Issues in Psychoanalytic Theory," in Sidney Hook, ed., *Psychoanalysis: Scientific Method and Philosophy* (New York, 1960), pp. 39-40.
14. S. Stansfeld Sargent and Marian W. Smith, "A Brief Epilogue," *Culture and Personality*, pp. 213-15.
15. J. A. C. Brown, *Freud and the Post-Freudians*, p. 5.
16. Carl Rogers, "The Loneliness of Contemporary Man," in Ruitenbeek, p. 33; Rollo May, "The Context of Psychotherapy," in Ruitenbeek, pp. 72-73, 81, 90.
17. Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. vi.
18. See in particular *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 15-20.
19. Quoted in Richard Heffner, "An Interview with Erich Fromm," 132-33, 213-18.
20. "Epilogue," *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, p. 159.



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