

masochism can be "enjoyed," that submission may be felt as security, simply requires that psychology must show up the false nature of these phenomena in relation to the true aims of human life and happiness.

But even the ideals of freedom, justice, and the like "have no metaphysical character."<sup>1</sup> Instead, they are to be understood as "rooted in the conditions of human life and can be analyzed as such."<sup>2</sup> Here Fromm apparently means by "metaphysical character" some abstract form of existence in some second world other than ours.

But the pursuit of genuine ideals may involve, not as the purpose of the ideals but incidental to the pursuit of them, much unpleasantness even sacrifice. "True sacrifice," Fromm writes, "presupposes an uncompromising wish for spiritual integrity. The sacrifice of those who have lost it only covers up their moral bankruptcy."<sup>3</sup> This is to say that the moral element in any instance of sacrifice can not be judged solely in terms of motive or solely in terms of the nature of the cause which elicits it. If cause is good but motive other than "uncompromising wish for spiritual integrity," it is not truly moral. If motive includes this but the cause in objective fact is evil, then in one sense it may be moral act for the individual but not in relation to the larger purposes of human fulfillment. Besides, this second condition happens seldom; in most instances, like the devoted loyalty of some Germans to Hitler, the motive is not pure but masochistic.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 268-269.

### Reason, Emotion and Love

The fifth of our categories of Fromm's ethical thought-- concerning reason, emotion and love--may be dealt with briefly because implied in what we have stated previously. As Fromm uses the term, reason is crucial in his system. What he attempts to do is to save for "reason" the meaning which it has had in the classic philosophical tradition which, in Tillich's words, shows reason as "the structure of the mind which enables the mind to grasp and to transform reality," without permitting it to fall into a rationalism which would make its exercise unconjunctive with either emotion or with love.<sup>1</sup>

So the basic contrast to reason is to be found in merely knuckling down to outside demands, i.e., being submissive in an authoritarian manner to the group. The two most fundamental types of "orientations" which are possible are "by proximity to the herd" and "by reason."<sup>2</sup> Any exercise of one's "own powers," which transcends mere submissiveness, is an exercise of one's reason.

Reason involves, therefore, a dimension "of depth, which reaches to the essence of things and processes."<sup>3</sup> This is not, Fromm says more than once, a concern with what is behind things, but "with the generic and universal."<sup>4</sup> Reason should not be understood as merely instrumental, and not as rationalistic. "Once

<sup>1</sup> Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 72.

<sup>2</sup> Fromm, PAR, p. 59. <sup>3</sup> Fromm, MFH, p. 102. <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

skepticism and rationalism were progressive forces for the development of thought; now they have become rationalizations for relativism and uncertainty."<sup>1</sup>

With such a concept of reason, there can be no possible divorce between reason and emotion if emotion be thought of as the feeling quality of experience and not, as it is in physiology, as the emergency automatic efforts of preparation for physically fighting or fleeing. For if the latter narrower concept of emotion be held to be all of emotion, then these automatic reactions may easily fail to be brought under the control of the whole personality, leaving "emotional" expression as, by definition, segmental. But if the feeling or affective quality and mode of experiencing be the general sense of emotion, then:

In our society emotions in general are discouraged. While there can be no doubt that any creative thinking--as well as any other creative activity--is inseparably linked with emotion, it has become an ideal to think and to live without emotions. To be "emotional" has become synonymous with being unsound or unbalanced. By the acceptance of this standard the individual has become greatly weakened; his thinking is impoverished and flattened.<sup>2</sup>

Although reason and love are "expressions of different powers of man, they "are only two different forms of comprehending the world" and "neither is possible without the other."<sup>3</sup> All "productive love" contains these elements: care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge. Without reason love would not be possible, and without love reason would be some distortion like rationalism or skepticism.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>Fromm, EFF, p. 244.

<sup>3</sup>Fromm, MFH, p. 97.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

Reason, emotion and love, therefore, are to be seen as different aspects of man's "comprehending" the world, so related to one another that no one can be exercised "productively" without the other's being automatically involved also. This makes more comprehensible Fromm's statement that "Valid ethical norms can be formed by man's reason and by it alone."<sup>1</sup> This is to say that the exercise of any kind of powers man has for exploring and discovering the world and himself supplies the basis upon which ethical norms are grounded--the one possible contrast to this being the acceptance of patterns imposed by some men on others without knowledge that these have been formed in this way. So this point is another polemic against authoritarianism, when analyzed.

It is Fromm's concept of reason, and its relation to emotion and love, which prevents him from falling into ethical relativism.

... our knowledge of human nature does not lead to ethical relativism but, on the contrary, to the conviction that the sources of norms for ethical conduct are to be found in human nature itself; that moral norms are based upon man's inherent qualities, and that their violation results in mental and emotional disintegration.<sup>2</sup>

We may also note, that, in his more recent references to reason, Fromm has stressed its growth more than previously, i.e., set it a little more in process terms. It develops as man's freedom develops. "The unfolding and full emergence of reason is dependent on the attainment of full freedom and independence."<sup>3</sup> Thus without the constantly maturing capacity to use reason in this sense,

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Fromm, PAR, p. 59.

conduct on an ethical level is impossible. The capacity to exercise reason--like freedom, love, and productiveness--is a base line for ethical behavior.

### The Structure of Good and Evil

Our last two categories for examining Fromm's ethical thought are of a somewhat different order from those preceding. In this next, the sixth, we shall attempt to deal with his ontology, his concept of the structure of being, good, evil, reason, emotion, freedom and the like. In the seventh and last, we shall consider his conception of religion, and of how it may or may not be involved in ethics.

It is not easy to get at Fromm's "ontology," or to know that one is clear about the more structuralized aspect of his thought. This is not, apparently, because he is positivistic in the usual sense of that term, but rather because any discussion in ontological terms appears to him to blur the distinctions between genuine and pseudo, authoritarian and free, and the like. That is to say, his positivistic failure to state his ontology clearly seems to be for a dynamic reason--that he must at all costs protect these distinctions. In discussions with him, I have more than once asked this type of question, "But where, ultimately, does the capacity for love (or freedom, or productiveness, etc.) come from?" Fromm's answer has been invariably of the same order, "That is merely part of what is given."

Such an answer may imply either or both of two things.

First, a suspicion that an ontology can be only substantive, and

that to take seriously the question of what, in the most general and universal sense, is given would be to become substantive, to deal with some "second world" behind the world of our experience. If this is the source of Fromm's reluctance, then he could be wooed away from his silence by an ontology in process terms. Second, this can express Fromm's fear that ontological statements tend to become associated with authoritarian patterns, e.g., the idea of God. So while he would not object to an idea of God, let us say, like that of Tillich, he would be inclined to deny that such a God bears much resemblance to the God conceived by most people in most places most of the time. If asked whether the reality to which Tillich, or some one else, refers by "God" is important, Fromm would concede that it is, but that it can be adequately described in terms of human relatedness, freedom, love, productiveness, and the like. I am inclined to believe both implications are involved in Fromm's reply about the "given."

Good "is the affirmation of life, the unfolding of man's powers."<sup>1</sup> "Evil constitutes the crippling of man's powers."<sup>2</sup> Virtue is responsibility by man toward his existence; and vice is "irresponsibility toward himself."<sup>3</sup> There is "no meaning to life except the meaning man gives his life by the unfolding of his powers, by living productively."<sup>4</sup> How deep do the potentialities for good or for evil go? There is no doubt that Fromm believes good to be more basically rooted in man's nature (and pre-

<sup>1</sup>Fromm, MFH, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

sumably therefore in the nature of being) than evil, the following statement both showing his point and the kind of evidence by which he has reached it.

It might seem that the psychoanalyst, who is in the position of observing the tenacity and stubbornness of irrational strivings, would take a pessimistic view with regard to man's ability to govern himself and to free himself from the bondage of irrational passions. I must confess that during my analytic work I have become increasingly impressed by the opposite phenomenon: by the strength of the strivings for happiness and health, which are part of the natural equipment of man.<sup>1</sup>

Fromm criticizes Freud for not realizing the need to take a stand on the question of whether or not man is basically good, for he did not see man "as either essentially good or essentially evil, but as being driven by two equally strong contradictory forces."<sup>2</sup> Optimism of this kind is a distortion of the facts, Fromm believes. When Freud saw morality as "essentially a reaction-formation against the evil inherent in man," he was simply presenting "the secularized version of the concept of 'original sin!'"<sup>3</sup>

So eager is Fromm to make the point against any inherent evil in man that he superficializes the Augustine-Pelagius issue, not realizing that Pelagius stood for simple voluntaristic moralism which has been more effectively exposed by psychoanalysis than by any other development in the history of man. He wrote:

Pelagius . . . held that Adam's sin was purely personal and had affected none but himself; that every man, consequently, is born with powers as incorrupt as Adam's before the fall, and that sin is the result of temptation and evil example.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p.x.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-35.

The battle was won by Augustine, and this victory was to determine--and to darken--man's mind for centuries.<sup>1</sup>

Fromm is much closer to the truth in pointing out that the idea that man is made in God's image mitigates the authoritarian rigors of much of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> Man is not inherently evil; indeed, "evil has no independent existence of its own, it is the absence of good, the result of the failure to realize life."<sup>3</sup> The tendency or dynamism of life is "to grow, to be lived."<sup>4</sup> If this is thwarted, "the energy thus blocked undergoes a process of change and is transformed into life-destructive energy. Destructiveness is the outcome of un-lived life."<sup>5</sup>

The primary thing that appears to be given is this life dynamism. But if its growth is blocked, then secondary potentialities go into operation, the bewildering variety of structures and mechanisms of defense. There is "a primary potentiality which is actualized if the proper conditions are present," and "a secondary potentiality, which is actualized if conditions are in contrast to existential needs."<sup>6</sup> Man can adapt himself to almost any pattern of culture; but "in so far as these are contradictory to his nature he develops mental and emotional disturbances which force him eventually to change these conditions since he cannot change his nature."<sup>7</sup> There are "immutable laws inherent in human nature."<sup>8</sup> When these rise up in man, they do so on behalf of

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Fromm, PAR, p. 74.



good, i.e., the realization of man's nature. When they do so, furthermore, the conflict between good and evil becomes productive, and "as a result of the productive conflict between good and evil, the evil itself becomes a source of virtue."

The worst evil in man does not come from some lower nature. The best and the worst alike come from man's idealism, his spirit.<sup>2</sup> Greed, for instance, is not rooted in "man's animal nature but in his mind and imagination."<sup>3</sup> But this certainly does not mean the problem can be solved by a mere restriction of ideals, of spirit. ". . . the absence of visions projecting a 'better' man and a 'better' society has had the effect of paralyzing man's faith in himself and his future."<sup>4</sup>

Good is to be understood fundamentally as the "unfolding of life."<sup>5</sup>

The choice between life and death is indeed the basic alternative of ethics. It is the alternative between productiveness and destructiveness, between potency and impotence, between virtue and vice. For humanistic ethics all evil strivings are directed against life and all good serves the preservation and unfolding of life.<sup>6</sup>

So being must be such that it stands for the living of life, the "unfolding of powers." This may be interpreted, as we saw in the previous section, in a more substantive or more process pattern of thought. Fromm seems to oscillate between the two. Here is his dilemma. Man becomes human through both social interaction and inner self-awareness. The content for the latter to work on

<sup>1</sup>Fromm, MFH, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

comes through the former; in this sense man is human because he is social. If isolated from a social matrix, the "unfolding of powers" would be meager indeed. There is rock somewhere, something hard and stubborn, aiding man/not to be led too far from his own destiny (freedom, love, etc.), and this is a constant, if often low-voiced, critic of distortions and exploitations. Now if we see this in operation, it must have existence in some sense. If it exists, then where? To reply, "In God" would mean to Fromm something outside man. To reply "In the socializing-individuating process of man's developing selfhood" would apparently seem not definite enough to Fromm, not conveying the stubbornness of the reality. So he replies, "In man," and the ontological question, in effect, is handled positivistically, and there is reversion to substantive thinking.

The assertion that "there is nothing higher and nothing more dignified than human existence" seems to carry as a corollary the point that referral to any force or power of being which is non-human but which would be acknowledged as that upon which man's living depends would be an instance of depreciating man and his dignity.<sup>1</sup>

Fromm's appeal to the hard core of something in man which can criticize culture demonstrates the liberal and romantic aspects of his heritage; and his positivistic trends and substantive reversions reveal traces of Kantianism. But Herbert Spencer, and perhaps the American social gospel, speak in these lines:

<sup>1</sup>Ibid. p. 13.

While the conflict between socially immanent and universal ethics has decreased in the process of human evolution, there remains a conflict between the two types of ethics as long as humanity has not succeeded in building a society in which the interest of "society" has become identical with that of all its members. As long as this point has not been reached in human evolution, the historically conditioned social necessities clash with the universal existential necessities of the individual.<sup>1</sup>

### Religion and Ethics

Our last category, Fromm's view of religion as this affects ethics, may now be discussed. Fromm begins with man's nature and his current historical predicament. Man is "part of nature, subject to her physical laws and unable to change them, yet he transcends the rest of nature."<sup>2</sup> "Having lost paradise, the unity with nature, he has become the eternal wanderer."<sup>3</sup> The "peculiarity of human life" lies in man's strivings, "for power, or for love, or for destruction, . . . for political, for humanistic ideals . . ."<sup>4</sup> With his long infancy, man is the weakest of all animals; and yet this is "the prime cause for the development of his specifically human qualities."<sup>5</sup>

Because of the very qualities which make him transcend the rest of nature, man needs not only individuation and social relatedness but some "frame of orientation and devotion."<sup>6</sup> Religion may be understood as "any system of thought and action shared by a group which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> Fromm, PAR, p. 21.

We may find a "human reality" behind any religious doctrine or system, and we may find "the same reality underlying different religions and opposite human attitudes underlying the same religion."<sup>1</sup> The human reality behind the teachings of Buddha, Isaiah, Jesus, Socrates, or Spinoza is said to be essentially the same--the striving for love, truth, and justice.<sup>2</sup> Behind Calvin's theological system is said to be a human reality of "submission to power and lack of love and of respect for the individual."<sup>3</sup>

The knowledge of the human reality behind different religious doctrines which his psychoanalytic knowledge gives him makes Fromm a penetrating observer of religious form and dogma past and present. But it is in his rendition of history, and especially religious history, where the conflict in his thought to which we have referred several times comes most clearly into the open. He is scathing about Luther and Calvin as authoritarians, but says little against the high scholastics. Presumably, the reason for the latter is the basic optimism of Aquinas and the Middle Ages, to whom man was corrupt but not depraved. This fact seems to weigh more heavily to keep Fromm silent, than does the undoubted authoritarianism of the period to make him denounce.

As to Luther and Calvin, and Protestantism generally, it is as if they see so much of what Fromm also sees (as against medievalism, for instance), but because they do not regard as central what he does, he has more vehemence against them than he has against something which is farther away from his own view in

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

all respects. The heretic receives more abuse than the infidel.

Fromm does bring out usually neglected aspects of the character of Luther and Calvin. As to Luther, Fromm suggests that faith may be "the expression of an inner relatedness to mankind and affirmation of life" or "it can be a reaction formation against a fundamental feeling of doubt, rooted in the isolation of the individual and his negative attitude toward life."<sup>1</sup> Luther's faith, Fromm writes, contained the compensatory quality. "The compulsive quest for certainty, as we find with Luther, is not the expression of genuine faith but is rooted in the need to conquer the unbearable doubt."<sup>2</sup> In Calvin and Calvinism we see a "frantic activity and a striving to do something"--at the same time the doctrines of election and predestination make it clear that a man's fate is already decided and the action will change nothing.<sup>3</sup> But this is just what we would expect, Fromm writes.

These considerations show that the compulsion to unceasing effort and work was far from being in contradiction to a basic conviction of man's powerlessness; rather was it the psychological result. Effort and work in this sense assumed an entirely irrational character. They were not to change fate since this was predetermined by God, regardless of any effort on the part of the individual. They served only as a means of forecasting the predetermined fate; while at the same time the frantic effort was a reassurance against an otherwise unbearable feeling of powerlessness.<sup>4</sup>

Because Fromm sees so much of the depersonalized aspect of modern culture as being a secularized version of Reformation doctrine, as mentioned previously, he is not disposed to suggest the other

<sup>1</sup>Fromm, EFF, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 92-93.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 92-93.

and more positive "human realities" which were in men like Calvin and Luther. But as a corrective, even on these points, his comments would seem to be valuable. There were compulsive features in both Luther and Calvin which have been insufficiently acknowledged by official historians. It would seem not only extravagant but false to call these men among "the greatest haters among the leading figures of history," but such compulsive elements as are in their character and their doctrines should certainly be exposed as such.<sup>1</sup>

The Freudian view that religion is a collective form of neurosis puts the cart before the horse, according to Fromm. Instead, we may see neurosis "as a private form of religion," as "regression to primitive forms of religion conflicting with officially recognized patterns of religious thought."<sup>2</sup> Thus, for instance, many of the dependency-seeking, submissive, and masochist forms of neurosis may be understood as the equivalent of "ancestor worship."

Religious teaching is good or bad depending on what it does to man.

If religious teachings contribute to the growth, strength, freedom, and happiness of their believers, we see the fruits of love. If they contribute to the constriction of human potentialities, to unhappiness and lack of productivity, they cannot be born of love, regardless of what the dogma intends to convey.<sup>3</sup>

The last phrase above conveys a shrewd slap at those modern religious thinkers who reject the literalism of the doctrines of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Fromm, PAR, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 64. This point is reminiscent of Nietzsche.

past ages but who attempt to discover the "intention" of the dogma beneath its formulation. This can be rationalization and ideology, Fromm implies. If the dogma actually meant a certain thing in historical development, then it is distorting truth to look only at its "intention" as if the actual consequences had nothing whatever to do with the doctrine.

The question man has about religion is not whether he will have it or not, but what religion he will have: all the way from the private religion of neurosis to the highest "humanistic religion" the greater religious geniuses have had. Indeed, "the understanding of the 'religious' nature of these culturally patterned secular strivings is the key to the understanding of neuroses and irrational strivings."<sup>1</sup>

From the above we may see that the first big point about the relation of religion to ethics is this: the criterion of any religion is to be found in its ethical quality. Religion is not the judge of ethics. Ethics is the judge of religion: As we shall see, Fromm makes a slight qualification on this in terms of mysticism, but the main point is not affected.

What about the idea of God, certainly important within the religions of the west? Fromm really makes two basic points about the God idea, the first of which may be expressed schematically as follows: You may believe in a God if you wish, but such a belief in itself will not protect you from falling into idolatry.

~~"The real conflict is not between belief in God and 'atheism' but~~

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<sup>1</sup>Fromm, MFH, p. 48.



between a humanistic, religious attitude and an attitude which is equivalent to idolatry, regardless of how this attitude is expressed--or disguised--in conscious thought."<sup>1</sup> Or again, ". . . the question is not whether man returns to religion and believes in God but whether he lives love and thinks truth. If he does so the symbol systems he uses are of secondary importance. If he does not they are of no importance."<sup>2</sup>

Fromm's second point about God goes like this: Even if your idea of God is the highest it is possible to have, so that I could have no criticism of the idea, why is it that you want to do something more than acknowledge this? Why do you want to worship it? If you say you are dependent on it as the ground of your own nature, this may be true, but then why not merely state this as a fact and go ahead realizing your nature? ". . . it is one thing to recognize one's dependence and limitations, and it is something entirely different to indulge in this dependence, to worship the forces on which one depends."<sup>3</sup> When man does this, "He projects the best he has onto God and thus impoverishes himself. . . . Everything he has is now God's and nothing is left in him. His only access to himself is through God."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, "The more he praises God, the emptier he becomes. The emptier he becomes, the more sinful he feels. The more sinful he feels, the more he praises his God--and the less able is he to regain himself."<sup>5</sup> This point is of course reminiscent of Feuerbach. But it is one

<sup>1</sup> Fromm, PAR, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

of the most searching questions which can be asked in the field of religion, and one of the most difficult to respond to without destroying the significant truth contained in a position like Fromm's. "The real fall of man," Fromm writes, "is his alienation from himself, his submission to power, his turning against himself even though under the guise of his worship of God."<sup>1</sup> A more sophisticated view of God is not enough, Fromm implies; this may be merely a movement from an open toward an anonymous authoritarianism. One must ask: Why worship this God? Or, what does it mean to worship this God?

Tillich once said that Fromm had a well developed doctrine of Christ even if he did not put it in those terms, but not a doctrine of God. Now that Fromm has written further on religion, this is an exaggeration. Fromm does have a doctrine of God, but as a part of "negative theology." "While it is not possible for man to make valid statements about the positive, about God, it is possible to make such statements about the negative, about idols."<sup>2</sup> Commendable as this is in its humility, one can not help suspecting that it is the old problem of confusing authoritarianism with forms in which authoritarianism has often appeared which emerges again at this point; for if anything positive should be said about God, this God, to be the ground of being or of human values, would in many respects be unlike man, and "In authoritarian systems the authority is made out to be fundamentally different from his subjects."<sup>3</sup> ~~This kind of reasoning leads Fromm to the curious asser-~~

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>3</sup>Fromm, MFH, p. 149.

tion that "God is not a symbol of power over man but of man's own powers."<sup>1</sup> If those are the alternatives from which one must choose, no doubt one would choose with Fromm.

But there is one element of Fromm's thought of religion which would appear to lead in a slightly different direction from what we have discussed thus far, which he describes experimentally in these words:

One aspect of religious experience is the wondering, the marveling, the becoming aware of life and of one's own existence, and of the puzzling problem of one's relatedness to the world. Existence, one's own existence and that of one's fellow men, is not taken for granted but is felt as a problem, is not an answer but a question. Socrates' statement that wonder is the beginning of all wisdom is true not only for wisdom but for the religious experience. One who has never been bewildered, who has never looked upon life and his own existence as phenomena which require answers and yet, paradoxically, for which the only answers are new questions, can hardly understand what religious experience is.<sup>2</sup>

Mysticism, beginning at this kind of point, represents, Fromm believes, "the highest development of rationality in religious thinking."<sup>3</sup> He quotes Albert Schweitzer, "Rational thinking which is free from assumptions ends in mysticism."<sup>4</sup>

Speaking of humanistic as against authoritarian religion, Fromm writes further of mysticism: "Religious experience in this kind of religion is the experience of oneness with the All, based on one's relatedness to the world as it is grasped with thought and with love."<sup>5</sup> Again he writes, "Not fear and submission but

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<sup>1</sup>Fromm, PAR, p. 49.    <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 94.    <sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 93-94.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 94, quoted from Albert Schweitzer, The Philosophy of Civilization, trans. C. T. Campion (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949), p. 79.

<sup>5</sup>Fromm, PAR, p. 37.

love and the assertion of one's own powers are the basis of mystical experience."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps here more than at other points, it is clear that Fromm has been strongly influenced by Spinoza, and that what he has in mind is the kind of experience suggested in the long quotation above about wonder. In contrast to almost all his other comments about religious phenomena, he does not examine the pathology of mysticism as he does, for example, of faith, of love, or ritual, etc. The dynamic reason for this seems clear: in the kind of mysticism of which he thinks, all authoritarian powers including the gods are in some sense done away with. One expresses his independence in such mysticism. If one should charge Fromm with merely attempting to achieve a higher concept of dependence, and therefore similar to Schleiermacher, I expect he would reply that this gives the wrong idea of the tone of the proceeding.

And yet it seems possible that, in the further development of Fromm's thought, this now acknowledged interest in a kind of mysticism may prove to be the bridge which will enable him to take another "leap." The authoritarian versus the free, the compelled against the spontaneous, the false against the true, the happy against the depressed, the productive against the destructive, love against hate, faith against compulsive doubt--these distinctions are of immense significance. But they tend to lead back to substantive forms of thought, and to be partially unfair to the processes of which they are aspects or cross-sectional

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 49.



views. In some degree, Fromm's mystical interest transcends these distinctions, i.e., the fact that much mysticism has contained pathological elements does not bother him as much as does, e.g., the fact that many ideas of God have had such elements.

### Summary and Critique

In presenting a critique of Fromm's ethical thought, we may first pull together the points made in the running commentary which went along with the seven categories, adding a few new points. Fromm's concept of ethics as related to character, rather than to symptom or act, is of great importance if kept within the perspective which gave rise to it. What is good or bad fruit can be seen only in relation to the tree which produced it. The true subject of ethical inquiry is the tree, not just the fruit. Clear as this seems, it is impossible not to overlook it unless one is immersed in the data, to continue the metaphor, of trees. This is the broader application of the point we saw emerging in psychotherapy in the twenties, the movement from concern with symptom and cause to concern with character and its expression.

The emphasis on character can, however, be misleading in two ways. By emphasizing act as expressive of character, it may too easily assume that any person is altogether of a certain character because he is mainly so. As Fromm points to neurosis often indicating there is still life and hope, while the supposedly well-adjusted person may have given in, so the habit of thinking of the virtuous or vicious character might easily land in an unintended moralism. People may at times act better than they know

because, as Fromm would readily concede, there may be dimensions of the personality which help them move in a more positive direction than their clear conscious awareness would dictate. We need to remember the old adage about there being so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us.

The dynamic concept of character could also prove misleading if it were taken too structurally, if it were forgotten that many types of experience in life, and not alone psychoanalysis, can begin or continue either the break-up of an old pattern or the formation of a new. Any day may be judgment day for the old character. Provided we keep in mind what Fromm's characterology is designed to combat, what it asserts is of positive importance to any system of ethics.

Perhaps the most important feature of Fromm's thought on conscience is the attention he pays to the "humanistic conscience." The most obvious contribution of psychotherapeutic knowledge to our understanding of conscience lies in its pathology, its exposure of the intrapsychic and interpersonal processes which become tied to an automatic sense of oughtness, something considered in much detail by Flugel. But, as in Flugel, all this may easily leave the impression that such phenomena are conscience; and that, although it may be improved and made more rational, still conscience at root is an unreliable automatic signaling system.

Against such a position Fromm asserts, and on the basis of his therapeutic as well as other experience, that "man's recall to himself" is the true conscience, the other phenomena being distortions of this. The true or genuine conscience is not the Super-Ego,

slightly remolded and polished, but may be the very thing which sends a man to psychotherapy, or makes him feel sufficiently guilty for wasting his powers that he begins corrective measures.

What Fromm asserts about the humanistic conscience is, as he notes, not basically different from much in the western ethical tradition. His ability to assert it, when he is in command of knowledge of the pathology of conscience such as previous thinkers have not had, is what makes this significant. Fromm does not lose sight of the other type of conscience phenomena, seeing them all from a perspective of authority and submission which makes him call this the "authoritarian conscience." But he sees these, in any event, as distortions of a pattern of development which should occur if man is to be himself.

On the question of the relation between the two forms of conscience, Fromm is, from his own point of view, clear. One form is a distortion of the other; but the distortions never wholly blot out the true conscience even though its voice be very feeble. Both versions of conscience come, in content, from culture. But the authoritarian conscience comes, we might say, altogether from the content of culture; while the humanistic conscience comes in some sense from a true or real self which represents the real basic nature of the person. If it were not for the distortions in culture, conscience would develop as an altogether useful phenomenon, warning a man at any time he was straying from development of his own true nature.

This pattern of thought on conscience, which Fromm repeats on many other subjects (genuine versus pseudo self, produc-

tiveness versus destructiveness, freedom and compulsion, etc.), is essentially Greek in its conception. By abstracting from the whole welter of observed facts, distinctions are made between essence and existence, purpose and contingency, norm and distortion. The normal process of, let us say, conscience development is never actually observed in its entirety uncontaminated by distortion. But it is posited as more "real" than the processes which lead to the distortion. This is not only a Greek but very much a Platonic type of approach. And because the abstractive character is not always kept clearly in view, there is a strong tendency to view everything which contributes to the distortion under a single rubric. This would seem to account in part for Fromm's complete reliance upon the authority perspective in viewing the nature of the distortions.

Yet Fromm is struck with the depth and variety of the distortions of conscience, and also of love, productiveness, freedom, etc. His basic framework, if found in a non-psychological thinker, would no doubt lead him to lump all the "distortions" in a single package and let it go at that. Fromm's psychological, and especially his psychotherapeutic, interests will not permit this. The conscience we actually deal with is full of distortion, contingency, destructiveness, and compulsion. To help people rid themselves of its power, we pay attention to it in detail. But it gives us justified faith in their potentialities for doing so if, in addition to our knowledge of the pathology, so to speak, we also have a view of the physiology of conscience. No bodily organ, perhaps, ever operates without at least a trace of pathology; but



we know nevertheless something about the true operation of the organ, despite the elements of pathology which contingency brings in.

So it may be said that Fromm's unique contribution, on conscience and various other things, is his inclusion of a "Jewish" content within a "Greek" framework.<sup>1</sup> Phenomena like authoritarian conscience are real, but they are distortions of the norm. The norm is the really real. This is Greek. But this does not mean we can devote attention chiefly to the really real. For the chief road to this is by moving away the obstacles, and this is Jewish. In the actual process of change, away from pseudo toward genuine, an overwhelming proportion of attention is devoted to the distortions rather than the norm. The norm would seem to appear of itself if the distortions are removed. I know of no other system of ethics which has kept this kind of relation between Greek and Hebrew, and which has, at the same time, been consistent on the character point as against mere act.

The weakness of Fromm's position on conscience (as on self-hood, freedom, etc.) we have already noted on several occasions. We have pointed to this principally in terms of the reversion to substantive thinking as against following the logic into process modes of thought. We are now in a better position to see why this tendency to revert is, at present, in the very structure of Fromm's

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<sup>1</sup>After reading this chapter, Fromm wrote, in a personal communication, concerning my statements on the Jewish and Greek elements in his ethical thought, "Your point about the Jewish element in my thinking struck me very much, since I had never thought about it quite that way and yet it seems to be very true."