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ERICH FROMM'S CONCEPT OF INCESTUOUS TIES

by

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Submitted to the  
Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences  
of The American University  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Master of Arts  
in Religion

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Date: January 28, 1972

Date: 11/20/72

1972

The American University  
Washington, D. C.

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

JUL 26 1972



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE . . . . .	iv
<b>Chapter</b>	
1. THE HUMAN SITUATION . . . . .	1
THE FREAK OF THE UNIVERSE . . . . .	1
EXISTENTIAL AND HISTORICAL DICHOTOMIES. . . . .	3
MAN, A CREATION OF THE SOCIAL PROCESS . . . . .	6
MAN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS . . . . .	15
THE CRITICAL PROBLEM OF ANSWERING THE EXISTENTIAL QUESTION. . . . .	16
MAN'S EFFORT TO ESCAPE FROM FREEDOM . . . . .	18
2. THE ORIGIN AND DESCRIPTION OF INCESTUOUS TIES . . . . .	22
THE BASIC TIE TO MOTHER . . . . .	22
SIGMUND FREUD'S THEORY OF THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX . . . . .	23
FROMM'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX. . . . .	25
CAUSES OF MOTHER FIXATION . . . . .	28
IRRATIONAL DEPENDENCY . . . . .	30
THE LEVELS OF FIXATION. . . . .	33
INCESTUOUS SYMBIOSIS. . . . .	35
DREAMS. . . . .	37
FIXATION TO FATHER. . . . .	39
DISTORTIONS IN PERCEPTION . . . . .	40
SYNDROME OF DECAY . . . . .	42
FROMM'S THEORY OF REGRESSIVE LEVELS COMPARED WITH FREUD'S. . . . .	47



Schematic Diagram showing Levels of Progression and Regression . . . . .	50
3. INCESTUOUS TIES AND RELIGION . . . . .	51
MAN'S ANSWER TO HIS EXISTENCE. . . . .	51
THE REGRESSIVE ANSWER. . . . .	53
MATRIARCHAL AND PATRIARCHAL STRUGGLES IN RELIGION. . . . .	56
THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE MATRIARCHAL AND PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES . . . . .	59
SOCIAL REPRESSION AS A FACTOR IN MOTHER FIXATION, INDIVIDUALLY, AND IN THE FORMATION OF REGRESSIVE DOGMA . . . . .	61
WORSHIP OF THE STATE . . . . .	68
4. THE PROGRESSIVE ANSWER IN RELIGION . . . . .	71
THE RISE OF THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT IN RELIGION . . . . .	71
THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT IN THE BIBLE. . . . .	72
THE GOD IDEA IN MAN'S PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT. . . . .	76
THE PROGRESSIVE RELIGIOUS ANSWER: HUMANISTIC RELIGION . . . . .	81
FROMM'S CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCHES. . . . .	83
5. SUMMARY. . . . .	88
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	93
KEY TO FOOTNOTES . . . . .	98
GLOSSARY . . . . .	99





## PREFACE

Erich Fromm gives considerable attention to a psychological disorder, "incestuous ties," the nature and religious manifestation of which I propose to examine in this thesis. As an Episcopal priest I have been deeply concerned with the psychological conditions in man's life which block his development as an emotional and spiritual being. Fromm sees the incestuous orientation as a dangerous psychic pattern which can have devastating effects on man if the symptoms are not recognized and if the illness is not treated. If we accept Fromm's view of man's deep and widespread involvement in incestuous relationships, we must then see this orientation as one which presents very serious problems for the religious maturation and development of the individual and the program of Christian nurture in the Church.

It is impossible, however, to understand Erich Fromm's position on the incestuous orientation without first seeing what he thinks about the human predicament in general, with its special problems, needs, and strivings. This is the topic investigated in Chapter One. These problems are often overwhelming, and man in his loneliness, uncertainty, isolation, and fear seeks to hold on to what has been certain, consoling, and secure in his life; he holds on desperately to mother and her surrogates. The nature and consequences of this attachment to mother is dealt with in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three an attempt is made to extract from his various writings statements about regressive religion as they relate to the incestuous orientation. To the best of my knowledge no such synthesis has been made before. In Chapter Four Fromm's



progressive religious alternative is examined and comment is made on the challenge which his years of study of incestuous ties presents to the churches today. Chapter Five is a summary of the paper.

Those of Fromm's writings which deal with the human predicament include the following: Escape From Freedom, The Sane Society, and Man For Himself. The Sane Society, The Heart of Man, and Social Character In A Mexican Village contain extensive discussions of the problem of incestuous ties. The religious manifestations of the incestuous orientation receives attention in Psychoanalysis and Religion, You Shall Be As Gods, The Dogma of Christ, and The Art of Loving. Other books by Fromm which have important contributions for this study are: The Revolution of Hope, The Forgotten Language, Sigmund Freud's Mission, and The Crisis of Psychoanalysis. Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis by D. T. Suzuki, Erich Fromm, and Richard De Martino also presents valuable information as does Richard I. Evans' book, Dialogue with Erich Fromm.

There are a number of collateral works which deserve attention. An important review of Fromm's earlier thought is found in Oedipus Myth and Complex by Patrick Mullahy. Escape From Authority: The Perspectives of Erich Fromm by John Schaar also presents a critical analysis of Fromm's philosophical orientation. Dr. J. Stanley Glen, who is both a psychologist and theologian, has written in defense of the Reformation Fathers, Erich Fromm: A Protestant Critique. Dr. Albert Outler has considered the meaning of Fromm's work in his book Psychotherapy and the Christian Message. Dr. Guyton B. Hammond compares the view of Erich Fromm with Paul Tillich in his study Man In Estrangement. Several have





written on Fromm's Psychoanalysis and the Moral Basis of the Good, including Dr.

Clara Thompson, in collaboration with Patrick Mullahy, in Psychoanalysis: Evolution and Development; Dr. J. A. C. Brown in Freud and the Post-Freudians; and Dr. Leon Salzman in Developments in Psychoanalysis. A socio-psychological criticism of Fromm's position has been made by the Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse in Eros and Civilization. In a doctoral dissertation L. C. Lee has written An Investigation of Erich Fromm's Theory of Authoritarianism.

Every student who writes a thesis would welcome having an interview with the man who is the subject of his paper. It was my good fortune to be granted a personal interview with Dr. Fromm. We met on May 5, 1971, at his home in Cuernavaca, Mexico. There we discussed the subject of this investigation for several unforgettable hours, each of which was marked by the tolling of the church bells nearby.

In this interview it became very clear to me that a study of the forces which shape man's life, as Fromm understands and describes them, would be essential before turning to his concept of incestuous ties. Accordingly, a study of Fromm's view of the human situation follows in Chapter One.



## Chapter 1

### THE HUMAN SITUATION

#### THE FREAK OF THE UNIVERSE

In the very nature of man there is a serious problem which must be solved. Physiological man is a member of the animal kingdom but unlike lower forms of animals he is not dominated by instinctual behavior. Animals do not have to struggle with matters of truth and conscience. They do not have to ponder the meanings of their existence, nor the questions of their ultimate destiny; nor must they try to employ reason to fathom the complexities of their nature.<sup>1</sup> This radical difference in man from other animals came about in this way:

At a certain point of animal evolution, there occurred a unique break, comparable to the first emergence of matter, to the first emergence of life, and to the first emergence of animal existence. This new event happens when in evolutionary process, action ceases to be essentially determined by instinct; when the adaptation of nature loses its coercive character; when action is no longer fixed by hereditarily given mechanisms. When the animal transcends nature, when it becomes, biologically speaking, the most helpless animal, man is born. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Man's emergence into his present state may have taken countless eons of time, but what is of vital importance is the fact that this creature of a new species has the ability to transcend his own state and condition and begin to contemplate both.<sup>3</sup> This newly emerged man is able to recall his past history and contemplate his future. His

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<sup>1</sup>Erich Fromm, The Sane Society (New York: Premier Books, 1955), p. 29. (The title of this book is hereafter referred to as TSS.)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30. <sup>3</sup>Ibid.





enlarged intellectual capacity allows him to construct symbols which help him communicate ideas and feelings. Reason enables him to deal with the mysteries which surround him, and imagination empowers him to range far beyond the limits of his immediate situation.<sup>4</sup> Yet these human qualities which are his glory render him "... the most helpless of all animals . . ."<sup>5</sup> and present him with the gravest difficulties. The harmony which once existed between man as a lower form of animal was shattered by his emergence as the superior animal, but now he has become "the freak of the universe."<sup>6</sup>

Fromm describes man's dilemma:

. . . He is a part of nature, subject to her physical laws and unable to change them, yet he transcends the rest of nature. He is set apart while being a part; he is homeless, yet chained to the home he shares with all creatures. Cast into this world at an accidental place and time, he is forced out of it again accidentally. Being aware of himself, he realizes his powerlessness and the limitations of his existence. He visualizes his own end: death. Never is he free from the dichotomy of existence; he cannot rid himself of his mind, even if he should want to; he cannot rid himself of his body as long as he is alive--and his body makes him want to be alive.<sup>7</sup>

In the biblical Adam and Eve myth Fromm sees man's plight pictured with great perceptivity. Man, in the Garden of Eden, lived in complete harmony with all creation until he exercised his own free will and chose to disobey God's command. In this decisive choice he lost his former, placid security, and in this act he emerged as a being with a mind of his own who suddenly realized the individuality and separateness of his own existence.<sup>8</sup> Man then became the freak, a stranger and a

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<sup>4</sup>Erich Fromm, Man For Himself (New York: Fawcett Premier Books, 1947), p. 48. (The title of this book is referred to hereafter as MFH.)

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Fromm, TSS., p. 31.





foreigner in the only land that he will ever have, and after having time to contemplate himself, finds that his own nature is a strange confusing mixture; ". . . he is partly divine, partly animal; partly infinite, partly finite. . . ,"<sup>9</sup> ever seeking to find a resolution to the existential and historical dichotomies of his life.<sup>10</sup>

The capacity to reason, which has set man far apart from the rest of creation, springs from his nature to torment him. Always he must work to solve the problems presented by ". . . the state of constant and unavoidable disequilibrium."<sup>11</sup> He is not permitted merely to repeat an instinctual pattern endlessly. It is man's reason that has created the dichotomy in the first place and forces him to recognize his boredom, discontent, and confusion. And always he must struggle to master nature which is now alien to him, and what is just as difficult, he must try to understand and deal with the erratic powers which arise from within himself.<sup>12</sup> Man is pressed constantly to seek new solutions because each new stage in his development only brings forth new and different problems, and even though he must seek to resolve them for the sake of harmony and balance in his life, no plateau of certainty and stability is ever achieved. "Every stage he reaches leaves him discontented and perplexed, and this very perplexity urges him to move toward new solutions."<sup>13</sup>

#### EXISTENTIAL AND HISTORICAL DICHOTOMIES

Fromm does not see man being driven to seek new solutions by

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Fromm, MFH., p. 49. <sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-50.



some innate drive which forces him automatically to seek progress. Man rather searches for new solutions because he is always suffering under the heavy burden of his inner contradictions.

. . . Having lost paradise, the unity with nature, he has become the eternal wanderer (Odysseus, Oedipus, Abraham, Faust); he is impelled to go forward and with everlasting effort to make known the unknown by filling in with answers the blank spaces of his knowledge. He must give account to himself of himself, and of the meaning of his existence. He is driven to overcome this inner split, tormented by a craving for "absoluteness," for another kind of harmony which can lift the curse by which he was separated from nature, from his fellow men, and from himself.<sup>14</sup>

Man is aware that in the midst of his life, death is always fearfully close by to threaten his very existence. Yet, some day all men must die, and this ever-present tension between the force of life and the force of death is "the most fundamental existential dichotomy . . ."<sup>15</sup>

The fact that man is a mortal being who enters life without any choice or decision in the matter and leaves it with almost as little--his advent and exodus being largely accidental occurrences in the evolutionary progression of history--precludes man's full development and fulfillment even under the best and most favorable conditions. Even though every man has the possibility of developing infinitely his human potential, he is only vaguely aware of what he is or what he could be. The ideologies to which man has given greatest allegiance tend to avoid the problem by assuming that man's own time on earth provides the highest realization of human history; or they deny the existential dilemma by affirming that life's greatest fulfillment takes place in the afterlife; or the individual's happiness is subordinated to the greater welfare of

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<sup>14</sup>Fromm, MFH., pp. 49-50. <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 50.





some larger human or supra-human entity.<sup>16</sup>

Existential factors in life have a finality about them, but Fromm sees other contradictions which man has brought upon himself, and these he believes can be recognized and eventually solved by human intelligence and effort. The great material and technological resources in the world, for example, have not been harnessed for the needs of all peoples, a move which would enhance humane conditions and promote world peace. Such a contradiction is solvable and it is one which challenges man.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, there are many who have vested interests in seeing these historical contradictions as hopeless existential facts of life which simply cannot be changed and must be accepted with passive resignation. In such instances one group in power has attempted purposefully to confuse an existential with a historical contradiction, but this deception perpetrated on the innocent has not been held long without being challenged. In this regard Fromm has said:

. . . It is one of the peculiar qualities of the human mind that, when confronted with a contradiction, it cannot remain passive. It is set in motion with the aim of resolving the contradiction. All human progress is due to this fact. If man is to be prevented from reacting to his awareness of contradictions by action, the very existence of these contradictions must be denied. To harmonize, and thus negate, contradictions is the function of rationalizations in individual life and of ideologies (socially patterned rationalizations) in social life. . . .<sup>18</sup>

However, man's mind is easily led to accept as truth whatever might be approved by those who have been accorded great authority, or by the majority's affirmation in his particular culture. Yet, if man could only

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<sup>16</sup>Fromm, *MFH.*, p. 51. <sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*



really live by truth alone, authorities and majorities would never have gained power in the first place.<sup>19</sup>

#### MAN, A CREATION OF THE SOCIAL PROCESS

The intensity with which man goes about attempting to resolve the contradictions in his existence was clearly recognized by Sigmund Freud, who saw this great display of passionate striving and related anxieties ". . . as eternal forces rooted in the biological constitution of man."<sup>20</sup> Biologically controlling instinctual drives in man's nature demanded expression and satisfaction. If there is to be any satisfaction an individual is forced to relate himself to others who are "objects" and are always used as a means of gratification. Fromm sees the interchange of human relations in Freud's sense as "similar to a market--it is an exchange of satisfaction of biologically given needs, in which the relationship to the other is always a means to an end, but never an end in itself."<sup>21</sup>

Fromm takes issue with the Freudian position. He contends that the crucial problem of psychology ". . . is that of the specific kind of relatedness of the individual towards the world, and not that of the satisfaction or frustration of this or that instinctual need per se. . . ."<sup>22</sup> Nor can the individual's relationship with society be understood as a static condition. The individual with certain drives cannot be separated from the strong influences of a society which molds

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>20</sup>Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom (New York: Avon Books, 1941), p. 25. (The title of this book is hereafter referred to as EFF.)

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. <sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.





and shapes his life.

. . . Although there are certain needs, such as hunger, thirst, sex, which are common to man, those drives which make for the differences in men's characters like love and hatred, the lust for power and the yearning for submission, the enjoyment of sensuous pleasure and the fear of it, are all products of the social process. . . .<sup>23</sup>

There are beautiful and hideous sides to human character but neither, according to Fromm, can be established by ". . . a fixed and biologically given human nature. . . ." <sup>24</sup> The social process creates man; <sup>25</sup> it is not just a development which is alien to his nature for the purpose of restraining and restricting his basically anti-social physiological desires as Freud contended. <sup>26</sup> Society, Fromm admits, does have a suppressive function but this is not all--it has a very significant positive function.

. . . Man's nature, his passions, and anxieties are a cultural product; as a matter of fact, man himself is the most important creation and achievement of the continuous human effort, the record of which we call history. <sup>27</sup>

If man's life is developed in this way it is necessary to discover the psychological forces which have been operative in the shaping of human history. The very task of social psychology is to understand why one period of history has been so vastly different from another--the Renaissance in contrast to the Middle Ages. For example, questions must be asked relative to the difference in the social character produced in nineteenth century man as distinguished from twentieth century man. New concerns, directions, and actions in human

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Fromm, TSS., p. 27.

<sup>27</sup>Fromm, EFF., p. 27.

personality come forth with each new historical period, and this reshaping of man's goals, ideals, and behavior must be studied by social psychology.<sup>28</sup>

"But man is not only made by history--history is made by man."<sup>29</sup> It is precisely this area of study which Erich Fromm takes as part of his own task, not merely to show how human nature is molded by the forces at work in the social process, but to show ". . . how man's energies thus shaped into specific forms become productive forces, molding the social process."<sup>30</sup> The great craving for fame, and compulsive working for status and success in modern times, are not just by-products of the capitalistic system of the twentieth century. The obsession with fame and power played a very necessary part in prompting this commercial enterprise. The passive man, content with a minimal effort, would never have been able to produce a complex modern industrial system.<sup>31</sup>

Fromm sees his understanding of man as differing greatly from Freud's view, which saw man ". . . as the result of psychological forces that in themselves are not socially conditioned."<sup>32</sup> In his approach Fromm also finds himself in sharp disagreement with sociologists who omit the psychological dimension in human development, and with psychologists who are ". . . more or less tinged with behavioristic psychology."<sup>33</sup> Such sociological and psychological approaches assume that there are no vital creative forces actively at work within the nature of man. While these approaches may recognize the existence of a

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 28.    <sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.                      <sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 29.    <sup>33</sup>Ibid.





psychological factor, they give to psychology no dynamic role in the shaping of human life, a role which Fromm considers to be absolutely essential.<sup>34</sup>

Human nature, then, is not fixed into rigid patterns determined largely by instinctual drives as Freud thought. He believed that man's tremendously intense strivings were certainly the expressions of either the sex instinct or the unshakable drive for self-preservation, and that any passions which did not proceed directly from these natural goals were merely more subtle, but more complex manifestations of these unyielding biological demands which dominate man's existence.<sup>35</sup> Fromm, in reacting to Freud, contends that

. . . though there is no fixed human nature, we cannot regard human nature as infinitely malleable and able to adapt itself to any kind of conditions without developing a psychological dynamism of its own. Human nature, though being the product of historical evolution, has certain inherent mechanisms and laws, to discover which is the task of psychology.<sup>36</sup>

If there is no fixed human nature, and yet man cannot adapt himself to any and all conditions, just what are the characteristics of man's adaptation, and what forces him to seek some harmonious adjustment to the demands of various life situations?<sup>37</sup>

Fromm states that man's capacity to adapt is more evident in "certain sectors of man's nature. . . ,"<sup>38</sup> while in others he maintains a more rigid character structure, which is not as easily susceptible to any change. In response to various threats and fears, an individual develops life styles and personality adaptations to anxiety-laden life

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Fromm, MFH., p. 54.

<sup>36</sup>Fromm, EFF., p. 29. <sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 31.



conditions. Once these patterns of reaction have become firmly set in an individual's response to life, they are not easily changed or converted to some other drive. Yet, in childhood, a flexibility is apparent which allows for adaptation and adjustment according to the social configuration and need which is presented to the child. "None of these needs is fixed and rigid as if it were an innate part of human nature which develops and has to be satisfied under all circumstances."<sup>39</sup>

But there are human needs which are essential for life and must be satisfied. These are requirements for man's physiological survival and well-being. An individual must have food, water, and sleep, and when there is any threat to these basic needs man's quest for their satisfaction becomes an all consuming passion for self-preservation. At all times self-preservation is of crucial concern and this need becomes ". . . the primary motive of human behavior."<sup>40</sup>

If man is to survive, then, it is obvious that he must eat, sleep, and defend himself against all threats to his existence. He must also provide for himself which necessitates work. "Work is always concrete work, that is a specific kind of work in a specific kind of economic system."<sup>41</sup> There are many types of work each of which calls for different personality traits, and requires of the worker different relationships. The appropriateness of patterns of behavior of a particular job are established by the society and culture of his birth.<sup>42</sup> An individual does not have the opportunity to reorder or change society in any way before he discovers that he must work if he is to eat, and if

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 31-32.      <sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 32.      <sup>42</sup>Ibid.





he is to work, the demands within him for self-preservation force him ". . . to accept the conditions under which he has to live."<sup>43</sup> Later, when he is aware of the need for effecting change, he tries to reorder his world and the political and economic forces within it which have shaped his life. What is apparent to Fromm is that a child's life is deeply influenced, molded, and shaped by a particular culture and style of living, all of which confronts him and is imprinted upon him by his family which transmits the ethos of the culture to the child.<sup>44</sup>

Fromm believes that there can be no separation of sociological, economic, psychological, and ideological factors in a man's life. These are inter-related and are all tremendously important in the formation of the social character of a group.<sup>45</sup> Fromm states that

. . . the social character comprises only a selection of traits, the essential nucleus of the character structure of most members of a group which has developed as the result of the basic experience and mode of life common to that group.<sup>46</sup>

For Fromm the understanding of the development of social character is a key to the understanding of the entire social structure and social process.

. . . Character in the dynamic sense of analytic psychology is the specific form in which human energy is shaped by the dynamic adaptation of human needs to the particular mode of existence of a given society. Character in turn determines the thinking, feeling, and acting of individuals. . . .<sup>47</sup>

An individual's thoughts on moral, philosophical, political, and social

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 304.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 304-305.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 306.



problems are largely ". . . determined by the personality structure of the person who thinks."<sup>48</sup>

A doctrine or a philosophical system as well as concepts of love, justice, equality, and sacrifice will be shaped by the psychological condition of the mind that conceives it. There are, for instance, emotional roots, motives, and rationales which go into the understanding, expression, and interpretation of love, and even though the word is the same, people of differing character structures will have very different understanding of its meaning.<sup>49</sup>

The fact that ideas have an emotional matrix is of the utmost importance because it is the key to the understanding of the spirit of culture. Different societies or classes within a society have a specific character, and on its basis different ideas develop and become powerful. . . .<sup>50</sup>

In modern capitalistic society work and success have become controlling and consuming aims of life. Such aims would have very little interest, however, for the Pueblo Indians, or peasants in a Mexican village, where the social character is structured by different social demands.<sup>51</sup> Man reaches out to grasp those ideas, doctrines, and concepts which speak to his deeper needs and anxieties, and which, in some sense, provide answers to the problems he faces within a particular social context.<sup>52</sup>

If man's ideas are determined by his character structure, it is also true that his behavior reveals the condition of his inner make-up. Freud had already shown how this principle operates. In the case of

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 82.





neurotics it is quite evident. With the methods of clinical observation which are available to the psychoanalyst, even the more hidden compulsive patterns of western twentieth century man's working habits become apparent, and it can be seen how ". . . so-called rational behavior is largely determined by the character structure."<sup>53</sup>

But what is the function of human character? In answer to this question Fromm states:

. . . If an individual's character more or less closely conforms with the social character, the dominant drives in his personality lead him to do what is necessary and desirable under the specific social conditions of his culture. . . .<sup>54</sup>

The normal person's character function is to shape his personality and behavior so that he will be able to deal with his society in a meaningful way, obtaining from it what he wants and needs.<sup>55</sup> The social character of man must be designed so that the needs of the individual are fulfilled, and at the same time the individual contributes to the on-going maintenance and development of the society. ". . . By adapting himself to the social conditions man develops those traits that make him desire to act as he has to act."<sup>56</sup> The internalization of the goals, and corporate, external needs of a particular society channels human energy into the economic, political, and social tasks which must be faced. Without this internalization no culture would long survive.<sup>57</sup>

#### MAN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

Although Fromm is careful to underscore his conviction that

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 309.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 309-310.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid. "

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.



social character is influenced by the existing life style and economic and social structure within a particular society, he sees man yearning for individual satisfaction of deep psychological concerns. Man may have physiological demands which must be fulfilled, but there are also psychological demands in human nature which seek expression.<sup>58</sup>

. . . Even if man's hunger and thirst and his sexual strivings are completely satisfied "he" is not satisfied. In contrast to the animal his most compelling problems are not solved then, they only begin. He strives for power, or for love, or for destruction, he risks his life for religious, for political, for humanistic ideals, and these strivings are what constitute and characterize the peculiarity of human life. Indeed, "man does not live by bread alone."<sup>59</sup>

Even the quest for justice and truth is an essential striving built into man's nature. He can deny this urgent concern in his make-up, but there is something within him which makes him miserable if he does not heed this psychological need. In affirming this quest Fromm does not fail to realize that he could be ". . . on dangerous ground theoretically. . . ."<sup>60</sup> Neither religious affirmation that man is made in the image of God, nor philosophical speculation that finds justification in natural law is helpful.<sup>61</sup> Fromm contends that man's continuous quest for justice and truth, which can be seen with a careful analysis of human history, is vital because both are essential to the powerless person for his own personal freedom and development. Throughout history people have had to fight for their freedom from dominant groups which sought to control and use them. Thus, the need for truth and justice was not merely a theoretical concern unrelated to the deepest wishes of man.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>59</sup>Fromm, MFH., p. 54.

<sup>60</sup>Fromm, EFF., p. 316.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.





Man wants desperately to live, ". . . to expand and to express the potentialities that have developed in him in the process of historical evolution."<sup>62</sup>

Though man shares with other animals the need for food, drink, sleep, and copulation, he may have found these satisfactions without affecting his own mental stability and health. The specifically human needs call for fulfillment if man is to maintain his sanity. These needs come out of the peculiar situation in which man finds himself. They are

. . . the need for relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, the need for a sense of identity and the need for a frame of orientation and devotion. The great passions of man, his lust for power, his vanity, his search for truth, his passion for love and brotherliness, his destructiveness as well as his creativeness, every powerful desire which motivates man's actions, is rooted in this specific human source, not in the various stages of his libido as Freud's construction postulated.<sup>63</sup>

Karl Marx said: "Passion is man's faculties striving to obtain their object."<sup>64</sup> Fromm appreciates the insight shown by Marx in these words inasmuch as the word "passion" is used to express man's concern for relationship. Above all, in the depths of his nature, man yearns for relationship in life. Fromm said

. . . because I have eyes, I have the need to see; because I have ears, I have the need to hear; because I have a mind, I have the need to think; and because I have a heart, I have the need to feel. In short, because I am a man, I am in need of man and of the world. . . .<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., pp. 316-317. <sup>63</sup>Fromm, TSS., p. 67.

<sup>64</sup>Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1961), p. 132.

<sup>65</sup>Erich Fromm, The Revolution of Hope (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 72. (The title of this book is hereafter referred to as TROH.)

## THE CRITICAL PROBLEM OF ANSWERING THE EXISTENTIAL QUESTION

We have seen that, in Fromm's estimation, the most critical problem for modern psychology is not to be found in Freud's description of the human dilemma expressed as the conflict between civilization and instinctual urges. Man's ability to relate to his world, to himself, and to his fellow human beings, the tendency to regress to a symbiotic pattern of life--these are just a few of the areas which call for the greatest concern and attention if life is to survive--yet Freud viewed such problems merely as the secondary manifestations of frustration of more basic primitive drives.<sup>66</sup>

Fromm has said that man is trapped in the existential situation. He cannot give up the specific characteristics of his nature that make him miserable by reverting to an animal existence. As much as he might sometimes wish to, he cannot return to the less complicated times when he lived in harmony with nature.<sup>67</sup> Unlike the animal, whose instincts help him automatically to cope with his environment, man must use the powers of his reason to deal with the often overwhelming problems that life presents. Fromm says of man, ". . . he is in nature, yet he transcends nature; he has awareness of himself, and this awareness of himself as a separate entity makes him feel unbearably alone, lost, powerless."<sup>68</sup> As soon as he comes into the world he is confronted with

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<sup>66</sup>Fromm, EFF., p. 318.

<sup>67</sup>Erich Fromm, Psychoanalysis and Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 70. (The title of this book is hereafter referred to as PAR.)

<sup>68</sup>D. T. Suzuki, Erich Fromm, and Richard De Martino, Zen Buddhism & Psychoanalysis (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 87. (The title of this book is hereafter referred to as ZBAP.)





a staggering question which cannot simply be dealt with intellectually because man must respond with his entire being at all times during his life.

. . . This question is: How can we overcome the suffering, the imprisonment, the shame which the experience of separateness creates; how can we find union within ourselves, with our fellow man, with nature. . . ?<sup>69</sup>

Arriving at an answer is not an optional matter; it must take shape and form; even the delusions of the psychotic, who tries to cancel the pain-filled experience of reality, is a reaction to this question.<sup>70</sup>

This basic existential question does not change in any way or at any time. Although man always struggles to find the answer, as Fromm views the question, there are really only two possible answers. In order to escape from his separateness and aloneness, an individual must either give up the fight and regress, and thereby find a state of symbiotic unity which preceded his birth, or he must dare to face the question, and give the other answer, which involves confronting the anxiety, uncertainty, and risk.

. . . The other answer is to be fully born, to develop one's awareness, one's reason, one's capacity to love, to such a point that one transcends one's own egocentric involvement, and arrives at a new harmony, at a new oneness with the world.<sup>71</sup>

But the birth of a human being is not really accomplished by one physical act. Birth is a process, and Fromm sees this process going on at every moment of a person's life, and at every moment the basic, existential question is present: ". . . should we return, or should we develop? Should we go back, or should we go forward? We are afraid of

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 87.



progressing because it is risky."<sup>72</sup> Yet birth is the great dynamic thrust and purpose of life. Living is being born at every moment of existence, and this process only stops with death. ". . . Physiologically, our cellular system is in a process of continual birth; psychologically, however, most of us cease to be born at a certain point."<sup>73</sup> Moreover, there are many who are scarcely born at all. Their bodies continue to live, but their souls are stillborn, and their greatest wish is to avoid the struggles of life completely by returning to the existence which was experienced before the umbilical cord was cut. In the midst of the battle man is so very tempted to retreat; he longs to escape, to return to the uncomplicated past, to mother, but ". . . two angels with fiery swords block his return."<sup>74</sup> He can never go back.

#### MAN'S EFFORT TO ESCAPE FROM FREEDOM

Modern European and American history reveals that on many occasions man has fought battles which would free him from enslavement by oppressive classes. In these tortuous upheavals man generally saw himself as waging a righteous war against those who sought to dominate him politically, economically, religiously, and socially. Such battles were fought by people who wanted greater freedom in their lives, and while those who engaged in the overthrow of dominating classes saw themselves as liberators of human beings in general, they were, in fact,

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<sup>72</sup>Richard I. Evans, Dialogue with Erich Fromm (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), pp. 24-25.

<sup>73</sup>Suzuki, Fromm, De Martino, ZBAP., p. 88.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 89.



ministering to their own great desire for freedom.<sup>75</sup> The paradoxical element in these battles for freedom was revealed when those who had fought so long and hard ". . . sided with the enemies of freedom when victory was won and new privileges were to be defended."<sup>76</sup>

When The First World War was won, for example, it seemed that the western world had at long last achieved the defeat of old, malignant, oppressive powers which had enslaved many. The greatest victory for democratic forces seemed to have been won, and the greatest opportunities for man to enjoy his newly gained release from bondage in a new era of optimism was at hand. But within a very few years vicious and tyrannical political systems emerged which cancelled out the courageous battles for freedom which man had waged. And these new systems which quickly re-enslaved entire nations, usurping the most precious individual and civil liberties, were controlled by a very small group of ruthless demented men.<sup>77</sup>

There is a common belief which excuses the individual from responsibility for participation in the development of the Nazi regime saying that Hitler and his type used great cunning and deceit to gain control over the people who were ". . . the willless object of betrayal and terror."<sup>78</sup> In the years following The Second World War, when the question of German "guilt" had been examined, the theory of the helpless, betrayed populace proved not to be true. Fromm declares to the contrary:

. . . We have been compelled to recognize that millions in

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<sup>75</sup>Fromm, EFF., p. 17.    <sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.    <sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 19.