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ERICH FROMM, SOCIAL CHARACTER AND IDEOLOGY CRITIQUE

LI JIAN

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF
SINGAPORE**

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LI JIAN
(B.A., BLCU)

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SUMMARY

My thesis is an attempt to have a better understanding of Erich Fromm's most important contribution as a psychoanalyst and social philosopher, viz. his investigation of the social unconscious with the aid of the social character. The thesis offers the origin, the development and the conception of "Social Character" and it also purports to be an objective account of the Frommian "Social Character" theory. It argues that Fromm's theories on the social character of capitalistic society, as a matter of fact, formulate a model of ideology critique—a frequently contested theme in the Marxist tradition. Nevertheless, my study is also intended to explain why yet another formulation of ideological critique can be justified given that there have been several formulations of ideology since the very inception of the concept. I argue that Fromm's project can provide a more productive and satisfactory understanding of human nature in capitalistic society, for his social character theory aims at a combination of Freudian psychoanalysis and Marx's statement in base/superstructure. I shall show that the central point of view lies in his firm position that the development of the psychic structure of social entities, i.e., the social character, depends on the particular society's social and economic structures. Not merely reproducing a simplistic determinism as such, rather, by asserting an "*interaction*" of the psychic apparatus and the socio-economic conditions Fromm thus complicates his enterprise of fusing psychoanalysis and Marxism. More importantly, Fromm argues that it is from this interaction that ideologies arise.

My methodology in approaching this broad issue is basically as follows: first, I will build the theoretical foundation for the thesis argument on a critical reading of Terry Eagleton's well-established study in the history and concept of ideology. In order to



contextualize Fromm's position on the correlation between social character and the making of ideologies in capitalistic society, discussions and theories on ideology critique of other major thinkers in the Marxist tradition will be studied in parallel with Eagleton's. Furthermore, I will also engage in the extant commentaries on Fromm, charitable and harsh, particularly concerned with the above issue. Lastly, a detailed study of Fromm's analyses of various orientations of social character at different stages shall be done. As this is concerned, Fromm's literary executor—Rainer Funk—is particularly important as he provides a quite useful periodization.

Towards the conclusion, in rethinking what is at stake reading Fromm today, I suggest that Fromm's social character theory, his theorization about authoritarian orientation in particular, can offer valuable insights for China's building up a harmonious socialist society. As I will show in the closing remarks, the authoritarian character orientation of the Chinese has many psychological expressions in their interpersonal communications. These psychological expressions are not necessarily productive and probably obstructive in realizing a harmonious society as Fromm shows. All in all, the importance of what Fromm does in the Freudo-Marxist project and his social character theory will guarantee that for quite a long time, Fromm's ideas shall remain topical.

Erich Fromm, Social Character and Ideology Critique

Part I Introduction

In this introductory section, the questions of what the researcher is writing about (topic), what he does not know about (questions) and why he wants to know about it (rationale) shall be dealt with. And the methodology of this research project shall also be introduced.

Fromm's Freudian-Marxist Project

During his late years from 1959 to 1978, Erich Fromm exchanged much correspondence with others, including Marxist Raya Dunayevskaya, former secretary of Trotsky. Dunayevskaya, on the anniversary of the birth of Erich Fromm, wrote a short "In Memoriam" to Fromm (which appeared in the *News & Letters* of April 1980, the year when Fromm died). In that piece Dunayevskaya points out, "many articles that poured forth in 1980 when Erich Fromm died on March 18 all praised him only as a 'famous psychoanalyst.' The press, by no accident at all, failed to mention that he was a Socialist Humanist" (1). Reviewing a large portion of the extant literature on Fromm, it could be argued that it was not merely the press who erred, but also many scholarly publications made the same mistake. In addition, Daniel Burston points out that there is a widespread misunderstanding of Fromm, depicting him as "a naïve utopian, a naïve environmentalist, or an accomplice in the so-called Americanization or trivialization of psychoanalysis" ("Legacy" vii). In this study, I am going to write about the so-called "naïve utopian"—German-born U.S. psychoanalyst, social philosopher, and socialist humanist, Erich Fromm, the person and his aims, his

teachings and his arguments. I will give a brief sketch of Fromm's intellectual life and spiritual mentors in the following part with the focus on his social character theory and its interrelationship with the theories of ideology critique.

Given that both charitable commentaries and harsh criticisms exist in Fromm scholarship, an unavoidable question poses itself: how should we see Fromm and what is at stake reading Fromm today, some two decades after his death? Dunayevskaya elaborated on Fromm's tangled relations with orthodox Freudianism, with the "Critical Theory" of the Frankfurt School and his intimacy with Marxism. Dunayevskaya's assertions might help to unravel the complexities of Frommian ideas:

Erich Fromm was an original. In attempting to fuse Marx and Freud, it wasn't so much the audaciousness of such a move in the 1920s that needs to be stressed, but the fact that even when he was a most orthodox Freudian, it was social psychology that interested him; his use of psychoanalytic mechanisms was as a sort of mediating concept between the individual and the social. In any case, as he moved away from orthodox Freudianism to elaborate his own version, it was clear that he was breaking not only with Freud but with the famous Frankfurt School and its "Critical Theory," and that, not because he was moving away from Marxism, but coming closer to it. (1)

Issues such as Fromm's break with Freud, or his ambiguous "Freud piety," or his discord with former colleagues Adorno, Horkheimer, and the notorious Fromm-Marcuse Debate have all been well-studied elsewhere (e.g., Rainer Funk, 2000; Daniel Burston, 1991; Martin Jay, 1973). What interests me most instead is Fromm's social psychology. To be precise, what is really at stake is Fromm's psychoanalytic

social psychology and his use of psychoanalysis as a bridging concept between the individual and society. Speaking of Fromm's social psychology, we could hardly overemphasize the importance of Fromm's core concept "social character," a term that has been gradually formulated in his ambitious Freudo-Marxist project. It is for this long-term project that Fromm writes and works, and it is this that establishes him as a prominent social philosopher of the twentieth century.

Not a single man could claim that it is he who initiates the synthesis of Marx and Freud, two giants of the Western intellectual tradition. Yet, among others, Fromm could secure a distinct part in matchmaking this famous "marriage." In a recent book, *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, Joel Whitebook asserts that the Frankfurt School members were the first social philosophers who took psychoanalysis sincerely. And according to Whitebook, Fromm apparently played an important role. Being a member of both the Institute for Social Research and the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute, Fromm not only lectured on Freudian psychoanalysis for other Critical Theorists (his colleagues), but also contributed to the completion of *Authority and the Family*, "the first interdisciplinary empirical research that used psychoanalytic theory ... to investigate the relation between sociological developments and psychological phenomena" (74-5). Henceforth, Fromm embarked on his long journey of fusing a Marxist sociology and a Freudian psychoanalysis.

Rationale

Reading Fromm today, we are particularly impressed by his strenuous pursuit of a scientific analytic social psychology, starting as early as 1930s and ending with the publication of *To Have or To Be?* (1976). Apart from revisiting and reviving Fromm's

social psychology, a psychology that has absorbed nutrients from both Marxism and Freudianism, the aim of this study is also to have a better understanding of Fromm's most important contributions as both a psychoanalyst and a socialist humanist. Rainer Funk, Fromm's sole literary executor, explicitly concludes that Fromm's most important contribution is his investigating the social unconscious with the aid of the social character ("Reader" xvii). And the three orientations of social character that Fromm discovered constitute his equally significant contributions in the field of analytic social psychology (31). Therefore, the object of this study can be seen, among numerous publications on Fromm, as an attempt to analyze his crucial psychosocial concept—social character and its various orientations corresponding to the different developmental stages of capitalist society.

However, with regard to the application and the current relevance of Fromm's social character theory, my analysis will not be within the confinement of capitalist society. I suggest that Fromm's social character theory, his theorization about authoritarian orientation in particular, can offer valuable insights into China's building up a harmonious socialist society. Fromm proposes a sane society and suggests roads toward it. His solution is a multi-dimensional one in that he argues for simultaneous economic, political, cultural and *psychological* transformations in striving for a truly sane society. As I will show in the closing remarks, the authoritarian character orientation of the Chinese has many psychological expressions in their interpersonal communications. These psychological expressions are not necessarily productive and probably obstructive in realizing a harmonious society as Fromm shows.

In addition, by historically investigating the social unconscious, Fromm's theories on how social character is shaped and its function for society, in fact, formulate another model of ideological critique. As my analysis later shall show, this very "function" of social character for capitalist society is the mechanism by which ideology works. Thus, to debunk the function of social character is a productive project of penetrating social, political and cultural issues. Moreover, the aim of this research is also to assert Fromm's continuous relevance and significance today in the much-debated arena of ideology. Above all, why do I want to know about Fromm's analytical social psychology and its core concept "social character" anyway? The best justification is the fact that the interrelation of social character and ideology critique has hardly been noticed and discussed in Fromm scholarship before. So, a deep understanding of the interrelationship between the orientations of social character and the corresponding society's dominant ideologies shall be an enrichment of the existing Frommian scholarship.

There are many formulations of ideology. Which model or which combination of models provides a more productive and satisfactory understanding of human nature in capitalist society? Some general (and by no means complete) points for departure include: traditional Marxist formulations of ideology; Gramscian hegemony; Althusserian ISAs; and Ernst Bloch's ideology critique. However, through his distinctive discovery of different social character orientations and their functions for society, Fromm proposes a unique ideology critique, or perhaps, an anatomy of ideology of capitalist society.

Fromm posits that the development of the psychic structure of social entities, i.e., the social character partaken by the majority of the people of a certain society, depends on social and economic structures. This position, I suppose, is obviously rooted in Marx's own statement of the base/superstructure for whom the economic order is the ultimate determining factor. Unlike some scholars who insist on the so-called "vulgar Marxism" or economism, Fromm does not provide us with a simplistic theory that ideology is merely a reflection of the economic base; rather, he explains explicitly how ideologies arise from the *interaction* of the psychic apparatus and the socio-economic conditions of the society. To be sure, Douglas Kellner also points out that Fromm once suggested that psychoanalysis can help explain how the socio-economic interests and structures are transformed into ideologies, as well as how ideologies shape and influence human thought and behavior (*Erich Fromm: Biography 2*). By seamlessly wedding Marxism and Freudianism, the Frommian "interaction" shall be assumed to be as a central mechanism of Fromm's analytic social psychology in this study.

It could be maintained that in order to understand Fromm's social character as a model of ideological critique, some basic knowledge of Marx's own theory of base/superstructure should be used. Famously (or notoriously) formulated as the base/superstructure model in the *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (anthologized in Fromm's own book *Marx's Concept of Man*), Marx's theory of ideology, though never clearly established by himself, could be inferred in the following passage:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of

production that correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (*Marx's Concept of Man* 168)

Here, Marx firmly locates ideology within the "definite forms of social consciousness" that corresponds to "a legal and political superstructure." It implies that in the dichotomy of base/superstructure, ideology, as a "form of social consciousness," can be found in the latter. Hence in a Marxist model, ideology and other non-ideological human consciousness *arise* from economic structures of a given society. Marx's famous formulation of ideology has been subject to much criticism ever since its birth. Its socioeconomic reductionism and its impotence to articulate the mechanism by which the economic base affects human psychology, character, ideas, ideals, and ideologies, have rendered orthodox Marxism a bit embarrassing. This uncomfortable *status quo* of Marxism, of course, has been encouraging a good deal of revisions and reformations along the development of Western Marxism. As we have seen, both Critical Theory and Fromm's synthesis could be regarded as impulses of this kind.

As Kellner affirms, "one of the distinctive features of Critical Theory is their synthesis of Marx and Freud aimed at producing a theory of the psychological mediations

between psyche and society ignored by traditional Marxism" (1). What Kellner says about Critical Theory here is equally applicable to Fromm. For instance, Fromm's critique of Marx also follows from the latter's lack of psychological insights and overvaluation of political and economic structure. On the other hand Fromm carefully diverts orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis to a brand-new analytic social psychology. As my study will further show that while Fromm is synthesizing Marxism and Freudianism with his social character theory, he is also bringing the psychoanalytic perspective into an old defective Marxist tradition that needs fresh blood. Fromm's formulation of social character is a healthy development of, rather than a deviation from, both Marxist and Freudian traditions. Moreover, with his analytical social psychology, Fromm is able to offer a productive way of engaging social, cultural and political issues of our present day.

In this study, I also need to look into the flaws in Fromm's writings, in order to form a critical attitude toward his works in general, strikingly, for instance, Fromm's self-contradictory attitudes toward feminism. As Kellner asserts, Fromm's position toward feminist movement underwent an obvious shift (*Feminism, and the Frankfurt School* 13-15). Fromm's firm belief in a universal human nature and his candid essentialism and idealism are also subject to uncharitable criticism. For instance, David Ingleby regards Fromm's central concepts of humanistic psychoanalysis as purely metaphysical in nature ("Introduction" 38-50). Though I generally agree with these commentaries, I will examine them in more detail later in this study.

The Methodology

As to my research methodology, first, a foundational study must be done regarding ideology theories within the Marxist tradition, for example, the Althusserian conception, in order to situate and contextualize Fromm's own theory of ideology. In this area, much attention will be given to Terry Eagleton's seminal text, *Ideology: An Introduction*. The concept of ideology in the non-Marxist tradition will not be covered as that is outside the parameters of this study (see instead chapter four of David McClellan's well-organized book *Ideology*). I am aware that Fromm's theory of social character has seldom been discussed in relation to ideological critique in Frommian literature. However, Fromm's formulation of different orientations of capitalist social character and his ability to debunk the relations between complex socioeconomic structures and the corresponding social characters, and in particular their social functions (for instances, social filter and social cement), in fact serve as a form of ideological critique of capitalist society. This social task of debunking illusions and rationalizations, and of asserting the truth, is still of great importance to the concept of ideology critique, even in a postmodern time "when political and philosophical developments have cast significant doubt on the use and value of this concept" (Hawkes xi). In fact in his excellent book *Ideology* David Hawkes shows that, "postmodernism is nothing more than the ideology of consumer capitalism" (12). Hence the claim of "the end of ideology" or the "End of History" in the postmodern era itself betrays its ideological color. Ideology, far from having magically vanished or gone with the wind, as some postmodernists announce, continues to exist and will do so for a long time yet.

Fromm also insisted on "the use and value of" the concept of ideology. Renowned as a renaissance man, Fromm once in his "Credo" proclaims for certain that:

I believe that the only force that can save us from self-destruction is reason; the capacity to recognize the unreality of most of the ideas that man holds, and to penetrate to the reality veiled by the layers and layers of deception and ideologies; reason, not as a body of knowledge, but as a 'kind of energy, a force which is fully comprehensible only in its agency and effects ...' a force whose 'most important function consists in its power to bind and to dissolve.' ("Beyond the Chains" 170)

We can clearly see that, for Fromm, ideological critique must still be of use and "reason" must be "the only force" in penetrating the reality, i.e., to see things as they really are. Fromm's social character theory, as a science of human nature in capitalist society, can provide us with an important perspective in seeing human ideas and actions as they truly mean. And more importantly, Fromm's psychology can demonstrate how these ideas and ideologies rise.

Second, a brief account of Fromm's synthesis of Marxism and Freudianism, social character in particular, shall be given.

Third but not least, a detailed study of Fromm's analyses of various orientations of social character at different stages shall be done accordingly. Rainer Funk here is particularly important as he provides a quite useful periodization:

I. Authoritarian Orientation (1930-1939)

In 1930, Fromm joined the Frankfurt School upon an invitation by Max Horkheimer. There, as Funk notes, Fromm became a member of the famous Frankfurt School, "devoting mainly to a study of the authoritarian psychic structure of social entities,

thus creating the basis for a lengthy scholarly debate on authority and authoritarianism" ("Reader" 31).

II. Marketing Orientation (1940s)

Funk suggests that Fromm started to identify marketing structure as "a conformist and escapist mechanism" in his book *The Fear of Freedom* and identified it as the "marketing character" in *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (31).

III. Necrophilous Orientation (1960s-1973)

Funk posits that Fromm began to elaborate the orientation that he termed necrophilia with the theory of aggression in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (31).

Furthermore, according to Funk, Fromm's formulation of the marketing character orientation has not met with much discord or dispute, but his theory on "necrophilia encountered resistance in many forms and has remained largely unexplored to the present day" (31). However, to some critics like Burston, the "resistance" seems to be not only rational but also necessary, because "Fromm's notion of necrophilia and its underlying rationale are quite muddled. It could hardly be called a 'theory'" ("Legacy" 124). So, in the following exposition of Fromm's orientations of social character, while focusing equally on Fromm's authoritarian and marketing orientations, extra attention will be diverted to one of Fromm's more controversial issues, namely his concept of "necrophilia." However, considering the complexities of Fromm's concept of necrophilia, only another research project will do it justice.

Part II An Intellectual Biographical Sketch of Fromm

A Troubled Young Man and His Mentors

A brief sketch of his intellectual life and spiritual mentors is necessary before coming to know Fromm's works and ideas. In the opening passage of his intellectual autobiography, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud*, Fromm sheds some light on his family. According to Fromm, being "an only child, with an anxious and moody father and a depression-prone mother" was enough to initiate his "paramount interest" and curiosity in human actions and reactions, and "the strange and mysterious reasons" for them (1). Fromm's interest in psychoanalysis was piqued at an early stage in life. The adolescent experiences further stimulated Fromm's passion in Freud, "which was to become manifest only ten years later" (2).

The First World War exerted tremendous impact on his thoughts, and further prepared his encounter with Marxism. First the "prophetic vision of universal brotherhood and peace" Fromm received from his religious background, the Old Testament, echoed Marx's manifesto of a communist society. Then Fromm saw the deep hatred between strangers in the war and the brutal fact that "millions allowed themselves to be slaughtered on both sides for the sake of some territory and the vanity of some leaders" (8). As "a deeply troubled young man" he thus became "deeply suspicious of all official ideologies and declarations," and was in this way completely in line with Marx's own favorite conviction that "of all one must doubt" (8).

The genesis of Fromm's Freudo-Marxist project can best be summed up in his own words:

I was deeply troubled by questions with regard to individual and social phenomena, and I was eager for an answer. I found answers both in Freud's and in Marx's systems. But I was also stimulated by the contrasts between the two systems and by the wish to solve these contradictions ... I wanted to understand the laws that govern the life of the individual man, and the laws of society – that is, of men in their social existence. I tried to see the lasting truth in Freud's concepts as against those assumptions which were in need of revision. I tried to do the same with Marx's theory, and finally I tried to arrive at a synthesis which followed from the understanding and the criticism of both thinkers. (9)

By his own account, then, Fromm's Social character is therefore a crucial concept in that it results from a combination of the two. Hence the study of social character is bound to enhance our understanding and criticism of Fromm's Freud-Marxist enterprise as a whole.

Both mentors are great thinkers, but they do not count equally for Fromm. He declares, "Marx is a figure of world historical significance with whom Freud cannot even be compared in this respect. ... I consider Marx, the thinker, as being of much greater depth and scope than Freud" (11). For Fromm, what is so particularly interesting in Marx's works? Perhaps, as Funk argues, Fromm's "political interests deepened when he became acquainted with the work of Karl Marx, for in it he saw 'the key to the understanding of history and the manifestation ... of the radical humanism...' ("The Courage" 2).

"Apprenticeship of the Soul"

Considering the grand problems Fromm had in mind, it was very natural that he developed a keen interest in the study of psychology, philosophy and sociology. After the war, the early Weimar Republic witnessed the genesis and growth of Nazism. And Fromm, according to some scholar's observations, "became increasingly interested in political theory and in 'the hidden forces which act behind the back of the participants.'... Instead, he concentrated on formal study at the universities, with special emphasis on sociology and philosophy" (*Erich Fromm* 14).

He spent two semesters at the University of Frankfurt and then in 1919 transferred to Heidelberg to study under the guidance of Alfred Weber (brother of Max Weber), Karl Jaspers, and Heinrich Ricckert. As early as 1922, Fromm finished his doctorate dissertation on "the sociopsychological structure of three Jewish Diaspora communities: the Karaites, the Hasidim, and the Reformed Jews" ("The Courage" 2-3). As we can find out that at such an early stage of his academic pursuit Fromm already had a vision of conducting sociopsychological research.

However, Fromm had not yet begun a formal psychoanalytic training until he married Frieda Reichmann in 1926. As Frieda's biographer asserts in the well-informed book *To Redeem One Person Is to Redeem the World*, Fromm's analytic training was "clearly the result of Frieda's influence on him" and "he followed her lead and went at first to Wittenberg, then switched to Hanns Sachs at the Psychoanalytic Institute" (62). This marriage did not last, however. Frieda herself is a powerful figure. Fromm's friends even joked that his first book, *Escape from Freedom* should really be called "Escape from Frieda" (61). Though without an M.D., Fromm remained an analyst till

the end of his life thanks to the training he received from Dr. Landauer and Dr. Wittenberg in Munich, from Hans Sachs and Theodor Reik in Berlin respectively through 1928 and 1929 ("The Courage" 3).

His Own Thinking

The year 1930 was particularly important for Fromm, for upon Horkheimer's invitation he became the psychoanalytic expert at the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research) out of which the famous "Frankfurt School" emerged. Before his accession to the Frankfurt School, Fromm had already envisioned the interrelationship between psychoanalysis and sociology. According to Fromm, the psychoanalysts must stress that "the subject of sociology, society, in reality consists of individuals, and that it is these human beings, rather than an abstract society as such, whose actions, thoughts, and feeling are the object of sociological research" ("Psychoanalysis and Society" 241). In short, Fromm understands the individual in relation to society and the individual exists only as a socialized being. Hence, the individual's psychic apparatus is essentially developed and determined through the interrelationship of the individual to society. As Funk points out, Fromm's definition of the individual's relationship with society (penned as early as 1929) contains "the kernel of all that distinguished Fromm's analytical social psychology" ("His Life and Ideas" 68). And at the same time "it is clear that Fromm defined his viewpoint in opposition to mainstream sociology and psychoanalysis" (68). This might be part of the explanation for the fact that Fromm's idea has not been well received with enthusiasm by sociologists or orthodox psychoanalysts.

Fromm's early thoughts are synthesized in an important article that he penned in 1932 and published in the first edition of the institute's publication, the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. In this essay "The Method and Function of an Analytical Social Psychology" subtitled "Notes on Psychoanalysis and Historical Materialism," Fromm sketched the basic outline of his project, distinguishing himself as a psychoanalytical social psychologist.

In spite of Fromm's frequent illnesses between 1931 and 1939, as Funk notes, Fromm's reading and research continued and extended. In this period, Fromm developed a keen interest in Johann Jakob Bachofen's (1815-1887) Mother Right theory and wrote a few articles on it (1933 and 1934). He also published a sociopsychological critique of Freud's therapy (1935), an indication of his awareness of forming a systematic critique of orthodox Freudianism. More importantly, Fromm's central focus was on the authoritarian character, which later developed into his first hallmark book—*Escape from Freedom*. In this book, according to Funk, Fromm argues that in the historical transition from traditionalistic feudalism to rising capitalism, individuality for the first time emerged, and so increased insecurity and fear. The ultimately unbearable sense of insecurity and fear forced the individual to seek comfort and security from social orders such as fascism. And along with this transition, a social character called authoritarian character could be identified (50-101).

As Kellner points out, Fromm applied his own Freudian-Marxian perspectives to harsh critiques of contemporary capitalism in his post-World War II book-projects—*Man for Himself* and *The Sane Society*. He "popularized the neo-Marxian critiques of the media and consumer society, and promoted democratic socialist positions" (*Erich*

Fromm: Biography 1). Interestingly, in Herbert Marcuse's well-received book *One-Dimensional Man*, mass media and consumerism is condemned for its capacity to invest ideologies and create one-dimensional man as well. Here Fromm and his former Frankfurt School colleague had a common theme (only in regard to social critiques) in their writings. However, these two thinkers engaged in sharp polemics against one another from the mid-1950s into the 1970s. Though not attracting as much attention as that of the realism-modernism debate in aesthetics, the Fromm-Marcuse Debate had special repercussions for the New Left. Kellner goes to summarize this debate in concise prose:

Marcuse began the polemic by attacking Fromm as a new-Freudian revisionist, and Fromm retaliated by calling Marcuse a "nihilist" and "utopian." Marcuse claimed that Fromm's emphasis on the "productive character" simply reproduced the "productivism" intrinsic to capitalism, and that his celebration of the values of love, in books like *The Art of Loving*, and religious values simply reproduced dominant idealist ideologies. (1)

Apparently, Marcuse was not the only one who misinterpreted Fromm, as we can later find that his labeling Fromm as a "new-Freudian revisionist" and an "idealist" echoes many other voices. Specifically Marcuse misunderstood Fromm's concept of "productiveness" as my study will show later.

Apart from being a social theorist and thinker, a practicing psychoanalyst, and a prolific writer producing many important books which strongly promote and develop Marxian and Freudian ideas (his own Freudo-Marxist project in particular), Fromm was also politically proactive and engaged. We can find his presence, sometimes of

primary importance, in the organizing of SANE (National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy) in 1957, in the early "Ban the Bomb" campaigns, as well as in the anti-War movements of the 1960s. Fromm's political engagement surely inspires later political activities as much as his books do. Kellner rightly concludes that, "his many books and articles had some influence on the New Left and continue to be widely read and discussed today" (*Erich Fromm: Biography* 1).

Perhaps, the best way to sum up this section is to use a passage by Daniel Burston in his highly-acclaimed book *The Legacy of Erich Fromm*, which reads: "Few people achieve an unfailing congruence in their lives between theory and practice. The man who emerges in the following pages was, if nothing else, a probing, creative and sometimes visionary thinker whose life's work merits study" (29).

Part III Literature Review

A Much Underappreciated Masterpiece

It is not easy to understand Fromm's thinking without having discovered a clear inner logic unifying the numerous themes in his nearly fifty books. As Funk points out, Fromm's most important contribution to the field of analytic social psychology, i.e., the concept of "social character," through which Fromm investigates the social unconscious, determines his interests and perspectives "on political, religious, ethical, philosophical, and social questions" ("Reader" 15-7). Therefore Fromm's concept of "social character" remains an important one, connecting his whole body of work. In this section, I will chart and survey, with a focus on the theory of social character, the development of Frommian scholarship over the years.

First we need to discuss one of the seminal texts in the history of social psychology, i.e., *Social Character in A Mexican Village: A Sociopschoanalytic Study* published by Fromm and Michael Maccoby in 1970. The study sets out as an attempt to test Fromm's theory of social character and finds it confirmed in the case of a Mexican village. From the foreword we know that this project is a massive and multidimensional one. It spanned six years from 1957 to 1963 and was finally completed in 1970. As an empirical social research project, it involves designing and "answering the questionnaire" (based on an interpretative questionnaire first developed in the Frankfurt Study in 1932), face-to-face interviews, data collection and revising and reanalyzing the materials ("Study" 10-14). This study soon generated enthusiastic responses in the field.

According to an extensive bibliography on Fromm compiled by Funk (available in the online Erich Fromm Archive), the scholarly interest in this seminal text did not wane until 1973. However, it was in 1997 that review articles re-appeared on this book. So in a sense this book has almost been condemned to oblivion between those years. We can find that the early reviews generally failed to assess and anticipate Fromm and Maccoby's empirical study as a classic in this field. The later reception of this study was hardly any better, despite the fact that Fromm's framework of social character established in this book has been extensively used without being properly credited by many scholars. Nevertheless, there are a few scholars who see its unique importance. Burston posits that Fromm and Maccoby's project "is a much-neglected classic in the history of social psychology" ("Humanistic Psychoanalysis" 281). Many scholars also hold that the study of a Mexican village exhibits the mature practice of Fromm's social character theory originally stated in 1941 in his first and landmark book *Escape from Freedom* (appeared in Britain under the title of *The Fear of Freedom*).

In Fromm and Maccoby's book, the authors lay their theoretical grounds by (1) defining the object of study, i.e. "peasant" (with both anthropological and sociological perspectives); (2) analyzing the Freudian dynamic concept of character; (3) reaffirming their own concept of social character and methodology. They move on to give us a panoramic socioeconomic and cultural picture of the village, detailing in aspects such as literacy and schooling, occupation, housing, consumer goods, religious and cultural activities, etc. Chapters Four, Five and Six constitute the essential part of this project, in which the authors formulate different character orientations, analyze the distribution of character traits of the villagers with

convincing figures and tables, and contend the correlations between social character and socioeconomic-cultural variables based on firm evidence. Moreover, the authors do not ignore the sex difference in molding characters. They point out the intense conflict between men and women and its psychological and pathological effects on character. Then, before coming to a conclusion, they spend three chapters respectively on such critical issues as alcoholism and violence, the formation of character in childhood and possibilities for social change.

Although the reception of this study indicates a lack of influence, Fromm's theory of social character formulated in the book still casts a significant impact on forthcoming studies in the field of social psychology. Notably since the publication of this book, a few scholars had attempted to apply Fromm's social character to their own studies (see the electronic bibliography compiled by Funk). However, apart from its statement of an interrelation between social character and ideology critique, my study is more concerned with how other scholars comment on Fromm's concept of social character, on his characterology and personality theory rather than the applications of Fromm's theory.

Part IV Social Character, Ideology Critique and Commentary

In Fromm's numerous volumes, he discusses almost every problem that concerns human existence and development. His discourses on human nature, human character and the situation in which human being exist, and his ideas on matriarchy, his elucidation of spiritual and material production, and in particular his conception of social character and social unconscious, had and will continue to have extensive impact on our understanding of society and individual.

As some scholars have argued, Fromm's research in character structure is not only a crucial composition of his personality theory, but also a significant contribution he made to human thinking in the twentieth century (Funk, "Reader"). Fromm's character theory (as a complete theoretical framework in its own right) can provide us with insights into understanding the interrelation of character structure and human thinking, feeling and actions. His writing shows this delicate interrelation and does it in a skillful way. Reading Fromm's many books, readers could hardly overlook his dexterity in the use of literary figures to illustrate abstruse theories. He analyses these figures from both classical and modern literatures, and then applies these literary characters to his own character theory. Thus Fromm's character theory could somehow offer inspiration for the interpretations of aesthetics, arts and literature as well.

In addition to his character theories in general, Fromm's "social character" theory occupies a unique position in the Western personality psychologies. For the first time Fromm has formulated the concept of "social character," extending his treatment from

the individual to the majority of people in society. And this has had influence on psychoanalytic counseling, therapy, public education and psychology. Fromm sees human personality in the process of assimilation and socialization. He inspects the development of personality and different orientations of character through the historic process of social development (or "social process" in his own words), whilst taking into account the cultural and economic factors.

The Concept of "Social Character"

In a footnote to *Social Character in A Mexican Village*, the authors assert that the concept in question was originally developed by Fromm when he spoke of the "character *matrix* common to all members of the group" in a paper "*Die Entwicklung des Christusdogmas*" published in *Imago* in 1930 (English translation: *The Dogma of Christ*). In 1932, Fromm developed his idea by using terms such as "the drive structure, the libidinous and largely unconscious attitude of a group." Eventually, he began to articulate the "character of a society." The English equivalent "social character" was used for the first time in Fromm's 1941 book *Escape from Freedom* ("Study" 7). In this book, Fromm analyzes the authoritarian social character of the lower middle class during Nazi's reign of terror. And in his 1947 book *Man for Himself*, Fromm discusses in detail four nonproductive orientations to which I will turn shortly. Furthermore, Fromm in his 1955 book *The Sane Society* discusses numerous newly emerged orientations of social character in contemporary capitalist world. It could be argued that the apparent logic connecting all these works is "Social Character" and its many orientations.

Then, what exactly does Fromm mean by "social character"? The answer is explicitly made by Fromm himself: 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 experiences and mode of life common to that group*" (*The Fear of Freedom* 239). Fromm posits that the character of an individual can be sub-divided into "individual character" indicating the "peculiarities by which these persons differ from each other" and "social character" referring to the "part of their character structure that is common to most members of the group" (238). It can be implied that human character is largely determined by his "social character" part, on the basis of which the peculiarities of individual character express themselves in actions. It is important to further clarify the difference between social character and individual character.

Social character deals with certain groups such as the working class, the middle class and other social groups. Social character must be defined as the character structure common to the overwhelming majority of a social group. Yet, it is not a summation of individual characters. For Fromm, social character has a decisive effect on the thinking, feeling and acting of the individuals of certain group. Fromm accepts Freud's dynamic concept of character. He writes, "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" (239). So, like individual character, social character can also channel and operate human energy in certain directions. It differs in that social character channels the *majority's* energy in the *same* direction.

Fromm then tells us of the respective function character serves for individuals and for societies. He summarizes, "the subjective function of character for the normal person is to *lead him to act according to what is necessary for him from a practical standpoint and also to give him satisfaction from his activity psychologically*" (243). An understanding of the function character serves for society is closely related to the mechanism by which the subjective function of character works for the normal individual. Because by adapting himself to social conditions, a normal individual can be satisfied both practically and psychologically. Thus, man may develop those "traits that *make him desire to act as he has to act*" (243 emphasis mine). This is, to some extent, what ideology does to us. At both psychological and practical levels, we believe that what we are doing is what we have to do and what we wish to do. Other options are simply veiled. There are alternatives, but we cannot see them, and even sadly we do not wish to see them at all.

Here, Fromm's example of man's changing attitude toward the concept of "work" is especially convincing. Fromm argues that there are significant psychological changes accompanying the economic development of capitalism. He thus writes,

A spirit of restlessness began to pervade life towards the end of the Middle Ages...Minutes became valuable...Work became increasingly a supreme value. A new attitude towards work developed and was so strong that the middle class grew indignant against the economic unproductivity of the institutions of the Church. (50)

Apparently, the rising capitalist mode of production has deeply transformed people's conception and attitudes toward time and work. And meanwhile capitalism is able to impose extraordinarily supreme values on the concepts of time and work. The

psychological changes in turn determine the way man acts. As Fromm suggests, modern man's intense desire for unceasing activity is subconsciously rooted in aloneness and anxiety. This is an important psychological phenomenon in capitalist society. He further points out, the "compulsion to work differed from the attitude towards work in other cultures, where people worked as much as it was necessary but where they were not driven by additional forces within their own character structure" (50). This "compulsion to work" does not come out of nothing but from the intrinsic demand of the capitalist mode of production. It serves well for the dominant economic structures just as every other capitalistic ideology does for the same.

In conclusion, Fromm asserts that the content of social character is determined by the corresponding social structure. Social structure consists of the economic, political structure and cultural modes of the society. Social structure can mould social character, by means of public education system and various social institutions. Hence, it can further determine the thinking and acting of the members of the society. Consequently, in order to keep the society running normally, the majority of members of different social classes or groups will have to act in line with the requirements prescribed by those social institutions. The genesis and development of man's actions, ideas and ideals are fundamentally based on the corresponding social structure. In the process of relating himself to the outside world, man can only survive and maintain his sanity by developing the dominant social character. In short, he has to live and fit in this very powerful social structure.

The Content of Fromm's "Social Character" Theory

In this section I will start with Fromm's personality theory, which consists of two elements, namely temperament and character. Since temperament has slight or absolutely no ethical implications and hence is less productive in engaging Fromm's psychology of ethics, Fromm's personality theory naturally shifts the focus on the latter, viz. characterology. Then I shall introduce Fromm's character theory in parallel with Freud's dynamic theory of character and carefully indicate their similarities and more important their differences in order to situate Frommian characterology's own dynamic nature of character traits rather than of behavioristic traits. Before discussing concrete types of character orientations, I will introduce Fromm's theories of two processes in man's life and of his relatedness with the outside world—with material things and with his fellow men (or himself) respectively; the former he calls the process of assimilation and the latter socialization. Subsequently I will give specific examples of Fromm's four non-productive character orientations in the process of assimilation: the receptive orientation, the exploitative orientation, the hoarding orientation and the marketing orientation; I will also explore further Fromm's concept of productiveness in the process of assimilation. Lastly I will offer samples of Fromm's symbiotic relatedness and withdrawal-destructiveness which are equally nonproductive orientations in the process of socialization.

In *Man for Himself* Fromm clearly established his personality theory and its content on the basis of the current human situation that he observed as: 1) man's biological weakness and 2) the existential and the historical dichotomies in man. True, such a bold assertion of a universal "human nature" itself has been questioned from a positivistic perspective by many critics. Nonetheless, Fromm sticks to the claim that

the "infinite diversity of personalities is in itself the characteristic of human existence" (36). And he continues to subdivide personality into two categories: the inherited psychic qualities and the acquired psychic qualities. Fromm adds that by "inherited" he means "temperaments, gifts and all constitutionally given psychic qualities," whereas he firmly locates the "acquired" psychic qualities in the very object of our study, namely character. Fromm then uses C.G. Jung's concepts of temperament of "introvert" and "extrovert" in order to illustrate a fallacy in applying "the difference in value to the difference in temperament" when we judge people (37). For Jung and Fromm, both introverts and extroverts are equally *good*, in the strictest ethical sense. Inasmuch as temperaments have no ethical implications for Fromm, our focus shall be diverted to a more complex conception of profound ethical meaning—character.

Here we also have two fundamentally different approaches. As I have pointed out earlier, Fromm preferred the dynamic to the behavioristic concept of character. What is the difference between the two? According to Fromm, it was Freud who developed the first and the most "consistent and penetrating" dynamic theory of character. It holds that character is a system of strivings that underlie behavior. So, by no means is "character" identical with "behavior pattern." However, this is a common error that has been made by the behaviorists who traditionally tend to define character as "the pattern of behavior characteristic for a given individual" (39). Hence the differences between behavior traits and character traits are significant. Again, by employing Freud's concept of unconscious motivation, Fromm could offer a vivid and convincing illustration in the case of parsimony. If a person is economical just because he encounters financial problems, a behavioristic explanation would be substantiated. However most often he is parsimonious because "he has a stingy character, which

makes saving an aim for its own sake regardless of the realistic necessity" (40). Apparently the person who has a stingy character is entirely unconscious of the motivation that propels his irrational parsimonious actions. It is not behavior traits that are at work behind this phenomenon. Character traits are. Fromm granted Freud's pioneering research in terms of dynamic character theory, but Fromm never embraced the latter's theory wholeheartedly, that is, without criticism.

Fromm, among many others, is most uncomfortable with the way in which Freud "interpreted the dynamic nature of character traits as an expression of their libidinous source" (41). Fromm chose to move on, to open up this unpromising "closed system," and to give up the "primarily isolated individual." He writes, a new concept was based on

the relationship of man to others, to nature, and to himself and this very relationship governs and regulates the energy manifest in the passionate strivings of man—as H.S. Sullivan properly defined as a study of interpersonal relations. (41)

Fromm disagrees with Freud in the latter's doctrine that libido is the basis on which the character is founded. Fromm writes, Freud's essential principle is "to look upon man as an entity, a closed system, endowed by nature with certain physiologically conditioned drives, and to interpret the development of his character as a reaction to satisfactions and frustrations of these drives," whereas he posits that his own fundamental approach to human personality is "the understanding of man's relation to the world, to others, to nature, and to himself" (*The Fear of Freedom* 249). With regard to their difference in approaching human personality, Fromm consequently restates Freud's famous "oral" and "anal" characters. Fromm acknowledges that

Freud's observations such as "child experiences pleasure at so-called erogenous zones (mouth and anus) in connection with the process of feeding and defecation" and "this fixation on the pre-genital level leads to sublimations and reaction-formations that become part of the character structure" are of great importance. However, Fromm states that Freud's explanation was erroneous in that: "he mistook the causal relation between erogenous zones and character traits for the reverse of what they really are" (250-2).

Fromm continues to make his case by pointing to the third important difference between his and Freud's thinking—their different interpretations of all "ideal" motives in man. Despite Ingleby's assertion in the introduction to *The Sane Society* that Fromm's central concepts of humanistic psychoanalysis are "purely metaphysical in nature" (38-50), Fromm reasons that ideals like truth, justice, and freedom are "genuine strivings" having "no metaphysical character" (*The Fear of Freedom* 252).

Last but not least, Fromm interestingly states that "Freud's psychology is a psychology of want." In Fromm's terms, psychological phenomena of "abundance" (which is the opposite of "want"), like love or tenderness, do not play any role in Freud's system. As we shall find out, love is a very important psychological phenomenon in Fromm's own socio-psychological system as Fromm's popular book on *The Art of Loving* reveals. Elsewhere Fromm clearly reiterates that the main difference in his theory of character from that of Freud lies in the proposition that "the fundamental basis of character is not seen in various types of libido organization but in specific kind of a person's relatedness to the world" (*Man for Himself* 42). To understand Fromm's theoretical encounter with Freudian dynamic character theory

and to ultimately grapple with his revisionism of his giant predecessor is, so to speak, to have a better understanding of Fromm's social analytic psychology that he so insisted in his own independent research over the years. To sum up, for Fromm personality is composed of temperaments and character. And since temperaments are naturally constituted (hence no ethical implications), character is thus of vital importance to Fromm's psychology of ethics and of character. Two approaches are available to define character; but Fromm apparently prefers dynamic traits to behavior traits.

Now I shall get back to the specific content of character after dealing with Fromm-Freud difference. Fromm believes that the fundamental entity in character is constituted by, in his own terms, "not the single character trait but the total character organization from which a number of single character traits follow" (42). He termed this particular organization "orientation of character." For Fromm, the orientations of character have different trajectories or expressions in two processes of living respectively, namely the process of assimilation and the process of socialization. He writes:

In the process of living, man relates himself to the world (1) by acquiring and assimilating *things*, and (2) by relating himself to *people* (and to himself). The former I shall call the process of assimilation; the latter, that of socialization... Man can acquire things by receiving or taking them from an outside source or by producing them through his own effort... Again man can relate himself to others in various ways: he can love or hate, he can compete or cooperate; he can build a social system based on equality or authority, liberty or oppression; but he

must be related in some fashion and the particular form of relatedness is expressive of his character. (42 italics added)

Here "relatedness" is of crucial importance in grappling with Fromm's distinction between assimilation and socialization. It is also the first of Fromm's five human needs. Human needs are those existential needs that go beyond the simple, basic and physiological ones. For Fromm, human needs are what make humans human. As human beings, we are constantly aware of our mutual separateness and we desire to overcome it by relating to the outside world. In the process of man's relating to things and people, as Fromm puts it, "the particular form of relatedness is expressive of his character" (42).

Now I shall deal with the various orientations of character respectively in the above-mentioned process of assimilation and that of socialization. First of all, in the process of assimilation, Fromm further sub-divides the orientation of character according to whether productiveness is present in the relation between individuals and the things that they tend to acquire or assimilate.

Non-productive Orientations

Fromm firstly theorizes about four different orientations of character: the receptive orientation, the exploitative orientation, the hoarding orientation and the marketing orientation. A careful reader shall find them all typical of capitalistic character types.

By "receptive orientation," Fromm means an orientation in which a person feels "the source of all good" to be outside, be it material or spiritual. It is not difficult to understand why people tend to feel the source of material good to be external.

Nevertheless it is not easy to understand why people also tend to receive affection, love, knowledge and pleasure and all those spiritual feelings from an outside source. Fromm reiterates the theme of love in *The Art of Loving*. He writes, "In this orientation the problem of love is almost exclusively that of 'being loved' and not that of loving" (*Man for Himself* 45). Hence people with receptive orientation in their character will tend to fall for people who provide them love or whatever seems like love. Love becomes an easy task that requires no effort. Moreover in the sphere of thinking, Fromm also points out that receptive people will tend to turn to others for needed information. Gradually these people with a receptive orientation will become intellectually paralyzed. For instance in the religious dimension, receptive people are perfect targets for preaching, because they "have a concept of God in which they expect everything from God and nothing from their own activity" (45). In ordinary life, a magic helper is always designed and desired as an equivalent of God. Psychologically these people tend to "feel lost when alone because they feel that they cannot do anything without help" (46). Here Fromm makes an interesting psychoanalytic observation. He claims that people of receptive character love food and drink. Hence for these people, being fed with food and drink in their dreams is a symbol of being loved. As Fromm observes, people with the receptive character orientation are in great numbers in the society. But they are not harmful to the public. Fromm points out "the outlook of people of this receptive orientation is optimistic and friendly" and they usually "have a genuine warmth and a wish to help others, but doing things for others also assumes the function of securing their favor" (46).

By "exploitative orientation," Fromm refers to an orientation which tends to regard the source of all good to be from the outside world. The difference between a

receptive and an exploitative orientation, however, as Fromm asserts, is that the latter "does not expect to receive things from others as gifts, but to take them away from others by force or cunning" (46). Fromm then offers his own observations which are extended to all spheres of human activity. For people with exploitative orientation, a love object must be hard to get, the harder the better because these persons tend to "grab and steal." In academic activities, these persons will not produce their own ideas even if they could but rather tend to steal ideas from others in the form of plagiarism. As to material goods, Fromm best captures this character trait by quoting their unique motto: "Stolen fruits are sweetest" (47). Comparatively, unlike the receptive type of people who are not harmful, Fromm points out the exploitative type have an attitude "colored by a mixture of hostility and manipulation" (47).

By "hoarding orientation," Fromm means an orientation that is essentially different from the previous two in that the source of all good does not come from the outside but from an internal accumulation. He points out that their sense of security is only based upon "hoarding and saving," whereas spending is felt to be a threat in itself. In the realm of spiritual good, they regard love as essentially a possession and "they do not give love but try to get it by possessing the 'beloved'" (48). Fromm then explores two characteristic elements in this hoarding attitude, which are especially useful to unravel the psychology of the hoarding type. One is that they are sentimental, nostalgic and henceforth intellectually sterile. The other quality is their "pedantic orderliness", and sometimes even to the extreme extent of "compulsive cleanliness" and "obsessive punctuality". We can see that Fromm's hoarding theory is powerful in explaining these psychological phenomena as well (48-9).

The fourth non-productive orientation is "marketing orientation" by which Fromm means a dominant characterological orientation that can only be found in the modern era when a market economy has become fully-fledged. Here is Fromm's description of the function of the market and his definition of the marketing orientation:

Nevertheless, the regulatory function of the market has been, and still is, predominant enough to have a profound influence on the character formation of the urban middle class and, through the latter's social and cultural influence, on the whole population. The market concept of value, the emphasis on exchange value rather than on use value, has led to a similar concept of value with regard to people and particularly to oneself. The character orientation which is rooted in the experience of oneself as a commodity and of one's value as exchange value I call the marketing orientation. (50)

In this passage, I find that Fromm's conception of marketing character orientation is analogous to Marx's notion of alienation in that under both circumstances, the subjects (Fromm's middle class professionals and Marx's wageworkers) sink to the level of *commodity*. In his famous *First Manuscript* (on Alienated Labor), writes Karl Marx, "the object produced by labor, its product, now stands opposed to it as an *alien being*, as a power independent of the producer" (*Marx's Concept of Man* 79). Experiencing a similar transmission of power from Marx's producer to the very product of the producer's labor, Fromm's modern man becomes powerless on the "personality market" which has only emerged a few decades ago. With his notion of "personality market" Fromm is thus able to explain exactly in what manner modern man has become miserably alienated and lost his power and sense of security. Fromm points out that people of all walks of life in the modern era, ranging from clerks to salesmen,

from business executives to doctors, from lawyers to artists, are all "dependent for their material success on a personal acceptance by those who need their services or who employ them" (*Man for Himself* 50). And moreover, on either the traditional commodity market or Frommian personality market, it is *exchange value* rather than use value that matters though of course the latter cannot be entirely ignored. So, just as a commodity that sells must be first of all in demand on the market, people's personality must also be sweet enough to warrant a demand on the personality market in order to sell. Fromm continues to explore what he describes as the mechanism by which a personality market works: "since success depends largely on how one sells one's personality, one experiences oneself as a commodity or rather simultaneously as the seller and the commodity to be sold." Therefore a modern man is merely concerned with "becoming salable" in order to make a decent living in a capitalist society (51).

Then how does a modern man lose his power, if our analogy previously established between Marx's alienation and Fromm's marketing orientation is effective? Fromm makes a strong argument. He asserts that, since modern man experiences himself simultaneously as the seller and the commodity to be sold, his self-esteem has been tied with "conditions beyond his control." In another sense, it is success that has the final say. A man's value is solely defined by the extent of his material success. "Hence one is driven to strive relentlessly for success, and any setback is a severe threat to one's self-esteem; helplessness, insecurity, and inferiority feelings are the result" (53). And moreover, there is a tricky transformation in terms of self-identity from "I am what I do" to "I am as you desire me." By the former Fromm means "the mature and productive individual derives his feeling of identity from the experience of himself as

the agent who is one with his powers" whilst by the latter he means "his powers and what they create become estranged, something different from himself, something for others to judge and to use." Since marketing orientation is one of Fromm's most important character orientations, I shall return to the subject after the whole content of social character is introduced.

Productive Orientations

The word "productiveness" frequently used by Fromm in his numerous books has been developed from an earlier concept of "spontaneity" that was originally introduced and described in *The Fear of Freedom*. And in Fromm's psychological system, the problem of spontaneity is "one of the most difficult problems of psychology" (222). To best illustrate the conception of spontaneity, Fromm juxtaposes a positive freedom and the opposite of spontaneity, namely compulsive activities. He writes:

Spontaneous activity is not compulsive activity, to which the individual is driven by his isolation and powerlessness; it is not the activity of the automaton, which is the uncritical adoption of patterns suggested from the outside. Spontaneous activity is free activity of the self and implies, psychologically, what the Latin root of the word, *sponte*, means literally: of one's free will. (222-3)

Apparently, just as spontaneity is a rare phenomenon in our society and in our culture, productiveness is also hard to attain although it is not completely absent. For instance, for Fromm artists (in most cases original and successful artists) and small children are samples of spontaneity. However, what about us ordinary adults? Are we spontaneous or not spontaneous at all?

Fromm posits that most mature individuals can experience instances of personal spontaneity especially when feeling genuinely joyful. "Whether it be the fresh and spontaneous perception of a landscape, or the dawning of some truth as the result of our thinking, or a sensuous pleasure that is not stereotyped, or the welling up of love for another person"—in these cases, the individuals to some extent feel spontaneous and productive (224). Notably in his next book *Man for Himself*, Fromm expands the concept of spontaneity to that of productiveness in human character. Now I shall take a closer look at it.

First of all Fromm states the connection between the concept of "productive character" and that of Freud's genital character in order to, in his own words, "serve as a preliminary approach to the concept of productive orientation" (*Man for Himself* 61). In one of his classics, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, Freud brings up the notion of "erogenous zone" ("The Basic Writings" 555) and makes a clear demarcation between Oral zone, Anal zone and Genital zone (557-8). For Freud, in the context of his notorious libido theory the word "genital" has profound sexual implications. Freud posits:

Among the erogenous zones of the child's body, there is one which certainly does not play the first role, and which cannot be the carrier of the earliest sexual feeling, which, however, is destined for great things in later life. In both male and female, it is connected with the voiding of urine (penis, clitoris) ... The sexual activities of this erogenous zone, which belongs to the real genitals, are the beginning of the later "normal" sexual life. (558)

Freud argues that it is nature's intention to establish the future primacy of the genital-erogenous zones. But Freud's theory is merely based on physiological observations such as "the anatomical position," "the overflowing of secretions" and the sensations of pleasure these genital zones are capable of producing. In other words, these activities of genital zones are essentially sexual in Freud's system.

Fromm carefully uses the Freudian terminology of "genital" character without borrowing its sexual implications. Symbolically, writes Fromm, the concept of "genital character" denotes exactly the meaning of "productiveness." "For the stage of sexual maturity is that in which man has the capacity of natural production; by the union of the sperm and the egg new life is produced" (*Man for Himself* 61). Robert B. Ewen asserts that Fromm's productive personality type roughly corresponds to the Freudian genital character "albeit without the sexual implications," which points to, according to Ewen, a fact that a productive character "results from social and environmental influences (such as parental behaviors), rather than from libidinal instincts" (195). For both Ewen and Fromm, the phenomenon of productive character largely results from social and cultural contexts. Therefore Fromm's socio-psychological explanation of the concept of "productiveness" provides us with an alternative to Freud's sexually implicated theory.

Since we have already mastered two essential issues related to Fromm's concept of *productiveness* and the notion of a "productive orientation," we shall move on to his own full definition of this important socio-psychological concept. Fromm writes:

The "productive orientation" of personality refers to a fundamental attitude, a *mode of relatedness* in all realms of human experience. It

covers mental, emotional, and sensory responses to others, to oneself, and to things. Productiveness is man's ability to use his powers and to realize the potentialities inherent in him. If we say *he* must use *his* powers we imply that he must be free and not dependent on someone who controls his powers. We imply, furthermore, that he is guided by reason, since he can make use of his powers only if he knows what they are, how to use them, and what to use them for. Productiveness means that he experiences himself as the embodiment of his powers and as the "actor"; that he feels himself one with his powers and at the same time that they are not masked and alienated from him. (*Man for Himself* 61-2)

In this passage Fromm posits in what productive way man is able to satisfy the so-called human needs in order to be responsive to those five existential needs (i.e. relatedness, creativity, rootedness, a sense of identity and a frame of orientation). The question of psychic productiveness is crucial in Fromm's concepts of man and society as is the question of mental health for all clinical work. With this Frommian approach to the question of mental health (and bodily health as well), we can better understand some social-character-related questions such as what are the aims of the dominant social character orientations and what are the aims of *productive* character orientation. With Fromm's concept of "productive orientation," we can further ask the following question: is there any possibility to reconcile what is good for society and for the individual? For Fromm, the answer is positive.

After Fromm offered his own definition of this ideal personality type, he continued to theorize about what is not meant by productiveness, about the differences between

"activity" and "productiveness," and about other nonproductive activities such as hypnosis, reaction to anxiety, submissive activity, automation activity, irrational passions and so on (61-3). And subsequently Fromm seems to present us a brief history of the concept of productiveness from Aristotle's system of ethics to Spinoza. Fromm also posits that Goethe and Ibsen's great literary works respectively expressed his concept of productive activity in a beautifully poetic form:

Faust is a symbol of man's eternal search for the meaning of life. Neither science, pleasure, nor might, not even beauty, answer Faust's question. Goethe proposes that the only answer to man's quest is productive activity, which is identical with the good....

Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*—written in the second half of the nineteenth century—is a critical analysis of modern man and his unproductiveness. ... He discovers at the end of his life that his exploitativeness and egotism have prevented him from becoming himself, that the realization of the self is only possible if one is productive, if one can give birth to one's own potentialities. *Peer Gynt* unrealized potentialities come to accuse him of his "sin" and point to the real cause of his human failure—his lack of productiveness. (67-71)

To "give birth to one's own potentialities," for Fromm, is the noble aim in being human. Only when this has been achieved, can man maintain his self and hence satisfy one of the five human needs—a sense of identity. The literary characters illustrated above indicate a transmission from unproductive to productive character. Fromm has faith in the possibility of the full realization of human potentialities. Fromm, as a renowned humanist, deeply influenced by the great literary works and

ideas in the German tradition, at many instances in his theoretical constructions, shares with his readers this sanguine understanding of man.

In general, through specific literary figures and exquisite analysis of the concept of productiveness, Fromm presents his theory of productive orientation as an ideal personality type of human beings. And he also offers two concrete examples of productive activities in the following passages, namely that of productive love and productive thinking. I shall return to the topic of productive thinking shortly in the following section, so that now I may move on to Fromm's formulation of various character orientations in the process of socialization (as against that of assimilation, a process on which we have just studied).

Previously, along with our exploration on the content of Fromm's social character, we have known that the process of man's living can be categorized as the process of assimilation (indicates man's relationship with things) and that of socialization (indicates man's interrelation with other people). Hence, in the process of socialization, viz. in the interpersonal relatedness, man may demonstrate the following differentiated orientations as Fromm tells us: "symbiotic relatedness," "withdrawal-destructiveness" and "love". Apparently "symbiotic" orientations and "withdrawal-destructiveness" correspond to the four types of nonproductive orientations in the process of assimilation I have just mentioned above. And here "love" in the process of socialization also corresponds to the concept of "productive love" in the process of assimilation.

Symbiotic Orientation

According to Fromm, in symbiotic relatedness a person is either actively or passively related to others in order to achieve a status of equilibrium. In symbiotic relatedness a person "loses or never attains his independence" even if he assumes an active role in the symbiotic relationship. Fromm then uses a nice metaphor (swallowed and swallowing) to illustrate this idea better. He writes: "he *avoids the danger of aloneness by becoming part of another person*, either by being 'swallowed' by that person or by 'swallowing' him. The former is the root of what is clinically described as masochism" (79-80, italics mine), and thus sadism too.

The italic part in the passage I just quoted draws special attention to a familiar theme that repeatedly appears in Fromm's works. To avoid the danger of aloneness, people willingly submit themselves to others or to other authorities, which is the very argument of Fromm's *The Fear of Freedom*. In it, Fromm examines the precarious situation of man in the so-called post-existentialist world. As our reading of the text shows, Fromm also deals with the theme of *symbiosis* and its two aspects, viz. masochism and sadism in detail when he enumerates three mechanisms of escape (viz. authoritarianism, automaton conformity, and destructiveness). Fromm asserts that,

I suggest calling the aim which is at the basis of both sadism and masochism: *symbiosis*. Symbiosis, in this psychological sense, means the union of one individual self with another self (or any other power outside of the own self) in such a way as to make each lose the integrity of its own self and to make them completely dependent on each other. The sadistic person needs his object just as much as the masochistic needs his. Only instead of seeking security by being

swallowed, he gains it by swallowing somebody else. In both cases the integrity of the individual self is lost. (*The Fear of Freedom* 136)

Thus Fromm is able to capture the essence of what symbiotic relatedness refers to in the context of character theory: a loss of "self". As one of the most prominent representatives of twentieth century humanism, Fromm is always concerned with the realization of the full potentiality of man's self. Henceforth, any kind of personality or character orientation that involves a loss of self is negative and unproductive in Fromm's thinking. This is also a strict benchmark Fromm and many other humanists use to measure the failings of contemporary capitalistic society. Therefore, Fromm proposes a kind of productive orientation wherever possible in his writings, in the forms of for instance productive love, productive thinking, rational reasoning or various other productive activities. Furthermore, the negative aspect of a symbiotic relatedness lies not only in its negating of self-identity, but even worse in its hostility towards others and mutual destructiveness.

Withdrawal-Destructiveness

Now I wish to discuss the "withdrawal-destructiveness" that is also extensively witnessed among interpersonal relations in our society. Fromm points out that, "while the symbiotic relationship is one of *closeness* to and intimacy with the object, although at the expense of freedom and integrity, a second kind of relatedness is one of *distance*, of *withdrawal* and *destructiveness*" (*Man for Himself* 81). Elsewhere in *The Fear of Freedom*, Fromm especially notes that the sado-masochistic strivings must be differentiated from that of destructiveness. Although in most cases these phenomena are tangled and blended we also need to know their difference, which according to Fromm's argument is that destructiveness "aims not at active or passive

symbiosis but at elimination of its object" (153-4). So in short, symbiosis aims at mutual dependence yet destructiveness aims at elimination of its counterpart.

In fact, Fromm made a slight yet further distinction between withdrawal and destructiveness. To Fromm, withdrawal is the main form of relatedness to others. And withdrawal has its emotional equivalent as "feeling of indifference toward others" (*Man for Himself* 81). If the claim that indifference is just the *passive* form of withdrawal is firmly grounded, destructiveness can be regarded as the *active* form of withdrawal. In Fromm's own words, "withdrawal and destructiveness are the passive and active forms of the same kind of relatedness, they are often blended, in varying proportions" (81).

To recapitulate the content of Fromm's social character is to better understand how Fromm's man under different social systems acquires either productive character orientations or non-productive ones. Readers could only have the whole picture in mind in order to understand each character type. For the purpose of illustrating the complete framework of Fromm's social character theories, I again wish to introduce Fromm's chart of character orientations which are frequently quoted by scholars (*Personality Theories*, Bem P. Allen; *An Introduction to Theories of Personality*, Robert B. Ewen).

character theory and the Marxist ideological critique after dealing with another important mediating mechanism—"social unconscious."

The Mechanism of Fromm's "Social Unconscious"

Fromm's social character theory serves as an important linkage between the social structure and ideas. So does his concept of "social unconscious." Investigations of the theories of the unconscious in the West achieved great headway. Three kinds of theories of the unconscious emerged: one is of course the Freudian "individual unconscious," one is the Jungian "collective unconscious" and another one is Fromm's "social unconscious." Freud built his theory of the unconscious on the ground of individual biologicistic mechanism, which naturally pushes the social out of its parameters. However, as one of Freud's numerous apostles, Fromm not only succeeds the classical "individual unconscious" theory but also extends the field of psychoanalytic investigation, diverting its attention from the individual to society. This, according to many scholars, has contributed greatly in deepening the study of the unconscious and is hence a milestone in the history of social psychology (Gui-bin Dai, 2001; Rainer Funk, 1994). I shall take a look at Freud's theory before turning to the notion of social unconscious.

In the attempt to explain dream-formation in his most important book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud develops a delicate theory of the unconscious and presents it in a well-formulated manner. In the chapter on "the psychology of the dream-process," Freud

ventured to assume two psychic "instances," one of which subjected the activities of the other to criticism, the result of which was exclusion

from consciousness. ... [We] now replace these "instances" by systems, the criticizing system will therefore be moved to the motor end. We now enter both systems in our diagram, expressing, by the names given them, their relation to consciousness. The last of the systems at the motor end we call the *preconscious* [Pcs.] to denote that the exciting processes in this system can reach consciousness without any further detention, provided certain other conditions are fulfilled ... The system behind it we call the *unconscious* [Ucs.], because it has no access to consciousness *except through the preconscious*, ... ("The Basic Writings" 459)

In Freud's topographical unconscious theory, it is of vital importance to distinguish the conscious from the preconscious and the unconscious. Because for Freud the conscious aspects are merely superficial and therefore not decisive whilst he attaches great importance to the Pcs. and in particular the Ucs., for the latter are fundamental drives for human behavior. Moreover, asserts Freud, there exists a kind of transference in the three: "an unconscious thought strives for translation into the preconscious in order subsequently to penetrate through to consciousness," and "a preconscious idea is repressed and subsequently absorbed by the unconscious" (508-9). As it is well-known, nevertheless, Freud eventually *attributes* the unconscious to man's sexual instinct and libido, which have been brutally repressed ever since his early childhood and can only obtain a false satisfaction by way of dreams, slips of tongue or pen. Sometimes, these unconscious strivings can be satisfied in the form of literary, artistic sublimations or technological innovations. Freud's unconscious theory has been hopelessly tinged by a kind of pan-sexism.

Although heeding the fact that Freud's exaggeration of libidinous drive is mistaken, Fromm has never been too naïve to ignore Freud's importance. Fromm asserts,

He is the founder of a truly scientific psychology, and his discovery of unconscious processes and of the dynamic nature of character traits is a unique contribution to the science of man which has altered the picture of man for all time to come. ("Beyond the Chains" 12)

By affirming Freud's place in mapping out the individual's unconscious processes Fromm's advancement in his own version of "social unconscious" therefore is well grounded. Fromm posits that it is inadequate to approach repression merely as the individual is concerned. A comprehensive understanding of the working of repression must take into account social repression as well. Where there is social repression, there is a social unconscious. And it is through his social unconscious theory that we spot a possible interrelation between social character and ideology critique.

Fromm continues to posit:

By "social unconscious" I refer to those areas of repression which are common to most members of a society; these commonly repressed elements are those contents which a given society cannot permit its members to be aware of if the society with its specific contradictions is to operate successfully. The "*individual unconscious*" with which Freud deals refers to those contents which an individual repressed for reasons of individual circumstances peculiar to his personal life situation. Freud deals to some extent with the "social unconscious" when he talks about the repression of incestuous strivings as being characteristic of all civilization; but in his clinical work, he mainly

deals with the individual unconscious, and little attention is paid by most analysts to the social unconscious. ("Beyond the Chains" 84)

This passage indicates that Fromm's social unconscious theory and the concept of social repression is, as a matter of fact, a reform of classical Freudianism. Fromm cannot take the full credit for his theoretical formulation of the concept of social unconscious despite the fact that we could better understand the concept of social character and its connectedness to ideology critique with his social unconscious. It is clear, at this point, that only a further study of Fromm's social unconscious can do it justice.

Fromm spends some time reiterating a few of Freud's most important notions, such as "the unconscious," "repression" (a term both Marx and Freud used) and "resistance" (85-93). And he sums up Freud's central thought in a concise proposition which runs: "man's *subjectivity* is, in fact, determined by *objective* factors" (95). Moreover, Fromm posits,

Man, so proud of his freedom to think and to choose is, in fact, a marionette moved by strings behind and above him which in turn are directed by forces unknown to his consciousness. In order to give himself the illusion that he acts according to his own free will, man invents rationalizations which make it appear as if he does what he has to do because he has chosen to do so for rational or moral reasons. (95)

Accordingly, it can be implied that the collective *subjectivity* of any given social group is also ultimately determined by *objective* social factors such as socioeconomic structures. Since the *subjective* ideas, ideals and ideologies of a certain social group are all products of the common character traits shared by the group in question, what

follows is again a Frommian argument that social character is determined by social structure (despite the *interaction* I have emphasized). In fact, it seems to be quite popular to pin down a determinism as such in social sciences (e.g. *subjectivity* determined by objective factors, character traits determined by social structure, not to mention Foucault's notion of discourse together with its immanent power in constructing *subjectivity*). With regard to the concepts of the unconscious and ideology critique, I would only discuss Althusser's classical formulations on "interpellation."

In a seminal essay titled "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)", Althusser states in the first place: *all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject (*Mapping Ideology* 130). Althusser goes on to explain what he truly means by the term *interpellation*:

I shall then suggest that ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!" (130-1)

Apparently Althusser's assertion is subversive in that it suggests all concrete individuals are constituted as "*subjects*." This tricky term, according to McClellan, assumes two different senses: one is of "an independent person" and the other is of "a subjective being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission" (29). As long as the

mechanism of interpellation works as the basic manner by which people communicate, it is rational that Althusser anticipates elsewhere that ideology will continue to exist even in a communist society. In other words, for Althusser ideology is an eternal phenomenon as much as for Freud unconscious is eternal. Strongly influenced by Freud and Lacan, Althusser has in effect bridged the gap between two most crucial concepts belonging to psychoanalysis and Marxism respectively; Fromm had been doing the same thing, only at a much broader level (the Freud-Marxist project).

With regard to Freud's argument that "man's *subjectivity* is determined by *objective* factors" and Althusser's concept of ideology, Eagleton has managed to clarify this matter within a short passage:

We might say that Freud's theory of ideology (though the term itself is hardly present in his work) is of an Althusserian cast. Indeed we have seen already that it is from Freud himself, via the detour of Lacan, that Althusser derives his notion of ideology as "lived relations", which exist largely at the level of the unconscious and involve an inescapable structure of miscognition. (*Ideology: An Introduction* 176)

Similarly, it could be argued that Fromm's social character and the mechanisms by which it is determined by social structure are also operative at an unconscious level, and only through investigating the social character can we really grapple with the complex concept of the social unconscious. Indeed, following his patient analyses of classical Freudianism, Fromm now comes to Marx's ideas on the concept of the unconscious. Marx, according to Fromm, "was able to give a much more concrete and precise expression to the idea of the function of human consciousness and the objective factors influencing it" ("Beyond the Chains" 97).

For example, Fromm notes Marx's observation of the "connection between consciousness and language". Inasmuch as language is a social construction, Marx saw and stressed the "social nature of consciousness" in a well-known passage cited by Fromm:

Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness, as it exists for other men, and for that reason is really beginning to exist for me personally as well; for language, like consciousness, only arises from the need ... Consciousness is therefore from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all. (99)

Marx goes on, only in general discussions, to affirm his position of "the determination of consciousness by social forces." And Fromm's interests and efforts also lie in demonstrating the mechanism by which this determinism works, or in his own terms, "how this determination operates concretely and specifically" (107).

According to Fromm, every given society "by its own practice of living and by the mode of relatedness, of feeling and perceiving, develops a system, or categories, which determines the forms of awareness." And this system operates, as it should be running normally, like "a *socially conditioned filter*: experience cannot enter awareness unless it can penetrate this filter" (109). It is not difficult to find out that Fromm, heavily influenced by Marx's ideas on language and consciousness, sees the linguistic as the primary mechanism of *social filter*, and hence of the social unconscious. Fromm noted an interesting linguistic phenomenon that in capitalistic society the number of people who prefer to think and speak "in terms of *having things*,

instead of *being* or *acting*" is increasing. Superficially, it is merely a linguistic preference to nouns over verbs. But Fromm extends his investigation in this simple case to that of two modes of living, *to have or to be*. Fromm states: "language, by its words, its grammar, its syntax, by the whole spirit which is frozen in it, determines which experiences penetrate to our awareness" (112). Readers shall find Fromm's ideas share insights with Lanca's. In fact, as Madan Sarup argues, one of Lanca's key ideas is that "the human subject is constituted through language. The subject is the subject of speech and subject to language" (53). Both thinkers see language as an important social dimension in determining awareness (or filtering the unconscious) and therefore in constituting human subject.

Aside from the linguistic mechanism in the operation of the social unconscious, Fromm also puts forward a *logic* mechanism which can equally make awareness possible. He also makes an interesting comparison between Aristotelian and paradoxical logic. However, according to Fromm, both the former two mechanisms are not as important as the third one, viz. *social taboos*. Fromm employs examples from "primitive" and present societies in order to investigate the phenomena of social taboos, which is apparently influenced, again, by Freud's works (for instance, *Totem and Taboo*). Then he comes up with a crucial conclusion that has tremendous impact on our understanding of modern ideologies. It reads, "the repression of the awareness of facts is, and must be, supplemented by the acceptance of many *fictions*" ("Beyond the Chains" 117). Thus in Fromm's critical eyes, there are many fictitious ideologies that are "fed into us" in capitalist society, such as:

We are Christians; we are individuals; our leaders are wise; we are good; our enemies (whoever these happen to be at the moment) are bad;

our parents love us and we love them; our marriage system is successful; and so on, and so on. (117)

Ironically, on the other side of the Iron Curtain:

The Soviet states have constructed another set of ideologies: That they are Marxists; that their system is socialism; that it expresses the will of the people; that their leaders are wise and work for humanity; that the profit interest in their society is a socialist profit interest and different from the capitalist profit interest; that their respect for property is that for socialist property and quite different from the respect for capitalist property; and so on, and so on. (117)

As it shall be shown, Fromm distances himself from both systems, though he mainly takes capitalistic society as the object of critique. In conclusion, the concept of the social unconscious and the various mechanisms of social filter proposed by Fromm can greatly enrich our understanding of his sociopsychological concept—the social character. And his critique of the whole realm of capitalist society can thus offer insights in interpreting numerous ideologies produced therein.

Social Character and Ideology Critique

Now that we have studied the full content and some fundamental principles of Fromm's social character (and social unconscious) theory, together with a few significant discrepancies between Fromm and Freud's psychological systems, we could at this point take a closer look at Fromm's own formulations of two major capitalistic social characters and examine whether the interrelation of these social character orientations and ideology critique is as intimate as I assumed. Here Funk's periodization of the three orientations of social character identified by Fromm

throughout his lifelong research is of particular use (see section on methodology). First of all, we shall study the authoritarian orientation, a phenomenon that attracts Fromm's attention in his first major book *The Fear of Freedom*. Meanwhile we shall study the problem of ideology within the Marxist tradition. I shall apply Terry Eagleton's well-received introduction on the domain of ideology to our study, for he asserts that ideology is the central concept of Marxist criticism and thus his idea is of particular use in understanding the subject matter.

I. Authoritarian Orientation

Funk notes that the period of Fromm's research in and theorization about authoritarian orientation spans from 1930 to 1939. In 1930, Fromm joined the Frankfurt School upon an invitation from Max Horkheimer and then became a member, and there he was devoted mainly to a study of the authoritarian psychic structure of social entities. The study was the basis for a lengthy scholarly debate on authority and authoritarianism published by the institute later on. Before discussing Fromm's concrete analysis of the wide-spread phenomenon, viz. authoritarianism, summed up in his 1941 book *The Fear of Freedom*, the general theoretical basis on which our central argument is founded shall be introduced first.

An iteration of our main argument in detail seems to be necessary here: since Fromm asserts that the development of the *psychic* structure of social entities, i.e., the social character shared by the majority people of certain groups or a given society, depends on *socio-economic* structure corresponding to the given society, he is able to offer an explicit explanation how ideologies arise from the *interaction* of the psychic apparatus and the socio-economic conditions whilst traditional Marxism fails to do so. If

Fromm's social analytic psychoanalysis can help explain how the socio-economic interests and structures are transformed into ideologies, as well as how ideologies in turn shape and influence human thought and behavior through the medium of social character and social unconscious, we are led to endorse Fromm's formulation of the social character theory as an alternative to traditional Marxism in the understanding of capitalist ideologies. Hence it offers a powerful ideological critique of capitalist reality.

First of all, what is ideological critique and what is ideology anyway? To be able to answer this complex question, I shall use Terry Eagleton's text *Ideology: An Introduction* together with David Hawkes's valuable study in this field as our starting points.

"Ideology," perhaps, is a word with much exposure in Eagleton's prolific writings. Eagleton mentions this word nearly in each of his numerous essays. His 1991 book *Ideology: An Introduction* presents a systematic study and elaboration of the domain of ideology. To some extent it does make sense to equate Eagleton's theories with a sort of theory of ideological critique. In *Criticism and Ideology*, he goes as far as to claim that ideology is the focus of Marxist criticism, which is itself part of a grander theoretical analytic system that aims to *understand* ideology—those concepts, values and feelings through which people experience the very society they are living in. And of course some of the elapsed concepts, values and feelings we can only attain from within the realm of literature. To understand ideology, thus is to better understand our past and present, which forms a sort of emancipatory understanding that is conducive to our own emancipation (2-3).

According to Eagleton's study, the suffix of ideology namely

-ology means the science or study of some phenomenon; but by a curious process of inversion 'ology' words often end up meaning the phenomenon studied rather than the systematic knowledge of it.

(Ideology: An Introduction 63)

Similar things happen to notions such as "methodology," "biology," "geology" and "ecology." So when the French thinker Antoine Destutt de Tracy invented the word "ideologie" in prison during the French Revolution, it originally denoted "the *scientific* study of human ideas; but fairly soon the object took over from the approach, and the word rapidly came to mean systems of ideas themselves" (63 italics mine). We can see from its original denotation that ideology is a concept generated in the Enlightenment era, and the concept is rooted deep in the "Enlightenment dream of a world entirely transparent to reason, free of the prejudice, superstition and obscurantism of the *ancien regime*" (64). However in our own time, ideology has been frequently referred as the antithesis of science. To say somebody is colored by ideology is to demean his thinking as unscientific and hence undesirable. Eagleton also points out a paradoxical truth in the conceptual development of ideology in history. Back then an ideologist was represented more often as a critic of ideology, "in the sense of the dogmatic, irrational belief systems of traditional society" (64). But as Eagleton investigates that, the critique of ideology conducted by the so called ideologists was, as a matter of fact, "an ideology all of itself" in that 1) it argued for John Locke's empiricist philosophy which "is itself deeply bound up with bourgeois ideological assumptions" and 2) the appeal to a disinterested nature, science and reason "simply masked the power interests which these noble notions secretly served"

(64). Eagleton's critique of the early ideologues is piercing and illuminating. The paradox he rightly points out betrays the complexity of the nature of ideology ever since it was brought to inception by Antoine Destutt de Tracy.

Eagleton goes on to discuss the career of de Tracy and his vicissitudes throughout Napoleon's reign. Although Marx, as Eagleton told us, attacked de Tracy severely in both *The German Ideology* and *Capital*, "dubbing him 'a cold-blooded bourgeois-doctrinaire'" in the latter work, the scholar Emmet Kennedy carefully found out a possible influence de Tracy's treatise had on Karl Mark:

the appearance of this work of bourgeois political economy as part of a general science of ideology might have firmed up in Marx's mind the connection between the two. In other words, it might have helped to shift Marx from his view of ideology as mere abstract ideas to his sense of it as political apologia. (69)

Be it a political apologia, ideology has already been seen as abstractions, gradually shifting from "denoting a skeptical scientific *materialism* to signifying *a sphere of abstract, disconnected ideas*" (70 italics mine). And Marx and Engels will appropriate the second meaning in their writings in no time. Eagleton offers a lucid historical development of the notion of ideology which is, in my opinion, a process of dematerialization. This process ends when Marx began to take up the renewed connotations.

According to Eagleton, Marx's theory of ideology can be best seen as part of his more general theory of alienation, a concept closely linked to that of reification. In fact, as Eagleton points out, the theory of Marxist ideology embodied in Marx and Engels's

1846 work *The German Ideology* "belongs with this general logic of inversion and alienation" (70). He explains that:

Consciousness is in fact bound up with social practice; but for the German idealist philosophers whom Marx and Engels have in their sights, it becomes separated from these practices, fetishized to a thing-in-itself, and so, by a process of inversion, can be misunderstood as the very source and ground of historical life. If ideas are grasped *as autonomous entities*, then this helps to naturalize and dehistoricize them; and this for the early Marx is the secret of all ideology. (71 italics added)

Here it could be argued that the early Marx's influence on Erich Fromm is obvious. Fromm has on many occasions buttressed his argument on the basis of Marx's fundamental teaching: it is not consciousness that determines social being but on the contrary, social being that determines consciousness. In respect of his social character, Fromm claims that, men's ideas, ideals and consciousness are not independently autonomous but are inclined orientations produced by their character structure and personality traits. The latter in turn are not naturally constituted but determined by the socio-economic structures, or social practices, or as Marx famously put it, social being. Therefore, through the medium of social character, Fromm is able to discuss and anatomize ideologies in relation to social being.

Notably, Fromm's method of unmasking ideology can be summarized by his own words: "Any psychological analysis of an individual's thoughts or of an ideology aims at the understanding of the *psychological roots* from which these thoughts or ideas spring" (*The Fear of Freedom* 57). Now I will examine specifically in what way

Fromm juxtaposes the super-structural authoritarianism and the corresponding capitalist socio-economic substructure from which the authoritarian social character orientation springs, which is exactly the central theme of *The Fear of Freedom*.

Firstly I shall introduce Fromm's approach and compare it with those of other sociologists. Fromm in this book frequently alludes to Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. So, clearly, Weber's religious-sociological thinking offers insights into Fromm's own approach to the relations between Protestantism (or as Weber interprets it, *ascetic rationalism*) and the germination of capitalism. However, their thoughts differ in many ways. According to Fromm, Weber's is an *idealistic* position, holding that "the new religious ideas are *responsible* for the development of a new type of economic behaviour and a new spirit of culture" (*The Fear of Freedom* 254). As we shall find out that Weber's idealism can be implied from the following passage:

The next task would be rather to show the significance of ascetic rationalism ... for the content of practical social ethics, thus for the types of organization and the functions of social groups from the conventicle to the State. Then its relations to humanistic rationalism, its ideals of life and cultural influence; further to the development of philosophical and scientific empiricism, to technical development and to spiritual ideals would have to be analyzed. ("Protestant Ethic" 124-5)

In this passage Weber goes so far as to claim the significance of "ascetic rationalism" for the formation and function of the State. Apparently, the State, as a material construct, can hardly be related to merely a kind of "rationalism". Ironically, by the end of this widely-studied treatise, Weber was soberly aware that it was not his

intention to "substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and of history" (125).

On the contrary, Fromm's position is a Marxist (or, to be precise, materialistic) one as I have affirmed before. After introducing Weber's idealistic explanations for the rise of capitalism and its culture, Fromm states his own version:

we have assumed that ideologies and culture in general are rooted in the social character; that the social character itself is moulded by the mode of existence of a given society; and that *in their turn the dominant character traits become productive forces shaping the social process*. With regard to the problem of the spirit of Protestantism and capitalism, I have tried to show that the collapse of medieval society threatened the middle class; that this threat resulted in a feeling of powerless isolation and doubt; that this psychological change was responsible for the appeal of Luther's and Calvin's doctrines; that these doctrines intensified and stabilized the characterological changes; and that the character traits that thus developed then became productive forces in the development of capitalism which in itself resulted from economic and political changes. (*The Fear of Freedom* 254-5, italics added)

Thus, Fromm has in clear prose established his argument. The sentence in italics shows that it is not a simplistic one-way determinism between social process and character traits, but rather a two-way *interaction*, an essential mechanism in Fromm's social psychology as I have postulated before. To put it in general terms: social process determines the individual's mode of existence or mode of life (viz. his

relatedness to the outside world, to material things, to others, and to his work and so on and so forth) and moulds the individual's character structure in the form of different character orientations as I have discussed previously; fresh ideologies—religious, philosophical, cultural or political ones—"result from and appeal to" this modified character structure and thus "*intensify, satisfy, and stabilize*" it; these newly formed character traits in their turn become important factors in further economic development and therefore influence the social process. An interesting phenomenon is that, in Fromm's words, although those new character traits originally "have developed as a reaction to the threat of new economic forces, they slowly become productive forces furthering and intensifying the new economic development" (*The Fear of Freedom* 88). To admit that character traits are also productive forces in forming economic structures is to offer an original alternative to tackle Marx's base/superstructure dichotomy (or dilemma), provided social character truly serves as the medium mediating super-structural ideologies and the economic base.

Secondly, as far as authoritarianism is concerned, Fromm discusses its concrete mechanism from the period of the Reformation to the modern era. And as we shall find out, Fromm manages to demonstrate that the further development of capitalistic society affected personality traits in the same direction which it had started to take in the period of the Reformation. Fromm points out that the capitalistic system is able to create contradictions. It is true that under capitalism, man was relatively developed yet he was much more helpless; modern man gained more freedom yet he became more dependent. Fromm thus concludes, "he becomes more independent, self-reliant, and critical, and he becomes more isolated, alone, and afraid" (90). At first sight, it is

difficult to understand modern man's psychological contradiction. Only dialectical thinking can understand these paradoxes, apparently.

In a positive sense, Fromm tells us that "What Protestantism had started to do in freeing man spiritually, capitalism continued to do mentally, socially, and politically" (90-2). He then verifies that modern men indeed achieve more freedom both in economic and political realms. But what is more important is that an explanation of modern men's feeling of insignificance and powerlessness is required. Fromm offers the first as well as the primary factor—the economic factor to support his argument. Under a capitalistic economy, the principle of individualistic activity places the individual "entirely on his own feet" (93), thus creating a sense of isolation, aloneness and insecurity. Yet even sadly, whilst modern man devotes all his energy to strive for material success *all by himself* he actually has not become "the centre and purpose of all activities" (93). Echoing Marx, Fromm rightly points out that in the medieval system capital was the servant of man; however in the modern system, capital has become man's master instead.

Fromm favors the theory of "means and ends" in order to further buttress his argument. He writes, under a capitalist society "economic activity, success, material gains, become ends in themselves" (95). Subjectively, these phenomena have made modern man "work for extrapersonal ends, made him a servant to the very machine he built, and thereby [have] given him a feeling of personal insignificance and powerlessness" (96). This too is true as Marx's theory of alienation, in particular Marx's concept of the "fetishism of commodities" and of the "alienation of labour" is

applied. Moreover, Fromm continues to account for modern man's feeling of powerlessness and alienation:

Not only the economic, but also the personal relations between men have this character of alienation; instead of relations between human beings, they assume the character of relations between things. But perhaps the most important and the most devastating instance of this spirit of instrumentality and alienation is the individual's relationship to his own self. (103)

In other words, for Fromm modern man is *selfless* in the sense that his self no longer belongs to him. The phenomena of alienation under capitalism are found on multiple levels. Hence capitalist alienation is all round; this very system is the culmination of alienation.

If alienated from himself, then how can modern man gradually develop an authoritarian character orientation? Or is modern man simply not responding to his deep sense of insecurity? If he develops mechanisms by which he is able to counteract the influence of powerlessness, then what are these mechanisms? Are these mechanisms socially constituted and therefore ideological? In general, it is safe to claim that ideology certainly plays a vital role in this process. First of all, according to Fromm, there are numerous mechanisms or, in his own words, "factors to help him overcome the overt manifestations of this underlying insecurity" (104). They are respectively, to name but a few, "the possession of property," "prestige and power," "family as a source of individual prestige" and "national pride (in Europe frequently class-pride)" (104-5). It was these factors and the conventional ideas (or ethics)

accompanying them that firmly backed up modern man's fragile and weakened *self*, if there is one.

Nevertheless, these back-up factors or mechanisms were only intended to "compensate for insecurity and anxiety" (105). Yet the deeper psychological functions they are meant to perform must be distinguished from the positive factors that truly made modern man freer, for instance, *factual* economic and political freedom and the growing rational enlightenment project. It can be seen again that Fromm's thinking is dialectical. In the following passage Fromm alludes to a Marxian ideological analysis that focuses on the function ideology performs in class society:

The supporting factors, on the other hand, only helped to compensate for insecurity and anxiety. They did not uproot them but *covered them up*, and thus helped the individual to feel secure consciously; but this feeling was partly only on the surface and lasted only to the extent to which the supporting factors were present. (105 italics mine)

A careful reading of this text leads our attention to Althusser. Because, as McClellan posits, like Gramsci, Althusser is also against any conception of ideology as false consciousness, a cliché that had originated from Marx's collaborator Engels (28).

McClellan goes on to assert that Althusser develops this radical non-orthodox stance partly

because he is not interested primarily in the possible falsehood of ideology but rather with *the function it performs*; more importantly he does not see ideology as a product of people's minds but as having itself a quasi-material existence which defines what people think and is

embodied in our society in what he calls 'ideological state apparatuses' such as churches, trade unions and schools. (28, italics mine)

Here McClellan's investigation is particularly important in that it could be argued Fromm's own treatment of ideology in capitalist society can be seen as extensive and as broad as Althusser's. As the most articulate thinker and the creator of the famous "ideological state apparatuses," Althusser is not actually the first one who has noticed the practical role and function ideology performs in social construction. According to Eagleton, interestingly, it was the founding father de Tracy who had a book on it: *Projet d'elements d'ideologie: a l'usage des ecoles centrals de la Republique*. It was "a clear enough indication of its practical, political character, its role within what Althusser would later call the 'ideological state apparatuses'" (*Ideology: An Introduction* 67). Therefore, for both thinkers, ideology is simply the theoretical expression of an all-pervading strategy of social construction and reconstruction, in which de Tracy, Althusser, Fromm, Eagleton and many others are key functionaries themselves.

Althusser's concept of 'ideological state apparatuses' (ISAs) was originally developed as an appendix to the Marxist theory of the State. In his classic text "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" Althusser made a summary of the traditional Marxist theory of the State:

(1) the State is the repressive State apparatus, (2) State power and State apparatus must be distinguished, (3) the objective of the class struggle concerns State power, and in consequence the use of the State apparatus by the classes (or alliance of classes or of fractions of classes) holding State power as a function of their class objectives, and (4) the

proletariat must seize State power in order to destroy the existing bourgeois State apparatus... (109)

Apparently, there is no place for ideology in the State theories hailed by traditional Marxism. The State is seen as the "repressive State apparatus" only. With this strict one-dimensional framework, Fromm cannot possibly explain the interrelation between individual and the society through his concept of social character. However, Althusser offers his observations of a pervasive State apparatus, which is responsible for social construction and the making of ideologies.

Althusser proposes his own thesis on the theory of the State. He takes into account not only the distinction made between State power and State apparatus but, more importantly, "*another reality* which is clearly on the side of the repressive State apparatus, but must not be confused with it" (110). It is this "reality" that Althusser called "ideological State apparatuses (ISAs)". Althusser made clear that classic Marxist theory regards the State Apparatus (SA) as comprised of the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc., which constitute what he in future would call the "Repressive State Apparatus (RSA)," with the term "repressive" suggesting that the SAs in question function by *violence*. On the other hand, for Althusser, ISAs are regarded as "a certain number of realities" that have already taken a (quasi-)material form. In fact, ISAs according to Althusser are simply equal to those different social institutions from which the overwhelmingly vast majority of subjects can hardly escape. He enumerates various kinds of mundane ISAs:

The religious ISA (the system of the different Churches);

The educational ISA (the system of the different public and private "Schools");

The family ISA;

The legal ISA;

The political ISA (the political system, including the different Parties);

The trade-union ISA;

The communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.);

The cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.). (110-1)

Apparently, as Eagleton suggest, Althusser's is a functionalist approach. So states Eagleton: "a functionalist approach to social institutions reduces their material complexity to the status of mere supports for other institutions, placing their significance outside themselves" (*Ideology: An Introduction* 147). On the basis of his critique of the functionalist approach to the question of ideology, Eagleton attacks Althusser's bold argument in which schools, churches, families and media are viewed "*sheerly*" as ideological structures, "with no other purpose than to buttress the dominant power" (147). He continues to show that these social institutions do much more than merely support the ruling class or the "dominant power". Schools surely instill patriotism; but meanwhile they also teach children how to fasten their shoelaces, as Eagleton argues. Eagleton concludes,

All of these institutions, in short, are internally *contradictory*, serving different social ends; and though Althusser sometimes recalls this, he just as quickly represses it again. Not all aspects of such apparatuses are ideological all of the time: it is misleading to think of the

ideological "superstructure" as a fixed realm of institutions which operate in an invariable way. (148 italic mine)

In the passage I quoted a moment ago by Fromm, he allocates important social functions as well to institutions ranging from family, media, and trade unions to nation state, which all intend to produce a sense of belonging, security or pride. Fromm further accentuates that these *supporting* institutions serve to maintain an individual's sense of security and even his sanity in a vastly unknowable society, by cunningly covering up reality. When discussing the monopolistic phase of capitalism, Fromm posits that the trade unions have not only "improved the economic position of the worker, but have also had the important psychological effect of giving him a feeling of strength and significance in comparison with the giants he is dealing with" (*The Fear of Freedom* 109). From this passage, I could argue that Fromm's approach to social institutions (including trade unions) is, though in some sense functionalist, not in the strictest sense Althusserian. As a social theorist, Fromm is always able to see the positive elements and neutral functions the social institutions perform even in the so-called ISAs. Hence Fromm's social psychology is not a static one but rather, a Marxist dialectical one. And therefore it could offer valuable critical insights with regard to the critique of ideology in capitalist society of our present day.

Finally, as to Fromm's theorization about the authoritarian orientation in the social character, I can briefly sum it up here by addressing Chapters Five and Six of his book *The Fear of Freedom*. Previously I have been working on Fromm's analyses of the inception of modern man's sense of powerlessness, insecurity and loneliness. Analyses and expositions have been offered, spanning from the period of the Reformation to the modern era, in which the capitalistic mode of production has fully

emerged. As a result of the immense insecurity experienced by the isolated individual in the modern era, the most convenient way for him is to escape from the reality. Thus Fromm offers his investigation of three mechanisms of escape (from freedom): authoritarianism, destructiveness and automation conformity. Therefore, authoritarianism can be best seen as a psychologically handy reaction to an isolated individual in the capitalistic mode of existence. And moreover in the subsequent Chapter Seven analyzing the psychology of Nazism, Fromm managed to build a convincing argument with the practical application of his theory of authoritarianism.

It is, in fact, not his further theorization about the psychological strivings (masochistic and sadistic—which I only briefly touched upon earlier) that work behind the phenomenon of authoritarianism which constitutes the main subject of the current study; rather it is his powerful debunking of the interrelationship between the interacting economic order, its social institutions, social character and ideologies that repays study. As long as Fromm is capable of revealing the essential mechanism by which social structures are transformed into ideologies, his theory shall still be relevant in any practical ideological critique intended on the capitalist society for a long time. Now I shall turn to another important investigation made by Fromm in the marketing orientation of social character to examine how his ideological critique works.

II. Marketing Orientation

Fromm started to view the marketing structure of character as a conformist and escapist mechanism in his book *The Fear of Freedom* and eventually identified it as the marketing character in *Man for Himself*. It is to this book I shall re-turn in the

following section. Previously I have introduced the definition of the "marketing orientation" given by Fromm. Now it can be seen that Fromm firmly bases his investigations of this typical character orientation on various realms of capitalist society.

In examining the dominant non-productive social character orientation, Fromm attacks the capitalist marketing orientation by exposing its alienating effects and its capability to transform people into *living commodities* on the personality market. It was his delicate use of a trope (the handbag-human analogy) that vividly illustrated the commoditization of modern man's essential humanity (*Man for Himself* 51). He states that one has to be like a handbag and to be *a la mode* on the personality market "in order to be in fashion one has to *know* what kind of personality is most in demand" (51). Where does this kind of knowledge come from?

Like Althusser's formulations on educational and family ISAs with regard to the marketing orientation, Fromm also posits that this "*knowledge* is transmitted in a general way throughout the whole process of education, from kindergarten to college, and implemented by the family" (51-2). Fromm goes on writing that:

The knowledge acquired at this early stage is not sufficient, however; it emphasizes only certain general qualities like adaptability, ambition, and sensitivity to the changing expectations of other people. The more specific picture of the models for success one gets elsewhere. The pictorial magazine, newspapers, and the news-reels show the pictures and life stories of the successful in many variations. Pictorial advertising has a similar function. (52)

It is in reading this passage that one is encouraged to endorse Rainer Funk's commentary in his introduction to Fromm's *Man for Himself* which reads "it is fascinating to see how Fromm in 1947 described this marketing orientation and how visionary he was in regard to what happens today" (x). Fromm was able to predict an overwhelming role that the media plays in shaping modern man's marketing character. Fromm also blamed the motion picture industry for transmitting the "*desired* personality patten to the average man" (52, italic mine). Ironically, the desired personality is not *desirable* at all in the sense that it deviates from a productive human nature for which Fromm fights hard.

To buttress his argument, Fromm observed a few interesting scenes such as young girls emulating the facial expressions or gestures of a Hollywood megastar (boys turning crazy about World-Cup heroes). Superstars and millionaires become man's "saints and because of their success they embody the norms for living" (52). Modern man is very likely to be driven by, so to speak, the American (day-) Dream; he thus develops, with the interference (or help) of various social institutions, his adaptability fitting in the dominant market-orientated social character merely in order to realize his dream. But he only finds a *selfless* man. Man experiences himself as selfless; moreover, his Other are also experienced as commodities rather than real living person. On the universally permeating personality market, both man and the Other "do not present *themselves* but their salable part" (53). These Self-Other conditions naturally color human relationships at all levels.

Fromm in the following passage captures a man-to-man relatedness:

When the individual self is neglected, the relationships between people must of necessity become superficial, because not they themselves but interchangeable commodities are related. ...Everybody is involved in the same battle of competition, shares the same striving for success; all meet under the same conditions of the market. (54)

This superficial character of human interrelationships thus strengthens his thirst for individual love, for they believe that a love relationship might offer a way out of this indifferent human world. However, Fromm asserts that this wishful thinking is not going to be the case because "love for one person and love for one's neighbor are indivisible" (54). To be sure, the former relationships are only a more intense expression of the relatedness to man prevalent in that given culture. Hence, Fromm claims, "it is an illusion to expect that the loneliness of man rooted in the marketing orientation can be cured by individual love" (55). Again, with the indoctrination of educational systems (sometimes, intelligence test designers) and various cultural institutions, thinking has degenerated to the degree of merely wishing to know the "surface features of things" and the truth has become an "obsolete concept." Critical thinking has been dislodged somehow by a prevalent pragmatism. What is worse is the fact that "Knowledge itself becomes a commodity" (55).

A deep skepticism toward *knowledge* itself seems to have become a sociological cliché. However, Fromm here is not fighting the battle for the Truth alone. In the point of view of some theorists, knowledge has to be understood in the context of varied social situations and cultural patterns, as Fromm insisted. Take for example Karl Mannheim who argues for a "sociology of knowledge". He states:

Rather, the sociology of knowledge seeks to comprehend thought in the concrete setting of an historical-social situation out of which individually differentiated thought only very gradually emerges. Thus, it is not men in general who think, or even isolated individuals who do the thinking, but men in certain groups who have developed *a particular style of thought* in an endless series of responses to certain typical situations characterizing their common position. ("The Sociology of Knowledge and Ideology" 238)

This "common position" can be translated into Fromm's social structure in which man encounters different yet most often "typical situations." In responding to these situations, man develops distinctive modes of thinking and perceiving (or "a particular style of thought") and a distinguishable social character. Mannheim was a prominent thinker on the theory of ideology in the non-Marxist tradition. To examine the similarities and differences between his and Fromm's formulations on the relations between ideas and social structure may help understand Fromm's ideology critique better.

To establish his own general "total theory of ideology," Mannheim needs first of all to distinguish between a special theory of ideology and his own:

Mannheim's treatment of ideology, leans heavily in the direction of his German "historist" predecessors. This is very clear in his approach to Marxism which is his point of departure in developing his own self-reflective theory of ideology. Previous to Marx, there existed only a "particular" conception of ideology. ... The particular conception of ideology merely rejected *what* was said and convicted its opponent of

error—the very condition of which was a shared conceptual framework; with the total conception of ideology, by contrast, it was the conceptual framework itself which was brought into question. (*Ideology* 37)

So, it was Mannheim who proposed a methodological shift in the study of ideology. With his self-reflective stance, Mannheim also saw the fact that a Marxist position can be "formed against Marxism itself" (38). And in effect, this eminent non-Marxist theorist transformed the Marxist theory of ideology into a "*method of research*" ("The Sociology of Knowledge and Ideology" 236-240). In McClellan's view, Mannheim's "sociology of knowledge" thus established a framework with which we could investigate the interrelationship between "changing structures of thoughts and changing historical situations" (*Ideology* 38).

However, McClellan also tells us, Mannheim's formulation of the sociology of knowledge raises two preliminary questions that must be answered initially. The first one would be, in McClellan's words, "What sort of knowledge does the sociology of knowledge investigate?" McClellan cites Mannheim's reply to this question: it is "the attempt to reconstruct the whole outlook of a social group, and neither the concrete individuals nor the abstract sum of them can legitimately be considered as bearers of this ideological thought-system as a whole" (38). In other words, Mannheim's sociology of knowledge intends to investigate social reconstruction, which is what Fromm does too.

It is not surprising to find out that Fromm's sociopsychological investigation is also meant as an "attempt to reconstruct the whole outlook of a social group." And what is more, Fromm's definition of social character centers on the character *matrix* of the

majority of a group, which accords here with Mannheim's distinction between "concrete individuals" and "the abstract sum of them". Therefore, both Fromm's Subjects of social character and Mannheim's legitimate "bearers of this ideological thought-system as a whole" are belonging to certain *social groups* as such.

McClellan introduces the second question which Mannheim failed to answer: "what is the relationship of these thought systems to society?" Mannheim did not define precisely the nature of this relationship, nor did he offer a reductionism, according to McClellan's investigations (38-9). However, Fromm's psycho-social formulations seem to provide a plausible answer. Because as I have noted, Fromm's is not a straightforward causal relationship in which *knowledge* always has a social origin. Although Fromm insists on the extensive impacts social structures have on individual thoughts, ideas and hence character traits, he never put it in a simplistic language. As I have emphasized before, Fromm's sociopsychological *interaction* is crucial in the whole character theory.

Another difference between Fromm and Mannheim lies in the problem of relativism. McClellan offered a relatively charitable commentary by concluding that "the charge of relativism is clearly misplaced" with regard to Mannheim (40). Though both Eagleton and McClellan saw Mannheim's efforts to distinguish between relativism and his own *relationism*, their views diverged on this point. According to Eagleton, Mannheim

speaks up for what he calls "relationism," meaning the location of ideas within the social system which gives birth to them. Such an enquiry into the social basis of thought, he considers, need not run

counter to the goal of objectivity; ... by a process of self-monitoring, we can come to appreciate the limits of our own perspective, and so attain a restricted sort of objectivity. (*Ideology: An Introduction* 108)

However, in practice, *self-monitoring* is a rarity. In a somewhat satirical tone, Eagleton intentionally identifies Mannheim as "the Matthew Arnold of Weimar Germany, concerned to see life steadily and see it whole." He goes further to claim that Mannheim's approach only "pushes the question of relativism back a stage" (108-9).

Eagleton cannot accept this kind of metamorphosis of relativism. Because he observes that Mannheim's "sociology of knowledge" inescapably serves an ideological function. This ideological function aims at, in Eagleton's words, defusing "the whole Marxist conception of ideology, replacing it with the less embattled, contentious conception of a 'world view'" (109). Can Eagleton's charge be applied to Fromm's own formulation of ideology? It remains a crucial question to which I shall turn in the following section.

Social Character and Critical Commentary

Generally speaking, Fromm's social character theory, as I have shown, is unique among various Western personality psychologies and hence repays systematic study. So far, in discussing his social character theory and notions of social unconscious, social filter and social cement in relation to the central concept in the Marxist tradition—ideology critique, I firmly believe that Fromm's social character theory could offer numerous insights into our understanding and interpreting of the human world and various societies in which we lived, are living or will live in the future. For instance, in the concluding section I intend to briefly discuss Fromm's theory of

authoritarian personality in relation to some of the psychological traits of the Chinese people. Nonetheless, like many other theoretical systems, Fromm's system has defects that merit critical attention. In fact, one of the most significant features of Critical Theory is the fact that this theory itself must be subject to critical examination (or self-monitoring). In this respect, Fromm's social character theory is no exception.

In synthesizing a Marxist sociology and a Freudian psychoanalysis, Fromm without doubt has to resort to some of their important conceptions and practices, such as the concept of alienation, the psychology of ethics, and psychotherapy. I shall briefly deal with these issues in the following section, with a focus on how Fromm establishes his own theory and how some scholars intentionally misjudge him. For instance, one Chinese scholar charges that Frommianism is essentially an idealism, and Fromm's concept of alienation fundamentally rejects revolution (Shi-xin Liu, 2002). Liu pretends not to notice a fact that has already been pointed out by many critics that Fromm's concept of alienation is based on Marx's own labor alienation theory.

First of all, to investigate the *interactive* relatedness between individual thoughts and social structures, Fromm places social character into the broad social context (including economic, political and cultural realms), which is a clear indication of antithesis of Freud's notorious biologism and instinct theory. Fromm is also firmly against the behaviorist position which holds that characters are merely expressions of behavior patterns. Tremendous social changes and new cultural patterns have occurred since the sexually repressive Victorian era, on the grounds of which Freud investigated the human unconscious and worked out his system. Fromm's own social character theory, therefore, is a relatively timely production of the twentieth century

Western world, producing a neat social-cultural analysis of human character in advanced industrial capitalist societies. And what is more, Fromm has reconstructed his own sociopsychological system based on the notion of individual character, thus bringing out the concept of "social character" for the first time. Along with this imaginative creation, he worked out a systematic character typology, theorizing about a sequence of social character orientations which correspond to modernized Western societies. Fromm's ideas thus provide a theoretical framework for further analysis of personality type in Western societies. Meanwhile, Fromm also extends the object of psychoanalytic study from limited singular psychotic cases to the vast majority members of a given society or certain social groups. By extending the object of psychoanalytic investigation Fromm is able to reveal the shared personality of a group, which has special political, economic and cultural implications for that given period.

To be sure, Funk has made the significance of a Frommian approach to psychoanalysis clear. He states:

Doubtless this way of looking at man is plausible if you study society by analyzing the social character of persons living under similar conditions. But the attraction of this specific psychoanalytic approach of Fromm's is not diminished by looking at an individual or a patient. Here you are, in the first instance, acquainted with the *social character* of a specific person that Fromm is always primarily interested in. ... for Fromm it is the orientation and the traits shared with others that assume decisive importance according to their dynamic nature and weight. This focus on common traits and orientations is just the opposite of our normal way of looking at people. Especially in

psychotherapy we prefer the individualistic point of view and thereby overestimate what is most individual. ("Social Character and Its Relevance for Clinical Practice" 341-360)

Funk's commentary does justice to Fromm's imaginative approach in psychotherapy. Whilst traditional psychotherapy tends to focus on what is idiosyncratic or rather abnormal in an individual patient, Fromm's attention is devoted first of all to the patient's normal traits or orientations shared with others living under similar social conditions. Only when the knowledge of the social character matrix is obtained, can the psychotherapist offer a comprehensive and plausible diagnosis.

Secondly, Fromm upholds the conviction that even though it might be distorted and frustrated, human nature is still capable of pursuing perfection and thus bringing its potentialities into full play. This, arguably, is one of the most distinctive features Fromm's character theory has. Not surprisingly, Fromm's firm belief in the possibility of the full realization of Self is conditioned by the spirit of humanism which characterizes Frommian ideas. Reading Fromm between the lines in numerous instances, we cannot help but being deeply impressed by a spirit of unflinching optimism which is so rare, in Freud's works for example. Fromm's sanguine attitude toward human potentiality and its realization can be best represented in his 1955 book *The Sane Society*, in which he asks a crucial question that if "The human race had the wisdom to create science and art; why should it not be capable to create a world of justice, brotherliness and peace" (v)? His answer is positive. To this book I shall return in the section of Closing Remarks.

Thirdly, Fromm's ingenious combination of a character theory and ethics is another significant contribution not only to the discipline of social psychology but also to an interdisciplinary social science as a whole. For instance, Fromm argues that a *productive* man is also a man with *virtue*. In his *inquiry into the psychology of ethics* (subtitle of *Man for Himself*), Fromm states that "the real ethical alternative is not between them but between repression-indulgence on the one hand and productiveness on the other" (171). This typical statement of Fromm's was a historical breakthrough to some extent. Fromm also posits that "alienation" is both an ethical and psychological issue. And because of Fromm's advocacy of such a psychology of ethics, many other personality psychologists have to confront the ethical issues such as right or wrong, good or evil aside from their own exclusive field. Moreover, as David Ingleby in the introduction to *The Sane Society* has argued, Fromm's ability to "combine a psychological level of analysis with historical, sociological and philosophical insights" perhaps is one of the most valuable features in Fromm's works. Indeed, Fromm made significant contributions to the Freudo-Marxist project often in a "more cogent" fashion than those of his Frankfurt School colleagues ("Introduction" li).

Finally, through analyzing and appraising his core concept of social character, we are prompted to offer a rough and far from comprehensive commentary on Fromm's *humanistic psychoanalysis* as a system. Fromm's humanistic psychoanalysis can be formulated in this way: *humanism* as its fundamental principle; *psychoanalysis* as its methodology; the conviction of a *human nature* as its point of departure (also theoretical foundation); and *alienation* as its central concept. Thereby Fromm launches a comprehensive critique of the *psychopathic* character of capitalistic society

in the hope of creating a truly sane society which, in his own terms, should be a Humanistic Communitarian Socialist one.

In this respect Fromm offers many illuminating insights. First, when modern Western society embraces a so-called highly-advanced materialistic civilization, Fromm remains at a critical distance. With his powerful vision, Fromm has instead started an extensive critique of capitalistic society at all levels including philosophical, economic, social and psychological, focusing on crucial issues like "repression," "manipulation" and "alienation." Like Adorno, Fromm thus challenges capitalist society by subverting the *rationalization* of its very existence. Through designing a social reformative blueprint aimed at solving the capitalist crisis, Fromm offers an alternative which is seemingly much more attractive. From the point of view of China, Fromm's ideas provide a frame of reference and thereby offer constructive insights and advice in China's building up a Socialist society. Second, by insisting on a productive human character and the full realization of human potential, Fromm emphasizes that under any social circumstances humans must be more important than *things* they have created. This invaluable conviction in humanity has special implications as well for today's China, where ironically on a tremendous scale a so-called Socialist market economy has been in process. In short Fromm's humanistic psychoanalysis and his warning against a loss of self under China's new market economy can serve as a heterophony whilst the whole nation hails capitalism.

However, despite the positive comments, the limitations and defects in Fromm's theories can only indicate that he too is *human*. It is a strange world in which the most enchanting ideals enthusiastically received are most often rejected with equal fervor.

Take for example Fromm's insistence on a human nature that highlights love, reason, productiveness and self-realization. It was Fromm's conviction concerning a universal human nature that was charged with the most severe criticism (e.g. labeling his thoughts as "essentialism", "idealism" and so on), so was the concept *humanism* itself. This is obviously too complicated a matter to address here (Rainer Funk had a chapter on "the Humanism of Erich Fromm and Its Critique," 1982). Perhaps, as Tony Davies concludes,

the task of defining humanity has passed elsewhere. Others will tell us *if we are human, and what that means*. Whether it leads in turn to new humanisms, and whether they will find a way to avoid the essentialism and imperialism of the old, it is much too early to say. (*Humanism* 135, italics mine)

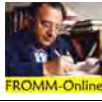
Davies holds a distanced and rational stance toward the question of humanity. What is humanity? To my point of view, "others" will never answer the question in the name of man. This is a question posed to man since the very first day he came into being. It is legitimate to ask such a question; yet the answer is easily fallible.

Aside from this inescapable charge, Fromm's teaching has been frequently savaged as a kind of "utopianism" simply because Fromm is stubbornly against any form of violent revolution. This labeling is especially championed among scholars in China (for instances, Jun-kang He, 1995; Gui-bin Dai, 2001; Shi-xin Liu, 2002 and so forth). But some of the opposing views by these critics are clearly misplaced. Take for example Shi-xin Liu who simply identifies Frommianism as *utter* Historical Idealism. Liu's argument is based on the following grounds. He first states that Fromm's concept of alienation is an ontological one which has its roots in human existence; hence

Fromm proposes that all forms of alienation are in the form of alienation of human nature. Liu thereby criticizes Fromm for not being able to analyze the phenomena of alienation at the level of *class* relations. He claims that Fromm failed to see the relations of production and relations of class formed in the course of man's protests against nature; therefore, Fromm repudiated the economic sources and class sources of human alienation and all together, a proletariat revolution.

Arguably I might say Liu himself is deeply biased by the ideology of class struggle, and hence has consciously overlooked many important dimensions of Fromm's works, especially Fromm's philosophical-anthropological ideas. Since Fromm always regards the human situation as the key to and the departure point of his humanistic psychoanalysis, he at several points theorizes about this central theme. When he deals with it again in *The Sane Society*, Fromm indeed argues for man's existential needs as they "stem from the conditions of his existence" (26) but he only came to discuss the phenomenon of alienation within a capitalistic society (117). And there is no further evidence that Fromm posits an ontological view of alienation as such. In a single section that deals with alienation, Fromm clearly assigns the phenomenon of alienation as "the central issue of the effects of Capitalism on personality" (117).

As to the accusation of Frommianism as *utter* Historical Idealism, it only requires careful reading of Fromm's essay "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology" (also anthologized in *The Erich Fromm Reader*) in which Fromm argues for a social psychology that is a combination of psychoanalysis and historical materialism. Fromm's argument has been proved well-grounded ("Reader" 9-15). With regard to the irresponsible accusation that Frommianism is utopian, one can look



to his *magnum opus*, *The Sane Society* for retorts. It is to this specific *polemic* that the final section is devoted.

Part V Closing Remarks

Proposing a "Sane Society" in the first place implies a yardstick that can be theoretically and practically grounded. For Fromm, this yardstick is what he terms "man's needs." For many suspicious scholars, this yardstick is simply Fromm's own ideal. As I have already claimed, whether there exists a human essence or man's need as Fromm insisted is still one of the most complex problems that many scholars in the humanities face. Also, it is one of the most challenging difficulties within Fromm's humanistic psychoanalysis that he has to confront. My study cannot offer a solution in this regard. But I do think, as long as the doctrine of the ancient philosopher Protagoras is concerned—"man is the measure of all things"—Fromm's candid humanism and his unflinching belief in a universal human nature remains a significant source for our own critical thinking.

Proposing a "Sane Society" also suggests there are roads toward it. Otherwise, this sane society can only be seen as another sexy utopia. In this respect, it is Fromm's theorization about the ways of realizing such a sane society that should attract contemporary China's attention. Ironically, it is also Fromm's rejection of a violent revolution in realizing such a society that irritates most Marxist scholars in China. However, I want to argue that most Chinese scholars misinterpreted Fromm's visions and assertions. In Chapter Eight "Roads to Sanity" Fromm establishes his argument:

I shall arrive at the conclusion that sanity and mental health can be attained only by simultaneous changes in the sphere of industrial and political organization, of spiritual and philosophical orientation, of character structure, and of cultural activities. The connection of effort

in any of these spheres, to the exclusion or neglect of others, is destructive of *all* change. (264-5)

Fromm in the following pages meticulously explains what those economic, political and cultural transformations really are if a sane society is to occur. Thus, Fromm does not ignore the *economic* structures and *political* transformation as some Marxists claim. Even though the Chinese scholars know that a proletariat revolution cannot be possible in the kind of contemporary capitalist society Fromm has in mind, they do not wish to admit it. Or rather, they just do not feel comfortable abandoning the weapon of class struggle to embrace a "Marxism without a proletariat" (this could be said of many Chinese scholars' attitudes toward Western Marxism). Their criticisms of Fromm's repudiation of revolution in the realization of a sane society are superficial and therefore groundless.

On the other hand, I think Fromm's proposal of a multi-dimensional transformation in realizing a sane society is of particular significance to China's striving for a socialist society. Recently under the pressure of the polarization of the rich and the poor, China's government has pledged to build a *harmonious* society. A harmonious society without sanity cannot be imagined. Fromm's vision of a sane society thus offers valuable insights for China. Also, just as we understand that democracy cannot work in an alienated society, so too an economically harmonious society without political transformation is impossible. China has to simultaneously bring about transformations in respects to economics, *politics*, culture and psychology in order to achieve a genuinely harmonious socialist society. Along with these changes, the psychological traits of the Chinese may shift from largely an *authoritarian* to a democratic one. Here Fromm's social character theory can help explain the authoritarian personality of the

Chinese. I want to suggest a return to Fromm's psychological system despite the fact that his "Sane Society" is, fundamentally, a political project. Because, in answering what is really at stake reading Fromm today, as a Chinese scholar, I find Fromm's importance for China does not lie in an imaginative political construction (China already has one), but rather in his stressing the psychological realms of social changes.

With Fromm's social character theory, I want to argue that the authoritarian personality of the Chinese poses an obvious obstacle in realizing a harmonious society. First, the authoritarian personality of the Chinese finds its expression in interpersonal relations in the form of superior-inferior. In other words, they attach great importance to each other's gender, age, social position, income and other factors in order to categorize. There is always an invisible ranking working behind you, him/her and me. If you are superior to me, then I will treat you as you are greater. Otherwise, I feel lost as to how to respond properly. Second, the Chinese people tend to treat those superior to them as absolute authorities and hence obey the authorities unconditionally. This can be argued as a manner of solidifying different social groups in order to achieve social stability, but I deem it as a product of ideology. Another psychological trait in the authoritarian personality is a simplistic polarization of man: good or bad; people belong to my side or the outside. The above general psychological traits constitute the most important ethical codes in Chinese society. Without them people will not respond to others as usual. With them, however, a truly harmonious society can hardly be maintained in that the authoritarian people cannot be essentially productive as Fromm posits.



This is only a tentative application of Fromm's social character theory to Chinese society. Further research in Fromm's humanistic psychoanalysis and social analytic psychology will produce more evidence that Fromm's ideas can still help us understand better the individual and contemporary society, both West and East. More importantly, with Fromm's social character theory, an interactive relation between the individual's psyche and social structures can be substantiated. And it is from this very interaction that Fromm's ideological critique of capitalist society obtains illumination and power. At the same time, on the other side of the world, it is, as I have argued, Fromm's insistence on the psychological realms in social changes that is at stake for China's socialist construction. I do wish the study can serve my purpose well in justifying the above reading of Erich Fromm.

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