

action unaccountably produces harmful consequences. We praise courage; a man is destroyed by his own courageous act. We praise honesty; one's honesty brings the ruin of his friend. In the moral life, the hard problems arise not when good clashes with evil or virtue with vice but when good runs against good and virtue against virtue. Then goodness and justice appear under the aspect of radical ambiguity. Can we find no surer guide through this ambiguity than Aristotle, who can advise us only to shun excess, to take care for the context of action, and push nothing past its limits?

The source of this danger lies in taking particular virtues or vices as the subject matter of ethical study. The philosopher isolates, say, courage or honesty from their surroundings and takes them to his workroom. There he dissects them, hoping to lay bare their inner structure. Having done that, he has already committed the error that forecloses further understanding. A virtue or a vice taken by itself is ambiguous and loses its ambiguity only when it is seen in context. This context has two parts: the character structure of the actor, and the stage of action on which he plays his role.

The stage of action is as variable as life itself, so variable that no two situations are ever exactly the same. Hence the theorist can do little with this sector of the context of ethical study beyond keeping himself open to its heterogeneity and variability. He can at best think of typical contexts in which man must live. The theorist might, for example, treat of domestic virtue, virtue in the life of business, ethics in wartime and ethics in peacetime, virtue in public life, the ethics of friendship, and so forth. Such a classification must remain very rough, however, and the theorist must recognize that none of his arguments or examples can have universal application. He must be prepared to see each of his prescriptions modified by circumstance.

It is possible to say that a prescription can be at once universal and modified by circumstances. A number of old natural law theorists, such as Aquinas, as well as a number of modern writers, such as Stammler, with his search for a "natural law with a changing content," have said substantially this. That, however, is not a solution to the problem posed by the discontinuity between ethical situations, but only a way of stating it.

The theorist can do a good bit more with the sector of context which is made up of the character structure of the person of whom the virtue is predicated. Like events and situations, persons come in an infinite variety. Yet it is possible to talk about types of men in a language precise enough for ethics. Pythagoras divided those who came to the Olympic games into three types. Plato arranged the citizens of a state into three classes. These were early characterologies, that is, classifications of men on the basis of their salient talents, traits, and attitudes. Each category represented a certain way of looking at the world, a typical relationship to things and men, a style of life.

Recent developments in psychology make possible great advances toward the achievement of a subtle and scientific characterology. Such an achievement, quite obviously, holds great promise for the advancement of ethical philosophy. Depth psychology in general, and psychoanalysis in particular, have illuminated large and hitherto impenetrable areas of the psychology of ethics. Freud's explorations of the dynamic unconscious, and the analyses of such psychic processes as rationalization, sublimation, projection, and repression—these and similar advances make possible great strides in our understanding of ethical subjects and in the development of ethical philosophy.

It is evident that the promise of depth psychology for the development of positive ethical systems has not been



fulfilled. On the whole, the application of psychoanalysis to ethics has meant a savage debunking of the latter. Psychoanalysis has been used to unmask ethical pretensions, to strip away the objectivity of ethical claims, to reduce ethical positions to rationalizations of instinctual demands. The application of psychoanalysis to ethics has been destructive rather than constructive. Perhaps this was inevitable, given the orientations of the early analytic movement. Or, it may be only a particular manifestation of the temper of our age, which is analytic and critical, rather than synthetic and constructive. Whatever the reasons, the fact itself is indisputable. Psychoanalysis has certainly contributed much toward a greater honesty in our attitudes toward ethics, but it has not contributed much toward the construction of sound and positive conceptions of the good life.

This suggests part of the interest and importance of Fromm's work. The chief strength of his approach to ethics is that it rests on a sensitive appreciation of the fact that any discussion of virtue or vice is ambiguous unless the discussion proceeds from the recognition that the meaning of a virtue or vice is a function of the character of the person of whom the virtue or vice is predicated. Fromm opens his study of ethics with a theory of character, for, as he puts it, "*the virtuous or the vicious character, rather than single virtues or vices, is the true subject matter of ethical inquiry.*"² Fromm's theory of character, and the conception of the good man which flows from it, represents one of the few attempts to apply psychoanalytic principles and concepts to the construction of a portrait of the good man and a conception of the good life.

The theory of character compels attention for another reason: its breadth. It represents a bold attempt to blend the dissimilar geniuses and insights of Marx and Freud. To this basic stock, just add a little Hippocrates for dramatic

color, some Harry Stack Sullivan for that uniquely American tang, a dash of Rousseau for piquancy, and you have it. The mixture is remarkably successful. It is the finest part of Fromm's work, the one part of which it can be said without qualification that his eclecticism has issued in a fruitful synthesis. No single component of the theory is original with Fromm, but the ingredients are blended in such a way as to produce a new whole which is greater than the sum of the parts. The originality and strength of the theory come, I think, from the brilliant way Fromm makes one science mirror another. In this part of his work there is something more than a section of psychology, one of sociology, and another of economics—the usual result of interdisciplinary attempts in the social sciences. Rather, each science is reflected in the other and all are made to bear upon a single problem. Fromm achieves this integration of the several sciences through a closely knit fabric of definitions and conceptions which is at once descriptive and normative.

The Theory of Character

The theory of character starts with a definition of personality, which is "the totality of inherited and acquired psychic qualities which are characteristic of one individual and which make the individual unique."³ In the main, inherited or constitutional qualities are synonymous with temperament, and acquired qualities are synonymous with character. Following Hippocrates, Fromm distinguishes four temperaments: choleric, sanguine, melancholic, and phlegmatic. Hippocrates connected each of these with a specific somatic source, and modern researches on temperament, such as those of Kretschmer and Sheldon, still retain this basic link between temperament and somatic processes. As



a concept, temperament refers to the speed and intensity of one's typical reaction to experience. The choleric's reaction, for example, is "quick and strong." Temperament, since it is constitutional, is unchangeable. One does not choose or make his temperament, he inherits it. Hence "differences in temperament have no ethical significance."⁴

If we know a man's temperament we can say in general how he will react, but we cannot say what he will react to. To know that, we must know something about his character as well, for while temperament determines how one reacts, character determines both the kinds of persons, events, and situations he reacts to and the general content of his reaction.

Character, unlike temperament, is a social product. It is formed primarily by one's early experiences, though it can be changed to some extent by new insights and new experiences. It is the great problem of dynamic psychology to understand the processes by which character and culture interact. It is, similarly, the great problem of ethics to develop a critical characterology, for differences in character "are expressive of the degree to which an individual has succeeded in the art of living."⁵

Fromm's conception of character differs from both the behaviorist and the Freudian conceptions. Behaviorist psychology considers character traits as synonymous with behavior traits. Character is simply a pattern of behavior: a man's character is the cluster of behaviors typical of him. Freud, on the other hand, developed a penetrating theory of character as a system of strivings which underlie, but are not identical with, behavior. He appreciated the decisive point, which is that character traits underlie behavior and give behavior its real meaning. He also understood that the basic entity in character is not the single trait but the total character organization or orientation from which the single

traits follow. Further, Freud recognized the conative and dynamic nature of character traits. He knew that a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions are in great measure determined by the structure of his passions and are not merely the results of rational responses to realistic situations: "man's fate is his character." Finally, with the insight of genius, Freud found that the seething energies which form the core of character inhabit a realm of psychic life which lies far below the rind of consciousness.

Fromm follows Freud on all these points—and disagrees on the fundamentals. In his view, Freud saw much that no man before him had seen, but he saw it all aslant. Freud, the greatest psychologist who ever lived, was just fundamentally wrong about human nature. His basic error, Fromm thinks, was to conceive of man as a closed system of biological forces rather than as a being who is fundamentally socially conditioned. This means that while Freud's clinical observations were strikingly keen and of great importance, his explanations and interpretations were profoundly wrong.

In contrast to Freud's biologism, Fromm sees man as essentially a social product. "Man's nature, his passions, and anxieties are a cultural product; as a matter of fact, man himself is the most important creation and achievement of the continuous human effort, the record of which we call history."⁶ This difference in starting points has important consequences for psychology in general and for characterology in particular. Given the premise that man is primarily a social being, it follows that all psychology is at bottom social psychology. Here is Fromm's statement of the point.

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, in our opinion, the fundamental approach to human personality is the understanding of man's relation to the world, to others, to nature, and to himself. We believe that man is *primarily* a social being, and not, as Freud assumes, primarily self-sufficient and only secondarily in need of others in order to satisfy his instinctual needs. In this sense, we believe that individual psychology is fundamentally social psychology or, in Sullivan's terms, the psychology of interpersonal relationships; the key problem of psychology is that of the particular kind of relatedness of the individual toward the world, not that of the satisfaction or frustration of single instinctual desires.⁷

For characterology, the difference means that the basis of character is to be found in the fundamental style of a person's relations with the world and not, as Freud thought, in various types of libido organization. Fromm offers two definitions of character, each of which emphasizes the differences between his own and Freud's conception. "Character . . . 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." And: "Character can be defined as the (*relatively permanent*) form in which human energy is canalized in the process of assimilation and socialization."⁸

"Assimilation" and "socialization" are technical words for Fromm. In the process of living, a person relates to the world in two ways: (1) by acquiring and using things; and (2) by relating to other people and himself. The former process Fromm calls assimilation, and the latter socialization. The two processes, patently, are closely related, and each has a number of forms. In anticipation of later discus-

sion, it will be enough at this point simply to note that each process has five forms or orientations. The orientations in the process of assimilation are the receptive, the exploitative, the hoarding, the marketing, and the productive. The five styles of socialization are masochism, sadism, destructiveness, automaton conformism, and love. The orientations in both processes are respectively related as listed above: the person whose assimilative style is that of receptiveness will usually follow the masochistic way of socialization; the hoarding character is destructive; and so on.

The task of psychology, then, is to understand how the conditions of life make character and how character in turn molds history. Fromm's solutions to these problems are straightforward. To live, man must work and produce. It is through work that man is brought into the stream of society and assigned a certain place in relation to other men. Work is always concrete, a specific kind of work in a specific kind of economic system: one works as a slave in ancient Athens, a serf in feudal France, a salesman in modern America. Different kinds of work require and create different character types. Fromm holds with Marx that a man's character is a function of his position in the system of production and distribution: "the mode of life, as it is determined for the individual by the peculiarity of an economic system, becomes the primary factor in determining his whole character structure, because the imperative need for self-preservation forces him to accept the conditions under which he has to live."⁹ In summary, Fromm's psychology, which is fundamentally social psychology, is specifically Marxian social psychology.

Fromm agrees with Freud that the early experiences are crucial in molding character, though he does not give them all the weight that Freud does. At first glance, this seems to run counter to Fromm's insistence that society,



and especially its economic institutions, molds character. How can the child, who after all does not work and who has little contact with the life of society, be molded by it? The answer is, through the family, which transmits society to the child. "The character of the child is molded by the character of its parents in response to whom it develops. The parents and their methods of child training in turn are determined by the social structure of their culture. The average family is the 'psychic agency' of society. . . ." ¹⁰ Thus, the core of the child's character becomes similar to that which is common to the members of his class and culture. Fromm calls the complex of traits thus acquired the "social character," which he formally defines as "the core of a character structure common to most people of a given culture. . . ." The social character is "*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.*" ¹¹

Around this common core cluster all the variations which make of each human being a unique individual. The variations arise from many sources: personality differences between parents; material and psychological differences between environments; genetic differences; and so forth. The relation between social and individual character may be thought of as a linear scale or continuum. On one end of the scale are people whose characters are composed almost entirely of social norms and conventions. At the other end are the extreme deviants, those who depart widely from the conventional patterns. ¹²

At this point it is necessary to say again that Fromm's purposes are always both scientific and moral. His analyses of the social character and of the forces that make for individual variation are scientific, but his final concern is moral. Every society has a social character, but what matters is

whether that social character is good or bad. Every individual deviates to some extent from the social character, but what matters ethically is not the amount of deviation but its direction. The deviant may be a creative genius or an ineffectual eccentric. Fromm's ultimate purpose is not merely to understand social and individual character but to make them good. He wants to build social conditions which will assure both that the social character will be good and that individual deviations from it will go in a productive direction.*

This part of the theory of character concludes with a treatment of the functions character performs for the individual and for society. One's character does for him what instinct does for the lower animals. It channels his energy and relieves him of the impossible burden of having to make a deliberate decision to cope with every situation. One need not think out his behavior in every situation: he acts "true to character." A person's character also conditions his perceptions, ideas, and values, thereby stabilizing the environment and making it appear consistent and reasonable. Character also provides the individual with motives for doing what his social position requires him to do and offers him psychological rewards for performing the role which society assigns him. As Fromm puts it, "the subjective function of character for the normal person is to *lead him to*

* One passage in the above should be modified. It is correct in principle to say that Fromm does not value individual differences from the social character merely because they are differences. But when the social character is radically bad, as it is in modern America, for example, then individual departures from it, even in a nonproductive direction, are valuable as such. This explains Fromm's admiration of the neurotic, for the neurotic is one who has not given in to the deadening demands of an evil social character. The neurotic knows he is sick and his differences from the mass make him feel the pain of his sickness. His pain provides the power which can move him toward a cure. But for the masses who share the sickness of a sick social character there is little hope. They do not feel the pain of sickness because they are like everyone else and hence do not even know they are sick.



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act according to what is necessary for him from a practical standpoint and also to give him satisfaction from his activity psychologically.”¹³

From the standpoint of the social order, character functions as a powerful cementing force. Through his incorporation of the social character, the individual “acquires that character which makes him want to do what he has to do. . . .”¹⁴ (“Makes him want to do what he has to do” in order for the social system to work, one should add, not to be sane, or good.) The modern industrial system, for example, requires that our best energies be given to work. The industrial discipline to which we submit seems light only because we are so thoroughly accustomed to it. If the workers did not voluntarily accept their tasks the whole system would either break down under its own frictions or else would have to be held together by force. But modern man does not have to be driven to work by external authorities. He has internalized a number of attitudes about the value and duty of work which are far more effective in controlling his work behavior than any authorities set over him could ever be. These attitudes are part of the social character, and each individual shares them to the extent that he shares in the social character. From the standpoint of the social order, then, “*the social character internalizes external necessities and thus harnesses human energy for the task of a given economic and social system.*”¹⁵

Under normal conditions, the psychological forces which are channeled through the social character cement the social structure. But under abnormal conditions what was once cement becomes dynamite. This happens when changing economic conditions produce situations in which the traditional character traits are no longer useful and may be actual handicaps. Fromm made this notion of character lag the key concept in his analysis of the rise of fascism in

Germany. He traced the process by which the traditional middle class virtues of frugality, industry, prudence, and obedience became irrelevant or of limited utility in the rising new industrial and business system, so that only a minority of the sons of the middle class could successfully use their character traits in their economic pursuits. The lag between economic and psychological evolution caused the psychological forces to become unfastened from the economic structure and made available for deployment in the political and military spheres. Only now, the old virtues, freed from all restrictions and energized by insecurity, frustration, and resentment, were transformed into the vicious energies which powered the German effort in World War II.

This completes the basic theory of the formation and function of character. On this foundation, Fromm builds a typology of character styles which will be presented in a moment. First, a few comments on the theory as developed to this point.

Fromm’s theory of character formation is an excellent instrument of description and analysis. This part of his work represents one of the most successful of all attempts to bridge different levels of analysis and combine different styles of approach to social problems. Fromm achieves far more than a psychosocial parallelism. He shows that individual psychological experiences and social events do not just form two parallel cause and effect series. Rather, the series converge and interpenetrate, so that an understanding of individual problems and tensions requires an understanding of social problems and tensions, and vice versa. In this sense, *Escape from Freedom*, which was based upon the concept of character formation which has been briefly set forth here, is one of the finest examples in modern



social science of what C. Wright Mills calls "the sociological imagination."¹⁶

The second comment is in the nature of a question. Is it as easy as Fromm thinks to assert that "differences in temperament have no ethical significance"? Fromm is right when he says that ideas, values, and actions have an emotional context and that they take their meaning from this context. Part of the context is provided by temperament. Hence it follows that love, say, will mean quite different things to the choleric and the melancholic man. What is even more troublesome is that it is doubtful whether spontaneity, which in Fromm's view is the mark of the full life, can have any meaning at all to the phlegmatic man, who by definition is . . . phlegmatic.

Temperamental differences can have another kind of ethical significance, the nature and importance of which are suggested by the close attention which such great political thinkers as Plato and Machiavelli gave to the question of the *whole personality* of the ruler. The four temperaments differ in the ease, speed, and strength of their reactions to events. Assume a situation in which prompt and vigorous action is required to stop an injustice, or forestall a social catastrophe, or exploit a fleeting opportunity. To have a phlegmatic man in charge of affairs in that situation could be disastrous. He might be unmoved by the injustice or unimpressed by the emergency until it was too late. This is not a far-fetched example. Fromm at one point suggests that German labor, despite its socialist and libertarian convictions, failed to act at the critical moment of Hitler's advent to power because of the prevalence of authoritarian character traits among the workers. Apart from other considerations, such as bureaucratic leadership and a conservative, rigid trade union organization, Fromm's analysis does not persuade one that the phlegmatic temperament

of the German workers had nothing to do with the failure to act. Other examples could be provided, but one ought to be enough to show that temperamental differences can have moral significance.¹⁷

Turning to the scientific side of the theory, two comments should be made. The first again takes the form of a question. How strictly should one construe Fromm's formulation of the relations between the conditions of work and the formation of character? Read strictly, Fromm would seem to be saying that one's mode of work determines his character. To demonstrate that thesis would take far more, and far more systematic, knowledge concerning class differences than we now have. To be sure, there is a great amount of information available on differences of attitudes and opinions among the classes, but such differences are not the same as characterological differences. Also, nearly all the work that has been done on class-correlated characterological differences (*e.g.*, the work on the authoritarian personality) suffers from enough methodological weakness to make its interpretation a delicate and tricky matter. Furthermore, in a society such as the United States where social mobility is high, lines between the classes hazy, and the voice of the mass media so penetrating, really sharp characterological, or even opinion, differences among the classes are already hard to find and seem destined to diminish. Those who were once called the working classes have become the blue collar employees, and their collars get a little whiter each year. It is already hard to tell the classes apart in the daytime; and in the evening in suburbia they are practically indistinguishable.

If one construes Fromm's hypothesis strictly, he encounters hard problems of evidence. On the other hand, a loose or generous reading of the hypothesis would cause serious trouble in another part of his work. As will be



pointed out later, Fromm's constitution for the sane society revolves around changes in men's relations to work and the instruments of production. Through changes in the organization of work he hopes to effect basic changes in the character of men. His scheme of social change, then, demands a strict construction of his hypothesis about the relations between character and work. This hypothesis seems to be one of the areas of Fromm's system which needs elaboration and clarification.

The final comment I shall make at this point concerns a certain inconsistency in Fromm's analysis of the relations between society and character and a certain vagueness about the source of the power which produces decisive social change. On the one hand, he offers the concept of character lag to account for tensions—even revolutionary tensions—in a social order: when economic development and social character are out of phase, the psychological forces which once cemented the social structure become transmuted into dynamite which can blow it apart. On the other hand, he gives us the concept of inherent psychic needs to account for tensions: when a society fails to afford productive satisfaction of the basic needs, men will react against that society and reform or overthrow it. These two explanations can lead in very different directions.

Escape from Freedom revolves around the concepts of social character and the character lag. Time and again the argument returns to the central thesis: economic changes resulted in an ever widening gap between economic reality and the social characters of the classes, with the result that the psychological forces were finally unfastened from the old social structure and made deployable for revolutionary adventures. Assume that instead of anchoring his analysis on the notions of social character and character lag, Fromm had used the concept of the basic needs. Then the fundamental

thesis might have read somewhat like the following: as a consequence of certain economic and social conditions, the basic human need for transcendence was fulfilled destructively rather than creatively. Now, whatever else Fromm might say about fascism, he surely would not say it was progressive, in the sense that it was dedicated to the fuller productive satisfaction of the five basic psychic needs. Yet that is the conclusion toward which the concept of the basic needs would push him. The heart of that concept is Fromm's conviction that men strive for an ever higher and more productive fulfillment of the basic needs. Fromm asserts that history is progressive and irreversible. It might be possible for some persons still to believe, as many Communists did before the invasion of the Soviet Union, that the fascist era was a necessary step forward on the road to the final victory of humanism and the sane society, but I fear that another such step would undo us all.

The ambiguity in Fromm's thought concerning the source of the power which propels social change can be shown in another way. In *Escape from Freedom* he seems to argue that the energy which produces social change is generated by the tension between new economic conditions and an older social character structure. In *Man for Himself* and *The Sane Society* he maintains that the need for transcendence is what drives man to seek ever better solutions to the problems of his existence. The former thesis puts the source of change precisely where Marx put it—in the forces of production, not in a postulated need for transcendence. But if Fromm accepts this Marxist view, he unfortunately also loses its greatest benefit, which is the belief in the reality and inevitability of progress in history. There is a curious paradox here. Fromm's notion of the character lag, with its basically Marxist orientation, denies him the grand Marxist faith in the inevitable development toward ever

higher forms of civilization. On the other hand, the notion of the five basic needs, with its thoroughly un-Marxist essentialist psychology, permits him to believe in the progressive character of social change. I leave this precisely where Fromm leaves it—in a woefully paradoxical condition.

When paradoxes are examined closely they have a way of dissolving into apparent paradoxes, or perhaps into mere tensions. So it is here; and this time I want to use the occasion to remind the reader of one of the general features of Fromm's work. The style of argument followed in the immediately foregoing paragraphs can be employed at point after point in Fromm's system because, as was indicated in the Prologue, the system itself contains a number of contradictory principles and concepts. The particular incompatibles here are social determinism versus an essentialist psychology. Others will appear in later pages.

Types of Men

The second half of the theory of character is the characterology. Fromm technically defines character as the "form in which human energy is canalized in the process of assimilation and socialization." The names he gives to the different types of character are those which describe the processes of assimilation, but it is important to remember that each character type includes orientations of both assimilation and socialization. To assure clarity on this point, I shall present in modified form a chart which Fromm uses to show how each character type is a blend of orientations in both spheres.

Two preliminary comments. First, the characterology is at once descriptive and normative. All the nonproductive orientations are ethically imperfect types. Each represents a specific thwarting and crippling of man's powers. The

nonproductive orientations are analogous to Freud's neurotic character types. The productive orientation is the one which expresses the full unfolding of the human powers. Productive man is the good man, the counterpart of Freud's genital man.

The second comment is that Fromm's types are ideal constructions, not photographic copies of real men. Every real man is of course a mixture of several orientations, and he is assigned to one or another of the ideal types in accordance with the orientation that is dominant in the mixture.

Let us turn now to the characters themselves.¹⁸

*Character Types*¹⁹

ASSIMILATION	SOCIALIZATION
I. Nonproductive orientations	
A. Receptive (Accepting)	Masochistic
B. Exploitative (Taking)	Sadistic
C. Hoarding (Preserving)	Destructive
D. Marketing (Exchanging)	Automaton conformity
II. Productive orientation	
Working	Loving

The first of the nonproductive orientations is the receptive man. His distinguishing feature is a large and open mouth, for he is the ever expectant one, the eternal suckler, the one who locates the source of all good outside himself. Receptive man does not create, he consumes. He relies not on himself but on the "magic helper" for the satisfaction of his needs. By and large, he is an optimistic, friendly sort of chap, with little malice or suspicion toward his fellows.



He enjoys helping others and is loyal to his many friends, but in all his generous acts there is a taint; he really desires to secure the favor of the helped one in order to put him in his debt. For receptive man, loving means being loved. Left to himself, he is paralyzed, for he draws his sustenance from others. His anxiety is that his source of supply will be cut off.

Like receptive man, exploitative man also feels that the source of good is outside himself, but unlike receptive man, he does not look for gifts. He takes what he wants by force or guile. For him, everything and everyone is an object to be exploited, an object to be bitten off and ingested. Exploitative man is the man of the biting mouth and the clenched teeth. When he is fed up, when he has taken what he wants from the outside, he discards the rest. Exploitative man is suspicious, critical, envious. But like receptive man he is nothing without the others, for whatever he has he has stolen from them.

Next on display is the hoarder, the one whose arms are folded tightly across his chest, forming a forbidding barrier between himself and the world outside. Hoarding man relates to the world neither by receiving nor by grasping. He has little faith in anything outside and is concerned to save what is in himself. He is the miser. He hoards and saves. Spending and giving are uncongenial to him for he hates to let anything escape his grip. His psychic economy is one of scarcity. From his point of view, the whole world is determined to take from him the things that are properly and personally his, and he is just as determined to dig a moat which the others cannot cross to penetrate the fortress which is himself. His motto is "mine is mine and yours is yours."²⁰ For this man, loving means possessing, not sharing or creating. He admires order, strict justice, security, cleanliness.

Next is the marketing man, the man of the friendly

smile and the casual but correct attire. This one is for sale. He must give constant attention to the fashion of the moment in ideas, values, and tastes, for his own value is determined by how well he meets the demands of the personality market. Marketing man has no real self. His "self" is a sort of echo box, a hollow receptacle which collects and magnifies the things which others say about him. He learns about himself, as it were, only by rumor. If you catch this man in an unguarded moment you will see his smile twist into fear and worry, for of all men he is the most insecure. He knows how fickle the personality market is. Marketing man also judges others as commodities. For him, a man is worth what he brings on the market. Success is the sovereign criterion, and success means the approval of the others. This man is terribly afraid of being "peculiar," out of fashion. His relations with his fellows, while friendly and fair, are always superficial. He manipulates and is manipulated. The superficiality of his relationships has led him to put a desperate faith in finding a real union in romantic love, but "it is an illusion to expect that the loneliness of man rooted in the marketing orientation can be cured by individual love."²¹ Marketing man lives on the edge of despair, and he fills the emptiness of his life by trivial busyness and movement. Meanwhile, as he waits for the Big Opportunity, he looks more and more like Willy Loman.

This completes the somber collection of the non-productives. Fromm adds that one or another of the types predominates in a given historical period in accordance with the economic structure and social relations of the era. Thus the receptive orientation is typically found in societies where the authority of one group over another is firmly established. Since the subordinate groups cannot shape affairs and direct their own destinies, they look up to the masters as the providers, as those from whom all blessings



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flow. The exploitative character, with its motto "I take what I want," goes back to piratical and feudal origins and reached its highest development in the imperialistic and rapacious capitalism of the nineteenth century. In those days, the great exploiters roamed the earth in search of power and profit. Supporting them were the hoarders, the methodical, industrious, sanctimonious middle classes, to whom property was security and thrift the highest virtue. Marketing man is distinctly the man of our day, the authentic product of the mass market society. He is accompanied by growing numbers of receptive types, who have come to expect society to gratify their every felt need and wish.

The characterology does not stop with description and criticism but accepts the perilous task of construction. "In discussing the *productive character* I venture beyond critical analysis and inquire into the nature of the fully developed character that is the aim of human development and simultaneously the ideal of humanistic ethics."²² Coming from a man of our day, that is a bold proposal; a proposal, we cannot help but feel, that only an innocent could make. Our age is not kind to visionaries and projectors. And when he deals with productive man Fromm explicitly adopts the vocation of the visionary, for productive man has yet to be born. He lives only in Fromm's imagination.

The fact is, Fromm stands almost alone among today's writers in this effort to paint in detail the portrait of the good man. To my knowledge, Freud is the only other recent writer who has built both a penetrating theory of character and an image of the good man. His clinical descriptions of the pregenital character types are thorough and brilliant, and this judgment stands even if one agrees with Fromm that his theoretical concepts are in need of revision. Freud's portrait of the genital character, however, is unfortunately

vague and shadowy, lacking the precision of his portraits of the pregenital types. In technical terms, the genital man is one in whom oral and anal libido have been subordinated to genital sexuality, the aim of which is sexual union with a person of the opposite sex. It is not easy to say much more about him. At most, genital man might be described as the man who has come to terms with himself and who recognizes that the inner life must always be a life of conflict. This conflict, however, can be tempered by self-knowledge and curbed by reason. It can be lived with. Genital man can spare enough energies from the inner battle to function capably in the public sphere. Freed from extravagant hopes and false fears, genital man knows that something of value can still be found in this life. While rather vague, this is surely not an unheroic ethic.*

In an important way, productive man is the equivalent of genital man. If we think of Freud's term symbolically rather than literally, genital man is the one who produces new life through union with another person. Productive man also produces through union. The great difference be-

* Philip Rieff's recent exploration of Freud's thought leaves me uncertain of the accuracy of my sketch of genital man. In his last chapter, Rieff outlines that new character type known as psychological man, who is replacing political man, religious man, and economic man as the character ideal of Western civilization. I am unclear whether Rieff's intention here is to expound Freud or to describe the impact of Freud on the modern mind. In either case, psychological man does not look much like my brief description of genital man. Psychological man is the trained egotist, the connoisseur of the inner life. He lives beyond reason and conscience. He has given up the public sphere. He has relinquished all hope of salvation for himself and others, in this world as well as the next. He accepts the hospital as the permanent home of man. Rieff's final sentences seem to suggest that this sickness is health. "Aware at last that he is chronically ill, psychological man may nevertheless end the ancient quest of his predecessors for a healing doctrine. His experience with the latest one, Freud's, may finally teach him that every cure must expose him to new illness." Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (New York: Viking, 1959), p. 357. Carved above the portals of that gigantic hospital which shelters all Rieff's psychological men is this emblem: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."



tween the two is that productive man persists in Christian man's praise of faith, hope, and love. So productive man is not a new type on the earth, but the realization of a very old type. He speaks in modern accents, however, and this makes a difference.

"Productiveness" is the term that counts here, and to avert misunderstanding, I shall repeat one of Fromm's fullest definitions of it.

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.²³

Productive man can be known by his works, for he is the doer, the builder, the creator. The artist is "the most convincing representative of productiveness,"²⁴ but do not be discouraged if you cannot paint great pictures or compose great symphonies. To do those things requires gifts which few have, while to be productive requires only a set of attitudes which all may have. Fromm saves us all by saying that productive man's noblest product is himself. He lives to live, that is, to actualize his potentialities: "*by far the most important object of productiveness is man himself.*"²⁵

Productive man's guide on the journey of self-realization is his conscience. A word must be underscored: *his* conscience. Fromm believes there is a true or humanistic and a false or authoritarian conscience. "The authoritarian

conscience is the voice of an internalized external authority, the parents, the state, or whoever the authorities in a culture happen to be."²⁶ This is the equivalent of the superego, and Fromm agrees with Freud that it is a hard master. It governs by fear of punishment and hope for reward. Guilt is its harsh sanction and approval its dubious reward. Its most cruel and subtle weapon is repression, by which the victim unknowingly turns his fears and desires back upon himself, until they consume his finest powers and leave him pale and drawn. He grows deaf to his own inner voice, so cut off from the truth about himself that his whole life becomes a sterile hypocrisy. Worst of all, the authoritarian conscience conquers its victims while they are still too young to resist. For his unavoidable transgressions the child receives not mild correction and loving forgiveness but a conditional pardon, which makes his guilt and his need for forgiveness all the stronger. Thus the will is paralyzed and the powers sapped. The prisoner of the authoritarian conscience serves a life sentence, confined by his own desire to gain the pardon of the authorities. It may happen that the commands of the authoritarian conscience are also "good." Then, of course, the subject will move toward the good. But what matters is that the authoritarian conscience imposes its commands in the interests of the authority rather than those of the subject, so that any similarity between the dictates of the authoritarian conscience and the true good is purely accidental.*

* It is strictly correct to say that in Fromm's view any similarity between the dictates of the authoritarian conscience and the true good is purely accidental. But the tenor of his work suggests that lean accuracy is not enough here. In a very real sense, Fromm goes beyond the view that might and right may accidentally correspond, to the view that might is always wrong. The dictates of authority are wrong even when they may be good for the subject, because the authority always has his own interests foremost in mind. The interests of the subject are secondary. This violates the canon that no man should be treated as a means. It also violates Fromm's canon that

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Fromm believes that “this is only one form of conscience or, possibly, a preliminary stage in the development of conscience.”²⁷ Another and truer conscience also calls to each of us, if we will but listen for it. “Humanistic conscience is the reaction of our total personality to its proper functioning or dysfunctioning. . . . Conscience judges our functioning as human beings; it is (as the root of the word *conscientia* indicates) *knowledge within oneself*, knowledge of our respective success or failure in the art of living.”²⁸ So emphatic is Fromm’s advocacy of this notion that I must quote extensively from his fullest formulation of it.

Actions, thoughts, and feelings which are conducive to the proper functioning and unfolding of our total personality produce a feeling of inner approval, of “rightness,” characteristic of the humanistic “good” conscience. . . . *Conscience is thus a re-action of ourselves to ourselves.* It is the voice of our true selves which summons us back to ourselves, to live productively, to develop fully and harmoniously—that is, *to become what we potentially are.* It is the guardian of our integrity. . . . If love can be defined as the affirmation of the potentialities and the care for, and the respect of, the uniqueness of the loved person, humanistic conscience can be justly called the voice of *our loving care for ourselves.*²⁹

Productive man breaks out of the circle of loneliness through love, which is the only way one can unite with others and still retain his and their uniqueness. Love is a

we ought to love and care for others as for ourselves. In addition, submission to authority is also always wrong, because any act of submission means a crippling of one’s human powers. Fromm’s view on this comes close to saying that might is always wrong, that there can be no right in an authoritarian-inegalitarian relationship between two men. Where there is a superior-inferior relationship there is evil.

feeling made up of care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge. Love for self comes first, for without that no man can love another, but self-love by no means excludes love of others. “On the contrary, an attitude of love toward themselves will be found in all those who are capable of loving others.”³⁰ In Fromm’s view, the injunction “love thy neighbor as thyself” is no stern command against selfishness. It is, rather, the only real meaning of love and the attainment of any man who has affirmed his own life. “Love of one person implies love of man as such.”³¹ A mere *égoïsme à deux*, or a primary love for one’s family, say, is not authentic love but its caricature. Whoever loves, loves all mankind.

Like all other men, productive man has faith. He has religion too. Productive man’s faith is a “certainty of conviction based on one’s experience of thought and feeling, not assent to propositions on credit of the proposer.”³² His religion, by whatever name he calls it, is in content humanistic; that is, it is a religion which furthers his powers and develops his capacities. Insofar as his creed is theistic, God is not a symbol of power over man but a symbol of man’s own finest powers. Insofar as his religion is productive and humanistic, it will have the following articles, which, Fromm says, express the core of ideas and attitudes common to all the great spiritual teachers from Lao-tse to Fromm?

Man must strive to recognize the truth and can be fully human only to the extent to which he succeeds in this task. He must be independent and free. . . . He must relate himself to his fellow men lovingly. If he has no love, he is an empty shell even if his were all power, wealth, and intelligence. Man must know the difference between good and evil, he must learn to listen to the voice of his conscience and to be able to follow it.³³



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That is the message of humanistic religion, the message at the heart of the inspirations of the great spiritual teachers. All religions are at bottom one, and poor mankind would never have lost sight of this truth had not subtle metaphysicians, vested authorities, and the superficial differences of time and place conspired to conceal it. Again Fromm speaks in the authentic accents of Rousseau. "As soon as the nations took to making God speak, every one made him speak in his own fashion, and made him say what he himself wanted. Had they listened only to what God says in the heart of man, there would have been but one religion upon earth."³⁴

Productive Man Re-examined

So rare are portraits of the good man in our time that each deserves a careful examination. For this reason, and not because of its inherent excellence or its superiority over the portraits of the nonproductive types, I shall look with some care at Fromm's model of the productive man.

He is a smiling figure, and the smile tells us at once that here is a man who has affirmed life. He is able to think for himself and he can enjoy the sensuous pleasures without guilt and anxiety. He enjoys and respects his fellows and does not regard their lives as instruments to the advancement of his own. All these amiable traits make him quite pleasant and attractive. He is no hero, certainly, but he does seem a sane and competent fellow; and if he never does anything heroic, neither will he do much that is vicious. He is decent, responsible, and generous, the sort of chap who would fit comfortably into any fairly liberal circle. There is that troublesome little thing about becoming like God, to be sure, but one feels confident that productive man would never commit any of the more desperate sins of

pride, just as he would never lose his head in any passion or for any cause. He is not angular and tense, given to extreme actions. On the contrary, he is well-rounded, buoyant, sympathetic, at peace with himself and his brothers.

That is one's first impression. A second look brings a disturbing discovery: the face of productive man is empty. It lacks character.

What passions, what conquests and defeats, what joys and sorrows have etched their lines on his face? What does productive man live for? Fromm answers that he lives for himself, he lives for living. It is not easy to understand what that statement means. Does it mean that productive man is at bottom the sensualist? In a certain sense, yes. Productive man is a sort of prudent sensualist. He wants to experience as much as he can—within certain limits of safety. He has no taste for extreme experiences as such, and there is no danger that he will consume himself in any Verlainean explorations of the bizarre and the grotesque. Although open and sensitive to experience, like a delicate hi-fi, he is not quite preoccupied with the gadget of the self. He knows instinctively that when one conceives of the self primarily as a marvelous receiving instrument, he inevitably experiments with ways of increasing the current to the set, thinking in that way to heighten its fidelity. He may get only noise. I suspect that is what Itchy Dave, that new anti-hero of the Beat, got when he "turned on":

Sometimes it is a heightened sense of self that is sought [through the use of marijuana]. . . . As Itchy Dave Gelden expresses it, "It's like this, man, we need more awareness of the I. It's like, before I light up I'm drug with the ten thousand things . . . you can't concentrate," but when you light up you can "follow the song of yourself. You're listening and you're hearing the song and you're swinging along with it." ". . . I never really



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heard the music till I started listening with pot," is something you hear often in beat circles. "It's like switching from an old-fashioned phonograph to hi-fi." 35

Itchy Dave is not totally unlike productive man, in this as in other ways. Both live for living; or, at least, both seem unwilling or unable to formulate a meaning for life beyond the living of it. Both also seek to open the self to a whole range of deliciously novel experiences. Both share the ethic of spontaneity and productiveness, and give not a damn for the world's judgment of their products. Both are resolutely dedicated to developing the potentialities of their selves. With Rousseau, both could say "I may not be better than any other man, but at least I am different."

The foregoing sentences, I know, have serious connotations. Is productive man really a Beatnik in disguise? Is Fromm really the philosopher of the Beat, when all along he has seemed to be saying something else? About the first question, one can say at least that, while productive man might not quite be a Beatnik, he would certainly be at home among them. About the second question, I can say that my own modest researches among the Beatniks convince me that Fromm is read and admired by them, though he certainly is not their foremost hero.

But this is a theme which could lead us far afield. At the moment, I am concerned to make only one point about the injunction "live for living." To say that productive man lives for living is to say something that is wrong on its face. Truly productive men do not live for living. They live for ends, for purposes outside themselves. This man lives for his work, that one for his family, and the one over there for his god. The greatest, the freest, the most creative men live in obedience to some unfulfilled, perhaps only vaguely understood, purpose. A life without some purpose larger

than its own cultivation is a life without direction and meaning, for a man realizes himself through working toward his ends. To make "live for living" the categorical imperative is to counsel man to emptiness. It is to counsel him either to a vulgar Epicureanism or to a kind of moral dilettantism.

The previous sentence is not quite correct. It needs a qualifying phrase. The imperative "live for living" is an invitation "to a vulgar Epicureanism or to a kind of moral dilettantism" *under the modern conditions of economic abundance and the prevalence of the marketing orientation.* This phrase suggests both that "live for living" may mean different things under different social circumstances, and that it may have a broader import which has not yet been examined. The first needs no argument or illustration: moral imperatives are colored by their social contexts. The second needs a fuller discussion, which can be best opened by examining the imperative under the light of another of Fromm's favorite concepts, the concept of "life as an art." This formula, which at first glance seems only an evocative phrase, even if not a new one, has an importance in Fromm's thought which is more than rhetorical.

The attitude toward life which is implicit in the notion of life as an art is one which a moralist can maintain only by denying his own vocation, for it is an attitude which assumes that the canons of one field, esthetics, can be applied in another field, ethics. This is an assumption which no moral philosopher can grant—unless the intention of his teaching is moral anarchy. Ethics and esthetics are different subjects, each with its own canons. When the canons of either field are promiscuously applied in the other, grievous confusion must result. When the perspectives of esthetics are substituted for those of ethics in the judgment



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of the quality of human life, the necessary result is something that verges on moral anarchism. It is easy to see how that happens.

The ways of art—both its methods and its ends—are diverse and numerous, perhaps infinite. The artist is a creator, and the stuff of which he creates his world of art comes only in part from the external world. The rest comes from the secret depths of his own being. From these materials he fashions a world which is governed by its own laws, which he also creates. What is lawful in his artistic world may not be lawful in the real world, and vice versa; just as what is true in his artistic world need be true only there, and not in the real world. This means that esthetic criticism must start from the premise that the only question which may legitimately be asked of a work of art is, did the artist succeed in doing what he set out to do? The success or failure of a work of art can properly be measured only by the standard of how well the artist used the means he chose for his task and how closely he came to the end he set for himself. The question of whether the end chosen is a good or a bad one is beyond the province of esthetics. Since the artist is God in his own world, he enjoys an enormous latitude in the choice of ends and means, a latitude far greater than that permitted to the moralist. The point that matters here can be summarized in the following form: the chief canon of esthetic criticism is that there is no such thing as *the* good work of art; the chief canon of moral criticism is that there is such a thing as *the* good life.

Now, to see life as an art is to see it within an esthetic framework. This is an attitude toward life which has relinquished every hope that life might have a purpose fixed in the nature of things, an end and meaning outside itself toward which it ought to be directed, and by which it may

be judged. When life is seen within this esthetic framework, each individual is permitted complete freedom in his choice of means and ends. The only question that may properly be asked is how well did the individual do what he set out to do. The question of whether the end chosen was good or bad is foreign to the esthetic perspective. There can be many ends—in principle, as many ends as there are individuals—but from the point of view of life as an art there is no such thing as *the* end, no *summum bonum*. There are only good lives and bad ones; and the question of whether a particular person's life was a good or a bad one can be answered only by the data and the criteria *internal to that life*. In short, to conceive of life as an art is to accept a latitudinarianism in the choice of the means and ends of living which is indistinguishable from moral anarchism.

This, I think, is the necessary tendency of Fromm's esthetic orientation toward moral questions. I am quite aware that this is not apparent on the surface of his thought; and the reason it is not is clear enough: he has not thought through the implications of the esthetic position. In fact, he has concealed these implications under a superficially attractive picture of the good man who would emerge from such an orientation toward life. Here Fromm does what almost all the writers who have adopted this idea of life as an art have done. The few writers who have seriously attempted this theme have been restrained by their own training and their inherited decency to create and treat in their art only decorous and decent men—men like themselves. (Henry James is an excellent example of this.) Such writers rarely treat of the "terrible ones." But this is a limitation imposed by the artist's temperament and training, not by the concept of life as an art. From the esthetic point of view, there are no good or bad men in a moral sense. There



are only good or bad men in an artistic sense. Artistically, Hamlet is no greater and no better than Macbeth; Iago is as good as Othello. And, if life is an art, then Caligula was as good as Aurelius, Savonarola as good as St. Francis, Hitler as good as Roosevelt, for all these men worked consummately with the means at their disposal and all in a large degree realized their capacities and achieved the ends they had set for themselves.

It is only at this point that some of the larger implications of Fromm's well-known idea of "positive freedom" become apparent. In *Escape from Freedom*, he developed the distinction between negative and positive freedom, or freedom from and freedom to. Modern man has won the former, Fromm argued, but the victory has turned to ashes because he has not won the latter. Negative freedom has left men isolated, anxious, powerless, eager to escape into new submissions. Salvation lies in adding positive freedom to negative freedom. "To know how to free oneself is nothing," Gide wrote in *L'Immoraliste*, "the arduous thing is to know what to do with one's freedom." "What to do with one's freedom"—that is the precise question which the moral and political philosopher, or any man whose vocation is the cure of souls, must be able to answer. When Fromm says that positive freedom means "the realization of [the] individual self; that is, the expression of [one's] intellectual, emotional and sensuous potentialities,"³⁶ he provides no substantive answer to the question of freedom for what. He supplies only the form and not the content of an answer. In a very real sense, Fromm is a moralist without a conception of the moral life.

Fromm worships Eros; and for the followers of Eros the meaning of life is sensation—fuller, closer, warmer feeling—not for the sake of some end, but for the sake of the sensation of living itself. This is a view of life as a voluptu-

ous Strauss waltz, or a kind of Balinese love play, an undulating surge and counter-surge of emotions and energies which never break outward in one direction, but remain in a ravishing equilibrium: stimulation without climax. In its slightly tarnished innocence, this idea, it seems to me, is deeply expressive of a specifically American sentimentality about man and life. No other of Fromm's ideas shows more clearly the triumph of America over the Marxist and Freudian elements of his thought. We cannot be sure what answer the modern age will finally give to the question of freedom for what—beyond the freedom to enjoy more of the pleasures of consumption—but we can be sure that when the answer comes it must contain more than a hollow "live for living."

The imperative "live for living," furthermore, is incompatible with one of the finest of Fromm's own conceptions, the conception of a "negative psychology," a psychology which aims not to force the secret of man by a full and positive knowledge of man's soul, but to remove the distortions and illusions which keep each of us from knowing himself and others. The internalized voices of the others, the cares and habits of the daily round, and all the forgotten pains and sorrows build layer upon layer of sedimentary materials over the bedrock of the psychic life. The authentic self, the I which underlies the countless things one does and means and says each day, can in time become entirely buried. Each day we see men who are totally guided by what they think they ought to be, and we know that such men are nothing more than the demands of others. A man's greatest despair, as Kierkegaard said, is "choosing to be another than himself." So the most serious search of one's life is the search for the self he really is. The important point, however, is that this search is done negatively; it is a work of stripping away the things that one is not. In this



process one comes closer to knowing who he is, but he does so by finding out who he is not. That is a very different matter from Fromm's positive formulation of the productive man's creation of himself.

The task of stripping away the sedimentary layers is the first and the hardest duty of the man who would find himself. In this work he begins to discover what he is not. He also begins to realize that he is much more than he had known, and he begins to accept that "much more" as belonging to him. He begins to explore hitherto unknown reaches of his psyche, and he learns to respect its infinite depths. Such a man knows that the command to realize his potentiality is foolish, for he is a being of infinite potentialities, only some of which he can realize, often at the pain of thwarting others. In a brief essay, Carl Rogers, who appears to share Fromm's basic perspectives on the nature of man and the method of approaching him, has given a good account of the kind of person one becomes as a result of this process.³⁷ The person becomes more open to experience, both of himself and of the world around him. At the same time he becomes more realistic and discriminating. He can tolerate ambiguity and variety because he has developed an internal locus of evaluation which rests upon a trust in his own organism as a suitable instrument for choosing the best behavior in changing situations. Purified of distortions and illusions, the person knows he is a process rather than a product, and he accepts this, rather than the achievement of some fixed and final state, as the necessary condition of man. In short, a self begins to come to life. But what matters is that the process of birth is primarily negative, a matter not of trying to create oneself but of trying to rid oneself of what he is not.

I hope I shall not be misunderstood on this. In the

previous chapter I tried to show that there are severe defects in Fromm's essentialist psychology. In particular, I argued that his explanation of evil and destructiveness as the results of thwarted primary urges toward love and creativeness is not convincing. On this topic, Fromm's thought expresses, albeit in a different vocabulary, something like the frustration-aggression hypothesis of early stimulus-response psychology, and suffers from about the same defects. Another way to put this point would be to say that Fromm has no real appreciation of the concept of sublimation; or, at least, the idea plays no important part in his thought. In the immediately foregoing passages I argued that the injunction "live for living" and the conception of productive man producing himself are also unconvincing. But nothing in the previous chapter and the foregoing passages should be taken as a denial of something that everyday observation confirms: there are men who have a powerful drive toward a certain goal, or who have a compelling urge to test some capacity of their nature. Such capacities must be realized, or at least tested, or else life is indeed diminished. In this sense, there are life-demands which are peculiar to one's nature and which must be expressed: as Milton put it, there are talents which it is "death to hide." If such talents are thwarted, the personality may be arrested and life may go bitter and dry. Destructiveness may result. On the other hand, the person who is blocked in one sector of his life may divert the blocked energies into magnificent creativity in another sector. Or, the one who has seen his powers crippled may develop a loving sympathy for the other crippled ones around him and may strive to ease their pains and smooth their paths. There are, I think, no general rules here, certainly none so general as Fromm's "destructiveness is the outcome of un-lived life." Nor are there any



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so general as to give us confidence that his "live for living" provides a useful ethical guide for the living of a life. That is as far as the foregoing passages are meant to go.

What has been said thus far suffers from a certain distortion, which must now be corrected. My critique of productive man is based not on the man Fromm has in mind but on the man who would naturally emerge from the moral premises he lays down. Fromm's emphasis on life as its own end is to be explained by his hatred of authoritarianism, which posits an end outside of and imposed on man. The motive power here is repulsion from, not attraction toward. What drives Fromm to the position that life is its own end is not so much the attractive power of the "live for living" idea, as the repulsive power of the authoritarian idea. But in backing away from authoritarianism, with its imposed and alien ends, Fromm stumbles into a formulation which leaves man no ends at all. I have argued that the implications of this conception are shabby, but I have not argued that he accepts them, only that they are inherent in his own premises. This means that Fromm can be criticized for failing to find a good solution to the question of what ends a man should live for, but he can not be criticized for consciously recommending a shabby solution.

The conception of productive man as his own chief product would be less troublesome if one were more confident of the existence and the nature of what Fromm calls the humanistic conscience. Fromm seems to agree with Rousseau that "there is . . . at the bottom of our hearts an innate principle of justice and virtue, by which, in spite of our maxims, we judge our own actions or those of others to be good or evil; and it is this principle that I call conscience."³⁸ Fromm speaks of this innate principle almost as though it were a faculty or sense in the meaning of

Jefferson: "This sense is as much a part of [man's] nature, as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling; it is the true foundation of morality. . . . The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm. It is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or less degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body."³⁹

This makes Fromm's usage understandable, if not acceptable. In this sense, the creation of oneself is a sort of psychic exercise. The athlete of the productive life trains himself to understand the voices from within and to follow their directions. Creation of oneself is, strictly, a process of discovery. One brings to life what is already there: it is analogous to the Platonic *anamnesis*. This usage is consistent with Fromm's essentialist conception of the self and his teleological metaphysic. Unfortunately, the conception of the moral sense is a postulate of reason and not an idea of experience. It is an attempt to "explain" certain phenomena by positing an underlying psychic force or agency which brings them into being and gives them meaning.

Perhaps Fromm does not mean to postulate a moral faculty in Jefferson's sense. What then might he mean? If by the distinction between the authoritarian and the humanistic conscience he means only to distinguish between ethical norms which are good for man and those which are not, then we must permit him to stipulate meanings as he wishes, although the stipulation may not strike us as a particularly useful one. But Fromm also says that the content of norms in the authoritarian and humanistic consciences may be the same, with the difference being that in the first case one obeys the norms out of fear of an external authority while in the second case he obeys out of respect for himself. At this point meanings again become clouded,



for it is doubtful whether Fromm can show a consistent ethical superiority in actions undertaken in response to some moral code absorbed in the process of socialization. Furthermore, it is probably impossible to tell just when an individual obeys himself and just when he only seems to obey himself, while actually obeying an internalized command of his group or authority. For Fromm, with his tension between essential human nature and social determinism, this is probably an insoluble problem. At least, it is for him a far harder problem than it ever could be either for a thoroughgoing individualist like Freud or for a thoroughgoing social determinist like Dewey. To use the language of social science, Fromm does not seem to take into account the work that has been done in reference group theory. To use an older language, he fails to come to grips with Pascal's maxim that "custom is our nature."

It is clear, also, that Fromm wants to make something more than a subjective or nominal distinction between the authoritarian and the humanistic consciences. He believes that movement toward the humanistic conscience is inherent in the moral evolution of the race. The authoritarian stage may have been a necessary step toward the creation of the humanistic conscience, but what matters is that moral evolution progresses inevitably toward the full flowering of the humanistic conscience. Fromm even suggests that, after a certain point, we can leap intermediate stages and go directly to the highest stage:

Julian Huxley has pointed out that acquisition of an authoritarian conscience was a stage in the process of human evolution necessary before rationality and freedom had developed to an extent which made humanistic conscience possible; others have stated this same idea with regard to the development of the child. While Huxley is right in his historical analysis, I do not be-

lieve that with regard to the child, in a nonauthoritarian society, the authoritarian conscience has to exist as a precondition for the formation of humanistic conscience; but only the future development of mankind can prove or disprove the validity of this assumption.⁴⁰

Athens and Sparta existed side by side, until they finally set out to destroy each other. The two cities still symbolize opposing conceptions of the good life. But the two cities were coeval. How can we talk about moral evolution here? The citizens of Athens certainly had as much freedom, gave as much admiration to reason, and were as magnificently productive as any citizenry before or since. Which way has moral evolution been running? Finally, Plato, who had some appreciation of the moral life, thought that authoritarian Sparta was morally superior to humanistic Athens, while his student Aristotle was, on balance, inclined toward the opposite view. Why should two philosophers hold opposed views on a question which, according to Fromm, has the same logical status as an empirical question?

Before leaving this conception of the innate humanistic conscience, one further point, which is probably already obvious, ought to be made explicit. Here I shall only state the point and defer fuller discussion of it to a later section.

Few writers on ethical subjects have let us believe that the way of righteousness is easy. It may well be the highest immorality to say that morality is easy. "All noble things are as difficult as they are rare," wrote Spinoza, and his melancholy reflection epitomizes a dominant theme in ethical thought. Man is weak and lacking in knowledge. He is driven to evil by forces he cannot master and exposed to temptations which he lacks the will to resist. Man must



prepare for the good life as for a battle. He must train, develop discipline, study the wiles of the enemy who is both within and without. He must make himself hard so he might endure in the endless and relentless fight against evil. The evil is always within one, waiting to lead him into error and wrongdoing, and he must constantly wage war against himself. He must recognize that authority—laws, judges, punishments—is absolutely necessary in this struggle, and he must learn the virtue of obedience. He will lose more battles than he will win; therefore, both to help him and to protect others, society needs codes and sanctions, punishments and repressions.

Fromm rejects this whole orientation. He denies the need for external as well as for internal authority in the moral life. He repudiates the judge and the hangman. For him, a society makes its members virtuous not by punishing evil but by creating the conditions of good. Since both the meaning and the conditions of the good are known, this is no impossible task. The fight against evil can lead to no victory, for there is no enemy. Rather, if there is an enemy, it is the very idea that evil inheres in human nature, the idea that men must take precautions to see that it is confined there and not freed to attack other men or society itself. As Fromm puts it:

Virtue is proportional to the degree of productiveness a person has achieved. If society is concerned with making people virtuous, it must be concerned with making them productive and hence with creating the conditions for the development of productiveness. The first and foremost of these conditions is that the unfolding and growth of every person is the aim of all social and political activities. . . .

Every increase in joy a culture can provide for will do more for the ethical education of its members than

all the warnings of punishment or preachings of virtue could do.⁴¹

Here only one thing need be said about this. Fromm's vision of a society actively engaged in creating the conditions of the good life and in providing "increases of joy" echoes a theme which runs as far back as Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*. This implies a very "positive" view of the state, a view which assigns the state an enormous range of functions and responsibilities. This is no mere welfare state view; and it goes far beyond anything like T. H. Green's conception of the role of the state as the hinderer of hindrances to the good life. But along with broad functions and heavy responsibilities goes great power. And that opens a theme which will require more attention when we come to Fromm's vision of the good society. Here it is enough to suggest that Fromm's generous conception of human nature and his notion of the humanistic conscience lead him—though he will not admit it—toward the perilous conclusion of the omniscient state. If the state is to create the conditions of the good life it must acquire enormous powers, at least during the transitional period between the old order and the new. In political life, such transitional periods have a way of becoming permanent.

This hint of the omniscient state would arouse little concern were the Frommian state frankly impossible or hopelessly Utopian. But it is not. In Fromm as well as in others, Eros strains toward satisfaction and will have it. The familistic state is always a possibility, for men are always cold. The ideal of the all-embracing state has always been a feature of erotic thought. In this part of his work, Fromm continues the tradition of Rousseau and Comte.

For the moment, let us return to productive man.



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There are two further observations to make about him. The first concerns his style of religion, the second his style of love.

The notable feature of Fromm's view of religion is its thoroughgoing pragmatism, a word I shall use here exactly as James did in his famous essay in definition.⁴² James wrote that the term meant both a method of settling philosophical disputes and a certain theory of truth. As a method, it means the attempt "to interpret each notion by tracing its . . . practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true?" It means an "*attitude of looking away from first things, principles, 'categories,' supposed necessities; and of looking towards last things, fruits, consequences, facts.*" As a theory of truth it means "*that ideas . . . become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience. . . . Any idea upon which we can ride, so to speak; any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally.*" In this view, the true and the good are not distinct categories. Rather, truth is a species of good. "*The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief. . . .*" As James promised—the promise must seem a dire threat to devout religionists—pragmatism thus understood "may be a happy harmonizer of empiricist ways of thinking with the more religious demands of human beings."

Productive man turns out to be James's happy harmonizer. Productive man has a religion, of course, just as all other men have, but his main concern is not with the truth of his religion but with its utility. Nor is he interested in

the question of the existence of God; that hypothesis he, like Laplace, no longer needs. For productive man, God is a symbol "whose significance is essentially historical."⁴³ Thus Fromm offers a definition of religion which carefully excludes a theistic component. Religion is "*any system of thought and action shared by a group which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion.*"⁴⁴ It is evident that this definition would embrace, say, a political ideology as easily as it would the doctrines and institutions ordinarily included in the term religion.

What matters to productive man is not whether his religion is true in some objective sense but whether it is useful. Does it liberate your powers and help you grow? If it does, then it is true and good in exactly the sense James had in mind. Pascal asked what do you stand to gain or lose by accepting or rejecting the hypothesis of God. Fromm asks what do you stand to gain or lose by choosing one meaning of the God symbol rather than another. It is clear that religion can do without all the paraphernalia of theology, authority, and organization that traditional religions have always had. In Fromm's view, religion and the church are not just in tension; they are incompatible.⁴⁵ It will come as no surprise to learn that the religious tendency Fromm admires most is mysticism, in which the seeker crashes through all barriers to a personal union with God, becomes indeed one with God.* It is not easy to see how

* Here too Fromm joins James, though this time the harmony is psychological, not logical. In the *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James almost totally ignored anything that has to do with churches and organized religion. He conceived of religious experience as a heightened or intensified psychic state, verging on the pathological. He treated of conversion experiences, religious visions, mystical union, inspired prophetic utterance, morbid gloom, and the like—as though the religion experienced among men and in an enduring congregation were somehow not "real" religion. Real religion means enthusiasm or special grace. Fromm also comes very close to this conception of the religious life.



Fromm can square his admiration for mysticism with his distaste for symbiotic relatedness and his admiration of individuality; the mystical union, after all, is the complete absorption, the total disappearance of the one in the One. It is even harder to determine what he might mean when he says that mysticism is the “highest development of rationality in religious thinking.”⁴⁶ Whatever else one might say about mysticism, he should not confuse it with a rational enterprise. “By love, He may be gotten and holden,” wrote the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, “but by thought of understanding never.”⁴⁷

These eccentricities in Fromm’s thought are not central to my purpose, so I shall not pursue them. My purpose was to show Fromm’s pragmatic view of religion. It may seem curious that Fromm, who believes in the objectivity of ethical norms, should hold such a view of religion, but here I only point out that he does. The picture becomes clearer when one merely says that when Fromm talks about religion he is really not talking about religion at all but about ethics. He has reduced religion to ethics; or, if that expression seems pejorative, he has incorporated religion into ethics. Let us turn to Fromm’s real religion, which is love.

Love is a risky and compromising subject, for when a man writes about love he necessarily writes about his own loves. And when we know a man’s loves we have caught a glimpse into the secret center of his being. Everything you say about a man’s conception of love you say *de hominem* and *ad hominem*. I feel uncomfortable about this, for it comes too close to confession on the one side and prying on the other. Hence I shall restrict myself to the most general comments on the broadest features of Fromm’s conception of love.

Start with the central conception, which is Fromm’s idea of the universality of love: “Love of one person implies love of man as such.”⁴⁸ The implications of this can be summarized in the formula “all are capable of love and all who love, love all.” Then add a formulation which is manifestly inconsistent with the first one and the problem is set: erotic love “is by its very nature exclusive and not universal. . . .”⁴⁹ These two conceptions can never come together, unless we force a word entirely out of shape. Is love universal or is it exclusive? The answer to this question decides all the others.

Fromm will not tolerate exclusiveness: the magic circle of love must be opened. So in the end he denies the essential exclusiveness of erotic love and fuses it with universal love. “Erotic love is exclusive, but it loves in the other person all of mankind, all that is alive. It is exclusive only in the sense that I can fuse myself fully and intensely with one person only. Erotic love excludes the love for others only in the sense of erotic fusion, full commitment in all aspects of life—but not in the sense of deep brotherly love.”⁵⁰

What has happened is clear: this is another of those places in his work where Fromm juggles opposites. He will not choose between two diametrically opposed conceptions. He refuses the choice and asserts that the two conceptions are “basically” one. The necessity of this refusal is apparent in all aspects of his thought, as are its consequences. At bottom we are dealing with aristocratic and democratic orientations toward life, and Fromm is a democrat. He will not abide exclusiveness and privilege. He would make all men equal. This is the theme of what I shall say about Fromm on love.

How else can we account for the paleness, the lack of color and vigor, of Fromm’s treatment of erotic love?



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Fromm understands the fundamental point in any discussion of love, which is that love is the most total act of a human soul, but he will not go on to accept the obvious corollary, which is that the nature of a man's soul will determine the character of his love. A man's love is as he is. If he is shallow, his love will not be otherwise. If he is coarse, or inconstant, or noble, so will his love be. A man's way of love expresses his total constitution—his vital energy, his perceptiveness, his intelligence, his ability to communicate. Hence love has degrees of psychic pressure, depth, and temperature, and these variations reflect the powers of the being who loves. It is misleading to conceive of love as a capacity which all may possess in the same degree. Love is a talent, and just as some men have a great talent for poetry, others have a great talent for love. There are aristocrats of love just as there are aristocrats of painting, music, politics. Whether the love be erotic, religious, or brotherly, an extraordinary love reflects an extraordinary person. By making love the birthright of all, Fromm necessarily denatures it. That, I think, accounts for the paleness of his treatment of love.

Fromm makes love synonymous with sympathetic relations among men. This of course is one of the characteristics of our day, which has agreed to make love mean affection, loyalty, care, and concern, as it usually does, for example, in the state of matrimony. This strips love of the aura of mystery and enchantment which has always surrounded it. Again, it must be insisted that the enchanted circle does not protect only profane love, where the idea is captured in the motifs of the magic potion, the philter, and the secret formula, but is just as powerful in sacred love. In the Bible, love is the ultimate mystery, the mystery of mysteries, impervious to reason and analysis. The simple

words "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son . . ." ⁶¹ are as "reasonable" on the hundredth as on the first reading: they yield nothing to reason.

Fromm's rational and democratic conception of love rests on a confusion. He confuses love with its consequences. Many things, such as the care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge which Fromm speaks of, grow from love, but they are not love itself. They are its products. They presuppose love because they arise from it. To take them for love itself is to take accidents for essence. Or, if I may adapt a metaphor from Kierkegaard, "the tree is known by its fruits," each tree by its own fruits. We do not say that the tree is the fruit, however, but only that we can learn something about the nature of the tree by its fruit. The inward secret life of the tree is unknown to us. We know only that the life of the tree becomes partially manifest in the fruit. So too with love, which may also be partially known by its fruits, but which is not one and the same with them. The essence of love is mysterious, graspable by only a few rare spirits. Most men never truly love another nor are they ever truly loved by another on this earth. We can accept that sadness or we can with Fromm try to conceal it by equating sympathy with love.

What is worse, sympathy may falter. Fromm's democratic conception of love grows from his desire to establish solidarity among all men. He thinks that love is the only force capable of forging that bond. But I doubt whether this sympathy-love of Fromm's is adequate to its assignment. Human feelings are inconstant, and a bond forged of them alone becomes brittle or soft with changes in the psychic temperature. It is for this reason that I must disagree with Fromm's formulation of brotherly love. He claims to express the Biblical conception:



The most fundamental kind of love . . . is *brotherly love*. By this I mean the sense of responsibility, care, respect, knowledge of any other human being, the wish to further his life. This is the kind of love the Bible speaks of when it says: love thy neighbor as thyself. Brotherly love is love for all human beings. . . . If I have developed the capacity for love, then I cannot help loving my brothers.⁵²

The Bible, however, does not “speak of” love in quite this way. All Fromm has left out of the Biblical expression is its foundation and its middle term, that is, God. In the Biblical conception, God’s love is both the ground of all love and the middle term in the love between man and man. From God’s love and back to it all lesser loves flow. Christianity teaches that all human love, no matter how intense or pure, is still but the reflection of the eternal love, still but the shadow of God’s love. Indeed, the Christian teaching starts with a terrible secret question: do men really love themselves and their neighbors, or is it that they desire to be loved? In answer to the question, neighbor-love is made, not the first, but the second commandment, because men are capable of loving their neighbor, or even of desiring that their neighbor be loved, only when they themselves are assured of the love of God. That is the pain of trying unaided to love one’s neighbor, for the demands of human love cannot be satisfied by men alone at all.

As the peaceful lake is grounded deep in the hidden spring which no eye can see, so a man’s love is grounded even deeper in the love of God. If there were at bottom no wellspring, if God were not love, then there would be no quiet lake or human love. As the quiet lake is grounded darkly in the deep spring, so is human love mysteriously grounded in God’s love.⁵³

Fromm has left out something else; two words which are decisive to the rest, the words: “Thou shalt.” It is critical here that we remember the precise context in which Christ gathered up the Old Testament witness to a God of love. One of the Pharisees, thinking to tempt and confound him, asked Christ this question: “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.⁵⁴

The whole context is one of law, duty, obligation. Man is *commanded* to love. Furthermore, he is commanded to love God and the neighbor unequally. The “first and great” commandment is, not to love God as the neighbor, but “with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” One need only love the neighbor as himself. The Christian teaching recognizes degrees of love, and the highest degree is owed to God. To love man as much as God is for the Christian not the delicious vision of a poet, but blasphemy. Central to the conception is the idea that man is indebted to God for the limitless love God gives man. Hence man must strive to repay the debt through love. The Biblical conception further requires the presence of a God who loves and judges and punishes as a father loves and judges and punishes.

There is in the Christian command no pretense that it is easy to love our neighbor and no easy assertion that he who loves, loves all mankind. We know from all experience



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that such an assertion is just not true. Human love is partial, selective, erratic. We believe, I think rightly, that our love is a valuable thing, not to be thrown about indiscriminately and given to all men regardless of merit. We believe we act unjustly toward those few who deserve or have won our love if we put all others on a level with them. We believe that if we broadcast our love there will be but a meager portion for each. We feel, perhaps rightly, that some men have a stronger claim to our hatred than to our love. The Biblical formula recognizes all these hard objections, and then—commands. The command is on its face anything but reasonable and just. It is in the highest degree unreasonable and unjust. This is the brotherly love of the Bible, but it plainly is not the brotherly love of Erich Fromm. In the end one has to say that Freud, for whom the whole business of religion was a fraud, understood the spirit of the Biblical command in a way that Fromm, with his easy and generous religion of man, has not. Freud's reflections on the "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" are those which any ethical man (in Kierkegaard's sense) must make.

We will adopt a naive attitude towards it, as if we were meeting it for the first time. Thereupon we find ourselves unable to suppress a feeling of astonishment, as at something unnatural. Why should we do this? What good is it to us? Above all, how can we do such a thing? How could it possibly be done? . . . What is the point of an injunction promulgated with such solemnity, if reason does not recommend it to us?

When I look more closely I find still further difficulties. Not merely is this stranger on the whole not worthy of love, but, to be honest, I must confess he has more claim to my hostility. . . . If it will do him any good, he has no hesitation in injuring me. . . .

I imagine now I hear a voice gravely adjuring me:

"Just because thy neighbour is not worthy of thy love, is probably full of enmity towards thee, thou shouldst love him as thyself." I then perceive the case to be like that of *Credo quia absurdum*.⁵⁵ *

Freud's soliloquy suggests that a certain form of genetic argument can be brought against Fromm's thesis that "love for one person implies love for man as such." I hesitate to approach such exalted subjects as love with such mean devices as genetic argument, but here, for whatever it may be worth, is the argument.

Fromm would have to agree that for love to grow the lover must first have knowledge of the existence of the beloved. Hence to love mankind requires knowledge of the existence and nature of mankind. What is the source of knowledge of "mankind"? Unless Fromm is prepared to show (and of course he is not) that such knowledge is innate, he must admit that it comes through experience. But if knowledge of mankind is not innate, neither is love for it. Both love and knowledge of mankind must derive from experience. Here it is sufficient to say that only under certain conditions and only in certain contexts does knowledge of mankind lead to love for it. Suppose that the only men outside the small circle of family and kin one has ever had close knowledge of are the foreign soldiers who burned his crops and ravished his women. How will that victim be led to love all mankind, regardless of how loving and productive his small group relationships may be? †

* There is a tantalizing hint of stealth in Freud's argument. Is the case really "absurd"? The absurdity would seem to be that precisely because enmity of the neighbor is like the enmity of the self toward itself, there is no way to feel toward the neighbor which does not reflect self-orientations. That "voice gravely adjuring" sounds like the voice of the analyst—Freud speaking to Freud?

† This argument can be used to clarify another tendency of Fromm's thought. Fromm could reply to my genetic argument along the following lines. He might say, with Hobbes, that one can read mankind in himself:



The Biblical conception of brotherly love can make the sense of human solidarity vital and compelling in a way that no purely secular and ethical conception can. Furthermore, is it really true that the only way we can achieve care, concern, and respect for our fellows, and ultimate affirmation of their right to live and grow, is through love? It is entirely possible to find delight, just simple delight, in taking people as they are, in enjoying their infinite and motley variety, and not asking any man to be other than he is. But this does not mean loving them. It means only taking pleasure in them. Love, I think, must remain secret and mysterious, the talent and the privilege of the few. It must also remain exclusive, except in that specific Biblical sense, which includes some elements which Fromm will not accept.

To me it seems that Fromm loves love. With Augustine, he cries from the depths: "Out of a deep-seated want, I wanted, in love with loving." What is loved matters little: all men are at once equally deserving and capable. This is dangerous counsel today, when the mass media have cosmeticized sensualism and sold it for love. It is dangerous

knowledge of self is knowledge of man. Access to such knowledge comes through listening to the voice of the humanistic conscience. Unfortunately, most men never gain such knowledge, because they live in sick societies, societies which block access to the humanistic conscience and stifle or pervert the satisfaction of the basic psychic needs. This would be a sound reply to the genetic argument. But it proves too much. Fromm cannot say that every man can accurately read mankind in himself. Rather, only *productive* men can do so, for all other types of men are as alienated and cut off from the truth about themselves as they are alienated and cut off from true knowledge about other men. Hence only productive men have knowledge of and love for mankind. But where shall we find productive men? Only in sane societies; you cannot have productive men without having sane social conditions. But that comes back to the basic point of my genetic argument: you cannot expect a man to love mankind unless his social experience of mankind has been an experience of productive men living in sane societies. Here again Fromm is attempting to juggle incompatibles, this time social determinism versus essential human nature.

counsel for a people who, as Fromm himself has so incisively shown, are coming to regard all pleasures as their due and to think of their every desire as a command which the world ought to gratify. Fromm has called us the ever expectant ones, the eternal sucklers, the ones who have only to utter a need to have that need become a command upon the universe. An age of the sucklers is exactly the one to confuse desire with love and to fall in love with love. In such an age, it is precisely the duty of one who is concerned with the quality of life to insist on the exclusiveness of love and the importance of its object.

Look at the choice here, and the opportunity Fromm has lost. He takes issue with Freud for "seeing in love exclusively the expression—or a sublimation—of the sexual instinct, rather than recognizing that the sexual desire is one manifestation of the need for love and union."⁶⁶ The criticism of Freud may or may not be sound; that does not matter here. What does matter is that while he specifically criticizes Freud's reduction of love to sexuality, Fromm himself commits an error that is remarkably like the error of Freud's pan-sexualism. Fromm fails to see that the exact difference between the sexual instinct and love is that the former is indiscriminating and universal while the latter is discriminating and particular. The sexual instinct craves satisfaction: any object will do. The amorous sentiment is entirely different. Its essence is choice: only this unique object will do. Love is a choice not on all human beings but on this particular human being. It is true, as Fromm has shown, that love completely affirms its object and defends its right to exist. But it affirms *its* object. Love is the affirmation of a certain type of humanity, a beautiful humanity with a noble future. It sees that humanity and that future already existing in the one other being who is the object of love. That is the whole point: love is not an affirmation



of all mankind; it is the affirmation of a certain good and beautiful mankind which exists now in one person, the beloved.

Hence the essential feature of love is choice, decision, discrimination. It is false to think that the one who loves affirms mankind as such, respects all men equally, and takes everybody into his care and concern. Indeed, I think it is quite the other way round. It is true that the one who loves sees the world through rose glasses. His smile falls graciously on those around him, and seems warm and generous for all mankind. But look at that smile more closely. Does it really fall on the beholders with love, or is there in it a note of benevolent superiority, perhaps even a hint of amused arrogance? Does the smile really embrace the beholders, or does it seem to hint that the smiling one looks down on the smaller ones from a supreme height they cannot reach? Perhaps the smile expresses the joy of a man who is above the world, immune to its cares and desperations. The lover smiles on men not because he loves and affirms them but because he really has no intercourse with them. When the lover smiles on those around him his smile does not mean he has affirmed them, but that he has fundamentally overlooked them. His smile is really a projection onto others of his own well-being, not a genuine concern for theirs. Why, this smile of the lover expresses not universal love, but Byronic disdain, for surely there is no higher disdain than failure to see the defects, the pains, and the limitations of others. The lover disdains the whole world. If you doubt this, if you think the lover's generous smile affirms you, then try to keep him from his beloved. Try to detain him or send him somewhere else. Try merely to interest him in your affairs. He will thrust you aside—forcefully, without remorse. I want to emphasize that this is true of love as a passion, not only of erotic love. Try detaining the mystic or the man

who conceives himself to be in a state of grace. He will push you aside as firmly as the erotic lover.

So I think Fromm's democratic conception of love is wrong both in itself and because of its possible consequences in our age. His great error is to confuse the products of love (care, respect, etc.) with love itself. He makes this error because he refuses to see that love is a talent which only a few possess in the highest degree. He also fails to see that the lover affirms not the whole of mankind as it now is but a future beautiful mankind. "Love is a desire for generation and birth in beauty." That is how Plato defined the divine madness; and in his formulation lies the heart of love's mysterious creativity. Love is a desire that is consummated only in the birth of beauty.

In denying the mystery of love, Fromm tries to make love rational. That is the import of the emphasis he puts on knowledge as one of the dimensions of love. And yet, though the emphasis is there, its meaning is not entirely clear. In Fromm's analysis, knowledge apparently has two main relations with love. The first is that we cannot know another person unless we love him. That, I think, is the meaning of the following passage:

To respect a person is not possible without *knowing* him; care and responsibility would be blind if they were not guided by knowledge. Knowledge would be empty if it were not motivated by concern. There are many layers of knowledge; the knowledge which is an aspect of love is one which does not stay at the periphery, but penetrates to the core. It is possible only when I can transcend the concern for myself and see the other person in his own terms.⁵⁷

The first infinitive clause is untrue. My Webster defines respect as "to consider worthy of esteem; hence, to refrain



from obtruding upon, as a person's privacy." As synonyms it offers "honor," "revere," "venerate." In this sense, one respects many people he knows little or nothing about. I respect Erich Fromm though I know him not at all. The second sentence is dubious. I can know a good bit about people without having much concern for them. It is even possible that the more I learn about a man, the less concern I will have for him. Finally, it is hard to say whether the passage as a whole means (1) knowledge is impossible without love; (2) love is impossible without knowledge; (3) both; or (4) neither. I have taken it to mean that we cannot have full knowledge of another without love for him.

The second relation Fromm posits between knowledge and love is that love is the only way to gain full knowledge of another *without violating him*. There is a "specifically human desire," Fromm asserts, to know the secret of man, to fathom the inmost recesses of the human soul. There are two ways to know the secret. The first is to gain power over a man and force him to submit to your probes and experiments. The other path is through love, not thought about love, but the act of love. "The only way of full knowledge lies in the *act* of love: this act transcends thought, it transcends words."⁵⁸ "However," he continues, "knowledge in thought, that is psychological knowledge, is a necessary condition for full knowledge in the act of love." Thus objective knowledge about a person is the first step on the ladder to loving union with him, just as thought about God is the first step toward mystical union with Him. This leads Fromm to the bold conclusion that just "as the logical consequence of theology is mysticism, so the ultimate consequence of psychology is love."⁵⁹

Here Fromm has found the right words for a discourse on love. And notice how emphatically those words convey the themes of exclusiveness, mystery, incommunicability.

Fromm's guiding analogy here is with mysticism, which is the perfect sacred counterpart of profane love. Now, the way of the mystic has always been lonely and secretive, and whatever discoveries he makes he cannot communicate. The mystic's knowledge, unlike the knowledge usually called scientific or rational, is essentially private and inward. "The mystic may say—is indeed bound to say—with St. Bernard, 'My secret to myself.' Try how he will, his stammering and awe-struck reports can hardly be understood but by those who are already in the way."⁶⁰ So it is with the lover.

But Fromm will not accept the full implications of his own analogy, which, to say it again, is the correct analogy. The "logical consequence" of theology is not mysticism at all. The mystic and the theologian go separate ways, and each has always mistrusted the other. Theology fears mysticism for mysticism has no need of theology and usually feels hampered by it. Nor does this mutual animosity have anything to do with the old and complex question of the relationship between reason and faith: it is a matter of different kinds of reason and different kinds of faith.

This suggests similar ideas with regard to profane love. Fromm says the "ultimate consequence of psychology [that is, scientific knowledge of human nature] is love." The folk adage says "love is blind." It seems to me that the adage comes closer than Fromm to understanding the relations between knowledge and love. It is not true that love requires "objective knowledge" of the beloved. Like the mystic, the lover has no need of that and most likely will be impatient with it. Love never asked for facts nor consulted learning. The lover, as Stendhal's notion of crystalization makes clear, in a very real sense invents, that is, creates the beloved. Again we run up against the ineluctably exclusive and aristocratic meaning of love.

Fromm regards love as producing an enrichment of the



mental life. The lover knows more deeply, sees more clearly, senses more vitally than the one who does not love. In one sense that is true and in another it is false. The lover is one who has concentrated his whole being on one object. All the rest is shut out or perceived only in relation to the object of love. Hence the poets describe love as a mania, a madness, an intense concentration of energy upon one object. The lover feels his life to be richer than before, his psychic and emotional faculties keener, but this feeling of enrichment is partly a function of the fact that his whole being has become fixed on one center. His life is richer because it is narrower. Thus what from the point of view of the lover seems an enrichment of the psychic life is from the point of view of the outside observer an impoverishment of it.

I am arguing, in summary, that Fromm's universalistic conception of love overlooks essential dimensions of the meaning of love. Rather, Fromm does not actually overlook those other dimensions; he just will not give them full importance in his thought. This is a consequence of his wholly admirable desire to vindicate the brotherhood of man. But I have also argued that love, excepting the Biblical and specifically theistic expression of it, is not suited to that end. Human love is essentially exclusive and attempts to universalize it run two risks; the risk of diluting it, and the risk of confusing it with its consequences. I have argued further that to praise love in the style of Fromm is in our day to run the risk of adding to a debased conception of love as the right to be accepted as one is and the right to have one's sensual wants gratified. We must all in this age of national parochialisms long for the day when mankind realizes its larger solidarity. But I think we must work for that community with the methods that, in Thoreau's phrase, raise the individual to a higher power. That means

we should respect greatness, learn to delight in the variety and uniqueness of men, and above all strive toward a tact and a respect in our relations with our fellows that will make it possible for each to work toward his own destiny without violating the private destiny and the inner universe of another. Tact, respect, pride in achievement, delight in variety, admiration of excellence—these, and not sympathy and sincerity disguised as love, are the basic constituents of that larger and nobler community of human excellence toward which our age can aspire.

Our age has silently but massively resolved against the conceptions of love which dazzled the Western imagination and seared the Western heart for centuries. We have ended both the epic of Christian love and the dream of romantic love which succeeded it. We have chosen sympathy-love over the stern imperatives of Christian love, and we have chosen sentimental love over the agony of romantic love. In these respects, Fromm's work is an appropriate epilogue to the story of Western love. In Fromm's pages, Christian love appears only as a bland residue of sympathy and benevolence left over after all the stringent elements of duty, debt, and sacrifice have been distilled out. Romantic love, too, has lost its perfume, its mystery, and its terror in his work, and remains only as a wispy haze of sentiment for the brotherhood of all mankind. In the Western story of romantic love, individualism found its supreme expression. And as the individual grew more and more spiritually autonomous, and hence, as Fromm himself has shown, more and more lonely, he came to worship Eros as the only god capable of breaking through the individualistic isolation. The romantic lover sought in the beloved not merely a beloved, but salvation. But this charged love with unmanageable spiritual demands, so that in the end romantic love had to be an agony, a shipwreck of the soul. Fromm



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has lifted this burden from love and assured us that we can all be happy in the benign aura of fellow-feeling. In Fromm's pages on love, we can see on display some of the deepest resolutions of the modern mind—its conviction that the visible world it comprehends is the only real world there is, its wish to risk only small stakes in the game of life, its faith in the reality of happiness.

Pleasure and Happiness

With that ringing word happiness I come to my last series of remarks on productive man. In the following pages I shall discuss Fromm's thought on those two central terms in ethical discourse, pleasure and happiness. I shall be particularly concerned to examine his attempt to solve the problem of subjectivity in a hedonistic ethic by recourse to the sovereign notion of productiveness.*

Authoritarian ethics, Fromm begins, has the virtue of simplicity: it solves all problems by making authority's dictates the standard of good and evil and by making obedience synonymous with virtue. Humanistic ethics, which rejects the authoritarian solution, has one great difficulty: "in making man the sole judge of values it would seem that pleasure or pain becomes the final arbiter of good and evil." The humanistic solution thus understood is obviously no solution at all, for it is radically subjectivistic and can lead to grotesque and self-destructive results. Are we left then with a choice between two grossly bad alternatives?

Fromm thinks not. He thinks that "this alternative between submission to authority and response to pleasure as

* Fromm's treatment appears in *Man for Himself*, pp. 172–197. Since I shall state his case largely in his own words, it would be tedious to footnote each quotation. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in this section will be found in the aforementioned pages.

guiding principles is fallacious." It is fallacious because it fails to recognize that "pleasure, satisfaction, happiness, and joy . . . are different and partly contradictory phenomena." With the aid of psychoanalytic methods and findings, we are finally in a position to solve the ancient problem of humanistic ethics, the problem of the qualitative analysis of pleasure, in a way that overcomes subjectivism and results in an objectively based ethics. Thus Fromm undertakes an analysis which will show that "happiness and joy although, in a sense, *subjective* experiences, are the outcome of interactions with, and depend on, *objective conditions* and must not be confused with the merely subjective pleasure experience. These objective conditions can be summarized comprehensively as productiveness."

For the better appreciation of the new wisdom, Fromm turns first to some older writers on pleasure and happiness. He starts with Aristippus and ends with Spencer, bowing along the way to Epicurus, Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza. His treatments of these writers are so brief as to be valueless in themselves (Aristippus gets a short paragraph, Epicurus, Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza get medium paragraphs, and Spencer a full page), so it will do to summarize Fromm's findings before moving on to the new science.

The concepts of Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, and Spencer have in common the ideas (1) that the subjective experience of pleasure is in itself not a sufficient criterion of *value*; (2) that happiness is conjunctive with the good; (3) that an objective criterion for the evaluation of pleasure can be found.

All these theorists were handicapped by the fact that they wrote before psychoanalysis had been invented. They built on coarse data, data not refined by subtle techniques of observation and study. Aided by such techniques, Fromm



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attempts to push the discussion of pleasure as a norm for living beyond its traditional scope.

At the outset, psychoanalysis joins the opponents of hedonistic ethics in the view that "the subjective experience of satisfaction is in itself deceptive and not a valid criterion of value." As examples, Fromm mentions the psychoanalytic insight into sadistic and masochistic strivings. Although satisfaction of such strivings is accompanied by pleasure, psychoanalysis can show that both the strivings and the pleasure are "objectively harmful" to the total personality. He also mentions the psychoanalytic discovery of the ambiguous dynamics of repression. The discovery that pain and pleasure, unhappiness and happiness can be unconscious as well as conscious leads to an important principle, the principle that "happiness and unhappiness are expressions of the state of the entire organism, of the total personality. Happiness is conjunctive with an increase in vitality, intensity of feeling and thinking, and productivity; unhappiness is conjunctive with the decrease of these capacities and functions." This principle is important because it permits Fromm to say that a man can be unhappy despite his belief that he is happy. It is not enough to have the "illusion of happiness." There must be real happiness, which is a product of certain definable objective conditions. Fromm would take as nothing an affirmative verbal response to the question "are you happy?" He would insist that a valid answer to that question must come from an analysis of the person's total personality and social situation.

At this point Fromm turns to the analysis of the qualitative differences among the various kinds of pleasure. This analysis is "the key to the problem of the relation between pleasure and ethical values." The argument can be best developed by presenting a number of definitions.

Satisfaction. Fromm defines this as the subjective

feeling of pleasure which accompanies the relief of physiological tensions, such as hunger, thirst, the need for sexual release, and the like. Satisfaction can be very intense, and it is the easiest, the most common, and for many men the only kind of pleasure attainable. Desires for this kind of pleasure are rhythmic and satiable; that is, such desires appear only when a physiological need is unfulfilled, and they disappear when the need has been met. Such pleasures are perfectly normal. Many writers, Freud among them, have made the mistake of thinking that satisfaction is the essence of all kinds of pleasure.

Irrational pleasure. This type of pleasure also comes from relief of tension, but from irrational psychic tension rather than from physiologically based tension. This kind of tension often manifests itself in physiological forms, but the origin remains psychic. Thus, the need for drinking is often not due to thirst but to some psychic dysfunctioning. An insecure person who has an intense need to prove his worth to himself may try to do it by "making" others sexually. He may rationalize his desire as due to the virile demands of his body, but it is really due to his need to justify himself or to dominate others. It is in the very nature of such irrational psychic tensions that they cannot be "satisfied." They spring from a basic deficiency within oneself; hence they are insatiable. Such pleasures are an indication of pathological desires and basic unhappiness.

Gratification. This is the pleasure which accompanies the accomplishment of any task one has set out to do—making a sale, building a boat, writing a book. Achieving a desired goal is gratifying, even if the goal is not a productive one, because the achievement gives proof of one's powers and shows his ability to cope with the world.

Pleasure. Fromm reserves this word for the one type of good feeling which is based not on effort, but on relaxa-

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tion. It accompanies effortless but pleasant activity. It means rest and relaxation, easeful activity.

Happiness and joy. Both satisfaction and irrational pleasure are part of a "system of scarcity." They are types of pleasure which result from fulfillment of some lack, and the lack itself is the basis of the pleasure. Satisfaction is the pleasure which accompanies fulfillment of a physiological lack. Irrational pleasure comes from the temporary mitigation of a psychic lack, a lack which is always "rooted in the fundamental lack of productiveness."

Beyond the realm of scarcity rises a nobler realm, the realm of abundance. In this higher realm, not satisfaction and irrational pleasure but happiness and joy prevail. This is "the realm of productiveness, of inner activity." This realm comes into existence only to the extent that the province of scarcity is diminished, so that men need not consume their best energies in the struggle for subsistence. "The evolution of the human race is characterized by the expansion of the realm of abundance. . . . All specifically *human* achievements of man spring from abundance."

The pleasures of the realm of scarcity are pleasures of satisfaction. Those of the realm of abundance are pleasures of joy. The distinction between the two realms is to be found in all spheres of life—work, love, eating, sex, and the rest. To clarify his point, Fromm offers a number of examples. One will suffice here. "Hunger is a phenomenon of scarcity; its satisfaction, a necessity. Appetite is a phenomenon of abundance; its satisfaction not a necessity but an expression of freedom and productiveness. The pleasure accompanying it may be called joy." He goes on to say that joy and happiness are the same in quality and differ only in usage: "joy refers to a single act while happiness may be said to be a continuous or integrated experience of joy. . . ." The sequence closes with a definition of happi-

ness, which is "the indication that man has found the answer to the problem of human existence: the productive realization of his potentialities. . . ." Happiness is thus the feeling of pleasure which accompanies productive living. As such, it is "*the criterion . . . of virtue in the meaning it has in humanistic ethics.*"

Let Fromm state the conclusions of the analysis.

We are now in a position to formulate our view on the ethical relevance of pleasure. Satisfaction as relief from physiologically conditioned tension is neither good nor bad; as far as ethical evaluation is concerned it is ethically neutral, as are gratification and pleasure. Irrational pleasure and happiness (joy) are experiences of ethical significance. Irrational pleasure is the indication of greed, of the failure to solve the problem of human existence. Happiness (joy), on the contrary, is proof of partial or total success in the "art of living." Happiness is man's greatest achievement; it is the response of his total personality to a productive orientation toward himself and the world outside.⁶¹

This theory of the "ethical relevance of pleasure" presents a distressingly large number of complex questions, so the first task is to limit the scope of the discussion. First of all, since the theory is only a special application of Fromm's general theory of good and evil, it is not necessary to retrace the arguments of the first chapter. That already removes most of the basic questions from the present discussion. Secondly, I shall limit the discussion by directing most of my remarks to the relations between the theory of the ethical relevance of pleasure and the concept of productiveness. My argument will move toward one conclusion: in the end, productive man is without anything that can be meaningfully called moral obligation, either to himself or to his fellows.



At the outset, it should be said that Fromm's distinctions among the types of pleasure make a real contribution to ethical discourse. They make possible an accuracy of expression which is often lacking and always valuable in ethical study. It seems to me too that the distinctions represent real differences in the realm of experience. Fromm has made a contribution to the understanding of pleasure as well as to the language of ethics.

Useful as the distinctions may be, however, they are not watertight. This is especially clear in his treatment of "satisfaction" and "irrational pleasure." It is impossible to tell just where physiologically based needs leave off and psychologically based needs begin. Take even the simplest case, the need for food or sleep. Even here no purely scientific measurement will quite do the job. And when we come to sex, the intermixture of the psychological and the physiological is so intimate that no filter, no matter how fine, can separate the two components and measure their respective weights with much accuracy. This ambiguity seriously weakens Fromm's contention that "satisfaction . . . is neither good nor bad . . . [but] ethically neutral. . . ."

Fromm's dismissal of satisfaction-pleasure as ethically neutral permits him to avoid two of the central problems of moral philosophy: (1) by what methods should satisfaction-pleasure be pursued and achieved; and (2) given a condition where supplies (food, for example) are scarcer than the demand for them, by what principle should the available goods be distributed among needy claimants. As soon as one poses such questions, he is compelled to realize that satisfaction-pleasures are not ethically irrelevant at all; rather, they go to the heart of moral and political philosophy, for it is precisely in this area that the hard problems arise, the problems men have to face in this world. Consider the tortuously complex ethical and moral questions raised

by the legal and customary regulation of property ownership, say, or of sexual behavior. Here, where men must live and work and concern themselves with distributive justice and social well-being, Fromm coolly tells us that ethical philosophy can offer no counsel.

This is one aspect of the thoroughly utopian (in the bad sense, meaning artificial, unrealistic) character of Fromm's treatment of these matters. Another is his distinction between the realm of scarcity and the realm of abundance, and his assignment of happiness exclusively to the latter. This is a cruelly utopian distinction, for it informs those who endure shortages that happiness can be theirs only after scarcity is abolished by abundance. Meanwhile, the life that must be lived in the realm of scarcity—and that of course is the life of most of us—is just "ethically neutral." It is hard to think of a doctrine with harsher consequences than this one. Taken seriously, it would put an end to the moral ties among men, abolish all ideas of social justice, and return us to a kind of Hobbesian state of nature. We are dealing here with a secular chiliasm; and chiliasm has always meant rejection of this world.

"All specifically human achievements of man spring from abundance." When one reads that memorable Frommian sentence for the first time, he is warmed by its generosity. It is radiant with love for mankind, humble with respect for the grandeur of the human enterprise, powerful in its affirmation of the nobility of man. We feel that all the author's instincts are with the right and human cause. Successive rereadings do not destroy that impression, but they do evoke others less pleasant. The sentence rests on a special use of the adjective human which is all the more ruthless precisely because of its face nobility and generosity. The sentence epitomizes the unintentional cruelty and the terrible blindness of the utopian.



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Men have done an infinite number of things. Is Chartres cathedral a more specifically human achievement than the Kremlin? The one may in some sense be specifically French and the other specifically Russian, but surely both are generally human. What does it mean to talk about specifically human achievements? Presumably, it means that some (small) portion of the actions of men is human while another (much larger) portion is, perhaps, nonhuman or inhuman or subhuman. This distinction would define the works and lives of most men out of the human realm. Somehow, this seems less "humanistic" than the ancient "nothing human is foreign to me."

What does it mean to say that all specifically human achievements "spring from abundance"? This really seems to suggest that men behave in a "specifically human" way only after they have fulfilled their drives for gratification, satisfaction, and pleasure. This is incomprehensible. What of the prodigious works of pride? Are they not human? And if they are, in what meaningful sense can we say that they spring from abundance? What of the achievements of sacrifice? Do they not suggest that men are often willing to forego abundance? What of the enormous achievements that have been made in the face of extreme scarcity, or perhaps at the cost of abundance? Taken seriously, Fromm's notion would simply deny that most of history is "human" history.

It seems that Fromm has accepted the very modern idea that men begin to act like good men only after they have gained something called security—a strangely materialistic idea for one who calls himself a humanist. Furthermore, where could one find the evidence that would support the thesis of a direct and positive correlation between degree of abundance and degree of happiness or virtue? Many teachers have thought the opposite was the case: It

is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Fromm himself has charged that our riches have corrupted us. My only point is that we just do not know much about these matters; certainly not enough to support Fromm's thesis that abundance is the necessary foundation of happiness. We do know one thing for sure, and it is a thing which brings into question Fromm's whole distinction between the realms of scarcity and abundance: scarcity and abundance are both social definitions, which vary widely from place to place. What is scarcity at one time or for one people may seem abundance at another time or for another people. In such matters, we must be content with relatives and cannot hope for absolutes.

From these particular considerations I now move to two more general matters which will, hopefully, lead to the promised conclusion that productive man really has nothing that can properly be called a moral or ethical code.

The first of these matters is what may be described as the static quality of Fromm's treatment of the "ethical relevance of pleasure." The point can be developed by comparing Fromm with a man he doubtless does not admire, Thomas Hobbes. I shall try to show that although the two start from just about the same point, Fromm never moves much beyond it, while Hobbes, of course, does reach conclusions, baleful though they be.

The details of Hobbes's general psychology need not be inquired into here. What is most relevant is his principle that the human organism inherently, instinctively, strives to maintain and to increase its vitality. This rule governs all behavior, and from it may be built a whole psychology and a theory of value. Every stimulus, every condition in the environment, affects vitality either favorably or unfavorably. If the stimulus enhances vitality, man moves



toward it; that is, he tries to gain and preserve the favorable condition. If the effect is unfavorable, the organism retreats or tries to modify the deleterious condition. Movement toward an object Hobbes calls desire; movement away, aversion. Whatever a man desires he calls good, and whatever he hates he calls evil. Hence there is nothing good or evil as such, for each man calls that which he desires good. There is also no final end, or *summum bonum*, but only a succession of ends which a man from time to time desires. Success in achieving one's ends Hobbes calls felicity, and since there is no final end felicity is always a condition of movement or activity, not of calm or rest. One is always striving after felicity. He never attains it once and for all. In the pursuit of felicity, certain habits of mind are useful and others are detrimental. The former Hobbes calls virtues; the latter he calls defects. The means or abilities a man uses to attain felicity Hobbes comprehensively calls powers. Hence the struggle for felicity is virtually identical with the struggle for power. Men perpetually strive to increase their power, for that is the only way to assure success in the pursuit of felicity:

I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this, is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a more moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more.⁶²

Hobbes's bleak description of the state of nature follows ineluctably from this account of human motivation. That description need not detain us. What matters is that Hobbes recognized that in such a state there is neither right

nor wrong, justice nor injustice. The only rule of life is "that to be every man's that he can get; and for so long, as he can keep it." Hobbes recognized too that such a state is a state of fearful insecurity. Men must use their reason to build a civil order that can overcome the anarchy of nature. To build a civil order means that men must establish rules and conventions, and they must erect a sovereign who can see that the rules are obeyed.

The similarity between Hobbes's and Fromm's fundamental psychological premises is remarkable. Fromm shares Hobbes's principle that the human organism acts to increase its vitality. He also shares the idea that to live and to develop one's powers are one and the same. His definition of virtue is almost exactly that of Hobbes: virtue is that which increases man's powers. But there the similarity ends. Fromm will not unfold the implications of these dynamic premises. He will not face up to the social consequences of a psychology which defines man as the creature driven to preserve and fulfill himself, the creature who must always increase his powers to achieve his ends. Instead, Fromm concludes—and the conclusion is entirely out of harmony with his premises—with a static conception of happiness that applies only in the realm of abundance. He simply dismisses all problems raised by the search for satisfactions (felicity) in the realm of scarcity. Above all, Fromm seems unable to understand that the so-called ethic of productive man is no ethic at all. He fails to grasp Hobbes's insight that morality consists of a conventional body of rules which men have collectively agreed to obey so that the interests of each can be secured. This brings me to my last point.

The point can be opened by developing the answers to two questions. (1) What is the specific nature or content of value in Fromm's ethical system? (2) Is the source of



value in Fromm's ethical theory internal or external to the individual?

In answer to the first question, it is obvious that Fromm's ethic is not hedonistic, whether pure or modified. He rejects the naive hedonism of Aristippus as well as the more prudent and sophisticated hedonism of Epicurus. Fromm's position is closer to that of Spinoza. Like Spinoza, he regards happiness (joys) as both the reward of and the evidence for the productive, that is, the good life. Productiveness is its own end and the only end. Happiness accompanies it; happiness is the feeling-state which is produced by productiveness. Since this is so, happiness is also the evidence or indicator of productiveness. Happiness is not an end in itself; rather, it is "proof of partial or total success in the 'art of living.'" ⁶³ In sum, Fromm's ideal is an ideal of health or hygiene. Physical and psychological fitness, vibrant growth and expansiveness—these are the *summum bonum*, the highest end and good. Happiness is merely their reward and indicator.

The answer to the second question is unequivocal. Time and again Fromm has said that the individual is the sole source of value. The consequences of this simple affirmation are profound. In a basic sense, "ought" loses all its traditional meaning, for it no longer refers to anything outside of the individual. "Ought" implies a source and locus separate from the actor. It has no meaning when it is self-contained. In Fromm's ethics, to say someone ought to do something is like saying God ought to do something—an idea which, given the notion of God, is absurd. From the point of view of ethics, there is no metaphysical difference between an ethics of pure pleasure-seeking and one of health, self-realization, self-denial, or anything else, *so long as these refer to nothing outside of the individual*. If nothing outside of me is a source of value for me, I can be

obliged to no man, nor he to me. We are each alone and sovereign; we are to each other as man is to man in the state of nature.

Let me offer an example. A number of American soldiers taken prisoner in Korea were confined in a small hut in North Korea under extremely harsh conditions. Inside the hut, there were filth, malnutrition, cold, crowding, despair. Life was reduced to the struggle for survival. Outside the hut, the temperature was far below freezing, and the ground was covered with snow. One of the prisoners was stricken by a noisome and debilitating diarrhea. He needed attention and care which the group could not provide him without danger and sacrifice to itself. One of the soldiers whose bunk was next to that of the sick man, fearing for his own health and no longer able to endure the stench, threw the invalid out of the hut, where he died. The soldier who committed the act might have reflected as follows. This man is the sole source of value for himself, just as I am for me. His "ought" does not extend to me, nor mine to him. And there is no source of "oughts" outside of and above us both. I conclude that I owe him no help. There is no moral reason why I should care if he dies. Now, of course, Fromm argues that I *will* care, if I am a productive man; and if I do not care I am by definition unproductive, that is, sick. Given Fromm's meaning of productiveness, this is probably true. But note what has happened here. There is still no *moral* obligation to help this man, my injured neighbor. Any inclination I may feel to help him is merely an *accidental* manifestation, a by-product of my productiveness. Furthermore, I would repeat, though it is not necessary to my thesis here, that I tried to show some pages back that the brotherly care and concern which Fromm thinks would move me does not even necessarily result from productiveness. More broadly, I suggested that

mere sympathy and pity for the pains of one's fellows will not provide the roots of secure mutual aid. As La Rochefoucauld's chill maxim has it, "we all have strength enough to endure the troubles of others."

Thus it turns out that all this talk of pleasure, irrational pleasure, satisfaction, and the rest, is really not very important. The important thing about Fromm's ethics is not his choice of productiveness (happiness, joys, health) over pleasure but his choice of the individual as the sole source of value. It is now possible to see in a fuller light the meaning of a statement quoted earlier, the statement that "this alternative between submission to authority and response to pleasure as guiding principles is fallacious."⁶⁴ There is a course between authoritarian and hedonistic ethics, and Fromm has found it in his ethic of health.* But the course is just not very significant. Fromm took the decisive step when he centered value in the individual. After that, definite and severe consequences follow, no matter what the content of value may be.

This is the ultimate expression of Fromm's utopianism, and the measure of the failure of his ethical theory. By banishing all moral authority external to the individual, he banishes all inter-individual morality. This, in effect, is to banish all morality whatever. Fromm has simply failed to come to grips with that hardest of all problems for a theorist who, like Hobbes or Locke, starts from individualistic premises—the problem of forging moral links among individuals. Hobbes and Locke attempted the problem. So far as I can see, Fromm has not. He refuses to introduce into his theory of ethics any element of convention, of art, of rules of conduct which men rationally make and agree to follow. There is a distressing paradox here: Fromm, who

* Actually, there are many such courses, but they are not germane to this discussion.

explicitly vaunts reason, implicitly discards it as an element in the moral life and encourages us to return to nature.

Not all the way back to nature, however. Fromm will not do that, even though the price of not doing so is to leave the major problem without a solution. It must be emphasized that the root of the problem here is Fromm's individualism. Starting from such premises, he must either go forward and confront the problems which Hobbes and Locke confronted, or he must go back and accept one of the two solutions to this problem of forming bonds between men which Erotic thought has developed. The first of these solutions is to maintain the passionate connections among men by assuring that the desire for closeness never reaches absolute fulfillment, thereby binding the members of the community together in a tense network of constant yearning and unfulfilled desire. (The previous remarks on the Balinese love-play quality of Fromm's ethic are relevant here.) The high effectiveness of this solution is suggested by the findings of Shils and Janowitz in their work on cohesion in the *Wehrmacht*.⁶⁵ Fromm cannot accept this solution because for him love (desire, yearning) must come to completion. The second Erotic solution is to stamp out individuality altogether, to build a community which has no notion of difference, of distinctness, of separateness. In such a community, no member can calculate the utility and the advantage of action for himself alone, distinguished from the group. The purest forms of this type of community appeared in the ancient world, before the notion of individuality had developed. The Band of Thebes is an excellent example; the army of Sparta another. Compare either of these with the squabbling, selfish, unruly, and yet in some way more admirable pack which Xenophon described in the *Anabasis*, and the contrast will be clear. Fromm, of course, cannot accept this solution because it abolishes the



individual. Rejecting both of these primitive and “incestuous” solutions, and failing to come to grips with the problem of a rational morality, Fromm is left with no solution at all.

Having dissolved morality in productiveness, the only social adhesive he has left is the natural tendency of productive individuals to love and care for each other. Seen in this light, the necessity of his theory of love to his whole system becomes apparent. Perhaps too it is now clear why I spent so much time discussing the aristocratic element in love and the element of command in Christian love. That was my way of preparing the conclusion that Fromm’s theory of love, which is basic to his whole system, is wrong. We do not look for allies when we love; rather, we set ourselves apart. I would repeat here that even if Fromm is right on the nature of love, even if productive individuals will care for one another, this care is a non-moral phenomenon. Fromm indeed banishes all morality in the grand hope that, given abundance, men can get along harmoniously by their good will and natural generosity. That is the ultimate meaning of the “morality” of productiveness. In the meantime, as we endure in the realm of scarcity, any talk of values is merely empty, or perhaps deceptive. One is compelled to Auden’s lines:

All the ideals in the world won’t feed us
Although they give our crimes a certain air.⁶⁶

With this, I leave productive man and move to the next question, which is, why are productive men so scarce?

CHAPTER III

Alienation

The question which ended the previous chapter can be answered in a few words: productive men are scarce because modern society is sick. This answer raises two further questions, which this chapter will explore. The first one, which will be treated very briefly, is, in what sense can a society be sick? The second is, what, in Fromm’s view, is the specific sickness of modern society?

Can Society Be Sick?

In what sense can a society be called sick? What are the symptoms of social disease and social health? How can a social sickness be diagnosed? This decisive question is the first one that any doctor of social reform ought to explore, carefully and at length. It is remarkable how few have done so. Plato did, and so did Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Marx, and Durkheim. This completes the list of names of the first rank, and one needs only a glance to see how various the answers are. Plato, for example, thought social sickness meant a derangement in the proper relations of the



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classes, while Marx thought it lay in the very existence of classes. Hobbes saw social sickness as a lack of shared meanings among men, a lack which could be remedied only by the creation of an absolute rule maker. Durkheim, on the other hand, thought social sickness was expressed in the very growth of the state power. When such wise doctors disagree, not much can be expected from a novice. I shall try only to show how Fromm approaches the problem and to indicate some of the difficulties of his approach.

At the outset, it should be noted that the problem is an important one in Fromm's thought. His use of such terms as social pathology, sick society, and sane society is not metaphorical. He means such expressions literally, and he means them scientifically. Basic to his thought is the idea that a society as well as an individual can be in various degrees and states of sickness or well-being. Further, thanks to modern social science, it is possible to determine objectively the state of health of a society. Once the diagnosis is made, remedial measures can be scientifically prescribed.¹

Fromm believes there are universal and objective criteria of mental health. He further believes that we know what these criteria are. It follows that mental well-being is measured not by the degree to which one is "adjusted" to his society, but by the degree to which he fulfills the objective criteria. In formal terms we can say that the mentally healthy person is one who has achieved a productive fulfillment of the five basic psychic needs. In more substantive terms, Fromm defines mental health as follows:

Mental health is characterized by the ability to love and to create, by the emergence from incestuous ties to clan and soil, by a sense of identity based on one's experience of self as the subject and agent of one's powers, by the grasp of reality inside and outside of ourselves, that is, by the development of objectivity and reason.²

To the degree that one meets these criteria, he is healthy. Whether or not he will be healthy, however, is a matter largely out of his hands. It is determined by the society in which he lives. A healthy society makes healthy men and an unhealthy society makes unhealthy men. A healthy society can be defined as one which provides the conditions for the productive fulfillment of the basic needs.

A healthy society furthers man's capacity to love his fellow men, to work creatively, to develop his reason and objectivity, to have a sense of self which is based on the experience of his own productive powers. An unhealthy society is one which creates mutual hostility, distrust, which transforms man into an instrument of use and exploitation for others, which deprives him of a sense of self, except inasmuch as he submits to others or becomes an automaton.³

A large gap appears in the system at this point. Fromm nowhere explains how one should conduct a diagnosis of society. Of course, a certain amount of direction is implicit in his analysis. You could presumably tell whether and how society is sick by looking at a sample of individuals in it. To know how society was making men sick you would probably look first at the conditions of work and then at the family, since the former largely determines the social character, and the latter transmits it to the new generations. Beyond that, Fromm says little about the art of social diagnosis.

Finally, the cure of social pathology follows the same procedures as the cure of individual pathology. As Fromm puts it at the beginning of his discussion of "roads to sanity":

If this chapter is to discuss . . . methods of cure, we had better . . . ask ourselves what we know about the



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nature of cure in cases of individual mental diseases. The cure of social pathology must follow the same principle, since it is the pathology of so many human beings, and not of an entity beyond or apart from individuals.⁴

The conditions for the cure of individual and social pathology, then, are the same. These conditions are: (1) a development must have occurred which conflicts with the requirements of human nature; (2) this development causes suffering, conscious or unconscious; (3) the sick person or society must be made aware of this suffering, and of the repressed or shut out or thwarted sectors of the psyche; (4) awareness of suffering becomes fully effective only if the sufferer goes on to alter the realistic situation and the norms and values which produced the pathological tendencies in the first place. With this, the cure is complete.*

All this seems clear enough; but it is not without difficulties. Two appear right away. First, Fromm's description of the characteristics of the healthy society is very loose and general. He employs terms whose meanings must be specified more carefully than they have been before we

* The fourth point again indicates the gulf between Freud and Fromm. For Fromm, cure is complete only when the sufferer has altered the realistic situation which produced the sickness. And, since Fromm stresses the relevance of *current* (as opposed to early childhood) situations in the production of neurosis, it follows that current realities are the ones which must be changed. This is an emphatically *political* conception, one which calls for large changes in the social order. In his conception of a cure, Fromm sheds the mantle of the doctor of the soul and takes up the sword of the reformer. The healer of the Freudian persuasion, on the other hand, includes no such political element in his formulation of the conditions of cure. He does not say "change reality"; he says "recognize reality." Furthermore, he stresses the realities of early life over current realities. Fromm wants to tell people how to live. The Freudian wants to help people understand what reality is, so that they themselves may learn to choose a path through it. I know this overstates the case, because the Freudian also recognizes that current realities must sometimes be changed for treatment to be meaningful, but it does usefully point up the differences in time orientations and the relative politicalness of the two schools.

can be confident that we know what he has in mind. The second difficulty is closely related. Loose and ambiguous though it is, Fromm's description of the healthy society makes it clear that no actual society has ever been very healthy. We are confronted with something like the Platonic problem. There may be a model of the perfect society laid down somewhere in the objective law of nature, but since no actual society has ever very closely approximated this model, how shall we gain knowledge of the perfect society? Such knowledge, clearly, must come from methods which are designed to study something other than historical or actual social systems.

Fromm's reply to this question, presumably, would take the form of saying that we can recognize the sane society by inspecting its members: if they are good, it is good. Put another way, the good society is the good man writ large. Under most circumstances, this expression need be taken only as a convenient shorthand statement of a social-individual parallelism; but in this case, it can be used to open an interesting difficulty in Fromm's conception of social health and sickness.

The formula ". . . social pathology . . . is the pathology of so many human beings, and not of an entity beyond or apart from individuals," rejects the decisive idea that society or the social system is in some sense an entity or unit subject to its own laws and different from the individuals who compose it. Fromm recognizes only one kind of body, as it were, and that is the body of the individual human being. It follows that, if he is to be consistent, all he can mean by social pathology is something like "individual pathology in the plural." When he speaks of a sick society he can mean only that so many members of a group are sick that it is convenient to call the group sick. To speak of a sick society in this sense is like speaking of a nation



of shopkeepers, say, or a nation in arms. It refers to a condition which exists widely among the members of a collectivity. A good example of this is Fromm's idea of the socially patterned defect, which is a defect that is widely shared among the members of a group. A socially patterned defect is, in this special sense, a social neurosis.

This is not a conception of social pathology at all, in any sense other than a statistical one. By denying the existence of an "entity beyond or apart from individuals," Fromm is left with nothing but individuals. Only individuals can be sick, for they are the only entities there are. If this analysis is correct, it makes no sense to talk about diagnosing the pathology of a society, for the idea of pathology assumes the existence of some entity which can be sick, and Fromm denies that society is such an entity. Nor can he talk meaningfully and consistently about the social causation of individual pathology, for the idea of causation requires both a causal entity and a condition which is caused. In denying the existence of society as an entity, Fromm is left with no causal entity.

Here we reach a logical dead end. Starting from a radically nominalistic conception, a conception which sees society as nothing but a convenient name for a number of individuals, it is impossible for Fromm to answer the question: How does society produce neurosis in individuals? What makes men neurotic? Fromm can answer only that men make themselves neurotic, or that *some* men make *others* neurotic. But does this not run in the face of his thesis that there is in all men an inherent "primary" urge toward self-realization and health? Does this not suggest that in some men the secondary urges are stronger than the primary ones?

No writer can long endure such frustration. He must escape it, even at the cost of inconsistency. That is the

price Fromm pays. Fromm assuredly does have a conception of society or the social system as an entity which is in some sense real and apart from the individuals who compose it. While he never offers a formal statement of this conception, the conception itself appears on page after page of his work. Consider the following passage, in which the terms "society," "social structures," and "social system" are patently used in a realistic rather than a nominalistic sense:

Each society is structuralized and operates in certain ways which are necessitated by a number of objective conditions. These conditions include methods of production and distribution which in turn depend on raw materials, industrial techniques, climate, size of population, and political and geographical factors, cultural traditions and influences to which society is exposed. There is no "society" in general, but only specific social structures which operate in different and ascertainable ways. Although these social structures do change . . . they are relatively fixed at any given historical period, and society can exist only by operating within the framework of its particular structure. The members of the society and/or the various classes or status groups within it have to behave in such a way as to be able to function in the sense required by the social system.⁵

What should one do when he catches a writer with his consistency down? A gentleman would proceed as though the misfortune had not occurred. A critic, however, must take the opportunity to see what the exposure reveals about the writer's thought.

So powerful is the realistic theme in Fromm's writing that one's instinct is to dismiss the nominalistic expression as just an accidental aberration. Fromm's whole work, after all, is an attempt to chart the relations between character



and social structure, and such work presumes the real existence of society as something other than a number of individuals. A closer look, however, shows that each of Fromm's two usages of "society" serves a special function in his thought.

The nominalistic usage, the essence of which is the denial of reality and value to society as such, provides the foundation for Fromm's program of radical change. In this view, society is a collection of individuals acting in concert—nothing more, nothing less. Since each individual has an inherent urge toward self-realization, neither a single person nor a collection of them will long persist in ways of behavior contrary to human nature. When men feel that something is wrong with their behavior, they will try to change it. All that is required is the concentration of natural intelligence and the will to self-realization upon the present ways of behavior. This nominalistic conception, in brief, denies all value to tradition, to vested interests, to established institutions, customs, and beliefs and sees only the present. It also denies the need for any special science of society. That is to say, it excuses Fromm from examining the hard questions of the relations between social structure and character from the point of view of the possibility of social change. And it excuses him from doing so precisely at the point where he is trying to convince men of both the possibility and the desirability of vast social change. It relieves his advocacy of the burden of answering such questions as the following: Can society be sick while individuals are well; that is, is social sickness a manifestation of something other than the sickness of individual members of the society? Can individuals be sick without impairing the functioning of society? Just how, and why, does social malfunction cause individual malfunction? These matters would have to be examined in any real diagnosis of social sickness, and they

cannot be examined without calling on a real "science of society." Fromm avoids this through his nominalistic usage. All that is needed is knowledge of the laws of human nature, which can then be used to order the relations among men after the model of human nature. The nominalistic conception, in short, at once provides that radical denial of the value of the established order and nourishes that faith in human perfectibility without which the revolutionary would lack confidence. Fromm's nominalism is the fulcrum of his radicalism.

The realistic usage, whose essence is the belief in the independent existence and value of society as such, serves the same end, but in a very different way. Fromm employs this conception in two large divisions of his thought, first in his analysis of the origins and development of the modern crisis, and again in his construction of utopia. Between history and utopia lies the excluded middle of the revolutionary present, when he always reverts to the nominalistic conception. By employing the realist conception in historical analysis, Fromm is able to identify certain concrete structures, such as "capitalism," "Calvinism," "private property," "the market," and talk about their "essential properties," their "real character," and their vicious influence on human life. He is able to identify the forces that chain man and corrupt his finest powers. Men are thus given real powers and structures to contend against, real institutions to blame for felt unhappiness.

The realist conception is useful in the construction of utopia because it enables Fromm to fall back on his premise that a "real" society really does mold character, and that if men would only build certain institutions, along the lines he suggests, they would have established the conditions for the good life.

In summary, Fromm's talk of the "sick society" and



the diagnosis of social pathology is to be understood not as the language of social science but as the rhetoric of social reform. So strong is the magic of science in our day that even the reformer must make his case in its terms. I have argued before that this appeal to science clutters Fromm's case and confuses his arguments. Fromm has a great subject—humanity as it ought to be—and he has a solid core of “data” from which to start—humanity as it actually has been in a few of its noblest representatives—but confusion enters when he superfluously tries to dignify his subject and universalize his data by the appeal to science. An important theme and a keen sense of the data relevant to one's theme are essential to all good work. Beyond that, only insight and passion and intelligence can make a good work great. Like many generous men before him, Fromm is outraged by the moral and esthetic niggardliness of his world. He hungers for righteousness and yearns for love. He would build a spacious social mansion fit for the noble human soul. He refuses to see why he must live among men who are wretched and crippled, unable to love and be loved. These are enough strengths for a moralist. Science does not add to their power.

Diagnosis of the Modern Condition

Fromm brings three assets to the task of understanding the modern condition. The first is his appreciation of the problem of the present as a problem of history, his recognition that present conditions can be fully understood only in the light of their origins and developments. The second is his possession of a generous measure of the sociological imagination, the ability to detect the social causes of personal troubles. The third is his possession of a body of convictions, even a dogma—if that word is understood

as something other than a term of abuse—about the relations between character and social structure. Fused into one compound, these three elements form the substance of his method of diagnosis. His Marxist convictions lead him to focus on economic institutions as the chief personality-molding force. His historical orientation and his sociological imagination lead him to analyze changes in economic institutions and social character through time. Fromm's theme is the impact of the changing nature of capitalism on the character of man.

The problem, then, of the socio-economic conditions in modern industrial society which create the personality of modern Western man and are responsible for the disturbances in his mental health requires an understanding of those elements specific to the capitalistic mode of production, of an “acquisitive society” in an industrial age.⁸

Although I am most interested in the modern period, at least the outlines of the historical analysis ought to be presented.*

Capitalism, Fromm begins, has been the dominant economic system of the West since the seventeenth century. During all this time, and despite all changes, capitalism has had four common and enduring features: (1) the existence of politically and legally free men; (2) the fact that free men sell their labor to the owners of capital on the labor market; (3) the existence of the commodity market as the mechanism by which prices and the distribution of

* Fromm presents his fullest history of capitalist development in *The Sane Society*, pp. 83–103. My account draws heavily on those pages. Of course, much of his writing is concerned with one or another aspect of this problem. The whole of *Escape from Freedom* may be read as a treatment of the social psychology of capitalism.



the social product are regulated; and (4) the principle that each acts to seek his own profit, and that by this competitive self-seeking the interests of all are advanced.

Fromm then divides the history of capitalism into three periods, each with its distinctive features.

The early period, covering the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had two distinctive features. The tools and techniques of production were still quite primitive. A residue of medieval ethical ideas restrained economic practices and kept the competitive ethic within some limits.

In the nineteenth century the system triumphed, and man lost. This was the century of capitalism rampant, of capitalism coming close to a realization of the wildest utopian scheme that men had ever entertained.⁷ The most characteristic element of nineteenth-century capitalism was the ruthless exploitation of the workers. Man had lost his central place in society and had become just another commodity. The principle of the use of man by man prevailed across the whole social order, and capital, the dead past, ruled labor, the living present. The market was freed of all restrictions and its laws determined the price of everything. The competitive ethic supplanted all others and was perceived to have a redemptive power. Technique grew apace. The goal of production was not use but profit. Owing to the supreme authority of the market and the ethic of profit and competition, all genuine human solidarity and reciprocity broke down. Income lost all relation to the amount and social value of work. Finally, on the institutional level, nineteenth-century capitalism was still private capitalism, not yet the capitalism of huge corporations which nobody really owns.

Along with these institutional and ideological features went a certain social character, which Fromm describes as the hoarding orientation. The core of this character type

was its love of saving and its pride in property and in mastery over things. Around this nucleus other traits clustered: competitiveness, individualism, aggressiveness, and exploitativeness. Characterologically, then, this was a period of repression and exploitation.

On his way to the twentieth century, Fromm pauses to observe that the reform movements of the nineteenth all started from these symptoms. The socialists wanted to end the exploitation of man by man. The liberals worked to liberate man from the irrational authorities who dominated him. Concentrating on sexuality, the forbidden land of the nineteenth-century bourgeois mind, Freud brought a heavy attack against the ethic of repression. Then Fromm notes what numerous observers before him had noted: to a remarkable degree, the programs of nineteenth-century reformers—socialists, liberals, and psychoanalysts alike—have been realized. In addition, our century has enjoyed an almost undreamed-of material prosperity. According to the lights of the nineteenth century, then, the life of the twentieth ought to be beautiful. Such is not the case. “In fact, it seems that in spite of material prosperity, political and sexual freedom, the world in the middle of the twentieth century is mentally sicker than it was in the nineteenth century.”⁸ Like Tantalus, we grasp for the cooling drink and the delicious grape, only to see them slip away. This is the condition that Fromm would diagnose and cure. Not for a moment does he seriously consider the thought that the condition of Tantalus might be the condition of man. Fromm does not forsake the eighteenth century.

Fromm turns next to the economic and social features which characterize the new capitalism. In a ruthlessly summary form, which loses much of the depth and power of Fromm’s analysis, these are: the technological revolution, which is already well into the stage of automation; high

concentration of capital and the separation of ownership and control (Fromm follows the classical analysis of Berle and Means); the declining number of independent, self-employed entrepreneurs, and the consequent rise in the number of employees of the great corporations; the practical disappearance of the old middle class, with a consequent increase in the rise of a new employed middle class, whose members increasingly manipulate not things but people (Fromm follows C. Wright Mills here); and, finally, the “miracle of production,” which has made increasing consumption the vital principle of the economy, and which has brought in its train a whole new industry designed to manufacture the desire to consume.

Bridging the gap between socioeconomic structure and character structure, Fromm asks:

What kind of men, then, does our society need? What is the “social character” suited to twentieth-century Capitalism?

It needs men who co-operate smoothly in large groups; who want to consume more and more, and whose tastes are standardized and can be easily influenced and anticipated.

It needs men who feel free and independent, not subject to any authority, or principle, or conscience—yet willing to be commanded, to do what is expected, to fit into the social machine without friction.⁹

Alienation: Hegel, Marx, Fromm

Fromm’s description of the social character of the capitalist era is at once precise and impressionistic, subtle yet comprehensive. Nothing important is excluded, yet the description escapes superficiality because the whole canvas is bound together by one theme. Despairing of the possi-

bility of a useful condensation of Fromm’s pages, I shall move directly to that theme. The sickness of modern man is the sickness of alienation:

By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become . . . estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts—but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced; with the senses and with common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside productively.*

Alienation has reached plague proportions in modern society. It pervades man’s self-perceptions and his relations with his fellows. It contaminates the spheres of work and consumption and poisons man’s relationships to politics, the state, and the social structures and forces which shape his

* *The Sane Society*, p. 120. This diagnosis goes beyond that offered in Fromm’s first book, the broad theme of which was that “European and American history since the end of the Middle Ages is the history of the full emergence of the individual. It is a process which . . . only now seems to have come to a climax. . . . But while in many respects the individual has grown, has developed mentally and emotionally, and participates in cultural achievements in a degree unheard of before, the lag between ‘freedom from’ and ‘freedom to’ has grown too. The result of this disproportion between freedom from any tie and the lack of possibilities for the positive realization of freedom and individuality has led . . . to a panicky flight from freedom into new ties or at least into complete indifference.” (*Escape from Freedom*, p. 37.) *Escape from Freedom* was written under the shadow of Hitlerism. Fromm was trying to analyze the anguish that led a nation to flee freedom and embrace fascism. In *The Sane Society*, he tries to explain the “complete indifference” to freedom which he finds in the United States today—and especially to explain that indifference to the moral powers and the moral demands of the self which is the essence of alienation.



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destiny. Nor has religious life remained pure; it is as tainted by alienation as all the relationships of secular life. In all sectors of existence, "man does not experience himself as the active bearer of his own powers and richness, but as an impoverished 'thing,' dependent on powers outside of himself, unto whom he has projected his living substance."¹⁰

In some of its meanings, the idea of alienation is as old as literary history. The outsider existed before Colin Wilson made a hero of him, and there were strangers before Camus' Meursault. Homer had written of the "tribeless, lawless, hearthless one," the one outside the fellowship, doomed to work his way through the desolate regions beyond the friendly fires of clan and kin. The motif of the eternal wanderer begins in the dawn of Jewish tradition and weaves in and out of the whole subsequent history of Western religion. Abram is the prototype and universal symbol of alienated man. Separated from his family, his nation, and his national religion, he wanders without a home in soil, society, or faith. He is the nomad, unable to love and belong. Unable to love, he subjects himself to a transcendent power and substitutes law for communion, subordination for love. Estranged from himself, Abram projects all that is good in him unto a strange absolute being, which is no longer his absolute being. In return for this, he gains a new identity, which is symbolized by the change of his name to Abraham. All this was long before the modern Existentialist teaching that alienation is rooted in the human condition.

What is distinctive about our era, however, is that alienation is increasingly coming to be one of the words that men use to describe the temper of the age. "Homelessness has become a world fate," Heidegger wrote, and his words state the theme of a swelling current of modern writing. In poetry and the novel, theology and philosophy, and even in sociology, the theme of alienation is used to describe the

inquietude of our age. So Fromm's work must be seen as one current of a much larger stream of tendency. It is a current whose sources are in Hegel and Marx. In order to understand Fromm, it will be useful to look first at the concept of alienation in these two writers.

A "few words" about Hegel are nearly worthless. That original, profound, and grandiose cathedral called Hegelianism cannot be divided into parts for, as its architect wrote on the cornerstone, the part has meaning only in the whole. The discussion of alienation which appears in a brief section of the *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807) is just an explicit statement of a theme which weaves in and out of the book and which cannot be understood without understanding the *Phenomenology* as a whole. Now, the *Phenomenology* fairly heaves with gravid abstractions. Whatever is there to be delivered, be it a passing remark on current affairs, a sermon, an account of a philosophical dispute, a grand vision, or just a fact of history, must struggle for light and air through a wheeze and murk of language that chokes all but the fleetest and strongest. It takes a long time and a firm will to work through Hegel's pages; and you can never be sure until the very end that the product was worth the labor. Too often one gets the feeling that H. G. Wells reported after he had read Henry James: James's huge sentences with their small rewards reminded him of a hippopotamus struggling to pick up a peanut from the corner of its cage. Furthermore, the whole work of Hegel is held together by a conception of philosophy and logic which must seem the grossest obscurantism to a mind at home in the atmosphere of positivism and pragmatism. A genuine comprehension of the *Phenomenology* is beyond me, but in the faith that Hegel was a great philosopher and not, as Bertrand Russell would have it, a pompous fool hiding his confusions and trivia under verbiage, I shall attempt a few

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remarks in the hope that they will set the background for a discussion of Marx's idea of alienation.

Hegel's philosophic vision is usually regarded as an optimistic one, and, in the large, that is a correct judgment. He achieved a triumph over all change and seeming irrationality in his vision of history as objectified reason. But the optimistic vision itself sprang from a profound pessimism. Hegel was bitterly aware of the separation of himself and his age from both antiquity and Christianity. He wrote at a time long after the sun of the Greek spirit had set, and he sensed that the Christian faith had been shattered beyond all possibility of resurrection. The present was a period of change and purposelessness, which men met with mixed frivolity and ennui. The future was shrouded, and men looked toward it with foreboding. In the introduction to the *Phenomenology*, written on the eve of the battle of Jena, when he was thirty-seven, Hegel described his epoch as "a birth-time, and a period of transition. The spirit of the age has broken with the world as it has hitherto existed, and with the old ways of thinking, and is in the mind to let them all sink into the depths of the past and to set about its own transformation."¹¹ In such an age, the consciousness of man is fragmented, and the soul is a scene of conflict and division. So Hegel's largest question was, how can the consciousness of man become total, unified, at rest? His guiding purpose was to restore meaning and unity to a shattered world, and the *Phenomenology*, the *Philosophy of History*, and the *Logic* are his metaphysical account of how the process takes place. The three books trace the dialectical progression through which the Spirit realizes itself in history.

Hegel can be understood on alienation if the basic idea of the *Phenomenology* is kept in view. This is the idea that

mind is not a simple substance distinct from and existing independently of the outside world. Rather, it is a complex entity which develops from the animal stage of mere sense-awareness through a progression of stages in each of which more and more of its potentialities are unfolded, until it finally arrives at a stage of complete self-consciousness. This ultimate stage loses none of the earlier stages, but absorbs each of them and fashions them all into a new and larger synthesis. Trusting the reader to keep this fundamental notion in mind, I am going to risk an excursion over Hegel's description of the main stages which consciousness goes through on its journey to the ultimate stage of perfect freedom and self-consciousness, which Hegel usually called Reason, or Realization. After that, I shall return to the broader aspects of his conception.

The section in which Hegel sets forth the stages of self-consciousness is entitled "Freedom of Self-consciousness: Stoicism, Scepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness." The historical background of the mental chaos and dissolution of Stoicism and Scepticism is found in the political and social chaos and dissolution of the Roman Empire. Since consciousness could not find fixed and stable objects outside itself, self-consciousness could not find a permanent subject in itself. Chaos and division prevail in all realms of life, internal as well as external, with the result that man becomes the slave and victim of his own formless subjective and objective life. The first stage through which the mind gropes in an attempt to end this slavery is that of the Stoic consciousness. The Stoic asserts freedom by holding aloof from the entanglements of real existence. Self-consciousness closes its gates against the stream of life and escapes into the freedom of pure thought. This freedom in thought, however, is not real freedom, not living freedom,

but merely the notion of freedom, for it lacks the concrete content of life. The Stoic achieves freedom through refusing to play the game of life.

This is only a transitory stage in the development of mind toward real freedom. Hegel insists on an advance from freedom in thought to "living freedom." The next step in this progress is taken in the Sceptical form of consciousness. At this stage, man does play the game of life, but with no solid conviction that either the self or the world exists in real and stable form. The Sceptical consciousness regards the self and the world as delusions, with the result that it is unable to form a conception of either, and finally breaks down through its own contradictions. The recognition of these contradictions prepares the way for the next stage, that of the Unhappy Consciousness. Before turning to that, however, Hegel's decisive statements on the contradictions in the Sceptical consciousness ought to be quoted at some length, both because they convey the flavor of his style, and because they are the most difficult passages in the whole analysis of alienation:

Sceptical self-consciousness thus discovers, in the flux and alteration of all that would stand secure in its presence, its own freedom, as given by and received from its own self. . . . This certainty does not arise as a result out of something extraneous and foreign which stowed away inside itself its whole complex development; a result which would thus leave behind the process by which it came to be. Rather consciousness itself is thorough-going dialectical restlessness, this *mêlée* of presentations derived from sense and thought, whose differences collapse into oneness, and whose identity is similarly again resolved and dissolved—for this identity is itself determinateness as contrasted with non-identity. This consciousness, however, as a matter of fact, instead of being

a self-same consciousness, is here neither more nor less than an absolutely fortuitous imbroglia, the giddy whirl of a perpetually self-creating disorder. This is what it takes itself to be; for itself maintains and produces this self-impelling confusion. Hence it even confesses the fact; it owns to being an entirely fortuitous *individual* consciousness. . . . But while it passes in this manner for an individual, isolated, contingent, in fact animal life, and a lost self-consciousness, it also, on the contrary, again turns itself into universal self-sameness; for it is the negativity of all singleness and all difference. . . . This form of consciousness is, therefore, the aimless fickleness and instability of going to and fro . . . from one extreme of self-same self-consciousness, to the other of contingent, confused and confusing consciousness.¹²

These hierophantic sentences work remarkable effects on the mind. After the first few astonished readings, the mind balks and yearns for safety and release. At this point, the words of James Frederick Ferrier, a leading English student of Hegel, offer comfort. In his *The Institutes of Metaphysics* (1854), Ferrier confessed that, although he had read "most of Hegel's works again and again," he was still "able to understand only a few short passages here and there." These few he "greatly admired for the depth of their insight, the breadth of their wisdom, and the loftiness of their tone." But for the rest, Hegel remained "as unpenetrable almost throughout as a mountain of adamant." Give the passage a half-dozen more readings, and a new effect appears. You become quite convinced that if you could but penetrate to the center of the mountain of adamant, you would find there the key to the mystery of the universe. That is the dangerous stage; and one should postpone his interpretation of Hegel until it has safely passed.



(Most of his commentators, it seems to me, have not heeded this warning.) Then, it is safe to go back and see whether there might actually be some meaning to be delivered from the passage. In the faith that there is, I offer the following plain version.

The Sceptical consciousness, Hegel seems to be saying, appears to be individual and isolated. This seeming self-certainty is deceptive, however, for the Sceptical consciousness cannot establish a basis for itself which is impervious to doubt. It also, therefore, cannot distinguish itself from anything else in the universe. Thus it is the very opposite of true individuality, which must be able to distinguish itself from everything else.

One might note here that Hegel is right. The Sceptic must try to prove that the real world exists by the evidence of his consciousness. But in doubting the real world he also must doubt his consciousness, which is part of the real world. Furthermore, he cannot understand the world except as a part of himself, because whatever he proves can only be a construct of his own mind. It follows that if he succeeds in proving to his own satisfaction the existence of the real world, he can no longer distinguish himself from this "proved" world, which is only an outgrowth of himself. This seems to be Hegel's argument in the quoted paragraph. The argument is an excellent special application of his general fundamental principle, the thesis that an absolute idea is needed for ultimate knowledge.

Let me now move backward from the conclusion of Hegel's argument to his description of the life of the Sceptical consciousness. The Sceptical consciousness arises through the interplay of thoughts and impressions, which the mind resolves into a sense of its own identity. But since the Sceptical consciousness sees itself as a mere collection of impressions and sensations (Hume's argument on the

self was well known to Hegel), it must ceaselessly dissolve this identity into its constituents. Thus an enduring self-conception is impossible, and all the Sceptic can achieve in the mental life is the "giddy whirl of a perpetually self-creating disorder." This means simply that the knowledge of self which the Sceptic has at any given moment is merely a conception which will change with each succeeding impression. There is no stable self which may come to be known, for in the very act of knowing the self, the self is altered.

The remaining stages in the development of the spirit can be described more briefly. Hegel sets the historical background for the "Unhappy Consciousness" in the life of the Middle Ages. The craving of the mind for certainty and stability amidst change and uncertainty was recognized by the Church, which tried to build a permanent connection between the insecurity of this world and the perfection of an Immutable Reality beyond the material realm. The methods by which the Church attempted to forge the bond only reflect the great contrast and distance between the two realms. Moving desperately and uncertainly between these two realms, repeatedly falling short of the perfection which it had placed above it in the heavens, the free mind is tortured. This inner process Hegel calls the "Unhappy Consciousness," unhappy because the spirit craves but never gains complete consciousness of self and complete union between itself and its objects.

This gives way to the stage of reason, which comes when the mind realizes that it had closed itself to the real world and tried to realize itself in the world beyond. The stage of reason is reached when man enters into the world in full consciousness that it is not an alien world but his own. The subject admits the distinction between itself and its objects but yet asserts that the distinction is not a real dis-

inction but one within itself. The contradiction between subject and object is resolved. In this stage, man realizes that the world and the soul are alike rational and real. He then can observe the external world, mental phenomena, and the nervous organism as a unity, as the common meeting ground of body and mind, object and subject. Having completed its long journey toward self-realization, the soul is now unified and complete, at rest in the knowledge that the rational is the real and the real is the rational.

Having followed Hegel's account of the journey of the spirit toward self-realization, I shall now return to the broader questions and try to delineate the largest outlines of his analysis. It should be clear from all the above that for Hegel the mind is process, activity. Activity of course produces objects, and the mind best becomes aware of itself by reflecting on the objects its own activity has brought into being. In the beginning, the mind sees only opposition and distinction between itself and its objects. It sees them as alien. But there can be no mental development at all without opposition, without a sense of the distinction between the mind and the non-mind. Thus Hegel writes of the "labor of the negative"; and this use of "labor" is not just a metaphor, for the mind learns about itself not by looking within itself but by going out into the world which its own work has produced and reflecting on the objects of its labor. Throughout the *Phenomenology* Hegel offers concrete examples to show how man's consciousness of himself is improved by work and by reflection on the products of his work—architecture, painting, music, philosophy, religion. The mind develops only by working for its living, as it were, by putting itself into objects and then reflecting on and drawing meaning from those objects.

This "going outside itself" Hegel calls *Entäusserung*, alienation. Without it, life is merely animal. Civilization

cannot exist and develop without opposition and division. And this division exists in the minds of men, for, on the one side, there is mind as externalized in its works; while, on the other, there is mind that confronts its works and senses that they are foreign. Hegel discusses certain historical epochs when this opposition between the mind and its works is acute, when the world is seen as totally alien. He mentions, for example, the position of the early Christians in the Imperial period. This perception of the gap between the spirit of man and the world produces felt turmoil and unhappy divisions in the minds of men, and this unhappy state of mind Hegel calls *Entfremdung*, estrangement. Full freedom is reached only when man transcends these divisions and absorbs them into a higher synthesis. In summary, the major theme of the *Phenomenology* is the progress of the human spirit from unreflective living through opposition, labor, alienation and estrangement to ultimate self-consciousness.

Hegel, then, had set the problem of alienation on a metaphysical and ideal-historical foundation. Marx borrowed Hegel's term and translated it from the language of metaphysics into the language of sociology and economics. Thus translated, it became one of the central categories of his critique of the capitalist era. It is in this form that the idea has come down to Fromm.*

* Marx's major statements on alienation were made in his earlier writings, especially in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844); *The Holy Family* (1845); and *The German Ideology* (1846). Some of these have not yet fully appeared in English, but substantial extracts may be found in T. B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (London: Watts & Co., 1956). Few statements on alienation appear in Marx's later, more mature writings, although the problem receives some attention in the first volume of *Capital*. This has led some interpreters to conclude that the concept of alienation was just a part of Marx's Hegelian baggage, of no decisive importance in his real



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Marx took from Hegel the germinal idea that man creates himself in history through the practical activity of living and working in society. "The outstanding thing in Hegel's *Phenomenology* . . . is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-genesis of man as a process . . . ; that he grasps the essence of *labour* and comprehends objective man as the outcome of man's *own labour*."¹³ But Marx thought Hegel's idealism had led him into a radical misunderstanding of the nature of the process of self-creation through labor. Hegel had pictured the historical process as the movement of abstract categories, the activity of pure spirit, of which individuals were merely the masks and mouthpieces. Marx insisted that the historical process through which man created himself must be seen as a process of real work, real labor, not the labor of the abstract spirit. In conceiving labor as the work of the pure spirit, Hegel had in fact conceived labor in an alienated form. This criticism, of course, is less than fair to Hegel, who had a clear and full conception of the relationships between actual work and consciousness.

The broad connection between Hegel's conception of alienation and Marx's conception of it will be clear if it is remembered that what Marx did was to write a huge analogue to Hegel, but in the language of sociology and economics rather than in the language of metaphysics. Note, for example, how closely Marx's philosophy of history follows the form of Hegel's account in the *Phenomenology*.

thought. It has led others to distinguish between the earlier "humanistic" and the later "scientific" Marx. I think that neither of these quite hits the mark, though the second comes closer than the first. Alienation receded from Marx's work as he gave more and more time to technical questions of historical, philosophical, and especially economic analysis. But Marxism was from the beginning a cry of protest against the degradation of man under capitalism. And from this point of view, the idea of alienation stands at the center of all Marx's work.

Hegel's theme was the mind's progress from unreflecting existence through opposition and alienation to ultimate freedom. In Marx's philosophy of history, man moves from primitive communism through class conflict to the ultimate freedom and harmony of the new communism, in which men finally take full, rational control of their own destinies. Nothing has changed but the language. Similarly, Marx's account of the condition of the proletariat in capitalist society is analogous to Hegel's description of the divided and estranged mind. Just as Hegel described the estranged mind which is lost in the world of objects which it has itself created, so Marx explains how under capitalism men are crippled and bewildered by a social world which, though they have created it, appears to them as alien and menacing. Marx's work is a point-by-point translation of Hegel's metaphysical categories into economic categories. Only at the very end of his analysis does he depart from Hegel. He either did not understand, or else willfully rejected, Hegel's notion of synthesis—though, of course, he used the word itself. In the whole of Marx's thought there is no real idea of synthesis, but only of the conquest of one extreme (capitalists-proletarians) by the other. That, however, is not of direct concern here.

The historical link between Hegel's idealistic conception of the problem of alienation and Marx's socioeconomic conception of it was provided by the materialism of Feuerbach. In *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841), Feuerbach set out to interpret religion by the concepts of projection and alienation. He presented religion as the essence of man projected outside himself and personified in god-figures: the capacities ascribed to the gods were really man's own capacities in an alienated form. Marx started from this position and put the question more generally. He wanted to know under what conditions men projected their own

powers onto forces or entities outside themselves and then permitted themselves to be ruled by these alien forces which they themselves had manufactured. How did man's own powers and capacities become transformed into self-subsistent entities alien to him and in control of his actions? This problem of alienation, now conceived as a sociological or socioeconomic problem, dominates all his writings.

The foundation of Marx's critical position is an essentialist view of human nature, which, regrettably, he never worked out systematically. Accompanying this is an almost Aristotelian, or at least a teleological, conception of freedom. To Marx, the free man was the man who each day realized the potentialities of his being through works which gave his inner capacities the form of concrete embodiments. The great evil of alienation is that it constrains liberty. Alienation is a form of slavery, an especially vicious form, because it is one which man unknowingly makes and imposes on himself. Each of man's activities and products ought to be so many steps along the road to self-realization; that is, they ought to be at once the manifestations and the foundations of man's freedom. Instead, they have become alien forces standing outside man and hostile to him. Instead of enriching man, they deplete him. Instead of liberating man, they enslave him.

Marx never offered an explicit account of the genesis and growth of alienation, but it is reasonably clear that he thought its origins lay in the division of labor: "the division of labour offers us the first example of how, as long as man remains in natural society, that is, as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long therefore as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man's own act becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him."¹⁴ Occasional references to the idea also appear in

his history of the changing forms of private property. More frequent references appear throughout his discussions of political economy as an ideology. These passages, however, do not substantially alter the general conclusion that he never offered an explicit and systematic account of the development of alienation.

At first glance, this omission seems to be a fault. A closer view shows that what appears as a fault is really a necessity of Marx's whole analysis of capitalism and his whole concept of alienation. Alienation is nothing but capitalism seen from one angle of vision, capitalism seen from the point of view of its evil impact on man. Hence, when Marx wrote the history and analyzed the dynamics of capitalism, he did the same for alienation, because alienation was not an incidental feature of capitalism but capitalism itself, capitalism in its social-psychological aspect. From this it follows that alienation advances as capitalism advances and disappears when capitalism disappears. It is a superficial view, albeit one shared as often by his ostensible friends as by his enemies, which sees Marx's work as primarily a technical or scientific analysis of the capitalist system of production and exchange, and his appeal to revolution as a kind of demand for fair shares and equal treatment. Marx's scientific work was but an aid to, as his call for revolution was but an appeal for, the realization of his moral vision of man restored, man liberated from the alienations of capitalist society and in command of his own destiny.

This is not the place to say anything at all about the whole Marxist system. I just remind the reader that the concept of alienation is embedded in a complete intellectual structure. Let me assume a familiarity with that structure, and especially with those parts of it which deal with the materialist conception of history, the relations between existence and consciousness, and the origins, development,

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and nature of capitalism. Let me assume that one has followed Marx through his description of the institutions and the ideology of mature capitalism and is now prepared to follow his account of the meaning of work and the character of human relationships in such a society. Here the concept of alienation enters.

It is possible to distinguish four main forms of alienation in Marx's treatment: (1) alienation of the worker from the process of work; (2) alienation of the worker from the product of work; (3) alienation of each from himself; and (4) alienation of each from his fellows. For the purposes of exposition, the first two forms can be gathered under the category of "alienated labor," and the second two can be abbreviated as "alienated human relations."

Alienated labor. Here Marx attempts to show the impact of capitalist labor on the psychodynamics of individuals and classes. Under the conditions of capitalism, the process of work has become external to the worker, not a part of his nature. Consequently, the worker experiences work not as fulfillment but as impoverishment. Work gives him not a feeling of well-being and accomplishment but a feeling of physical and moral debasement. He feels at home with himself only during his hours of leisure; while at work he is homeless. Work is not voluntary but forced labor. "His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labour*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it."¹⁵ The alien character of work appears clearly, Marx said, in the fact that as soon as there is no compulsion to work, men avoid it like the plague.

Out of this world of alienated labor grows another world, a world of objects. Though created by human energy, this realm of objects acquires an independent power hostile

to man. Marx's decisive statement deserves extensive quotation.

The more the worker expends himself in work, the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, and the poorer he himself becomes in his inner life. . . . It is just the same as in religion. The more of himself man attributes to God, the less he has left in himself. The worker puts his life into the object, and his life then belongs no longer to him but to the object. . . . What is embodied in the product of his labour is no longer his. . . . The *emptying* of the worker into his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, takes on its own existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force.¹⁶

In trying to describe man's relation to this world of commodities, Marx again had recourse to the religious analogy. The productions of the human mind become reified and projected into a realm beyond the human. In the mist-shrouded regions of the religious life, the phantoms of man's brain take on concrete shape and appear as independent beings with their own indwelling spirit and their own powers and laws. These phantoms then enter into relations both with one another and with the fearful race of men. So it is with the world of commodities. The productions of the human hand also seem to take on independent existence and develop laws and powers of their own. What is really nothing but the product of definite and specific social relations between men assumes in the eyes of men the fantastic form of a relation between things which have objective characteristics. This phenomenon Marx calls by



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the evocative name of the fetishism of commodities. The core of the idea is contained in the following extract:

. . . the mutual relations of the producers, within which the social character of their labour affirms itself, take the form of a social relation between the products.

The mystery of the commodity form, therefore, consists in the fact that in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective characteristic, a social natural quality of the labour product itself, and that consequently the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. Through this transference the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.¹⁷

Alienated human relations. Marx returns repeatedly to his central theme: capitalism as human tragedy. It has shattered all genuine community and reduced social life to a commercial enterprise. Capitalist society is nothing but a series of bi- and multi-lateral exchanges, a tawdry business of buying and selling, in which every man is at once a salesman and a commodity. In this vast marketplace, men respond to themselves and each other not as vital, free, precious human beings but as objects, lifeless articles to be bought and sold and used, and discarded when no longer useful. Man is no longer in direct contact either with himself or with his fellows. His "human" relations are now controlled by an alien intermediary. This alien intermediary is money; and again Marx's description of its character and power cannot be excelled.

The nature of money is . . . that [in it] the *mediating activity* of human social action by which man's prod-

ucts reciprocally complete each other, is *alienated* and becomes the characteristic of a *material thing*, money, which is external to man. When man exteriorizes this mediating activity he is active only as an exiled and dehumanized being; the *relation* between things, and human activity with them, becomes the activity of a being outside and above man. Through this *alien intermediary*—whereas man himself should be the intermediary between men—man sees his will, his activity and his relation to others as a power which is independent of him and of them. His slavery therefore attains its peak. That this *intermediary* becomes a *real god* is clear, since the intermediary is the *real power* over that which he mediates to men. His cult becomes an end in itself. The objects, separated from this intermediary, have lost their value. . . . This *intermediary* is thus the exiled, alienated *essence* of private property . . . just as it is the . . . *alienated* social activity of man. All the qualities involved in the production of this activity, which really belong to man, are attributed to the intermediary.*

Alienation affects the capitalists as well as the workers, though in different ways. The owning class is satisfied with its situation, recognizes self-alienation as the source of its own power, and retains at least the semblance of a human existence. The proletarian class, on the other hand, recognizes that it is condemned to an inhuman existence. Caught

* Bottomore and Rubel, *op. cit.*, pp. 171–172. Compare this with a passage where Aristotle describes money as a requisite to community, precisely because it mediates between man and man, and man and commodities: ". . . all goods must have a price set on them; for then there will always be exchange, and if so, association of man with man. Money, then, acting as a measure, makes goods commensurate and equates them; for neither would there have been association if there were not exchange, nor exchange if there were not equality, nor equality if there were not commensurability." (*The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Richard McKeon (ed.), New York: Random House, 1941, pp. 1011–1012 (*Ethics*, Bk. V, Chap. 5, 1133^b).



in the contradiction between their “humanity” and their inhuman situation, the proletarians are forced to revolt against the degradation which alienation imposes on them. From the political point of view, therefore, “the property owners are the *conservative* and the proletarians the *destructive* party.”¹⁸ Since alienation is endemic to capitalist society, it will disappear only with the victory of the “destructive party.” Marx never showed very clearly how socialism would end alienation, but if we take strictly his thesis that *all* forms of human servitude stem from the relation of the worker to the privately owned instruments of production, it follows that alienation will end when the emancipation of society from private property is complete. If, however, we also take seriously his hint that the genesis of alienation is the division of labor as such, it is hard to see how socialism alone can do much to cure the disease of alienation, unless the socialists are willing to forego the advantages of the division of labor and return to a more primitive economic order.

This exposition will have served its purpose if it has elucidated the core meaning of Marx’s concept of alienation. The question now is: What does Fromm do with these ideas? What changes does he work on Marx’s formulation?

From one point of view, the answer is that he has not basically altered the ideas of Marx. He has kept intact the core of Marx’s concept, which, in Fromm’s formulation, is the idea that “*man does not experience himself as the active bearer of his own powers and richness, but as an impoverished ‘thing,’ dependent on powers outside of himself, unto whom he has projected his living substance.*”¹⁹ This core identity also can be seen in many of Fromm’s specific applications. He retains Marx’s four types of alienation, follows Marx in his treatment of commodity fetishism and the

worship of money, analyzes the impact of the market on man just about as Marx did, and accepts the broad outlines of Marx’s discussion of work. In all these areas, Fromm has added little beyond some modern illustrations and citations.

While Fromm has kept the core constant, he has considerably expanded the idea at its margins. This expansion takes two forms. First, he has broadened the idea to cover a greater range of phenomena. Secondly, he has given the idea more psychological depth. Put slightly differently, Fromm has brought Marx’s notion up to date by applying it to modern phenomena and by giving it firmer psychological underpinnings. In this expansion lies Fromm’s contribution. In it also lies his peril, for in his hands, alienation becomes so protean a term that it loses some of the precision, and therefore the analytic utility, of Marx’s formulation.

On balance, I think Fromm has gained more than he has lost. If this is so, the gain derives from a specific feature of this analysis: his perspective is that of mass society, not class society. He liberates alienation from the confinements of class analysis and discusses it under the conditions of massness. This liberation at once makes Fromm’s analysis more relevant to modern conditions and permits him to escape some of Marx’s shortcomings. Fromm, for example, does not romanticize and glorify the proletariat. Similarly, when he comes to offer a cure for alienation, he avoids Marx’s narrow class solution and offers a more broadly social and moral remedy.

These points will appear more clearly in later discussion. At the moment, I want to turn to a few of Fromm’s applications of the idea of alienation. What follows is not intended to be a full exposition of his usage of the concept, for such an account would be as long as his critique of capitalist society. My purpose is to convey a reasonably full



sense of Fromm's broadened and deepened idea of alienation.

Fromm starts by saying that alienation is at bottom the same thing as idolatry. Idolatrous man spends his capacities on building an idol and then worships this idol as though it were an independent being and not merely the lifeless creature of his own hand. What the idol gains, man loses. In contrast to this, Fromm argues, the central principle of Old Testament monotheism is the idea that God is indefinable and infinite. Since man is made in God's likeness, man too is the bearer of infinite qualities. Hence in worshipping God man escapes the error of hypostatizing one partial quality of himself into the whole, and then submitting to it. Unfortunately, Fromm complains, Protestant Christianity itself regressed to a form of idolatry, for in the theology of Luther and Calvin man was commanded to yield his own finest powers to God and then trust to grace that these powers will be returned to him.*

In our time, the major organized religions have escaped active idolatry only by emptying religion of spiritual content. Religion is just another of the commodities on display in our sumptuous show windows. Some of us buy it, while some do not; on the whole, it is probably better if one has it, but it is certainly not one of the things we simply could not do without. It is a good prestige item in most circles, and for a great many of us it is a pleasant leisure time activity; but neither of these should be confused with the real religious meaning of the Jewish-Christian ideal, which is the search for salvation and the quest for answers to the deep-

* I forego comment on this, for an adequate comment would have to be very extensive. Although psychologically sound, Fromm's analysis is disastrously wrong from the religious and historical points of view. After all, Old Testament monotheism assumes the real existence of a transcendent being: God is not merely the symbol of man's powers.

est problems of our existence. "Our culture is perhaps the first completely secularized culture in human history. . . . The majority of us . . . take it for granted that God exists. The rest . . . take it for granted that God does not exist. . . . In fact, whether a man in our culture believes in God or not makes hardly any difference either from a psychological or from a truly religious standpoint. In both instances he does not care—either about God or about the answer to the problem of his own existence."²⁰ God has been promoted. He is the man upstairs, the benevolent general director of the corporation who will watch out for you as long as you do your part. As some wit has put it, when a man of today tells you he knows God, you can be pretty sure he is only name-dropping.

Turning to the state, Fromm finds the same phenomena of idolatry-alienation. Masses of men have abdicated their own powers and bestowed them on a political leader or on the state. "In Fascism and Stalinism the absolutely alienated individual worships at the altar of an idol. . . ." ²¹ Other masses simply have no or little interest in and no real knowledge of public and political matters. Fromm thinks this is the situation in most of the Western republics. In those countries, everyone has the right to express his will, but what does this right mean if individuals have no real will of their own, if their will is merely an echo of the chorus around them, or a product of the machinery of opinion formation? In Fromm's view, our politics has become just another commodity, to be merchandized like automobiles or soap. The only difference is, not as many people care as much about politics as they do about automobiles. Fromm accepts Schumpeter's judgment that the typical citizen has little sense of reality and no effective volition toward the great issues of politics. These



factors in turn account for the monumental ignorance and lack of judgment the average citizen displays in political matters.²²

Fromm also turns his attention to bureaucratization, "one of the most significant phenomena in an alienated culture."²³ The reality and the spirit of bureaucracy pervade the whole of modern society—business, government, religious life, the trade union, education, the political party. More and more people earn their living as bureaucrats, and more and more people come under the sway of the bureaucracies. Bureaucratized human relations are alienated human relations. The bureaucrat deals not with real living individuals but with abstract quantities which can be manipulated in various ways. If the market has made man an article to be exchanged, bureaucracy has made him an object to be manipulated.

Some of Fromm's most telling pages are devoted to a description of alienation in the sphere of consumption. Our mass production economy is directed almost exclusively by the principle of production for profit rather than for use. As such, it devotes prodigious effort to stimulating the desire for consumption goods. Modern capitalism has been instrumental in creating what Fromm calls the principle of nonfrustration, "*the principle that every desire must be satisfied immediately, no wish must be frustrated.*"²⁴ Consumption is inculcated as both a duty and a right, with the consequence that we have become the most voracious consumers in history. This orgy of consumption dominates our leisure hours and fills our dreams of heaven.

Modern man, if he dared to be articulate about his concept of heaven, would describe a vision which would look like the biggest department store in the world, showing new things and gadgets, and himself having

plenty of money with which to buy them. He would wander around open-mouthed in this heaven of gadgets and commodities, provided only that there were ever more and newer things to buy, and perhaps that his neighbors were just a little less privileged than he.²⁵

The heaven of consumption, however, is in the end unsuitable for human occupation. The act of consumption should be a rich and vitally human act, an act involving all our senses, our needs, our esthetic capacities. The act of consumption should be a humanly meaningful and productive experience. In our culture, there is little of this. "Consuming is essentially the satisfaction of artificially stimulated phantasies, a phantasy performance alienated from our concrete, real selves."²⁶

Fromm, in short, pushes the concept of alienation into every sector of life. Indeed, he even uses it to help account for death: he believes that many suicides are caused by "the boredom and monotony . . . which is engendered by the alienated way of living. . . ." ²⁷ But it is not necessary to provide additional examples. Let me conclude this exposition with a few remarks on his discussion of alienation and mental health. A few remarks will do, for it follows from Fromm's view of human nature that alienated men can be neither happy nor healthy.

The core of alienated man's sickness is the loss of the sense of the self. The characteristic symptom of his sickness is anxiety. Since alienated man is worth to himself only what he thinks he is worth to others, he must ceaselessly strive for approval. This he does through conforming to the prevailing fashions. Yet, insofar as he *is* human, he cannot help straying from the herd from time to time. Hence he anxiously expects disapproval all the time, and he strives ever harder to merge with the herd. So desperate is this



situation in our time that it is not excessive to say that to the degree that one is human, he will suffer the pains of acute neurosis, and to the degree that he is alienated, he will enjoy the narcotic pleasures of conformity. Fromm agrees that the proper label for our age is the "age of anxiety." He adds that this anxiety is produced by alienation, by the lack of genuine selfhood.

Another symptom of alienation is guilt, which Fromm thinks is widespread and deep-rooted in our culture. This guilt comes from two sources. The first is the feeling that one is a deviant, different from the rest, poorly adjusted. The second springs from the core of man's own true (humanistic) conscience. The voice of conscience tells alienated man that he is wasting his powers and dissipating his substance. One cannot help feeling guilty for this waste. This is the cruel rack of alienated man in an alienated society: he "feels guilty for being himself and for not being himself, for being alive and for being an automaton, for being a person and for being a thing."²⁸

Despite his protestations, alienated man is unhappy. Considering the nature of man and the conditions of happiness, it could not be otherwise. "Having no faith, being deaf to the voice of conscience, and having a manipulating intelligence but little reason, he is bewildered, disquieted and willing to appoint to the position of a leader anyone who offers him a total solution."²⁹ This, Fromm says, is the objective state of alienated man. He concludes with a warning that we must beware of doctors of the soul who tell us that alienated man is real man, and as happy as he can be. Much of modern psychiatry is itself an alienated ideology. "Our current psychiatric definitions of mental health stress those qualities which are part of the alienated social character of our time: adjustment, cooperativeness, aggressiveness, tolerance, ambition, etc."³⁰ Fromm singles out Harry

Stack Sullivan's work as the most instructive example of an alienated psychiatry, but Sullivan is by no means alone. Just as Marx thought that political economy was the perfect ideological expression of alienation in his time, Fromm thinks that most modern psychiatry performs that role in his. Just as Marx thought that political economy had mistaken the shopkeeper for man, so Fromm thinks that modern psychiatry has mistaken marketing man for man.*

* The definition of marketing man (alienated man) as the man who has no self raises a hard problem for the definition of a cure in psychoanalytic work. Here I can only outline the problem, without exploring its ramifications. As I understand it, the classical definition of the role of the analyst is to help the patient strip away the accretions and repressions which cloak his identity. Through the insight thus gained one becomes aware of his true self, of the real values which make up his true identity, and of the real philosophy of life which he stands for. All this assumes an identity that was already there and that had only to be discovered. Marketing man faces the analyst with a totally different problem. Marketing man is precisely the man who *has no identity*. He comes before the analyst not because his identity has been lost but because the method of conforming to the others as a substitute for identity has failed him. If the analyst peels away the accretions and repressions of marketing man, he will discover not an identity but a vacuum. Hence the problem for marketing man is not to discover his identity, but to create one. But no psychoanalyst is equipped to do this, for psychoanalysis is a method of investigation and not a way of life. The psychoanalyst is a healer of souls, not a maker of them. Fromm would try to escape this dilemma with the aid of his essentialist notion of the humanistic conscience: there is in each of us a noble god struggling to emerge. I have already treated this idea in an earlier chapter. Here it is enough to remember Orwell's remark: in every thin man a fat man struggles to emerge.

This dilemma, which is inescapable in the Frommian system, gives the Freudian far less trouble, for the simple reason that he would not diagnose absence of self in marketing man. There *are* some clinical types which approach selflessness in the Freudian sense, but they are too few to form a social character style in Fromm's usage, and they overlap with the Frommian category of the marketing man in an apparently random fashion. The "impostor" is a case in point. Here there is good clinical evidence of an incompleteness of self; but the impostor's character orientation may be exploitative (competitive, status-seeking), hoarding (accumulating a cache by fraud and guile), or even productive (the few impostors who actually seem to transcend their limitations through their pseudo-identities, and who use these new powers skillfully and constructively; the archetype might be Thomas Mann's Felix Krull). Another example of a selfless one in Freudian diagnosis is the "as-if" personality. But these types are quite rare, and they cut across all