

CHAPTER V

Behold, the Man . . .

Ortega's remark introduces the closing themes of this critique. All that remains to be done is to set forth some of the basic perspectives which have guided my appraisal of Fromm's work. Nothing here will be new: it is a matter of making explicit and general what has thus far only been suggested. The primary perspectives which have guided this appraisal, the perspectives which lie at the base of my differences with Fromm on questions of the second and third order, can be treated under two headings. The first concerns the basic political categories of liberty and authority. The second concerns one moral and one esthetic question. Under the first heading I shall argue that Fromm misunderstands both the nature of liberty and authority and the functions they perform in the lives of individuals and communities. Under the second I shall try to show how certain of Fromm's settled tendencies and orientations effectively blind him to certain dimensions of the meaning of beauty and the good life.

A preliminary caution. To talk about settled tendencies and orientations in the work of a writer whose thought is

still changing may seem a risky enterprise. In Fromm's case, however, thanks to the recent appearance of an essay on "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism," the enterprise can be approached with a fair measure of confidence.*

The recent essay comes at a convenient time for my purposes because it is at once an arrival and a departure: Fromm has broken through the confines of Freudian rationalism and taken a bold step toward intuitionism and mysticism. In this respect, his intellectual biography resembles that of John Stuart Mill, who also started out the prisoner of a disciplined system and spent most of his life trying to escape it. Mill began with the rigors of Utilitarian logic and ended with the frivolity of female suffrage, an advocacy which was as "advanced" for his day as Zen is for ours. The essay on Zen also expresses emphatically some themes which, although present in the earlier work, had appeared there in subdued tones. The essay still contains some of the ambivalences present in Fromm's earlier writings, so it seems reasonable to regard them as permanent features of his work. An epilogue which will tie this latest essay to the earlier work now seems both necessary and possible.

Fromm's writing, the earlier more than the later, has power because he faces up to the reality that to live in our day is to feel lost. He faces up to the felt condition that something has gone wrong, that everything in our life, even our guilt, is problematic. Of course, it will be said, men

* The essay appears in a book which originated, Fromm reports, "in a workshop on Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis," held during August of 1957 in Cuernavaca, Mexico. A *workshop* on Zen—there is a true marvel. Many things can be done in the singular Western institution of the workshop, but it is hard to include Zen among them. Workshops are for work, not for contemplation, and they are busy, noisy places. The typical posture of the workshop delegate is not that of the lotus position. Will Zen survive the din? Can Zen be retooled, given more zip and chrome, shined up and packaged for the American consumer?



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have always felt this; and to an extent this is true, especially in politics, where men are always assaulted by unique situations, which means confusion and doubt.

But if other men in other ages have also felt the anxiety of the problematic, what is special about our own age? In respect to the problematic, nothing. In respect to our fear of where the problematic is heading, perhaps a great deal. Our age fears, as few others have, that the problematic seems headed toward the chaotic. We fear shipwreck; and we know that this time the disaster could be total. This sense Fromm has caught, and not to see that he has offered us a description of how men react to the possibility of shipwreck is to miss a chief value of his work. He has shown us three basic styles of response to shipwreck. Some persons break into the ship's stores and abandon themselves in drink and revelry, one last party before the end. Others give themselves to a leader who claims to have a secret chart and an unsinkable boat. Still others, and these the greatest number, look on life numbly and go through it aimlessly, afraid to confront the catastrophe, but unable to ignore it either.

In a time like our own the ideas of the shipwrecked are the ideas most worth reading, for any man who today does not know he is lost is lost beyond hope. He will never find himself or guide others. The Liberal epoch has run its course. In our own day we have seen the superannuation of the purposes and premises which inspired liberal thought and action through the 1930's, and we are now compelled to confront without blinkers the full tragic crisis of the concrete present. It can no longer be denied that Western man, for all his restlessness, his dynamism, his craving for movement, does not know what he really wants. Lacking that knowledge, and therefore lacking the power to gain fulfillments, Western man now shows himself hostile to life, and perhaps prepared to destroy it.

Fromm has recognized much of this and has sought for something of value beyond it. It is this affirmative part of his work that makes it appealing to those of us who are temperamentally unable to accept the politics of cynicism and despair, and who are morally committed to the liberal conviction that intellect ought to enlighten the human condition, not lament it, and that learning ought to ennoble the human estate, not mock it.

While Fromm has added nothing to the poetry and philosophy of shipwreck, he has told us something of its sociology. While he has added nothing to the great literature of the personal styles of facing shipwreck—of which there are basically only two, the way of Montaigne and the way of Pascal—he has offered us a healing doctrine. Fromm's doctrine follows the way of Pascal, though his solution is secular and social, while Pascal's was religious and personal. Furthermore, although he follows the way of Pascal, he does so without Pascal's anguish, beauty, and fierce concentration. Now, when Pascal is made secular and social, he looks like Rousseau. Start with Rousseau's sentiments; then, strip away the poetry; next, translate him into the modern American idiom, emphasizing the themes of work, activism, and equality; finally, add a lot of material on specifically modern conditions and problems, taking care to use wherever possible the standard terms of social science—and the result will be Frommism. Fromm's solution reads in substance: since we lack faith, and know not where to go, let us cleave to one another in love, while we search for ourselves in our work.

Much of Fromm's power, then, lies in his courage to face shipwreck, his grasp of what shipwreck looks like under modern conditions, and his offer of warmth and work to replace coldness and boredom. I have tried to show throughout this essay that while this is much, it is far from enough.



Fromm's work is weakened by his misunderstanding of the two fundamental problems, the problem of authority and the problem of liberty.

Fromm thinks that the malaise of modern times is a consequence of the invasion of our world by irrational authority. In a sense, this is surely true. But it is not fundamental. The fundamental trouble is not the presence of irrational authority, but the absence of all authority properly so-called. Irrational authority rushes in to fill the vacuum left by the flight of rational authority. These two formulations may seem close together, and they are, but it makes an enormous difference which way the problem is stated.

Fromm thinks that if we can only banish the irrational authorities—tradition, superstition, convention, authoritarian monotheism, social and economic class limitations, advertising and propaganda, charismatic leaders, bureaucracy—reason and beauty will flourish. This is just not enough. Men will be ruled. The majority of men lack the power to form their own conceptions of the real and the ideal. Therefore, there must be guiding ideals, and there must be uniform and authoritative rules based on the guiding ideals. There must also be men who represent and embody the ideals, and who make and enforce the rules based on them.

When one says that authority has fled, in this sense, he sets the discussion in a very old context. Saint Jerome wrote the following passage over fifteen centuries ago:

Shame on us, the world is falling in ruins, but our sins still flourish. The glorious city that was the head of the Roman Empire has been engulfed in one terrific blaze. There is no part of the earth where exiles from Rome are not to be found. Churches once held sacred have fallen into dust and ashes, and still we set our hearts greedily on money. We live as though we were

doomed to death on the morrow, but we build houses as though we were going to live for ever in this world. Our walls glitter with gold, gold gleams upon our ceilings and upon the capitals of our pillars; yet Christ is dying at our doors in the persons of His poor, naked and hungry. . . . Flocks and shepherds perish together, because the priest is now even as the people.¹

The guiding ideals dim, and men live by taste and desire. Meaning and commitment go out of life, to be replaced by frivolousness and boredom. To have deep convictions, strong principles, becomes almost a matter for embarrassment. A kind of skepticism or even cynicism saps all intentions and movements. The great thing is to keep cool, stay loose, be uncommitted. But it must never be forgotten that men, and especially young men, stay loose because they can see nothing in the dominant social order worth attaching themselves to. That is part of the meaning of the flight of authority, and it seems to be the largest meaning behind the currently felt concern about the "silent generation" and juvenile delinquency. The refusal of the young to commit themselves, and the rise in delinquent behavior—even, as the surprised and pained expression goes, among young people who come from good homes where they have everything—are implicit proof for the proposition that the young find little in the culture about them that attracts or merits their commitment and that, furthermore, they are not very sure their parents do either.

The film *The Wild One* stated the themes that matter here. In this movie, whose imagery was based upon an actual event, a club of motorcyclists—chewing gum, drinking beer, and dressed American style in their black leather jackets bearing the club emblem of a death's head and crossed rods and pistons—roar into a small town and hold it in terror.



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At one point there occurred between a sweet young girl of the town and the leader of the club an exchange which epitomizes my theme. The girl asked: "What are you rebelling against?" Reply: "What have you got?" The authority of the leader over his band was absolute, because he was the coolest and most accomplished nihilist among them.

The mocking and almost casual destructiveness of the motorcyclists was so upsetting to the viewer just because it was directed against the values and symbols which inform our lives, but in which we are unable to believe very deeply, suspecting them to be hollow at the center. The citizens of this typical American small town were defenseless precisely because their culture of platitudinous morality, high living standards, and Hollywood tinsel was not worth defending. The town cop, the enforcer of the rules, was a caricature of authority: weak, indecisive, alcoholic. The violence of the motorcyclists could be met only by the violence of the brutal men of the town, the dispensers of justice by force, and then by the state police, the impersonal and efficient wielders of superior power. Beyond this, however, the film's terror came from its power to make one realize that the promiscuous destructiveness of the motorcyclists endangered not only the sham values and the mock authorities but real human values as well. The sham values of the town were contemptible, but it is possible that more noble values might lie beneath them; and it is certain that if noble values are to arise, they must arise from the town. The cyclists would destroy the town.

Now, to say that is to say that a discussion of the breakdown of authority must be embedded in a context even older and deeper than that provided by the lament of St. Jerome. Jerome wrote of the death of an actual city, great Rome, the reality and the symbol of the authority that

ordered an Empire. But if even great Rome can fall, then what city is ever safe? Authority is always in jeopardy.

At the dawn of civilization, men lived closer to the deepest realities of communal life than we ever can. Knowledge which they grasped immediately, almost physically, we grasp only by the hardest work and thought; and, even then, our grasp sometimes seems weak and our vision narrow, when set alongside theirs. Hobbes's intellectual destruction of the civil state, for example, and his lucid re-creation of the state of nature, powerful feats of the imaginative reason though both were, seem pale and weak when compared with any of a number of ancient myths and folktales dealing with the same themes. The men of the first cities each day could see the high wall which separated their city from the chaos of nature outside it. They knew their city and its defining wall were works of art, not products of nature, tiny islands of order surrounded by nature's vast wildness. Being so close to experience, they could report their knowledge in the vivid concrete language of experience, as poets still do, rather than in the drier, more remote language of the detached and observing intellect that Hobbes had to use.

The men of the early cities, long before and for quite some time after systematic political philosophy came to be written, put their knowledge in wonderful folktales, haunting myths, rich clusters of imagery and symbol. They typically set aside special periods during which their knowledge was acted out in ritual and ceremony. Many of these myths and rituals concerned the guilt man felt for violating nature, for hacking open the earth, subjecting it to slavery, and forcing it to yield up its living fruit. For this violation, man had to ask nature's pardon; and he also had to pay nature's debt, often through the sacrifice of one of his own kind, the mankind, the kind that alone among the creatures forced nature to his will.

But these men of the dawn-cities knew that nature existed inside the walls of the city as well as beyond them. Inside the walls, nature existed in the breast of every man. And just as the nature beyond the frail walls threatened the city from without, so did the nature inside each man threaten the city from within. So, the defense of the city also required that the nature within the breast of man be chained, and perhaps violated; and what violated this aspect of nature was authority. From numerous myths and tales concerning this theme, many of them conveniently collected in *The Golden Bough*, we may rediscover the deepest of all political insights: authority is a sin; its guilt is order itself; and the guilty are those who through their authority impose order.

In all social orders the individual suffers a split attitude. Society nurtures and strengthens men, and men (who are neither gods nor beasts) require an ordered society for the unfolding of their finest powers; still, men feel the constraints and pressures of social order and fear even that order may unman them. On the one side, there is the lunging animal drive for unlimited satisfaction, the pulse of nature which throbs in the vitals of the city and yearns to disrupt it; on the other, the realization that order is necessary for the fulfillment of the human potentialities. This is the dilemma of both man and the state. It is a struggle within the breast of the polity itself, and the sin of authority is that it must, in the name of order, judge the passions guilty. For this sin, authority must make expiation. But just as there is the sin of authority, so is there the sin against authority. Men do realize that without authority they would be as beasts; so even while authority is challenged, the challengers feel the guilt which comes from denying a necessary part of themselves. That is the deep

truth of the Proverb: "The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul."²

Out of this double sin, the sin of authority and the sin against it, has come the whole dark folklore and symbolism of the dying king, the mock king, the king as fool. In some of the legends the king himself had to die a ritual death after a fixed reign. In others, the real king evaded death by appointing a scapegoat who died in his place, always after a period during which he could employ his tragic power in the enjoyment of all pleasures. Sometimes a mock king would reign for a period during which all authority was mocked. In a thousand variations, the ancients acted out the tragedy of kingship, the tragedy of presuming to impose order on the wild and chaotic forces of nature. All these variations had one theme, the theme of the king who must die for the sin of order, and the theme of the fierce and guilty pleasure of the populace at the death of the king.

Many ancient peoples gave anarchy its due but still retained for everyday life the benefits of order by setting aside a fixed period of license during which authority lapsed. Then law and morality were set aside and all things were permitted. Work stopped, the markets closed, slaves became masters, the populace abandoned itself to revelry, and the darker passions enjoyed a license which could never be theirs in the course of normal life. Of all these holidays, the one which is most familiar to us, and the one which has given the name to the rest, was the Roman Saturnalia. The Saturnalia was not merely a symbol; it was a literal acting out of the lapse of authority. It is significant that the Saturnalia was popularly supposed to commemorate the lusty and merry reign of Saturn, god of sowing and husbandry, who was king during the fabled Golden Age, when

all men were free and all fields were fertile; that is, the Saturnalia was the revenge of nature against order.* This custom of the ancients was a wise one, for restraint is always unbearable to some people, and conventional virtue is felt as a heavy burden. And all of us yearn at times for the life which is natural and free.

When the problem of authority is formulated in this way it becomes clear that every solution of it is in a basic sense both artificial, that is, a work of art and will rather than a work of nature, and false, that is, an attempt to solve a dilemma which is insoluble because it is inherent in man and polity. When the problem is formulated in this way it also becomes clear that any attempted solution of it demands a positive conception of duty and goodness, for, unless they are offered this in return for renouncing their passions, men will see the whole working of authority as an unnatural imposition. They will then rise against it actively, or mock and ignore it passively. The result in both cases is the submersion of the individual in society, pure fellowship and warmth, and from there the regress to nature, the free expression of the instinctual desires.

The main point of my critique is that Fromm's solu-

* There seems little doubt that in the earliest days the King of the Saturnalia was killed at the end of his reign, as were a garish array of similar comical yet tragic figures from other lands and ages, who, wearing their mock crowns and gorgeous costumes, went to a violent death after a few days of pranks and pleasures. In the remoter and cruder parts of the Empire, the practice of killing the mock king may have continued well into the Christian era. Frazer reports a well-documented case of a Roman garrison in Lower Moesia which was performing the ceremony in the ancient way as late as A.D. 303. Each year the soldiers selected by lot one to play the part. For thirty days the chosen one, attended by a mob, went in public and enjoyed absolute license. His merry reign ended abruptly on the thirtieth day, when he was made to cut his own throat on the altar of the god he had impersonated. The practice was more quickly civilized in the metropolis, so that by the time of Augustus the ludicrous, doomed figure has become merely the lusty, ribald Lord of Misrule depicted by the classical writers.

tion to the problem of authority does not offer these positive conceptions. His solution reads simply: liberate men from irrational authorities. But if you liberate men in this way, that is, without helping them toward a conception of what liberty is for, you only lead them into deeper slavery, the slavery of the social. The man of today is led, to be sure, but he is led by fashion and opinion, by the taste and desire of the many at the moment. And it is significant, as Fromm himself has shown, that the desire which increasingly wells up from society is the desire for the gratification of all demands, the desire which Fromm has accurately called the "principle of nonfrustration." Moral philosophers have always known that there is no greater slavery than the slavery of unlimited desire. As that principle permeates more and more sectors of society, it becomes clear that to advocate, as Fromm does, the extension of the democratic principle into every sector of life is in effect to advocate government by desire. And what is desired is defined by fashion and opinion. Fashion is a severe dictator, for it is government not by rule but by whim. The regime of fashion is not constitutional.

The greatest failure of Fromm's thought is that he cannot see this. He cannot see that when authority is lacking fashion reigns. He cannot see that authority must rest upon positive conceptions of duty and the good life. He cannot see that his advocacy of the democratic principle, as he has defined it, is really an advocacy of fashion and passion, made attractive by the understanding that all men have an equal right to see their desires gratified. He advocates, in effect, the unrestricted development of the mass democracy of our day; and this mass democracy can be best defined, I think, as that style of government in which every man gets what he desires, while nobody can be blamed for the fact that our communities seem ever more adrift, the larger affairs of



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life increasingly beyond control, and the conception of the good life itself ever more a vague and hazy, almost anachronistic myth.

All this comes down to saying that Fromm lacks a clear and accurate conception of the political. Lacking that, his reasoning on political subjects becomes clouded. Political life occupies a middle terrain between the sheer givens of nature and society on the one side, and the transcendental ends toward which men aspire on the other. Political action is that type of action through which men publicly attempt to order and to transform the givens of nature and society by the light of values which are above or outside the order of the givens. Political authority is that authority which defines the ideal aims of the community and which tries to shape and direct nature and society in accordance with these ends. Just as the father in the family has the twofold task of restraining the children from regressing to the comforts of infantilism and of urging them upward toward the acceptance of mature human standards and obligations, so the authority in the polity has the twofold task of restraining the citizens from regressing to nature and society and of urging them upward toward the achievement of ideal ends. The task of restraining the citizens from regressing to nature is beautifully symbolized by the city's wall, which it is the special duty of authority to maintain, and which, it must not be forgotten, not only limits entry into the city but also restrains escape from the city back to nature. The task of restraining the citizens from regressing to society is embodied in all those rules and regulations which order life within the city, and which are maintained by authority. Within the ordered human space established by the laws and guaranteed by authority, men can live together in trust and friendship and can cooperate in the give-and-take of political activity properly so-called. Through this political

activity, men come to realize themselves by working out their destinies with others. And that leads to the third task of authority, which is that of enabling men to order their lives toward ideal aims. This function of authority is completely captured in Aristotle's two deepest ideas: man is a political animal; and men form societies not just to live but to live well.

In summary, it is the ambiguous fate of politics to be "contaminated" by nature and society even as it aspires toward the ideal. Political reasoning is the hardest and most subtle kind of reasoning, for, when the political theorist is reasoning about anything other than trivial questions, he is reasoning about questions which lie at the two boundaries of the political: the basic political-philosophical problems are "boundary exchange" problems. This means that the theorist always runs the risk of transgressing the boundaries of the political and either reducing politics to nature and society, or else denaturing politics entirely and substituting for political thought pure and uncontaminated metaphysics. But to make either error is to destroy politics. Fromm makes the first error: he deals with political subjects only in order to end politics and begin the reign of nature.

My criticism of Fromm's formulation of the problem of freedom has followed the same lines. Considered from the aspect of freedom, human life presents a strange dilemma. The dilemma is that while each of us must live his life alone, by and for himself, if one does not live his life toward some goal outside his own life, his life will lack tension and power, achievement and meaning. This is the dilemma which has flayed the souls of sensitive men for centuries; and it will continue to do so, for it is ineluctable. One escapes it only at the price of slavery, the form of which depends on the side of the dilemma one embraces. If one

stops with the self, he becomes his own slave. If he emphasizes only the external end, he becomes the victim of external forces, "even," as Augustine put it, "unto contempt of self."

Fromm commits the first kind of error. He defines freedom as the expansion of life, the unfolding of all one's powers, the fuller living of life. Life becomes its own end and product, the goal and good in itself. I have indicated that Fromm embraces this conception for good and worthy motives—a hatred of all unjust and irrational authorities and ends imposed on man—but the consequences of the position are the same, regardless of the motives which led to its acceptance. A life which merely turns round and round within itself is lost in its own labyrinth. The directed life requires a goal. And this goal is not the living of life, not the motion and fever of living, but an end outside the self toward which the motion is aimed. A life whose imperative is "live for living" is aimless, adrift in its own existence. A life given over to itself is empty, with nothing to occupy it but the invention of frivolities and busynesses—as though these could fill the void left by lack of purpose.

This is why Fromm's notion of self-fulfillment must seem a mockery to the person who earnestly seeks the meaning of freedom. One can be many things; that is, he can choose to fulfill any of a number of possible conceptions of his self. But to live is to choose, and that means to choose one part of one's powers and desires over others. Often this choice is made at the greatest pain, for one realizes that when he chooses to follow one path he at the same time chooses not to follow others, which may also be very attractive. Thus freedom always means a disciplined and reasoned rejection of some alternatives in favor of others, a domination of some of one's powers and desires by others. If this choice is not made in the light of a conception of the

good life, which is to say a conception which helps man understand that not *all* his powers ought to be actualized, but only those which are *properly and uniquely* man's glories, then it is a choice made in the darkness of egoism. Fromm's doctrine leads to the omnipotent I who is chained by his own energy.

These are some of the personal consequences of trying to escape the dilemma of liberty by embracing only its first half. But liberty is rarely an exclusively personal matter. It nearly always involves other persons, as the root of the word indicates. (*Liber* and *Libera* were ancient Italian deities of fructification and increase, often associated by the Roman poets with the Greek Bacchus. The goddess *Libertas*, to whom several temples were erected at Rome, originally personified personal freedom, but in imperial times she represented constitutional government.) Fromm has given virtually no consideration to the problem of liberty on the social level. He is silent on the question of what happens when two omnipotent I's, rushing through the dark, bump into each other. This is no oversight in his work, no mere failure to remember to deal with the problem. Rather, it is a position which he must hold as a consequence of his thesis that truly productive men will never harm each other but will always relate to each other through love and knowledge. It is a consequence of his thesis that there are no real conflicts of interest between men that will not disappear in the sane society. "Men, let them but once clearly understand one another, will not be long ere they agree." Jeremy Bentham said it, and Erich Fromm believes it.

Taken seriously, Fromm's doctrine would drown all true individuality in a sea of brotherhood. It would erase the distinction which lies at the heart of any social philosophy which is also moral: the conviction that the good man is never the same as the good citizen, not even the good



citizen of the good society; the conviction that the best men always transcend the standards of the city, and are the critics and teachers of the city, even while they benefit from it and perform their duties to it. It would abolish politics, and it would convert individual or minority disagreement with the community into a species of sin, which for Fromm is the same as mental sickness. Along with many writers of the utopian bent, Fromm has apparently forgotten the central teaching of the history of the struggle for constitutional government: the most important article of any plan for the good society is the article which defines the limits of the plan's own power to control the lives of men.

So far, I have argued generally that Fromm misunderstands both the nature of authority and liberty and their functions in the lives of individuals and societies. Now I want to remove the discussion from that general context and examine authority and liberty specifically within the structure of Fromm's thought. This will require an examination of the relationships between his notions of liberty and authority on the one side, and his conception of human nature and his vision of the good society on the other. This examination will lead to conclusions very similar to those of the more general discussion, but there may be some value in showing how these conclusions are built right into the structure of his thought.

Let me start with a rough division of all social theorists into three classes. Writers of the first class take a generally pessimistic view of man. They may agree largely with Swift's judgment of *Homo sapiens* as "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth." Or they may, with Hobbes, see man as *homo homini lupus*, the most formidable of the

beasts of prey, the only one that systematically preys on its own species. Or perhaps the writer sees man as only the child grown large, but the child still—impulsive, often unaware of his own real interest, mindless of the interests of others, still in need of restraint. What matters is that the writers of this class accept some variation on the theme that man is weak, evil, sinful. Writers of the second class take a generally optimistic view of man and see him as essentially good and pure. They might agree with the Rousseau of the early essays, in which man appeared as the noble savage. Perhaps with Kropotkin they stress the sympathetic faculty in human nature. Finally, theorists of the third class paint a picture of man that falls somewhere between the two extremes. For them, man is a marvelous compound of many elements—weakness and strength, good and evil. A little lower than the angels and a little higher than the animals, he has something of each in his nature. Man may be nature's weakest reed, but he is also, as Pascal wrote, a thinking reed. He may be in part a gorilla, but he is also, in Renan's description, a Good Gorilla.

Corresponding to each view of human nature is an attitude toward institutions. Writers of the first class emphasize order, hierarchy, the need for authority and restraint. On the whole, they look at social policy as a body of measures designed to advance culture and civilization by restraining the forces of evil and destructiveness in men. Writers of the second class emphasize freedom, equality, opportunity. They think that culture and civilization can best be advanced by measures which lift restraints from man and promote personal freedom, self-expression, and creativity. Writers of the third class live in a more complex institutional world than do those of either of the first two classes. For these writers, institutions must both promote



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and restrain. Social policies can advance culture sometimes by restraining malevolent tendencies and sometimes by promoting benevolent ones.

I would feel very uncomfortable with this caricature if Fromm did not fit so neatly into one of its compartments. Fromm falls—he need not be pushed—squarely into the camp of Rousseau. His faith in man reborn is unlimited. His vision of man as the spontaneous creator is clouded by no melancholy reflections on the pages of history that have been written in blood. Pride, hate, destructiveness—these are only secondary potentialities which emerge when the primary potentialities are thwarted. The great thing is to lift the false restraints, to free man from the burdens of the irrational authorities, the stupid customs, the authoritarian ideologies, and the false religions which bend him down and pervert his powers. Fromm has a faith in the noble savage which makes Rousseau's faith seem a pale negation by comparison.

Given this view of man, it is all but impossible for Fromm to come to terms with the restraining institutions of a society. In his view, practically all institutional restraints are either unnecessary or demonstrably harmful to man's finest powers. Fromm wants to abolish the authority of one man over another. This theme, the fear and hatred of authority, runs through all his work and makes it almost impossible for him to build a meaningful *political* theory. In England, Fromm's first book appeared under the title *Fear of Freedom*. If ever his writings are collected and published in a uniform edition, they might be issued under the title *Fear of Authority*.

There is an irony in this. Fromm's faith in man and his desire to see man freed from restraints would, in the end, turn the individual over to the worst tyranny of all—the tyranny of the neighbors. This appears most sharply in

his utopia: that warm and friendly community would bring men so closely together and expose them so nakedly to the influences of their neighbors that it is doubtful whether any really free and creative spirit would survive the ordeal. So eager is Fromm to break down the barriers between men that he forgets that barriers are defenses against the encroachments of the outsiders as well as separations from them. Freedom and creativity, and dignity too, require law and restraint, formal procedures which a man can use to keep a safe distance between himself and the others. Sometimes the others, pressing together for warmth, may forget that around each man there must be an empty space, a territory of considerate neglect, a private backyard in which one may roam as he wishes, unobserved and unchallenged even by his friends. Schopenhauer once said that men are like porcupines: if they stand too far apart they freeze to death; if they huddle too closely together they stick each other with their quills. We would all stick each other in Fromm's community, for there would be no institutional barriers and authorities to keep us a safe distance apart.

All I am saying is that freedom grows only in civilization and that civilization requires justice and order as well as mercy and love. I am not saying that civilization is *all* order, nor that we must keep order above all, even if that means calling out the military. It just seems to me that Fromm is incapable of coming to terms with the first problem of political philosophy, the problem of order.

If the analysis is sound to this point, it must be carried farther. If you take Fromm's radically optimistic view of man, combine with that his hatred of authority, and then add a third element which has not been considered in this context, it may turn out that Fromm is led to a position which virtually denies the possibility of ordered society—not just institutions of restraint and denial, but ordered



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society itself. The third element is Fromm's conception of the good.

For Fromm, it will be remembered, good is the affirmation of life. It is the unfolding of one's powers according to the laws of his being. Life itself is the great principle. There is no other beyond it by which to judge or explain it. The creative and mature person recognizes "*that there is only one meaning of life: the act of living itself.*"³ This introduces the dithyramb in honor of spontaneity.

Spontaneity. It is hard for Fromm to describe, but whatever it may be, it is the greatest and most truly human experience, the hallmark of the liberated and creative man. It involves total knowledge and acceptance of one's self and all its emotional, sensuous, and intellectual capacities. The spontaneous act is one that is not thought out. It comes on the spur of the moment and wells up from the center of the soul; the authentic and unrehearsed expression of all one's powers. In acts of spontaneity one affirms himself and the whole world in love. The truly spontaneous person realizes that in living, "what matters is the activity as such, the process and not the result." If man lives for the future rather than in the present, if he plans and strives and denies himself for tomorrow and does not relish each moment of today, he misses "the only satisfaction that can give him real happiness—the experience of the activity of the present moment—and chases after a phantom that leaves him disappointed as soon as he believes he has caught it—the illusory happiness called success."⁴ Unfortunately, Fromm complains, spontaneity is dimly scarce in our alienated and achievement-oriented society, but we crippled ones can at least get a glimpse of its beauties by observing the human types which have the most of it, artists and small children. "And a little child shall lead them. . . ."

It is unpleasant to have to put a damper on such

enthusiasm. Certainly, acts which proceed from an inner impulse and express one's whole feeling without inhibition are among the richest experiences of life, and they can bring great joy both to the one who acts and to the one who beholds. But no man could hold that pace forever, and even spontaneity can become monotonous. Life would be a dull business without some moodiness, some gloom, and even some downright nastiness. Furthermore, I doubt whether the view of spontaneity as including the total affirmation of self, and the view of productivity or creativity as the hallmark of the sane mind, has any merit at all. One cannot read far in the biographies of the writers who have told us the most about the self or the soul without discovering that, almost to a man, they were profoundly disturbed about their own souls. And many of the great creators have had more than a slight touch of madness. If spontaneity means total affirmation of the self, and if productivity means sanity, what shall we do with Van Gogh and Dylan Thomas, and a host of others?

Swift had pains in his head.
Johnson dying in bed
Tapped the dropsy himself.
Blake saw a flea and an elf.
Tennyson could hear the shriek
Of a bat. Pope was a freak.
Emily Dickinson stayed
Indoors for a decade.
Water inflated the belly
Of Hart Crane, and of Shelley.
Coleridge was a dope.
Southwell died on a rope.
Byron had a round white foot.
Smart and Cowper were put
Away. Lawrence was a fidget.



Keats was almost a midget.
 Donne, alive in his shroud,
 Shakespeare, in the coil of a cloud,
 Saw death very well as he
 Came crab-wise, dark and massy.
 I envy not only their talents
 And fertile lack of balance
 But the appearance of choice
 In their sad and fatal voice.⁵

There is another difficulty with this notion of spontaneity in the moral life.⁶ Along with a number of related words, such as authenticity, autonomy, individuality, and sincerity, spontaneity is one of the most attractive and most frequently used words in moral discourse today. What has to be pointed out is that all these terms are instrumental. They may suggest criteria for judging how an act should be done, but they provide no guides for evaluating the ends of action. Spontaneity may be a lovely and virtuous feeling-state, but in the realm of moral discourse this is only half of what matters. One can spontaneously commit homicide, smash windows, or push the button which sends an atomic missile on its journey of death. Spontaneity may be a necessary condition of the virtuousness of an act but it is not sufficient. The act must also have a virtuous content and objective. This requires a positive morality and a philosophy of authority, neither of which the ethic of spontaneity provides.

In fact, the tendency of the ethic of spontaneity is to draw attention away from the aims of action, which come to seem paltry and almost irrelevant, and concentrate it upon the will to live itself. When authority disappears, all things are allowed. And when everything is allowed, everything is equal. It seems foolish to try to establish a scale of values among one's experiences: what matters is experi-

ence itself. As Camus put it in his analysis of the ideal of the absurd man, "what counts is not the best living but the most living."⁷ In contradistinction to this ethic of spontaneity, a really distinguished code of ethics must rest upon a rule of authority and obedience, a rule which Nietzsche stated with the finest lucidity:

It clearly seems that the chief thing in heaven and on earth is to *obey* at length and in a single direction: in the long run there results something for which it is worth the trouble of living on this earth as, for example, virtue, art, music, the dance, reason, the mind—something that transfigures, something delicate, mad, or divine.⁸

The ethic of spontaneity, then, emphasizes the form of life and neglects its substance and aim. Seen from this point of view, Fromm's idea appears as one current in the much larger modern stream of technicism or instrumentalism. Many writers have commented on the various manifestations of this theme, and on the growing power of the theme itself, in modern life. Some writers have noted the displacement of "substantive reason," which evaluates the validity of goals, by "instrumental reason," which evaluates only the efficacy of techniques for achieving preset goals. Many writers have commented on the tendency of academic ethical writers to deal more and more with the logical analysis of ethical propositions and less and less with substantive ethical questions: philosophers do not try to define the good life; rather, they construct treatises on the many senses in which the term "good" has been used. Even the popular manuals of ethics take on an increasingly instrumentalist character: how to get along with your neighbors; how to be successful; how to reduce your tensions and guilts. (What if your neighbor is not worth getting along



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with? What if you in fact have committed a crime?) This technicism, it seems, pervades more and more areas of life: methodology replaces substance; why and what for are swallowed by how. Without stopping to examine it carefully, I would remind the reader of Spengler's warning that technicism is one of the marks of a declining civilization.

What should be examined more carefully, though the examination need not take long for the problem is a simple one, is the prescription of spontaneity as the antidote to conformity. Fromm, along with a host of other writers, is disturbed by the prevalence of conformity in our society. I am not concerned with the question of how widespread conformity is, or whether it is spreading, but I am concerned with what seems to me a radical and widespread error of thought, an error shared by Fromm, on this matter. What makes conformity seem such a danger is not conformity itself, not the mere fact of conformity, but the fact that what we conform to seems so banal, so trivial, so humanly unappealing. That this is the case will appear if one reflects for a moment on the simple truth that no one objects to conformity with others *in a good cause*. Then conformity is regarded as a great value, a term of praise. What we have to fear is not conformity as such, but conformity for the sheer sake of conformity, and conformity toward trivial or contemptible ends. When the "problem" of conformity is stated this way, it becomes evident that it is really an expression of a deeper problem, the lack of any positive and compelling visions of the good to fill the emptiness of modern life. Thus the "answer" to conformity is not spontaneity but the construction of and the dedication to such visions of the good for man and society. The ethic of spontaneity provides no help in this task; rather, it is a way of evading the task.

The glorification of spontaneity is not new with Fromm

nor does his expression of it differ essentially from many older expressions: one thinks immediately of the Romantic cult of genius. Nor is it surprising that the notion itself, and others like it, should be so appealing today. A certain tension which may be inherent in civilization itself underlies such patterns of thought and makes them a recurrent feature of an intellectual tradition. In any community which has reached an advanced and complex state of civilization, or which has moved in a rather short time from a condition of relative simplicity and freedom to a condition of relative sophistication and restraint, there will appear an urge to return to a style of life which is more passionate and unfettered than the style permitted by the current conditions. The Greeks had their memory of the tribal past, which was enshrined even in the greatest cities in the cult of Dionysus. America has her national memory of the virgin continent and the limitless frontier. In a day when civilization seems to tower over man, observing and regulating his smallest acts, it is to be expected that the call for spontaneity should come forth from many writers, and that it should appeal to many men. All of us yearn to express ourselves; and when complex social conditions demand so many things from each of us, and forbid so many others, it is easy to feel that what matters above all is expression itself, free and self-generated action, regardless of content.

This is fine, so long as the tendency is kept within some limits. Civilization rests upon restraint and needs compulsion. The chief difference between the civilized man and the savage (or the child) is that the civilized man has cultivated the habit of prudence and accepted the discipline of forethought. He does not act only on impulse and he does not live only for the moment. He takes thought for the future and performs many tasks not because they please him today but because he reasons that they will profit him in



the long tomorrow. He knows that life is more than the pleasure of the moment. It is in debt to the past and responsible to the future. The worship of Saturn is for holidays.

These things are obvious to any one who thinks for even a moment about the first man who planted seeds in the ground and anxiously worked and waited for the harvest. Fromm's praise of spontaneity tells half the story. His view of human nature blinds him to the rest.

In the latest essay on "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism" Fromm expresses these tendencies toward the primitive more emphatically than in any of his earlier writings. In this essay, he says that *the* question of life is: "How can we overcome the suffering, the imprisonment, the shame which the *experience of separateness* creates; how can we find union within ourselves, with our fellowman, with nature?"⁹ In discussing this question, society is always regarded as the separating and stultifying force. The "socially conditioned filter" of language, logic, and taboo limits the kind of experience which can enter awareness and deprives men of a full "awareness of reality." The result is that the social I, the I of consciousness, is crippled, debased, a corruption of the real man. "We might say . . . that the content of consciousness is mostly fictional and delusional. . . . [Most] of what is in our consciousness is 'false consciousness' and . . . it is essentially society that fills us with these fictitious and unreal notions."¹⁰ Whereas consciousness represents only the social (partial) man, unconsciousness represents universal man. It represents "the whole man, rooted in the Cosmos; it represents the plant in him, the animal in him, the spirit in him; it represents his past down to the dawn of human existence, and it represents his future to the day when man will have become fully human, and when nature will be humanized as man will be 'naturalized.'"¹¹ The great tragedy is that the "socially conditioned

filter" not only limits what enters consciousness but also limits our awareness and corrupts our perception of the commands of "the 'humanistic conscience,' that voice which speaks in the name of the full development of our person." Society blocks the realization "of the immanent evolutionary goals inherent in the chromosomes from which [one] develops. . . ." ¹² The great aim of therapy, then, as humanistic psychoanalysis uses the term, is to transform "*the mere idea of the universality of man into the living experience of this universality: it is the experiential realization of humanism.*" ¹³ All the limitations which evil societies have imposed on universal man must be removed, so that he can realize his universality and live according to his conscience. When this is done, men will have conquered the separateness which societies impose. Each will realize himself as a true citizen of the world, a brother of all who live.

With these formulations, Fromm in effect converts all known social orders into so many prisons, places in which each individual is locked in his own cell, isolated from his fellows by the delusions of consciousness, and brought into a vicious and alienated contact with the "community" only during the scheduled periods of collective recreation and work. Gone is the earlier understanding that society aids as well as impedes the growth of the human powers. Fromm here sees society only as a force which cripples, corrupts, confines. Any collective smaller than the universal brotherhood of love is too small for universal man.

There is really very little to be said about this. Fromm is of course correct when he says that the "socially conditioned filter" cramps awareness of reality, but he quite forgets that it also permits awareness of reality: men are both blinded and given vision by their social spectacles; and even if their social spectacles were removed, their vision would still be restricted, as Kant took pains to show some



time ago, by factors internal to themselves. Our societies are like our clothes. They do sometimes conceal our beauties, impede our movements, make us arrogant, even make us ridiculous. But that is no reason for throwing them all away, at least not while we cannot remain forever young and straight and graceful, and pass all of our days in Tahiti. Our social clothes protect and beautify as well as impede and conceal.

Fromm's universalism gives great comfort in an age which has suffered much from cruel and stupid nationalisms. But the answer to nationalism is not the obliteration of all differences in the universal church of mankind. Indeed, the answer we need is not religious at all, but political. We need to develop political methods and attitudes which while permitting—and even encouraging—national and other differences can yet fashion them into a mutual strength and glory, orchestrate the diverse themes into one harmonious composition. The Frommian answer sacrifices too much. Any developed culture and civilization is a unique and irreplaceable creation, not to be cast down merely because it limits the vision of its members. And any social order worthy of memory has created bonds among its members which are more precious to them than all talk of mankind. The whole reply to Fromm's promiscuous universalism is contained in the question asked by a citizen of Rome a very long time ago: "When all men are brothers, what then can brotherhood mean?"

The earlier themes of spontaneity and productiveness also receive a special expression in the latest essay. The unconscious must be made fully conscious, not to the end that it may be understood and thus mastered, but so that it may be fully liberated. Fromm's program here advocates the elimination of all convention and inhibition—all discipline,

no matter how imposed. The natural man must be released from the social prison so he can fulfill the destiny which is "inherent in his chromosomes." The implications of this are clear and terrifying. Hobbes and Freud may not have had the whole truth about the nature of "savage lust" and the forces of the *id*, but they certainly had a piece of it, and, I think, a greater piece than Fromm. There is a hidden elemental wildness in man, a "heart of darkness," as Conrad called it, and civilization with its parliaments and police forces, its temples and taboos, is still sometimes unable to restrain it. In this smoldering power there are both salvation and damnation, and not just the former, as Fromm would have us believe.¹⁴

One more comment on this theme. In the latest essay Fromm returns to the subject of authority, and this time the tendency of his thought toward the irrational and the prepolitical becomes explicit.

Fromm opens the discussion with his favorite distinction, that between rational and irrational authority. This time the meaning of rational authority is personified in the Zen master.

The attitude of the Zen master to his student is bewildering to the modern Western reader who is caught in the alternative between an irrational authority which limits freedom and exploits its object, and a laissez-faire absence of any authority. Zen represents another form of authority, that of "rational authority." The master does not call the student; he wants nothing from him . . . ; the student comes [and goes] of his own free will. . . . But inasmuch as he wants to learn from the master, the fact has to be recognized that . . . the master knows what the student wants to know. . . . The Zen master is characterized at the same time by

the complete lack of irrational authority and by the equally strong affirmation of that undemanding authority, the source of which is genuine experience.¹⁵

This is revealing in a number of ways. First of all, it emphasizes authority as an intensely personal and private relationship, bound by no rules and subject to no public scrutiny: no constitution stands between master and pupil.

More important, Fromm overlooks all those elements in the relationship which, to my myopic Western eyes, hint at the deepest kind of irrationality and arbitrariness. Consider these incidents. The Indian master Bodhidharma, seeking to test the seriousness of Shen-kuang, who wished to come to him for training, for a long time refused even to grant an audience to the suppliant. Shen-kuang kept returning and even stood one whole night in snow to his knees. At dawn, Bodhidharma received him, only to warn him that the way was hard and not to be undertaken by those lacking in perseverance. To attest his seriousness, the suppliant hacked off his left arm with a sword and presented it to the master, who then accepted him as a student.¹⁶ De Martino relates how the young Zen students, made desperate and fearful by their struggles with the *koan* (a kind of question or problem), may have to be "spurred, inspired, goaded or even driven by the master." The frantic student may try to avoid the master and may even refuse to go to the master for compulsory sessions: "he has sometimes to be beaten, pulled, dragged, or, as once was actually witnessed, forcibly carried by four other monks out of the meditation hall and into the interview."¹⁷ The master asks his student a question, and tells him he must answer yes or no. Then he says, "thirty blows whether you affirm or negate."¹⁸

Subject a man to enough of this and there is no doubt

that he will become enlightened. He will surely learn to break through his old ways of seeing and discover new ones. This process can be described in a number of vocabularies, of which Zen is only one. It might be called brainwashing. It might be called the annihilation of the ego. It might be called the destruction of reason and will. In any language, it is clear that the student has been subjected to an intolerable burden of frustration which his anguished spirit must somehow escape, even if that means leaping out of itself. This is indeed a method well designed to teach one to "know and apprehend who one is beyond the 'fold of reason,' that is, beyond the subject-object structure of intellection."¹⁹ It does this simply by destroying the instrument and the capacity for intellection. That Fromm accepts this goal is indicated by one of the most remarkable of his sentences. "The cerebrating person is the alienated person, the person in the cave who, as in Plato's allegory, sees only shadows and mistakes them for immediate reality."²⁰ (It hardly needs to be said that this is not quite what Plato had in mind.) In this same essay, Fromm finds still another remarkable expression for his conviction that intellection alienates and enslaves: "He [modern man] *thinks* of God, instead of experiencing *being* God."²¹

In short, this rational authority seems to lead to the destruction of reason. And when reason falls, all those restraints which prudent men have always put on authority also fall. It is clear that by "rational authority" Fromm means something other than the limited, rule-bound, predictable, responsible exercise of power which the thinkers of the West have meant by rational authority. I only repeat the obvious: we have learned by grim experience not to submit ourselves totally to the ministrations of any "teacher," no matter how wise or merciful. Zen is always presented to us of the West in glowing terms. I wonder how many victims

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of the “rational authority” of the Zen masters are to be found dragging their crippled spirits around the courtyards of Zen enlightenment. Is it entirely wrong to see that sad tale of Bodhidharma and Shen-kuang in terms of the priests of Cybele, who also had to mutilate themselves before they were admitted to the mysteries?

These Zen themes, together with some others from Existentialism, attest Fromm’s passionate desire to see man overcome alienation and achieve spontaneity and wholeness. But there may be danger in this eagerness to transcend the human condition. In these concluding pages, I shall try to show how certain tendencies and orientations in Fromm’s thought effectively blind him to certain large ethical perspectives and sectors of experience.

Fromm touches the dominant theme of modern Existentialism when he accepts finitude and estrangement as the central categories of the human condition. Existentialism sees the world we live in as a disrupted unity, a rubble of fragments and ruins. Man, the stranger, stumbles among the ruins and, driven by his very finitude, strives to restore even small heaps of the rubble to order. From man’s finitude comes the *Angst* which compels him to action, but this action only leads to greater anxiety, for even as he strives he senses the world is alien. The action brings only deeper anxiety, then despair, and finally guilt as man faces the realization that he is really trying to escape the human condition, which is finitude. Man becomes alienated from his guilty self. He knows too that the real experiences of his life are unique to him. Death, guilt, fear, anxiety—these cannot be shared, hardly even communicated. Each lives in his own prison. In public one talks only of public things, and often he tries to escape the private things by covering them over with public action. But in the end he knows he is alone, and he escapes only at the price of a bad conscience.

Thus man is also cut off from other men as well as from himself. Existentialism accepts the relation between finitude and estrangement as necessary and inescapable.

That is precisely the relation Fromm will not accept. He begins with the Existentialists by accepting finitude as the basic feature of the human condition. He goes on to describe man’s loneliness and his estrangement from himself and others. But he will not accept the Existentialist thesis of the necessary connection between finitude on the one side and loneliness and estrangement on the other. Fromm believes that estrangement (which he usually calls alienation) can be overcome in a new world. He will not see that every man, almost to the extent that he is an authentic and integral person, is lonely, for to be an individual means to recognize that one is different and in some ways cut off from all the others around him. He believes that loneliness arises from present evil social conditions, and that it will disappear when a decent human community is built. Another way to put the point is to say that for Fromm the category of alienation is at bottom a category of sociology rather than of metaphysics.

This makes Fromm’s work attractively simple. And in its simplicity lies its charm and its power to persuade. Fromm believes that the only problem left in the destiny of mankind is to bring individual and social needs and purposes into harmony. To be sure, this is a big problem, but for Fromm it is a manageable one because he thinks he understands the basic needs of human nature and he sees no irreconcilable conflict between the needs of man’s nature and the principles of a just and productive social order. Therefore, all that is required to bring society into harmony with human nature is a creative act of will. Fromm has banished mystery and guilt, terror and tragedy from the center of human affairs and relegated them to the pe-



ripheral status of grievous accidents, grievous precisely because they are so unnecessary. This places him squarely in the tradition of optimistic liberalism and separates him from all writers who have understood tragedy. For Fromm, all conflicts are mistaken, and the good man is at once the good citizen of the good society. In the latest essay, the good society is finally revealed as nothing less than the restoration of the garden on a universal scale. Fromm restores the harmony of the garden, but only at the price of oversimplifying reality and denying two of the oldest and richest themes of ethical thought.

This notion of estrangement is of course not new with the Existentialists. In one form or another, under one name or another, it is as old as moral philosophy. But the writer can either accept estrangement as a necessary part of the human condition or he can, as Fromm does, believe that it can be vanquished. The view one takes of this matter makes an enormous difference to his moral philosophy. Those who hold the first view often accept something like the courage to affirm life in the face of despair or the practice of the intellectual virtues as the highest good. Here, for example, is Burnet's summary of the ethic of Pythagoras:

We are strangers in this world, and the body is the tomb of the soul, and yet we must not seek to escape by self-murder; for we are the chattels of God who is our herdsman, and without his command we have no right to make our escape. In this life there are three kinds of men, just as there are three sorts of people who come to the Olympic Games. The lowest class is made up of those who come to buy and sell, and next above them are those who come to compete. Best of all, however, are those who come to look on. . . . The greatest purification of all is, therefore, science and it is the man who devotes himself to that, the true philosopher, who

has most effectually released himself from the "wheel of birth."²²

Those who went to the Olympic games to buy and sell, those who went to compete, and those who went to look on have their counterparts in all times and places. Pythagoras admired the true philosophers, those who "only" looked on. They see life as a wonderful spectacle—half glorious and half sordid, half religious and half secular, half beautiful and half ugly, half victory and half defeat. The great danger is that one too easily gets caught up by the spectacle and lost in it. The great virtue is to understand and appreciate. Among all who go to the games, those who understand are the happiest and the dearest to the gods, for only in the life of contemplation does man at once gain safety from the transient pleasures of the game and exercise the faculty that makes him akin to the gods. Fromm claims the authority of Aristotle for his ethical views but I doubt whether he could ever appreciate Aristotle's supreme ethical conception, for to embrace the contemplative life as the noblest life requires an acceptance of the essential estrangement of man from man and man from society which Fromm could never make. Fromm's optimism, his meliorism, and his desire to reconcile conflicts result in an ethical activism which precludes a full appreciation of the contemplative style of life.

The same characteristics of Fromm's thought make it impossible for him to appreciate what Unamuno has called the tragic sense of life. Fromm talks often of the "tragedy" of modern life, but he uses the word to cover loosely any situation in which a chance has been lost, a pain suffered, a hope defeated. The sense of tragedy, the tragic sense of life, is finer than that. It involves more than deep sympathy for the defeated. *Katharsis*. This is what the Greeks called the

state of feeling produced by the dramatic tragedy. It meant the stillness at the center of one's being which comes after pity and fear have been burned out. The soul is purified and calmed, freed from the violent passions. *Hybris* is broken, just as it was broken in the drama. Chastened and freed from the bondage of passion, the mind grasps newer and deeper meanings in reality. The spirit, now strengthened and deepened, gravely prepares for new duties and the courageous acceptance of whatever fate brings.

This state of mind, which is produced in its most intense and exalted form by the spectacle of the tragedy, can also be maintained as an orientation toward life. But that requires a fuller acceptance of the discontinuities of existence than Fromm is willing to make. Out of the tension between man's capacity for a self-transcending freedom and the essential limitations of his creatureliness come the desire and anxiety which urge him to pride and self-inflation. (I of course mean pride here in the theological sense: "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil. . . .") This pride enlists all man's biological talents and energies in its cause and bends other men and social institutions to its purposes, but is itself the product neither of biological drives, as Freud would have us believe, nor of social institutions, as Fromm would have us believe. It comes from the self in the existential situation.

Once this is grasped, we sense vividly the limitations of all human achievement and the ambiguity of all human virtue. We can no longer believe in the innocence of man nor call every defeat of his highest aspirations a "tragedy," for we know that man lacks the power to do all he wishes, and that he will always wish to do more than he can. Great pride and talent are needed for great attempts, and all attempts are but preparations for the greatest attempt of

all, which is to become God. But the attempt is doomed from the outset for the tragic flaw is already there. Still, we shall always try, for the origins of pride are in the human situation. Only one thing is certain: the nobler the effort and the closer the victory, the more catastrophic will be the final defeat. "And now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever. . . ." Here is man's glory and misery, the fate he cannot escape.

This image of life, with its own understanding of the moral problem, is inaccessible to Fromm. He starts his analysis of the human condition by insisting that finitude is its defining category, but he will not accept the stern imperatives of the analysis. Fromm agrees with the Existentialist and the Christian that finitude is man's fate and that man is driven to attempt to transcend this finitude, but he seems to make the agreement only so he can hurry on to say that man *can* escape his fate and overcome his finitude. For the works of man, Fromm has much praise. But man himself he cannot praise. He scolds the very being whose work he so admires.

Man has created a new world with its own laws and destiny. Looking at his creation, he can say, truly, it is good.

But looking at himself what can he say? Has he come closer to the realization of another dream of mankind, that of the perfection of *man*? Of man loving his neighbor, doing justice, speaking truth, and realizing that which he potentially is, an image of God? ²³

This is to argue that Fromm first accepts the definition of man as the finite creature who wishes to be the infinite creator, and then goes on to assert that man can be what he wishes. Fromm will tolerate no unbridgeable gap between the two categories. He will not for long abide the existential

dichotomy. This craving for wholeness has blinded Fromm to the prodigious history of pride and made it impossible for him to apply his own powerful talents to an understanding of the psychology of pride.

What I am arguing, in summary, is that very different moral systems than Fromm's own can be built on the base of his own analysis of the human condition. Had he accepted the full implications of his own view of man as the stranger, he might have gone on to build an ethical system in which the contemplative life is the best life. Had he accepted the full implications of his own view of man as the creature who strives to depose the creator, he might have gone on to build an ethical system around the tragic sense of life. I am not arguing that any vision of the moral problem which cannot encompass these perspectives is simply wrong, but I am arguing that it is narrow. The ultimate choices which guide an ethical system are esthetic and temperamental, and I am willing to put my differences with Fromm on these grounds. I think Fromm's ethical outlook will do for the days of our youth, when life is all richness and promise, but it will not serve for the whole of life, during which we must watch our powers wane and see our hopes defeated, and know that the highest state man can achieve in this world is still a state of qualified unhappiness.

Fromm's work has a resonance in this time of small hopes and little beauty because it is a work undertaken in favor of man. Fromm's pages are alive with expressions of love and compassion for all mankind. His work is in the splendid tradition of those who have shown man a vision of life as beauty and creativity. Much of Fromm's own vision of that good life is noble, and many of his expressions of it achieve beauty in their simplicity and clarity. It is no pleasant task to criticize writers who give us so much. Still, one must express reservations. For if life would be

poorer without such writers, they also have the talent of making us forget that the life we have is not all poor. So this is a question of self-defense. The utopian's love for the beauty that does not yet exist sometimes dims his appreciation of the beauty that does exist. We must take care that the utopian does not rob us of what we have by dazzling us with his offer of so much more.

The utopian desires perfection. Nothing else will do. So avidly does he gaze upon the shining "city on the hill" that its light blinds him to the beauty that is present even in the lives of those who dwell in the plains below. Earthly beauties pale and become tawdry in the light of the beauties above. The utopian often cannot see that "mere" earthly beauties are all the more wondrous precisely because they have been wrested from ugliness and affirmed in the face of terror and absurdity. That is the meaning of human beauty, although the utopian cannot see it. Emerson caught the point in his judgment of the utopians of his day:

The philosophers at Fruitlands have such an image of virtue before their eyes, that the poetry of man and nature they never see; the poetry that is in man's life, the poorest pastoral clownish life; the light that shines on a man's hat, in a child's spoon, the sparkle on every wave and on every mote of dust, they see not.²⁴

Fromm suffers some of the handicaps of the utopian blindness. He leaps too quickly from the ugly present to the beautiful future. So perilous is this leap from finitude to perfection that he can attempt it only with his eyes closed. It is not solely that Fromm judges modern man and his civilization harshly—though he does that too—but that he ignores so much of the good that men win every day from evil, so much of the beauty that men every day create and affirm



in spite of ugliness. In his eagerness to see Prometheus unbound, Fromm fails to see the beauties and nobilities that are Prometheus's only while he suffers. It is a cruel judgment which decides that man must be "healthy" and "happy" before he can be human and create beauty. Some writers, Mann and Verlaine, for example, even postulated that the beautiful had its roots in the morbid. It is not necessary to accept this whole theory to recognize, at least, that the beautiful and the morbid are intimately related. Some part of the deep secret of human beings lies in the fact that they can combine the sacred and the obscene. Some part of the mystery and grandeur of human beings lies in the fact that they make paintings on the walls of miserable caves and write poetry and philosophy in the midst of hunger and filth. For Fromm, these things, which some of us judge noble precisely because they have been built at the price of great sacrifice and in the face of great risks, are just not good or beautiful enough. In his eagerness to see man reborn, Fromm fails to see the beauties and nobilities which man achieves even—no, only—in the fallen state.

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6. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
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9. *Ibid.*, pp. 359–360.
10. Ecclesiastes 12:13.
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45. *Man for Himself*, pp. 43–45.
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47. All from Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 7.
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54. George H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1934), p. 138. For similar or equivalent formulations, see also pp. 151–156, 193–194.
55. Peter F. Drucker, *Concept of the Corporation* (New York: John Day, 1946), p. 152.
56. Nowhere has this theme been treated more emphatically than in Philip Selznick's *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson, 1957).
57. This scheme is set forth in David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), Chap. I.

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2. *Man for Himself*, p. 33.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
4. *Loc. cit.*
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 50–51.
6. *Escape from Freedom*, p. 13.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 290.



8. The first is from *Escape from Freedom*, p. 278, and the second is from *Man for Himself*, p. 59.
9. *Escape from Freedom*, p. 18.
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11. The first formulation is from *Man for Himself*, p. 60. The second is from *Escape from Freedom*, p. 277.
12. I borrowed this figure of the scale from Patrick Mullahy, *Oedipus: Myth and Complex* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), p. 259.
13. *Escape from Freedom*, p. 283.
14. *Man for Himself*, p. 60.
15. *Escape from Freedom*, p. 284.
16. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), esp. pp. 3–15.
17. The example is drawn from *Escape from Freedom*, pp. 280–281. Incidentally, Fromm vacillated on this question of the workers. In the place just cited, he attributes their failure to their authoritarianism. On p. 209 he says it was “due mainly to a state of inner tiredness and resignation, which . . . is characteristic of the individual in the present era even in democratic countries.”
18. The characterology is set forth most fully in *Man for Himself*, pp. 62–117. My exposition will draw heavily from those pages.
19. Adapted from *Man for Himself*, p. 111.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 84. Fromm also says that the concept of productivity is an elaboration of the concept of spontaneity which was presented in *Escape from Freedom*.
24. *Man for Himself*, p. 85.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
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27. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
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59. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
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CHAPTER III

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2. *The Sane Society*, p. 69. Italics omitted. See also *ibid.*, p. 275.
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25. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
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CHAPTER IV

1. The following discussion draws heavily from Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, tr. by R. F. C. Hull (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), esp. pp. 1–16, 129–151. I have elaborated freely on Buber, however, so he is not responsible.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
3. *The Sane Society*, pp. 282–283.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 343–344.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 271–272. Fromm repeats the point at *ibid.*, p. 361: "No change must be brought about by force, it must be a simultaneous one in the economic, political and cultural spheres. Changes restricted to *one* sphere are destructive of every change."
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 283–284.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 323.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 334–335.
9. *Man for Himself*, p. 243.
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13. See Frank Tannenbaum, *A Philosophy of Labor* (New York: Knopf, 1950).
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8. Quoted from *ibid.*, p. 64.
9. Erich Fromm, "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism," in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 87. Emphasis added.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 105.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
14. In addition to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, see on this theme the equally chilling parable by William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1955), and the fine treatment by J. Bronowski, *The Face of Violence: An Essay with a Play* (New York: Braziller, 1955).
15. "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism," *op. cit.*, pp. 120–121.
16. Drawn from Richard De Martino, "The Human Situation and Zen Buddhism," in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 152.
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18. Drawn from D. T. Suzuki, "Lectures on Zen Buddhism," in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 121.
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22. John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (New York: Meridian, 1957), p. 98.
23. *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, p. 1.
24. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals*, entry of March, undated, 1843. Quoted here from Bliss Perry, ed., *The Heart of Emerson's Journals* (New York: Dover, 1958), p. 196. By quoting Emerson on this point I do not mean to suggest that his

vision was always clearer than that of the philosophers of Fruitlands. Emerson, too, was a utopian, and suffered from the utopian blindness to the everyday. And his conception of beauty was everlastingly spiritualized and otherworldly. Perhaps he could see the shortcomings of those he criticized because he shared so many of the same ones himself, and because he tried so hard to conceal or overcome them. See, for example, the *Journal* entry for April 18, 1824, pp. 17–23.



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tinguishes sharply between the public and the private sectors of a man's life. He argues that one man can discover another only through an extraordinary act of creative love and union. It follows that if we want knowledge of the inner life of man we must go not to the standard or common observer who employs the methods of social science but to the rare and special observer who employs the methods of the poet, the lover, or the artist. William James once remarked that the broadest gap in nature is the gap between two minds. To leap that gap requires the extraordinary strength of the poet and the mystic, not the strength of the ordinary social scientist using the ordinary methods of social science. Hegel wrote that "A hero is never a hero to his valet; and that is not because the hero is not a hero, but because the valet is a valet." Ordinary men see ordinary things in other men. Only an extraordinary man can see the extraordinary things in other men, or tell us how wonderful and extraordinary the apparently ordinary things really are.

This is to argue that social science is limited in its possibilities and ought to be limited in its claims. It is to argue, concretely, that to treat the works of Shakespeare, or Goethe, or Spinoza as on a level with the latest treatise in behaviorist psychology is to misunderstand both. The plays of Shakespeare, the sermons of Christ, the poems of Goethe are not reports to be checked for their verisimilitude, not mines where hypotheses lie, not papers to be read and judged as the teacher grades an undergraduate blue book. They are rare and wondrous works of genius whose meanings may be ultimately inaccessible to most of us. Our proper attitude toward them is an attitude of respect, of appreciation, of earnest attempt to understand. If we treat them as examinations to be graded by our standards we diminish them. If we mine them for hypotheses we destroy them.

This is to argue that rule and method cannot replace genius. In the view of Fromm, the order of knowledge achieved by the social scientist will never replace the order of knowledge which belongs to the awakened ones. In the end, Fromm's call for a science of man comes down to the conviction that man is the center of the universe, and to the thesis that if we are to advance in the moral studies we must lay the ground for the advance in an understanding of man. Thus far and no farther could Fromm agree with Hume:

Here then is the only expedient, from which we can hope for success in our philosophical researches, to leave the tedious lingering method, which we have hitherto followed, and instead of taking now and then a castle or village on the frontier, to march up directly to the capital or center of these sciences, to human nature itself; which being once masters of, we may every where else hope for an easy victory. . . . There is no question of importance, whose decision is not compriz'd in the science of man; and there is none, which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science. In pretending therefore to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security.²⁴

That "march up to the capital" will be made not by the battalions of social science but by the small band of the "awakened ones."

I have tried to establish two conclusions: (1) no science of man exists in the sense that Fromm has in mind; and (2) the prevailing methods and concerns of modern social science make of it a thing that is, at best, of small use

ways which contribute to happiness or in ways which contribute to unhappiness. Only a frame of orientation and devotion based on reason and objective knowledge will contribute to happiness.

This analysis of the human condition and the psychic needs stemming from it is the foundation of Fromm's social criticism. He measures the happiness and virtue of an individual by the degree to which the person has fulfilled the basic needs in a productive way. He judges the worth of a society by the degree to which it helps the individual satisfy the needs. A careful look at the scheme now will ease the way for later discussions. In the following pages I shall first mention a few logical and terminological difficulties in the analysis, move on to expose the hypothesis that underlies it, and then discuss the view of human nature which it contains. This will lead into some remarks on the larger social and ethical implications of the analysis.

It is clear at the outset that Fromm did not find the five needs by following the method of his own proposed science of man, that is, by observing the reactions of men to varying situations and from these observations inferring the core qualities of the being who reacts. He found them in the pages of a number of philosophers and moralists and in his own brief philosophical analysis of the human condition. They are philosophical postulates, not empirical findings. That does not destroy the value of the constructs, but it does remove them to a realm beyond the reach of "merely" scientific and empirical criticism. A discussion of this part of Fromm's work must take its terms from logic and esthetics.

The notion of the existential dichotomy or contradiction is very important to Fromm's thought. As will be shown later, it is the base of his theory of biological-moral

progress. Yet, what he means by the term is never quite clear. What is the source of existential dichotomies? Fromm says they are a result of the emergence of reason. He also says they come from the split between the human and the animal parts of man's nature. What are the existential dichotomies? The fundamental one is that between life and death. Another is that between man's drive to realize all (not just his own) human potentialities and the brevity of his life. It is evident that dichotomy or, as Fromm also calls it, contradiction, has many meanings, not all of which are clear. What can it mean, for example, to say that there is a contradiction between the fact that man wants to but cannot return to the passionate animal state and the fact that he feels driven to use his reason to master nature and build society? The fact is, some men have returned to the animal state, and others have never left it. Finally, to say that man must use his reason sounds less like a contradiction than it does like a part of the definition of human nature.

Fromm's basic meaning here will become clearer, I think, if his passages on the development of a brotherliness and a framework of orientation and devotion based on "reason" are translated from the language of dichotomies into the language of commitment. This translation can be made with confidence because in his latest essay Fromm makes fully explicit a theme which has been powerful, but implicit, in his thought from the very beginning. For Fromm, the basic question of life is: "How can we overcome the suffering, the imprisonment, the shame which the experience of separateness creates; how can we find union within ourselves, with our fellow man, with nature?"⁴³ He then relates various attempted answers to this question and discusses various impediments to its solution. Among the latter, he mentions "intellectual knowledge," the vice of which is that it deludes a man into thinking that *he* grasps

reality, while in fact it is not his whole self but only his "brain-self" which grasps it. This kind of knowledge, which is "more widespread and intense in modern culture than it probably was at any time before in history," takes man ever farther away from himself, from his fellows, and from nature. If there is any doubt as to just what is at stake here, Fromm dispels it with an incisive phrase: "The cerebrating person is the alienated person. . . ." ⁴⁴

Put the two notions together—the basic problem of life is the achievement of union; the cerebrating man is the alienated man—and it becomes clear that for Fromm the "original sin," the force which has driven man from the garden and made him a wanderer, is reason itself. Reason corrupts because it separates man from himself, from his fellows, and from nature. We must learn to perceive and relate to the world "beyond the fold of reason." Fromm may explicitly affirm that man must "go forward" to a new harmony based on reason, but it is clear that the deeper thrust of his thought urges us "backward" to a state before reason. This, I think, is the real meaning of his theory of progress. It is a kind of great circle theory of progress; or, as Koestler calls it, the theory that history progresses by the "law of detours": we can only go forward by first going back. "Forward to Yesterday," as the Southern Senator put it in a recent Broadway musical.

The confusions of the existential dichotomies are compounded by the introduction of "historical dichotomies." ⁴⁵ As distinguished from the existential variety, these dichotomies are man-made and soluble. They result from a shortage of courage and wisdom. Fromm provides two examples: the institution of slavery in ancient Greece, and the modern contradiction between an abundance of technical means of production and the incapacity to use them exclusively for peace and public welfare. If Fromm means

to say only something like "it is unfortunate that we use some of our economic facilities for military rather than for peaceful purposes," then his formulation is at least understandable: he is expressing a preference for one set of goals over another. But it is not enough just to assert the preference, and to imply that men who disagree lack courage and wisdom. On the other hand, if Fromm means to say that there is something inherent in the structure of an advanced industrial economy that leads it to produce for war rather than for peace, he has a very big job of analysis on his hands before we can accept the thesis. I think this latter position is in fact the one Fromm holds, for it is consistent with his Marxist orientation: just as the Greeks needed slavery to run their economy, so does advanced capitalism need military production to maintain itself. This may clarify Fromm's view, but it does not make it compelling, for the Marxist argument on this point suffers from a number of defects, most of which are so well-known that they need no statement here.

What is the relationship between historical and existential dichotomies? It may be a little closer than Fromm would like to think. Existential dichotomies compel men to action. This action can take place only on the stage of history. So the existential dichotomies cause the historical dichotomies, in the sense that they compel men to the actions which produce historical dichotomies. Seen in this light, it is not so easy to say that the historical dichotomies can be annulled if we apply enough courage and wisdom to them, for a shortage of courage and wisdom is part of the very definition of the human condition. Man is limited. He makes mistakes. This conclusion is implicit in Fromm's analysis, but he dare not accept it. To do so would bring down the utopian aspirations of his thought.

In summary, while it is difficult to attach any clear and



man had been my intellectual conscience. That was Edmund Wilson.

(2) That another man represented my sense of the "good life," though I saw him once in a decade, and since then he might have been hung. . . . But in difficult situations I had tried to think what *he* would have thought, how *he* would have acted.

(3) That a third contemporary had been an artistic conscience to me. . . .

(4) That a fourth man had come to dictate my relations with other people when these relations were successful: how to do, what to say. . . . This always confused me and made me want to go out and get drunk, but this man had seen the game, analyzed it and beaten it, and his word was good enough for me.

(5) That my political conscience had scarcely existed for ten years save as an element of irony in my stuff. When I became again concerned with the system I should function under, it was a man much younger than myself who brought it to me, with a mixture of passion and fresh air.

So there was not an "I" any more—not a basis on which I could organize my self-respect—save my limitless capacity for toil that it seemed I possessed no more. It was strange to have no self—to be like a little boy left alone in a big house, who knew that now he could do anything he wanted to do, but found that there was nothing that he wanted to do—⁵²

In short, you can lose your identity without knowing it; and you can think you have an identity without having one.

Fromm has formulated this problem clearly enough, and he thinks he has found a solution to it. His solution is that the person who achieves a productive fulfillment of the five basic needs has by that achievement also achieved authentic selfhood. The solution is not convincing: Fromm

has failed to come to terms with some of the central conceptions and conclusions of empirical social science. Just as philosophy lost the self, so has social science—but with the difference that now it is the psychological self that is lost. In order to see where the loss occurred and what problems it raises for Fromm's thought, I shall again make an excursion over the history of the question.

The excursion need not take long, for after Kant the course of thought on this subject was as nearly predictable as anything in intellectual history can be. Kant argued only that the idea of the self cannot be based on sensory experience or empirical examination, but is exclusively an idea of reason. He agreed, for example, that freedom of the will and immortality of the soul are the necessary bases of all moral action, but he did not attempt a proof for these two concepts: he simply put them down as necessary postulates for the exercise of the practical reason. But the question could not be left there, and what happened next was bound to happen, even though it ran against all Kant had hoped. While Kant wanted to show only that we cannot build our idea of the self from experience, men soon began to argue that *experience* denies any theory of the self as a simple substance having identity over time. In other words, while for Kant the problem centered around the nature of perception, in our time it appears in the sciences of psychology and sociology. Today the question is whether what we call the self is anything more than a social emergent, a product of social interaction. The question is whether the observed manifestations of the empirical Sweeney spring from some unity other than that of a mere organism which can be located in physical and social space and time. Is Sweeney merely a point or container where social forces converge to produce certain observable events; or does he have some essential self beyond and above a merely social self?



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.



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

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



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



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.⁶

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.



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is done, there must remain the nagging suspicion that alienation may be little more than an expression of the malaise of the intellectual, who, rejected by and in turn rejecting the larger society, projects his own fear and despair onto the broader social screen.

I am not suggesting that Fromm ought to do this kind of work. Nor do I think that alienation is nothing more than a projection of the malaise of the intellectual. I am saying only that until a fuller and different kind of evidence comes in, any discussion of alienation must be understood to have certain important limitations.

Until such evidence appears, we must make do with the evidence we have. Here, perhaps, Fromm is vulnerable, for he does not always use the best and most recent evidence available, and he sometimes selects and interprets the evidence in rather special ways. Three examples follow.

Fromm's analysis of alienation in the sphere of production centers around the concepts of the bureaucratization of the corporation, the separation of ownership from control, and the broad (and thus from the point of view of corporate control, ineffective) dispersion of stock ownership. For all these points he relies exclusively on Berle and Means's study of 1932, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*. The broad conclusions of that pioneering work remain undisturbed, but subsequent research has

alienation, defined as the psychological state of a person "who has been estranged from, made unfriendly toward, his society and the culture it carries." (*Ibid.*, p. 672.) Nettler's analysis of the interviews he conducted with thirty-seven alienated persons shows that his concept of alienation is peculiarly "intellectual." Thus: "The common ground beneath these estranged ones is a consistent maintenance of unpopular and averse attitudes toward familism, the mass media and mass taste, current events, popular education, conventional religion and the teleic view of life, nationalism, and the voting process." (*Ibid.*, p. 674.) This unduly restricted concept of alienation renders irrelevant the large theoretical, philosophical, and psychological literature on the subject.

expanded and somewhat altered their empirical support, has suggested important revisions in the general analytic frame of reference, and has sharpened the meaning of particular analytic concepts in this area. Fromm seems unaware of these developments.³¹

Another example is his very infrequent use of the large amount of data from surveys designed to discover what and how people actually do feel and think on a broad range of topics: he cites such survey-type findings just three times. Moreover, the conclusions he draws from the findings are not always the only ones possible. For example, he cites the following data from two studies on job satisfaction: in the first study, 85 per cent of professionals and executives, 64 per cent of white collar people, and 41 per cent of factory workers expressed satisfaction with their jobs; in the second study, the percentages were 86 for professionals, 74 for managerial persons, 42 for commercial employees, 56 for skilled workers, and 48 for semi-skilled workers.³² He concludes that these data show a "remarkably high" percentage of consciously dissatisfied and unhappy persons among factory and clerical workers. Starting from other value premises than Fromm's, some analysts might conclude that the percentages really tell us very little at all, while others might even conclude that the figures are remarkably low. Eric Hoffer, for example, once said that America was a paradise—the only one in the history of the world—for workingmen and small children. What matters is that while Fromm's reading of the data is not the only one possible, it is precisely the one we would expect from a writer who earnestly believes that every man can and ought to be happy and satisfied. Fromm also cites a poll on attitudes toward work restriction conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation in 1945, in which 49 per cent of manual workers said a man ought to turn out as much as he could in a day's



a more intense degree. This task is difficult for exactly the same reason psychoanalysis is difficult: it is painful.

This suggests an important warning, which, although obvious, is often ignored. Since the task of reconstructing the self is both complex and painful, there is no guarantee that the one who undertakes it will succeed. He may achieve not an authentic restoration but a blemished copy. This is just another way of saying that the fact that one pays heed to his history and his feelings does not mean that he is exempt from error in his understanding or report of them. One can make mistakes about the causes of his feelings, and he can make mistakes about their real content and location. Merely paying attention to oneself, being aware of oneself, does not mean that one therefore accurately grasps his self. No man is more aware of himself than the hypochondriac, but his mistake about himself is so large and so pervasive that he confuses "real" feelings with fancied ones.

These considerations indicate the differences between self-alienation and alienation from others. Turning to the latter, it is useful to start by distinguishing it from a situation it is often confused with, that of open conflict. Two features are decisive. First, the man who is alienated from others feels *estranged* from them, cut off, detached from their affairs and concerns. Secondly, and this is only the other side of the first point, he has little or no emotional *investment* in the lives of those from whom he is alienated. The alienated one is distant from the others and has no desire to draw closer to them. In the situation of open conflict, on the other hand, not only are the two actors (individuals or groups) already very close to each other, but they also desire intensely to draw even closer, albeit for destructive purposes. (To avoid misunderstanding, it is worthwhile stating the obvious point that physical space and movement are irrelevant here.) This is the meaning of the ancient

observation that love and hate are akin: "In one's friend one shall have one's best enemy," as Nietzsche put it. The closer a relationship between two actors approaches either friendship (positive investment) or open enmity (negative investment), the less appropriately can the term alienation be applied to that situation, for alienation from others means essentially estrangement from and lack of investment in their affairs and concerns.

Alienation from others may happen in two ways. First, the one may "arrange" to have others alienate him, as the saint, the aristocrat, or the intellectual (in Benda's sense) does. Or, one may become alienated from others without himself encouraging or initiating the process. Examples would be the person who is a kind of natural "misfit," or the members of certain minority groups, such as the Jews in the United States or the Negroes in the North. Those who are alienated from others might be called the strangers. The stranger may or may not have his self destroyed. It is true that some portion of a man's history is robbed by those who alienate him, but this robbery (though the coward will try to "forget" it) may come to be an important part of the man's history, as it is, for example, with the intellectual. In this case, what looked like robbery is only attempted robbery. The self endures and is often strengthened and improved by the very memorableness and violence of the event. It follows that alienation from others is by no means inherently bad or destructive of the self. It may indeed be the very anchor point of a strongly developed selfhood. This will be true especially if the stranger is fortunately endowed with a combination of guilt and curiosity: guilt to make the robbery important to him; curiosity to examine the robbery as to its style and meaning. The stranger who has both guilt and curiosity will emerge from the attempted robbery with a stronger self and a sharper percep-



tialist theory of alienation can be presented under four headings: (1) rejection of the separation between subject and object; (2) the way man exists in the world; (3) how the essentialist error has cut man off from being; and (4) the description of the human condition.

Subject and object. Existentialism rejects the distinction between subject and object in the cognitive act and refuses the view that the ethic of “detachment,” of “objectivity,” is the royal road to knowledge. This is the “lunatic postulate” that Kierkegaard had to demolish on his way toward the discovery of the “thinker in existence.” What Tillich calls the existential attitude can be generally defined as “the attitude of participating with one’s own existence in some other existence.” It means “participating in a situation, especially a cognitive situation, with the whole of one’s existence.”⁸⁷

There are of course realms of reality where detachment and objectivity are the only acceptable methods. But there are other realms where another method must be followed, a method which seeks not the separation of thought from its object, but their most intimate union. You cannot, for example, know another person by detaching yourself from him. To do that is to convert the other into a thing, thereby destroying the very element which makes a self something other than a thing. To know another self you must participate in it, must share in its existence. But by participating in it you change it. Hence the act of knowing changes both the subject and the object. In existential knowledge, a new meaning is created, and this creation is the joint product of the knower and the known. In this way Existentialism hopes to lead men “back to the objects” and heal the divorce between the knower and his world, a divorce which has impoverished both by making man a mere *res cogitans* and his world a mere object to be manipulated. Existential-

ism would return to Emerson’s definition of the philosopher as “man thinking.”

The way man exists in the world. The Existentialist argues that the essentialist separation between the spectator and the world has produced a grievous misunderstanding of the structure of human existence. This misunderstanding centers on the attempt, in both naturalistic social science and essentialist philosophy, to conceive of man as one object among others.

Man’s existence is not merely spatial and temporal, like that of an object. Objects are determined by their properties; that is, the object is its properties. Hence, objects can be defined without inquiring into their existences. It is sufficient to know their properties, which are their essences. The case is different with man, for what a man is, is determined not by his properties but by his choices. It is impossible to ascribe an essence to the self for the self is able to transcend its properties and break away from its past.

So the core of human existence is possibility. Man is the being who is able to transcend himself, to project himself toward a future which will exist only when and because he makes it. Hence we cannot say that man is, but only that he *exists*, and that he is on the way to being this or that. In Sartre’s formulation, “man’s essence is his existence.” This is the meaning of Existentialist freedom and the core of the Existentialist analysis of the structure of human existence.

How the essentialist error has alienated man from knowledge of being. Man’s existence in the world is such that he is involved in the world, concerned with it, interlocked with it. Thus some Existentialists argue that man has a kind of primordial understanding of the structure of being which comes from the fact that he is involved in the world and that he handles and uses and lives with things

sky and their rocky shore contrasted sharply with the sea. No confusion possible; in the sharp light everything was a landmark. And from one island to another . . . I felt as if we were scudding along, night and day, on the crest of the short, cool waves in a race full of spray and laughter. Since then, Greece itself drifts somewhere within me, on the edge of my memory, tirelessly . . . Hold on, I too am drifting. . . .

By the way, do you know Greece? No? So much the better, What should we do there, I ask you? There it requires pure hearts. . . .³⁸

Before concluding this sketch, it should at least be mentioned that there are “schools” and divisions within Existentialism. Perhaps the three main tendencies are: (1) the Christian Existentialism of Kierkegaard, which has been developed theologically by Barth and Tillich, and psychologically by Jaspers and Marcel; (2) the atheistic Existentialism of Heidegger and Sartre, which has had an enormous literary development; and (3) the specifically Thomistic Christian Existentialism expounded by Maritain. All, however, share the views that the starting point of philosophy is the problem of existence, that detached reason alone will not achieve the knowledge necessary to the solution of basic moral and human problems, that freedom is the condition and anguish the emotion of men as they confront the problems of life, and that the development of morality requires positive action and participation by the individual.

Kierkegaard developed these ideas within a religious framework. He started from the conviction that the intellect alone will not resolve the paradoxes which confront man, and that it is these paradoxes which engender the anguish which characterizes human life. For Kierkegaard, the tension is resolved through the leap to God, for in Him the

finite and the infinite are one. Each takes the leap alone. Tillich preserves the integrity of this lonely vision, while Jaspers seems to recommend a flight to the security of a philosophical faith, and Marcel comes close to advocating a return to something like medieval communalism and collectivism.

Sartre gives no quarter to the absolute: for him, God is dead and man can never again revive Him. Since no Creator exists, there is no model of human nature, no essential nature of man. Man is what he wills and chooses to be, and as all his efforts to find inherent meaning in the world result in failure, he comes to see the world as alien to him, absurd. A stranger in this world, man’s entrance upon life and exit from it are both accidental events in a meaningless universe. But aloneness gives absolute freedom, accompanied by absolute responsibility. Man becomes as God, able to choose without dependence. For this freedom, man must pay in anguish and despair. He is always strongly tempted to escape his “dreadful freedom” and submit to some alien force, be it a party, an ideology, or a vested authority. But this escape brings in its train even greater despair, the despair of “bad consciousness,” the despair of choosing to be what one is not. The only choice man cannot make is choosing not to choose.

Maritain’s Thomistic Existentialism also starts from a definition of the human condition as one of finitude and anguish. In Maritain’s thought, man’s desire to realize his being can be reconciled with his anguish over the possibility of nothingness only through faith in the Free Existent. This faith restores one’s ties with humanity and develops in one the strength to practice the Christian virtues of love and charity.

What matters for present purposes is that all these

writers stress finitude and estrangement as inherent in the human condition. Any solution to them must be metaphysical, not sociological.

It would be wrong to conclude that the theory of alienation outlined above implies a counsel of quietism toward the concerns of social existence. On the contrary: all Existentialist thought starts from the premise that man is deeply and necessarily involved in the affairs of this world. Driven by the anguish of existential paradoxes, man strives incessantly for solutions to his problems. He seeks these solutions on the sociological as well as on the metaphysical plane. The Existentialist conception of man as the being who projects, who throws himself forward into an unknown future, implies not a social quietism but the most vigorous kind of social activism. Existential man, indeed, is committed to only one thing: change. He is the permanent revolutionary, the one who is forever striking out toward a new stage, even while the old one comes within his grasp.

What the theory does imply is a certain skepticism of all plans even while recognizing that plans are necessary, a certain disloyalty to all social schemes and ends even while recognizing that human existence is always social existence. This implies that human effort is at one and the same time an essay in creativity and a meditation on failure. There may be in the end no answer but failure, but man must nonetheless gather unto himself the courage of despair and seek without end for ends. He must realize that every end is only a stage to be transcended, not the goal at which action stops. The important point, in short, is that the metaphysical theory of alienation implies not social quietism but the recognition that all thought and action must in a sense end in failure. In this framework, the basic perspective on social action is the perspective of cautious and continuous experi-

mentation, combined with the basic understanding that no man or party can make claims on any other man or party which would impair the freedom to experiment. This is a radicalism, to be sure, but a radicalism which hopes for little success and which acknowledges the legitimacy as well as the inevitability of disloyalty against the established order.

This is the orientation that Fromm rejects. Time and again he comes close to it, and, as was emphasized in the first chapter, he shares more with the Existentialists than he seems aware of or cares to acknowledge. But he always returns to the plane of naturalism and offers a total solution through sociology. Starting as he does with a view of man as the stranger, the freak of the universe, he never seriously considers the question as to how far and under what conditions the stranger can find a home in society. He never considers the question as to just how far social transformation can heal the wounds of alienation. This, which should be the deepest problem in Fromm's thought, is in the end simply ignored. In the end, he puts the freak of the universe in the cage of society, and says simply that if we build the cage to proper specifications the freak will be happy and comfortable. What should be a radical dichotomy in Fromm's thought, a dichotomy requiring the most painful consideration, is dismissed. It is resolved by the drive of temperament. In the language of Existentialism, Fromm lacks the courage of despair. He will acknowledge no problems that cannot be solved here and now, by the methods of reason and the powers of man. Again Fromm is faithful to the eighteenth century.

But not the eighteenth alone. As the brilliant Simmel suggested, each age that is truly an Age is guided by a sovereign idea. All the energies of the age are shaped by this idea and appear as manifestations of it: it is to the energies of the age as form is to content. In the Middle Ages, Simmel



writers, move on to a few comments on the utopian tradition strictly so-called, and then place Fromm within the general utopian tradition and indicate the distinctive characteristics of his approach.

Utopianism is by no means the monopoly of a class of writers called utopians. It is not even confined to those who explicitly address themselves to the theme of social reconstruction. In a general way, every educated and sensitive man is a utopian. Each possesses in his imagination a sanctuary to which he can retreat from the despairs and perplexities of everyday life. Often enough, the clash between the agreeable fantasy and the disagreeable reality provides the sadness and the drama in the works and lives of such men. It is also noteworthy that gaping distances between fancy and reality are as common among literary men as among those who are usually, and disdainfully, called utopians. One can find many examples among, to limit the field, famous Americans from Mark Twain's time to the present. Twain had his dream of small towns and great rivers, where boys lived in truth and harmony with nature: too bad boys become men. Henry Adams had his exclusive club, where gentlemen talked of literature and politics: why must there be the servant problem? For Eugene O'Neill the perfect world seemed to be one in which the primitive religious instinct was still in communion with gods powerful enough to work tragedy: Freud and rationalism undermined all that. Fitzgerald built his utopia of international hotel rooms and Riviera villas, where shimmering flappers and handsome youths reveled in grace and champagne: but three o'clock in the morning always had to come. Sherwood Anderson longed for a world where buoyant young people shared a sunny love, expressed in bountiful natural sexual intercourse: but the Winesburgs of this world are always oppressed by convention and haunted by lonely misfits. Dos

Passos for a while dreamed of redemption by the legions of history's only noble army, the proletariat: too bad the workers took to Fords rather than to the barricades. William Faulkner dreams of a plantation world of brave gentlemen and gracious ladies, served by loyal old retainers and obedient fieldhands: but in 1865 the South spawned the Snopeses and the NAACP soon followed. Ernest Hemingway still recalls that world where Manolete faces his death alone and with grace each afternoon: is there an arena left where they do not file the horns of the sons of Islero? Mr. T. S. Eliot has retreated to a world where devout churchmen write urbane prose, and the masses know their place in a moral universe defined by the king, the bishops, and their own simple piety: it is sad that neither the classes nor the masses any longer put much stock in the Trinity and the apostolic succession. If the visions of the previously mentioned writers are all hopelessly anachronistic, those of the modern Capotes and Salingers are so fragile and private that it would be coarse to invade them. Unwilling to do that, I turn to the public world of utopian thought strictly so-called.¹

The starting point of utopian thought is the conviction that man has reached a point in the historical journey where the ascending trail, once so broad and smooth, has abruptly narrowed to a thin ledge and come to a dead end above an abyss. Crouched on the ledge, too cramped to turn around, he sees above him a broad shelf beckoning on up the mountain in another direction. With every passing moment, fear and fatigue sap his strength, and all his equipment, which before had seemed so light and useful, now drags him down and threatens his balance. He must leap, and he knows he can make the leap if he does it now while strength is still his and the light is still clear. That is to say, the utopian orientation is a complex blend of a sense of crisis, a peculiar



courage based upon knowledge and faith, and a vision of salvation.

The utopian begins with the sense that his is a time of total crisis, a time when what is in question is not just this or that feature of society but the whole of man's life in the world. The old structure is near total collapse; great sections of it already lie in rubble. This total crisis demands a total act, a leap into a new mode of life. The total act that is demanded of us, however, must be based upon the fullest and most earnest knowledge of our present condition and of our own resources, human and material, for building a new order. Only that knowledge can give men the faith in themselves which they will need for the leap into the future. The leap itself is both encouraged and guided by the vision of a future perfection.

The utopian is at once a critic and a dreamer, and the great utopian works are a rich blend of logic and poetry, a compound of lucid criticism and glowing prophecy. But the utopian dream is not a private one, nor do its origins lie in the primitive unconscious. Rather, the utopian wish must be made concrete in symbols which have objective and shared meanings, and it must be expressed in the public language of social justice. The utopian, at bottom, expresses the deep human cry for harmony, community, brotherhood, and love. Hence his vision is essentially a moral and esthetic one, and his achievement is to be measured by standards drawn from those spheres.

There are a number of important distinctions within the utopian style. First, there is the distinction between moderate and radical utopianism. The former, which is almost synonymous with the "social planning" mentality, consists in looking at recent history and using the knowledge thus gained to exercise more-or-less control over short-range future developments. The moderate utopian is not out

of step with the present time nor in revolt against it. He wants only to harness the power and control the pace of current social-economic tendencies. The radical utopian, on the other hand, is entirely out of step with the current movements of society. He would go back to the root of the malady and work basic changes in the foundations of the social order. He is the one who, even while he crouches on the narrow ledge, insists that we must retrace in thought the whole trail back to the point where the first wrong choice was made, the choice which culminated in the present catastrophe.

There is also an important difference of technique between the moderate and the radical utopian. The former employs the gentle arts of public relations and administrative manipulation. The latter relies on the spread of enlightenment and the enlargement of moral vision for the foundation of the new society, and calls for direct popular action in order to achieve it.

A second distinction within the utopian style is that between mechanicism and organicism. The former, which is displayed best in the work of Bentham and Fourier, flows from an abstract imagination which first lays down a theory of human nature and then deduces from it a universal social order. This social order is a lifeless mechanism, a machine which solves all problems by the same operation. The blueprint of the new society, which pretends to be a grand work of social architecture, is really nothing more than an abstract form imposed upon disparate living human beings and social forces.

The organic style, represented by Kropotkin and Proudhon, flows from a willingness to look into the hidden tendencies of the present social order, to probe there for the forces which, though for the present obscured, are yet working toward the transformation of society. This organic



Ethical and moral foundations. The supreme value is man, and every man is to be treated always as an end and never as a means. No man may, by virtue of his wealth or social position, exercise power over any other man. All authority must be based on competence and must be exercised in the interests of those subject to it. All are equal, and all are equally free. The purpose of society is to provide the conditions for the fullest development of man's capacity to reason, to love, and to produce. All instruments of coercion must disappear, and the state must be replaced by a free association of all citizens bound together by their common interests and their sense of brotherhood. Each individual must be brought to understand his solidarity with all mankind. In sum, the principles of the good society are liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Economic transformation. The great aim of communitarian socialism is to achieve an economic system in which "every working person would be an active and responsible participant, where work would be attractive and meaningful, where capital would not employ labor, but labor would employ capital."⁶ To achieve this aim, all economic activity must be put on a new moral footing: production for use, not for profit. The rights of the owners of capital do not include management of the industry. Capitalists are entitled only to a fair payment for the use of their capital. Although communitarian socialism is not opposed to private ownership or enterprise as such, any enterprise whose proper social functioning is not compatible with profit must be socialized. Also, the state must found new enterprises in all areas of the economy which are not now adequately served by private enterprises. Industries which influence taste and morals, such as communications and entertainment, must be socially regulated to whatever extent is necessary to produce a healthy cultural environment for

the people. All attempts to stimulate artificial needs by the methods of mass persuasion must be stopped.

These technical problems of ownership and regulation in the public interest solved, Fromm turns to the more important question of how industry should be governed. The answer is, by the principles of "co-management and workers' participation." Industrial government must be democratic government. All who have an interest in the industry must have a voice in it. The principle, Fromm thinks,

. . . can be worked out in such a way that the responsibility for management is divided between the central leadership and the rank and file. Well-informed small groups discuss matters of their own work situation and of the whole enterprise; their decisions would be channelled to the management and form the basis for a real co-management. As a third participant, the consumer would have to participate in the decision making and planning in some form.⁷

This may seem a little vague, but Fromm is confident that the details can be worked out. After all, "in constitutional law we have solved similar problems with regard to the respective rights of various branches of government. . . ." (True, we have; but the comparison seems an unhappy one, for we have not solved the jurisdictional problems of separation of powers by democratic methods. The Supreme Court is not a democratic institution.)

Only if the workers achieve full participation in the government of industry will alienation from work, which is the root of all alienation, be healed. But we must also take steps to see that the new industrial rulers rule competently. The workers must be educated to a "wider knowledge of all the technical problems involved in the production of the

have a direct influence on the decision-making exercised by a centrally elected parliamentary executive.”

These goals can be achieved by a pleasingly simple reform: revive the town meeting and adapt it to modern conditions. The population would be organized into groups of about five hundred persons each on the basis of residence or place of work. These groups would meet regularly, say once a month, and would choose their own officials and committees, which would change every year. The groups would discuss the main political issues of national and local concern. They would receive objective information prepared by a politically independent cultural agency composed of “personalities from the fields of art, sciences, religion, business, politics, whose outstanding achievements and moral integrity are beyond doubt. . . .” After discussion and decision, the five-hundreds would forward their votes to the central seat of government, where the over-all result would be computed and registered. The decision thus arrived at would be regarded as the decision of the “true ‘House of Commons,’ which would share power with the house of universally elected representatives and a universally elected executive.” Through this procedure, “the process of alienation in which the individual citizen surrenders his political will by the ritual of voting to powers beyond him would be reversed, and each individual would take back into himself his role as a participant in the life of the community.” *

Cultural proposals. First of all, “we do not need new ideals or new spiritual goals,” for “the great teachers of

* In the lecture cited above, Fromm has increased the work and power of the five-hundreds. They would meet weekly, and more often in cases of emergency. The collective decision of this “lower house” would have “eventual predominance” over the decisions of the national Congress. It seems to me that Fromm has here, unwittingly, solved the problem of the use of leisure time in the abundant society.

the human race have postulated the norms for sane living.” What we need is not new wisdom but richer understanding of, and more serious dedication to, the old wisdom.

The task of impressing on men the guiding ideals is the task of education. We must abolish the concept of education as a process of training people to adjust to the social machine and devote our schools to the development of the human powers. Schools should strive to impart to their students the taste for critical thought, and to give them character traits “which correspond to the professed ideals of our civilization.” We must erase the harmful separation between theoretical and practical knowledge, for “this very separation is part of the alienation of work and thought.” From the beginning, theoretical instruction and practical work must be combined. No primary education would be complete “before the student has a grasp of the fundamental technical processes of our industry.” The high school “ought to combine practical work of a handicraft and of modern industrial technique with theoretical instruction.” The system of adult education must be enormously expanded.

We must develop collective art and rituals which will help us “*respond to the world with our senses in a meaningful, skilled, productive, active, shared way.*” This “will begin with the children’s games in kindergarten, be continued in school, then in later life. We shall have common dances, choirs, plays, music, bands. . . .” Not a word about football.

What about religion? It is likely that within the next few hundred years a new humanistic and universalistic religion will develop. In the meantime, we can unite in firm negation of the idolatries of the state, of power, of the machine, and of success. In this negation we shall find more of a common faith than in any “affirmative statements



about God.” We can also, religionists and nonreligionists alike, take seriously the Jewish and Christian ethical teachings of the dignity of man, of love, of reason, and of the supremacy of spiritual values.

This completes the constitution of utopia. When all these things are done, Rousseau’s problem will have been solved. Men will have “succeeded in building a society in which the interest of ‘society’ has become identical with that of all its members.”⁹

Utopia is at once a vision of the good and a program of action. The utopian appeals to the freedom of the future against the prison of the present. His work begins with the destruction of the actual so that imagination can be free for the flight into the possible. Hence the utopian demands two things of his reader: he requires that the reader also liberate himself from the present; and he requires that the reader conceive of man as the fantastic one, the being who routinely does the prodigious and is insulted by the merely practical. If the reader will not meet these two obligations, the utopian builds in vain. In a very important sense, then, the only really adequate critique of a utopia is the construction of a counter-utopia. Above all, the whole line of criticism of utopia which takes the form of saying “it isn’t practical, because men and things just are not that way” is beside the point.

Governed by these canons, I shall comment on two features of communitarian socialism. The first, and briefer, set of remarks will treat the question of whether, within the framework of Fromm’s theory of man, utopia is possible. The argument here will attempt to show that Fromm’s optimistic and generous view of man leads necessarily to pessimistic conclusions on the possibility of utopia, conclusions which might have been avoided had Fromm shown

a little less pity for man’s sufferings and weaknesses, and a little more respect for his perversity and toughness. Another way to put the thesis would be to say that, by making individual goodness and badness almost entirely a function of social conditions, Fromm makes it almost impossible for men to reform society. The second set of remarks will concern Fromm’s views on a basic substantive question, the transformation of work and authority. Here I shall argue that the trouble with his utopia is that it is not utopian enough, that he fails to escape the confines of the present.

Can Robots Revolt?

I am not concerned to comment on the futility either of utopianism or of rationalism. That has been done often enough; and, more often than not, by men of small courage and imagination who would spare themselves the pain of thought and failure by calling themselves realists and everybody else idealists. There is no more distressing symptom of our failure of nerve than the power of this word “realist” in recent political discussion. The realist, we must suppose, is one who realistically faces up to “reality.” Without accepting solipsism, I think Vladimir Nabokov is right when he says that “reality” is one of the very few words which mean nothing without quotes. In the intellectual currency of our day, however, it has taken on some precise values. The political realist divides all “reality” into two parts, interest and power. The first is what you are after, and the second is what you use to get it. Since every path has obstacles, the realists’ wisdom comes down to the precept, takes the path of least resistance. That is why it is so hard to follow realists; they turn aside, double back, and strike out anew with dazzling dexterity. No wonder they are always bumping into themselves and into each other. Of all



others. Men who hate themselves also hate others. From self-contempt, as Pascal said, come “the most unjust and criminal passions imaginable.” Such men are less likely to be moved by prophets of love and construction than by prophets of hate and destruction.

Before leaving this question of the possibility of achieving the sane society, one other point ought to be made. Here again it is a matter of spelling out the implications of Fromm’s position. The corollary of the law of simultaneous advance is the proposition that failure to advance in one sector of society threatens the advances made in all other sectors. Put in its extreme form, the corollary asserts that one recalcitrant class or interest (for example, the owners and managers of capital, though it is as likely to be the workers, who do not seem to realize how unhappy they really are) can thwart all progress toward utopia. Given the diversity and perversity of men, the general insecurity and fear aroused by sweeping social change, and the tenacity of the vested interests of all kinds, it is inevitable that many more than one segment of society would refuse to march with Fromm toward the sane society. This means that Fromm’s revolutionaries would very promptly be confronted with the choice of watching the revolution fail or attempting to establish more and more control over society. The communitarians would soon have their Lenin. Fromm’s thought on this matter stops at the level of the slogan: the revolution must be accomplished by peaceful means. His failure to probe much beneath this shows, I think, his shortcomings as a political thinker.

This raises a question which one must always come to when dealing with a moralist and ideologist: what is the writer’s audience? If one asks, whence come the heroes who will lead men to the sane society, the answer must be, from among the followers of Erich Fromm. This suggests that

Fromm is really addressing two audiences. The first is the small band of productives and near-productives; men who, like Fromm himself, are either already healthy or else capable of healing themselves. These fortunate few, for reasons only poorly understood, either have escaped the plague of social insanity or else have thoroughly recovered from it. Having risen above their age, they can see the sickness of the masses beneath them, just as they can see the way toward cure. To this group Fromm the prophet speaks in the language of program and action. The second group consists of all the rest of us, the legions of the nonproductives — marketers, receptives, hoarders, exploiters. These are the followers, those who will, each for his own unhealthy reason, accept the direction of the healthy few. They will, presumably, follow in the same style that they do everything else, that is, as robots. Their great hope is that they may become healed in the sane society. What matters here, however, is that Fromm addresses these people not in the language of action but in the language of hope and comfort. All he can achieve with them is to persuade them that the Frommians are on their side.

The thin line of the productives, I have argued, is a very flimsy barrier against the catastrophic movement which is inherent in Fromm’s whole analysis, the movement from human to robot to Golem. Even if we grant that the strength of each of the productives is as the strength of ten, because his psyche is healthy, only an incorrigible optimist could have confidence in their ability to withstand the hordes of the nonproductives. Indeed, the more one reads Fromm, the more one comes to marvel at the way he always puts down the gloomy implications of his own analysis and comes up with a shout of affirmation. In this, he reminds one of the despairing-triumphant Walt Whitman of the *Democratic Vistas*.



complex performance equations made up of numerous standard terms for energy, cost, time, motion, and the like. That the trade unions agree to this panopticonic system is just another index of how far we have come from any real understanding of dignity and freedom in work. It is certainly true that unions have greatly reduced the brutal exploitation of the workers and have achieved something like a constitutional order of fair play in industry. But when we see the union agreeing to piecework schemes, standard norms and rates of work, duties and rewards determined by time-motion principles, and the like, we must ask whether this is fair play for real human beings, or whether it is fair play for men who are treated as though they were machines which must be handled carefully and maintained properly if they are to perform at their fullest capacity. The unions have entirely accepted the principles of efficiency and productivity as the criteria of economic effectiveness, and ask only that the worker get a fair share of the rewards. Indeed, the one feature of the Panopticon which most modern factories and bureaucracies lack is the conviction that work has a moral meaning, the belief that through diligent labor the rogues can be made honest and the idle industrious. Bentham's Panopticon, after all, was not merely a prison but a *penitentiary*, a place where bad men paid for their sins and thus were made good. Work has no such reforming and disciplining function for modern man. It is something he does because he needs the money to buy the things which his society tells him are identical with the good life. The modern worker enters the Panopticon not because he has transgressed against society, but precisely because, having accepted society's values, he becomes society's slave—a fact which makes the work go more smoothly and reduces the demand for warders.

Thought which is truly radical would give these prem-

ises serious consideration. Certainly Fromm is right when he says that the principle of profit and efficiency must be replaced by the principle of use and satisfaction. But the acceptance of this principle entails some consequences which Fromm has given no sign of recognizing. His panacea is co-management and workers' participation. There is really very little to be said about this, mainly because it is so amorphous. But, vague as it is, it seems to me to run in the wrong direction. First of all, if the idea means worker control of the whole economy, it ought to be challenged as merely another form of interest domination. Secondly, if the idea means worker control in specific industries, it ought to be rejected as a technique which would in effect make labor an auxiliary of capital. As Bell has pointed out, worker participation in management "tends to minimize the separate interests of workers from management, and to rob the workers of an independent status in the plant."¹⁴

The idea of workers' control can be given a concrete meaning and does have valuable applications in one place—the immediate workplace itself. The worker should be given the fullest democratic voice over all the matters which directly affect workaday life in his particular shop. He should have a check on the bureaucratic power over him, and he should have the strongest voice in setting the pace and conditions of work. He also should have a voice in setting just standards of pay.

But all these things do not go very far. They are at most small techniques, and they may not even be the best ones which can be designed. What is needed is a basic change of attitude. If the radical says that the worker is not a commodity, he should go on to accept the implications of the statement. Those implications go far beyond Fromm's co-management and co-participation. They entail a thorough rejection of the cult of efficiency and a thorough acceptance

ists could believe that utopia would arrive when the last capitalist had been sent to join the last priest. What is needed now is not a slogan of technique but a program of content, a new vision of the moral purpose of work and life. Most of the slogans which rattle through the windy spaces of the national mind today are legacies from a time which knew what the ideals meant because the realities so utterly denied them. Full employment, prosperity and comfort, protection for the rights of labor and the underprivileged, social justice—these ideals meant something in the context of a social order characterized by drastic unemployment, depression, exploitation of the workers, neglect of the underprivileged, and social injustice. But today, when we have come closer to these goals than any other society ever has, they no longer provide much guidance nor have much meaning. When Henry Wallace spoke not so long ago of “sixty million jobs,” he was derided as a visionary. Today, if there were only sixty million jobs we would declare a national emergency. Nor is this only, or even mainly, because the population has increased. It is primarily due to the fact that we have just kept on demanding and producing more and more material wealth without any clear idea of what end it is we are seeking. Only a very few men have even begun to think about the need for new goals in the uses of wealth.¹⁵

Under present conditions, co-management and workers’ participation would, most probably, mean only an acceleration of the present powerful tendencies toward materialism and what Fromm calls alienated consumption, for the workers have no conception of any moral or esthetic order beyond the present one. What has to be recognized is that the workers have been “corrupted,” tamed. And they have been tamed to the harness of meaningless work not by the stick of hunger, but by the carrot of limitless consump-

tion, by the vision of utopia offered by the ad-men and sold on the installment plan. Only if this is kept in mind can one explain the astonishing fact that organized business and organized labor have combined to make productivity, profit, and “full” employment—that is, work in its inescapable modern meaninglessness—the dominant and almost the sole aim and function of the community’s internal political life. The principal feature of our political life is the use of truly prodigious means for paltry ends. After all, the expenditure of a very small proportion (the Goodmans estimate one-seventh) of our available resources of labor, time, money, and materials would provide all Americans with a very solid “subsistence.” The remainder goes for luxury and emulative consumption goods—as though we had already thought through to a solution the profound political and moral question of the relation between standard of living and quality of life.

It was once believed that men would not work unless they were hungry. William Townsend’s *Dissertation on the Poor Laws* (1786) drew some conclusions from the fable of the “natural” balance of the goats and dogs which were to have an enormous impact on nineteenth century thought. According to the fable, Juan Fernandez landed a few goats on an island off the Chilean coast. The goats multiplied at a lavish rate, thereby providing a convenient meat supply for the English privateers who were plundering the Spanish trade. In a flash of pre-Darwinian insight, the Spanish authorities then landed a dog and a bitch on the island. They too increased and fed on the abundant supply of goats which nature and Juan Fernandez had provided. “Then,” wrote Townsend, “a new kind of balance was restored. The weakest of both species were among the first to pay the debt of nature; the most active and vigorous preserved their lives.” From this theorem, Townsend drew some maxims



It hardly seems necessary to draw the implications of this for a theory of authority in work and politics. It is enough to suggest that to implement the principle of democracy in all sectors of life under such conditions is to invite rule by the masses in exactly the sense that Ortega had in mind when he defined the masses as “those who demand nothing special of themselves, but for whom to live is to be every moment what they already are, without imposing on themselves any effort towards perfection; mere buoys that float on the waves.”¹⁷

This small fable of the talent state—the Meritocracy, as Michael Young aptly calls it—must not be taken literally. All I wanted to point out was that all parties officially accept the ideology of the opportunity state, and that more and more social policies look toward the end of the rainbow where talent will be the sole passport to advancement, and where all men will have equal opportunity to develop their talents. But when the word becomes flesh, it must undergo the corruptions of the flesh. At least three strong barriers stand in the way of the pure talent state.

The first is the power of the family, which is bound together by carnal and erotic bonds, not by the ties of talent. The family is the ancient fortress of favoritism and nepotism; and as long as the family unit remains, talent will never be the sole passport to position. Private virtue becomes public vice: parents protect the weak, the slow, and the ungifted as fiercely as they do the strong, the fleet, and the gifted. A true talent state would have to destroy or greatly weaken the philo-progenitive family and model itself after, say, the Society of Jesus, which is masculine and celibate. The masses show no readiness for a program of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

The second barrier is the large and growing number of elderly people in the population. Their vice is their age;

and the medicine they ask is not the purgative of competition and struggle, but the anodyne of insulation and security. No party dare ignore them.

The third barrier is nothing other than the temper of the mass itself. For centuries the masses lived in societies which were essentially noncompetitive. These societies, of course, had room for talent, but mainly for those few who were born into privileged positions. The industrial revolution destroyed the status societies and threw the masses into the market, where “merit,” which meant the ability to survive the competitive struggle, was the law of life. But ever since the industrial revolution, the masses have struggled to destroy the market society and restore the status society, with the one great difference that now the masses also demand their fair share of the comforts and privileges which once were enjoyed exclusively by the elites.

So the apparent movement toward a real talent state is largely an illusion. The masses are willing to use the slogans of opportunity—indeed, politicians dare talk in no other language—but what they really desire is a social order which will give the ungifted millions assured security and comfort. The talented few will be permitted, even encouraged, to rise, but they will not be permitted to build a state in their own image or to build a social order which imposes elite values on the masses. They will not be permitted to build a social order which dissolves all familial and status bonds in the giddy and limitless flux of talent, a social order which has no place and no esteem for the common people. This will be a Meritocracy of a sort: a Meritocracy which has no choice but to assure and to advance the comfort and security of the masses. Under such conditions, it is a nice question to determine who rules whom—which is precisely the question Ortega asks and Fromm ignores.



8. The first is from *Escape from Freedom*, p. 278, and the second is from *Man for Himself*, p. 59.
9. *Escape from Freedom*, p. 18.
10. *Man for Himself*, p. 60. See also *Escape from Freedom*, p. 287.
11. The first formulation is from *Man for Himself*, p. 60. The second is from *Escape from Freedom*, p. 277.
12. I borrowed this figure of the scale from Patrick Mullahy, *Oedipus: Myth and Complex* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), p. 259.
13. *Escape from Freedom*, p. 283.
14. *Man for Himself*, p. 60.
15. *Escape from Freedom*, p. 284.
16. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), esp. pp. 3–15.
17. The example is drawn from *Escape from Freedom*, pp. 280–281. Incidentally, Fromm vacillated on this question of the workers. In the place just cited, he attributes their failure to their authoritarianism. On p. 209 he says it was “due mainly to a state of inner tiredness and resignation, which . . . is characteristic of the individual in the present era even in democratic countries.”
18. The characterology is set forth most fully in *Man for Himself*, pp. 62–117. My exposition will draw heavily from those pages.
19. Adapted from *Man for Himself*, p. 111.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 84. Fromm also says that the concept of productivity is an elaboration of the concept of spontaneity which was presented in *Escape from Freedom*.
24. *Man for Himself*, p. 85.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 143–144.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
32. *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, p. 37.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
34. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or Education*, tr. by Barbara Foxley (London: Everyman's Library, 1911), p. 259.
35. Lawrence Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians* (New York: Julian Messner, 1959), p. 172.
36. *Escape from Freedom*, p. viii.
37. Carl R. Rogers, “Becoming a Person,” *Pastoral Psychology*, Vol. 7, February 1956, pp. 9–13; Vol. 7, April 1956, pp. 16–26.
38. Rousseau, *op. cit.*, p. 252.
39. Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Peter Carr, August 10, 1789. Quoted here from Adrienne Koch and William Peden, eds., *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Modern Library, 1944), pp. 430–431.
40. *Man for Himself*, p. 167.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 229–230.
42. William James, “What Pragmatism Means,” in *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1907), pp. 43–81. All the following quotations from James are from this essay.
43. *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, p. 114.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
45. See *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 85–86.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 94, footnote.
47. Quoted from Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th ed., 1930 (New York: Noonday Press, 1955), p. 48.
48. *The Art of Loving*, p. 59.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
51. John 3:16.
52. *The Art of Loving*, p. 47.

