

John Clarkson

## THE FUNCTION OF ANTI-SEX

*The Social Meaning of Dr. Erich Fromm's  
Ethical Desexualization of Psychoanalysis*

Among the latter-day epigones of Marx and Freud, Dr. Erich Fromm has achieved unique distinction by having managed simultaneously to drape himself in the mantles of both. Dr. Fromm is widely accepted as an authority on psychoanalysis, and likewise purveys his own brand of socialism. His latest book, *The Sane Society*, according to its jacket blurb, presents for the first time "a complete and systematic concept of humanistic psychoanalysis", as well as outlining "various possibilities for social change". The last is an understatement. Actually Dr. Fromm offers to the world nothing less than "Humanistic Communitarian Socialism"; this, together with a strategy and methods for transforming society, such strategy and practical devices being none the less political for all their careful apolitical formulation. What an achievement to have brought socialism and psychoanalysis into the same bed! These two movements have rarely been on comfortable speaking terms before.

But even more astonishing than the exploit of having arranged these happy nuptials between movements that had previously bristled with so many incompatibilities, is the blessing that Dr. Fromm has secured for this union from the powers that be. Two decades ago when Dr. Wilhelm Reich attempted his rapprochement between the ideas of Marx and Freud, all the wrath of Christendom burst about his head. He was expelled from both movements, and society at large loosed its dogs against him. Dr. Fromm, however, has secured an opposite reaction. The man who has lately brought socialism and psychoanalysis to wed is honored in the universities and extolled from the pulpits.

His books and articles flow from the printing presses. In the *New York Times*, 8th January, 1956, in a review of the symposium "What Is Science? Twelve Eminent Scientists and Philosophers Explain Their Various Fields to the Layman", Professor I. Bernard Cohen of Harvard states: "Erich Fromm's presentation of psychoanalysis is a classic of succinctness and lucidity". Possibly Sigmund Freud might have commented otherwise in view of Dr. Fromm's persistent efforts to desexualise psychoanalysis.

In 1955 Dr. Fromm participated in another symposium, this one issued by the Society For The Study of Social Problems, and entitled *Sexual Behavior In American Society, An Appraisal of*

*the First Two Kinsey Reports.* Dr. Erich Fromm, who is presented to the public as "Fellow and Trustee, William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and Psychology, New York City", contributes Chapter 27 entitled "Sex and Character. The Kinsey Report Viewed From The Standpoint Of Psychoanalysis". This discussion of character reveals something of Dr. Fromm's own character. It is worth some analysis.

Because the sexual question is an explosive issue, the Kinsey reports have become something of a touchstone to separate honest dissidents from the mob of slavish and cynical intellectuals who support the system, although their defenses of it may be variously disguised. The Kinsey reports have come in for every sort of attack, ranging from faint praise and peevish carping to swingeing, eye-gouging assault. Frequently, new works of scholarship of radical import are given the silent treatment. This method could not be applied to the Kinsey reports because of their mass circulation and the public furore that ensued. Guardians of the moral order were obliged to attack, and where their cultural function is a disguised one, they found themselves obliged to devise indirect means for undermining Kinsey without impairing their valuable reputations as liberals.

It is of particular significance, then, to determine exactly where Dr. Fromm stands on the Kinsey issue. And when at the outset of his discussion of *Sex and Character* he appears to support Kinsey against "unfriendly criticism by a number of psychoanalysts (a minority only, I hope)",<sup>1</sup> it becomes necessary to determine the actual substance of Dr. Fromm's implied approval.

One will search Dr. Fromm's chapter in vain for any specific reference to the content of Kinsey's findings, either pro or con, except, possibly, the sapient admission that "Kinsey has succeeded in unearthing relevant data in a field which is believed to be impenetrable".<sup>2</sup> For this reason, and secondly, because Kinsey's "data throw light on one aspect of behavior and hence, if properly interpreted, on the social character",<sup>3</sup> Dr. Fromm submits that "Kinsey's survey ought to be very stimulating to social scientists", specifically social psychologists.

One favorite way of sniping at Kinsey is to impugn his methods and to pick flaws in his statistical technique. Dr. Fromm grants that "the quantitative-statistical method [was] legitimately used by Kinsey for the study of sexual behavior", and he also admonishes social psychologists to "approach their problems with the same courage and energy which Kinsey and his collaborators have demonstrated in their work".<sup>4</sup> But Dr. Fromm plainly rejects Kinsey's "quantitative-statistical" method for social psychology and future "empirical investigations studying the forces underlying mass

1. *Sexual Behavior In American Society*, page 302.
2. *Ibid.*, page 310.
3. *Ibid.*, page 310.
4. *Ibid.*, page 310.

behavior" which he deems now to be imperative. For if Dr. Fromm draws any precise conclusion at all from the Kinsey reports, it is that their appearance has underlined with special urgency the need for correlative, possibly corrective studies of the "social character" by social psychologists.

Dr. Fromm distinguishes *social character* from *individual character*<sup>5</sup> as being "the core of character common to most members of a culture, in contradistinction to the *individual character* in which people belonging to the same culture differ from each other".<sup>6</sup>

As Dr. Fromm has explained in another context, "it is the social character's function to mold and channel human energy within a given society for the purpose of the continued functioning of this society".<sup>7</sup> Such human energy is emotionally generated, and the "emotional forces which are operating in most of its members become powerful forces in the social process, stabilizing, changing, or disrupting it". Dr. Fromm is critical of the preoccupation of "contemporary social science" with the opinion poll, confined in its subject matter "to what people *think* (or believe that they are supposed to think) instead of studying the emotional forces behind their thinking".<sup>8</sup> Studies of opinion, he opines, limit themselves to surface phenomena failing to penetrate to the undercurrents of mass emotion. Thus, their predictive value is limited, for, "from the standpoint of *social dynamics* every opinion is worth only as much as the emotional matrix in which it is rooted", and "only if we know these forces are we able to predict how members of a society will react in critical situations . . .".<sup>9</sup>

For the phrase "social dynamics" substitute the plainer and less pretentious word, politics. Actually Dr. Fromm is occupied with practical politics and offers a political approach directed to feeling and emotion rather than the classic humanist appeal to reason. This might seem odd because Dr. Fromm calls himself a humanist, and inconsistent, possibly, inasmuch as Dr. Fromm has written extensively against the Nazis whose political technique, it will be recalled, gave primacy to the manipulation of mass feeling and emotion. In any case Dr. Fromm's emphasis, here, on the "emotional matrix" of public opinion should serve as an alert. Political methods for

5. When Dr. Fromm attempts to sharpen his definition of the "social character" by placing it in "contradistinction to the *individual character*" he does not quite make sense. The "social character" is a legitimate generalisation. There can be, however, no abstract generalised "individual character", only concrete *individual characters* or personalities, as many as there are individuals. In a society that enforces conformity and mass mediocrity as successfully as ours does at present, individual characters, that is to say, individuals, will differ only slightly, and for the most part, only in socially insignificant details in their personal particularization of the "social character."

6. *Sexual Behavior*, page 309.
7. *Sane Society*, page 79.
8. *Sexual Behavior*, page 309.
9. *Ibid.*, page 309.



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molding opinion through the management of mass emotion are the means of fascism, not of socialism.

Dr. Fromm in discussing the study of the emotional undercurrents of the social character in terms of the *prediction* of mass behavior in "critical situations" (would these be "revolutionary situations" in Dr. Fromm's socialist vocabulary?) leaves no doubt that his concern with such prediction is practical. Prediction of mass behavior is a prerequisite for controlling it. Further, an interest in controlling it is directly implied. And obviously motivated by such interest, Dr. Fromm urges the study of the social character and its emotional undercurrents as against the superficial opinion surveys of the pollsters. But who buys the pollsters' wares? Can it be that Dr. Fromm is interested in competing in that market?

"What, for instance, do we know about the happiness of people in our culture?" Practically nothing, says Dr. Fromm. Nor, he says, do we know any more about the effective rôle of ethical considerations in influencing contemporary behavior. Notwithstanding the paucity of reliable data on the effectiveness of ethics, "tremendous expenditures in energy and money are made to increase the weight of ethical motivations".<sup>10</sup> It is interesting that Dr. Fromm should express alarm over the waste of "tremendous" sums of money in promoting ineffective ethical controls. His concern should be appreciated by those who furnish the money. On the other hand, it is hard to see how there could be any like enthusiasm among the large body of social scientists who now find opinion polling and surveys a lucrative field of operation. For expressing these views, we might, if we chose, credit Dr. Fromm with professional courage of a sort similar to that which he accords Kinsey.

Why does Dr. Fromm think it so important to discover the exact "degree of genuine happiness or unhappiness in our culture", which he claims is now "anybody's guess"?<sup>11</sup> His own reply is that "it is this very knowledge which can answer the question whether our institutions fulfill the purpose they are devised for: the greatest happiness of the greatest number".<sup>12</sup> First, let it be noted, this is an odd statement to fall from the lips of a socialist, even from a "Humanistic Communitarian Socialist". Over the years the mantle of Marx has proved to be very elastic, and many are the strange constructions over which it has been stretched, but few stranger than this assertion that the institutions of capitalist society "are devised" "to fulfill" "the greatest happiness of the greatest number". It had always seemed that even the most diverse species of socialists were united at least to the extent of agreement that capitalist institutions were devised and maintained for objectives quite remote from insuring "the greatest happiness of the greatest number".

Be that as it may, and regardless of the peculiarities of Dr. Fromm's

10. *Sexual Behavior*, page 310.

11. *Ibid.*, page 309.

12. *Ibid.*, page 310.

formulation, there is admittedly direct connection between the level of happiness prevailing in a given society and the stability of its institutions. Social institutions are the structured means whereby the masses are habituated to misery and bound in patterns of recurrent frustration. These repressive structures are threatened and likewise the entire social fabric trembles on occasion when the curve of social misery dips suddenly and steeply, or when for various reasons a new or sharpened awareness of customary abnegations penetrates public consciousness.

It is thus important for "social dynamics" to utilize whatever means it may to prevent awareness of the repressive rôle of social institutions from breaking through into public consciousness. It is in this connection that the "problem of sex and happiness" becomes urgent for "social scientists" like Dr. Fromm. Almost invariably such social scientists turn a consideration of this problem, at one stage or another, into a defense of the institution of compulsive marriage, albeit such a defense may take so tactful and so sophisticated a form as to be hardly recognizable for what it is. Nevertheless, they all seek in one way or another to anchor the dogma that monogamy, if not quite a sacred ordinance, is all the same a right and wholesome estate uniquely satisfactory to human needs, and alone harmonious with the laws of nature.

In his comments on the Kinsey reports, Dr. Fromm does not go so far as openly to defend the institution of compulsive marriage, but he does work out a rationale for such a defence. The same rationale recurs in *The Same Society*, and likely will be often borrowed in classroom and pulpit. It were well to let Dr. Fromm state the key premise himself: "Freud and his school emphasized that sexual satisfaction was one condition for mental health and happiness. To-day it is widely advocated and believed that marital happiness is based primarily on sexual satisfaction and that marital unhappiness can be cured by applying better sexual techniques. However, the facts do not seem to bear out these assumptions. True enough, many neuroses are coupled with sexual disturbances and many unhappy people suffer also from sexual frustrations; *but it is not true that sexual satisfaction is the cause of—or identical with—mental health and happiness*".<sup>13</sup> (Emphasis added—J.C.)

If "it is not true that sexual satisfaction is the cause of—or identical with—mental health and happiness", what then is the truth of the matter? Does Dr. Fromm dare imply that "mental health and happiness" are possible for those whose sexual life is chronically disturbed, frustrated, or denied? As Dr. Fromm has introduced the subject of marriage, what precisely does he have to say about "marital happiness"? Does Dr. Fromm openly state that marriages can be happy, wholesome, or even tolerable which fail to yield sexual satisfaction? Or does he seek to avoid ambiguity by making any clear assertion to the contrary? Characteristically, Dr. Fromm confuses and evades the issue.

13. *Sexual Behavior*, page 307.

Meaningless arguments as to whether "sexual satisfaction [is] the *paramount* condition for happiness", or whether "marital happiness is based *primarily* on sexual satisfaction" (Emphasis added—J.C.) are diversionary and misleading. Certainly there is more to happiness in marriage and in life than sexual satisfaction. But let no one be deceived by semantic manipulations of this obvious truism into thinking that the factor of sexual satisfaction is incidental, trivial, or to be brushed aside or otherwise dispensed with. Admittedly, sex is not everything, but it does not follow that sex is nothing or practically nothing. The simple straightforward fact is that there are *several necessary conditions* for marital happiness, one of which is sexual satisfaction. It is precisely this fact of being necessary and indispensable, no more, no less, that Dr. Fromm is at pains to obscure.

Dr. Fromm deftly disparages "sexual techniques". Whoever said that marital happiness was *solely* a matter of sexual technique? Notwithstanding, sexual technique is a worthy art that needs no apology. In a like manner in his discussion of "sexual satisfaction", Dr. Fromm manages to evoke images of the disturbed potency of the so-called sexual athlete. Does Dr. Fromm, as an authority on psychoanalysis, mean to identify priapic prowess with sexual satisfaction? It is now commonly understood that it is exactly the pathological inability to achieve sexual satisfaction that is frequently manifested in satyriasis or nymphomania.

Dr. Fromm states that "sexual desires can be the expression of fear, vanity, or of a wish for domination . . .".<sup>14</sup> Most assuredly this is true of *disordered* sexual desire. Such pathological perversion is symptomatic of neurosis, as Dr. Fromm well knows. And it is exactly wide-spread neurosis of this kind that lies at the core of the prevailing "social character".

As has been noted, Dr. Fromm designates by "social character" the cultural common denominator of a society as distinguished from particular individual differences, and possibly special class differences, also. This is a useful distinction. Beneath the seemingly random proliferation of personal and class differences in modern European culture, there is a common core of behaviour anchored and perpetuated in institutionalised family relations. While the social character does not determine individual character in an absolute sense, it heavily conditions it, and it does, in most cases, set strict limits upon individual expression and development.

Dr. Fromm in choosing to consider the "dynamic" relationship between "sex and character" takes pains to align himself with H. S. Sullivan, and against views attributed to Freud. "Interpersonal relationships, assumed by Freud to be the *result* of varying forms of sexual desire, are considered [by Fromm and Sullivan] to be the factors determining sexual strivings. In this view *it is not sexual behavior that determines character, but character that determines sexual behavior*".<sup>15</sup> Dr. Fromm's dictum that it is character—a

14. *Sexual Behavior*, page 308.

15. *Ibid.*, page 303.

priorly given datum—that determines sexual behavior apparently applies to individual characters, that is, personalities. That he is not referring in this context to the "social character" is apparent from his summation on the following page: "In our view sexual behavior is not the cause but the effect of a person's character structure".<sup>16</sup>

But whence that prior and private individual possession, "a person's character structure"? Dr. Fromm is silent, here, about the rôle of the "social character". Nor does he analyse the complex "interaction" whereby the social character sets conditions for the interplay of personalities, that is individual characters, and at the same time is itself changed, however slightly, in the process. In his section on "The Social Character" in *The Sane Society*, Dr. Fromm makes it clear that he holds that particular individual characters are determined, that is "shaped" to an important degree, by the social character, that "nucleus of the character structure which is shared by most members of the same culture".<sup>17</sup> Actually it is so that in the western world there is a nucleus of common character anchored in compulsive marriage and the possessive family that does to a large extent determine individual sex behavior. Also, it is just as true on the obverse that it is a particular quality of individual sex behavior that supports and perpetuates these institutionalised relations, or if you choose, the social character. It is these concrete, dynamic, mutually supporting relationships that Dr. Fromm, and likewise the entire "interpersonal relations" school, strive to distort and obscure.

For in the final stand, the "interpersonal relations" school of psychology is concerned to defend and to shore the prevailing forms and relations of western culture up to and including existing property relations. These people understand full well that sexual privation is an integral and necessary element of the general, inclusive privation that is enforced by physical and moral compulsion under capitalism's artificially maintained economy of scarcity. Thus they minimise the rôle of sexual behavior. Sex becomes trivial. Or the problem is taken care of by the brazen assertion "that sexual repression has diminished to a remarkable degree", that a "sexual revolution" has virtually established "sexual freedom".<sup>18</sup> License is not sexual freedom, but commonly the concomitant of restriction and frustration. The fact of wide-spread and aggravated sexual frustration in this society is a palpable and insistent fact, however assiduously and ingeniously "social scientists" like Dr. Fromm may deny or attempt to disguise it. Studies are not required to prove, nor can they disprove<sup>19</sup> the prevalent massive sex misery. It is a fact too intimately

16. *Sexual Behavior*, page 304.

17. *Sane Society*, page 78.

18. *Ibid.*, pages 101-102.

19. Authoritarian science can rig studies to "prove" anything. While ancient soothsayers inspected the entrails of birds and animals, modern hierophants practise divination by statistics and their mechanical manipulation by the I.B.M.

and recurrently felt in individual experience. It is only natural for the "social scientists", as defenders of the system, to make every effort to deny this fact, to suppress it from consciousness, or at least to minimise it. To the extent that they are realistic they will attempt to insulate this disturbing fact, that is to separate it from the cultural context in order to keep its political implications hidden as much as possible. In the long run such efforts must fail. In the short run they may be more successful. And it is on this front that some of the most energetic propaganda *against* a sane society is being waged.

Success in persuading the public that "happy" marriages can be achieved in spite of incidental sexual frustration can have a number of consequences. It at once elevates the institution of compulsive marriage to a relatively secure and protected position above the uncertain fluctuations of individual misery in an endemic social condition of material and emotional insecurity. But by denying the importance of sexual satisfaction *within* the marriage relation, it surreptitiously opens the door to the *sub rosa* quest for illicit sexual satisfaction *outside* the marriage relation.

Thus the defence of compulsive marriage becomes, in effect, the defence of what its champions pretend to abhor. For in defending marriage devoid of sexual satisfaction, they are shoring and patching a facade of hypocrisy that hides but dimly an utterly fantastic saturnalia of neurosis and crime from which everything that is joyful, wholesome, and responsible in the sex relation is more completely excluded with every passing day.

Naturally, Dr. Fromm does not take an open stand against marital happiness. The boldest moralist to-day dares not do that. As we have seen, to exclude "sexual satisfaction" as a necessary prerequisite for marital happiness may either be to deny force to the sexual appetite or to suggest that "satisfaction" be achieved outside the marriage relation. There is a third alternative, however, namely, the *ethical* solution to the problem of happiness. This is the one that Dr. Fromm falls back on, quoting Spinoza to the effect that happiness is *virtue*, the delight whereby we restrain our lusts.

To the unsophisticated, happiness would appear to be more simple and substantial than that. And some recalcitrants would deny that they required a course in ethics to savor life's joys. Yet, strangely enough, a course in ethics, that is to say in the philosophy of renunciation, has been found effective to ensure submission when a fair share of life's joys has been *withheld*. Nor is this course one that is delayed until the university, but starts with the mother's milk. The family is the prime school for ethics, and while the infant is grappling with the ABC's of controlled gratification, the parents are taking a post-graduate course in what Dr. Fromm calls the "*social character*", or, as he bluntly puts it, "*wanting to act as they have to act*".<sup>20</sup> "Gratification in acting according to the requirements of culture": that is the specific content Dr. Fromm intends for

20. *Sane Society*, page 79.

Clarkson, J., 1958: The Function of Anti-Sex: The Social Meaning of Dr. Fromm's Ethical

"happiness". But what if the "requirements of culture" are such as do not yield happiness? Ah, then the individual's drive for satisfaction must be adjusted, but not the social structure. It is from this standpoint that Dr. Fromm attempts to persuade us that marriages devoid of sexual gratification can be happy ones.

In all effort to be fair and not to misconstrue Dr. Fromm's meaning, it were well to take a more comprehensive view of what he is saying here. Marriage, far from being limited to a simple sexual relationship, is rather a complex of social relationships. It is a truism that marriage is an economic relationship. In addition, in this society, as in most, marriage is normally a child-begetting and a child-rearing relationship. Concretely, in individual marriages, these several component relationships assume different relative weights, or, exceptionally, one or more of them may be absent from the total configuration. Childless marriages, and seemingly happy ones, too, are not uncommon. Occasionally there are stable marriages that are quite sexless. In addition there are marriages, mainly among the wealthy, in which the classic economic conflicts have been largely surmounted.

These last, in which one partner is not dependent on the other, and both are equally secure and free from economic compulsions, are not typical of our capitalist society. In some instances such exceptional marriages anticipate a higher stage of social organisation. Under capitalism the marriage relationship is identified with the family relationship, and the family is, above all, an economic arrangement. Indeed, marriage is structured as the basic economic institution of society. The family produces human beings, that is to say it is the source of human material required for production. Further, it educates and disciplines the productive working force. "The production of human beings",<sup>21</sup> far from being accomplished by the physiological process of procreation, only begins with parturition. The production of human beings structured to fulfil their respective rôles on either side of the great class divide in capitalist society is a long process of education and discipline. Dr. Fromm is well aware of this, and has stated that the family "may be considered to be the *psychic agency of society*, the institution which has the function of transmitting the requirements of society to the growing child".<sup>22</sup> This is only a partial statement. In actuality the disciplinary function of the family bears with equal severity on adults, as well. Thus, not only does the family begin in infancy to mold and to consolidate the "social

21. "According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. This, again, is of a twofold character. On the one side, the production of the means of existence, of articles of food and clothing, dwellings, and of tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species." *The Origin Of The Family, Private Property, and The State*. Frederick Engels, International Publishers, New York, 1942, page 5, Preface to the First Edition.

22. *Sane Society*, page 82.

character", to use Dr. Fromm's phrase, but throughout life it supports and enforces the "social character".

Beneath the class dichotomy of capitalism the roots of the "social character" are identical for the exploiters and the exploited. The basic required traits are submission to authority, resignation to duty, deferment of satisfaction, renunciation of desire, conformity and obedience. For different classes the expression of these identical traits of the "social character" assumes a different content. But the repressive essence is the same. If the worker is driven by his boss, the boss is frequently driven even harder by his Duty.<sup>23</sup> A system that has not freed itself from the limitations of material scarcity cannot permit freedom to anyone living under it, and enforces its slavery upon high and low alike, though in varying kind and degree.

So long as the problem of scarcity remains unsolved, so long must men labour painfully to satisfy their material needs; yet not producing a sufficiency for all, so long must society employ compulsion of one kind or another. The success of capitalism in its ascendant period, meaning the prodigious expansion of the productive capacity of society in the 19th century, bespeaks the effectiveness of its methods and devices of compulsion.

Now that the material prerequisites for abundance unlimited have been attained and the final emancipation of the human race from age-old economic slavery is within grasp, the cultural mechanism that whipped men so relentlessly into productive effort formerly, in this day drives them into madness. The inhuman disciplines, culturally devised to make men work as men had never worked before and need never work again, refuse to be abolished now that the economic problem has been solved. Their power and deep-rootedness is evidenced by the tenacity of their death grip.<sup>24</sup>

The industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism are identified in popular thinking with the invention of engines and machines and the expansion of a power technology based upon coal and iron. Less appreciation is to be found for the cultural mechanisms developed to harness the psychic energy of human passion and affections in the

23. Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!  
O Duty! if that name thou love  
Who art a light to guide, a rod  
To check the erring, and reprove;

Oh, let my weakness have an end!  
Give unto me made lowly wise,  
The spirit of self-sacrifice;

From William Wordsworth's "Ode To Duty" written at the beginning of the 19th century.

24. A prominent social scientist sees it differently: "It is clear we have developed a society which depends on having the *right* amount of anxiety to make it work." (Margaret Mead, *New York Times Magazine*, 20th May, 1956.) Apparently Miss Mead believes our society is working, hence the amount of anxiety that prevails, though it puts one out of ten, or more, in hospitals, is "hopeful" and "right"

service of commodity production. Nor is it fully appreciated why the apogee of hypocrisy and repression in manners and morals occurred in Victorian England coincident with the final flowering of capitalism in the leading capitalist nation of the world.

The first crude, tentative ventures at social organisation seem to have been in substantial part attempts to control erotic feelings and to confine them within forms of expression consistent with the needs of the prevailing economy. No human societies have been discovered lacking some sort of institutionalised marriage and family relationships in which economic and sexual activity were mingled, with consequent restrictions upon the latter. Thus it appears that restriction upon the sexual appetite was an invariable element in the rise of civilisation, that is to say in the gradual progress of human mastery of the material conditions of life.

How sexual repression operates to economic advantage in particular productive systems under scarcity is a complex function that is at once involved and obscure. An adequate historical analysis remains to be worked out. A comprehensive explanation for advanced cultures promises great difficulty. To begin with the subject is taboo. This is a dark corner into which few contemporary social scientists have any intention of shining their flashlights. Yet there are indications available—and some of long standing—as to how sexual privation works, in general, to make humans servile, tractable and exploitable, or compulsive to duty. The facts are scattered through a thousand works leading back from Kinsey. The basis for integrating and interpreting these facts is already laid in Engels and Freud.<sup>25</sup> Actually the economic function of sex repression is well understood by many social scientists who take care, however, not to publicise this insight.

Dr. Fromm, for one, betrays a clear comprehension of the reactionary effects of social restrictions on sex. He is at once surprisingly frank and at the same time safely obscure, for one of the things that puts Dr. Fromm above the ordinary rank of "social scientists" is his facility in writing for two audiences at once—caviare for the professional cognoscenti, moral pie for the general. In opening a discussion of "ethical implications of sexual behavior", Dr. Fromm observes that "for centuries sexuality had been stigmatised as morally bad. . . . Every sexual activity which was not for the purpose of procreation, and particularly all sexual deviations, were considered to be morally evil".<sup>26</sup> Why is this so? Because, so far as we can capture any direct answer in Dr. Fromm's elusive generalities, "man's flesh was a source of corruption and that only by suppressing

25. Dr. Wilhelm Reich, 25 years ago, based extensive analysis of the social function of sex privation upon the pioneer insights of Engels and Freud, for example in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* and *The Sexual Revolution*. In particular Reich predicted early Russian counter-revolutionary degeneration from the Russian retreat from sex freedom.

26. *Sexual Behavior*, page 305.



instinctual demands could goodness be achieved".<sup>27</sup> This is no explanation, but of itself calls for elucidation. Instead of a sensible reason we are given an analogy between moral badness and the disintegration of the body after death.

Then at the end of the next paragraph Dr. Fromm actually gives the explanation which he should have brought forward at first. It is thrown out in a different context, without any explicit causal connection being established with his first statement, that for centuries sex has been stigmatised as bad. After pointing to Freud's finding that suppression of sex frequently leads to neurosis, Dr. Fromm says: "But it seems that another effect of sexual taboos is not less important: the development of intense guilt feelings in every individual. Since every normal human being has sexual strivings from childhood on, these very strivings must become an inexhaustible source of guilt feelings if they are stigmatised by the culture as evil. *Guilt feelings make a person prone to submit to authorities which want to use and subdue him for their own ends.*"<sup>28</sup> (Emphasis mine—J.C.) This is profoundly true. Dr. Fromm's concluding statement, here, that "maturity and happiness conflict with the existence of an all-pervasive sense of guilt" is also quite correct, except that guilt to be effectively pathogenic by no means has to be "all-pervasive". Some might wonder how Dr. Fromm would ever be able to square the statement just quoted with one he makes two pages later, and one that we have already examined, namely, that "it is not true that sexual satisfaction is the cause of—or identical with—mental health and happiness". How does Dr. Fromm reconcile these two seemingly opposed views? This is done by equating it at one time with the absence of sex-guilt—something different from sexual satisfaction—and then at another time identifying "happiness" with Spinoza's state of virtuous delight whereby one restrains one's lusts.

But now to revert to Dr. Fromm's formulation that cultural stigmatization of normal sexual strivings induces guilt feelings that "make a person prone to submit to authorities which want to subdue him for their own ends". This is an acute insight<sup>29</sup> and the

27. *Sexual Behavior*, page 305.

28. *Ibid.*, page 305.

29. Dr. Fromm, for his own good reasons, ignores the psychosomatic mechanism that connects privation, guilt, and submission in endless circular frustration. The recognition of the social function of guilt anxiety in enforcing submission is an insight acquired from Freud, who did not, however, penetrate very far into the specific psychosomatic process. Greater light on what is involved is thrown by Wilhelm Reich, Freud's pupil and one time close collaborator. Dr. Reich's classic discussion of this problem is to be found in his book, *The Function Of The Orgasm*, New York, 1942. More recently Dr. Reich's work has taken a highly speculative, not to say, fantastic, turn. The vagaries of the current period, while they do, admittedly, raise doubts, may not be used legitimately to discredit retroactively or to refute Reich's earlier findings which stand on their own footing and require to be tested scientifically independent of subsequent additions and reformulations, and without bringing in irrelevancies concerning Reich's personality.

Clarkson, J., 1958: The Function of Anti-Sex: The Social Meaning of Dr. Fromm's Ethical Desexualization of Psychoanalysis, In: Contemporary Issues, Vol. IX (1958), pp. 75-105.

formulation is accurate so far as it goes. It is important to grasp this insight for it clears up a troublesome mystery, namely, the heretofore unexplained stigmatization of sex and sexual satisfaction as bad by most cultures at a certain stage of economic development. So universal a development could not have been accidental. And it only becomes understandable as an indispensable social invention where conditions of material scarcity necessitated compulsive inducement to labor and the subordination of one segment of society to another. Thus would be explained why the denigration of sex generally increased in the degree that advancing production required ever greater exactions of labor and renunciation from the laboring masses, and likewise ever greater devotion to business and duty from those who direct the productive process.

An hypothesis of economic utility of sex-guilt under conditions of material scarcity would explain much more than previously has been obscure or inexplicable. It even explains something that in another context is "amazing" to Dr. Fromm, as we shall see. First, however, it is in order to apply this insight to the enigma of religious illusion. Why is it that religious superstition and practice is so invariably identified with the regulation of sexual expression in cultures developed under the pinch of scarcity? The answer is simple. Religion works both as a mechanism for inducing sex-guilt and as a mechanism for controlling it. Religion induces a perpetual state of sinful anxiety and at the same time provides for draining off the harmful excess of this emotive force, that is, what is over and above the amount required to make submissive workers and dutiful masters.

Religion makes men ever conscious of their sin but periodically relieves their accumulated guilt. Because men are purged of their anxiety every seventh day, they are able to work on the other six. Religion turns out to be an economy of sin, that is guilt, and at the root, sex-guilt. That is why in popular thinking—which in this case, as in others, hits the truth closer than some sophisticated rationalizations—sin is identified, if not equated, with sex.

Also accounted for is another observation of Dr. Fromm's, thrown out for his own purposes without reasonable explanation. "The stigmatization of sex had another most undesirable result—ethics was narrowed down to the small area of sexual behavior, and thus the really significant ethical problems in human behavior were veiled."<sup>30</sup> Ethics was narrowed down thus, because the prevailing conditions of production demanded it. Further, as one who claims to be a socialist should know, any broad, effective solution to "significant", that is to say, fundamental, ethical problems is excluded in economies of scarcity.

If the leadings of the hypothesis of the economic utility of sex-guilt

30. *Sexual Behavior*, page 305.

are followed, much becomes simple and clear concerning the origin and progress of psychoanalysis, much that seems to escape Dr. Fromm. It should throw light indirectly on Dr. Fromm's hostility to Freud, which like that of some other revisionists of psychoanalysis is only thinly veiled, and at times breaks through in malicious and outrageous distortion.<sup>31</sup>

Freud, as the consistent child of nineteenth-century materialism, was by intellectual conviction an atheist, and recognised the illusory nature of religious belief. In his later years he grasped to a considerable extent religion's social function for controlling anxiety. Thus Freud foresaw the persistence of religious illusions in spite of their irrationality. To some extent he realised that his own invention, psychoanalysis, was called forth by the partial failure of capitalism's religious mechanism, and that psychoanalysis from the first was a substitute for religion.<sup>32</sup> Possibly in his early inventive years when he devised the basis of classic psychoanalytic technique, he worked largely unconsciously and mostly unaware of the social need and contradictions that were working through him. Certainly the growing concern of his later years with the broader social questions was an expression of his deepening appreciation of the social rôle that psychoanalysis would come to play. Freud's rationalizations were kept on a relatively high plane. It is a surety that Freud never clearly foresaw the extent of the debasement of accommodation to

31. E.g., "For Freud, man is driven by . . . the craving for . . . complete sexual freedom, that is, unlimited sexual access to all women he might find desirable." *Sane Society*, page 74.

32. For 30 years, from 1909 to the end of Freud's life, the Protestant clergyman, Oskar Pfister of Zürich was Freud's close friend and collaborator. Pfister applied the insights and techniques of psychoanalysis in his pastoral duties. The following quotation is taken from a letter from Freud to Pfister in 1909 and published in the appendix of Vol. 2 of Ernest Jones's *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, New York, 1955.

"You on the other hand have young people with recent conflicts who are attached to you personally, and who are in a suitable state for sublimation and indeed its most convenient form—religious sublimation. You do not, of course, doubt that in the first place your success comes about in the same way as ours, through the erotic transference to your person. But you are in the fortunate position of leading them on to God and reconstructing the conditions of earlier times, fortunate at least in the one respect that religious piety stifles neuroses. We no longer have this opportunity of settling the matter. People in general, whatever their racial origin, are irreligious—we are mostly thoroughly irreligious—and since the other forms of sublimation through which *we* replace religion are commonly too difficult for most patients our cure generally issues in the search for gratification. Moreover we do not see in sexual gratification anything forbidden or sinful in itself but recognise it as a valuable part of our vital activity. You know that our word 'erotic' includes what in your profession is called 'love' and is not at all restricted to gross sensual pleasure. Thus our patients have to seek in people what we are not able to promise them from the Land Above and what we have to refuse them personally. Naturally, therefore, it is much harder for us, and dissolving the transference impairs many good results."

the general retrogression of a putrescent capitalism that would come at the hands of a revisionist priesthood. It is that same revisionist priesthood who have now effected an amicable division of labor and perquisites with the older priesthoods, and complacently identify themselves, like Dr. Fromm, with "the great spiritual teachers of the human race".<sup>33</sup>

Dr. Fromm states that "Freud pointed to the fact that the suppression of sex frequently led to the development of neurosis".<sup>34</sup> Actually Freud categorically asserted innumerable times his theory of a basic and invariant sexual etiology of neurosis. It is well known how Freud was compelled by the empirical findings of his early practice to recognize the sexual factor. Dr. A. A. Brill in his introduction to *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud* states: "I have always found it hard to understand why Freud's views on sex roused so much opposition. Freud did not enter that realm voluntarily, but was forced by the natural course of events into taking account of the sexual factor in neurosis." "The natural course of events" was mainly, to be sure, the symptoms of his patients. It is of greatest significance to understand why Freud's patients, particularly at the beginning, were predominantly of upper-class origin, and mainly upper-class women. That only persons of means, not to say wealth, could afford analytic treatment is not sufficient reason. This is no reason why persons, and the particular class of persons involved, should require treatment and should be impelled to make the substantial expenditure of money and effort required for analysis. No, this reason will not suffice, and it is necessary to go much deeper.

We must now examine the psychosomatic mechanism whereby sex-guilt supports an economy of scarcity. The biophysical aspect of sexual suppression is still obscure. Precisely how and why postponement of gratification and its denial in general produces and maintains a submissive character requires extensive research. That interference of the sexual function starting in infancy and continuing throughout life has this effect there can be no doubt. Such resulting character traits as submission to authority, resignation to hardship and painful experience generally, compulsive adherence to duty, and the like, are accompanied invariably by anxiety in some form or degree and frequently by other specific neurotic symptoms. Unless anxiety expressed as guilt feelings or consciousness of sin as well as related neurotic symptoms can be controlled, that is, alleviated and kept within due bounds, they prevent effective participation in production. In that case the cultural gain from the sex-denial-guilt mechanism would be lost. This is prevented in two ways. We have

33. *Sane Society*, page 69.

34. *Sexual Behavior*, page 305.



seen how religion at the same time as it cultivates a sense of sin, also periodically prunes this morbid growth to keep it within manageable bounds. But there is another specific against anxiety. That is compulsive work. Work is often a symptom that to some extent functions as its own therapy. Absorption in work, the more exacting, the more effective, has long been known to be a specific for maiming emotional wounds. Thus it happens to be a fact that so long as humans have God and work they can usually carry on in their life station in a decent and acceptable fashion. Even with only one of these it is possible to manage.

When, however, God fails and the anodyne of compulsive work is withheld, while at the same time sexual repression obtains and is even aggravated, then the plight of the unfortunate individual is indeed desperate. Such was exactly the plight of many upper-class Europeans at the turn of the last century when psychoanalysis had its inception. Their religious illusions had been undermined by the tidal wave of scepticism that swept across the educated classes as the nineteenth century wore on, constituting one of the social contradictions that had then begun to crack the foundations of capitalism. Women especially, because women's subjugated status had not been broken, were largely denied the release of socially approved work. And, of course, the same precondition for neurosis obtained for parasitic males of the leisure class. At the same time the exorbitant exactions of Victorian morality bore down upon upper-class women with a weight of instinctual renunciation previously unknown in history. And their situation was worsened by the fact that their means and the changing habits of upper-class life at the time tended to increase the sexual stasis by an increased stimulation from which the more circumscribed lower classes were still protected. Thus while psychoanalysis was in a sense the creation of Freud's unique personal genius, it was in a more fundamental sense called forth by the need of a social system entering upon its decline; and in precise correspondence with the deepening of that decline, has the subsequent development of psychoanalysis unfolded. From the status of an upper-class luxury, psychoanalysis in its numerous revisions and latter-day denominations is now percolating downward through all class layerings. Its function as *ersatz* religion has greatly extended itself in the general retrogression, just as the anxiety and related neurotic symptoms it was originally devised to alleviate have spread downward and deeper into the social structure, and for exactly the same reasons that first affected the top social layer.

While an earlier and healthier intellectual scepticism is now frequently replaced by an effete cynicism, the guts of religion, nevertheless, are gone for the educated classes, and if intellectuals appear to be flocking back to the churches, it is partly the padded

statistics of the religious hucksters, and partly because nominal church membership and outward compliance with traditional church forms is an approved method for demonstrating social conformity. Also there is the disconsolate herd seeking fellowship which is not to be found in this competitive and insecure culture. But these things are not religion in any true sense, nor do they constitute an effective therapy against guilt anxiety. Likewise, the healing balm is to a large extent gone out of work which is what Dr. Fromm means when he says that work is no longer creative. As modern developments, including automation, depersonalize the productive process, the meaningful content of more and more jobs disappears entirely. Neurotics can no longer rationalize their drudgery into something important and significant. Work that expends little effort or emotion yields little catharsis. Thus while women have been admitted into business and the professions on close to an equal footing to men, and while for the nonce there are jobs for nearly everyone, work is generally becoming so depersonalized and meaningless, which is to say in the latter instance, non-productive, irrational and even socially destructive, that even those with the greatest masochistic need can find little release in dedication to work duty. Concurrently sexual stasis is mounting, that is to say the dammed-up need for physiological and emotional release of libido, that in pathological excess is recognized in psychoanalytic theory to produce the classic neurotic syndromes and related psychosomatic disorders. The abnormal excess of erotic stimulation in this society over and above wholesome and possible means for release is due to a complex of causes and is a direct expression of deepening social retrogression.

Dr. Fromm writes of a moral "rebellion [that has] developed since the beginning of our century".<sup>35</sup> In *The Sane Society* he characterizes this social phenomena as a "sexual revolution", specifically stating that "after the First World War, a sexual revolution took place in which old inhibitions and principles were thrown overboard".<sup>36</sup> It is true that old inhibitions and principles were thrown overboard to some extent. But this negative development does not constitute a true "sexual revolution" in any positive sense. It marks no advent into sexual freedom in the sense of establishing free and positive *alternatives* for sexual expression as a release from irrational, unnecessary, and harmful compulsion. More properly called rebellion, what has transpired so far is, in fact, the sexual phase of the general preliminary breakdown that precedes the social transition to an economy of abundance. To the extent that social transformation is held back, sexual *mores* are bound to grow increasingly more chaotic.

35. *Sexual Behavior*, page 305.

36. *Sane Society*, page 101.



The pathogenic excess of stimulation that characterizes this period of moral breakdown is due in part to the tremendous commercial exploitation of sex as a commodity. The emergence of women into industry, business, and the professions, as well as the disappearance of most of the traditional barriers that once separated the sexes, has directly increased stimulation and stasis. The rise of youth as a separate and powerful social faction with its platform of demands, including sexual satisfaction, is another factor. Also there is coming to the front a correlative faction of ageing and elderly persons vastly increased in numbers and demanding more and more of life and life's satisfactions, as the average life span continues to increase. In addition must be figured such factors as greater leisure, a higher level of material consumption, and increased physical mobility. These and numerous other changes all contribute to throw the sexes together without the old restraints, yet without the social preconditions for a new moral synthesis. The result is to raise the pressure of sexual stasis in our society to a nearly unbearable pitch.

The directly resulting guilt-anxiety and neurosis permeate all levels of society, finding expression in alcoholism, violence and crime, mental illness, and psychosomatic sickness. This is not to claim a simple and exclusive sexual etiology for these related aspects of the overall social disorder under a system of artificially maintained scarcity. It is only to insist that the pathogenic effect of sexual malfunction be recognized, and its relation to economic malfunction in capitalist retrogression be opened up to public view. As beneficiaries of the system, at least in a short-run, financial sense, the revisionists and latter-day practitioners of psychoanalysis are uniformly concerned to hide the sexual problem. By one means or another they must deny or conjure out of sight Freud's sexual content. They must do this because the sexual problem always raises the more inclusive social problem. And particularly must they minimize sex<sup>37</sup> as an irrelevant issue because sex and economics are so closely coupled in the basic social institution of family and marriage. To deal with family and marriage in any candid way is at once to expose the most glaring and irrational contradictions of the social impasse of our time.

Thus it is that a revisionist of Freud (not to mention Marx), like Dr. Fromm, is obliged to be circumspect. *The Sane Society* intended for mass consumption is less direct than his simultaneously published essay on *Sex and Character* written for the Society of the Study of Social Problems, and certain to reach only a select professional

37. An interesting omission: the index of *The Sane Society* lists no entries under *sex* or *sexual*, although in other respects the index is detailed and rather complete.

audience.<sup>38</sup> In this discussion directed to "social scientists" we have already seen how Dr. Fromm under the heading of "Ethical Implications of Sexual Behavior" openly admits a direct causal connection between repressive "sexual taboos" and guilt feelings, specifically stating that, "since every normal being has sexual strivings from childhood on, these very strivings must become an inexhaustible source of guilt feelings if they are stigmatized by the culture as evil". The locus of such "moral condemnation of sexuality" in culture, Dr. Fromm clearly indicates, is religion. And then Dr. Fromm drops the key admission, already noted, that "guilt feelings make a person prone to submit to authorities which want to use and subdue him for their own ends". Oddly this is a point thrown in gratuitously, not being strictly necessary to the argument in hand. It is almost as if Dr. Fromm was under a compulsion to say this, and deeming himself in safe company, permitted himself the indiscretion.

Awareness of the repressive function of institutionalized religion is obviously an asset in writing a work of liberal confusion like *The Sane Society*. It is something that is not mentioned openly, to be sure. Dr. Fromm must walk a tight-rope. On the whole he contrives in this book to write of religion in a way that should put churchmen in an appreciative glow, while at the same time managing to throw a few crumbs to free thinkers. Thus in discussing "Man in Capitalist Society", Dr. Fromm admits "the prevalence of a feeling of guilt", going on to say, "it is indeed amazing that in as fundamentally irreligious a culture as ours, the sense of guilt should be so widespread and deep-rooted as it is".<sup>39</sup> It would indeed be *amazing* if Dr. Fromm were amazed by this. Unable to deny the gross fact of overwhelming mass guilt-anxiety in this society, Dr. Fromm adopts a pose of naiveté in order to obscure the origin of these guilt feelings. His confession of amazement somewhat removes the sting from the implication that guilt-anxiety is a natural outcome of religious belief. Nevertheless the implication is clearly

38. There is a widespread tendency among "social scientists", when obliged to report data derogatory or disturbing to the system, to couch it in professional jargon which safely removes it from the attention of the general reader. The anthropologist Margaret Mead in *Male and Female*, New York, 1949, page 450, advocates this reactionary practice quite brazenly:

"Similarly, the anthropologist who looks at a modern society may see symptoms that are deeply disturbing, and indeed this may be a principal drive towards work. But I believe that such analysis should be reserved for the specialized work of competent professional groups with well-developed ethics of responsibility. . . . We have certainly not reached a stage in social awareness where ordinarily functioning men and women can afford to carry about with them a knowledge of the cultural psychodynamics that unites them with psychopath and criminal. . . . This is one of the most serious criticisms that can be levelled at the way in which the Kinsey report was permitted to become a best-seller."

39. *Sane Society*, page 205.



there, and if it does serve, to be sure, as bait for liberals, it also throws a somewhat sinister light on previous statements by Dr. Fromm, namely, that his "concept of mental health", the same that underlies Humanistic Psychoanalysis, "coincides essentially with the norms postulated by the great spiritual teachers of the human race".<sup>40</sup>

Since "the great spiritual teachers" never pretended to be able to get rid of sin and its painful consequences in this life and this world, it would seem that Humanistic Psychoanalysis is not particularly recommended as therapy for the guilt-ridden. But perhaps it is on another front that Dr. Fromm wishes to identify himself with "the great spiritual teachers of the human race". Writing of the rôle of the Catholic church in the feudal era (to which pre-capitalist Elysium, be it noted, Dr. Fromm frequently harks back with nostalgia), he states "such psychological satisfaction was given to the masses that they accepted their dependency and poverty with resignation, making little effort to improve their social condition".<sup>41</sup>

Thus Dr. Fromm in his own words depicts religion, more precisely, institutionalized religion, as performing a socially repressive function of a dual nature. On the one side inspiring a sense of guilt; on the other, partially allaying this pain with "psychological satisfaction". Further, he localizes the origin of at least a considerable part of these guilt feelings in "stigmatized sexuality". When one accepts Dr. Fromm's proposition that "guilt feelings make a person prone to submit to authorities which want to use and subdue him for their own ends", what comes to view is apparently a circulatory, self-maintaining mechanism for social discipline. It would be a social invention of prime utility under conditions of material scarcity where an increase in production entailed more severe renunciations and greater exactions of labor. Religious prohibition stigmatized sex, sex taboos produced guilt, guilt induced submission to authority, both religious and secular, as the required price for partial alleviation, the unresolved residue of guilt-anxiety being sufficient to maintain the original religious, guilt-producing taboos, but not enough to disrupt production.

This formulation might seem comprehensive. It does not, however, take into account the fact, already noted, that work itself, under certain conditions, is as effective as the sacraments in dispelling guilt. Nor does it explain how this guilt-generating device got its original impulse, and how it was apparently so easy for "the great spiritual teachers of the human race" to convince people that sex is bad. This is the part that Dr. Fromm keeps well hidden. This is

40. *Sane Society*, page 69.

41. *Sexual Behavior*, page 305.

Clarkson, J., 1958: The Function of Anti-Sex: The Social Meaning of Dr. Fromm's Ethical Desexualization of Psychoanalysis, In: Contemporary Issues, Vol. IX (1958), pp. 75-105.

what he goes to great pains to deny with his high-flown constructions from philosophical idealism and his elaborate dualisms distilled from "the great teachings of all cultures".<sup>42</sup> From where we stand to-day it is not easy to keep this part hidden. It is particularly difficult since Freud's discovery of the sexual etiology of neurosis, which is precisely the nub upon which Dr. Fromm's revisionism centers. In fact Dr. Fromm, himself, recognizes this difficulty, but in reverse, so to speak, attempting to make it out to be a difficulty on the part of obtuse or stubborn colleagues. "There is one particular difficulty which many psychiatrists and psychologists have to overcome in order to accept the ideas of *humanistic psychoanalysis*. They still think in the philosophic premises of nineteenth-century materialism which assumed that all important psychic phenomena must be rooted in (and caused by) corresponding *physiological*, somatic processes. Thus Freud, whose basic philosophical orientation was molded by this type of materialism, believed that he had found this physiological substratum of human passion in the 'libido'. In the theory presented here, there is no corresponding *physiological* substrata to the needs for relatedness, transcendence, etc. The substratum is not a physical one . . ." <sup>43</sup>

This is false, perniciously, and studiously false. The key to the whole thing is that that which Dr. Fromm calls the substratum is exactly *physical* and material. Starting here, the mystery of what activates the socially repressive religious sex-guilt mechanism is soon brought out into the daylight.

It may be categorically asserted that it is possible to stigmatize sex as bad only when it is *felt* to be bad. Such feelings at the root are *physical* feelings. *Actually it is never sex, that is to say sexual satisfaction, that is felt to be bad.* It is rather the somatic suffering induced by the lack of sexual satisfaction. It is at the root the flesh-and-blood distress of the physical organism specifically expressing the disorder of its sexual function, especially that arising from sexual privation.

Freud never claimed credit for having discovered the sexual etiology of neuroses. The idea was suggested, he modestly maintained, by several persons, namely, his teacher Charcot, and his colleagues, Breuer and Chrobak.<sup>44</sup> But it was Freud's indisputable achievement to have taken this idea out of obscurity and to have built the psychoanalytical movement upon it. Freud's clinical work established beyond all doubt the fact of a gross, physical element of sexual disturbance in all neurosis. Thus was positively demonstrated a

42. *Sane Society*, page 69.

43. *Ibid.*, page 69.

44. "History Of The Psychoanalytical Movement", *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, Brill translation, Modern Library Edition, page 937.

direct causal link between guilt-anxiety and sexual privation. And it is this causal link, and nothing less, that the latter-day revisionists move heaven and hell to deny.

Revisionists like Dr. Fromm, regardless of their critical pose and socialist make-up, are stalwart supporters of the capitalist system—a system that rewards them well, and affords them scope for their “creative” talents. Dr. Fromm is obliged to deny sexual privation as an effective cause in the admitted current crisis of mental disorder. First, he must deny it, because sexual privation is an expression of material scarcity which cannot be remedied or removed under capitalism. Secondly, because the compulsive marriage-family complex, the basic institution of our capitalist culture, is a relationship historically structured upon sexual privation. Dr. Fromm’s attack on the significance of acculturated sexual privation is two-pronged. On some occasions he denies that there is now any appreciable amount of sexual privation in our society since the accomplishment of the “sexual revolution” in the earlier decades of this century. At other times he denies that sexual satisfaction is a necessary (“primary”) condition for happiness (for “marital happiness”, at least), which is to say actually that sexual privation is inconsequential and in effect no genuine privation at all.<sup>45</sup>

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It may be assumed that in the race’s sub-human stage instinctual satisfactions were occasional, fleeting, and precarious. Pleasure was taken where it was found, without much foresight or hindsight, or with little regard for consequences. While there may have been mating, that is to say more or less permanent pairing relationships between the sexes, there was no marriage. Marriage is a late social relation.

Speculation about primeval conditions is mostly fanciful, and is usually based either upon false analogies with the behavior of other animal species or upon unwarranted inferences drawn from recent observations of “primitive” human groups, the “lowest” of which

45. The “sexual revolution” is frequently mentioned by Dr. Fromm. Do we get a hint of sexual counter-revolution in his rejection of the now nearly universal view that knowledge of “sexual technique” is beneficial to the marriage relation? For what sort of rejection can be derived from Dr. Fromm’s denial “that marital unhappiness can be cured by applying better sexual techniques”? (*Sexual Behavior*, page 307.) Such disparagement of marital sexual technique is reminiscent of orthodox Jewish and early Catholic codes, the former having forbidden nude coitus for some 2,000 years, the latter having held any coital position “except the prone position with the male above as a matter for confession and in days when the church authority was backed by the civil administration, as a matter for punishment”. Pages 366, 370. Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, Gebhart, *Sexual Behavior In The Human Female*, Philadelphia, 1953.

are far removed in cultural evolution from the primeval stages. We do know, however, that for ages the human species was few in numbers and widely scattered, probably small wandering bands of food gatherers, and later, hunters. The uniquely long dependency period of the human young, biologically structured, entailed social co-operation. Perhaps the primary social tie was established at the mother’s breast. But we have no reason to assume, for instance, that males were bound to females solely by sexual need, and tolerated children only because of the mothers. Rejecting all such tendentious assumptions, it is more reasonable to be content with the lone, indubitable fact that by some measure of social co-operation between the sexes human young were begotten, fed, protected, and educated. And only because of this did the race survive. It is a truism that we are here to-day because from earliest times some humans did find enough to eat, had sex relations, and reared their young.

If we were able to go back far enough, we might reach a stage when as soon as humans were weaned from the breast they ate their food separately as they found it, or fought for it like jackals and hyenas. Certain it is, however, that very early with humans the hunt for food and its consumption began to emerge as a shared activity in which co-operation grew increasingly more important. In seeking the genetic root of human society some might want to give primacy to shared activity in food gathering, others to the co-operative nature of the sex act, and others to the nurturing of children by adults. It were better not to single out any one of these relationships in particular, recognizing that for humans co-operative behavior emerges naturally in all three of these basic activities, and that different co-operative acts are mutually supportative.

In practice these activities were of necessity carried on in close conjunction. But because alimentative need under conditions of primeval scarcity was first and last the most tyrannical, the procurement of food must have absorbed the larger share of human attention and effort, setting the frame within which all human activity was carried on. At first sex pleasure must have come as casually as the spring sunshine or the ripened fruit of autumn. And in practice the nurture of children, when they appeared, was, as the derivation of the word, nurture, indicates, mainly the feeding of them.

The original tyrant is the empty belly. The compulsion to fill it has forced the development of human life up through the ages, and has finally brought the race to where it stands to-day on the verge of abundance and freedom. To secure its existence the race has not only brought forth superb powers of inventive intelligence unequalled by the other species, but it has disciplined itself with unique and merciless rigor. Up to now every established social institution, whatever else it may be in addition, is to some degree an instrument



of compulsive discipline, serving to bind humans to the wheel of labor. This compulsive function is particularly oppressive in the interwoven complex of social relations that in our culture is variously designated, at different times and for different reasons, according to its several parts, that is to say as *marriage*, the *family*, or the *home*.

We cannot here unravel all the various threads of this intricate social fabric, nor follow back their windings through social evolution. It is mainly the disciplinary function of the home that requires analysis here. We have noted that its involved and highly developed compulsive pressures serve to subdue humans to productive effort. The hard exactions of material want have structured the home. The price of its protection is high and cruelly exacted.

*Home* includes both marriage and family and considerably more besides. Everyone knows that a home is what we are born into and where we live until we outgrow it and leave it to make a home of our own, that is, in conjunction with a mate of the opposite sex. If to *marriage* is assigned a meaning roughly comprising the specific, socially-licensed sex relations between man and wife, and to *family* the broader relations involving children, what remains is the material means and context of these two classes of relations, secured through labor. The contemporary compulsive complex of sex relations, child-rearing relations, and work relations derives from the simple primeval prototypes of cave or campfire, except that in the course of social evolution, sex and child-rearing have been increasingly subordinated to the requirements of production. It is precisely this subordination of human relations to work relations that is now obsolescent. More than that, with the age-old goal of material abundance finally within reach, it is the dead weight of institutionalized work discipline structured under material scarcity, that more than anything else holds back the impending Utopia of universal plenty.

We have already considered the mechanism whereby through sexual privation human tractability to work is augmented and anchored. We have seen how sex privation is converted *physiologically*, as well as psychologically, to anxiety and guilt-feelings and finally, submissiveness. We have taken cognizance of the religious device whereby a supply of guilt-feelings are continually generated, while at the same time any socially dangerous excess is drained off in ritual. Thus marriage, as institutionalized sexual privation is made compulsive under secular law, and as a religious sacrament is invested with sacred sanctions.

But compulsive marriage involves only one phase of the general sexual privation exacted according to the requirements of production in an economy of scarcity. In some "backward" cultures, where the productive drive was minimal because of the exceptional natural bounty of the environment, children were sometimes permitted nearly

unrestricted latitude of sexual expression. In contrast in nineteenth-century Europe when the capitalist productive machine was attaining top speed, and before it had begun to break down seriously, the suppression of the child's natural sexuality was carried to an incredible extent, and it was thus forgotten for a time that children were sexual beings. Freud's rediscovery of infant sexuality at the beginning of this century was an accomplishment of genius, notwithstanding that this discovery had been placed on the order of the day by the incipient breakdown of the capitalist cultural mechanism and its entire repressive structure.

The recrudescence of sex and sex-right is in part a reaction against extraordinarily severe instinctual repression and in part adumbration of an emergent era of material abundance in which restrictions upon free expression of natural sexuality will have no economic utility nor social reason of any sort. As soon as we shall have passed over into abundance and shall have assured to every child born, as his inalienable birthright, free, unrestricted, lifelong access to any and all material means for a good, full life as he may want to live it, the character of education will change completely. And so will the character of marriage. In dissolving the primary compulsion which is the age-old compulsion of material scarcity, there will be dissolved with it, and rendered socially baseless, all secondary compulsions. When all compulsion disappears out of marriage, and sexual relations, for the first time in history, become the free acts of free agents, then and only then shall we finally know to what extent monogamy is a condition for human happiness. Also when that time arrives the question shall have largely lost significance.

But now every teacher, preacher, social scientist, and politician with an eye to the main chance rises to the defense of monogamy, that is, more precisely, to the defense of the compulsive content of monogamy in this society. It is both a creed and a pledge of allegiance. It is absolutely safe and appropriate on all occasions to deplore the rising incidence of divorce, which every half-way conscious person understands, though he may not admit it, as a direct expression of rebellion against the constrictive misery of the system.

The sexual "rebellion" which Dr. Fromm cannot deny, is well advanced. Not only does it find expression in mounting divorce, but the so-called "juvenile delinquency" is in part the revolt of youth against the incredible restrictions officially maintained by our society against adolescent sexuality. This is a revolt against the ancient sexual discipline of the home which has long enforced sexual privation upon the young in order to inure them to a life of privation in an economy of scarcity, and to ensure submissiveness to work and duty. The shame and tragedy of so-called "juvenile delinquency" is the manner in which our best and most vital youth are broken

and wasted because they will not tamely submit to irrational and inhuman requirements of a moribund culture.

Kinsey found that 85 per cent of male youth as well as 95 per cent of the male population in general are sometime sex offenders liable to imprisonment under our repressive legal code. And the report holds up for consideration the theoretical absurdity of 5 per cent of the population maintaining 95 per cent in jail as sex criminals. "Sex crime" is a basic contradiction of the system. All law, that is to say the entire repressive legal structure, economic, as well as applying scientifically to sexual behavior, is undermined by this contradiction. From this fact issues much of the incentive of the shorers and patchers of the system who are now starting to busy themselves with projects for liberalizing the sex law. But only superficial reforms are possible in an economy of scarcity. Sex and economics are far too closely intertwined. And any honest and reasonable attempt to cure the sexual problem flies straight as an arrow to the heart of the social question.<sup>46</sup>

To avoid the sexual problem, to deny it, to cover it up, to confuse it, to belittle it—all these amount in effect to defense of the system. Certainly it is often not a conscious defense. In the case of Dr. Fromm, however, taking into account his intellectual grasp of social theory and his background in social movements, it is a surety that his efforts to obscure the sexual question are both consciously and cynically undertaken.

Dr. Fromm has earned himself great credit in some quarters by putting himself forward as a critic and revisionist of Freud. He never neglects an opportunity to belittle and besmirch Freud's reputation by attributing to Freud a crude obsession with sex. It is Dr. Fromm who is obsessed with sex. He is obsessed with getting it out of sight, hiding it, covering it up, as a dog scratches over filth, yet always returning to sniff. Such is particularly the case in *The Sane Society*.

What Dr. Fromm does with incest in this book is a direct case in point. The incest taboo carries heavy emotional freight. The ancient and nearly universal incest prohibition seems naturally invested with revulsion and horror. That this powerful aversion is culturally acquired may be explained easily, nor is any resort to theories of instinctive abhorrence required. While we shall never know the exact steps by which the incest taboo arose in primeval culture, it is obvious how and why it came about. The incest prohibition would be an effective social device for repressing sexuality in the service of economic productivity, especially in primeval family groups. It is

46. This was the theory and practice of the American experiment in communism undertaken more than 100 years ago in the Oneida Community. See John Humphrey Noyes, *History Of American Socialisms*, Philadelphia, 1870.

not necessary to attribute conscious design. A cultural mutant that proved superior for survival is sufficient explanation. But instead of accounting for incest rationally, Dr. Fromm goes about making a mystery more mysterious.

He turns the incest concept inside out and proceeds to remove its specific sexual content, retaining however, its horrid connotations for application to another order of experience. In constructing his incest symbol, Dr. Fromm narrows incest to a child-mother relationship, that is a one-way relationship of forbidden attachment, or "fixation", of child to mother. Thus: "the incestuous desire has its strength not from sexual attraction to the mother, but from the deep-seated craving to remain in, or return to the all-enveloping womb, or to the all-nourishing breasts".<sup>47</sup> Issuing from this generic fixation to the mother, Dr. Fromm discovers incestuous fixations to nature, to blood and soil, to race and nation. "Nationalism is our form of incest",<sup>48</sup> he declares. Thus Dr. Fromm desexualizes incest and attaches its stigma to "a new idolatry of blood and soil, of which nationalism and racism are the two most evident expressions",<sup>49</sup> in three words, "Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism", "the new totalitarianism".

The identification of fascism with incest may afford emotional release for some, but not much political enlightenment. There is a decided flavor of demagoguery about this characterization that is hard to stomach for those who genuinely abhor "nationalism" and the "new totalitarianism". Dr. Fromm's list of "incestuous"-isms is by no means inclusive, and further to protect his meaning from any embarrassing un-American imputations, several escape clauses have been worked into his general condemnation of "nationalism". "Undoubtedly, a lack of concern for one's own country is an expression of a lack of social responsibility and of human solidarity . . ."<sup>50</sup> While this might not be forthright enough to satisfy the American Legion, statements of this nature should be amply reassuring to more liberal patriots.

Returning to the special meaning that Dr. Fromm gives to *incest*: that it is a pathological inability to grow up, to abandon out-worn situations of security that are secure no longer, to accept necessary change. Surely this is a drastic revision of established terminology. But going along, here, with Dr. Fromm, nevertheless, no better example of this sort of incestuous fixation could be found than that offered by Dr. Fromm, himself. For when the resolution of human

47. *Sane Society*, page 40

48. *Ibid.*, page 58.

49. *Ibid.*, page 57.

50. *Ibid.*, page 60.



ills, and, in fact, the very existence of humanity itself, depends upon speedy passage into a world economy of abundance, Dr. Fromm, on all practical issues, stands committed to the outworn scarcity system.

Dr. Fromm's masquerade as a socialist should not mislead any reader whose memory and comprehension extends as far as from one page to the next. *The Sane Society* takes capitalism to task in a manner that will afford vicarious release to "alienated" intellectuals. But it is mostly philosophical shadow-boxing that does not reach the vitals of the system. In his own shrewd way Dr. Fromm is frequently the defender of what he appears to denounce. And his defense is the more insidious because it seems daringly critical to those who credulously interpret his generalized indictment in terms of their own concrete grievances. Thus Dr. Fromm gathers and seduces an audience, and then leads them off into a maze of dualistic abstraction and ethical duplicity.

A fellow professor, but an adherent of an opposed school of philosophy, has recently taken Dr. Fromm's measure neatly, but rather too politely. "This ambiguity makes the revisionist philosophy [of Dr. Fromm] appear to be critical where it is conformist, political where it is moralistic . . . this philosophy is achieved by directing criticism against surface phenomena, while accepting the basic premises of the criticized society . . . The character of the revisionist philosophy shows forth in the assimilation of the positive and the negative, the promise and the betrayal. The affirmation absorbs the critique. The reader may be left with the conviction that the 'higher values' can and should be practised within the very conditions which betray them . . ."<sup>51</sup>

Just as likely the reader discovers a way to divorce the "higher values" from practice entirely, which at the bottom is the *practical* aim of the dualistic ethics of philosophical idealism. And this separation of theory and practice, it happens, is the essence of "alienation". So Dr. Fromm who states that "alienation" is the deepest symptom of social insanity reveals himself as a purveyor of "alienation". *The Sane Society* which purports to be a critique of our society in terms of alienation, reveals gross alienation in its failure to grasp social reality. For example, Dr. Fromm would have us believe that economic security has been largely attained in our society, so that now we have mainly to concern ourselves with attaining "psychic security". As if *psychic insecurity* were something other than a direct reflection of prevailing *economic insecurity*! In January, 1957, a survey sponsored by the Twentieth-Century Fund

51. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, New York, 1955, pages 259, 261.

revealed that nearly three-fourths of the men and women in the United States over 65 years old have either no income, or incomes less than \$1,000 per year. Instead of taking cognizance of facts like these, Dr. Fromm with the most vapid insouciance proposes that: "The psychic task which a person can and must set for himself, is not to feel secure, but to be able to tolerate insecurity, without panic and undue fear".<sup>52</sup> Such callous and impertinent alienation were incredible did it not appear in print.

With the immediate transition to an economy of abundance the urgent issue of the day, and the possibility of an overnight transformation of industry by automation within grasp, and, in fact, well under way, Dr. Fromm is so alienated in factual information and social insight, that it appears to him that "it will still be many generations before such a point of automatization and reduction of working time is reached . . ."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, he estimates the time required to be a "few hundred years". And what is to transpire in the meantime? Dr. Fromm toys with a vague proposal which he gives the high-sounding name of "Humanistic Communitarian Socialism".

Can Dr. Fromm expect to be taken seriously, when he himself is not serious. How casually he whips up his mess of Communitarianism. This frothy dish is mostly concocted second-hand out of Claire Huchet Bishop's *All Things Common* from which Dr. Fromm abstracts an extensive and probably already obsolete description of a French co-operative watch-case factory. "Communities of work", like Boimondau, are apparently Dr. Fromm's alternative to the insanity of retrograde capitalism, which Dr. Fromm, in some of its superficial manifestations, it is true, recognizes and aptly describes. Quite typically, there is no evidence that Dr. Fromm ever took the trouble to investigate work communities first hand, or ever lived in them, or has the slightest intention of participating personally in the community-of-work movement.

In his chapter on "Sex and Character" Dr. Fromm opines that "because ethics was narrowed down to the small area of sexual behavior . . . the really significant ethical problems in human behavior were veiled",<sup>54</sup> these being "hate, envy, and ambition", also "lust for power", and the like. The causal relationship stated here is false and misleading. In this society all important ethical problems, including sexual problems, are veiled, and for the most practical of practical reasons. In fact "ethics" is precisely the veil that is employed to cover up and to disguise the inevitably horrible

52. *Sane Society*, page 196.

53. *Ibid.*, page 288.

54. *Sexual Behavior*, page 305.



features of human relations under conditions of scarcity and class exploitation. "Ethics" in practice turns out to be a fabric of hypocrisy and rationalization. As there is no real cure under capitalism for "hate, envy, and ambition" or "lust for power", the practitioners of "ethics" hide their impotence with floods of cheap moralizing. By this means the moralists seek ever to divert socially disturbing emotions away from their rational objects and to turn them back upon their source of origin.

Under our accustomed and accepted forms of human mass-sacrifice, whereby untold numbers are continually degraded, maimed, poisoned, and destroyed, it is only natural for individuals to seek to climb out of the pit<sup>55</sup> and to escape from the common misery by any means whatsoever. And as inevitably, those who are pushed back or are in danger of being pulled down, condemn the efforts and desperation of others as "ambition" or "lust for power". Also those who cannot escape, or who fall back into the pit by the same token are bound to "hate" and to "envy" those above them.

Thus only with the advent of abundance, when the pit is finally and eternally abolished, can the "ethical" problems generated under scarcity be solved. And when these problems dissolve, "ethics", that is to say, systems of ethical dissimulation and compulsion, will also vanish. When Dr. Fromm calls, as he finally does at one point, for a "re-evaluation of the moral aspects of sex",<sup>56</sup> the meaning should be plain. At once an admission that the old compulsions are slipping, it is also a bid to anchor them anew. His proffer is not impressive. So once, another standing by the ocean undertook to persuade the waves to roll back.

It was by no random, vulgar accident that morality, heretofore, has been identified in popular thinking largely with restrictions upon sexual behavior. Very early in cultural evolution, and under the compulsion of primeval scarcity, sexual restriction became one of the principal elements of social discipline. Human survival depended upon that discipline. Scarcity enforced a restrictive morality. Moral discipline now solidified into an autonomous, self-perpetuating system of social constriction currently threatens human survival. The much publicized and deplored "breakdown" in sexual morality, far from

55. The *pit* is no far-fetched symbol. Since trench warfare in World War I turned the European battle area into one vast hell-pit, reality has increasingly tended to reproduce this symbol in the capitalist retrogression. Examples include the police cellars of the Russians and their death ditches into which hundreds and thousands were driven to be shot and buried as they fell; the extermination basements of the Nazis and their underground furnaces for human incineration to the extent of millions of souls; and finally the instantaneous transformation of two Japanese cities into flaming infernos by American atomic bombs.

56. *Sexual Behavior*, page 307.

being a manifestation of decay and decadence is actually in large extent and in general direction a progressive development. However crude, uneven, and seemingly irresponsible, the "sexual rebellion" constitutes a break through of vital force that refuses to be bound by a strangulated culture. With the advent of material abundance and the consequent liberation of human desire, the despised flesh will come into its own; humans will achieve an innocence and freedom yearned for but never known; and sex will become pure and an *end* in itself as it ceases to be exploited as a *means* for anchoring economic restriction.

E. I. Pye

## PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETY

*Comments on the views of  
Clarkson and Fromm*

Clarkson's critique of Fromm's views is based on what he calls Fromm's "persistent efforts to desexualise" Freud's ideas. According to Clarkson, the present-day widespread "sexual misery" reflects the deep-seated social crisis of our time. Thus, the sexual question must be kept out of sight, and Fromm is only playing his part in preserving the *status quo* when he minimizes sexual factors. But, implies Clarkson, Fromm knows more than he is willing to tell. In an essay intended for professional "social scientists", Fromm permits himself an "indiscretion". This "indiscretion" is Fromm's remark, in passing, that:

Guilt feelings make a person prone to submit to authorities which want to use and subdue him for their own ends.

Clarkson calls this formulation an "acute insight", and proceeds to base on it a social theory which might be called "sexual determinism". He rapidly provides explanations for many "mysteries": the relationship between sexual repression and capitalism, the special rôle of religion, and even the details of the development of the psychoanalytic movement. However, Clarkson's constructions fail to hold up even under the most superficial scrutiny. And, as we shall see, Clarkson fails utterly to see the real point of Fromm's "desexualized" psychoanalysis.

Clarkson proposes to make use of Fromm's statement connecting

