



II. Responsibility in Fromm's Constellation of Totality

The charm of Erich Fromm lies in the fact that he is a complex dialectical thinker but a simple and clear writer. I hope to unravel in this chapter some of the turning points in his thinking on the issue of human participation, directionality, and responsibility. These three terms are essential to his constellation of totality. Fromm himself has faced the dilemma of whether to root responsibility in a human orderer or in a system of totality, and he chose the latter alternative. He derives subjectivity from objectivity and defines participation and directionality in terms of man's dialectical positionality in nature. These decisions involve him in certain philosophical perspectives of man which he himself has labeled humanism. I am concerned in appraising the philosophical implications for the human orderer and his responsibility in Fromm's humanistic system of totality.

There are several ideas that commit Fromm to a system of totality which he believes is model-free. One is the notion that each person carries within himself "all of humanity," that he is the bearer of the universal. Mankind, as a smaller totality, implicates the larger totality of nature which Fromm conceives dialectically. Hence responsibility, which symbolizes freedom rather than unfreedom, also bears the stamp of the universal. According to Fromm, "The humanistic conscience is its readiness to listen to the voice of one's own humanity and is independent of the orders given by anyone else."¹

Fromm has been a popular spokesman for the antiauthoritarian humanistic conscience which implicates mankind and the larger totality of nature. He himself has encouraged those elemental modes of response in man which support unitive experience and totalistic participation in life. But he has bound man to a system of dialectics which submerges man in a system of totality from which it is difficult to extricate the humanity of

¹ Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope* (New York, Harper and Row, 1968), 82.

man. This dialectical view of man is another feature which commits man to a system of totality rather than to the human orderer. Man is involved in nature but rises above it in reason, imagination, awareness, and transcendence. As a "freak of nature," man reflects that stage of evolution where life is aware of itself. This self-awareness need not imply a human orderer in existence. In fact, life's awareness of itself in its totality implicates a system of real and immediate totality. Man's amphibious nature is what gives him feelings of loneliness and separateness which he would overcome by committing himself to a system of totality that is more than a model of existence. This very precarious condition of man drives man for wholeness, to come up with a new sense of transcendent unity which is different from that original unity of existence that man had as a piece of nature. To seek that oneness with nature which primitive life experienced is a form of retrogressing. Fromm is interested in a new dimension of unity based on basic human awareness of totality in himself and beyond. This progressive search for wholeness in a real and immediate system of totality goes beyond mere animal survival. As Fromm views it: "The wish to be alive 'beyond survival' is the creation of man in history, his alternative to despair and failure."² Man's search for wholeness is not yet self-realization. Without a real and immediate system of totality which would crown this quest, man remains a bundle of contradictions with the ensuing feelings of separateness and loneliness. Man must be more than an animal to reach such integral unity with totality, yet he is not a human orderer that is self-directing in human participation. While he practices love and reason to search for this new equilibrium, he can reach authenticity only by being implicated in a system of totality. For it is the "whole man" that utilizes love and reason in its drive for unitive experience, and this implicates a human striving that has intimate ties with totality.

To be sure, man has a more dynamic role to play in such a system of totality, but he is not self-directing in his awareness, for such self-transcendence implicates man as being goal-directed to a system of totality. On his own, man is never free of the basic rift in his nature, between nature and his awareness of it, but in a system of totality it is possible for him to achieve a new sense of unity. That such a system of totality is real and immediate, not a model of existence, Fromm makes clear by emphasizing the significance of birth and of the continuous nature of the birth process in

² *Ibid.*, 86.



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life as the individual and mankind together strive to achieve a new sense of their wholeness.

The problem, then, which the human race as well as each individual has to solve is that of being born. Physical birth, if we think of the individual, is by no means as decisive and singular an act as it appears to be. . . . Actually, the process of birth continues. . . . Birth, then, in the conventional meaning of the word, is only the beginning of birth in the broader sense. The whole life of the individual is nothing but the process of giving birth to himself; indeed, we should be fully born, when we die—although it is the tragic fate of most individuals to die before they are born. . . . The birth of man began with the first members of the species *homo sapiens*, and human history is nothing but the whole process of this birth.³

This, then, is a third aspect in Fromm's effort to relate man to a system of totality that is more than model-free. Man is part of the creative process in relating his search for wholeness with a real and immediate system of totality. Fromm believes that no man escapes this alternative of regression and progression in his drive for wholeness, that "all essential human cravings are determined by this polarity."⁴ He concludes his book, *Man For Himself*, with the same message: "Man's main task in life is to give birth to himself, to become what he potentially is. The most important product of his effort in his own personality."⁵

As a neo-Freudian, Fromm emphasizes culture and history as significant parts of the new and real totality. Being a piece of nature is no longer a workable totality for man. The real totality has now the Marxian image stamped upon it. In order to claim immediacy and reality for this new sociohistoric totality, Fromm is eager to transfer the meaning of biological birth to sociohistoric continuity to give credibility to the process of creation that is model-free. The real nature of man is now newly and dialectically ordered. Man is goal-directed toward a sociohistoric totality. Since this goal-directedness is real and not a model of human participation of history, it determines all human purposes and achievements. Consequently, man's search for himself can only be accomplished by immersing himself in the creativity that is totality. This is what Fromm means by "life aware of itself" and by the injunction to "practice life." When man rejects Fromm's model of existence, he falls into the category of "alienation."

³ Erich Fromm and R. Xirau, *The Nature of Man* (New York, Macmillan, 1968), 309–10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁵ Erich Fromm, *Man For Himself* (New York, Rinehart, 1947), 237.

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Fromm has identified his model of existence with existence as existence. To arrive at the experience of oneness with all that exists (what I have called "participation in the whole") thus comes at a great cost. Fromm believes that it is still possible to have a notion of individuality as a separate entity in such a holistic context. Perhaps, but this is not the "human orderer" we have been seeking. Within the system of totality, man has the freedom of *alternativism*, which is a freedom determined by man's bio-social nature and life's awareness of the contradiction that man himself is in nature. This means that man has freedom within the structures of his existence. He has the freedom to respond to the system of totality (dialectically ordered) by affirming its directionality and responsibility as his own. The self achieves its real nature by making the system of totality its main responsibility. Here, freedom is nearly synonymous with destiny. This is brought out by the dialectical relation which holds that man is a "constellation of forces structured in a certain and ascertainable way" and "life aware of itself."

It is freedom rooted in transcendence, which is that universal urge in us that finds its total fulfillment in the system of totality. The primary directionality is this capacity for self-transcendence, which Fromm has taken from its theological and philosophical orbits of meaning and placed in the individual organism. This universal urge is similarly goal-directed toward totality. Since it provides the primary guidance for man's freedom, it can be said that freedom, too, is goal-directed toward the hoped for unity in the system of totality. Fromm remarks:

The basis for love, tenderness, compassion, interest, responsibility, and identity is precisely that of being versus having, *and that means transcending the ego*. It means letting go of one's ego, letting go of one's greed, making oneself empty in order to fill oneself, making oneself poor in order to be rich.⁶

THE PATH TO SELF-REALIZATION

Fromm's perspective requires that man give up his capacity for ontological self-direction to find realization in a system of totality. Man must empty himself of being a human orderer and make himself poor in this ability in order to find fulfillment in totality. Direct experience in the form of spontaneity is the bearer of the directives of totality and is the means to self-realization. Spontaneity can overcome the externality in alienating experiences. Such immediacy of self-expression enables one to confirm

⁶ Fromm, *Revolution of Hope*, 85–86.



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himself in the system of totality by affirming its intentions and structures and making them one's own.

The path to self-realization is discovered also by self-transcendence, in which human freedom is rooted. This universal urge is dialectically controlled and goal-directed to the sociohistoric totality. Self-transcendence is a primitive feature of man's essential nature, for it is that basic awareness of life that enables man to progress toward his destiny. It is a quality of organismic life, a finite and temporal notion, deepened by psychoanalytic meaning. In Fromm's perspective, it is the equivalent to "self-transformation," the vehicle by which one achieves the new unity. Might it not be an insecure wish, however, if man is a basic contradiction, with no deity to help him extricate himself from the contradiction that he is?

The search for wholeness by the act of love is central to Fromm's plan for self-realization. It is an elemental mode of response on the part of man, an "act of penetration," which grasps the meaning of union better than any other mode of response. Fromm claims that

In the act of fusion I know you, I know myself, I know everybody—and I "know" nothing. I know in the only way in which knowledge of that which is alive is possible for man—by the experience of union, not by any knowledge our *thought* can give. The only way of full knowledge lies in the act of love; this act transcends thought, it transcends words. It is the daring plunge into the essence of another person, or into my own.⁷

Speaking of the "limitations and dangers" of psychology, Fromm continues: "Psychology becomes a substitute for love, for intimacy, for union with others and oneself; it becomes the refuge for the lonely, alienated man, instead of being a step toward the act of union."⁸

Love, along with other spiritual qualities, is the "leap" to unitive experience, to encounter experience, to realization in a system of totality. It is thus a greater asset than knowledge in reuniting man with totality. If man is to continue the process of birth in self-realization, he should "take the leap into the act of commitment, concern, and love." Central to man's integrating experiences are the act, the commitment, the leap, the act of love, and, Fromm adds, "the responsible act of commitment."⁹ All these terms and phrases suggest an appeal to immediacy as the path to totality.

⁷ Erich Fromm, "The Limitations and Dangers of Psychology," in *Religion and Culture*, ed. by Walter Leibrich (London, SCM Press, 1959), 33–34.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

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Man's search for wholeness of experience is an immediate yearning. The cry of loneliness and separation is the basic motivation for unitive experience and totality.

The unconscious also has a great role to play in the path to self-realization. As Friedman suggests:

One source of such transcending . . . is his unconscious, which to Fromm is neither good nor evil, rational nor irrational, but both—all that is human. The unconscious is the whole man, the universal man, minus the social part. . . . "To become aware of one's unconscious," therefore, "means to get in touch with one's full humanity and to do away with barriers which society erects within each man and, consequently, between each man and his fellowman."¹⁰

When the concept of the unconscious is related to spontaneity, self-expression means a prepurposive search for wholeness and relatedness. It is prior to ontological self-direction, for man's elemental modes of response are separated from the human orderer. In fact, they implicate a system of totality which operates its intentions from below. The admonition to "practice life" can only mean a commitment to a system of totality prior to man's capacity for self-direction. The prepurposive model of totality is thus the lure for both the individual and mankind. The goal which Fromm envisions for humanity is to transform the unconscious to consciousness, to have rapport with the wholeness of existence. Spontaneity and productive work are essential to the realization of such union.

Spontaneity plays such a significant part in self-realization that it is essential to examine it more critically to see its implications for human responsibility. As a form of subjectivity, it relates to the concepts of the "whole man" and the system of totality. As a form of derived experience, it needs a system of totality to make it real, and, in turn, spontaneity is needed to breathe life into the abstraction of totality. As a form of subjectivity, it is itself in need of directionality and responsibility. Fromm's appeal for relatedness and union depends on these basic human sensibilities, on man's elemental modes of response. Unitive experience thus needs spontaneity to give it processive permanence in the midst of change and flux. In Fromm's system, however, a dialectical totality is in control of human sensibilities and not the human orderer. The latter is alienated from such elemental acts because the primary drive for the lonely and separate man is the need for wholeness. Because the human possibilities are prewired by the system

¹⁰ Friedman, *To Deny Our Nothingness*, 235.



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of totality, the self-expressions of spontaneity are proper responses for their realization.

The human orderer is thus dissipated in life's awareness of itself. The goals man makes are not his own. They reflect the basic schism of his nature. The choices he makes are similarly dominated by the alternatives that life sets up for him. His entire life, in fact, is controlled by the system of totality which has invested him with its sociohistoric possibilities. The primary task, then, is to reunite with the system of totality, to open the path to spontaneous experiences, the source of unitive experience in its myriad forms and the path to human responsibility. Spontaneity means that man is created from below and he must first be responsible to its directives *via* self-expression. However, one is not responsible for this creativity and self-expression. The act of continuous birth and the creation of ourselves is not our own. We can only be responsible to its directives. Thus Fromm's belief in the importance of spontaneity as a guide to life becomes the basis for the schizoid theory of responsibility I noted in other humanistic psychologists. Yet Fromm calls this form of immediacy "positive freedom" or "the process of growing freedom." It is thus a freedom of relating to a system of totality. Both the immediacy of self-realization and the immediacy of totality are thus free of model-making and abstractionism on the level of lived experience.

Perhaps the best way to focus on the problem of spontaneity is to see it as the central motivating factor of man in his relationship to life and joy. Fromm viewed this effort as "strengthening the life-loving side in oneself," as he characterized the biophilous conscience. Friedman's criticism of Fromm's perspective is very much to the point on this issue when he writes:

Fromm cannot capture *man* in the sheer love of life since man's relation to life is different from that of the rest of life. Life is not worth loving and enjoying unless implicit in the concept of life is living well. Growth is not necessarily a good unless implicit in the concept of growth is growth in a direction that realizes positive values. Fromm's syndrome of growth does indeed imply such values—love, independence, openness—but for that very reason his scheme is circular. His ethics of growth rests on another set of ethics which in turn he seeks to ground in the ethics of growth.¹¹

Fromm's image of man as a "completely human being" suffers from the same fate as the notion of growth. Neither can be stated in terms that are model-free or free of human valuation. There is an ideology critique in

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

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Fromm, as I noted earlier in Herbert Marcuse. They have in common the Marxian image of man as a social being. I am in agreement with Friedman's criticism of Fromm's position, but I would carry it a step further. One cannot identify his model of existence with existence as existence, as Fromm has done in relating man to the totality of life. This is the basic confusion. The further ethical conclusions follow this mistaken identification. It is necessary now to be more specific in criticizing Fromm's notion of spontaneity.

One, spontaneity is the servant of totality and does not liberate the human orderer, as Fromm supposes it does. He is correct in speaking of "our fear of spontaneity" as a modern problem of alienation. He deals with alienation largely in terms of external and cultural conditions. He offers a simplistic solution to it by turning inward, to existential subjectivity, to achieve the "act of oneness" with life or to have "a total intuitive grasp" of life in its lived presence. Fromm believes that subjectivity in the form of spontaneity is the bridge by which man transcends the ego and unites with a system of totality and has the benefit of the guidance of unitive experience. It is interesting, however, to note that spontaneity is characterized as being real only if it implicates a larger system of totality that is similarly regarded as being real.

Two, spontaneity is a prepurposive model of subjectivity. Subjectivity can also be viewed postpurposively. Fromm confuses these two models of spontaneity, just as he runs together existential and naturalistic modes of encounter, assuming they are one thing. Why it should be called a form of positive freedom and growing freedom is difficult to see because it is freedom within the structures of existence, freedom depending on the total person in a system of totality. It is goal-directed freedom, and spontaneity itself is goal-directed self-expression. Both come under the orbit of meaning that I would term "active passivity." In this context, spontaneity means receiving the directives from totality, to which one has committed himself, to which he is responsible. Man does not have the freedom for purposive participation in existence, that is to say, he is not self-directing in the structures of existence. The positive freedom that Fromm's productively oriented person has is free in relation to totality but not in relation to his purposive nature. Man's goal-direction to totality is prior to self-direction, as I have used the term.

Three, Fromm mentions the child and the artist as the great exemplars of spontaneity. The whole point about both is they bear no burdens of



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responsibility. The child is exempt from it and is not accountable till a certain age. When the artist endorses the pre- and postpurposive model of immediacy and creativity, he is not responsible in and for his creativity either. If he looks at creativity *from below*, then nature or the unconscious is responsible for the creative life. When he looks at it *from above* (in terms of the great analogy to God), then God or some Other is responsible for his creativity. Spontaneity means to practice something, to give self-expression, but not to be responsible for it, or for its participation, or for its directionality. Has Fromm given a premature discussion and solution of the relation of spontaneity to freedom? Or is this a calculated game for the system of totality as against man, the human orderer? In either case, self-realization through the system of totality is a precarious gain. If it is a gain at all, it is on the side of totality, as I noted. In terms with its linkage with responsibility, it can only mean “responsibility to.”

Four, spontaneity is not its own; it belongs either to the human orderer or to a system of totality. In fact, it is a way of breathing new life into an abstraction called totality. Thus to have a science of immediacy is somewhat premature because there is a prior problem that must be faced: how such a form of immediacy is related or identified with reality, and also whether spontaneity, as a direct form of experience, is controlled by our models of existence. Unless such freedom is first related to a human orderer and self-direction, its capacity for self-expression can only mean adherence to the directives of totality.

Five, the self-expression of our potentialities presupposes the self-directing character of purposive being. Otherwise there is no self to express itself. Since man's given potentialities are not his (but those of a given totality), he has some freedom only of actualizing what is there as given by totality. Potentialities, too, must then be related to directionality. Since Fromm does not relate them to man, he relates them to totality. He justifies all this by an uncritical belief in the immediate wholeness of experience, a romantic version of life. Unless we assume that in some real sense man is self-directing in human participation, the concept of self-realization is a myth. Unless man is self-directing in his potentialities, there is no way to firm up notions like the “acceptance” or the “spontaneous affirmation” of our powers. Human vitality in the form of creativity and dynamism is insufficient to account for human responsibility either for one's own life or for a system of totality. Perhaps Fromm's drive for perfectionism is so strong that the drive for wholeness must terminate in a real and immediate to-

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tality instead of a model of existence. Besides being a philosophic problem, it may also be a psychoanalytic one.

Six, if spontaneity is real only because subjectivity is real, and the latter is real as a completely human being only if a real system of totality is assumed, the model of creativity which follows this order of things must be prepurposive. This model requires that one be responsible to creativity or to spontaneous activity but not responsible for them. One can only be “genuinely related” to them but not a human orderer in such activities. This is the confluent, pragmatic model of participation where life cooperates with Life to sustain itself in meaning. That this leads to a schizoid theory of responsibility does not trouble Fromm in the least, as the following remarks make clear:

Ours is only that to which we are genuinely related by our creative activity, be it a person or an inanimate object. Only those qualities that result from our spontaneous activity give strength to the self and thereby form the basis of its integrity. The inability to act spontaneously, to express what one genuinely feels and thinks, and the resulting necessity to present a pseudo self to others and oneself, are the root of the feeling of inferiority and weakness. Whether or not we are aware of it, there is nothing of which we are more ashamed than of not being ourselves, and there is nothing that gives us greater pride or happiness than to think, to feel, and to say what is ours.¹²

But unless man is ontologically self-directing in integrating feeling with reason and the creative existence with his own notions of creativity, there is no point in talking about self-development. Thus in going beyond the subject-object split through spontaneity, Fromm, like Erikson, postulates an identity between the I-process and the social process and settles for man's relationship to the world in terms of “one structural whole.” But if this is a model of existence in competition with other totalisms which postulate other patterns of the part-to-whole logic, then the sacrifice of the human ordering capacity is in vain.

Seven, perhaps the most central meaning of spontaneity for Fromm is its commitment to relatedness, in which man “confirms himself” or identifies himself with totality. In his book, *The Revolution of Hope*, Fromm makes this rather explicit: that man has the “need to be related to man and nature and to confirm himself in this relatedness.”¹⁸ Prior to this remark, Fromm is impressed with Marx's position on the passions, which he defined

¹² Fromm, *Revolution of Hope*, 69.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*



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as “man’s faculties striving to obtain their object.” Fromm quotes Marx approvingly in the following manner:

In this statement, passion is considered as a concept of relation or relatedness. The dynamism of human nature inasmuch as it is human is primarily rooted in this need of man to *express his faculties* in relation to the world rather than in his need to use the world as a means for the satisfaction of his physiological necessities.¹⁴

This is a way of endorsing one’s model of goal-directedness with a claim to ultimacy by saying that such goal direction is the very necessity of human nature. But the Christian makes a similar claim about his God that a Marxian makes about the totality of history, that it is a real, immediate, and an ultimate totality. Every totalist who identifies his model with existence *qua* existence makes this claim of “necessity of human nature” at one time or another. It is a way of competing with other systems of totality. Spontaneity is merely an unjustified mediative device to help man “confirm himself” in this relational totality. This is what I have called a mistaken identification of one’s model of existence with existence itself. But this may be the requirement only of the pre- and postpurposive models of existence and not the demand of life itself. The fact is that “life aware of itself,” understood in terms of spontaneous awareness, may not be the most responsible life. Is this a form of masochism, to use one of Fromm’s favorite terms, to give away the directives of our purposive nature to a system of totality and then to plead for it in spontaneous receptivity?

Eight, the relationship of spontaneity to responsibility breaks down in Fromm’s perspective, just as it did in the first chapter on the radical youth, primarily for the reason that some sense of directionality is needed to relate to spontaneity for it to be the positive value that Fromm thinks it is. Friedman senses the problem in Fromm’s writings, but he comes up with a rather similar alternative himself. Friedman writes:

Insofar as the image of man is concerned—the direction to authentic personal existence—he has left us with an affirmation of man and of “self-realization” without the direction that would make these terms meaningful. . . . Growth is not necessarily a good unless implicit in the concept of growth is growth in a direction that realizes positive values. . . . We cannot define ourselves or our potentialities apart from the direction we give them, apart from what we become in relation to others. This direction, this becoming, implies a movement toward the authentic, toward values, toward the image of man.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Friedman, *To Deny Our Nothingness*, 237–38, 240.

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Friedman’s perspective is both a criticism of Fromm’s view, to the effect that he absorbs the image of man in a system of totality and thereby does not allow the “image of man” sufficient directive agency in human life, and an alternative to Fromm’s perspective in which the “image of man” is a vital directive force or power which functions “as a direction of movement which shapes the raw material of the given into authentic personal and human existence.”¹⁶

It is necessary to move beyond the perspectives of both authors in order to liberate the human orderer from systems of ultimate goal-directedness. The conflict between particular goal direction (Friedman) and more totalistic goal direction (Fromm) is not the central issue in this case. The problem is how to go beyond the “image of man” (the total man) and the “image of the universe” that has been identified with existence itself. Unless goal direction is related to ontological self-direction, we have no other alternative but to submerge man into a system of totality or to follow the various myths of the “whole man” in the history of thought. Both authors exemplify the confluent model of participation to varying degrees. Fromm commits the total man to a system of totality through spontaneity which invests man with wholeness. Friedman attributes directive power to images of man. The fact is that the human orderer is self-directing in both forms of totalism. Both relate significantly to man’s search for wholeness as a self-directive effort on the part of man’s being in the matrix of participation. The above views cannot integrate *responsibility for* with *responsibility to*, to human choices and goals. Fromm’s insistence that “there is only one meaning of life: the act of living itself” can only relate “life’s awareness of itself” to a form of “responsibility to.” This is insufficient for a “human” concept of responsibility. Such spontaneous activity is better than compulsive or automatic behavior. But unless man is self-directing in his activities (and the notion of “human agency” fails to qualify here), there is no way in which the self can make claims on responsibility and exhibit responsibility for his choices and goals for images of himself and systems of totality.

Nine, John Schaar’s critique of spontaneity in Fromm’s writings is primarily concerned with its shortcomings in terms of goal-directedness. It provides “no guides for the end of actions,” in fact, “it draws away from the aims of action.” Schaar comments: “The ethic of spontaneity, then,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.



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emphasizes the form of life and neglects its substance and aim.”¹⁷ That this concept provides an antidote to “conformity” is somewhat misleading, Schaar thinks, because spontaneity is still left with a lack of a positive vision of a good life. Thus he recommends a civilization that has a serious concern for goals and vision, that is capable of placing restraints and rules on spontaneous living. “Truly productive men do not live for living. They live for ends, for purposes and ends outside themselves.”¹⁸

The basic difference between Fromm and Schaar appears to be that Fromm recommends the ends and goals discovered in the stream of unitive experience and Schaar views them in a nonprocessive manner. Thus they adhere to two different models of goal-directed designs for living. Consequently, it is not enough to challenge spontaneity, to insist on the fact that it lacks the traditional meaning of purpose defined in terms of ends, aims, or goals. Schaar simply gives us another dimension of goal-directedness, or rather another arrangement of it. Both views fail to liberate the human orderer in the matrix of participation. They stop short of ontological self-direction that gives meaning to each model of goal-directedness, whether it is within the stream of experience or beyond it.

The positive freedom disclosed by spontaneity in Fromm’s writings, which is beyond the coercive character of instinctive mechanisms (the addition of Marx to Freud), is insufficient to state the case for the human orderer in the matrix of participation because it implicates a system of totality rather than man’s contribution to his becoming. Spontaneity thus lacks the notion of directionality in its self-expressive movements and a consideration of ontological purposiveness. The goals and choices this allows man are those provided by the structures of given existence. It is the freedom of self-expression in the structures of existence in terms of prewired possibilities. The determinism of possibilities or of human potentialities is more difficult to observe than a determinism that is fixed into patterns of actualities because one has to wait for the actualization of such potentialities to take notice of the determinism. If freedom of self-expression can only win its freedom by being bound to a real and immediate system of totality instead of a human orderer, it is a freedom that is inherent in the chromosomes and in the total process of history, in short, in the evolutionary process itself. Man can only be *responsible to* such a process but not *responsible for* it. It is not the freedom of man’s purposive nature to contribute to human be-

¹⁷ John Schaar, *Escape From Authority* (New York, Basic Books, 1961), 306.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

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coming, which shapes and forms the very character of unitive experience and schemes of totality.

The definition of spontaneity “as the total affirmation of the self” indicates the failure of Fromm to liberate the human orderer in the process of participation. The confirmation of such participation in the whole of existence is the work of an alleged real and immediate system of totality. It is not the human orderer that “confirms himself” in such relatedness but an individuality that lacks precisely this quality and ability to confirm itself. If it has this capacity to confirm itself in a system of totality, this is denied to it in theory. Thus the unity that spontaneity is said to introduce into human life, though warm and feelingful, is ignorant of the positive values which direct and give design to such unity. The postulate of a unitive spontaneity already assumes a human orderer in practice which is denied in theory. Fromm already makes a holistic use of purpose to introduce spontaneity as a unifying principle of selfhood. Such unity presupposes ontological self-direction and purposive participation in existence. Unless spontaneity belongs to a purposive being, and he is its gathering focus, it is incapable of manifesting either purpose or responsibility. It can warm the heart of man with unconscious designs for living. It does not, however, liberate the human orderer to be humanly aware of life as he participates in it. The limitations and dangers of this perspective will show themselves as we consider Fromm’s view of the relation of responsibility to the humanistic conscience in the pages which follow.

RESPONSIBILITY AND THE HUMANISTIC CONSCIENCE

Responsibility is a slippery term in Fromm’s constellation of totality. The author is so preoccupied with the relation of man to society and to totality, and of the relation of values to man’s inherent nature and to facts, that he neglects to relate these topics to the human orderer. If we raise the question, why should man be responsible “for himself,” we are at a loss to find a reply. When it is Fromm as pragmatist who is speaking, the answer appears to be that man is a problem-solver, that if he has the problem of loneliness and separateness he will go about solving it and look out for himself in the process. But aside from the fact that man is problem-oriented, there is no account given of why he should be so predisposed. There is one passage which anticipates Fromm’s reply, and it reads as follows:

It is one of the properties of the human mind that it cannot remain passive in the face of contradictions, puzzles, anomalies, and incompatibilities. Inevitably



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it wishes to resolve them. . . . Since the existence of such dichotomies generates such complex needs as the need to restore the sense of equilibrium between himself and nature and the need to understand the why and wherefore of the universe, an orientation or frame of reference becomes necessary. . . . [In order to be a problem-solver man must] acknowledge his fundamental aloneness and solitude in a universe indifferent to his fate, to recognize that there is no power transcending him which can solve his problem for him. Man must accept the responsibility for himself and the fact that only by using his own powers can he give meaning to his life. . . .¹⁹

If man is not a human orderer in the matrix of participation, however, how can he use “his own powers” for self-realization? Fromm’s obvious reply is that man makes an alliance with the system of totality that helps him utilize his own powers for his own good. But this already presupposes an identification of one’s model of existence with existence itself and an identification of one’s interests with the directives of totality. In short, as Friedman reminds us, “one must *already* have meaning in life, meaning that can be actualized through man’s meeting with life,”²⁰ in order to seek such a meaningful relatedness to a system of totality and identify with its intentions. There is prior purposive participation that is required to account for such identification. In short, man must be a human orderer before he can be a responder to the world or to a system of totality.

Another problem concerns what Abraham Kaplan states is the central problem in Fromm, namely, the tendency to deduce values from facts, from man’s assumed inherent qualities.²¹ When Fromm appeals to man’s “own powers,” he has in mind these inherent qualities, like in the passage above where he refers to the inherent disposition of the mind to be a problem-solver. It is, however, difficult to separate the goals of the mind from the human orderer. Consequently, I look at this as an awkward pragmatic terminology to account for self-direction in the practice of human participation where there is no such self-direction in theory. The mind is an adaptive function of life and not a self-directing agency. We have run into similar problems with John Dewey’s perspective. The fact is that man is more indeterminate in his basic nature than what Fromm is willing to account for in terms of his theory of positive freedom. Man is also more self-directing and purposive in participation than Fromm gives him credit

¹⁹ J. A. C. Brown, *Freud and the Post-Freudians* (London, Cassell, 1961), 153–54.

²⁰ Friedman, *To Deny Our Nothingness*, 233.

²¹ Abraham Kaplan, “The Heart of Erich Fromm,” *The New York Review of Books* (April 8, 1965), 33–35.

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for. Thus a theory of organic maturation cannot account for the liberation of the human orderer, who would, then, be in a position to help himself through his own powers. Fromm’s productive man is not a human orderer; he is part of a system of totality whose burden of responsibility he bears and carries out.

This is further documented by Fromm’s theory of freedom defined as alternativism. Of this, Kaplan says that it is “in striking accord with the conception of John Dewey. . . . The character-structure of the free man . . . is under constant pressure from social forces as well as from inner compulsions.”²² The theory of responsibility which results from such alleged positive freedom is the study of response-relations in terms of their consequences. Thus it suffers the fate of the confluent model of participation and of the pragmatic theory of responsibility noted earlier. If man is a part of a larger interactive network of things and receives primary guidance from unitive and totalistic experience, it is difficult to see how man can be responsible for himself. Thus the admonition that “man must accept the responsibility for himself” is a form of simplistic moralism. If he is not his own, how can he be responsible for himself? He can only be responsible to one of several alternatives that sociohistory provides for him. He can make his way in this structuralist context in terms of feelingful responsibility, but this is not the human orderer that I have described in previous chapters.

Moreover, becoming aware of what we truly are, in terms of our inherent qualities, has about it a certain quality of impotence when compared with the purposive model of participation. First of all, we do not know what we truly are in terms of our possibilities; we know these potentialities only after they have been actualized, when it is too late to do anything about them. Secondly, to become what we are may simply mean to conform to a model of existence rather than to actual laws of human nature. Thirdly, if the human orderer has no ontological status in such participation, how do we know what we are doing when we go through these procedures? There is another sense of impotence which Kaplan notes: “With Freud and Marx he shares the postulate that to understand is to transcend; consciousness of who and what we are reveals our true interests and directs us to their fulfillment.”²³ From my perspective, self-transcendence, as a form of goal-directedness, is more the servant of totality than man’s effort

²² *Ibid.*, 34.

²³ *Ibid.*, 33–34.



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to order his life or to integrate his experiences into meaning. In all these respects, then, the appeal to the facts of human nature or to its inherent laws for directionality is a way of obeying the dictates of totality, of being responsible first to the system of totality and of not being responsible for man's choices, goals, and designs for living.

The truth of the matter is that Fromm is more eager to exhibit the risks of the live creature in its confrontations with life than he is to show how he is responsible in those confrontations. Thus he is much closer to Freudian permissiveness than he would declare. The individual is basically a self-seeker in a larger structure of totality. This is an abstraction from the human orderer's capacity for self-direction. Since man is only a self-seeker, he cannot truly be *responsible for himself*. Whether man is a self-seeker or a self-giver in situations of relatedness, we must attribute the directionality of some such movement to the human orderer if the concept of individuality is to have any meaning at all. The issue of whether man should be for himself or for the other is posterior to the purposive being and his purposive participation in existence.

Fromm's positive image of man is in terms of productivity, which is giving birth to the potentialities inherent in human nature. A person that is productive is capable of exhibiting love relations and other spiritual qualities. In short, he is capable of showing care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge. He shuns all authoritarian paths. Responsibility in this humanistic context of productivity is defined as "my response to a request which I feel to be my concern." It is thus a *feeling* of responsibility. In terms of this humanistic conscience, man is a responder and an answerer. To be responsible is equated with "to be ready to respond." Responsibility is an aspect of the act of love. Both are conceived as elemental modes of response for which man is not the gathering focus as a constituent element of love. Responsibility can only be stated negatively, as a responsibility to one's feelings. Both love and responsibility are unifying principles in man's quest for wholeness. The ultimate lure for both is a system of totality that is regarded as real and immediate.

Perhaps we can get at the matter more quickly by Fromm's concept of "well-being" as it is perceived by the humanistic point of view. The most forthright comments on this theme are to be found in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*. His concept of well-being is reminiscent of Paul Tillich's method of corollation, where man asks the questions and religion gives the answers. In the case of Fromm, it is life that gives the answers. It is

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also reminiscent of James Bugental's position when Fromm defines well-being as being "in accord with the nature of man." This is well-being in terms of direct and immediate experience prior to ontological self-direction. It is reminiscent of Heidegger's system of Being minus its value connotations. In terms of Fromm's own words:

Well-being is the state of having arrived at the full development of reason: reason not in the sense of merely intellectual judgment, but in that of grasping truth by "letting things be" (to use Heidegger's term) as they are. Well-being is possible only to the degree to which one has overcome one's narcissism; to the degree to which one is open, responsive, sensitive, awake, empty (in the Zen sense). Well-being means to be fully related to man and nature effectively, to overcome separateness and alienation, to arrive at the experience of oneness with all that exists—and yet to experience myself at the same time as the separate entity I am. . . . If it is all that, it means also to be creative; that is, to react and to respond to myself, to others, and to everything that exists—to react and to respond as the real, total man I am to the reality, to everybody and everything as he or it is.²⁴

Relating oneself productively to world-totality means living according to that reality and its laws and acting within the structures of world-totality. In terms of the goals of psychoanalysis, such well-being is reached by the attempt "to make the unconscious conscious—or, to put it in Freud's words, to transform the Id into Ego."²⁵ Fromm continues:

If one pursues the aim of the full recovery of the unconscious, then this task is not restricted to the instincts, nor to other limited sectors of experience, but to the total experience of the total man; then the aim becomes that of overcoming alienation, and of the subject-object split in perceiving the world; then the uncovering of the unconscious means the overcoming of affective contamination and cerebration; it means the de-repression, the abolition of the split within myself between the universal man and the social man; it means the disappearance of the polarity of conscious vs. unconscious; it means arriving at the state of the immediate grasp of reality, without distortion and without interference by intellectual reflection; it means overcoming of the craving to hold on to the ego, to worship it; it means giving up the illusion of an indestructible separate ego, which is to be enlarged, preserved as the Egyptian pharaohs hoped to preserve themselves as mummies for eternity. To be conscious of the unconscious means to be open, responding, to *have* nothing and to *be*.²⁶

²⁴ Fromm, D. T. Suzuki, and R. De Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1960), 91–92.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.



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Such “full union, the immediate and uncontaminated grasp of the world,” is Fromm’s biggest illusion, for it identifies the model of existence with existence as existence, and this presupposes omniscience on the part of the psychoanalyst; it puts him in a class even beyond that of the “high priest.” It is quite obvious that the effort to deliver the unconscious into consciousness is an effort of a purposive being, a human orderer, which Fromm’s theory does not account for. It is an act of self-direction to relate oneself to the world that is model-free. Fromm, too, is obliged to view the wholeness of the universe through human participation, just like the rest of us. That is to say, he, too, must see the entirety of existence through a model of existence. To identify his model with existence itself is a claim of ultimacy for the model. One does not proceed from model-making to lived experience that is free of participatory abstractions, as Fromm supposes.

Fromm wants a humanism without a human orderer. This request itself is a request to be liberated by immersing oneself in a system of totality. It is a path that a purposive being takes on the level of primal encounter. The very effort to go beyond the subject-object split is doomed to failure because such a design is the work of a human orderer. His preference for meditative thinking that is imitative of Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* is a way of courting negative mysticism that is similarly immersed in immediacy. Whether man is a self-seeker “for himself” or an other-seeker or the seeker of totalisms, such movement presupposes not only directionality but, on the human level specifically, self-directionality in the matrix of participation. Thus Fromm wants human emancipation without a human emancipator. His concept of individuality lacks that which it needs most to operate as an individual, namely, self-direction.

Making the unconscious conscious does not get rid of the human orderer; it presupposes him as a purposive being. In transforming the id into the ego, the ego is not lost but finds itself in the process of self-direction. Fromm’s theory ignores this important fact. He prefers the prepurposive model of human directionality. This means giving ultimacy to the unconscious as a prepurposive source of directionality. Since it is the custodian of total man and total humanity, it appears to be the ultimate in directing man to a life of meaning. The cost of discipleship to the total man, the universal man, the world citizen, and to totality, is the negation of the human orderer as a contributor to his becoming in the matrix of participation. This is idiocy: to exchange the human orderer for the whole man. It is, in fact, a form of masochism, in which man gives up his powers to totality

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and then begs for them in return in order to transform himself through his own powers.

The presence of the human orderer is seen also in man’s search for unity by relating feeling and reason to obtain the image of the total man and of relating this partial totality to the real system of totality. Yet Fromm’s theory does not account for the human orderer in these moves of purposiveness. How does one love a whole? He loves it by loving his idea of it. Fromm loves his model of existence so much that he makes claims of ultimacy for it. The fact is that he cannot make the transition from his model of existence to existence itself by unitive experience, like the concept of the total man, because such unity is itself the product of purposive being. We participate in existence first before we come up with designs about the total man or the total universe. Because both of them are products of purposive participation and model-making by experience, we cannot claim a reality-status for them apart from man’s search for wholeness. It is because man is a purposive being that he goes on the quest for wholeness. This is not the request of a scheme of totality. The contrast between my view and Fromm’s is that Fromm prefers the directives of immediacy and the intentions of totality to those of man’s purposive nature in achieving the good life. I believe that what Fromm wants is impossible to design without a consideration of a purposive being.

Fromm’s dependence upon Heidegger and Zen Buddhism shows his preference for the directives of immediacy. But how can he judge the point that immediacy is of one color in both schools of thought? I think that immediacy comes out in two different models of direct experience, and these are controlled by two respective models of existence. They are two different kinds of encounter. Just because both deny the role of the human orderer in the sphere of immediacy does not necessarily make immediacy a unified sphere of being. To postulate such unity for immediacy is already a holistic use of purposive being in participation. Such unity does not follow from the “very nature of man.” It is this very nature of man that is itself the problem of this discussion. The “power to act creates a need to use this power” is true only for a purposive being. The use or misuse of power we cannot leave for immediacy to decide for us. Fromm’s pragmatic solution to this dictum—“the power to act creates a need to use this power”—is a meaningless gesture unless we can point to a human orderer who gives meaning to such acts. Otherwise we are merely a witness to simple physiological motions.



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Fromm's attempt to escape the omnipotentiality and narcissism of the ego leads him to a greater form of narcissism, to the omnipotentiality of a system of totality. It is not so much the love of life that drives him, but the love of a model of existence which he equates with existence as existence. This needs psychoanalytic treatment as much as the wayward characteristics of the ego. Fromm mistakes the model of existence with "ways of being." Thus when one *participates in the whole*, or when one experiences the "total experience of the total man" (and shows an appreciation of the unconscious as the voice of total humanity), this is already an abstraction from man's purposive participation in existence; it involves all sorts of mistaken identifications, hypostatizations, and reifications. Every totalist loves his model of totality so much that he wishes it to be cosmic reality itself. But such a model of existence, which allegedly solves the subject-object split, is only a reality-claim, a claim of ultimacy for one's model, a feeling of reality (or reality-feeling). It is the spurious claim of "an uncontaminated grasp of the world," when all along it is fashioned and formed by purposive being in the process of participation. Like Bugental, Fromm discounts the Otherness of "the Being of beings" in Heidegger's thought, which oppresses the individual in being's goal direction to Being.

Such concepts as love, care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge that make up the characteristics of the productive man and productive thinking, as in *Man For Himself*, are in essence the guardians of man's goal-directedness to the system of totality. Man can only be "for himself" through a given totality. In this context, responsibility is a unifying principle in the system of totality. It has a guide other than man the human orderer. In such responsibility, man does not confront the human orderer either in himself, in society, or in the schemes of totality that have dominated the history of thought. Its basic meaning is that of "response," which is a hangover from totalistic thinking about man.

The upshot of this digression on the "well-being" of man is that the "humanistic conscience" implicates a system of totality more valuational than Heidegger's ontological approach to totality and more existential than Dewey's naturalistic approach to the problem. Fromm does not even trouble himself to differentiate between such divergent models of encounter as we find between Heidegger and Dewey. He lumps them together indiscriminately to arrive at a constellation of totality which is still another attempt to state the case for a third system of totality. Neither is Fromm concerned with a discussion of a common structure among such

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systems of totality which his position obligates him to clarify. These are some of the basic assumptions underlying the notion of the humanistic conscience, which is "our own voice," the "voice of the human race," the voice of "unitive experience," and the voice of a "real and immediate totality." It functions as a magic talisman to overcome human alienation in a fragmented world. But Fromm is unaware of the new "repressedness" and "alienation" created by his narcissism for a real and immediate totality, which the humanistic-conscience is responsible to but not responsible for.

Fromm's frame of orientation, frame of devotion, frame of commitment, is not fashioned and formed by purposive being. Is it a new form of authoritarianism that has escaped the author's attention in his concern for humanism? I would call it ideological authoritarianism. Fromm has struggled so long with the problem of authoritarianism that this form of it may be a residue of his thought, scars of the battle. He has fought it so long he can no longer recognize its subtler versions. Unless man as a human orderer is the source and origin (the *fons et origo*) of such totalistic models of existence or systems of responsibility, we have to face the prospect of ideological authoritarianism. Once we disconnect man's search for wholeness (via self-direction) from totalisms, we are on the way to being submerged in systems of totality.

Fromm's "constellation of totality" is a syncretistic product of many schools of thought. We noted its pragmatic and existential sides. There is also the modern vitalist or romanticist view of wholeness to which Fromm subscribes. Of this, Bruce Wilshire writes:

Not just the concept of the whole, but the whole in its concrete immediacy of nature, not just accurate knowledge about nature, but sensuous intuition of it and active involvement within it as process—that is the earmark of the romantic.²⁷

Is this man's claim of closeness to experience or the demand of totality upon man's search for closeness and wholeness? Fromm and the romanticists take the latter. The humanistic conscience, which is the source of responsibility, implicates this immediate system of totality, where immediacy that is model-free is equated with totality. In Fromm's view, this leads to an uncontaminated version of the image of man and of the entire universe.

²⁷ Bruce Wilshire, *Romanticism and Evolution* (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), 15.



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But can the mind and imagination of man come up with more than a model of existence in its entirety? Fromm subsumes the reason under the whole man theme. The whole man is master of its reason, then. Does this come any closer to equating the immediacy and wholeness with cosmic reality? The reply is obviously negative in the light of my theory. There are many reasons for its rejection. Even if the mind is a “slave to the idea of unity” in its “insatiable search” for “all possible experience,” this is no guarantee of the existence of totality and does not warrant the identification of immediacy with absolute being. Konstantin Kolenda remarks that this goal of the mind, to embrace “all there is,” is fraught with difficulties in the Christian scheme of religious totality.²⁸ I would say, in addition, that this peril exists for every totalist, not only the religious totalist. The “gap between conception and existence” cannot be bridged by the mind, even when, as in Fromm’s case, the whole man is in charge of the mind. Fromm’s *psychological misuse* of reason’s striving for wholeness of knowledge is that he identifies this model of reason about the wholeness of life with life itself. I have suggested, on the other hand, that the mediating link between thought and existence is the “model of existence,” which never identifies model with existence itself but only provides correlations with it in participation. “Participation in the whole” is thus an abstraction of purposive participation in existence. The gap between concept and existence is not closed by a “mistaken identification,” but there is correlation and commerce between the two by the mediating link of “model of existence.” This is the product of purposive participation in existence, in which purpose has an equal share in primal experience. Such model-making by participation is as close as we can get to life, in our love of life and in our strivings for systems of totality. Purposive participation is thus the deepest, kind of lived experience we can have. Philosophies of encounter which advocate more intimacy with existence, than such models of existence, are caught up in the narcissism and omnipotentiality I noted above in Fromm’s totalism. Fromm is correct to relate the mind’s search for universality with man’s entire search for wholeness, but he is wrong in going from that

²⁸ Konstantin Kolenda, “Thinking the Unthinkable,” *Journal For The Scientific Study of Religion* (Spring, 1969), 72–78. The author concludes that religion need not “postulate an entity which purports to answer to the highest demands of reason.” Perhaps this is also the reply to Fromm: that humanistic psychology need not postulate a Whole, Totality, or Unity (which are logical notions), to answer to the highest demands of reason. When this is practiced by psychology, the “whole man” becomes the servant of totality.

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resultant model of existence to existence itself. The “whole in its concrete immediacy of nature” is already a model of existence. One can go beyond it only at his own peril, by claims of ultimacy for his model. Fromm shares this illusion with romanticism and vitalism.

Can the mind come up with more than a model of existence? Can the perspectival participator in existence come up with more than a model about the whole of existence? My reply to both questions is in the negative. What each kind of experience gives us is a model of ultimate goal-directedness which requires the metamodel of purposive being in participation even to operate. Thus man is responsible for systems of ultimate responsibility. The “humanistic conscience,” as Fromm defines the notion, does not make man human; it makes him “whole.” Wholeness in itself is neither human nor inhuman. It is what we do with it in our purposive being that makes it human or inhuman. If man is somehow made responsible for such total systems of responsibility, wholeness can have a wholesome effect upon human life. However, if man is submerged in systems of totality (which define his individuality and humanity prior to his purposive nature), there is no way to claim that wholeness is a “humanizing” factor in life.

The conclusion I reach is that Fromm’s constellation of totality cannot be the source of human responsibility because it is itself only a model of existence and not a real and immediate wholeness equated with the entirety of the universe. Thus the replacement of the id by the ego in a system of totality does not make man any more *responsible for* systems of responsibility than the id did before it. Turning the unconscious into conscious considerations, if the consciousness is dominated by the structures and processes of totality, is an academic solution.



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The Crisis of Responsibility

Man as the *Source* of Accountability

by William Horosz

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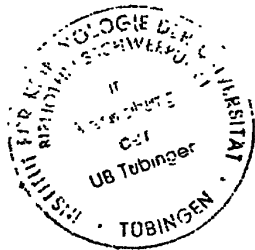
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To My WIFE, for love and care, for having discovered that marvelous alchemy of blending human vitality with responsibility.