



Chapter 3

Alienation

Chapter 2 examined the nature of character and freedom in man. The productive character orientation and positive freedom are essentially connected. The productive man is the free man. Chapter 3 will explore the obvious question, which is, why are there so few productive men in modern society? Fromm's answer is simple and direct: productive men are few because modern society is sick. The name of the illness is alienation. Man's alienated condition prevents him from responding to the real needs of society, his neighbor, and himself.

Moving directly into the theme, Fromm (1966b) defines the sickness of alienation and modern society:

By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become . . . estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts--but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced; with the senses and with common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside productively [p. 111].

The Old Testament concept of idolatry is utilized by Fromm (1966a) to clarify his understanding of alienation.



He maintains that at root they are the same thing. Idolatry is primarily denounced by the prophets, not because it permitted the worship of several gods instead of one, but because, as Fromm (1966a) states:

. . . . Man spends his energy, his artistic capacities on building an idol, and then he worships this idol, which is nothing but the result of his own human effort. His life forces have flown into a "thing" and this thing . . . is something apart from himself, over and against him, which he worships and to which he submits The idol represents his own life forces in alienated form [p. 112].

As pointed out in his biographical notes, Fromm was steeped in the Old Testament tradition. His Jewish background gave him a profound understanding of biblical concepts. Nevertheless, it is well to measure him against the scholars in the field. John McKenzie (1963), an outstanding Old Testament scholar, cites Albright's archaeological finding that Hebrews did not make images of Yahweh and then concludes:

. . . . Here is one of the most striking and distinctive features of Yahwism: there is no other god in the ancient world without his image No convincing reason for the absence of images of Yahweh has been adduced except the Hebrew belief that Yahweh could not be represented by image. He was transcendent, "wholly other" [p. 141].

McKenzie (1963) closes his argument concerning the nature of idolatry by two summary conclusions:

This was the error of polytheism, that it attributed divinity and personality to a subject which did not possess it, which had, indeed, no reality, no substance. . . . No conclusion is possible except that Semitic polytheism believed in some sort of identity between the image and the deity beyond that of representation [p. 144].

The exegesis above supports Fromm's contention, if only indirectly. It is obvious that polytheism invested gods with power and magic; power they in no way had, and magic they in no way could exercise. These were pure projections, and robbed the believer of his own energy and talent. What the idol gains, man loses.

Moreover, Fromm (1966a, p. 113) states that monotheism is the idea that God is indefinable and infinite. Since man is made in God's image, he too is the bearer of infinite qualities. While this appears to be psychologically sound, Fromm's analysis, as he well knows, is not in line with traditional Old Testament theology. The God of the Hebrews was believed to be a transcendent being, existence itself. He is the source of all being, is infinitely more than a mere symbol of man's power. When Fromm (1965b) states the opposite, he is referring to that subtle core of man's progressive and productive drive of which he feels humanistic religions are a part:

. . . . Inasmuch as humanistic religions are theistic, God is a symbol of man's own power which he tries to realize in his life, and not a symbol of force and domination, having power over man [p. 37].

An understanding of alienation will demand a closer scrutiny of the religious experience itself. This will be done further along in the discussion. For the present, it is sufficient to point out two things about Fromm's thought. First, for Fromm (1965b, p. 37), humanistic religion aims at achieving man's greatest strength, his greatest self-realization. Monotheistic religions themselves have, to a



large extent, regressed into idolatry. Man's power of love and reason he projects unto God, then making a virtue of obedience and helplessness, he begs them back again. This process puts man out of touch with himself. Second, Christianity does not escape the same idolatrous indictment. Fromm (1965b, p. 35) maintains that early Christianity looked to the enriching and individuating of the believer, but this soon deteriorated into a grab for power and demand for submission. Luther and Calvin are seen as a summit in this alienating process. They render man absolutely powerless.

Man's original "break" with nature, as discussed in Chapter 1, is seen by Fromm as man's psychological "birth." This birth of the human race is quite analogous to the birth of an individual. He views the birth of the human race and the birth of an individual as a process. In the process, man finds himself torn in two directions. There is the drive, which Fromm views as an extension of history, moving through stages of growth toward the full realization of man's potentials. However, countering this drive, there is the disruptive influence making man not only feel unbearably alone, lost and powerless, but also holding out the possibility of man regressing toward the original state of unity with nature. This possibility leads away from life toward death.

Basically, his understanding of alienation comprises both tendencies and can be seen in terms of a fundamental



and disturbing question. This question life poses to every man at his birth. What is the question? Here is Fromm's (1970) formulation of it:

. . . . The question is: How can we overcome the suffering, the imprisonment, the shame which experience of separateness creates; how can we find union in ourselves, with our fellowman, with nature [p. 87]?

It should be noted that man's answer to the above question forms the balance of this chapter. In a real sense, an individual's answer is not as essential as his question. There is only one question, but its formulation is exceedingly difficult. Modern society, as the following discussion will indicate, aims at foiling man's attempt to frame a question concerning his essential nature and his basic needs. This is in line with the discussion earlier on the nature of freedom. There, Fromm understood "questioning" to be an essential part of man's nature. Essentially, man is one, life-long, ongoing question aimed at resolving the contradiction inherent in human nature which will lead to the actualization of his human potential.

However, while there is only one question, Fromm's (1970) analysis indicates two basic answers:

. . . One is to overcome separateness and to find unity by regression to the state of unity which existed before awareness ever arose The other answer is to be fully born, to develop one's awareness, one's reason, one's capacity to love, to such a point that one transcends one's own egocentric involvement, and arrives at a new harmony, a new oneness with the world [p. 87].

Alienation, then, can be either a negative or positive answer. The concept not only embraces the possibility



of regression, but also applies to a necessary stage in the progress toward maturity, comprising one's awareness of self as an individual. Both aspects of alienation, regression and self-awareness, demand extensive examination.

Alienation and Regression

The use of the concept of alienation for regressive as well as progressive answers to the fact that alienation tends to confuse rather than clarify. Hammond (1965) underscores this inconsistency in Fromm's work by turning to his treatment of religion:

He [Fromm] understands religion as an attempt to answer the problem of human existence. Religion is the formalized and elaborate answer to man's existence. However, religion may give two fundamentally different answers to man's problem: the progressive and the regressive answer [p. 67].

Hammond's assessment is borne out by Fromm's (1970) own findings:

. . . One answer is to go back to prehuman, pre-conscious existence, to do away with reason, to become an animal, and thus to become one with nature again. . . . The other pole of religion is represented by all of human existence, by developing the specifically human potentiality of reason and love, and thus by finding a new harmony between men and nature--and between man and man [pp. 93-94].

The distinction is clear. Alienation, in the negative and regressive sense, is man's attempt to escape from the pain and helplessness created by the absence of paradisiacal harmonies. Fromm (1970, p. 103) declares authoritarian religion, repression, neurosis, and psychosis

are but a few common forms of escape. Thus, any attempt to fall back on destructive impulses or find symbolic security in the womb or death, are totally incompatible with the goal of man's nature.

Repression

Repression is a form of regression. Fromm (1967, p. 288) refers to repression as a process which does not permit an impulse to enter the realm of consciousness or quickly remove the experience of the impulse from awareness. Thus, man is unconscious of valuable and necessary experiences which greatly limit his awareness. Fromm (1970, p. 98) indicates that a more complete view of the process reveals that reality is not only prevented or limited in man's awareness, but delusions and fictions are funneled in its place. Man's conscious life is the product of an elaborate social filtering process which molds and determines the content of that awareness. Fromm (1970, p. 99) finds the better part of modern man, needs and goals which are human and humane, repressed.

All forms of regression are the result of repression, and repression in any form is evil and archaic. Moreover, Fromm (1967) feels that repression, when it takes the form of neurosis, is a "symptom of moral failure . . . the specific expression of moral conflict [p. 5]."

A backhanded and more detailed investigation of this concept is found in the last section of this chapter.



There, Fromm's (1970) concept of "de-repression" is discussed in terms of increasing the margin of self-awareness or "making the unconscious conscious [p. 95]."

Repression and human relatedness. Fromm's diagnosis of the modern condition is more than mere sociological imagination. Scharr (1964) gives three reasons:

. . . The first is his appreciation of the problem of the present as a problem of history The second is . . . the ability to detect the social causes of personal troubles. The third is his possession of a body of convictions . . . about the relations between character and social structure [pp. 168-169].

Fused together, these three elements form the basis of Fromm's method of diagnosis. With this compound, Fromm (1966b) attempts to measure the influence a given society has on the development of the individual:

. . . The problem, then, of the socio-economic conditions in modern industrial society which create the personality of modern Western man and are responsible for the disturbance in his mental health requires an understanding of those elements specific to the capitalistic mode of production, of an "acquisitive society" in an industrial age [p. 80].

The repressive influence of alienation in modern society is particularly pernicious. The whole of man's modern world is imperceptively but steadily being poisoned. It is found in man's work, his politics, his consuming attitude, his reverence for the "machine," in his relations with others, and himself. Fromm (1968) indicates that man's real enemy is the advance of a dehumanizing technology. The scientific truth, which assured man's power over nature, is also heralding his destruction. One-sided emphasis on

technology and material consumption promises to force a radical change in man--a change that will cause him to lose touch with himself and with life. Man's machine has become so powerful that it has developed its own program, which now determines man's own thinking. Fromm (1968) reasons that it is neither Communism nor Facism which currently threatens man, but a new horror:

. . . It is a new specter: a completely mechanized society, devoted to maximal material output and consumption, directed by computers; and in this social process, man himself is being transformed into a part of the total machine, well fed and entertained, yet passive, unalive, and with little feeling. With the victory of the new society, individualism and privacy will have disappeared; feelings toward others will be engineered by psychological conditioning and other devices This new form of society has been predicted in the form of fiction in Orwell's 1984 and Aldous Huxley's Brave New World [p. 1].

The economic and social features which characterize the technological revolution are for the most part regressive answers to the alienating influence of the new capitalism. Fromm's view of the nature of work is one such example. Fromm (1966b) understands work not only to be an inescapable reality for man, but:

. . . Work is also his liberator from nature, his creator as a social and independent being. In the process of work, that is, the molding and changing of nature outside of himself, man molds and changes himself [p. 159].

Work in the new technological society has lost its creative and molding influence. Where labor was once satisfying and pleasurable in itself, it now becomes little more than a distraction to offset boredom. By way of



contrast, Fromm (1966b) indicates the meaning of work for the ordinary factory worker:

... He needs his work in order to make a living, but his role is essentially a passive one. He fulfills a small isolated function in a complicated and highly organized process of production, and is never confronted with "his" product as a whole . . . His work can be defined as the performance of acts which can not yet be performed by machines [p. 161].

Fromm (1966b, p. 164) ends his treatment of work by observing that boredom and meaninglessness are not even the worse reaction to man's alienated labors. Hostility is enjoined for many men because they feel prisoners to their business and their commodities, and depreciated because of the fraudulency of their products and exaggeration of their claims. These men hate consumers and competitors alike. For the most part, all this hatred and contempt is unconscious, and various types of regressive escapes assure it will remain so.

The same kind of idolatry-alienation is present in politics. Facism, according to Fromm (1966b, p. 208), was the product of masses of men abdicating their powers to leaders who were to work miracles in their behalf. The Second World War indicates the danger of such fascination. However, political leaders in Western republics gain position through apathy and indifference. Our politics have become just another commodity, ready for quick and unconscious consumption. Modern elections certainly bear this out. Television packages a candidate like a bar of soap or a new automobile. Fromm would surmise that there is



hardly a difference except the majority spend a good deal more time picking a new car than a president. Fromm (1966a, pp. 166-170) questions how the masses can press their will when they have no will of their own, or if their will is merely an echo of those around them--a product of the machinery of opinion formation.

In this connection, Fromm (1966a) turns his attention to bureaucratization: "one of the most significant phenomena in an alienated culture . . . Bureaucrats are specialists in the administration of things and men [p. 116]." In reality bureaucracy pervades the whole structure of modern society. Not only the government and cooperative-style business, but education, labor unions, political parties, and even religious life suffer the effects of people being looked on as things rather than as individuals. Thus, through a necessary abstractification, people are objects to be administered. The bureaucrat must be impersonal; he must manipulate people as though they were figures or things.

Nowhere, according to Fromm, is alienation more in evidence than in the sphere of consumption. Consumption is founded on the principle of profit rather than usefulness. Uselessness, the inability to withstand ordinary wear, is built into many commodities.

Moreover, the consumer himself seldom answers his real needs. The act of consumption should be a meaningful, human, productive experience. However, consumption is

essentially the satisfaction of artificially stimulated fantasies. Thus, the toothpaste, the mouth wash, the make and model of automobiles are produced to answer needs which are artificially developed. Fromm (1966a) quotes Marx to substantiate his case:

. . . Each person speculates to create a new need in the other person, in order to force him into need dependency, to a new form of pleasure, hence to his economic ruin With a multitude of commodities grows the realm of alien things which enslave man [p. 123].

No wish must be frustrated, no gratification can afford delay. Fromm (1966a) indicates the result is an orgy of consumption which dominates leisure and even dreams of heaven:

. . . Modern man, if he dared to be articulate about his concept of heaven, would describe a vision which would look like the biggest department store in the world, showing new things and new gadgets, and himself having plenty of money with which to buy them. He would wander around open-mouthed in this heaven of gadgets and commodities, provided only that there were ever more and newer things to buy, and perhaps that his neighbors were just a little less privileged than he [p. 123].

Regressive answers to the fact of alienation not only manifest themselves in relationship with others, but also with oneself. Repression--man out of touch with himself--signals the beginning of mental illness. Fromm (1966a, p. 114) teaches that the difference between neurosis and psychosis is how far out-of-touch a person is from himself. The number of neurotics are legion in comparison to mere handfuls of psychotics. The neurotic isolates some secret striving from himself. For example, some irrational



impulse for power or blind passion to acquire money pushes him from behind, so to speak. The impulse or passion draws a great deal of energy and creativity. His vision is greatly narrowed; it is as if he worships power or money. The neurotic person is alienated against himself. The insane person is absolutely alienated; he is completely out of touch with himself; he does not feel himself to be the center of his own experience.

Repression in religion. Fromm (1970) views religion that is shared in communion with others as creating feelings "of reasonableness and security," but when not shared, "when the regressive wishes are in contrast . . . to the existing culture, the secret, individual religion is a neurosis [p. 91]." Moreover, Fromm (1970) states that the same is true for every individual:

. . . In order to understand the individual patient--or any human being--one must know what his answer to the question of existence is, or to put it differently, what his secret, individual religion is, to which all his effort and passions are devoted [p. 91].

The distinction is that the neurotic is led away from his own sense of power and experience, whereas, the religious man, with a progressive orientation, is brought closer to himself. Fromm's (1966b, p. 25) concern about the religious phenomenon is the influence it has on man's psychic development and the fact that all men, whether they admit it or not, have religious needs that must be expressed in some fashion. Fromm's (1965b) definition of religion is "any

system of thought and action shared by a group which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion [p. 21]."

Fromm's fundamental dispute is not with religion in itself but idolatrous religion founded on submission. Fromm (1966b) states that "every act of submissive worship is an act of alienation and idolatry [p. 113]." Historically, the basis of man's relations with God was certainly one of submission. This traditional concept of God perpetuated the idea of superiority and inferiority which Fromm finds so alienating. His comments may well be borne out. The idea of the believer reducing himself to nothing could work against man's need for growth and independence. Leslie Dewart (1966) insists that the traditional concept of God, heavily influenced by the Hellenic culture, is in rapid transition:

The hellenic cultural form of christianity, however, has made it difficult for us to realize the difference between man's relations with the God of metaphysics and his relations with the God of the Christian religion. Conceiving the Christian God as the First and Supreme Being of Greek metaphysics . . . we have consequently conceived the fundamental relation between God and man to be one of ascendance-submission. But as Christian theism is dehellenized the christian faith may recast the meaning of religion in terms that do not at all imply God's ascendancy over man, or man's submission to God [p. 200].

The question of religion is vital to Fromm's position on man and ethic. Religion, according to Fromm (1969, p. 97), had its humanizing influences on the history of mankind. Much of its tradition is humanistic in the

highest form. Nevertheless, Fromm (1966b, p. 46) assumes conceptual and historical events to be essentially the projection or fantasies of man's inner needs and impulses. It must be kept in mind that Fromm's personal position concerning a theistic faith is not germane to the question of the religious experience per se. What is important is the depth of his insight into man's religious experience. The discussion of religious alienation hinges on the soundness of Fromm's psychological evaluation of that experience.

Fromm (1969) clarifies his position:

. . . Is religious experience necessarily connected with a theistic concept? I believe not; one can describe a "religious" experience as a human experience which underlies, and is common to, certain types of theistic, as well as nontheistic, atheistic, or even antitheistic conceptualizations. What differs is the conceptualization of the experience, not the experiential substratum underlying various conceptualizations . . . One can speak of a theistic as well as of a nontheistic religious experience [p. 47].

To avoid confusion, Fromm (1969, p. 49) refers to a religious experience, no matter what the conceptualization, as the x experience. It is obvious that Fromm's observations here point merely to the phenomenological and cultural fact of the x experience. Nevertheless, it would appear that there is the same sort of fundamental attitude toward totality and resolve toward existence, regardless of the specific content of that attitude. What does the x experience involve? Fromm's (1969, pp. 49-50) explanation can be summarized briefly. One who experiences life as a problem, and has a hierarchy of values, which places

spiritual over material concerns, has the basis of the x experience. He also views his fellowman as an end, never as a means, and empties himself (his ego) in order to fill himself with the world. Thus, the x experience permits one to transcend his own ego, leaving behind the prison of one's separateness and selfishness.

It is worthwhile to contrast the content of Fromm's x experience with the findings of Novak (1965), a leading Catholic theologian:

. . . The decision to believe, made with authenticity, appears to have roots other than emotional weakness or monistic prepossessions. The decision to believe (the religious attitude) springs from a decision about what in human experience is to be taken as the criterion of the real. As each man is, so will he decide what is most real in human experience. According to that decision, he will shape his own identity [p. 135].

But, of course, Novak (1965) states that the same is true of the decision to disbelief, because:

. . . Belief is opposed to unbelief as one radical interpretation to another The serious non-believer and the serious believer share a hidden unity in spirit. When both do all they can to be faithful to understanding and love, and to the immediate task of diminishing the amount of suffering in the world, the intention of their lives is similar, even though their conceptions of what they are doing are different. Such a unity in the intention of two lives seems in the end to be more profound than a unity on the conceptual level. Some Christians . . . feel closer to non-believers like Albert Camus than to other Christians whom they know, in their understanding of the fundamental dynamism of the human spirit [pp. 189-190].

The salient point is that atheism and theism have certain areas of contact. When the believer or nonbeliever consciously and resolutely embraces his position, that

embrace is an act of faith. Fromm would not shy away from the phrase, "an act of faith," because it implies a religious commitment in the sense that it is an existential (and therefore essentially humanistic) commitment. Thus, it matters little whether that commitment is called humanistic or religious. What is important is that, in the order of reality, theism and atheism differ in content but not in form; that is, they share the same ground upon which commitment is exercised.

There are any number of regressive, unprofitable answers to the fact of alienation. The common core to all these phenomena--the worship of idols, the idolatrous worship of God, the worship of a political leader, the state, and technology--is the process of alienation. Fromm (1966a) concludes:

. . . It is the fact that man does not experience himself as the active bearer of his own powers and richness, but as an impoverished "thing" dependent on powers outside of himself, unto whom he has projected his living substance [p. 114].

Alienation and Self-Awareness

Alienation and regression were found to be inseparable and yet, not coextensive concepts. With this distinction in mind, the connection between alienation and self-awareness will now be explored. While alienation can have reference to either positive or negative answers to human development, it is perhaps not as accurately applied to regressive answers. Hammond (1965) concludes that the

term is most appropriately used as a "description of man's separateness and aloneness because of self-awareness [p. 69]." It is those factors which estrange man, making him feel isolated and distinct, which look to his positive growth. His awareness of his limitations demands the attempt to offset those selfsame limitations. Nevertheless, there is a distinction between awareness and alienation. Awareness is not alienation per se, but rather alienation is the limiting of awareness.

The achieving of self-awareness involves three aspects: the development of objectivity, overcoming narcissism, and the distortion suffered by consciousness through society.

The first aspect, the development of objectivity, removes the child some distance from himself. Fromm (1971a, pp. 73 & 75) contends that this is in contradistinction both of the fetus' life in the womb, and the symbiotic relationship developed shortly after birth. Fromm (1970) states there is neither subject nor object:

For the new born infant there is as yet no separation between the me and the not me. This separation takes place, and the final achievement is expressed by the fact that the child can say "I" [p. 128].

Absolute narcissism of uterine existence and the total symbiotic relationship of the newborn infant meant, in terms of awareness, that the subject experienced everything directly and immediately. The child knows no boundaries or limits; he is his experience. For the newborn

infant, there is no reflection on his experience. Rather, Fromm (1971a) states, there is merely the experience:

. . . . We might also say that the infant is not "interested" (inter-esse = "to be in") in the world outside. The only reality that exists for the infant is itself: its body, its physical sensations of cold and warmth, thirst, need for sleep, and bodily contact [p. 75].

What does it mean to say the infant is his world, is his experience? It means, in part, that there is neither history nor future. Everything is now, an existential happening. On an experiential level the infant is the high or the low of his feelings and experiences. The experience, according to Fromm (1970), penetrates, overwhelms, and is almost totally identified with the infant, even though the infant begins to make minimal use of a subtly developing conceptual system:

. . . . But still the child's grasp of the world remains relatively immediate and direct. When the child plays with a ball it really sees the ball moving, it is full in this experience, and that is why it is an experience which can be experienced without end, and with never ceasing joy [p. 128].

The immediate, direct, total grasp of the world is lost with the increase of intellection which for Fromm (1970, p. 128) is symbolized in the biblical account of "The Fall." Innocence is a state of non-reflection, a state prior to any repression. The infant is this state without excuse or qualification. There are no checks or balances. However, the mature child must now reflect on his experience, realize that his actions are followed by consequences, and

thus lose the joy and unconfused excitement of simply being coextensive with his immediate sensations.

The "Adam Myth," utilized by Fromm to draw out the psychological elements in the process of alienation, is a universal experience. Everyman, with the advent of consciousness, must measure, weigh, and distort his experience. He loses the purity of life. Every experience is mediated through social filters which splinter his total grasps of the world into factions--each with its own vested interest. Can this lost state be regained? Fromm (1970) answers, yes--by reaching a state of non-repression. This is found on the other side of alienation, i.e., the full development of man's reason and individuality:

The state of non-repressedness is a state in which one acquires again the immediate, undistorted grasp of reality, the simpleness and spontaneity of the child; yet, after having gone through the process of alienation, of development of one's intellect, non-repressedness is return to innocence on a higher level; this return to innocence is possible only after one has lost one's innocence [p. 128].

The overcoming of narcissism is the second aspect of the process of self-awareness. For Fromm (1970, p. 89) this is largely restricted to the affective development of the child. As noted earlier narcissism is a state of absolute self-centeredness. Fromm (1971a) indicates that this situation must change if self-awareness is to be forthcoming:

. . . By many blows to the child's narcissism, his ever increasing acquaintance with the outside world and its laws, thus of "necessity," man develops his original narcissism into "object love." The "normal," "mature" person is one whose narcissism has been reduced to the



socially accepted minimum without ever disappearing completely [p. 74].

The overcoming of narcissism demands the development of full maturity, i.e., the psyche must turn loose of its twisted and distorted world and, not only be aware, but also accept reality. Needless to say, this reality is not merely a correspondence to the convention and structures of modern living. Fromm (1970) maintains that this refusal will result in either the "impulse to force reality to correspond to his wishes (that is, to do the impossible), or with a feeling of powerlessness because he can not perform the impossible [p. 90]."

Thirdly, awareness is increased or diminished by the social character of society. Fromm (1970) understands the key to increased awareness as the "attempt to make the unconscious conscious--or, to put it in Freud's words, to transform Id into Ego [p. 95]." However, it must be noted that the unconscious and conscious, rather than part of the personality and specific content, are spoken of by Fromm (1970) as "states of awareness and unawareness [p. 97]." Moreover, what most people have in their awareness about themselves, others, and society, is mostly fiction. Historically, this is due to society's need to survive in a particular form which is at odds with the human needs common to all men. To this, Fromm (1970) concludes:

... We might say, then, that the content of consciousness is mostly fictional and delusional, and precisely does not represent reality. Consciousness as such, then, is nothing desirable. Only if the hidden



reality (that which is unconscious) is revealed, and hence is no longer hidden (i.e., has become conscious)-- has something valuable been achieved [p. 98].

Hammond (1965) clarifies Fromm's analysis of awareness by differentiating between consciousness (the form) and the content of consciousness, which society regulates:

. . . . Man has the formal or abstract capacity for consciousness. However, the actual content of consciousness (that is, how self and the world are understood) is deeply affected by the type of society into which the individual is born [p. 68].

It is clear that the mode and attitude of any society not only forbids acting on certain impulses, but also prevents certain aspects of the unconscious from reaching awareness. It is this limitation that must be removed in full maturity. Fromm (1970) states that:

. . . . Every society, by its own practice of living and by the mode of relatedness, of feeling, and perceiving, develops a system of categories which determines the forms of awareness. The system works, as it were, like a socially conditioned filter; experience can not enter awareness unless it can penetrate this filter [p. 99].

The achieving of self-awareness includes three aspects: the development of objectivity (intellection), the overcoming of narcissism, and the influence of society on the content of consciousness. In the discussion, it was found that the first two aspects, to which every man is subject, lead necessarily to envisioning oneself as a separate individual. Thus, they are the basis of a temporary, yet necessary alienation. Societal factors or influences, the third aspect, act as a filter which shapes

and molds awareness. Such influences are not necessarily alienating, but increase or decrease awareness, depending on whether the culture's social character is regressive or progressive. ✓

In conclusion, the discussion on alienation delineated that Fromm identifies idolatry with the affective state of alienation. Moreover, attempts to escape loneliness are deemed regressive; if so, they are also termed a state of alienation. However, there is a distinction between the two concepts. Man becomes alienated, as was shown, as a necessary consequence of the development of consciousness. Fromm's thought essentially views alienation as a progressive, though frightening, step. It is dangerous because it can lead to regressive answers which forestall self-awareness.

The analysis of alienation, together with the previous investigation of the nature of man, his character and sense of freedom, according to Fromm, give the necessary background to understand the full impact of his ethics. His ethics, as will be seen, are built on man's developmental and evolutionary nature. Fromm concerns himself with man's progressive unfoldings, a dimension innate to his nature, which does not have a necessary correspondence to morals, but attach themselves more to historical periods than to man himself.



Chapter 4

Fromm's Ethical View of Reality

In the preceding chapters, Fromm's understanding of man's nature and character were examined. That investigation revealed what Fromm termed "the productive man." The chapter on alienation sought to discover why so few men become productive. Fromm's answer, of course, is the alienating condition of society itself. And, as this chapter will indicate, the root problem for man and society is ethics, despite the fact that perhaps no generation has shown as little interest in any kind of theoretical ethics as the present. Of all questions, ethics seem the most superfluous; not, perhaps, because of supposed ethical indifference, but because of a fantastic increase of concrete ethical problems in modern living. This chapter will investigate the meaning of ethics according to Fromm. Such an investigation will reveal that he feels that not only is man's happiness and hope tied to his ethical understanding and posture, but the entire existence of the human race, without exaggeration, may indeed be threatened unless man follows his ethical impulse.

Fromm's concern with ethics emanates from the growing skepticism and moral confusion found on every side.



of today's world. Man's knowledge of the physical sciences and his incredible technological advances have far out-distanced his knowledge of himself. Fromm (1967) states the problem--a contemporary human crisis:

While becoming the master of nature, he (man) has become the slave of the machine which his own hands built. With all his knowledge about matter, he is ignorant with regard to the most important and fundamental questions of human existence: what man is, how he ought to live, and how the tremendous energies within man can be released and used productively [p. 14].

Man has utilized his energies to manipulate his environment, leaving the fundamental question of existence not only unanswered but unasked. This jumbling of priorities has not only forced ethical considerations to lag far behind, but has witnessed man retreating into a kind of ethical relativism. The speed of the technological advance brought forth questions which showed the serious deficiencies in the traditional guidance of revelation or reason. Fromm (1967) views these changes as creating further problems for man:

The result is the acceptance of a relativistic position which proposes that value judgments and ethical norms are exclusively matters of taste or arbitrary preference and that no objectively valid statement can be made in this realm. But since man cannot live without values and norms, this relativism makes him an easy prey for irrational value systems. He reverts to a position which the Greek Enlightenment, Christianity, the Renaissance, and the eighteenth-century Enlightenment had already overcome. The demands of the state, the enthusiasm for magic qualities of powerful leaders, powerful machines, and material success become the sources for his norms and value judgments [p. 15].

As is obvious, the battle is pledged. Fromm must steer a middle course which avoids relativism on the one hand and heavy ethical dogmatism on the other. Valid ethical



norms cannot rest on an unseen and unheard authority which is outside man's world and scientific knowledge. This is an attack on both religion, when it is deemed against man's best interest, and the state, which has more than once claimed divine powers. Moreover, man cannot norm his behavior merely on his own subjective and arbitrary preference. The middle course which Fromm (1967) has chosen is human reason:

... Valid ethical norms can be formed by man's reason and it alone. Man is capable of discerning and making judgments as valid as any other judgments derived from reason. The great tradition of humanistic ethical thought has laid the foundations for value systems based on man's autonomy and reason. These systems were built on the premise that in order to know what is good or bad for man one has to know the nature of man [p. 16].

Fromm's sources for the development of valid ethical norms are humanistic. Humanism, wherever it is found, is based on reason. Hence, philosophic or religious ideals, so maligned by modern psychologists are, in fact, the product of rational insight into human nature by the great teachers of various cultures. Fromm (1966a) points out that the "concept of mental health coincides essentially with the norms postulated by the great spiritual teachers of the human race [p. 68]." Thus the "awakened ones," as Fromm (1966a) calls them, are awakened insofar as their teachings coincide with the essential needs of man. History bears out that Ikhnaton, Moses, Confucius, Lao-tse, Buddha, Isaiah, Socrates, and Jesus have postulated the same norms for human life, with only small and insignificant differences.

Fromm's position on man's nature is clear from earlier investigations. However, he attempts to validate his finding, not only from the great spiritual teachers of the past, but the mountain of data amassed by the scientific community. He finds his efforts far from satisfying. Fromm (1966a) concludes that "our knowledge of man is still so incomplete that we cannot give a satisfactory definition of man in a psychological sense [p. 21]." Nevertheless, Fromm (1966a) infers that a:

. . . core common to the whole human race from the innumerable manifestations of human nature, the normal as well as the pathological one, as can be observed in different individuals and cultures. The task is furthermore to recognize the laws inherent in human nature and the inherent goals for its development and unfolding [p. 22].

The common core to which Fromm refers is in no way an affirmation of the "natural law" so long contended by churchmen. For Fromm (1965a, p. 316), human nature is evolutionary and changing. It is not biologically fixed, but shaped by the basic conditions of life. While man can survive under almost any condition, his growth and development demand a good deal more than the answering of mere survival needs. If the laws and precepts drawn from the natural law are humanistic, they are acceptable. However, they are little more than tentative answers, which in the long run are quite inadequate.

The Natural Law Ethic

An examination of the natural law is outside the scope of this study. The comments to follow will at least indicate the present status of the natural law ethic. The understanding of Schillebeeckx (1968) is that historically the development of the natural law concept is one of the deepest roots of secularization. The thirteenth-century theologians began to insert a natural law (lex natura), a law inherent in human nature, in between God and his divine law (lex divina) which consisted in the teaching magisterium based on revelation and tradition. Schillebeeckx (1968) states "its purpose was to humanize morality, to base it in man himself and thus to interiorize it, without denying its ultimately theistic foundation [p. 57]."

This attempt to humanize morality had all the defects of any beginning. Nevertheless, over the centuries, man has become more and more the authority of what is right and wrong. This developing authority kept pace with the deterioration of the concept. While there were periods alternating between relative quiet and violence on the matter, its defense was never sufficient to win immunity from attack and outright repudiation. Yet, Fletcher (1967) maintains that in the twentieth century the skeptical criticism has reached a climax both within and without Christendom. In fact, Fletcher (1967) concludes that "it seems most unlikely it [the natural law] can survive .



conceptually in any recognizable guise [p. 58]." Fletcher (1967, pp. 65-68) supports his position by sounding out various theologians on the subject over the last fifty years. It would appear without doubt that the concept, in spite of attempts to revive it now and again, is in real trouble.

Perhaps a good measure of the situation can be seen in Fletcher's assessment of Schillebeeckx's presentation at the Second Vatican Council. Schillebeeckx is a leading theologian of the Dutch Catholic Church and represents, as well as any, the temper and mood of the new theological thinking sweeping Catholicism. Addressing the issue of birth control, Schillebeeckx (1968):

. . . has proposed a personal instead of a biological interpretation, so that the "nature" to be respected becomes not the reproductive processes, but "what is worthy of a human being"--freedom, planning, control of physical nature to serve human nature [p. 72].

There can be no doubt that for these theologians the phrase "natural law" has lost not only its meaning for conventional use, but has radically departed from its traditional definition.

The answer for Fletcher is to avoid the legalism of the past (natural law or scriptural law) and the radical subjectivism (antinomianism--the spontaneity or impulse of the moment) of the present by turning to still a third approach. This approach Fletcher (1967) calls situation or contextual ethics:

. . . the situationist or contextualist enters into his decision making well armed with "principles generally valid" but prepared to modify, suspend, or even violate any principle or "general rule" if in the



situation the command to love the neighbor is better served. The situationist always remembers he is commanded to love persons--not precepts nor even principles! This is Bonhoeffer's idea of "formation"--"no abstract ethics" Otherwise, as Bultmann has argued, principles are idolatrous. This brings an end to all legalisms--natural, Scriptural, or doctrinal! When love is the norm, we work with maxims but not the rules [p. 74].

Fromm's (1967, p. 20) position in these matters can be drawn from his own thought. His thought, a logical and consistent presentation, permits criticism of almost any position dealing with man's nature and his ethical behavior. Briefly, as will be seen shortly, Fromm welcomes this new turn of events, because it moves away from the heavy legalism of the past which he finds so alienating. The problem is that to "do good and avoid evil" is platitudinous, meaning-almost nothing in the practical order. The law of nature and the law of scripture have suffered interpretations which historically favor those power groups with vested interests, maintaining a legislator who was for the most part lacking both the desire and the knowledge to establish competence. Such authority was built on power, real or imagined.

The second approach, "acting on the spur of the moment," is totally unacceptable for Fromm. Man cannot live without valid norms and value judgments derived from a knowledge of human nature.

It would seem that Fromm would view the situationist or contextualist as not quite so alienating. His criticism would concern itself with absence of solid scientific

knowledge or even investigation into the nature of man. Favoring persons over principles might seem well and good, but how can it be determined that "love of neighbor" is really reducible to the best interest of the neighbor. Unless there is solid investigation into the nature of man, the ethical decision-making may not at all enrich man. Doing what appears "good" is at least a human response. Fromm (1967, p. 19) recognizes that it can only be an interim solution. It is not a solution in the long run, because man's welfare cannot depend on guesswork or good feelings. In short, Fromm is neither for nor against Christian ethics. He is not concerned with whether the natural law persists as an ontological affirmation or not. However, in the practical instance, Fromm feels that it is dead as an epistemological doctrine. No outside source of information can help man. Man must derive his knowledge of his nature from pure reason.

Moral-Biological Progress

What is meant by ethics? Webster's Dictionary (1961) defines it as "the science of moral values and duties; the study of the ideal character [p. 283]." Materially speaking, modern ethics is just that. It is the study of conduct and a judgment of conduct. However, the unit of ethics is always to be judged in the context of action. Fischer (1971) decries the fact that "the act . . . (is) the

unit of ethical activity, . . . ethical judgment is the unit of ethical truth [p. 262]."

However, the fact that ethics is derived from ethos suggests a richer conceptualization. Originally, Fischer (1971) finds ethos referred to "the haunts of wild animals; the word comes to refer also to the abodes of men, thence to custom, usage, or habit, and in the plural, to the disposition, temper, or character [p. 262]." Obviously, the word was originally rooted in concrete existence. It dealt with where the person lived, physically and psychologically. His ethos was his concrete everyday life. The judgment of actions, broken down into singular and abstract units, was not the subject matter of ethics, but rather an appreciation (vague and ill-defined) of a concrete way of living. Thus, it was seemingly an orientation or an inveterate tendency within the person which was indicative of how he related to himself, his neighbor, and the world.

Moving from the ideal of custom to the ideal of "human relatedness" tended to create confusion. Fromm (1966b) finds that same confusion existing in the minds of people today:

. . . Most people today consciously think of ethics in terms of an ideal, of ethical norms, when they really mean that which is custom is also that which is good; while we consciously mean by ethical norm an "ought," unconsciously we really think that the right is that which is accepted [p. 175].

Sometimes ethics refer to behavior. This refers to a code, that is, a desirable code of behavior. Such codes

produce a division in ethics: medical ethics, business ethics, or military ethics. These codes legislate the legal minimum, and concern themselves with a narrow range of actions which affect other people; that is, actions like lying, stealing, promising, and punishing. However, solitary acts are omitted in spite of the fact that such actions contribute to the individual's personal life as well as his social actions. Fischer (1971) states:

. . . They [solitary acts] reveal character--ethos as much as the cases of promising or lying, . . . for one may promise or decide once in a while, but one lives every moment of his waking life [p. 263].

Ethical codes are a product of a particular historical period. They may or may not borrow from the more productive or growth oriented tendencies which history or contemporaries may provide. This observation is borne out by Russell (1962, pp. 30-32) when he cites the tremendous diversity in moral codes in different times and places. The Aztecs had the painful duty of eating the flesh of the enemy. The code of Hammurabi, which influenced the substance and structure of the Ten Commandments, stated that if the daughter of a gentleman dies because of being struck while pregnant, the daughter of the one who struck her was to be killed. The Jewish law decreed that a woman taken in adultery should be stoned to death.

The individual, as a product of the cultural and social environment, has a natural impulse to maintain that his code is right, and all others are wrong. Russell (1962)

indicates that there is no way of knowing which is right unless some way is found to determine which is best when he states that:

. . . It might be maintained that a man should obey the moral code of his community whatever it may be. I should be inclined to concede that he can't be blamed for doing so, but I think he should often be praised for not doing so [p. 31].

Fromm is not quite so lenient. More than that, he feels strongly that ethical codes which block man's personal and social progress should be divested of their authority and influence. Obsolete codes can not only retard progress, but can quite possibly destroy the human race.

Fromm's position is in line with his analysis. However, what is not clear is that beneath his analysis there lies the assumption, not the hypothesis, that there is definite and discernible moral progress. This is nothing new. Many have taught and hoped such was the case. Fromm, however, as Schaar (1964) states, gives this old assumption a new twist:

. . . He [Fromm] argues that moral achievements become transformed into biological imperative, so that his hypothesis of moral progress is really a hypothesis of moral-biological progress [p. 57].

What Fromm in effect teaches is that mankind is moving closer and closer to a sane and happy life. As history moves on, each generation incorporates each new advance in freedom and growth of the previous generation. Should mankind retrace his steps and return to behavior which has rightly and properly been left behind, his



behavior is both regressive and pathological. Here is Fromm's (1966a) fullest statement of the thesis:

. . . We have reached a state of individuation in which only the fully developed mature personality can make fruitful use of freedom; if the individual has not developed his reason and his capacity for love, he is incapable of bearing the burden of freedom and individuality, and tries to escape into artificial ties which give him a sense of belonging and rootedness. Any regression today from freedom into artificial rootedness in state or race is a sign of mental illness, since such regression does not correspond to the state of evolution already reached and results in unquestionably pathological phenomena [pp. 57-58].

Schaar (1964) thinks Fromm's thought is similar to Bergson's creative evolution:

. . . Bergson . . . postulated life as a great force, a vital impulse, which had been set down once and for all, . . . and is struggling ever since to express its full potential. Bergson thought evolution could not be explained by the principle of adaptation to the environment, but must be understood as truly creative . . . The important thing is that the vital impulse creates real novelty, and that once a height has been reached there can be no retreat without crippling life force. Evolution is irreversible [p. 60].

It is difficult and unnecessary to deny that Fromm's thought bears a likeness to Bergson's. However, Fromm's view is much more stable than Bergson's restless view of life.

While man, according to Fromm, is essentially heuristic in his development, there are also teleological aspects in that development. In fact, White (1955) finds Bergson fighting against that very position:

. . . He [Bergson] offers the theory of creative evolution as the only defensible alternative to mechanism--the idea that we can characterize and explain evolution by reference to purely physical and chemical transformation--and also to teleology--the view that everything proceeds by a prearranged plan [p. 69].

What then is Fromm saying? He appears to be presenting what Schaar (1964) calls "the audacious concept of moral-biological evolution [p. 61]." The conclusion does merit consideration. Schaar (1964) draws out the implication of such an hypothesis:

. . . . If Fromm's hypothesis is correct it means that cultural advances are permanently registered in the psyche, and any retreat results in the pain and the crippling of life [p. 61].

Whatever the truth in the matter, it will remain unverifiable for some time to come. It does appear that Fromm views moral and technical progress as interdependent and necessary. Regression to a morally inferior position or period while in command of advanced technical equipment and weapons would cause anyone concern. It should be noted that Fromm's (1966a, pp. 70-71) use of Freud's characterization of neurotic psychic regression or fixation as applicable to the larger community remains just that, an analogy. There are qualities or attributes which are similar, but the relation of likeness ends there. They are not, de facto, the same thing.

However, it is interesting to note that other theorists, far removed from Freud's sphere of influence, are postulating similar hypotheses. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin held positions as Professor of Geology at the Catholic Institute in Paris, Director of the National Geologic Survey in China, and Director of the National Research Center in France. He is credited with playing a major role in the

discovery of the Peking man. Teilhard de Chardin's (1964) comment speaks directly to the issue:

. . . Many people, I am convinced, still regard the higher morality which they look for and advocate as no more than a sort of compensation or external counter-balance, to be adroitly applied to the human machine from outside in order to off-set the overflow of Matter within it. But to me the phenomenon seems to go far deeper and to have wider implications. The ethical principles which hitherto we have regarded as appendage, superimposed more or less by our own free will upon the law of biology, are now showing themselves--not metaphorically but literally--to be a condition of survival for the human race. In other words, evolution, in rebounding reflectively upon itself, acquires morality for the purpose of its further advance. In yet other terms, and whatever anyone may say, above a certain level, technical progress necessarily and functionally adds moral progress to itself. All this is surely proof that the two events are interdependent. In fact, the pursuit of human knowledge cannot be carried out in concrete terms beyond a certain stage without this power of reflective arrangement becoming automatically charged with internal obligations which curb and direct it; while at the same time, as we shall see, it engenders around itself an entirely new atmosphere of spiritual need [pp. 203-204].

Humanistic Ethics vs. Authoritarian Ethics

Fromm (1967, pp. 18-24) demands the norms of human behavior be objectively valid. In his search for criteria he demands a middle course. On the left, ethical relativism abandons not only the search, but even the need for objectively valid norms; on the right, ethical authoritarianism bases its norms on the criteria of irrational and dictatorial power.

The middle course is ethical humanism. The norms are based upon the criteria of rational authority. Fromm distinguishes between the criteria of authoritarian and



humanistic ethics. Fromm (1967) indicates that the difference is not only absolutely necessary, but also fundamental:

In authoritarian ethics an authority states what is good for man and lays down the laws and norms of conduct; in humanistic ethics man himself is both the norm giver and the subject of the norms, their formal source or regulative agency and their subject matter [p. 18].

The use of the word "authoritarian" demands investigation of Fromm's understanding of the nature of authority itself. Authority can be irrational or rational. The former, irrational authority, Fromm (1967, pp. 18-20) understands to be founded on "power over the people [p. 19]." All criticism is not only discouraged, but forbidden. The necessity for this is seen clearly in the formal and material criteria. Formally, authoritarian ethics deny man's ability to know what advances or diminishes him, that is, what is good or bad for him. Materially, or according to content, authoritarian ethics look primarily to itself; that is, its norms or laws signify what is good or bad for maintaining authority. Subjects may derive benefits, but the authority's needs are of almost exclusive concern.

The criteria of humanistic ethics are in almost direct opposition to authoritarian ethics. Formally, it is derived from the principle that only man himself can determine the criteria for good and evil, and not any authority transcending him. Materially, humanistic ethics are based on the principle that "good" or "virtue" is what is good for

man, and "evil" or "sin" is what is detrimental to him. The only criteria is man's welfare.

Likewise, criticism, in humanistic ethics, is not only tolerated but demanded from subjects. Such criticism assures that those exercising authority do so with competence. For competence, according to Fromm (1967), is the backbone of rational authority:

The person whose authority is respected functions competently in the task with which he is entrusted by those who conferred it upon him. He need not intimidate them nor arouse their admiration by magic qualities Rational authority not only permits but requires constant scrutiny and criticism of those subject to it [p. 19].

Fromm's observations are vital to his study.

McKenzie (1966), in a detailed study of the nature of authority, indicates that "rational authority" is natural to man:

Ideally, obedience is given naturally and almost spontaneously to the wise and good man, to the man whose authority is based on his power to see further, plan more effectively, conceive a nobler idea than his subordinates. In principles, it is only in virtue of his possession of such qualities that obedience to him is justified. In other words, obedience is a wholly rational and reasonable attitude of mind provided that the man who is in authority bases his orders on reason [pp. 6-7].

While McKenzie's intention is to define the moral of obedience, a term to which Fromm (1969, p. 59) takes exception, the findings nevertheless support Fromm's underlying contention. The only moral base for the power of authority to command is that whatever authority dictates, is the right thing to do.



Obedience is usually conceived as a virtue. However, Fromm maintains a radical distinction between the meaning attached to the word virtue by humanistic and authoritarian ethics. Humanistic ethics follow Aristotle's use of the term "virtue" to mean "excellence"--excellence of activity by which potentiality peculiar to man is actualized. Fromm (1967) sums both positions:

. . . Man's virtue . . . is that precise set of qualities which is characteristic of the human species, while each person's virtue is his unique individuality. He is "virtuous" if he unfolds his virtue. In contrast, "virtue" in the modern sense is a concept of authoritarian ethics. To be virtuous signifies self-denial and obedience, suppression of individuality rather than its full realization [p. 23].

The problem of authority is crucial to the understanding of human relations in any society. Authority is not a quality a person has in the sense that he has this or that physical quality or property. Rather, it refers to an interpersonal relation in which one person views another as superior to him. However, there is a fundamental distinction between the kind of superior-inferior relation which rests on the above distinction of rational and irrational authority. Fromm (1966a, pp. 90-92) utilizes an illuminating illustration of teacher-pupil and owner-slave relation to investigate the dynamics in a superior-inferior relationship. The teacher-student interests lie in the same direction. Success or failure is attributed to both teacher and pupil. However, the owner-slave interests lie in opposite directions. The achievement of either's aim means the



frustration of the aim of the other. Fromm (1966a) indicates that the dynamics of the two types of relations are different:

. . . the more the student learns, the less wide is the gap between him and the teacher The rational authority relationship tends to dissolve itself. But when the superiority serves as a basis for exploitation, the distance becomes intensified through its long duration [p. 91].

The very nature of the teacher-pupil relation, in the best sense of the phrase, breaks down into two fundamental rights: the freedom to exercise rational authority and the freedom of self-expression. These two rights are polar and stand in opposition to one another. Such opposition, as the very nature of competence indicates, reveals a necessary, even vital, tension between those in authority and those under authority. It bears repeating that this opposition ought to exist. In society, or any vital organism, tension is a sign of life and health; its absence is a sign of death. Therefore, neither side should seek the destruction of the other. The right of individuals to express their needs and honest demands, and the authority (power) of competent rulers to carry out the legitimate ends of society assures that there will always be a healthy and flexible tension between these poles. It is clear from this that Fromm (1967) recognizes "that humanistic ethics is not incompatible with rational authority [p. 20]."

Humanistic ethics are for Fromm (1967, p. 23) — anthropocentric; i.e., not in the sense that man is the center