

Chapter Five

LONELY LIBERALS:

Erich Fromm's neo-Freudianism

Homelessness has become a world fate.

Heidegger: 'Letter on Humanism'

In Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Christ returns to medieval Spain. He is recognized and excited crowds gather and follow, until the Grand Inquisitor of Seville has Him arrested and taken to the dungeons of the inquisition. Later the Grand Inquisitor interrogates Christ and reproaches Him for starting a religion of freedom – human beings do not wish to be free, he explains. So unbearable do they find being free that the Church has been forced to become authoritarian and relieve them of freedom by insisting on obedience. The inquisition is for those who disobey; but for those who do obey, the Church guarantees salvation. This arrangement is what people want, the Grand Inquisitor explains to Christ: 'There is nothing a man is more anxious to do than find someone to whom he can hand over as quickly as possible the gift of freedom with which the poor creature was born.'

Like Dostoevsky, Fromm was troubled by the flight from freedom into authoritarian beliefs and totalitarian regimes. Why in the twentieth century had people swarmed to join Nazism and Fascism and other sick '-isms'? Why did modern society produce organization men and women, happy to hand over their personal responsibility to commercial corporations, political parties and state governments? In answering these questions, Fromm was investigating the nature of human beings, and his answer begins in our evolutionary past.

In the Bible story, Adam and Eve are one with God and nature. There is no work, no struggle to exist, no pain, discord

or loneliness, only peace and harmony. There is no freedom either; it is the peace and harmony of the womb. Adam and Eve must do what God tells them and not eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. All this ended when in one act of rebellion they ate the apple and God banished them from paradise. The womb-like existence of the paradise garden was over and humans became separate from the rest of nature. They were on their own now, alone in the world, with no heavenly father to guide them and talk to them in the cool of the evening. Fromm sees the Adam and Eve story as myth – human beings are a consequence of evolution. But the myth tells us that, as evolution progressed, humans became separate from the rest of nature. The myth ends with Adam and Eve alone, without God, outside paradise and about to begin their journey through the world. There is no going back because God posted angels with flaming swords at the gates. For Fromm, what started as biological evolution became also a psychological separation as humans emerged and developed into separate beings. They were part of nature still but apart from nature, each a freak of the material universe, and free.

In Fromm's account, what happened next was the creation of primitive creeds and religious beliefs to enable these separate humans to feel at home in the world they were part of but apart from. In Europe, in very recent times, the Catholic Church filled this role and provided such security. Dostoevsky's legend of the Grand Inquisitor parodied the more extreme forms this took. But the Catholic Church with its dogmas and sacraments spelled out to believers that God was in His heaven and that this world could be tolerated because all would be well in the next. Fromm saw that the Church, as mediator between God and humanity, guaranteeing salvation and promising that ultimately everything was well, limited human freedom. The Reformation put an end to this.

By the time that the wars of the German Protestant princes were over, the power of the Roman Catholic Church was broken. In a production of John Osborne's *Luther*, the founder of Protestantism stands at the edge of a battlefield, appalled by what he has done. The Catholic Church no longer exists to

embrace Europe in a community of belief, dogma and practice. Now there is nothing to provide men and women with the security of a God-ordained order, to give value and meaning to human life. 'You are your own priest now,' said Luther. Fromm believed that at this moment the men and women of Europe became free . . . but also alone in a meaningless universe. Separation – both physical and psychological separation from nature, and psychological separation from dogma and authority – makes people free. But separation makes people alone, and potentially insignificant and lonely.

This is the terrible reality from which the Grand Inquisitor had spared the Catholics of medieval Spain but from which, in Fromm's view, modern men and women cannot be spared. Without dogmas imposed by church and society we are free individuals, and this we welcome. But as free individuals, without religion and a community of believers, we are alone and insecure, our lives without meaning.

There is a way to rid ourselves of this loneliness and lack of meaning: give up the freedom that causes them. Keep a hold on nurse, 'For fear of finding something worse.' Fromm saw why men and women embraced authoritarian organizations and totalitarian regimes: it was to escape freedom.

Subjects in a psychological experiment who thought something unpleasant was about to be done to them could choose to wait with others or sit alone; they chose to wait with others. But modern men and women do not find waiting with others sufficiently reassuring. They must bind themselves to others in mass movements and totalitarian ideologies. Only in this way do they escape the freedom they find so unbearable. But before examining further the plight of modern men and women, we need to look at Fromm's general account of human personality and society. This is best done by relating him to three other thinkers: Freud, Marx and Weber.

Fromm agrees with Freud that what goes on in the family shapes the child's personality. A child stuck at the early breast-feeding stage grows up an oral passive adult, clinging, lacking initiative, dependent. For Freud the biology of breast-feeding

shapes personality. Fromm believes it is not biology and instinct but relationships which shape personality.

If a child grows up clinging, lacking initiative or dependent, it is because of the relationships the child experienced within the family. Mother was domineering, refused to allow any initiative, checked any assertiveness, insisted that the child was submissive. And Mother's manner of breast-feeding – because of her personality – was also smothering and oppressive. Freud has grasped the relationship between Mother's breast-feeding and the child's personality but has not grasped what caused what. What really caused the child to grow up a passive oral adult was Mother's personality, not her breast-feeding. Mother's domineering personality emerged in many ways, one of which was in the way she breast-fed. For Freud the satisfaction of instincts is all-important and largely decides personality. For Fromm human relationships, not biology, are all-important.

A child gets stuck at the late anal stage. The adult that emerges is characterized by the unholy trinity of obstinacy, tidiness, meanness, plus a tendency to constipation. What causes fixation at the anal stage, says Freud, is the bodily instinct of elimination that toilet training has to control. It is the other way around, says Fromm. Obstinacy, tidiness, meanness are ways of relating to the world and to other people, and these we learn from our parents. In a particular family a child learns to be stubborn, to keep everything in its right place, not to trust others, never to relax and let go. Mother may teach a child this in many ways, but one way will be in her manner of toilet training. The personality that results is the controlling late anal character which tends to constipation. For Fromm, the personality of parents operating through relationships with the child, and emerging – among other ways – in the way they toilet train, shapes the child's personality.

At the phallic stage, according to Freud, it is biology again, now that of sex, that determines personality. If an excessively strong sexual bond develops between boy and mother, problems of personal relations will arise when the boy grows up, as they did with Hamlet. It is the other way around, says Fromm. The

oedipus conflict is not caused by sexual instinct getting fixated; it is caused by poor personal relations.

Fromm believes that in patriarchal societies fathers represent society's repressive authority. When a boy grows up and wants to become free and independent, the omnipotent father tries, God-like, to crush him. The Adam-and-Eve myth is as much about the growth of personality as about the evolution of the human species. An oedipus complex results when a boy fails to sort out his relationship with his father by standing up to him. Freud was right when he said the oedipus conflict was at the root of every neurosis, but it has little to do with sex, instinct and biology. The key problem for every individual is that of human relations, and these start in the family. It is in this sense, Fromm says, that the family shapes personality.

But the sorts of human relations shaping Hamlet's personality were not unique to the royal family at Elsinore. The family does not exist in a vacuum but in a wider society. Hamlet's struggle with his new stepfather is one example of the fight for dominance found among males in all patriarchal cultures. In such societies, human relations among males centre round power. Women are incidental – they are part of the spoils. Succeed in toppling Father, and Mother is yours. *Hamlet*, like the Adam-and-Eve myth and the Oedipus story, is about the rebellion of sons against fathers among upper-class families in patriarchal societies. Hamlet's mother merely goes with the throne. Fromm argues that what happens in any family is caused by the wider society and by the family's position in that society, particularly its class. His reading of Marx had convinced him that both class and society influence and shape the family and the relationships within it.

'The rich really are different,' Scott Fitzgerald said to Ernest Hemingway. 'No, Scott,' Hemingway replied, 'they just have more money.' Hemingway is thought to have got the better of the exchange; but Karl Marx, aware how economic factors shape human lives, would have agreed with Scott Fitzgerald. Economic factors form personality. Having more (or less) money does make a difference, as Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*

was aware. "'She's got an indiscreet voice,'" I remarked. "It's full of –" I hesitated. "Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly.'

The late anal personality which Fromm regards as typically lower-middle-class is the result of its position in capitalist society. Clerks, toolmakers, grocers live the way they do because of their income. They cannot afford to take risks because their incomes are low. If they got into serious debt they would have difficulty getting out of it, so they rarely overdraw at the bank. When they do, they are not at peace until they have cleared the overdraft. But their incomes are reliable, and they play to their strength by eking out their steady income carefully, saving when they can, taking three buses rather than a taxi. Carefulness with money is what the lower-middle class need in order to survive in a capitalist society. They lead orderly lives, take no risks and – apart from a 'flutter' on the Grand National – never gamble. They live in tidy houses, save and – if redundancy threatens – save even harder. Redundant manual workers typically 'blow' redundancy money on a good holiday.

But the lower-middle class do not feel trapped. The influence of income and class on family and its members goes even deeper. What family upbringing does, in Fromm's view, is so shape us that we end up *wanting* to act the way we *have* to. So effective is the family in shaping personality that the lower-middle class have no desire to be any different. Quite the reverse – they wax morally indignant when others act differently from themselves, condemning both the wastefulness of the rich and working-class fecklessness. But the rich and the working class also have the personalities they have because of family income and class. Daisy in *The Great Gatsby* cannot help her voice being full of money any more than a working man can help spending his redundancy money on a holiday rather than investing it.

For Freud the structure of personality is universal and exists for all time. Personality is based on biology, and biology never changes – except over hundreds of thousands of years. But according to Fromm, we are shaped by personal relationships within our family and these are shaped by the wider society.



These vary from class to class, and change when society changes.

If Fromm's account of the lower-middle class now reads a little out of date, it makes this very point. As society and the economic situation change, what goes on in a family changes. The lower-middle class is more assertive nowadays than when Fromm originally wrote. It throws its money around more, occasionally enters the betting shop, goes abroad on package holidays. It does this because of economic changes. Lower-middle-class jobs are no longer secure and guaranteed for life. With rapid technological change, being careful and clinging to the old ways is no longer a sound strategy for survival. So shopkeepers and clerks and skilled workers now teach their children to be more flexible, to adapt to new ways, to take risks, to become computer operators and programmers. The economic forces affecting the lower-middle class have changed, so the personality of the lower-middle class has changed.

Whatever the class, whether lower or upper-middle, lower- or upper-working, aristocracy or *nouveau riche*, a social character arises common to a particular class because of its economic situation. This is Fromm's Marxism. He has used Freud to give Marxism a psychology, and used Marxism to give personality a social and economic context. Scott Fitzgerald was right – 'The rich really are different', and so is every other class.

A third influence on Fromm was the German sociologist, Max Weber, who argued – it seems common sense enough – that ideas influence events. Marx believed that economic forces and methods of production decide what goes on in society and shape its ideas, beliefs, values. For Weber the reverse was also true: people's ideas, beliefs and values affect what happens in society. The destruction of the power of the Catholic Church may have been completed by the armies of the German princes, but it began with the ideas of Protestantism. The ideas led to the armies.

Fromm agreed with Weber that ideas, beliefs and values even shape the economic structures and forces which Marx regarded as all-important. Common sense confirms this: we observe that when governments are committed to certain economic theories,

such as monetarism or socialism, the economic repercussions are considerable. Human ideas have power, and the ideas of Protestantism which broke the structure of the Catholic Church went on to cause an economic system called capitalism. For Fromm this historical development had repercussions for personality.

When the Catholic Church with its community and comforting assurances no longer had its old influence, what were people to do? Calvin and Protestantism came up with an answer: they must work, because to work is to do the will of God. You are alone before God, said Protestantism, but if your work succeeds, this is your guarantee of God's approval which the Catholic Church is no longer in a position to give.

But if one worked and succeeded, what should be done with the profits? Wine, women and song were out, since they conflicted with other Protestant values. One might resort to the medieval idea of charity and give to the poor, but this no longer seemed a good idea. If success and wealth were a sign of God's approval, failure and poverty were as sure a sign of His disfavour. It could not be right to give one's God-approved profits to the undeserving poor whose very poverty was evidence of moral bankruptcy. The alternative was to make use of profits to finance new work, buy more land, invest in one's own and other people's developments.

Fromm saw that ideas, beliefs and values, acting through personality, cause economic development. These particular beliefs and values, the ethic of early Protestantism, brought about capitalism. But Fromm also saw, with Marx, that economic developments by shaping personality give rise to certain ideas, values and beliefs. The steam engine is a product both of human individuals and of the economic society that formed the individuals who invented it. And so a cycle is created. The economic basis of society forms human social personality, and personality shapes ideas, values, beliefs. In turn these ideas, values and beliefs acting through personality determine the economic basis of society – and the cycle is complete. On this cycle Fromm saw everything in history developing. On this cycle capitalism, industrial society and eventually the twentieth century emerged. From Fromm's general account of personality

and society, we return to his account of how they are now.

In John Osborne's play, *Breakfast in Amsterdam*, three couples talk incessantly about the boss they have left in London. They joke about him, criticize him and complain bitterly about him. But when they awake the following morning to the news of his death, they feel no relief or liberation, only loneliness and fear; and this in part is how Fromm sees our situation now. We have been separated from nature and from other people by evolution and our emergence as individuals. Until recently, in the West the Catholic Church acted as an intermediary between human beings and a benevolent God. While Protestantism flourished, humans still had a meaningful place in the universe, but one depending on a personal relationship with God. In the nineteenth century with industrialization and the growth of capitalism, human beings came to have no value other than an economic one, and the universe turned into a machine. God had no place in such a landscape; and at the close of the century Nietzsche announced His death. God's death, with the advance of the unfree machine and the cost-obsessed balance sheet, left people alienated and lonely, their lives without meaning or significance. Human personality cannot be understood outside its social and economic situation, and this was how Fromm regarded the situation of twentieth-century men and women.

Fromm saw the central problem for human personality in modern times was, how to live in a Godless, meaningless universe. For many the answer lay in a flight to authoritarian beliefs and totalitarian regimes. For Fromm the true solution is to be found in using our freedom. But in Fromm's account so far there is an emphasis on what causes and shapes personality and behaviour, so where – according to Fromm – is human freedom to be found?

Faust sells his soul to the devil and later, when death approaches, cannot find it in himself to repent. Fromm believes it is possible for people to become like Faust and to be determined in what they do because they have forfeited their freedom. At the end of their lives, Hitler and Stalin are unlikely to have found it in themselves to grieve for the suffering they caused. At the other extreme, Fromm believes there are a fortunate few

who, because of lives of right choices and actions, can eventually opt only for what is right and good. They have arrived at a blessed state in which they are no longer free to choose evil and to do wrong. Their personalities are fixed by the good they have done. We cannot imagine an elderly St Francis suddenly going to the bad. At both extremes, as a result of a lifetime of bad or good, an individual will no longer be free. Some like Faust can do only bad, while others, like St Francis, can do only good.

How did these people ever get into their sorry or their blessed state? With the former, it was like Hogarth's *Rake's Progress*, just one damn and damning thing after another. The rake's first bad act was a free choice; once done, it made the second easier, and the second made the third easier, and the third made the fourth easier still. At these early stages the rake remained free and able to choose. But with every bad act he became less free, until eventually he arrived at the *n*th bad act. By this time he had declined and fallen to such an extent that he could no longer help himself. He was no longer free because his personality had lost any capacity to choose good. By a similar but happier progress, our saint-in-the-making does one good turn after another, with them getting easier every time. Eventually he or she is no longer free, having lost any inclination or capacity to choose to do wrong.

At these extremes Fromm believes that human behaviour is caused and determined. After many years of drinking I am no longer free to stop – they say no alcoholic is ever really cured. The forces working on my personality have become so strong that they determine what I do: as an oral passive adult to start with, because of my childhood, and with my adult habits of drinking so rooted, I am not free to change now.

But most of us are not yet alcoholics, compulsive smokers or gamblers, saints, irredeemably bad, irreproachably good or incurably kind. It is only at the end of a long chain of acts that such determinism operates. Earlier along the line I am free, to drink or not to, to act well, to act badly, and this is the position most of us are in. In Fromm's view, most of us remain such a fine balance of contradictory inclinations that we are usually in a position to choose.



But freedom is never absolute, and it is always restricted by the alternatives available. Bored and irritated at a meeting I am obliged to attend, I may be free to choose between being aggressive and saying nothing; but I may not have it in me to get up quietly and leave the meeting early. Fromm believes that human beings are free when their inclinations are balanced, but even then they can choose only from the options available. But free they usually are, within limits, to change themselves, their character, their ideas, and free to change the family relationships and economic forces that shaped them in the first place.

Human freedom turns on a key decision that everyone is faced with. Either I accept, even welcome, that I am free . . . after a long depression William James wrote in his diary: 'My first act of free-will shall be to believe in free-will.' Or I can choose to escape from that freedom by surrendering myself and my freedom to a person, ideology or organization – according to the Grand Inquisitor, this is what people really want. We can either embrace our freedom or fly from it. Fromm has described the choice as between humanistic and authoritarian attitudes, between the productive and non-productive character, between being and having. Fromm believed that our personalities are shaped by economic forces, family relationships, ideas and values, but also by our choices, because choice certainly exists. The choice enters into and affects all areas of life: personal relations, sexual relations, politics, religion, being a parent, being an employer. It is a choice which we have no alternative but to make one way or the other and to go on making. For Fromm, accepting and welcoming that freedom is the only true solution to the human situation. But, as we shall see later, Fromm's account of human freedom is merely a description, not an explanation.

It is the use that we make of our freedom, together with economic forces, family relationships, and ideas, beliefs and values, that forms our personality. Fromm divides personality into five main types: the productive character who embraces freedom, and the receptive, exploitative, hoarding and market-ing characters who choose not to be free.

Receptive characters feel nothing worthwhile inside them.

Everything good comes from outside, and this they passively accept, whether it be help, opinions – they have so few of their own – or the love they crave. Receptive characters are submissive, they lean heavily on others and, if religious, they believe that 'God will provide'. On the positive side they are devoted, modest, often optimistic, they enjoy their food and drink, resembling Freud's early oral suckers. They avoid the demands of freedom by being dependent, inoffensive and lovable, so that others will do everything for them.

A key element in their psychology is what Fromm calls masochism. This masochism emerges as a search for a magic helper. I rid myself of my freedom by submitting to someone or something more powerful. I marry and do as my husband tells me. I join the Party, put on a uniform, and follow the Party line. By submitting I cease to have a separate self which would feel lonely and insignificant. The Me that remains takes on the power of what I submit to, be it husband or Party or organization. I join a multi-national corporation, become an organization man, and what is good for the company is good for me and good for everyone else. The need for moral choices is gone. When I lay down my freedom at someone else's feet – my husband's, the Party's, the company's – and identify with them, I become something, somebody, and my loneliness and insignificance disappear. Receptive characters show excessive devotion, duty and 'love' because of the inadequacy they feel, which their masochism is a way of escaping. Their dependency makes it hard for them to say 'No' – they will love anyone who loves them. Depending so much on others they have no opinion until they know what the *Daily Express* or the *Guardian*, the Pope or the Kremlin, has to say. For the receptive character, masochism achieves what the Grand Inquisitor was after for believers: getting rid of unbearable freedom by submitting. Receptive characters idealize those above them. They do not have ordinary mothers and fathers but parents who are saints, and Mother's Day and Father's Day on which to venerate them.

People take the shape that enables them to survive in their particular society with its specific ideas, values, beliefs and economic system. Receptive characters are made by societies in



which one group dominates another. Feudal serfs would tend to be receptive characters; slaves and domestic servants might become so. The subordinate group, powerless and with no control over its own destiny, has no alternative but to look to the dominating group to provide. Receptive characters are also formed in hierarchical societies in which a paternal but powerful aristocracy treats the 'lower orders' with kindly condescension, so long as they touch their forelocks and conform. Modern consumer society makes receptive characters of us all as we gaze passively at the adverts to see what goodies on the outside will fill up our emptiness inside.

Exploitative characters are different. They also feel that good things are only on the outside, but they believe that they are there to be got by cunning or force. Whatever it is that the exploitative character takes from others, whether objects, ideas or pleasure, these seem all the better for having been acquired in this way, just as St Augustine's apple tasted sweeter for having been stolen. On the positive side exploitative characters are active, self-confident and show initiative. They avoid the loneliness and insignificance that freedom brings, by outsmarting others, attacking them, getting one up on them, and as a result feeling powerful and superior.

Exploitative characters are related to Freud's oral sadistic personality, and sadism is central to their psychology. In Camus' novel *The Outsider*, Salamano constantly curses and kicks and generally bullies his dog, and seems to loathe the animal. But when the dog disappears Salamano is bereft. Dominating and damaging the animal had made Salamano feel strong and kept his loneliness at bay. An exploitative mother claims that she dominates her children because she loves them, but it is the other way around. She 'loves' her children because she can dominate them, and she is prepared to give them everything except the one thing they want – their freedom. Holding on to them and dominating them she feels important and real – though in this way she forfeits any possibility either for herself or for them to be free. But the last thing she wants is freedom, hers or theirs.

Like Salamano and his dog and the mother with her children, exploitative characters need the object of their sadism. A wife-

battering husband says he wants to be rid of his wife and keeps telling her to go. When she does eventually walk out, he is soon round at the local women's refuge begging her to return. The last thing he wants is to be without her, as he feels real only when he is bullying.

This sadistic flight from freedom illustrates Fromm's neat reversal of Freud's notion of sadism. Freud would say that the man hits his wife for the sexual pleasure he derives from perverted instinct. For Fromm, sadism is about wanting to dominate people and what has been perverted is human relations. Sadism may occasionally express itself sexually; but what comes first is not biology and instinct but psychology and human relations. Stalin's delight in ordering the torture or execution of the friend or wife of an official was non-sexual sadism; Stalin would leave the official himself untouched, because once he killed the official his pleasure would be gone. The sadism of exploitative characters fuses them with the object of their sadism, and this stops them feeling separate and lonely. Sadism, with its contempt for the scum below, is the obverse of masochism's reverence for those above. Both combine in the authoritarian personality, like that of the Nazi who kicks the non-Aryans beneath him and who bows and scrapes before his Führer.

What kinds of societies are most likely to shape humans into exploitative characters? They are societies in which economic and moral controls are few, the laws of the jungle hold, and where rewards for success are high. A situation of *laissez-faire* economics, the early stages of capitalism, a free-booting colonialism, are fine moulders of such characters. In Western society, the rapacious imperialism of the late nineteenth century was a time which favoured exploitative individuals like Cecil Rhodes. At certain times, says Fromm, capitalism needs people of initiative, ruthlessness, ambition and with a desire to dominate, to go out and grab; so society, working through the family, shapes men (and women) to become like this.

In contrast to receptive and exploitative characters, who regard only what is outside as worth while, Fromm sees hoarding characters as valuing only what is inside and their own.



Hoarding characters may collect first editions – but not because they like books; possession satisfies. Hoarders, feeling that things wear out and do not get replenished, hold on to and control what they have. On the positive side they are careful, orderly, tenacious, obsessively hard-working. They are cold fish because they cope with their own feelings of insignificance and loneliness by insulating themselves against other people. They hold back, in order to keep powerlessness, loneliness and change at bay, by hanging on tight to what they have: money, property, ideas, stamps, faeces. Fromm's hoarding character is close cousin to Freud's late anal personality.

A key trait of a hoarder is destructiveness. The hoarder enjoys destroying whatever is living, like the general who loved nothing better than the smell of napalm in the morning. Control is what the hoarding personality is after, and destruction is a particularly nasty way of achieving it. Having destroyed the enemy I am alone, but I am in splendid isolation and master of all I survey. Such destructiveness is an escape from loneliness and insignificance; the mugger or the Nazi staring down at his victim feels powerful and real. Fromm sees a society in which one group or class dominates another as a good breeding-ground for destructively inclined hoarders.

Industrial cultures shape more normal hoarders, the dutiful employees such societies need – or have needed until now. Industrial capitalism has depended upon thrifty characters, who are careful with money and who arrive regularly for work and on time. Such people emerged particularly from the lower-middle class; seeing themselves as having an investment in things as they are, they held on to what they had and supported the status quo. Living on low salaries, needing to be careful with money, buying a house and reluctant to get into debt, the lower-middle class provided a workforce which acted as a buffer between the managerial middle class and the more aggressive proletariat. They were also a useful source of capital for capitalist society, since they put their small, carefully acquired savings into the bank or invested them in stocks and shares. This was another reason why they had no desire for revolutionary change which would put their savings at risk.

Hoarding characters also emerged at another social level in the late nineteenth century. Exploitative characters at home and abroad needed men with money to back them and to invest in their enterprises. Society produced hoarders of money and property who would fill this role, as merchant bankers.

The marketing character is the next of those proposed by Fromm in his early writings. A trendy through and through, the marketing character is neither this, that nor anything in particular, but only what is currently fashionable. The hoarder finds change difficult, but the marketing character lives by change, becoming what society and the times require.

Marketing characters resemble Freud's phallic personality, who is always something of a conformist. Like their clothes, cars, feelings, opinions and actions, their personality is just another commodity to be marketed and sold. If no one buys them they feel valueless, like a young person who is never invited to a party. On the positive side marketing characters are tolerant, sociable, open-minded, willing to try anything new. By remaining a product that others want, they avoid loneliness and insignificance. While they stay the brand that sells, they feel worth while, and loneliness and lack of meaning are kept at bay. If they fail to find the right image when society changes, they soon go out of fashion and, like Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, no one attends their funeral.

The marketing character's strategy is to conform and be like everyone else – or, rather, everyone who counts. When it was fashionable to be radical and left wing, Dr Howard Kirk, Malcolm Bradbury's *History Man*, was radical and left wing. But times change; when reaction sets in, Dr Kirk becomes a Conservative. In conforming I am like everyone else, which solves the problem of being free, separate and lonely. Conformity wipes out any alarming difference between myself and others: 'See how nice I am – in fact, just like you.' What conformity makes me may be reasonable and decent if based on the right people and newspapers. But what I become is not me. What are supposedly *my* acts, thoughts and feelings are not mine at all, since I am only conforming ... to public opinion, mother,



LONELY LIBERALS

convention, duty. Dr Kirk was never a true radical, only a mirror of the times. The marketing character is a false solution because conformity destroys identity. The real Dr Kirk does not exist. Even in the short term I am in a state of permanent anxiety, having to be alert to the shifting expectations of others.

The marketing character is thoroughly modern. Thanks to the advances of technology, in the West we now produce in excess of our needs, and companies no longer require hard-working hoarders or maverick exploiters, or only a few. Selling has come to replace production as the key to economic success. What companies need is organization men and women to market and sell the company, the products and themselves. The marketing character is a product of modern consumer society.

Fromm regards these four characters as false solutions to the problem of human loneliness and insignificance. They all reject human freedom. The only satisfactory solution is the productive character who embraces freedom. But it is difficult for Fromm to give a precise account of the productive being, since this remains an ideal – what humans ought to become – and only few achieve it.

The productivity of the productive character emerges above all in love and work. This love relates to others, respects others, wants what is best for others as well as for oneself. In work, what matters is not what is made but the attitude towards it; the productive character may create great art or build a wall or type invoices, but the product is not important. The most important product of human productivity is the human self. What shapes the self is not having composed *The Ring* or built a wall or typed invoices but one's attitude to what one has done. Reason, spontaneity, caring, concern are among the elements of a productive character. It is related to Freud's genital personality, but again Fromm reverses Freud. The individual's creativeness and productivity are not the result of sexual competence, but the other way around: sexual competence is just one expression of productivity.

Productive characters have found the true solution to loneliness and insignificance. The solution lies not in rejecting freedom but in becoming oneself. This is achieved by a love that

LONELY LIBERALS

eliminates loneliness by having relationships with others but which at the same time remains free. It is achieved in creative work that realizes human potential, replaces insignificance with genuine power, and relates one truly to nature. The productive character embraces what Fromm calls the creative solution. Freedom is to be welcomed and embraced, but the loneliness, insignificance and lack of meaning that freedom threatens us with are avoided by uniting with others in spontaneous love and by working creatively. Love and work are the answer.

Where are productive characters to be found? What sort of cultures are likely to shape them? Productive individuals may be found anywhere since human beings are able to transcend the most limiting environments. But we are also made by society, and the sick societies we inhabit make sick people. Only sane societies would shape productive people, and we have yet to build sane societies to do this. For the present, productive characters are few and far between.

Modern men and women need to find meaning in their lives in a world where God is dead, without resorting to repressive ideologies or organizations. They have to find meaning in what they do and are, because, says Fromm, 'the meaning of life is living' and 'there is no meaning to life except the meaning man gives his life by the unfolding of his powers'. Productive characters are preoccupied with personal fulfilment, relate meaningfully to others, attend group therapy and consciousness-raising sessions, and want to feel good. 'Feeling good' is important and, in the absence of external values, is the only value left. Fromm's productive character is an account of what human beings should be, a model from modern psychology to replace the old ideals of religion.

But the productive character is vague, and at times Fromm seems to be proposing nothing more than a better class of hedonist. The productive character goes in for much psychological navel-contemplation . . . how do I feel? . . . do I feel good? . . . am I fulfilled? Fromm appears to be saying: since God is dead, and without religious faith we do not know where to turn, let us cling to one another in brotherly and sisterly love,

and work creatively. But having become a free productive character, what exactly am I to do? Common-sense critics might find such advice empty, preferring to have specific objectives and goals in their lives.

Productive people like Gandhi, Martin Luther King or Mother Teresa do not live for the sake of living itself but for goals and objectives. All three would think it absurd that they should do what they do in order to fulfil themselves, to make themselves feel good. They have definite goals: equality, getting rid of oppression, eliminating racial discrimination, feeding the hungry, preaching God's word. It is unlikely that they or anyone else would become productive personalities without aims outside themselves. It is because Fromm can find no absolute values or external goals that he resorts to emphasizing the style, manner and spontaneity with which things are done. With the productive character it is rather like the song: 'It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it'. But what is one to do? Smash windows? Beat up old ladies? Are there really no external criteria by which to judge the value of anything? Is how it is done all that matters? If this is the case, what is wrong with smashing windows or beating up grannies, so long as one does it with style and spontaneously, and it makes one feel good?

Fromm's answer is that smashing windows, assaulting grannies and sexual violence are unloving acts that would not satisfy and fulfil. When anyone finds and expresses their true personality; acts and desires that are uncreative and full of hate have no place. Freud would disagree. Violence and dangerous sexuality are exactly what Freud would expect if we came out with what we really feel. Marcuse, a Marxist and a Freudian, in a bitter attack accused Fromm of neo-Freudian revisionism. Fromm's account certainly emphasizes mind, choice, personal relations, and characterizes love, ethical values and meaning in life as being especially human. Fromm's emphasis is at the expense of the Freudian stress on body, instinct and passion. What Marcuse attacks Fromm for is his dismissal of the hard reality of biology and its substitution by what Marcuse regards as a false spiritual dimension. Fromm certainly writes as if God is about to be mentioned on the next page, but He never is – except as 'God is the image of what man might become'.

According to Fromm, concerns such as love, human relations, culture, meaning in life are what make humans human, and what might make them happy. This contrasts with Freud who regards these higher activities as the very cause of human suffering: 'Neurosis is the price we pay for civilization.' For Fromm, these higher concerns are as important as bodily ones, particularly in modern industrial society where it is possible to satisfy everyone's material needs without difficulty. According to Fromm, human unhappiness arises because the individual's needs for love, personal relations, meaning in life, fulfilment, come into conflict with society. All that is necessary for human happiness is to change society slightly (get rid of exploitation, injustice, inequality, competition, repression) and let people be themselves, without pressure to conform and with opportunities for self-expression. Marxists like Marcuse dismiss Fromm contemptuously as a liberal. Freudians, believing that human beings have insatiable appetites, an unconscious, a death instinct and are capable of unimaginable violence, also regard Fromm's account as liberal nonsense.

Fromm's knowledge is extensive – history, religion, philosophy, sociology, psychology and, in particular, psycho-analysis. He regards his character types as based on the scientific analysis of psycho-analysis. But with the productive character that human beings *ought* to be, Fromm stops being the scientific psychologist to become the moralist. He claims that his productive character is based on the insights and understanding that scientific psycho-analysis provides; but it seems to be just a point of view, with no particular data as evidence.

Fromm gets away with it because there is nothing he says that any decent individual would object to. We should love one another, work, be rational, care, use our abilities to the full – and who would disagree? There is nothing new in this; common sense, informed by most religious traditions, has been suggesting it for centuries. Where are the insights and revelations on the human condition Fromm promised psycho-analysis would provide? And though Fromm's exhortations are acceptable, their preoccupation with abstractions even threatens to make them meaningless. Loving an abstraction – humanity, the



oppressed, women (if one is male), the under-privileged – may be important, but it is not difficult. Equally important, and more difficult, is loving a flawed embodiment of such an abstraction, like Peter, Jane, Winston. Fromm believes that love, concern, compassion should be all-embracing, but they are in danger of becoming empty if they are not also particularized in specific human beings.

Fromm regards work as important. But his suggestion that people should work because they enjoy it would have been thought ludicrous at most times and in most places. Work has been unpleasant for the greater part of history, and human beings have worked simply in order to survive. Any dignity or meaning in work has come from surrounding beliefs – ‘Though your labour is painful, yet it means you do penance for your sins . . . you are doing the work of God’s redemption . . . you are blessed in God’s eyes . . . to work is to pray’.

It would be nice if we all had interesting and fulfilling jobs, and some people have; but many find their job boring and work only out of necessity. Some who find value in their work still do so because of beliefs, though these beliefs may have changed: work is the service of others, or is building the new capitalist or socialist Jerusalem. But for Fromm such justifications are irrelevant; the only value work would have in the sane society would be its intrinsic satisfaction. What should be marvellous about your job and mine is the work itself! Fromm takes this one step further. It is only your work – together with your love – that can give your life meaning. But work cannot carry such a burden of justifying and giving value to our lives.

And Fromm does not explain *how* we are to work creatively, love, embrace freedom, care, fulfil ourselves, be responsible and rational. We are simply to do so. How this is to be done in our daily lives or what it means for bringing up our children, Fromm does not say. Carl Rogers’ account is equally humanistic but at least he does suggest techniques to help in therapy; Fromm says little about therapy.

Fromm’s view, that human beings are free but that freedom depends on the conflicting forces being balanced, was outlined earlier. Neither the aged Faust nor an elderly St Francis are

likely to be free. What freedom exists for the rest of us is limited to the alternatives available. But the freedom which interests Fromm is not the trivial choice between tying up the left or the right shoe-lace first. He is concerned with moral decisions, with choosing good over evil, love before hate, and independence rather than subservience. Unlike atheistic existentialists, he does not hold that suicide, loving our neighbour, stealing from the blind, giving to the poor, assaulting granny, are all valid expressions of freedom, provided they are unforced. Fromm resembles Rogers in believing that the individual is really free only when choosing what is right and good. Freedom is about following reason, acting in the interests of oneself and other people, doing what is for the well-being of oneself and others. His view is like the medieval notion of an all-loving God who is utterly free but who has no choice to do other than what He does, which is right and good.

As a liberal, Fromm believes that education will help us achieve the true freedom of choosing what is good. He seems to hold ‘there is no sin but ignorance’. As a therapist he believes that with awareness and insight we are more likely to do what is good. Knowing what good and right and wrong actually are, which forces – particularly which unconscious forces – affect us, which options are open to us and what their likely consequences are, will help us to be free.

But if we are able to choose only from existing alternatives, how can anything new originate, like an original scientific theory or a new dance step? Fromm describes the productive character as possible only through a ‘free decision of the heart’. But his account emphasizes that human beings are shaped by economic forces and are a product of society’s values and beliefs, all operating through class and family relationships. He does not explain how, in this welter of influences, free choice remains possible, nor what it is.

It looks as if we are heading once more for what in *The Heart of Man* Fromm ‘called “soft determinism” and according to which it is consistent to believe in determinism and human freedom. While my position is more akin to “soft” than “hard” determinism it is not that of the former either.’ But despite his



denial, a form of soft determinism is what Fromm, like Rogers, leaves us with. Fromm seems to be saying, for example, that in choosing to be dependent on others, the receptive personality is acting in character: 'That was just like him.' In manipulating other people for her own ends, an exploitative personality is merely acting in the way her character is shaped: 'It was typical of her.' This is the soft determinism that Fromm adopts to qualify the idea that human beings are free. But soft determinism is no solution, since it is clear to common sense that in a given situation, a particular person is ultimately free or not free, one or the other, not both. With many qualifications, Fromm opts for free choice without explaining where the capacity for choice originates in the individual or how it operates. And if, as his historical approach appears to suggest, the capacity for free choice emerged during human evolution, he does not demonstrate how it did.

Fromm has to come down on the side of free choice because, if humans are moral beings, we must be free – to choose good or bad, right or wrong. And Fromm continually stresses our moral nature. There is a voice in us, he says, 'the voice of our true selves which summons us back to ourselves, to live productively, to develop fully and harmoniously – that is, to become what we *potentially are.*' The voice distinguishes between good and bad, right and wrong.

For Fromm, behaving morally means being true to our human potential: "'good" is what is good for man and "evil" what is detrimental to man.' I try to do right because right is good for me, and I try not to do wrong because wrong is bad for me. Acting in my own best interest, I act also in the best interest of others. When I do what is right by loving and acting in the interest of others, I am doing what fulfils my true potential and is right for me. This is the supposed revelation of psycho-analysis – or rather, Fromm's version, since he contends that Freud got it wrong about conflict.

Human conflict arises, Fromm believes, only because society is badly organized, and with the insights of psycho-analysis we can reorganize society on the right moral lines. In this new ethic, man and woman become the measure of all things . . .

'good in humanistic ethics is the affirmation of life, the unfolding of man's powers . . . Evil constitutes the crippling of man's powers.' And what we ought to be and do Fromm has expressed in the productive character. But its 'oughts' of love, care, concern, responsibility and the rest are nothing new; they are to be found in the Christian New Testament and in the liberal tradition of all great religions. Again, where are the insights Fromm promised from psycho-analysis?

If we interpret Fromm's "'good" is what is good for man' broadly, it is empty, but if we take it narrowly, it seems nonsense. When Oates walked out into the snow so that Scott and the others might survive, in what sense was Oates's act good for himself? His death was inevitable, so in the narrow sense nothing good could come of it for himself. In the broader interpretation, his act may have meant that he was a better man in those few moments between leaving the tent and dying. This may have made him healthier psychologically as he declined physically in the intense cold. But it is absurd to suggest that this was Oates's reason for leaving the tent – he did it to save the others, not for his own good. If what Oates did has any meaning, it does so because of moral standards that our common sense grasps but cannot explain or justify: 'Greater love than this no man has, that he lay down his life for a friend'. Sacrificing your life for others is a good act – it just is.

Most of Fromm's values add nothing to a common sense that has been informed by liberal religious traditions. At the same time, his values lack the power that the idea of God or of moral law as part of human nature gives to a value. When he attempts to justify moral acts, which for common sense need no justification, he resorts to verbal juggling. 'God is the image of what man might become', and 'there is no meaning to life except the meaning man gives his life by the unfolding of his powers'.

To suggest that Oates walked out into the snow because the act was good for him and made a productive man of him turns him into a sort of hedonist. Ironically – since Fromm is trying to raise human dignity – such a view diminishes what Oates did. It is as if knowing the significance of his act gave him a moral glow that compensated for the cold, the fear, the lonely



death, the awareness of the pain it would cause loved-ones in England! Oates walked out into the snow against his inclinations because he believed it was the right thing to do. Sacrificing one's life for others is a good act; it just is – there is nothing more one can add. The suggestion that scientific psycho-analysis provides a basis for human values is nonsense, and Fromm certainly provides no evidence in support of the idea.

Fromm sees human beings as naturally moral and innately inclined to good, as Carl Rogers does. But he does confront human destructiveness in a way that Rogers fails to do. Fromm's view is that hatred and destructiveness result when the human struggle to live and to act creatively is frustrated. Hamlet is thwarted by oppressive patriarchal life at the castle and the sick feudal society he lives in. It is not in Hamlet but in the state of Denmark that something is rotten. When his struggle to become what he truly is – free, productive, good – gets frustrated, it can end only in tragedy.

But hatred and destructiveness come second, only after the original impulse to love and to create is blocked. It happens not just to Hamlet but to everyone, and it happens because all societies are unfit for human habitation. All societies prevent people from achieving their potential; they twist love into hate; and they make our inclination to live morally turn into violence and destructiveness, like a prince changing into a frog. This is the Fall of Man the Bible describes; and it happens repeatedly, as every generation is damaged and distorted by the sick, insane society it is born in. Some societies are less damaging than others, but all frustrate human potential and make people flawed, mean, evil. 'If life's tendency to grow, to be lived, is thwarted, the energy thus blocked undergoes a process of change and is transformed into life-destructive energy. *Destructiveness is the outcome of un-lived life.*' What has blocked the human potential of twentieth-century man and woman, and made them the way they are, is patriarchal competitive capitalism.

When Freud introduced the death instinct in his later writings to explain human violence, he placed it on an equal footing with the life instinct. When Fromm in his later writings introduced necrophilia, the 'love of the dead', and biophilia, 'the love of

life', he did not regard them as equals. For Fromm 'the love of life' comes first, and life is what human beings are equipped for. The 'love of the dead' is merely a sick distortion which emerges when the impulse to life is blocked. The great refusal in the Garden of Eden meant the species separated from nature – it was cast out of paradise – and became human; but the rebellion has to be repeated in every lifetime. Each of us has to break free – from God in the Garden, from the Grand Inquisitor of culture, from the collective ant-hill of society, from incestuously inclined mothers – to become truly human. Whichever womb it is, we have to escape from it if it is not to become our tomb. Mother, family, society, mother-country, blood, race are our genesis, the source of life, but any of them can turn into an octopus that smothers and stifles us.

It is the failure to break incestuous bonds and become individual that is the root cause of Fromm's 'love of the dead', that 'passion to transform that which is alive into something unalive; to destroy for the sake of destruction . . . to tear apart living structure'. This is the late anal character in pathological form. In its full malignant destructiveness it is Hitler's enjoyment of torture, wanting the bomb to drop, or George Orwell's future in 1984 of 'a boot stamping on a human face – for ever'.

Free choice has its place in such destructiveness, though Fromm remains vague about this. However, Fromm is clear about what causes destructiveness, whether it be Hitler's or the modest disruptiveness of the late anal character or even that of Shakespeare's Hamlet. The play ends with bodies all over the stage, not primarily because of Hamlet's anger with the uncle who had murdered his father; it ends in violence because Hamlet cannot separate himself from his father and mother, even though one of them is dead. Hamlet has not grown up and become free, fully human and alive by standing up to his parents, and the result is destructiveness.

Human destructiveness manifests itself also as sadism. Sadism appears in many forms: bullying in the playground, sarcasm in the classroom, wife-beating, torture, Stalin's delight in ordering the execution of the friend or the wife of a subordinate. There may be innate factors in sadism, and personal experience of

terrifying and arbitrary punishment may play its part. School bullies are often on the receiving end of bullying at home, and wife-beaters usually have fathers who beat their mothers. But Fromm regards the influence of the wider society as important, and a society where one class or group dominates and exploits another is a breeding-ground for sadists. Like 'the love of the dead', sadism is secondary because humans are innately equipped with the potential for care, creativity and love. Sadism is adopted only as a last resort, a particularly unpleasant solution to loneliness and insignificance which emerges when societies make truly human solutions impossible.

Fromm is clear: the purpose of existence is love, doing good, genuine relationships and productive work. This is our nature. When men and women are evil and destructive, it is only because their potential to mature into free creative beings is frustrated by sick societies. Human evil and destructiveness are only 'the outcome of un-lived life'; when we have built sane societies, our full potential will begin to be realized. Within the limits of the human condition imposed by unchanging constraints like death, all problems are solvable – by technology and now more importantly by social and psychological science. Fromm affirms: 'I believe in the perfectibility of man.'

Though a neo-Freudian, Fromm – in contrast to Freud himself – provides us with an optimistic view of human beings. At the same time he has made us aware that we are not as fond of freedom as we would like to believe. He has enabled us to see that authoritarian ideologies, repressive regimes, totalitarian political movements, uncaring commercial companies are not unfortunate accidents of our times, but in part are the result of our reluctance to be free and responsible. Fromm has shown how the free choice that we have, even when embraced, is not total. Class, society, economic structure, and ideas, usually working through the family, shape us and limit our freedom. And Fromm has not ignored human violence and destructiveness but has suggested how they occur when human growth is frustrated, often by external circumstances.

Out of this awareness of how family, relationships, the economic structure, society, and the current coinage of ideas and

values shape human beings, Fromm has created a useful classification of personality. In this system, human freedom and choice are not ignored. And Fromm suggests that it is because such fluid factors shape personality that personality develops differently in different social classes and different historical situations. This leads us to ask: what is our situation? Human beings have never been at home in the world, and with the death of God and the decline of religion we seem now totally without any roof over our heads. Fromm has seen that 'Man does not live by bread alone' and needs meaning in life. Fromm's solution, that society should be so structured as to enable people to find love, creative work and meaning in their lives, is useful – if inadequate and rather obvious. More original is his realization that, besides love and relationships, people need to be separate and independent and free if they are to become truly human.

In his approach to the problem of mind Fromm begins from an evolutionary standpoint. Human beings are strange in many ways, but particularly odd is their ambivalent relationship with the natural world from which they emerged. In the course of evolution the power of animal instinct has declined, while the higher processes of reason, memory and imagination have increased. Freud knew this but stressed that animal instinct remains a powerful force in human beings. But for Fromm this evolutionary development of higher processes has transformed everything; and crucial for the human being has been the development of an awareness of one's self as something separate. The awareness of a self meant that mind and consciousness had arrived, and human beings had become separate from nature. Though separate, they remained subject to its laws, apart from nature while still part of nature. There was now a new species on Earth, an animal that not only knows but knows it knows. With human consciousness a quite different type of animal had arrived, part of nature but transcending nature. Evolution had produced a freak because life had become aware of itself – but Fromm does not explain how this happened.

It is our freak condition – part of but apart from nature – which is the origin of so much human anguish. 'It is wonderful



to look upon the things of the world,' said the Buddha, 'and terrible to be them.' It is also the cause of our strange experience of seeming to live in two worlds, material and spirit, body and mind. In Fromm's account, we have consciousness and mind which are partly responsible for making us do what we do. There is nothing startling in this and it would be part of any common-sense view of human beings. But though Fromm puts mind and consciousness firmly in an evolutionary context, nowhere does he account for their emergence.

For Freud we begin only as instinct and body and, from this, mind emerges. But Fromm does not see mind, consciousness, creativity, our need and capacity for love and human relationships as coming second. With Fromm mind is not determined by biology, but what we do with our body is partly decided by our mind. Mind comes first. Fromm, we have suggested, writes as if God is about to be appealed to on the next page; and his emphasis on the higher human processes recalls Genesis and God breathing spirit into matter. But Fromm is no dualist and does not believe that besides body there is soul or spirit. Like Freud he holds we are nothing but bodies . . . and minds!

Fromm does not adopt Freud's account of mind and consciousness emerging from bodies in the course of each individual development. In Fromm's account our minds may not precede our bodies into our mothers' wombs, but they seem to emerge with them. So what is mind, if spirit does not exist? How do mind and consciousness relate to the body which they affect so powerfully? Where does our need and capacity to relate to other people come from? Who or what does the relating?

Mind, conscious I, and the person that thinks, remembers, imagines, that needs to relate to others, to be free and to work productively, that is moral in nature . . . are real enough in Fromm's account. But he does not explain how they originate, nor even what they are.

Chapter Six

MERELY PLAYERS:

The social behaviourism of role theory and G. H. Mead

All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players.

Shakespeare: *As You Like It*, Act II, sc. vii

If you want to go to university, make sure you are not born the daughter of a labourer, a window-cleaner or a kitchen-hand. There are almost no women with fathers in social class five among graduates from British universities. If your father is an unskilled worker and you are male, your chances of getting to university improve only slightly. Even when IQs at the age of eleven are the same, the children of unskilled and semi-skilled workers are less likely to end up with 'O'- and 'A'-level passes and degrees than those from a higher social class. Your best bet is to be born the son of a father in a profession.

People's lives are decided by their social position – this is the view of role theory. There is no need to resort to Freudian super-egos, Skinner's rewards and punishments, the Rogerian self or Fromm's problems of relationships in order to account for the behaviour of human beings. All we need do is look at their sex, social class, family, religion, age. We are born male or female . . . black, white, yellow . . . in a certain family in a particular class . . . Protestant, Hindu or whatever . . . and we are a certain age. We have no choice about any of this – but, as role theory demonstrates, it decides our lives.

Even the jobs we seem to deserve credit for are not ours because of application and talent. I am now qualified as a doctor; but being male with a doctor for a father (and one who could afford the right school) helped me to get to medical college. Having become a doctor (or docker) decides the rest:

Peter Morea

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CONTENTS

	<i>Introduction</i>	I
1	THE PUZZLE	7
2	THE SAVAGE INFANT: <i>Freud's psycho-analysis</i>	15
3	PIGEON PEOPLE: <i>B. F. Skinner's behaviourism</i>	44
4	FLOWER PEOPLE: <i>Carl Rogers's self theory</i>	66
5	LONELY LIBERALS: <i>Erich Fromm's neo-Freudianism</i>	86
6	MERELY PLAYERS: <i>The social behaviourism of role theory and G. H. Mead</i>	115
7	THE KNOWING SCIENTISTS: <i>George Kelly's construct theory</i>	135
8	THE MYSTERY	153
	<i>Epilogue</i>	171
	<i>Sources</i>	175
	<i>Suggestions for Further Reading</i>	177
	<i>Index</i>	183

