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ERICH FROMM'S

Escape from Freedom

A Critical Commentary

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Introduction and Background Material

I. THE TRIUMPH OF IRRATIONALITY

Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* was first published in 1941. The war against Nazi Germany had been raging for almost two years, and Hitler's dominion stretched from Europe's Atlantic coast to beyond the borders of Russia. For a man of Erich Fromm's background—and more will be said about it later—there were two closely related questions that pursued him and demanded an answer. What explained the apparently willing, in part even fervent, submission of the German people to Hitler's brutal and antirational dictatorship—the submission of a people with a distinguished cultural history, of a people who were highly “civilized” if the grade of civilization is measured by the degree of literacy, technical skill, and artistic and philosophic achievements? And secondly, if this surrender of liberty had taken place in Germany, and in other parts of Europe, was there any assurance that the old, established democracies of the West—particularly the United States—were safe against a similar process? Could it “happen here”? There were men and women in America and elsewhere in the West who openly proclaimed Nazism and Fascism as “the wave of the future,” who saw in it a remedy against the ills of a materialistic liberalism that they thought had destroyed the feeling of togetherness, had rendered men egotistical and calculating, and had deprived them of the sustaining myths of traditional religion without putting constructive systems of belief in their place. Had not Hitler been able to arouse the German people—particularly German youth—to a high pitch of unselfish enthusiasm, to a will-



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ingness to merge their individual selves in the grand collective of the nation and to sacrifice material welfare, even their lives, for the sake of an ideal that transcended the petty goals of their everyday existence? One could not help but be haunted by the filmed reports of the huge Nazi rallies at Nuremberg, by the rhythm of thousands of stamping feet, by the forest of banners, and above all, by the faces of those marching—determined, impersonal, almost trancelike in their dedication.

It is a diagnosis of this phenomenon of mass surrender among a highly advanced people that Fromm attempts in *Escape from Freedom*. Since his work is a diagnosis of the “illness” that he claims to find at the root of this submission rather than a prescription for a remedy to bring about its cure, our estimate of his effort must depend on the adequacy of the work’s explanatory power rather than on the all too sketchy hints the author puts forth as his answer to the question of how society must be structured if it is to be safe against similar relapses into barbarism.

II. MARX AND FREUD

For an understanding of Fromm’s approach, and of its strengths as well as its weaknesses, it is essential to consider the influence on him of his intellectual godfathers: Marx and Freud. Fromm is neither a Marxist nor a Freudian in the crude sense that he can think only within the confines of the frameworks established by these geniuses. In many respects he departs from their insights, and nowhere more than in his insistence on integrating their very different (and in many ways contradictory) theories. Yet it is through drawing on Freud’s lessons on the power of irrational factors in influencing human behavior that Fromm is able, in his mind, to save Marxism from being obliterated by the evidence of political developments: instead of the triumph of the revolutionary proletariat predicted by Marx, history has witnessed the destruction of its organized power in one of the most highly industrialized nations; instead of the collapse of capitalism, bringing to a pitch the class consciousness and fighting spirit of the European working class, as anticipated by Marx, there has been economic depression paralyzing the working class’s ability to act, bringing with it apathy and resignation, if not willing surrender; instead of the petty bourgeoisie—the small shopkeepers, white-collar employees, artisans—uniting in a common cause with the class of exploited manual labor under the impact of crisis, the petty bourgeoisie has violently

attempted to resist being pushed down into the ranks of the proletariat and being declassed.

We should thus be aware of the tremendous shock that the success of Fascism and Nazism delivered not only to liberal democrats but also to Marxist socialists, for they had both shared an eighteenth-century faith in the innate rationality of man, a belief in the inevitability of progress through man’s struggle for freedom and peace. Neither liberals nor Marxists were prepared for the willing mass surrender of freedom once gained, the refusal to think rationally, the embracing of (seemingly totally obsolete) “blood and soil” myths, and the joyful endorsement of aggression, brutality, and murder.

For Marxists, certain popular explanations of this phenomenon, such as that based on German national character, were unacceptable or insufficient. They had been trained to think of historical developments as reflecting the struggles between classes—classes that had their basis in economic forces that transcended national boundaries. They were humanists in that they saw men everywhere as representatives of one human race, fundamentally alike though temporarily distinguished from one another by the differential development of the economic order in various parts of the world and by the diverse constellations of class power expressing these developments. An explanation in terms of racial or national peculiarities was therefore obnoxious to their way of thinking. The fact that Germany was among the most highly industrialized capitalist countries in the world appeared of primary significance; the special facets of German history seemed decidedly secondary.

Communists following the interpretation of events dictated by Stalin had a very simple explanation: Fascism was the last defense of monopoly (capitalism); Hitler and Mussolini were tools of the monopoly; and the system was bound to collapse because of its “inner contradictions” (its inability to resolve in the long run the crises supposedly inherent in capitalism). This explanation was obviously faulty in many respects. Above all it failed to explain that phenomenon most disturbing to socialist believers in the basic rationality of men, particularly in the rationality of the working classes: the apparent eagerness of the surrender—so widespread among the masses—to irrational domination that could not be explained away by reference to “traitorous” leaders or to the terror exerted by the “class enemy.”

Marxist Adaptation of Freudian Theory

It is at this point that some outstanding Marxist intellectuals in the

West turned to the teachings of Freud to supplement those of Marx. (Besides Fromm, one could mention Herbert Marcuse and the late Franz Neumann.) They not only were appalled by the barbaric throwback of Fascism but were also deeply disturbed by the emergence of Stalinist dictatorship in the Soviet Union, which called into question, from a different angle, their faith in socialist progress through the collective ownership of the means of production. Freud seemed to provide illumination primarily on two accounts: He had emphasized the nonrational component in human behavior; and, under the impact of the First World War, he had (in *Civilization and Its Discontents* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) developed a theory of human nature in which aggressive and destructive drives, directed against the self as well as against the outside world, were of decisive importance.

Yet Freud's message could not be swallowed whole by a socialist, Marxist or otherwise, for Freud's outlook was profoundly pessimistic. The "death wish" he postulated in his later work was opposed to the life-affirming philosophy of socialist humanism; the destructive tendencies of aggression were, to Freud, the inevitable price that men had to pay in their "progress" toward civilization, which forced them to repress so many individual desires. Freud had been quite explicit about it: Socialism—that is, collective labor based on mutual cooperation, not competition—was not a feasible solution, because it left no peaceful outlet for men's aggressive drives (see *Civilization and Its Discontents*).

While Marx had prepared his followers to accept the role of irrational beliefs through his theory of ideology, the basic optimism of the socialist faith was sustained by the assumption that this "false consciousness" (Freud's "rationalization") was limited to the exploiting classes. The laboring masses struggling against the exploiters had no need of conscious or unconscious deception of others or themselves. In the course of the struggle they would come to realize their own class interest and its identity with the traditional ideal of mankind: rationality and harmony in a cooperative, classless society.

A Marxist could accept Freud's pessimistic view that all men, regardless of class, were inevitably and permanently irrational and equipped with destructive impulses—but he would then have to cease being a socialist. Or he could modify Freud's findings to deprive them of their pessimistic core. While using Freud to explain the apparent irrationality of the masses, he would at the same time attempt to show that this was not an inherent feature

of human nature, as Freud has postulated, but a deviation—a disease, if you wish—brought about by specific and temporary historical circumstances.

III. CULTURAL RELATIVISM

At this point it may be useful to mention a third major intellectual influence that contributed to Fromm's shaping of the Freudian theory in a manner compatible with his optimistic socialist belief. I am referring to the influence of cultural anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Ruth Benedict and of psychoanalysts like Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan. Since Fromm explains in the first chapter of *Escape from Freedom* the nature of his modifications of Freud's theories and acknowledges his indebtedness to the writers mentioned, there is no need to provide here a detailed analysis of their views. For Fromm, the main significance of their findings lay in their emphasis on the dynamic interaction between a highly flexible human nature and its sociocultural environment—a strong contrast to Freud's picture of the individual pitted against a hostile society. Fromm was not willing, however, to throw overboard the concept of human nature altogether by embracing a theory of man as a "creature of culture." To do this would have implied abandonment of belief in the desirability of one social system—socialism—as needed for the full development of the creative potentialities of human nature. In fact, as we shall see, this is the controversial core of Fromm's thesis: that "human nature, though being the product of historical evolution has certain inherent mechanisms and laws"; and that social systems are to be judged by their ability to meet man's basic needs, particularly "the tendency to grow, to develop and realize potentialities which man has developed in the course of history."



Analysis and Commentary

I. FREEDOM—A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEM

A. External Domination and Internal Control

Western history is characterized by the successive and successful struggle of the individual against *outward* domination by the church, by the absolutist state, and even by physical nature. Nineteenth-century liberal optimism was based on the assumption that the abolition of external domination was not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition for the attainment of liberty. In the first half of the twentieth century, however, the observer was suddenly faced with the phenomenon of voluntary mass submission to an unaccountable and irresponsible authority. In Germany, in particular, millions appeared anxious to rid themselves of the liberties their father had struggled to gain.

In examining this apparent contemporary longing for submission and lust for power, some basic questions arise:

- (1) Is the desire for freedom inherent in human nature—inde- pendent of culture—or does it change with the degree of individualism in a particular society?
- (2) What is the nature of freedom? Is it merely the absence of outside restraint? Or is it also the presence of some- thing—and if so, of what?
- (3) What are the social and economic factors that encourage the striving for freedom?
- (4) Can freedom become a burden? And if so, why is free- dom a desirable goal for many, yet a threat for others?

- (5) Is there an innate wish for submission? What is the nature of submission? And what satisfaction is derived from it?
- (6) What creates in men an insatiable lust for power? Is it an expression of energy or of a fundamental weakness?

In order to attempt an answer to these questions it is necessary to examine the manner in which psychological, economic, and ideo- logical factors interact in the social process. The rise of Fascism came as a shock because people had been taught, particularly since the eighteenth century, to believe in a rational world, to relegate “the dark and diabolical forces of man’s nature” to the Middle Ages.

Freud’s View of Man in Society Freud was among the few who were not deceived by the prevailing optimism. He had not only drawn attention to the irrational and subconscious sectors of man’s nature but had also perceived the character structure of the individual as a reaction to the influences exercised by the outside world, particularly in early childhood. But Freud and most of his disciples were sociologically naïve and excessively culture- bound. Freud thought the function of society was primarily to restrain man’s basic, biologically rooted impulses. Because man appeared fundamentally antisocial to him, the advances of culture had to be paid for by diminishing the satisfaction of man’s basic drives. While Freud saw men in their relations to one another, these relations appeared to him to be modeled on the market as it operates in a competitive capitalist society. In this model the individual is assumed to work not cooperatively with his fellowmen, but selfishly for himself. Thus human relations become character- ized by a market pattern in which the other is not seen as an end but merely as a means to the satisfaction of one’s own needs.

B. The Limits of Man’s Adaptability

To this exploitative concept of man’s nature and social relations, Fromm opposes a plastic, cooperative concept for which he finds support in the writings of contemporary sociologists and anthro- pologists. He entirely rejects the dichotomy between the indi- vidual and society, as postulated by Freud on the assumption of a fixed set of instinctive drives that could only be frustrated or satisfied. Fromm notes that man’s character definitely changes in the course of history... Men of one era may burn with ambition and the obsessive need for work, while those of another period in history may lack drive and find work burdensome. Thus history cannot be understood as the result of psychological forces them-

selves incapable of modification. Men's energies shaped into specific forces by history become in turn "productive forces, molding the social process." The most important and most difficult task of social and historical analysis is to understand this interaction pattern between a dynamically conceived human nature and its social and physical environment. Fromm rejects the concept of a permanently fixed human nature. At the same time, however, he rejects the concept of human nature as infinitely malleable and capable of unlimited adaption to environmental conditions.

1. Static and Dynamic Adaptation Fromm differentiates between static adaptation, which leaves the character structure unchanged and only results in adoption of a new habit (e.g., eating with chopsticks instead of knife and fork), and dynamic adaptation, such as occurs when a boy submits to a strict father, becomes a "good" boy, but also may develop intense hostility against his father. This latent hostility becomes a dynamic factor in his character structure and may express itself in various forms. A crucial question remains, however: What are the limits of man's adaptability? Distinction must be made between needs related to self-preservation (hunger, thirst, sleep, etc.), which are physiologically determined and require satisfaction under all circumstances, and needs that men develop according to the whole mode of life they find themselves in (Fromm mentions love, destructiveness, and sadism). Although these psychological needs are not rigid in their origin, they cease to be flexible once they have become anchored in a person's character.

According to Fromm (following Marx), work is the main link, the mode of life, that connects what may be called primary needs with the secondary, derived ones—not work in the abstract, but the concrete work demanded by and defining an economic-social system. At birth man finds a social system already in existence. To live, he has to feed himself, and thus he has to work within the pattern established by the system. But different kinds of work—as a slave, as a peasant, as an entrepreneur, or as a manager—require different personality traits and make for different forms of relatedness to others. Thus the individual's personality is primarily molded by the particular mode of life he finds at birth, which is transmitted to him in childhood by the family.

2. The Need to Belong In addition to the imperative needs deriving from man's physical nature, Fromm perceives another need of overpowering force. Put positively, this is the mental need of man to relate himself to and identify with something or

somebody outside of himself. He feels the need to belong. Put negatively, it is the need to avoid the fear of isolation, the "moral aloneness," as Fromm calls it, which, in its extreme form expresses itself as schizophrenic disturbance. The explanation Fromm gives for this need is twofold. First, survival demands cooperation. The human child is helpless and completely dependent for a long period on communication with others. Second, there is the peculiarly human faculty of self-consciousness. Through this, man becomes aware of himself as a separate entity, subject to age, sickness, and death, and experiences his insignificance and smallness within the universe. This experience, according to Fromm, implants in man the need for finding meaning and direction in his life.

It is this inevitability of the process of individuation (men becoming aware of themselves as separate entities) coupled with the need to overcome the feeling of isolation and insecurity engendered by it that is at the heart of Fromm's analysis.

C. Social Character and Social Process: The Methodological Problem

To illuminate his core of concepts, "social character" and "social power," Fromm adds a theoretical appendix, which it would be wise to summarize before proceeding with analysis of his historical argument.

Fromm assumes that most members of a particular social group (class) will, on the basis of common life-experiences, develop character structures that are alike in crucial respects. He is aware that there may be major character differences between individual members of a specific social group, but these may either belong to unrepresentative "deviants" (statistically speaking) with totally different character structures, or may refer to character traits that are irrelevant to the understanding of the sociopolitical behavior of that group.

1. The Relation Between Performance and Gratification The behavior of members of a group, Fromm argues, cannot be properly understood or predicted from the conscious ideas expressed by them but only from the emotional matrix in which these ideas are embedded and which determines their meaning as well as their intensity. Ideas become effective as social forces only in relation to the human needs they serve, and these needs vary with a particular social character.

Individual character, according to Fromm, develops as a func-

tion of a person receiving practical and psychic gratification from his activities, leading him to want to act as he ought to act to receive these satisfactions. Social character performs the same function for the individual and society: it predisposes the individual members of a social group to perform—and to wish to perform—the tasks a social system objectively requires in order to function adequately.

As long as material and psychic gratifications result from the performance of socially required tasks, the system is in balance. Tensions arise, according to Fromm's interpretation of Marxist dialectic, when objective requirements change and the internalized character structure of some social group ceases to be functional. As an example Fromm cites the old German middle class, whose traditional characteristics of frugality, thrift, and suspiciousness became dysfunctional in the period of modern big-business capitalism when quite different qualities were required and rewarded.

2. Education and Social Character The educational system of a society cannot be understood independently of the social system in which it operates. Its function is to mold individual character so that it approximates social character, adapting desires to the necessities of the social role. Thus educational techniques cannot be used as a casual explanation of a particular kind of social character. The family functions as the psychological agent of society. It significantly helps in shaping the social character of the child. It does this not only through manifest training but also by reflecting the social atmosphere and the parents' own personalities.

3. Self-realization and the Social Process Furthermore, Fromm postulates another crucial source of tension. He assumes an inherent need to "realize potentialities which man has developed in the course of history." Suppression and frustration of this need are likely to result in the formation of destructive impulses. The striving for justice and truth is closely linked to the demand for freedom, as it represents the most important weapon of the weak and powerless in their struggle for self-realization. In Fromm's view, the dynamism that moves the social process forward is provided by this drive for self-fulfillment. A conception of man as a mere puppet, a creature controlled by social circumstances, must therefore be rejected.

4. Fromm's Modification of Freudian Psychology In contrast to Freud, Fromm believes man is primarily a social being. A

psychology that fails to focus on interpersonal relations is inherently faulty. Freud, Fromm argues, mistook the causal relation between the erogenous zones and character traits. Fromm reverses the relation: "oral" and "anal" character traits are not primary but derived reactions to a child's experiences with others. Oral or anal phantasies are not the causes of exploitative or dependent attitudes; they are, rather, bodily expressions of these attitudes. Freud's characterological findings become useful if—but only if—they are seen as describing mechanisms through which certain group attitudes are internalized in the child.

Fromm rejects Freud's interpretation of all "ideal" motives as rationalizations of essentially base or mean childhood desires. While Fromm does not deny that ideals such as truth, justice, and freedom are frequently used as rationalizations, he insists that they reflect fundamental strivings rooted in the conditions of human life and that they can and should be analyzed as such. Fromm views Freud's psychology as based on an assumption of scarcity in which "phenomena of abundance, like love or tenderness," play no role. Yet it is only in a system of abundance that man has enough time and energy left beyond the satisfaction of primary needs for the opportunity and need for free, spontaneous, and joyful activities to arise.

5. Fromm's Interaction Mechanism Fromm rejects the "psychological" explanation of Freud (capitalism as the outcome of anal eroticism); the "economist" approach of "vulgar" Marxism (subjective economic interest as the cause of religious or political ideas); and the "idealistic" position of Max Weber (religious ideas as causes of new types of economic behavior). Arguing a more complex relationship between psychological, ideological, and economic factors, Fromm feels that men change their personality structures dynamically in response to changes in their economic environment. Thus, psychological factors, while historically conditioned, are not fixed motivations, and economic factors as well as ideas are, in turn, affected by psychological forces. Instead of a simple, one-way cause-effect relationship, Fromm assumes an interaction mechanism.

II. THE EMERGENCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE AMBIGUITY OF FREEDOM

At the root of human individuality is man's capacity to think—more specifically, his capacity to think of himself as a separate

person. Man's recognition of himself as an individual is the source of both his strength and his weakness. In it lies "the ambiguity of freedom": freedom as a goal to be striven for and, dialectically, as a burden to be shed when it proves a source of anxiety.

The biblical myth of the fall of man would indicate that man's expulsion from the paradise of oneness with nature through growing knowledge of his separate individuality was a sudden act that was inherent in human nature as such. But Fromm insists that the awareness of individual separateness was not an event but a process; the social process of individuation reproduced on a large scale the growth process that every member of the human species has to go through. In order for men to become fully individuated, they had to sever two kinds of primary ties: those that bound them (first physically, through the umbilical cord, then psychically, through total dependence on the parents) to the core family; and those sociocultural ties that kept men embedded in their culture group and its authoritative value system. While the first, essentially biological, set of ties is automatically broken in the growth process of every individual, the possibly negative effects of physical independence (e.g., freedom from protection and security) are blocked as long as the group continues to provide its member with a structure in which he has an unquestionable—and unquestioned—place. As long as the individual is embedded in a stable and authoritative social matrix the pains or deprivations he experiences are bearable, for, like hunger or oppression, they do not destroy his inner security.

What characterizes human nature, and distinguishes it fundamentally from the nature of animals, is the weakness of man's instinctual equipment. Unlike ants, who construct highly complex social organizations through inflexible instincts, man's adaptation to nature is primarily based on learning, not on instinctual determination. This makes man dependent on his parents for a longer period than any animal and causes his reactions to be less quick and effective than automatically instinctive actions. But it is this biological weakness that is also the source of his greatest achievement: the creation of human culture through the productive modification of his environment.

Fromm holds that for a long time the individual, though biologically an adult, continued to be closely tied to the natural and social world from which he emerged. Breaking away from oneness with nature did not yet involve full awareness of the individual as a separate entity, thrust out "from the sweet bondage of paradise." The growth of self-awareness, of individual freedom, or

to put it negatively, of individual aberration, is a slow historical process. Fromm sees the full emergence of the individual (in the Western world) as beginning with the Renaissance and reaching its crisis-laden climax in our own century. It was the breakdown of the stable medieval social and religious order, the replacement of feudalism with capitalism, and the destruction of Catholic unity through the Reformation that first allowed the modern concept of freedom to develop. With it, however, there also emerged the ambiguity of freedom, marked by increasing external liberty and the simultaneous growth of feelings of individual powerlessness.

The Reformation contained within itself a basic contradiction. While it affirmed the individual's autonomy and his equality in the sight of God, it also brought home to him his unworthiness, his complete dependence on God's grace, and the need for submission to God's will. Fromm perceives here a strong parallel to the conflicts of our own period. Today, as then, radical socio-economic changes have threatened the traditional way of life of vast sectors of the population. With the growth of the capitalist market and with the concentration of economic power, the individual of the middle class has felt himself becoming more and more insignificant.

III. FREEDOM IN THE AGE OF THE REFORMATION

A. Medieval Background and the Renaissance

In talking about concepts such as medieval society, capitalism, and the spirit of the Protestant Reformation, Fromm wants it understood that he is using them as "ideal types" (i.e., that he is emphasizing the fundamental differences between epochs and systems at the expense of continuities that he does not deny).

It is important, Fromm argues, neither to idealize the Middle Ages nor to see the period as one of unrelieved darkness. Individual freedom in the modern sense did not exist, for man's role in the social order defined and limited his position and range of aspirations. The individual did not possess those liberties that we have come to prize most highly—the right to move, to strive, to compete, to believe. But within the defined limits of his social sphere there was considerable concrete individualism. Although suffering was admittedly widespread, it was alleviated by the Church's assurance of love and a sense of belonging. As Jacob Burckhardt has said, awareness of self and of society was covered by a veil "woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession. . . ."

1. The Growth of Capitalism In Italy the structure of medieval society was first undermined by the growth of a commercial, moneyed class. Individualism—affecting taste, art, fashion, philosophy, and theology—developed in all classes. But this development, Fromm insists, had different meaning for and impact on the group of prosperous capitalists, on the one hand, and the peasants and urban middle class artisans and small shopkeepers, on the other. For the poor, particularly, the growth of individualism represented both an opportunity for moving ahead and a threat to their traditional way of life.

The Renaissance was a culture of wealthy nobles and burghers; the masses had lost the security of their former status and had become prey to manipulation and exploitation by fiercely competitive power-seeking elites. Egocentricity replaced solidarity; the Renaissance capitalist's feeling of strength was accompanied by doubt, skepticism, isolation, and anxiety. The search for fame, so characteristic of Renaissance man, is perceived by Fromm as a fundamental attempt to give individual life a significance through recognition by others, and thus to silence one's doubts and anxiety. For the powerless masses and the urban middle class, which had no realistic hope of gaining fame because they lacked the financial means, this avenue of self-elevation was foreclosed.

It was not in Renaissance Italy, however, that the basis for the development of modern capitalistic society was laid. Following Max Weber's assertion of the close connection between Protestantism and the "spirit of capitalism," Fromm focuses on an examination of the interaction between the teachings of Luther and Calvin, the economic and social situation prevailing in Central and Western Europe during the sixteenth century, and the psychological factors characteristic of social groups living in this period of change.

The medieval economic structure had been marked by stability and lack of competition, and thus had given considerable security to small craftsmen and businessmen. Under the then prevailing system, economic activities were subordinated to religious and moral considerations. While accepted as necessary to the sustenance of life, economic activities were suspect as tempting man away from the true purpose of life, the search for values. They opened man to the pursuit of wealth for its own sake (the deadly sin of avarice), and thus required restrictions of various kinds.

Gradually, however, the stable guild system was undermined by increasing differentiation among its members, creating a widening gap between some masters and others and between masters and journeymen. Commerce, too, began to be subject to a process

of concentration; big commercial companies and monopolies preempted ever larger sections of the growing "international" trade and rendered the position of small traders increasingly insecure.

2. Effect on the Individual With the beginning of capitalism, all classes of society began to move. The individual's place in society was no longer fixed by tradition but depended on his own efforts. For the workers and apprentices in the cities this meant growing exploitation and impoverishment; for peasants and the lower nobility it meant economic pressure and the threat of ruin. The middle class was divided between those who participated in the upward trend of capitalist prosperity and the many others who were confronted with powerful odds in their struggle for economic betterment. Regardless of personal fortune, however, the emergence of a capitalist market based on competition rendered the individual highly insecure and prone to anxiety.

Production and commerce were no longer carried on within a limited, understandable, and controllable system of economic relations, but within an impersonal and uncontrollable network that subordinated all participants to its exacting and unpredictable requirements. Money, the great equalizer, became more important than birth or caste in determining an individual's chances in life. It freed the individual from the traditional bondage of servitude and status and made it possible for him to become the master of his own fate. But at the same time the individual felt threatened by powerful suprapersonal forces; he was becoming estranged from his fellowmen, for human relationships were now shaped by impersonal competition.

B. The Period of the Reformation

Fromm is primarily concerned with the meaning that the religious doctrines of Luther and Calvin had for the members of social groups who embraced them. "Meaning" is not intended to connote the manifest theological content of these doctrines, for Fromm abjures any judgment of their truth. Rather it involves a refusal to take statements at face value and the attempt to comprehend the entire doctrine and any part of it on the basis of the presumed psychic function it serves. When, for example, Luther speaks of submission to God as voluntary, resting on love not fear, Fromm discounts this formulation as a rationalization of the theologian's pervasive feeling of powerlessness and wickedness, which makes his relationship to God one of submission; similarly, Fromm goes on to say, "masochistic dependence of one person on another consciously is frequently conceived as 'love'."

1. The Change in Traditional Doctrine In analyzing the doctrines of the Reformation, Fromm again opts for an "ideal type" approach; that is, he emphasizes the discontinuities, which make for the new spirit of the Reformation, at the expense of the many doctrinal elements common to the old and new theology.

According to Fromm's interpretation, scholastic theologians from St. Thomas onward, while not able to avoid the problem of predestination, increasingly stressed the individual's freedom of will and his own efforts as instruments helping him to salvation. In spite of the taint of original sin, man's nature was viewed as providing him with the capacity for free choice of the good. The practice of buying indulgences revealed the relative ease with which men could free themselves of the haunting anxiety about the future of their sinful souls. In medieval mystical literature, too, sin was not treated so much as a crushing burden but as human weakness demanding sympathy.

The philosophy of the Renaissance and the Catholic doctrine of the late Middle Ages counteracted the bewilderment and insecurity connected with the beginning of capitalism by emphasizing the role of will and human effort. Philosophers and theologians thus reflected, so Fromm argues, the spirit prevailing in social groups whose economic position gave them a feeling of power and independence. Luther, on the other hand, expressed the anxieties of the middle class, which felt threatened by rising capitalism and overcome by feelings of powerlessness and individual insignificance.

2. Luther and Calvin: Psychological and Sociological Interpretation The core of Luther's doctrine that man could be saved only by faith and by faith alone was linked to an emphasis on man's fallen state, his depravity. Man, according to Luther, is fundamentally evil and could be saved only through an "incomprehensible act of justice," if he resigned himself to the will of God. Luther's answer to the unbearable anxiety that derived from the unpredictability of God's judgment was his belief that man could passively receive God's grace and gain indubitable subjective assurance of salvation. Fromm interprets this doctrine psychologically as meeting Luther's overwhelming need for certainty in the face of debilitating doubt.

Luther's personality and teaching showed ambivalence toward authority—an oscillation between awe and rebellion. He showed similar ambivalence in his attitude toward the masses: although he instigated them to rebellion against authorities he disapproved of, he had nothing but hatred and contempt for them when they exceeded the limits he had set. Members of the middle class as

well as the urban poor and the peasants felt their anxieties, frustrations, and despairs expressed in Luther's teachings, but each class reacted—as could be expected—in different ways. The peasants and city poor turned into a revolutionary class, claiming the support of the gospels in their struggle against injustice and exploitation. The middle class reacted in a more complex manner, torn between feelings of resentment, insecurity, and insignificance, on the one hand, and hostility to revolutionary leveling on the other. Luther, who had initially seemed to support the revolutionary tendencies of the peasants, subsequently preached submission to worldly authority in the most drastic fashion and encouraged the princes to deal with the rebels without mercy.

3. Differences Between Calvin and Luther Calvin's theology exhibits essentially the same spirit as Luther's, both theologically and psychologically. His adherents were recruited mainly from the conservative middle class in France, Holland, and England, and consisted mostly of artisans and small businessmen; they were members of a group that was relatively prosperous but threatened by the rise of capitalism. Doctrinally, Fromm notes only two points of difference between Calvin and Luther that are of importance to his analysis. Calvin's doctrine of predestination—the cornerstone of his system—denies the supreme role of love in Christianity and stresses God's unlimited and inscrutable power. The second significant difference from Luther's teachings is Calvin's greater emphasis on the importance of moral effort and leading a virtuous life. Though the individual could not really change his ultimate fate through his works, his ability to perform them effectively could be construed by him as a sign of God's having elected him to be saved.

The psychological significance of the first point—predestination—is twofold. Predestination expresses and enhances the feeling of individual powerlessness and insignificance; simultaneously, however, it assuages doubt by providing the followers of Calvin with the feeling of absolute certainty that they belonged to the chosen ones. The idea that only some are among the chosen implies also the principle of the basic inequality of men, reflecting, so Fromm argues, an identical psychological mechanism as modern racism. The emphasis on a virtuous life also has a particular psychological significance: though the doctrine of unceasing effort according to God's word appears to be *logically* contradictory to the doctrine that human effort is of no avail with regard to man's salvation, *psychologically* it is highly meaningful. The anxiety engendered by acute doubt concerning one's future after death

produces a compulsive need to keep active as a means to escape its paralyzing effect. Besides serving as an escape from anxiety, effort was neurotically interpreted as a reassuring indication of a future event that could not be controlled by the individual and the outcome of which he could not affect by his own actions.

The new attitude toward effort and work as aims in themselves was, as Max Weber has pointed out, a highly significant result of the Reformation. Previously men had worked in response to a concrete demand, usually under outside pressure, with the aim of securing one's livelihood. There was no urge to work beyond what was necessary to maintain one's standard of living. But now men were moved to work by a compulsive need that they had internalized.

4. Puritanism and the Middle Class The Protestant Reformation, according to Fromm, not only reflected the anxiety of powerlessness characteristic of the middle class but also projected that class's intense feelings of hostility and resentment. It did this strikingly in Calvin's conception of a despotic God damning or saving men without rationally comprehensible justification. It expressed itself in moral indignation and the conviction that the nonelect would be punished by eternal suffering. And it showed itself in the emphasis on one's own wickedness and insignificance, which the psychoanalyst explains not as genuine humility but as the result of hatred that is diverted from the outside world and directed toward the self.

Fromm explains that it was the middle class in particular that developed this intense hostility; its capacity for emotional and sensual expression had been thwarted, and, unlike the classes above and below it, could not vent hostility overtly. Hoping to move upward, members of the middle class could not attack the social system or those who were above them. They could only envy them.

The new character structure, marked by the compulsion to work, thrift, asceticism, and a sense of duty, became in turn important in shaping further socioeconomic development.

IV. THE TWO ASPECTS OF FREEDOM FOR MODERN MAN

A. The Dialectic: Self-assertion and Self-surrender

The dialectical union of self-assertion and self-surrender characterizing the Reformation contained within itself, in Fromm's view,

the dynamics that worked itself out in the development of Western capitalist societies. Dialectical thinking, Fromm argues, reveals that the triumphs liberalism has won—at least in the Western democracies—are hollow: Freedom of worship is accompanied by loss of genuine faith; freedom of speech goes hand in hand with manipulation of the content of the thoughts we wish to express. In celebrating his hard-won liberties, modern man appears to Fromm unaware of the internal restraints that have largely deprived these liberties of their genuine meaning.

Fromm by no means discounts the gains that liberal capitalism brought to Western man in his struggle against external authority. Under the leadership of the middle class, man's control of his physical and political environment grew. Men became (legally, at least) equal; the differences of castes and religions gave way to awareness of the unity of the human race. In the modern democratic state, based on the principle of equality, a peak was reached in the "growth of an active, critical, responsible self."

But the development of institutions based on formal equality and individualism (e.g., the capitalist market, representative democracy) was achieved through the depersonalization of human relations, through the individual's subordination to purposes outside of himself. Production through accumulation of capital became an end in itself that entrepreneurs and workers alike accepted as a valid imperative.

1. Self-love and Selfishness At this point Fromm finds it necessary to explain the apparent contradiction between his emphasis on the ascetic, self-denying core of the capitalist spirit and the widespread impression that self-interest, pursuit of personal pleasure, and advantage are the characteristics of men in a capitalist society. Fromm sees the resolution of the contradiction in the distinction between self-love and selfishness. The two are not identical, not even complementary, he argues, but opposites. Self-love is the affirmation of the self along with the affirmation of all other human beings, and is rooted in secure awareness of one's ability for growth, freedom, and happiness. Selfishness, on the other hand, is a form of greed, a ceaseless attempt to assuage anxiety born from insecurity and self-denigration.

2. Man as Commodity At the heart of this growing insecurity is the increasing loss of modern man's control over his social universe, a universe characterized by catastrophic economic crises and wars. Above all, it is the multifaceted alienation man experiences through his integration into an impersonal market system

that empties him of true personality and, thus, of his capacity for self-esteem. In the market, relations between human beings are impersonal, manipulative, indifferent. * Ultimately man becomes a commodity to himself, which he sells like other goods. His personality, to have value, must be saleable; that is, it must meet the requirements of the market. Self-esteem becomes dependent on popularity, on the opinion that others have of one. In the absence of popularity profound inferiority feelings beset the individual.

B. Power and Powerlessness in the Middle Class

In the socioeconomic development of the nineteenth century, centering around the old middle class of independent entrepreneurs and the growth of the nation-state, the positive aspects of the liberation movement against external authority outweighed the negative ones. First the middle class, through its accession to wealth, prestige, and political influence, and then even the working class, which had achieved a sense of self-importance in its struggle against exploitation, gained a feeling of expanding power over their environment. * But the concentration of capital, the change toward a monopolistic market, had, according to Fromm, a devastating psychological effect on these groups. The small or middle-sized businessman lost his independence—openly or covertly. Even if he kept his enterprise from being swallowed up by a big concern, his area of entrepreneurial activity was limited or eliminated. Frequently, like the present-day owner of a gas station, he became merely part of the distributive apparatus, with an attendant loss of skill and initiative, though still able to make a profit in good times.

1. The Powerless Worker Similarly the members of the greatly enlarged sector of the new middle-class identified as "white collar" have been turned into insignificant cogs of a machine that they cannot control. The increasing size of the plant has also affected the position of the manual worker. The personal "boss" has been transformed into impersonal "management"; the worker's job has become only remotely related to the process of production from which it derives its meaning. The trade unions that were able to instill in him a feeling of strength vis-à-vis the power of the employer have grown into large, impersonal organizations, leaving the individual member little scope for initiative.

2. The Powerless Customer The position of the customer has also changed greatly. In the large department store he is seen as an abstraction; his individual taste and choice are a matter of indifference to the owner. In the old days the businessman's appeal to his customer was necessarily essentially rational, involving knowledge of the merchandise in relation to the customer's needs. Modern advertising is irrational, for it tries to impress customers by such techniques as repetition, hypnotic suggestions, authority images, and terror—all designed to smother and kill customers' critical capacities.

3. The Powerless Voter In the political sphere a parallel development has taken place. The familiar small-scale world in which the citizen could actively participate in shaping decisions and in selecting candidates known to him has disappeared. The voter today is confronted with vast party organizations, complex issues, and remote candidates selected by party machines. Political propaganda consciously befogs issues and operates with irrational techniques resembling those of advertising. Though both advertising and political propaganda flatter the individual by appearing to appeal to his judgment and sense of importance, this appeal is mere pretense, a means of deluding the individual into believing that the decision he makes is still his own.

Other factors that, according to Fromm, have contributed to a feeling of individual powerlessness are the threats of mass unemployment (not really alleviated by unemployment insurance) and total war; these overshadow people's lives, even when they are not consciously aware of them. This theme of powerlessness before vast impersonal forces has been reflected in the writing of many thinkers and artists, most poignantly in Franz Kafka's *The Castle*. But the average man cannot live perpetually in this state of fear and futility. Anxieties can be covered over for some time by distractions such as business success, travel, and entertainment, but this is only "whistling in the dark." The more profound attempt to escape fear and bewilderment takes one of two forms in our age: submission to a leader (as in Fascism); and compulsive conformity (as in Western democracy).

V. MECHANISMS OF ESCAPE

In order to establish his case that neither Fascist society nor capitalist-democratic society can present a genuine and therefore

lasting solution to the basic problem—the reconciliation of individuality and the aims of society—Fromm considers it necessary to explain more fully the root of the problem. He, therefore, returns to the basic question: What is the essence of the human personality? What are the limits of its adaptability?

Fromm rightly perceives that the validity of his entire argument rests on the validity of his psychological premises. These premises he attempts to establish through the psychoanalytical method, which, though not experimental, is, in his view, thoroughly empirical, since it is a method based on careful observation of “thoughts, dreams, and phantasies.” Because psychoanalytical inquiry has predominantly dealt with individuals defined as neurotic, the question arises whether their admittedly malfunctioning personality structures can provide us with valid conclusions as to the behavior of groups of ordinary people. Fromm argues, however, that neurotic behavior is, in principle, not different from normal behavior; it merely represents more clear-cut and accentuated patterns that are frequently hidden to the consciousness of the normal person.

Fromm defines the term “normal,” or “healthy,” in two ways, which, he insists, must be clearly distinguished from each other. The first is a definition related to “social efficiency,” to an individual’s capacity to function adequately within the society into which he has been born. The second defines “health” in terms of the individual’s ability to meet his need for growth and happiness. Only in an ideal society would the two forms of health coincide. In all societies we have hitherto known, a discrepancy has existed between the aims of the smooth functioning of society and the full development of the individual. If this distinction is kept in mind, it becomes justifiable to view the apparently normal person (i.e., the well adjusted person) as really sick, if his adjustment is bought at the expense of surrender of his individual self. Similarly, a society can be described as neurotic when its demands obstruct the abilities of men to meet their needs for happiness and self-realization.

Any course of individual action that does not consciously aim at eliminating the discrepancy by bringing the needs of the individual and the demands of society into genuine harmony is viewed by Fromm as spurious, for it secures the individual’s temporary escape from panic at the cost of self-surrender and abandonment of integrity. Only a move toward “positive freedom,” affirming the needs of the individual while relating him to the world through “love and work,” can be a healthy answer to the problem. The

emergence of the self-conscious, separate individual cannot be undone by compulsive self-surrender, which often takes culturally significant forms of attempts at escape.

A. Authoritarianism

1. Masochism and Sadism One mechanism of escape consists of the individual’s borrowing from the outside the strength he feels himself lacking. The individual surrenders his self by attempting to fuse “with somebody or something” outside the self. This takes the form of masochistic or sadistic striving for submission and domination.

Masochism expresses itself in feelings of inferiority, powerlessness, and individual insignificance. Where it is not plainly pathological it may be rationalized. Masochistic dependency is then conceived of as love or loyalty. Sadism, overtly the opposite of masochism, is nevertheless invariably present in the same kind of characters. It takes the form of either asserting unrestricted power over other persons to exploit them or of making others suffer (physically or mentally). Sadistic tendencies are usually more frequently rationalized than the socially more harmless masochistic strivings, and often represent themselves as concern for others. What the sadistic relationship has in common with the masochistic one is that both are based on the subject’s dependence on the object. The sadist, like the masochist, also needs his object, and is desperate when he is deprived of it.

In looking for the origin of sadomasochistic tendencies, Fromm distinguishes his own theory from that of other psychoanalysts such as Freud and Adler. Freud first constructed a theory of sadomasochism based on assumptions about stages in the individual’s psychosexual development, but he subsequently shifted to a theory postulating its relation to the death instinct. Alfred Adler viewed power striving and inferiority feelings as responses to a sense of helplessness springing from the insecurity and inferiority experienced by the child. Fromm, on the other hand, rests his theory on the assumption that underlying the sadomasochistic tendencies is the need to rid oneself of feelings of isolation and helplessness.

Masochism is one way to get rid of the burden of freedom by eliminating the individual self. The pain, which is the price the individual pays, is, however, not his true aim and does not succeed in bringing him lasting tranquility. The situation itself is not effectively dealt with by the neurotic manifestations. Masochism aims at overcoming the unbearable feeling of powerlessness not

only by annihilating the self but by submerging it in a bigger and more powerful whole outside of oneself. Life's meaning and the self's identity are now defined for the individual by the authority—God, or another person, or even the individual's own conscience—to which he has surrendered his autonomy. Accepting this external or internal authority saves the individual from the doubt of making decisions, from having to give a meaning to his life.

The feeling of belonging derived from this identification with authoritative power is, according to Fromm, necessarily spurious. Unlike the primary bonds to society, which gave genuine security because the self-conscious individual had not yet fully emerged, it represents a futile attempt at escape from the irreversible fact of individuality.

Sadism, like masochism, is a symbiotic relationship between subject and object. Both masochistic and sadistic tendencies may erroneously be confounded with love. But love as urge for sacrifice or domination for the other person's benefit denies the independence and integrity of the two persons involved. Love, properly defined, is passionate affirmation of the partner, based on equality and freedom, and is thus the opposite of sadomasochism.

2. Two Forms of Power: Domination and Potency Fromm also differentiates between two forms of power—domination and potency—which are, in fact, mutually exclusive. Lack of potency (not merely in the sexual realm) results in sadistic striving for domination. The truly potent person is able to maintain his own integrity and has no need to dominate others.

3. The Authoritarian Character To describe persons or groups that are not clinically perverse or neurotic but who nevertheless meet his definition of sadomasochistic character, Fromm uses the term "authoritarian character." Fromm clarifies the use of the term "authority" in this context by differentiating between rational and irrational authority relationships. The former, illustrated by the teacher-student relation, is characterized by common interests and respect for the integrity of the other person. The latter, illustrated by the master-slave relation, is based on exploitation and antagonism; it is, in Fromm's terms, an "inhibiting" use of authority, marked by feelings of hostility or adulation of power. Though in reality the two types of authority are usually intermingled and characterized by many gradations between the extremes, they can and should be analytically distinguished.

The individual with an authoritarian character is attracted by

the powerful. Power fascinates him; powerlessness arouses his contempt. In spite of appearances to the contrary, the authoritarian person is never a revolutionary; if he exhibits a certain amount of rebelliousness, it may be construed as an expression of resentment or disappointment. Above all, he venerates the conditions that limit human freedom. Fate may be rationalized in the form of nature, God, or history. Activity for him always means acting in the name of something higher, never in the name of the future, the as yet unborn. The authoritarian's "faith" is rooted in his doubts, lack of confidence, and, ultimately, is based on desperation and the denial of life. His philosophy knows no equality, no solidarity—only domination and submission.

A milder form of this authoritarian character is extremely widespread in our culture, Fromm asserts. Lacking the passionate qualities of sadomasochism, it consists of a person's subtle dependence on some power outside of himself. This "magic helper" may be an abstraction or a personification of power. The dependence on a personification of power is bound to prove disappointing, as the individual expectations are based on illusion. Unlike Freud, Fromm sees the root of this dependence on the "magic helper" not in the Oedipal attraction of the child to his parent, but in the parents actions suppressing the child's spontaneity and independence. At the heart of every neurosis and at the core of normal development is, in Fromm's view, "the conflict between that basic dependency and the quest for freedom."

B. Destructiveness

In contrast to sadism, which aims at the "incorporation of the object," destructiveness attempts its removal, and thus the elimination of any threat from the outside. As the amount of destructiveness varies enormously from individual to individual and from group to group, Freud's explanation of it as expressing a "death instinct" appears unsatisfactory to Fromm. Any biological, instinctual explanation of destructiveness would lead us to assume constancy in its expression. History and anthropology reveal wide variations, however. Without elaborating on this point, Fromm asserts a direct correlation between destructiveness and the degree to which spontaneous expression of the whole self is blocked: "*Destructiveness is the outcome of unlived life.*"

C. Automation Conformity

The remaining mechanism of escape of great social significance

is the individual's adoption of the kind of personality offered to him by the cultural patterns of society. By becoming an "automaton," he rids himself of feelings of isolation and anxiety. This relinquishing of the self characterizes our society, in spite of our conviction that most of us are individuals free to think, feel, and act as we please.

That it is possible for an individual to consider himself free in his decisions, while in reality he is at the mercy of an external force, is proved conclusively by the possibility of hypnosis and the existence of posthypnotic suggestion. Fromm insists that the phenomenon of which posthypnotic suggestion is an example is the rule rather than the exception. What distinguishes genuine individual thought or feeling from pseudo thinking is immediacy of response, utilizing perceptions and experiences that have not been mediated and manipulated by others. Thus, for example, our reaction to a piece of music may be one of genuine delight; or we may find it beautiful—without any genuine inner response—because we know that we are supposed to find it beautiful. To believe that a decision is actually ours as long as we are not openly coerced into it is a common illusion we have about ourselves. Most of the time we play roles; that is, we act in ways that are expected from us, making the socially accepted responses. By playing these roles we substitute pseudo acts for original acts of thinking, feeling, and willing. Ultimately our original self is replaced by a pseudo self. This loss of identity leaves us at the mercy of others' expectations of us. Conformity, approval, and recognition by others assuage the panic resulting from the loss of identity.

VI. PSYCHOLOGY OF NAZISM

In explaining the appeal that Nazism had for the German people, an initial distinction must be made between that part of the population that bowed to Nazism passively and unenthusiastically, and those others who greeted Nazi ideology ardently. The former, drawn mainly from the working class and from the liberal and Catholic middle class, apparently accepted Hitler because of "inner tiredness and resignation"—a malady that Fromm considers characteristic of individuals in present-day democratic countries everywhere. Once Hitler was clothed with supreme power, he and his party stood for Germany, and opposition meant one was unpatriotic, shut out from the national community. Outsiders'

indiscriminate attacks on all Germans only tended to reinforce widespread identification with Nazism.

A. The Appeal of Nazi Ideology

It was, however, among the lower strata of the middle class, composed of small shopkeepers, artisans, and white-collar workers, that Hitler found his most enthusiastic and active followers. According to Fromm this class possessed a common social character compounded of asceticism (i.e., a certain emotional and material thriftiness) and hostility, of reverence for the strong and contempt for the weak. In the period prior to the 1918 revolution this class had been propped up by its still relatively solid economic position and by the strength of monarchical and bureaucratic authority. Defeat in war and the downfall of the monarchy, followed by wild inflation and, finally, by catastrophic depression, hit the middle class—economically and psychologically—hardest of all. Along with its economic position and its status, its values of orderliness and thrift were shaken to their foundations. The traditional structure of the family and, with it, the authority of the father were undermined. While the older generation tended to lapse into embittered passivity, lower-middle-class youth felt a strong urge to act. The nation served as a projection for their frustrations and discontent. The nationalistic resentments against the Treaty of Versailles were rationalizations of their feelings of social inferiority.

Nazism and Big Business The psychological element does not by itself explain the rise of Nazism. An explanation of causes must also pay attention to the specific interests of "big industry and the half-bankrupt Junkers," who felt threatened by a parliamentary system in which anticapitalist forces were on the rise. The feelings of the lower middle class were used by these groups to serve their own needs. Hitler allowed the lower middle class to identify itself with him, while he opportunistically managed to serve the interests of industrialists and Junkers. The mass of his middle-class followers were temporarily compensated for the economic and cultural impoverishment of their lives by sadistic spectacles and by an ideology that gave them a feeling of superiority to the rest of mankind.

B. Hitler's Authoritarianism

Hitler's personality, as revealed in his writings, expresses in

extreme form the "authoritarian" character structure, marked simultaneously by sadistic and masochistic drives. The wish for power over the masses drove him and other members of the Nazi elite. But the masses also received sadistic satisfaction by seeing weaker groups despised and maltreated.

Fromm sees the crude Social Darwinism of Nazi ideology as a projection of Hitler's own sadism upon nature. Hitler did not really care for national freedom; he had nothing but contempt for the struggle carried on by colonial peoples for their freedom, for they appeared weak and powerless to him. Appeasement aroused his hatred and contempt because it revealed lack of power and firmness. Masochistic longing, found alongside these sadistic tendencies, was expressed in the emphasis Nazi ideology put on self-sacrifice, self-annihilation, and renunciation of personal happiness. Submission to the power of nature was a leading motif in Hitler's thought.

Nazi practice realized what the ideology promised. The Fuehrer principle and the hierarchical structure established by Nazism provided opportunity to everyone simultaneously to bow down before superior power and to step on someone weaker below.

Though Nazism seemed to fulfill the emotional needs of a large part of the German population, Fromm doubts it would have been capable of establishing and maintaining itself as a stable political system. The attempt to restore primary bonds destroyed by the process of individuation is, in Fromm's view, doomed to failure. The fully developed individual cannot permanently surrender his "self" without suffering breakdown.

VII. FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY

A. The Illusion of Individuality

In the last chapter Fromm points beyond the danger of Fascism and addresses himself to the crisis of Western capitalist societies as he perceives it. It is this aspect of his work that he expands on in subsequent volumes, particularly in *The Sane Society*. At the heart of his discussion is the autonomy of the individual. Granted that in Western democracies external restraints have largely been eliminated, has this meant the emergence of true individuality? Fromm fears that it has not. The person Fromm views as typical is not the spontaneous, autonomous individual but the automaton, the conformist, who is manipulated and who lacks true identity.

1. Education as Repression. Fromm turns first to the American educational process. In this system the child is threatened or bribed into suppressing signs, and eventually feelings, of hostility; he is encouraged to replace them by uncritical and indiscriminate smiles and friendliness. From outward gestures these turn into pseudo feelings. Genuine emotions are discouraged and are replaced by "cheap and insincere sentimentality." Our era tends to deny death and the inevitability of suffering. It discourages the sense of tragedy. When the individual is forced to repress the fear of death, he is unable to experience joy with real intensity and depth.

Disrespect, condescension, insincerity, and lies mark adult behavior toward the child's curiosity about the world. College education concentrates on conveying scattered and unrelated facts. Truth is relativized and separated from the wishes and interests of the thinking person. Science is detached from passion. Thought is directed at the collection of facts that are unrelated to social or individual needs. Problems relating to the basic issues of individual and social life are intentionally befogged and made to appear too complicated for the average individual to grasp, when, in fact, they are very simple. The mass media segment reality instead of integrating it for us. "In the name of 'freedom' life loses all structure."

2. Surrogate Experiences as Escape The satisfaction and optimism of modern man are a deceptive facade. Underneath he is "deeply unhappy" and "on the verge of desperation." He escapes into cheap and ultimately unsatisfactory surrogate experiences such as drinking, sports, and mass entertainment. These must substitute for the genuinely spontaneous activity that the conformist fails to experience. Even among the democratic nations of the West the soil is, therefore, prepared for the reception of Fascist ideology. In his life of quiet desperation conformist man anxiously craves excitement and, even more, "meaning and order" for his structureless life. Any ideology or leader that promises fulfillment of these cravings may become acceptable to him.

B. Freedom and Spontaneity

Is this escape into the "new bondage" of automation conformity the inevitable consequence of the growth of individuality and of the severance of collective primary ties? For Fromm there is a positive alternative, and it is found in the "realization of the self."



This realization must encompass man's entire personality—his emotions as well as his reason.

1. Self-Realization Through Creativity Emphasizing the importance of spontaneity and creativity in self-realization, Fromm finds the best examples of these desired qualities in the personalities of artists and in children. Most of us, however, have moments of spontaneous experience, fresh perceptions, unstereotyped sensuous pleasures—experiences that could be cultivated and expanded in human life as it ideally ought to be lived. In this spontaneous activity man “unites himself anew with the world” and thereby experiences love. Through love the other is affirmed without annihilation of the self. Similarly, work can be an activity through which man unites himself creatively with nature.

What matters, then, is the activity expressing the self—not the result. True happiness is to be found only through the satisfaction we derive from spontaneous exercise of our faculties, not from any, necessarily fleeting, success. Ultimately man must recognize that “there is only one meaning of life: the act of living itself.”

2) Autonomous Growth as Man's Highest End Men are born different—no two individuals are alike. Growth consists in the unfolding of the nucleus peculiar to each individual. Equality means respect for each individual's “inalienable claim on freedom and happiness,” for his right to autonomous growth. This is the true purpose of life, and it must not be subordinated to supposedly higher ends; man's individual life is its own highest end and purpose. This affirmation of man as an end in himself, Fromm argues, amounts neither to unbridled egotism nor to a denial of genuine ideals. Genuine ideals, in contrast to spurious ones, are those that aim to enhance individual growth and happiness. The question of what is good or bad for man is not a metaphysical but an empirical question, just as is the question of which food is healthy or unhealthy. It can and must be answered on the basis of an analysis of man's nature. Sensations of pleasure or pain are not objective indicators, for, as the phenomenon of masochism shows, attractive experience may be “harmful to life.” Sacrifice to an ideal is thus never self-sacrifice, but rather the sacrifice of our physical self for the sake of our spiritual integrity; it implies assertion rather than annihilation of the self.

What about the argument that freedom of self-development is identical with anarchy, with “heedless egotism and destructiveness.” It is Fromm's conviction that destructiveness is only the

result of life being thwarted. Full and genuine self-realization, he believes, will do away with asocial drives, except in the case of a small minority of mentally sick individuals. The material basis for the development of a society of autonomous individuals has been established. The problem of production has been solved; we are entering an age of abundance. Man can and must now become the master of the social and economic forces instead of being their slave.

C. Democratic Socialism: A Solution

According to Fromm the social system that best enables man to be autonomous is democratic socialism; within this system the achievements of liberal democracy are preserved and supplemented by the principle of rational planning. There must be no more secret holders of economic power who are unaccountable to society. In a democratically planned economy the individual can “share responsibility and use creative intelligence in his work.” Democracy must not be restricted to the political sphere. What is needed is active participation in decisions affecting the individual's life and that of society. Fromm recognizes the great problem of combining central, national planning with individual participation. But he considers this a merely technical problem, not one presenting insuperable obstacles if the necessity of finding a solution is fully appreciated. The answer to planning by a bureaucratic elite is to be found in decentralization, which will give individuals control over economic decisions affecting them and which will provide opportunity for the cooperation that is presently lacking in their working lives. Only through spontaneous and creative activity will men be able to overcome present-day nihilism and authoritarianism.

Critical Appraisal

Though Fromm views what he perceives as the contemporary crisis mainly from an analytical, negative perspective in *Escape from Freedom*, it contains necessarily a positive concept of the "good society." This he uses as a basis for contrast, criticism, and evaluation of existing systems. Obviously, if you use the term "sick," you must have a definition of the term "healthy." If you conceive of people as "alienated," you must have a notion of what an "unalienated" person is like—and that he can exist. Fromm developed these positive counterimages more fully in his later work; nevertheless a critical analysis of *Escape from Freedom* must deal with them rather fully, because only they give meaning to his negative evaluation of man in twentieth-century society.

The following critique must necessarily remain incomplete and superficial, for Fromm takes—in the true tradition of the speculative political theorist—the entire social universe as his concern. This means that he unites the approaches of the historian, cultural anthropologist, psychologist, sociologist, political scientist, and, of course, the philosopher. Although Fromm claims that his own treatment of the subject is scientific, the difficulty with his integrative method is that it inevitably makes use of poorly defined concepts and assumes as established, findings that are, at best, controversial hypotheses; the integrative method often deals cavalierly with evidence and blithely disregards profound problems of methodology and philosophy. I am greatly indebted to the carefully argued examination of Fromm's philosophical and psy-

chological doctrines and their implications in John H. Schaar's *Escape from Authority*. Anyone desiring to deal seriously with the problems that I will only be able to pinpoint in the present essay must refer to this book. Unavoidably, my own criticism will, in part, overlap Schaar's, whose angle of vision I share to a considerable extent.

At the core of my criticism of Fromm's work is my belief that Fromm is a moralist and utopian disguised as a scientist. Fromm's moralism and utopianism become more evident in his later work, but they are already apparent in *Escape from Freedom*. Any critique of Fromm must, therefore, proceed along two separate lines: It must examine his scientific evidence for its validity or, at least, for its soundness; and it must analyze the philosophical moralistic aspects of his case for their meaning, consistency, and implications. Because Fromm is concerned with highly significant but also highly complex questions, a limited critical analysis will have to be largely destructive; that is, it must point out that Fromm's case is not proved and perhaps not even provable; that other, perhaps more plausible, interpretations exist; that the problem he raises is unresolved and continues to be a subject of scholarly controversy.

I. THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN NATURE

Fromm himself would presumably deny the validity of the analytical distinction between the scientific and moral aspects of his work, for central to his thinking is the conviction that life and nature are not just descriptive, empirical concepts but are identical with the good or the desirable. Though Fromm shares this conviction with a long string of natural law philosophers, he appears largely oblivious of the difficulties of the position and of the severe philosophical criticisms that have been leveled against it. Fromm's naturalism, which identifies the good with the natural (namely that which is natural for man), requires him, as Schaar points out, to "have full knowledge of the laws of human nature." It further postulates that this knowledge has revealed man's nature to be such that if left to its own, autonomous, socially unrestrained, expression, it will result in good for itself and for the other members of the human race.

The first questions to which we must, therefore, briefly address ourselves are these: Does such full knowledge of the nature of

man exist today? And if this question were to be answered affirmatively, does this knowledge establish the essential goodness of man? What is the evidence that man (i.e., the human being not conditioned or coerced into social behavior-patterns) will not develop traits destructive of social harmony?

Presumably no one, not even Fromm himself, would assert that modern science—be it psychology, psychoanalysis, or the social sciences—has established this sought-after comprehensive knowledge of man. It remains, in fact, an open and highly controversial question whether scientific methods as we understand them can ever provide us with this total knowledge. Modern sociology and social psychology, for instance, operate frequently with a “role concept” of human nature; that is, they insist that human nature, to the extent that it is scientifically observable in a social context, expresses itself in a multiplicity of accepted (though possibly frequently conflicting) roles. As Schaar notes, this theory implies that there may be no essence of human nature behind the various facades that the individual exhibits to the observer, no unequivocal identity that the individual loses at greatest peril. Contemporary existentialist philosophy views this absence of unequivocal identity as the central defining characteristic of man, the core of his freedom and of his task “to make himself.” But like Scripture—and unlike Fromm—it conceives of this freedom as choice for good or evil, without guarantee that free man will necessarily select what Fromm chooses to consider good.

II. THE PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH

Even if we were to assume that contemporary experimental scientific approach is too narrow in its definition of what is scientific, does the method chosen by Fromm—psychoanalysis—provide us with the knowledge required if we are to use human nature as the yardstick for evaluation of what is wrong or right with society? Though the psychoanalytic method may be empirical, as Fromm claims it is, the concepts it uses and the conclusions it reaches are largely incapable of verification or refutation. The pictures of human nature that emerge from it are, therefore, speculative—imaginative constructs, more or less, based on an interpretation of highly selective data. Given the nature of the problem that the study of man presents to scientific inquiry, this may be the optimum achievable in the attempt to grasp man’s elusive totality.

But it is a shaky foundation for any generalizations assuming a firm basis of “true” knowledge of man. Freud’s intellectual development, with its profound changes in his conceptions of man’s basic instincts and dynamics (e.g., the postulation of a destructive drive and death wish in his later work), is evidence of the speculative basis of psychoanalytic theory, particularly as this later part of Freud’s work is largely rejected by other—by even Freudian—psychoanalysts.

The continued coexistence of various schools of psychoanalysis (Jungians, Adlerians, etc.), each adhering to different and partly incompatible pictures of man’s fundamental needs, and Fromm’s own rejection of the most crucial aspects of Freudian theory, support the thesis that we are here dealing with essentially fictitious interpretations of the nature of man—interpretations whose relation to truth must largely remain an unsettled question.

Fromm’s insistence on the malleability of human character is undoubtedly in accord with a great deal of contemporary thinking in the social sciences. Yet at the same time, it not only contradicts Freud’s postulate of an irreducible and demanding human instinctual system but is also hard to reconcile with Fromm’s own insistence on the existence of an “indestructible core” of psychic needs that require satisfaction. For as Schaar points out, needs (as they are defined by Fromm) are essentially cultural variables that can be met, as cultural anthropologists have shown, in the most diverse ways:

No amount of calling for love, for example, will alter the fact that the meanings of love are many and that what stands for “love” in one society may be entirely absent or mean something very different in another. Given this intransigent fact, what can it mean to say that if man is to realize himself, the need for relatedness must be satisfied through love . . . ?

Functional analysis, taken over from the biological sciences by Freud and adapted to sociology and anthropology by Malinowski, can avoid this difficulty by restricting itself to postulating functions essential to the survival of the system, by not specifying in what ways the functions must be carried out, and by refraining from evaluating them as “better” or “worse” by absolute standards. (Instead, sociologists have developed the concept of the “dysfunctional,” defining it as that which is found to have an adverse effect on the maintenance of the system. The perpetuation of the system itself is usually taken for granted as desirable or as beyond question.)

If we conclude that psychoanalysis has failed to provide us with a firm picture of human nature that even psychoanalysts could agree upon, the question of man's essential goodness almost answers itself. If there is no agreement on what human nature is, it is clearly meaningless to base a social and historical theory on the presumed goodness of human nature. It may be useful to point out that at just this crucial point the abyss between Fromm and Freud appears unbridgeable. By postulating a grasping, aggressive id as part of human nature, Freud necessarily also postulates the need and pain of repression and sublimation. As Schaar notes, "for Freud, the very possibility of civilization is a problem, and the very existence of social cohesion is under a constant challenge." Fromm, when he does not explain away the irreducible core by emphasizing social malleability, postulates a basically altruistic and cooperative need-structure requiring no restraint or renunciation. The implications for the social philosophies of Freud and Fromm are obvious.

III. FROMM'S MARXIST ANTHROPOLOGY

Fromm attempts to overcome the apparent contradiction between postulating a core of essence and emphasizing the malleability of human nature by two means that are derived from Marxist philosophy. He interprets the historical development of Western man as indicating permanent drives for freedom, self-realization, and harmony, which find widely divergent expressions in various periods of history; and he assumes that the socioeconomic structure is decisive in shaping—and frustrating—the permanent need-structure discerned behind the facade of diverse and changing guises in which human nature has appeared.

Let us briefly consider the first of these assumptions and examine it for the difficulties it contains or hides. For one thing, as the example of Freud showed, it is possible to locate a human "core" in aggressiveness and acquisitiveness rather than in cooperativeness. Certainly history provides a sufficient basis for selecting these traits as well as those Fromm has chosen as central; and perhaps (as Christian anthropology has held all along) what characterizes human nature is its mixture of ideal aspiration and ineradicable self-centeredness. Furthermore, given the tremendous variety of cultural patterns provided for us by the historians and anthropologists, how valid is the assumption of a common core (beyond the most obvious physiological needs)

after all? Scientifically speaking, by what methods do we discover and establish its existence? If we take an extreme example, in what sense can it be argued that slavery is "against human nature"? After all, slavery was accepted as a valid and even necessary social institution, thoroughly compatible with human nature for most of Western history. Eminent philosophers such as Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas defended and justified it, arguing that certain members of the human race were, in fact, destined to be slaves by their own natures and would be happier as slaves than as responsible citizens. (The argument is not quite foreign to our age either.) And can we assert with scientific assurance that there were not indeed "happy slaves"? Was not the argument against slavery always strongest when it based itself not on the supposed hedonistic evidence—the slaves' unhappiness—but on an ethical, metaphysical (and quite unscientific) assertion of the dignity of man and his inherent rights, derived from what John Stuart Mill called the conception of man as a "morally progressive being"?

IV. THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

Fromm presumably would deny the possibility of a happy slave and insist that proper depth-psychological investigation would be bound to discover profound wounds being inflicted on the egos of human beings systematically treated as inferior. (For some psychoanalytical evidence see Dollard's *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*.) The complexity of the problem and of the approaches to it make it obvious that we cannot pursue Fromm's argument further but must leave it by only pointing once more to the ambiguous nature of psychoanalytical conceptualizations and findings. But we cannot turn to Fromm's view of the importance of the socioeconomic structure in shaping the permanent need-structure without showing the relevance of this discussion to one aspect of the idea of alienation central to Fromm's theory. Put succinctly, the question is: How do we know whether and when people are alienated? Does alienation describe a subjectively felt state of unhappiness, of longing, and of searching? Do we, then, discover it by inquiring whether people feel happy or unhappy, more happy now than in the past, and so on? Or is the subjective feeling-state irrelevant to the presence or absence of alienation? Can alienation exist without the supposedly alienated person having any awareness that something is missing,



that he really ought to be feeling unhappy or dissatisfied, when, in fact, he is not? Can the well-adjusted persons be called alienated?

Fromm, unfortunately, uses the term "alienation" in both senses without clearly distinguishing between them. Yet, a view of alienation as subjective unhappiness is based on empirical evidence, and scientific data on it are—or could be—gathered and analyzed. If work-dissatisfaction, for example, is accepted as an index of alienation, it can be established whether, and under what conditions, alienation is increasing or decreasing. Fromm occasionally does just this; he uses empirical data (unsystematically presented) to make his point that alienation has increased. But on other occasions he adduces the very presence of work-satisfaction as an indication of alienation, as a symptom of the successful automation of an individual who ought to be spontaneous. This second approach obviously is ethical and metaphysical, not empirical and scientific. This does not render it invalid except in the positivist sense of what constitutes scientific method; but the distinction and the different nature of the argument must be kept in mind. (See Schaar, p. 200 ff.)

Marx, whom Fromm follows closely in his discussion of alienations, does not face the same ambiguity when treating the concept. Marx was dealing with examples of obviously dissatisfied, rebellious persons (the nineteenth-century working class) and with open conflict-situations. A gap between the subjective feeling of being exploited or oppressed and the objective ideal of a dignified human life for the worker hardly existed, and it was not really necessary to tear the veil of false feelings of satisfaction from the eyes of the proletariat. Subjective aspirations, working-class interest, and philosophical idealist humanism (though Marx would have rejected being described as an idealist) were briefly—or appeared to be—joined. Fromm, particularly in his criticism of American capitalist society (the prototype of successful capitalism), faces an entirely different situation: one in which he tells well-adjusted and self-satisfied people that theirs is a false satisfaction based on manipulation and surrender of their true selves. This disjunction between perceived self-interest and the need for radical social change, alleged by Fromm, is what renders him, in the precise terms used by Marx, a utopian—not that the problem of working out a sound anthropology in the face of his dialectical materialism did not pursue Marx as well. How to reconcile his concept of man with his basic assertion that "being determines consciousness" was a question Marx never satisfactorily resolved, and in his later

socioeconomic writings he neglected the problem entirely. Though Fromm cannot afford to neglect it, it is possible, nevertheless, to discuss his concept of changing social character independently of it, and even, I would hold, independently of his specific psychoanalytic assumptions and interpretations. It is here that he may be said to have made his most fruitful contribution, regardless of the weaknesses that his particular argument reveals.

V. THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CHARACTER

There are actually at least two distinct aspects to Fromm's analysis that proceed from a basically Marxian foundation. Though the relationship of these elements to each other is central to Fromm's argument, it is possible—and necessary—to separate them analytically. The first is his assumption that social character is a concept that may appropriately be used to comprehend basic personality traits shared by members of a social group; the second is his assertion that these shared traits results primarily from life experiences that are located in the changing economic sphere.

We are familiar with the concept of group character through the writings of contemporary anthropologists, social psychologists, and a certain school of sociologists. The notion of national character, which is obviously an expression of the same perception, has been used over and over again by scholars and has been deeply ingrained in everyday commonsensical discourse. But the very frequency with which the concept of national character has been used and abused should put us on guard. If it is to have any value as a serious tool of scientific inquiry, it requires careful definition, sound measurements, and clarity about the level of personality being examined. Although a good deal of scholarly activity has been focused on the concept since Fromm discussed it, it cannot be said that the result has been a comprehensive, tested, and generally accepted theory. In a recent article, "National Character and Modern Political Systems," which summarizes the work done hitherto, Alex Inkeles writes:

With very few exceptions, the available studies of modal or group personality unfortunately suffer from several defects which make them poor evidence in support of any systematic proposition. . . . They are usually based on very small and haphazardly selected samples, making it extremely difficult to generalize with any confidence beyond the sample itself or the

narrow circle from which it is drawn. In addition, the analysis is usually based on the total sample without basic differentiation of the characteristics of subgroups whether deviant or merely variant. . . . Most of these studies, therefore, are obviously of limited usefulness to the student of politics.

While it is obvious that individuals differ widely from one culture to another—and even within one national culture—in the opinions they hold, values they profess, behavior patterns they exhibit, this does not answer the question of whether these variations are rooted in significant character differences or are merely expressions of diverse learned responses. As Inkeles points out, it must be admitted that the dynamic process by which assumed character features interact with cultural demands, are molded by them, and mold them in turn has apparently so far escaped scientific discovery. It is all the more important, therefore, to be cautious in the use of the concept and the conclusion based on it. Even if a definite relation between particular individual character structures and specific forms of political behavior had been shown to exist, the evidence for the assumption that this particular character structure is widespread in one nation or part of a nation does not exist as yet. It should be mentioned in passing that research has thrown considerably doubt on the assumption that an unambiguous association between character structure and specific forms of political behavior can, in fact, be established, though it appears probable, according to Inkeles, that “certain personality types may indeed be more responsive to one than another form of government.”

VI. THE GERMAN CASE

What holds for social character in general or for national character more particularly, obviously holds also for Fromm's application of the concept that might be called “class character.” Fromm starts with the undeniable fact that Nazism appealed in quite different degrees to Germans of different class and occupation—at least as far as we know from the votes they cast for the Nazi party in free elections. (Even here, however, the evidence is not entirely unambiguous. See, for example, Seymour Martin Lipset's “Fascism—Left, Right, and Center,” in *Political Man*, pp. 140-52.) We can only guess at the support Hitler received subsequently when free expression of political preferences became impossible. There can also be little doubt that a major segment of

his support came from the lower middle class and that the number of his supporters among members of the working class was disproportionately small. What is at issue, however, is Fromm's explanation for this historical fact. Specifically, how valid is his argument that it is the sadomasochistic character-structure supposedly typical of the old middle class in Germany that rendered it highly susceptible to Hitler's totalitarian appeal? No attempt can be made here to offer a worked-out counterexplanation (though one will be briefly suggested). The following questions and remarks are merely intended to indicate the speculative nature and inadequacy of Fromm's case.

Can it be said that authoritarian or totalitarian alternatives to parliamentary democracy appealed exclusively or primarily to the *German bourgeoisie*? Has it not been characteristic of democratic systems in all societies emerging from authoritarian traditions to be highly unstable and to be frequently replaced by authoritarian regimes? (Examples can be found in countries in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, etc.) Is there any evidence, or is it even likely, that this widespread rejection of democratic forms of government is related to a specific character structure?

How does Fromm's association of totalitarianism with bourgeois capitalism and with Calvinism account for the fact that the only stable democratic systems emerged in those societies most profoundly affected by the spirit of the Reformation, and in which the capitalist market-system had developed most fully (England, Scotland, Holland, the Scandinavian countries, and United States of America)? Is there any evidence that the German lower middle class, which so heavily opted for Hitler, possessed the work-compulsive, self-destructive drives Fromm associates with Calvinism? Or, if they did possess them, could not these characteristics have been possessed in equal measure by members of the German working class or by Catholics who rejected the appeal of Nazism? The one set of empirical data Fromm provides in this connection tends to contradict his own generalization, for he reports “that a great part of the white-collar workers—probably the majority—more closely resembled the character structure of the manual workers . . . than that of the ‘old middle class.’” Yet, as Fromm correctly points out, white-collar workers supported Hitler much more strongly than did manual workers. Thus social character can not have been the variable determining the vote for or against Nazism. (It should be noted that S. M. Lipset develops a hypothesis, largely contradicting Fromm's, postulating a positive relation between working-class status and

predispositions toward authoritarianism. See "Working-class Authoritarianism," in *Political Man*, pp. 91-130. Lipset's hypothesis, however, is not firmly supported by evidence.)

Does Fromm establish his argument that it was through its appeal to cravings for submission and lust for power that Nazism attracted the bulk of its enthusiastic supporters, that it was the imputed sadomasochist character-structure that predisposed the younger members of the lower middle class to join the Nazi movement? Undoubtedly the storm troopers were heavily recruited from bully types. But if they made up only a small percentage of Nazi supporters, and if we assume that other quasi-military political organizations attracted bullies of different ideological persuasion, what is the relevance of their (assumed) character structure to the popular success of Nazism? These questions have been posed because they cast doubt on two related assumptions in Fromm's work: that there is a definable social character related to the class structure of society; and that this class character helps significantly in the explanation of the rise of Nazism in Germany.

VII. INDIVIDUATION AND THE MARKET

If we analyze Fromm's theses carefully, it appears that they actually suggest another distinguishable explanatory theory regarding the appeal of Nazism, which appears more adequate in terms of the historical data. This theory contains what is most valuable in his overall analysis: the idea that the development of the capitalist market-economy required—and created in turn—a "new" type of man who fitted the needs of an impersonal industrial system. Whether the role of Calvinism in helping to create the necessary personality traits was as great as Fromm (following Weber) seems to assume has remained a subject of scholarly discussion and appears rather doubtful in the light of empirical evidence. But if we shift our focus from deep psychological explanations to the level of adaptive behavior, this part of Fromm's argument becomes secondary.

Fromm's alternative explanation emphasizes the process of individuation and the breaking of what he calls "primary ties." It is a different way of describing a historical change that the German sociologist Toennies has called the replacement of "community" by "society," and the English historian Sir Henry Maine has referred to as the move from "status" to "contract." It is doubtful whether

this has been, as Fromm assumes, a continuous process, beginning in ancient or prehistorical times and moving steadily on to the individualism and liberalism of nineteenth-century Western society. It should be kept in mind that the destruction of the Greek polis-community and the emergence of the large empire (Macedonian, then Roman) were clearly accompanied by phenomena that Fromm wishes to restrict to the change from medieval to industrial society. Post-Aristotelian philosophy was highly individualistic, exhibiting all the features of alienation and privatization that we tend to think of as specifically modern. The *Meditations* of Emperor Marcus Aurelius may serve as an example of highly alienated, individualistic thinking. And even the Greek polis, the prototype of the community in which primary ties supposedly were sound, obviously was familiar with the phenomena of individualism and alienation (in the sense of lack of identification with the other members of the community). This alienation is indicated by the arguments in Plato's *Republic* that Socrates finds it necessary to rebut (e.g., Glaucon's insistence that every man would do wrong if he thought he could get away with it; and Adeimantus' radical suggestion that if gods did not exist, disguised ill-doing would be the appropriate form of social behavior).

We may, however, accept Fromm's thesis that medieval society marked a restoration of primary ties if we keep in mind that Fromm is operating with "ideal types" (a scientifically dangerous, though probably indispensable method). Medieval society was characterized (much more than the preceding civilizations of Rome and Greece) by localism, parochialism, a single authoritative religious belief-system, and a rather rigidly stratified social structure—all of which severely limited individual physical, social, and intellectual mobility. (Most specialists on the period warn us, however, against exaggerating these limitations, which are, at best, truly characteristic only of the dark Middle Ages, prior to the twelfth century.) But it is correct that economically and socially the mass of the population was restrained and secured by the Christian-feudal order, which put little emphasis on production or efficiency and which attempted to dampen the spirit of competition and personal advancement.

Though the Christian-feudal values were being gradually undermined prior to the eighteenth century, they received their theoretical deathblow from the model of a competitive market-economy developed in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*; their actual funeral came with the more or less universal acceptance of the supreme value of productive efficiency by the nation-states of the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In reality the model of a competitive economy was nowhere applied with complete rigor (the introduction of factory inspection and the limitation of working hours almost coincided with the formal acceptance of Manchester capitalism and free trade in mid-nineteenth century England). But the process of mass production, the vast enlargement of the market, and the emphasis on efficiency as the controlling criterion did lead to the features that Marx and Fromm considered characteristic of the capitalist system: the reduction of human beings to a factor of production, and the mercenary view of the worker as labor—a commodity to be bought and sold in the market according to the laws of supply and demand. It also brought with it as a central phenomenon the stress on change, expansion, and “creative insecurity” in place of stability and secure order. The breakdown of tradition in the economic field went hand in hand with the simultaneous, widespread rejection of traditional political and religious authority. The question of how to determine what was true was opened to unlimited inquiry; the free market place of ideas paralleled the free market place of consumer goods.

A. Insecurity and the Search for Order

Fromm, who welcomes this growth of capitalist industrialism and considers it inevitable and irreversible, perceives as highly important consequences of this change the strong feelings of loneliness and insecurity that individuals experienced, and their frequently compulsive efforts to maintain or to restore external (and thus also, internal) order and stability to the world in which they had to function. He is aware that the dynamics of capitalist industrialism did not create these feelings equally strongly or at the same time for all socioeconomic groups in modern nations, and that their responses thus took diverse forms. Manual workers formed trade unions (frequently retaining the communal features of the medieval guild system); big capitalist entrepreneurs joined in trusts, concerns, and cartels to stabilize the market and to assure themselves of continuous profits. Depending on the political culture of a specific nation or class, the search for a stable authority-structure took the form of traditionalism (e.g., conservative monarchism, or holding on to religious institutions), socialism as an ideology and mass movement, or populist, charismatic leadership; frequently, in practice, a combination of all three forms could be found.

Though Fromm exaggerates and generalizes excessively, his

stress on loneliness and helplessness as sources of radical political movements appears plausible. It seems reasonable to posit the need for an environment in which threats to the physical and mental security of the individual are minimized as a basic functional requirement of the human being; this need may become compulsive for some individuals or social groups, particularly when the various authority structures that normally have provided security are simultaneously shaken or collapsing.

Psychology and the social sciences have not hitherto supplied us with any precise indication of the limits of tolerance for insecurity before neurotic breakdown occurs; nor have they suggested the mechanism or means by which different individuals and groups create for themselves the needed security structures. We note, for example, that religious certainty does not seem a necessary part of mental health, and that even in the highly insecure situation of a city under mass bombing-attacks, human beings continue to function without mental breakdown. Empirical evidence tends to show that in a normally functioning secularized industrial mass society the degree of insecurity and loneliness experienced by the average individual is by no means unmanageable. Fromm admits that, judging by superficial appearances, people seem to function quite well. Whether this is a veneer that hides deep-seated “despair of the human automaton,” as Fromm assumes, is a question to which we shall return shortly.

B. Nazism as a Search for Order

If we accept the feeling of insecurity and the consequent search for order as the central mechanism Fromm assumes it is, we find, I believe, that it provides a satisfactory and relatively simple explanatory scheme fitting the German case and a wide range of political phenomena beyond it. It is, then, not necessary to postulate a neurotic compulsion to submit or a sadistic satisfaction derived from vicarious sharing in the exercise of power. (It should be noted that, according to all reliable contemporary reports, Hitler's declaration of war in 1939 was not greeted by enthusiasm but by profound apprehension—in contrast to Germany's declaration of war in 1914!) Fromm himself lists some of the aspects of the breakdown that affected German society in the first part of the twentieth century, and which, it would seem, are sufficient to explain the appeal Hitler had for certain segments of the German population: defeat in war; destruction of the monarchy; establishment of a liberal parliamentary system hostile to the hierarchic,

authoritarian tradition of the German middle and upper classes; massive attack on the relatively rigid traditional class-system and on the authoritarian family-structure; relativism in religion, in philosophy, and in the arts; a peace treaty violently rejected by nationalist public opinion; an unprecedented inflation that wiped out savings and enriched speculators, reversing the traditional values of thrift and hard work; and, finally, an economic crisis that led to mass unemployment, widespread closing of factories, and increasing public disorder. All this took place in a nation that, undoubtedly, had traditionally put greater emphasis than some on neatness, order, and obediency to duly constituted authority, and in which the preceding period had seen the army officer erected as a social model worthy of emulation by all members of society. The "political culture" (a term that has achieved popularity since Fromm wrote *Escape from Freedom*) of Germany was inhospitable to the functioning of parliamentary democracy—a system that had relatively few unconditional supporters among the population and that lost even this limited support in the face of successive crises and disorders that democratic governments failed to master. Even the German working class, habitually identified with democratic values through its Social Democratic party, was, in significant numbers, deserting to the Communist party, whose appeal was based on rejection of liberal and peaceful values.

The question may be asked why the search for order took the brutal and ultimately totally destructive form of Nazism, and why the movement was marked by expressions of almost orgiastic self-surrender on the part of many of its followers. We should, of course, be aware that we cannot deduce the degree and intensity of support from the pictures of mass rallies and marches, and that similar vast exhibitions of disciplined mass fervor have characterized Italian Fascism as well as the Russian and Chinese Communist regimes. Fromm may be supplying us with an answer by stressing the reaction against the loss of primary ties. He sees Nazism as a form of neotribalism, in part, in which the "community of blood" is temporarily rediscovered in place of the attenuated ties of mass society; rational, analytical thought (which separates and alienates the individual) is blotted out by the rhythm of stamping feet—as in a tribal dance. It was characteristic of Nazism that its appeal could be traced to a nostalgia for the "comradeship of the trenches," to the experiences of World War I soldiers (like Hitler) who found a sense of community and excitement in war that peacetime society failed to provide. Though this phenomenon

was most pronounced in the Germany of the twenties, we should remember that veterans' organizations celebrating their wartime experiences have not been restricted to Germany; and that the British—the least militaristic society in the present-day world—tend to look back nostalgically to the "year of the Blitz," when class differences were largely forgotten, the nation stood united in face of the enemy, and life was exciting and unpredictable.

VIII. FREEDOM IN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

Fromm might be said to be at least partially right when he insists that industrial society starves the emotive, creative side of man. To use other terms, it might be argued that industrial society unduly rationalizes human relations, elevating the "Appollonian" potentialities of man at the expense of his "Dionysian" drives. Given a situation of individual or group frustration and insecurity, the Dionysian element may break forth in highly destructive forms. Whether, and to what extent, various forms of emotional release are capable of substitution for one another must at present remain an open question. Were we to accept the principle of substitution, we would really be back at the questions raised by Freud, and answered so very differently by him and Fromm: questions such as: Is there an irreducible quantity of emotive drive that requires release and satisfaction? Is this drive inherently constructive or destructive? In other words, is there any direction and content characteristic of it, or does culture define and satisfy drives that in themselves are highly malleable?

As initially indicated, Fromm's entire criticism of adjusted man, as well as his faith in free man's self-realization through love and work, hinges on the answers to these questions. On these answers will depend our judgment of whether Fromm is an empiricist who correctly diagnoses the ills of Western industrial civilization, or a moralist-utopian who projects his ideal values into contemporary society, inevitably finds it wanting, and prophesies its doom unless it changes itself profoundly. To put the questions differently: Is autonomous man possible or desirable? How valid or adequate is Fromm's description of automaton man? And if we were to grant that he was possible in the abstract, does Fromm provide us with an adequate blueprint of a social system in which he could be realized? Tentative answers to the first of these two questions have already been suggested, though the empirical evidence remains (necessarily) inconclusive.

Fromm would hardly maintain that the human child can or should be free from any form of socialization process. Perfect spontaneity and autonomy are thus precluded, and the problem becomes one of allowing for maximal expression of individuality within the necessary limits imposed by physical and social reality. Fromm presumably has faith in man's innate desire to cooperate peacefully with his fellows, and in his willingness to impose restraints on himself that he recognizes as necessary for harmonious social relations. While it has been shown that under certain circumstances (e.g., in the Israeli kibbutz or the Zuni village community) human beings are capable of a high degree of harmonious social living, this state of affairs apparently is not the outgrowth of a natural, spontaneous process, but of social conditioning. These people internalized the demands of their community, which they then accepted as legitimate. Further coercion and manipulation were not required, for the members of the community conformed because they had been conditioned to do so—and apparently at a certain psychic cost. Are they any less automata than the members of a large Western industrial democracy who accept the need to work for a living, the bureaucratization of their lives, and the pleasures of consumer spending? Could it not be argued—contra Fromm—that it is just in the small homogeneous community, where the primary ties have been reestablished through internalization of community values, that autonomy and spontaneity have been severely restricted? Have not the restrictions in this type of community been much more effective than in the large-scale society in which we live, where, in spite of bureaucratization, concentration of power, and attempts at manipulation, alternative styles of life remain possible, and opportunities for “opting out” of the system are increasing? Fromm may be right in one part of his analysis: that increasing individuation, increasing freedom from external and internal authority, has led to insecurity, anxiety, and attempts at “escape from freedom”; and wrong in the second part: that releasing man from present system-restraints (e.g., conditioning, bureaucratization, manipulation) is the remedy that leads him back to the Garden of Eden.

IX. THE PROBLEM OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Fromm is very close to Rousseau's model of the social contract

when he espouses the system of participatory democracy as that which allows man to act meaningfully and rationally. Unlike Rousseau, however, Fromm finds it necessary to couple the model with that of central production-planning—a concession to his Marxism. Fromm slides over one of the crucial problems of modern democracy: the degree of decentralization (~~permitting popular participation~~) compatible with effective performance of the tasks required by the contemporary technological-industrial system. As Rousseau and the so-called utopian socialists (~~such as Owen~~) recognized, and as the kibbutz experiment has demonstrated, in a small-scale community faced with relatively few and simple choices, social democracy in its pure form is possible. Members of a community can reach agreement on necessary decisions by process of rational discussion. Authority is not alien, imposed from outside, but voluntary and rationally accepted as meeting the exigencies of a common problem. Fromm wishes to see this town-meeting model of democracy restored to Western democracies. It is possible to argue that many opportunities for local decision-making in large-scale systems have not yet been explored (e.g., ~~neighborhood beautification~~), that others have failed to be fully utilized (e.g., school board elections), and that democratic participation can be vastly expanded into areas in which it has hitherto received little stimulation. (~~American experimentation in connection with some urban renewal and anti-poverty programs point in this direction.~~) But crucial problems remain, which can be only hinted at here. The first two are related to the problem of efficiency in an industrial system: How much decision-making can be delegated to the manual or clerical worker in a large-scale industrial enterprise without its efficient operation being hampered or bogged down? And which decisions affecting prosperity, full employment, and efficient utilization of resources must be made on a national or even international level if they are to be effective? To the extent that large-scale coordination, long-range prospective planning, and expertise are functional necessities, the possibilities for mass participation in the process of economic planning are clearly limited. There is another question that Fromm simply begs: Can work in an industrial system ever be creative for the great majority of those engaged in it? Can it satisfy their need (assuming Fromm is right in positing the existence of such a need) for expressing their personalities through the work process? What justifies the assumption that work, which, traditionally, has been viewed as a necessary and

perhaps even desirable burden and curse, can now become a channel of creative individual fulfillment?

This leads to a last question: Is not Fromm already somewhat obsolete, himself a prisoner of a past marked by scarcity and, thus, by the high social value bestowed on productive work? Is not David Riesman closer to the central problem of the next stage in our development when he perceives that the challenge lies in finding a creative substitute for productive labor, which is becoming increasingly automated and decreasingly significant for the lives of ever larger numbers of people in industrial societies? To put it differently, (the social-democratic answer that Fromm sketches for the problem of alienation may already be obsolete because the way in which alienation is experienced may be shifting. Attention formerly focused on finding ways to make work a meaningful part of life and to break down the distinction between work and play is now shifting to the problem of leisure.) How can the increased and presumably still rapidly increasing amount of surplus time available to the individual in automated society be used for ends that are creative (i.e., not shallow escapes from boredom)?

(Following Marxist thought, Fromm asserts that the production problem has been solved. Marx predicted a new human development to which all past historical experience was irrelevant. By ascending, in Engel's words, "from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom," man would find himself in a realm without scarcity. Thus there would be no need for power-striving, exploitation, or conflict of any kind. Man would return to the Garden of Eden, but on a higher plane, having become a rational individual. Neither Marx nor Fromm however, is, able to remove the nagging doubt of whether this rational individual can truly reunite himself with nature, thus ending the essential aloneness of a thinking man considering his own mortality. Nor is either certain that what Schaar calls a life "without some purpose larger than its own cultivation," a life that, according to Schaar, Fromm tends to conceive of as a "fuller, closer, warmer feeling—not for the sake of some end, but for the sake of the sensation of living itself," is not ultimately hollow and profoundly unsatisfactory.

Fromm, who accuses contemporary Western culture of having eliminated the sense of the tragic from its consciousness, may himself, it appears, be accused precisely of lacking the appreciation of the (inherently?) tragic nature of the human condition as it

has come to be expressed in the myths of Prometheus and Sisyphus. John Stuart Mill, who shared Fromm's confidence in the social value of freedom and rationality, was aware that knowledge was not likely to lead to happiness. "Pig happy, Socrates unhappy" expresses an insight that Mill was ready to accept. Would Fromm?

Suggested Study Topics

1. Examine the major differences in the conceptions Freud and Fromm develop of the structure and dynamics of human nature. What implications do their respective views hold for social and political behavior?
2. Examine the problem of interaction between culture and personality as presented in Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*. Compare her treatment of the subject with Fromm's.
3. Examine the discussion of the concept of alienation in Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and in his *German Ideology*. What does Marx see as the causes of alienation? What remedies does he propose?
4. What empirical historical evidence has there been for the Weber thesis that an association exists between Protestantism and capitalism?
5. Why has the idea of industrial democracy (i.e., participation of manual workers in decisions affecting their work) met with so little response and success? Examine the evidence from Yugoslavia and Israel with an eye to the problems encountered in establishing democracy in industrial enterprises.
6. What other explanations for the rise of Nazism in Germany exist besides the one offered by Fromm? Check the historical evidence for the assertion that it was the old middle class that was the main base of Hitler's support.
7. Is there reliable empirical evidence that people in Western democracies are today more unhappy, neurotic, or alienated than they were in the past? How would you find out?

8. What role does national character play in accounting for the stability or instability of democracy? Examine different theories that relate political institutions to socioeconomic or psychological factors.
9. What accounts for Fromm's present-day popularity? What is the connection between Fromm's views and those of the New Left?
10. Place Fromm's thought in the context of classical political theory. How does it relate to ideas about human nature and society expressed by thinkers such as Plato, St. Augustine, Hobbes, Hume, and Rousseau?
11. Examine Fromm's concept of nature in the light of traditional natural-law theory and the criticisms made against it by philosophers such as Bentham.

Erich Fromm

Biographical Information

Bibliography

Some biographical data will indicate Fromm's place in the historical and intellectual stream of our century. Fromm was born in 1900 in Frankfurt on the Main, Germany, and studied sociology and psychology at the universities of Heidelberg, Frankfurt, and Munich. In 1922 he obtained his doctorate, and subsequently took up the study of psychoanalysis in Munich and Berlin. From 1929 to 1932 Erich Fromm was associated with the famous Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, where he found a congenial atmosphere for his attempt to combine Marxist sociology with psychoanalysis.

After the Nazi seizure of power, Fromm (as well as other leading members of the Institute such as Karl Mannheim, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno) left Germany. He settled in the United States and became a member of the International Institute of Social Research at Columbia University in New York. Fromm joined the faculty of Bennington College in 1941 and of the National University of Mexico in 1951. Since 1962 he has been on the faculty of New York University.

Besides his teaching duties, Fromm has lectured widely and has produced a large number of books on sociological and psychological problems. In 1931 he published a study entitled "The Development of the Dogma of Christ," in which he attempted to explain the appeal of religious doctrines by analysis of the socio-economic groups that accepted them—an approach that he also used in *Escape from Freedom*. Of particular interest in connection with *Escape from Freedom* are his *Man for Himself* and *The Sane Society*, which may be said to form a trilogy fully stating Fromm's social philosophy. In these works his concepts of love and work and their relationship to mental and social conditions are further developed.

As the foregoing analysis of *Escape from Freedom* has indicated, a vast number of books in the fields of history, psychology, cultural anthropology, and political science are relevant to Fromm's arguments. The following represents a brief, highly selective, and highly arbitrary choice of works that may serve as a guide to further reading.

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