



D 089

AN EXAMINATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF MAN
OF ERICH FROMM AND REINHOLD NIEBUHR

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
Union Theological Seminary
Richmond, Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Theology

by
Yugo Suzuki
May 1971



Propriety of the Erich Fromm Document Center. For personal use only. Citation or publication of material prohibited without express written permission of the copyright holder.

Eigentum des Erich Fromm Dokumentationszentrums. Nutzung nur für persönliche Zwecke. Veröffentlichungen – auch von Teilen – bedürfen der schriftlichen Erlaubnis des Rechteinhabers.

© 1976

YUGO SUZUKI

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED



R 11
 2-103

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE	i
I. INTRODUCTION.	1
The Problem for Investigation	1
Justification of the Problem.	1
Methodology	4
The Scope of the Dissertation	5
II. ERICH FROMM'S DOCTRINE OF MAN	6
The Major Sources of Fromm's Doctrine of Man. . .	6
The humanistic atheism of Feuerbach	6
A synthesis of Freud and Marx	15
Fromm and Freud	15
Fromm and Marx.	26
Fromm and Zen Buddhism.	33
The influence of Judaism.	39
Fromm and other contemporary psychoanalysts . .	52
Fromm and Adler	53
Fromm and Horney.	56
Fromm and Sullivan.	61
Fromm's Concept of Man.	66
The Essential nature of man and the problem of human existence.	66
The essential nature of man	66

R.A. [unclear] 1971



CHAPTER

PAGE

The problem of human existence.	74
The five human needs.	74
The problem of human existence.	78
The sickness of man	91
The two presuppositions underlying Fromm's concept of the sickness of man.	91
Man's responsibility for his sickness	92
The essential goodness of man	95
The model of the productive man	97
The productive orientation in terms of assimilation.	97
The productive orientation in terms of socialization	101
The nature of human sickness.	116
The definition of the sickness.	116
The sources of pathological alienation.	119
The dialectical nature of freedom	119
The suppressive nature of society	129
Symptoms of alienation.	132
The internal symptoms of alienation	132
External symptoms of alienation	135
A proposed cure	143
Bases for Fromm's proposed cure for man's sickness.	144



CHAPTER	PAGE
Fromm's proposed cure for the sickness of	
man	150
Economic transformation	150
Cultural transformation	155
Political transformation.	160
III. REINHOLD NIEBUHR'S DOCTRINE OF MAN.	174
The Major Sources of Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine	
of Man.	174
The Bible	174
Liberalism.	179
Marxism	187
Kierkegaard and Pascal.	191
Augustine	196
Luther and Calvin	200
The Renaissance	203
Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Man.	205
The essential nature of man and the problem	
of his existence.	206
The essential nature.	206
Man as nature	206
Man as spirit	208
The problem of human existence.	215
The sin of man.	221
The origin of sin	221
The nature of sin	231



CHAPTER	PAGE
The forms of sin.	233
The sin of pride.	235
The pride of power.	237
The pride of intellect.	241
Moral pride	242
Spiritual pride	243
The sin of sensuality	245
The cure for sin.	250
Presuppositions	251
The source and nature of the cure	261
The source of the cure.	261
The definition of the source.	261
The locus of grace.	262
The nature of <u>arape</u>	264
The nature of the cure.	271
The cure in history	272
Humility.	272
Tolerance	273
Justice	279
The nonchalance of faith.	287
The cure beyond history	290
IV. CONCLUSION	297
Similarities and Differences of Fromm and Niebuhr	297



CHAPTER	PAGE
Similarities of Niebuhr and Fromm	297
Differences of Niebuhr and Fromm.	304
The essential nature of man	306
The sin of man.	310
The cure for the sickness	314
The source of the cure.	314
The nature of the cure.	315
Personal Views.	322
Internal coherence.	323
Common human experience	326
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	345
ABSTRACT	



PREFACE

This dissertation is a product of my interest in the differences and similarities between humanism and Christian faith particularly with regard to the doctrine of man which began while I was still in college. I began my research in the summer of 1968 in Richmond, Virginia. The major portion of the dissertation was written at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee, where I was serving as a campus minister in 1969-1970. The dissertation was set in final form in Seattle, Washington where I am currently serving Blaine Memorial United Methodist Church.

I wish to thank two scholars, Richard Armstrong of the Medical College of Virginia and Donald Dawe of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, for their discerning comments and precise but extremely helpful criticisms at various stages of my writing. Without their assistance, I could have never completed this project.

My appreciation also goes to Mrs. Fumi Kawakami, a faithful member of my present congregation, who has helped us type the final draft.

Most of all, I wish to acknowledge my deep thanks to my wife, Elizabeth, who has been a constant source of encouragement throughout the course of my research and writing. How many awkward phrasings and unintelligible sentences, not



to mention misspelled words, she has noted, is difficult to estimate. She willingly submitted herself to the excruciating task of typing and retyping the entire manuscript in addition to being a thoughtful and helpful wife. To her I dedicate this dissertation.

April 26, 1971

Seattle, Washington

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. The problem for investigation

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the doctrines of man of Erich Fromm and Reinhold Niebuhr in order to discover irreducible differences as well as similarities between a Christian and a humanist evaluation of man and of the human predicament; to ascertain if Fromm's humanist approach may contribute to the basic insights revealed by Niebuhr's doctrine of man; to discover what implicit or explicit critique Reinhold Niebuhr's doctrine of man makes upon Erich Fromm's concept of human nature.

II. Justification of the problem

"Man has always been his most vexing problem. How shall he think of himself?"¹ These words of Reinhold Niebuhr not only announce the unifying theme of his thought since the early 1930's, but also point out one of the most complex and dynamic areas of recent twentieth century thought: the encounter between the Christian theologian and the secular man. Speaking of this same issue, Paul Tillich reminds us that the history of Christian thought in the last two

¹Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), I, 1. Hereafter NDM.



centuries has been the drama of collision and synthesis between the classical tradition and the rising humanism.

So the whole story has a dramatic character. It is the drama of the rise of a humanism in the midst of Christianity which is critical of the Christian tradition, departs from it and produces a vast world of secular existence and thought. Then there is the rise of some of the greatest philosophers and theologians who try to unite these divergent elements again. Their syntheses in turn are destroyed and the divergent elements collide and try to conquer each other, and new attempts to reunite them have to be made.²

One major consequence of this struggle as far as theology is concerned is the so-called "anthropological reduction" of theology. This becomes particularly obvious in our time in such men as William Hamilton, Paul Van Buren, and Thomas J. J. Altizer, for whom the rejection of "supernaturalism" means the unqualified autonomy of man.³

Thus, one is compelled to state that an attempt to examine closely the relationships between Christian faith and secular humanism with a particular focus upon the problem of the nature and destiny of man is worth undertaking. Such an attempt becomes even more important in view of the

²Paul Tillich, Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology, ed. Carl E. Braaten (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), p. 5.

³For an able and concise analysis of this problem, see Albert C. Outler's Who Trusts in God: Musings on the Meaning of Providence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 3-30.

fact that it is the meaning of human existence that has become increasingly problematic in our time.⁴

The selection of the two men, Reinhold Niebuhr and Erich Fromm, for our examination of the relationships between a Christian and a humanistic concept of man calls for explanation. First of all, they are considered to be foremost contributors to the field of anthropology from a Christian and a humanist perspective. Secondly, both Niebuhr and Fromm are convinced of the importance of understanding the essential nature of man. Thirdly, they share the belief that man is not what he ought to be; man is sick. Fourthly, they maintain that if man is sick, then his sickness must be cured; man is in need of restoration. In short, Niebuhr and Fromm share in common certain strikingly similar areas of concern in relation to the doctrine of man. Yet, it is their answers to these areas of human life that separate them from each other.

⁴Paul Tillich, for example, describes in The Courage to Be the three characteristic types of anxiety. Ancient man suffered the anxiety of fate and death; for medieval man it was the anxiety of guilt and condemnation. Modern man experiences the anxiety of meaninglessness (The Courage to Be, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952, Chapter II).

H. Richard Niebuhr agrees with Tillich's assessment. "Our situation is not one of conflict between great forces. It is better described as a situation of emptiness. Life for man has become empty because it is without great purposes and great hopes and great commitments, without a sense of participation in a great conflict of good and evil" (Radical Monotheism, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960, p. 141).

It is, therefore, obvious that it is important to formulate these differences as well as these similarities in a way that would, so to speak, put them side by side so that they might be studied, evaluated, and compared. And, in view of the fact that no major study has been made of it, our attempt may make a contribution to the present dialogue between the Christian theologian and the secular man concerning the doctrine of man.

III. Methodology

In order to investigate the problem previously stated, at the outset, we shall discuss the background of each man. As for Fromm, the following points will be discussed: (1) Fromm's basic philosophical position as that of the humanistic atheism of Feuerbach; (2) his appropriation of and reaction to Freud and Marx concerning the nature of man; (3) the influence of Zen Buddhism in his thinking; (4) his keen interest in the Old Testament concept of the Kingdom of God and social justice; and (5) his position in relation to such contemporary psychoanalysts as Adler, Horney, and Sullivan.

As for Niebuhr's background, our attention will be focused on the following points: (1) the Bible as the basis of his anthropology; (2) Niebuhr's theological concern for the proper estimate of man as having grown out of his reaction against liberalism; (3) Marxist influence in his

thinking; and (4) his indebtedness to Kierkegaard, Pascal, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and to the Renaissance.

Our discussion of the background of Niebuhr and Fromm will be followed by a detailed examination of their doctrines of man in the following three areas: (1) the essential nature of man; (2) the sickness (sin) of man and its symptoms; (3) a proposed cure.

Having done this, we will then be ready to delineate irreducible differences as well as similarities of the two men and to examine what implicit or explicit critique the Christian concept of man, as interpreted by Reinhold Niebuhr, makes upon Erich Fromm's concept of human nature. This will be undertaken in the last chapter of the dissertation.

IV. The scope of the dissertation

Our study is not intended to be a comprehensive appraisal of Fromm's whole psychology over against the entire corpus of Niebuhr's theology. Nor is it primarily an inquiry into the evolution of their thoughts. Its scope is limited to issues immediately pertaining to the three areas of anthropology: (1) man's essential nature, (2) man's sickness, and (3) a proposed cure for the sickness. The bibliography will reflect this definition of sin in that it is selective rather than exhaustive.

CHAPTER II

ERICH FROMM'S DOCTRINE OF MAN

I. The major sources of Fromm's doctrine of man

Erich Fromm has been passionately concerned with what man and his society ought to be. He has always sought to show that what they ought to be is radically different from what they are. In his eager search for materials to support his case, he has hunted in the areas of psychology, sociology, politics, philosophy, and religion. Being a man of creative thinking, however, he does not simply repeat what his mentors have said. Instead, he goes on to correct them in order to fit them to the style of his thought. Therefore, it is essential for us to probe where Fromm finds the major sources of his doctrine of man and how he implements them to elucidate the validity of his understanding of man.

A. The humanistic atheism of Feuerbach

Fromm is deeply indebted to the thought of Ludwig A. Feuerbach, although nowhere does he specifically acknowledge his indebtedness. In the next few pages, we shall seek to delineate the impact that the thought of Feuerbach has created upon Fromm's doctrine of man.

Feuerbach has often been called a humanistic atheist, for the central thesis of his thinking is that God is nothing other than the projection of man's own self. In

The Essence of Christianity, he makes this theme unmistakably clear by declaring, "God is man, man is God."¹ Theology is defined strictly as anthropology.

Religion is the dream of the human mind. But even in dreams we do not find ourselves in emptiness or in heaven, but on earth, in the realm of reality; we only see real things in the entrancing splendour of imagination and caprice, instead of in the simple daylight of reality and necessity. Hence I do nothing more to religion--and to speculative philosophy and theology also--than to open its eyes, or rather to turn its gaze from the internal towards the external, i.e., I change the object as it is in the imagination into the object as it is in reality.²

Such an attempt to identify the divine with the human leaves absolutely no room for any concept of a transcendent deity.

This is exactly what Feuerbach intends to affirm.

To enrich God, man must become poor; that God may be all, man must be nothing. But he desires to be nothing in himself, because what he takes from himself is not lost to him since it is preserved in God. . . . in brief, man in relation to God denies his knowledge, his own thoughts that he may place them in God. Man gives up his personality. . . . He denies human dignity, the human ego; but in return God is to him a selfish, egotistical being, who in all things seeks only himself, his own honour, his own ends. . . . His God is the very beginning of egotism.³

What is presupposed throughout Feuerbach's argument is this: the object of any subject is nothing else than

¹Ludwig A. Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1957), p. xxxvi.

²Ibid., p. xxxix.

³Ibid., pp. 26-27, 30.

the subject's own nature taken objectively. Thus, he writes:

By his God thou knowest the man, and by the man his God; the two are identical. Whatever is God to a man, that is his heart and soul; and conversely, God is the manifested inward nature.⁴

Religion, then, is regarded as the highest manifestation of man's self-consciousness and is defined as "the consciousness of the infinite."

The consciousness of the infinite is nothing else than the consciousness of the infinity of the consciousness; or in the consciousness of the infinite, the conscious subject has for his object the infinity of his own nature.⁵

Man is in constant search for the realization of the infinite in his own life. This is the "dominant passion" of man's activity.⁶

But what is the infinite that man seeks? Feuerbach's answer is straightforward: the infinite means fully developed self-knowledge.⁷ Fully developed self-knowledge is further defined as the life of love, benevolence, and wisdom.

Thou knowest no higher human good than to love, than to be good and wise; and even so thou knowest no higher happiness than to exist, to be a

⁴Ibid., pp. 12-13.

⁵Ibid., pp. 2-3.

⁶Ibid., p. 4.

⁷cf. " . . . religion is man's earliest and also indirect form of self-knowledge" (Ibid., p. 13).

subject; for the consciousness of all reality, of all bliss, is for thee bound up in the consciousness of being a subject, of existing.⁸

Defining God as true humanity, Feuerbach can claim that "all the attributes of the divine nature are . . . attributes of the human nature."⁹ In short, what man desires, praises, and approves is the divine, whereas what man despises is the non-divine.

From this Feuerbach draws the obvious conclusion: religion is a necessary stage of human growth though it is a distorted and immature reflection of man's own life. "The necessary turning-point of history," writes Feuerbach, "is . . . the open confession, that the consciousness of God is nothing else than the consciousness of the primitive self-consciousness."¹⁰ But since man has now fully grown and attained maturity both morally and culturally, he no longer needs religion. Emancipated from the concept of a transcendent God, man now must love himself and his fellow human beings for the sake of common humanity.

From the above analysis of Feuerbach's atheistic humanism, it is clear that Fromm appropriates wholeheartedly the former's theory of projection. In order to see this point more clearly, we shall state three major conclusions

⁸Ibid., p. 18

⁹Ibid., p. 14

¹⁰Ibid., p. 270.



of Feuerbach and show how all three are incorporated into Fromm's thought. They are as follows: (1) man as the measure of all things, (2) the rejection of a transcendent God, (3) the attainment of man's meaning and goal within his own intrinsic nature, and (4) the incorporation of speculation and empiricism into his methodology.

For Fromm, too, man is the measure of all things. This conviction is based upon the assertion that "there is nothing higher and nothing more dignified than human existence."¹¹ Therefore, continues Fromm, it is only man himself who "can determine the criterion for virtue and sin, and not an authority transcending him."¹² From this he moves to the inevitable conclusion: "Evil constitutes the crippling of man's powers; vice is irresponsibility toward himself."¹³ This position of Fromm leads him to the rejection of any form of theism, and is made clear in his more recently published writing, The Art of Loving. In this book he states that he wants to make it clear that he does not think in terms of a theistic concept of God. For him the concept of God is only a temporary one in which man has expressed, though imperfectly, his freedom.

¹¹Erich Fromm, Man for Himself (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1947), p. 13. Hereafter MH.

¹²Ibid., pp. 12-13.

¹³Ibid., p. 20.

I myself do not think in terms of a theistic concept, and that to me the concept of God is only a historically conditioned one, which man has expressed his experience of his higher powers, his longing for truth and for unity at a given historical period.¹⁴

He even predicts that the theistic concepts of God will eventually disappear as man grows increasingly more mature.¹⁵ He rejects all theistic religion and emphasizes the creativity of autonomous man, because he sees the dangers of the heteronomous character of modern man.

In keeping with the spirit of Feuerbach, Fromm asserts that man is totally dependent on his own resources of knowledge and moral drive for working out his own salvation. Rejecting an appeal to a historical revelation and any cosmic support for human values, he sees all religions as the expression of the "quest for the good life."¹⁶ Thus, he holds that the attainment of man's meaning and goal must be realized within, and only within, his own intrinsic nature. Here again the similarity with Feuerbach is obvious. Fromm writes:

¹⁴Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), p. 72. Hereafter AL.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶The expression is quoted from Arthur C. McGiffert, The Rise of Modern Religious Ideas (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1915), p. 184.



. . . we must judge them [religious ideals] with respect to their truth, to the extent to which they are conducive to the unfolding of man's powers and to the degree to which they are a real answer to man's need for equilibrium and harmony in his world.¹⁷

In this context, it is to be pointed out also that Fromm, like Feuerbach, rejects as irrelevant any kind of speculative thinking which does not have empirical justification. Just as Feuerbach rebelled against Hegelian metaphysics,¹⁸ Fromm, too, wants to avoid pure speculation. This does not mean that he thinks little of speculation. Rather, his position is that in order to have any impact upon anthropology at all, speculation must have some concrete relationships with the actual ongoing processes of the life of the individual and society. Fromm insists on the "superior value of blending empirical observation with speculation."¹⁹

Furthermore, his concern to combine observation and speculation forces him to reject pure empiricism as well. "Much of the trouble with modern social science," says Fromm, "is that it often contains empirical observations

¹⁷Erich Fromm, Psychoanalysis and Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 25. Hereafter PR.

¹⁸Karl Löwith, From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1964), pp. 76-82.

¹⁹Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion (New York: A Trident Press Book, Simon and Schuster, 1962), p. 10. Hereafter BCI.

without speculation."²⁰ Both observation and thinking are equally important when we talk about man. However, it is true that, in some of his writings, he argues as if empirical sciences, particularly psychology, were the only means by which the essence of human nature can be established. It is perfectly possible, insists Fromm at one point;

. . . to infer the core common to the whole human race from the innumerable manifestations of human nature, the normal as well as the pathological ones, as we observe them in different individuals and cultures.²¹

What Fromm means by the above sentence is that one can come to discover who man is by observing the reactions of men under varying conditions and that from these observations he can make inferences about the nature of the man who reacts. His method then is identical with the inductive method of the empirical scientist.

But a closer examination of Fromm's writing shows that in his attempt to discover the core of human nature, he does not restrict himself to the empirical procedures of the scientist. In his well-known essay, "Man Is Not a Thing," Fromm argues that empiricism is adequate only for things. Man, however, is not a thing and therefore cannot be understood purely on the empirical basis.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Erich Fromm, The Sane Society (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1955), p. 13. Hereafter SS.

Psychology can show us what man is not. It cannot tell us what man . . . is. The soul of man, the unique core of each individual, can never be grasped and described adequately. It can be "known" only inasmuch as it is not misconceived. The legitimate aim of psychology . . . is the negative, the removal of distortions and illusions, not the positive, full, and complete knowledge of a human being.²²

Thus, despite his earlier claim to be scientific, Fromm seems to think that the basic method of science is essentially inadequate for his own true purpose, though it is useful in practical pursuits. The question of human nature is, in the final analysis, an empirical, philosophical, and religious one. In his later work, this affirmation becomes explicit.

This radical aim can be envisaged only from the point of view of a certain philosophical position. . . . This aim could not be better described than has been done by Suzuki in terms of the "art of living." One must keep in mind that any such concept as the art of living grows from the soil of a spiritual humanistic orientation, as it underlies the teachings of Buddha, of the prophet, of Jesus, of Meister Eckhart, or of men as Blake, Walt Whitmann, or Bucke.²³

It may be concluded, therefore, that despite his claim to be scientific, Fromm, in his analysis of the core

²²Erich Fromm, "Man Is Not a Thing," Saturday Review XL (March 16, 1957), 10.

²³D. T. Suzuki, Erich Fromm, and Richard DeMartino, Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 136. Hereafter ZBP.



of human nature, does not apply the inductive method of science to its logical conclusions, but, instead, turns to humanistic philosophers and what he calls "humanistic religions."

B. A synthesis of Freud and Marx

Even before he was a teen-ager, Fromm became keenly aware of the problems concerning the laws that govern the life of the individual man and the laws of society.²⁴ It was this interest in man, both individual and collective, that eventually led him to the writings of Freud and Marx. In his autobiographical essay, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, Fromm observes that his thought is best understood as an effort to reconcile and synthesize the insights of Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxian sociology.

I tried to see the lasting truth in Freud's concepts as against those assumptions which were in need of revision. I tried to do the same with Marx's theory, and finally I tried to arrive at a synthesis which followed from the understanding and the criticism of both thinkers.²⁵

In the following pages I shall seek to investigate exactly how Fromm has developed his doctrine of man through his process of coming to terms with Freud and Marx.

1. Fromm and Freud

Let us, first of all, examine how Fromm has developed his anthropology out of his reaction to Freud's concept of

²⁴ECI, pp. 3-10.

²⁵Ibid., p. 10.

the nature of human self and the function of society.²⁶

Freud maintains that man's self is forever divided into two areas which stand in opposition to each other: the id and the ego. The former is the repository of man's deep instinctive drives and occupies the dynamic part of the self.

It contains everything that is inherited, that is present at birth, that is fixed in the constitution--above all, therefore, the instincts, which originate in the somatic organization and which find their first mental expression in the id in forms unknown to us.²⁷

Since the id contains solely "instinctual cathexes seeking discharge,"²⁸ its function is to pressure for their immediate satisfaction. This gratification of instincts is defined as happiness.²⁹ Freud further declares "The power of the id expresses the true purpose of the individual organism's life. This consists of the satisfaction of its

²⁶Clara Thompson observes that "Fromm first took issue with Freud about man's relation to his society" (Clara Mabel Thompson, Interpersonal Psychoanalysis: The Selected Papers of Clara M. Thompson, Maurice R. Green, editor, New York: Basic Books, 1964, p. 96). Fromm is usually classified as a "Neo-Freudian revisionist." See, for example, Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 238.

²⁷Sigmund Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, trans. James Starchey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1949), p. 14.

²⁸Sigmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, trans. W. J. H. Sprott (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1933), p. 105.

²⁹Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth Press Ltd., 1953), pp. 31-32.

innate needs."³⁰ But the immediate realization of the instinctual drives of the id would imperil the entire organism by bringing it into conflict with its social and natural environment. The organism, therefore, requires another agency to assure its survival by restraining and controlling the irrational activity of the id. This agency, according to Freud, is the ego.

The ego has the task of bringing the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavors to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns supremely in the id. The ego represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the id, which contains the passion.³¹

Thus, it is clear that there exist two conflicting forces in the very existence of man: the rational (the ego) and the irrational (the id). "The ego stands for reason and circumspection, while the id stands for the untamed passion."³² The incurable tension between these two contrasting forces constantly dominates man's psychic life.

From the observations made thus far, Fromm draws the following conclusions concerning Freud's understanding of

³⁰Freud, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, op. cit., p. 19.

³¹Sigmund Freud, The Ego and the Id, trans. Joan Riviere (Fourth edition; London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1947), pp. 29-30.

³²Freud, New Introductory Lectures . . . op. cit., p. 107.

the self: (1) the self exists in isolation, and (2) the self is divided in its very existence. In his attempt to be a therapist for major individual, social, and political issues, he rejects both conclusions of Freud.

First of all, Fromm argues that the self does not exist in isolation. The healthy growth of the self is achieved only in its relation to nature, other selves, and itself without losing its own individuality. The failure of the self to relate itself to the world about him results in sickness. Man is a social being, not a self-sufficient one.³³ Fromm expresses this point thus:

. . . Freud's essential principle is to look upon man as an entity, a closed system, endowed by nature with certain physiologically conditioned drives, and to interpret the development of his character as a reaction to satisfactions and frustrations of these drives; whereas, in our opinion, the fundamental approach to human personality is the understanding of man's relation to the world, to others, to nature, and to himself. We believe that man is primarily a social being, and not, as Freud assumes, primarily self-sufficient and only secondarily in need of others in order to satisfy his instinctual needs.³⁴

Fromm's rejection of Freud's view of the self as isolated existence leads him to his more radical break with Freud

³³Erich Fromm, "Present Human Condition," The American Scholar, XXV (Winter, 1955), 29-35.

³⁴Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1941), p. 290. Hereafter EF. Also see "Freud and Jung," Pastoral Psychology, I, No. 7 (1950), 11-15.



on the issue of the basic structure of the self: is the self, in its very existence, harmonious or divided against itself? In order to be consistent with his attempt to correct Freud's concept of the self and with his own optimistic view of man, it is obvious that Fromm must show the harmonious nature of the self and reject the view of the self as divided against itself. It must be pointed out, however, that Fromm sometimes fails to see this logic and does not always succeed in showing the harmonious nature of the self. In fact, at times, he seems to hold a strikingly Freudian view of the self by insisting that in the self there are two kinds of impulses which are incompatible with each other: the progressive and regressive. Fromm writes:

We are never free from two conflicting tendencies: one to emerge from the womb, from the animal form of existence into a more human existence, from bondage to freedom; another, to return to the womb, to nature, to certainty and security.³⁵

Since the self is divided against itself in its very structure, the only possible way for man's growth and maturation is obviously the suppression of the regressive impulses.³⁶ It seems clear, then, that as long as Fromm holds this view, he has neither reason nor basis for correcting Freud's concept of the nature of the self.

³⁵SS, p. 27. This problem will be dealt with later when we discuss Fromm's concept of the sickness of man.

³⁶ZBP, p. 104.

However, in his later writing, Fromm explicitly affirms the harmonious nature of the self. At one point, for example, Fromm maintains that the incompatible dichotomy between the progressive and regressive impulses may be perfectly overcome, because it is contrary to the very nature of the self's structure. The basic premise of man's nature, declares Fromm, "is the acceptance of the total personality and the elimination of the split between 'reason' and 'nature.'"³⁷ And the regressive impulses will "melt away" once and for all as the progressive impulses are firmly developed.³⁸ That his latter position is what Fromm really intends to hold seems clear from his increasingly optimistic position on the future as well as from his infinite confidence in man's reason. In fact, in one of his latest works, Fromm affirms the existence of people in whom the development of the progressive impulses has reached such an extent that they have lost the capacity of regressing at all.

There are people in whom the archaic side has been so completely eliminated, not by regression but by the development of the progressive orientation, that they have lost the capacity of even regressing to it.³⁹

³⁷EF, pp. 258-259.

³⁸ZBP, p. 92.

³⁹Erich Fromm, The Heart of Man (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 122. Hereafter HM.

If it can be established that Fromm's main emphasis definitely falls upon the harmonious nature of the self, in what manner does he show it? Here his task is complicated by the fact that in reality the average self does seem to shift constantly between the progressive tendencies and the regressive tendencies. Empirically speaking, the self is not harmonious but divided against itself. Fromm solves this dilemma by terming the progressive impulses primary and the regressive impulses secondary. In other words, the essential nature of the self is harmonious and intact. But its harmonious nature, according to Fromm, will be broken if the progressive impulses are blocked or thwarted.⁴⁰

It is safe to conclude, despite the existence of some evidences to the contrary, that Fromm generally maintains, in reaction to Freud, that the self is not divided in its essential structure; but it is unified, rational, and harmonious. Man has the potentiality to be fully rational and wholly loving. Therefore, in Fromm's mature concept of the human self, the Freudian dualism is replaced by psychic harmony. Gone is the dark Freudian picture of the primordial struggle between the id and the ego.

⁴⁰W.H., p. 218.



In the previous analysis of Fromm's thought, we have concluded that his concept of the self must be understood as his constructive attempt to come to terms with Freud's concept of the self. It must be further pointed out that Fromm, in his concept of the function of society, shows an even more radical break with Freud. I shall now examine this particular problem by first examining Fromm's understanding of Freud's concept of society.

According to Fromm, Freud maintains that essentially the individual and society are mutually incompatible. This interpretation has definite bases in Freud's writings, for Freud asserts that every society "is based on coercion and instinctual renunciation."⁴¹ This is so, because, as the function of the id indicates, the happiness of man, which is the unrestricted instinctual expression, would make social life impossible. Freud insists that society and culture demand increasing amounts of instinctual renunciation.

How does society try to curb the fullest expression of human instincts? According to Freud, it does this in two ways: (1) the restriction of the satisfaction of the sexual instinct, and (2) the repression of aggressiveness. Man's

⁴¹Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), p. 11.

sexual instinct must be carefully regulated in order for society to exist at all. Much of man's creative activity is the result of the sublimated sexual drive. Thus, man's sexual energy must be transformed into the "aim-inhibited libido," the function of which is to "strengthen communities by bonds of friendship."⁴² Society creates the friendship so that man can live with others in harmony. Although friendship is essentially incompatible with the psychic structure of man, it is necessary for civilization.

Culture has to call up every possible reinforcement. Hence its system of methods by which mankind is to be driven to identifications and aim-inhibited love relationships; hence the restrictions on sexual life; and hence too, its ideal command to love one's neighbor as oneself, which is really justified by the fact that nothing is so completely at variance with original human nature as this.⁴³

But, in addition to man's sexual drive, society must restrain his aggressiveness, since uncontrolled aggressiveness is destructive to social cooperation. How does society repress this natural human instinct? Freud's answer is clear: it does this by interjecting the latter into the superego. The superego represents the ideal and always strives for perfection in contrast to the id which follows pleasure and to the ego which is concerned with reason.

⁴²Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, op. cit., p. 80.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 86-87.



It, therefore, may be defined as the person's moral codes. It develops out of the ego as a consequence of the child's assimilation of his parents' standards regarding what is good and what is bad. By assimilating the moral authority of his parents, the child replaces their authority with his own inner authority.⁴⁴

Civilization thus obtains mastery over the dangerous love of aggression in individuals by enfeebling and disarming it, and setting up an institution within their minds to keep watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city.⁴⁵

Fromm states that it is on this point that he disagrees with Freud. Freud's conclusion is that individual claims and society are basically incompatible with each other. His interpretation is supported by the following statement made by Freud in Civilization and Its Discontents:

A great part of the struggles of mankind centers around the single task of finding some expedient . . . solution between . . . individual claims and those of the civilized community; it is one of the problems of man's fate whether this solution can be arrived at in some particular form of culture, or whether the conflict will prove irreconcilable.
.....

The fateful question of the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent the cultural process developed in it will succeed in

⁴⁴Sigmund Freud, Moses and Monotheism, trans. Katherine Jones (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1932), p. 183.

⁴⁵Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, op. cit., p. 102.



mastering the derangements of communal life caused by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction.⁴⁶

Fromm, on the other hand, vehemently rejects Freud's view of the relationship between man and society. He defines the latter's view of it as one that "assumes a basic and unalterable contradiction between human nature and society, a contradiction which follows from the alleged asocial nature of man."⁴⁷ Elsewhere he makes his assessment of Freud even clearer by writing thus:

For Freud, social life and civilization are essentially in contrast to the needs of human nature as he sees it, and man is confronted with the tragic alternative between happiness based on the unrestricted satisfaction of his instincts, and security and cultural achievements based on instinctual frustration, hence conducive to neurosis and all other forms of mental sickness.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 61, 143-144.

It must be noted, however, that Freud inconsistently argues in The Future of an Illusion that the increasing dominance of the intellect over the emotions is being secured by the evolutionary process and that mankind will eventually learn to renounce illusion and face reality as it is (see Ibid., Chapter X).

Theodor Reik observes this inconsistency of Freud by saying, "whereas the main section of Freud's essay shows the future of an illusion, we may say with little exaggeration that this last section presents the illusion of a future" (Theodor Reik, From Thirty Years with Freud, trans. R. Winston, New York: Farrar, Reinhart and Company, 1940, p. 135). Reik concludes that Freud "overestimates both the extent and the strength of human intelligence" (Ibid., p. 131).

⁴⁷SS, p. 74.

Civilization, to Freud, is the product of instinctual frustration and thus the cause of mental illness.⁴⁸

What is Fromm's view of society then? He maintains that society is not the suppressor of the instincts, but the creator of the proper attitudes which are essential for man to be truly human. The sane man is the fruit of the sane society. This means that once society is restored to sanity, the essentially harmonious nature of man will express itself. Conversely, it is the evil society that corrupts the nature of man. The bad man is the product of the bad society. However, as we shall try to document it later, Fromm discards this concept of society whenever he comes to deal with the productive nature of man that transforms the bad society into the good society. Man is no longer regarded as the helpless victim of the regressive society, but he is the one who is actively engaged in the transformation of his society.

2. Fromm and Marx

Fromm is convinced that man and his world have desperately gone wrong and are in need of being corrected. This sense of urgency, which pervades all of Fromm's thought, has made of it an ambitious system of social criticism. Few writers in our time have spoken so passionately of freedom, justice, and the hopes for the future as he. It is from

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 76.

Marx that Fromm has learned so much about the sober realities of the present as well as the glorious hopes of the future and some of the objective conditions in which these hopes can be put into actuality. Fromm himself admits that "without Marx . . . , my thinking would have been deprived of its most important stimuli."⁴⁹ Let us, therefore, examine how Marxism has been the basis for Fromm's positive outlook and how Fromm has sought to go even beyond Marxism in his social criticism and reconstruction.

First of all, Fromm has learned from Marx that the core of man's sickness is alienation from himself, the world, and other men. Man's alienation from the self, according to Marx, is seen in his relationship with the product of his labor. Under the present system of capitalism, the product "now confronts him in the shape of an alien thing, a power independent of the producer."⁵⁰ Man's alienation from the self is further described by Marx as follows:

⁴⁹BCI, p. 11.

John Schaar states that "Fromm's psychology, which is fundamentally social psychology, is specifically Marxian social psychology" (Escape from Freedom: The Perspectives of Erich Fromm, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961, p. 89).

⁵⁰Karl Marx, "The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of Karl Marx," Marx's Concept of Man, Erich Fromm, editor, T. B. Bottomore, translator (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1961), p. 95.



The worker becomes poorer, the more wealth he produces and the more his production increases in power and extent.

All these consequences follow from the fact that the worker is related to the product of his labor as an alien object. For it is clear on this presupposition that the more the worker expends himself in work, the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, the poorer he becomes in his inner life and the less he belongs to himself. . . . The worker puts his life into the object and his life then belongs no longer to himself but to the object. The greater his activity, therefore, the less he possesses. . . . The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, assumes an external existence, but that it exists independently outside himself, that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force.⁵¹

Not only, says Marx, is man's labor alienated in the product of his labor, but in the process of producing it, he no longer feels that he himself is sufficiently grounded in his world. Labor is no longer activity in which man engages spontaneously for the sake of pure joy. Thus, production has become a form of servitude for some alien powers that threaten human existence. Marx describes man's alienation from his own world as follows:

. . . the work is external to the worker, that it is not part of his nature, and that consequently he does not fulfill himself in his work, but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 95-96.

mentally debased. The worker therefore feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, forced labor. It is not the satisfaction of a need, but only the means for satisfying other needs. Its alien character is clearly shown by the fact that as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion it is avoided like the plague. External labor, labor in which man alienates himself, is a labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Finally, the external character of work for the worker is shown by the fact that it is not his own work but work for someone else, that in work he does not belong to himself but to another person.⁵²

The result of these forms of alienation is alienation from other men. The common unity of mankind is broken. The most conspicuous manifestation of man's alienation from other men is found in his transformation into a commodity to be utilized. This dehumanization of man is described by Marx as follows:

Hence it is self-evident that the laborer is nothing else his whole life through, than labor-power, that therefore all his disposable time is by nature and law labor time, to be devoted to the self-expansion of capital. . . . It usurps the time for the growth, development, and maintenance of the body. It steals the time required for the consumption of fresh air and sunlight. It haggles over a meal time, incorporating it where possible with the process of production, as coal is supplied to the boiler, grease and oil to the machinery. It reduces the sound sleep needed for the restoration, reparation, refreshment of the bodily powers to just so many hours of torpor as the revival of an organism, absolutely exhausted, renders essential. . . . Capital cares nothing for the length of life

⁵²Ibid., pp. 98-99.



of labor power. All that concerns it is simply and solely the maximum of labor power that can be rendered fluent in a working day. It attains this end by shortening the extent of the laborer's life, as a greedy farmer snatches increased produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility.⁵³

If the sickness of man can be identified with man's three-fold alienation, what is the source of this alienation? Marx finds its source in the production of surplus goods or the accumulation of wealth by the minority which later brought about the division of classes.

Accumulation of wealth at one pole, is therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.⁵⁴

From this it follows that the only way to establish justice and freedom is the abolition of private property. Marx is convinced that it will bring a radical reversal in the condition of man, because then alienation will be completely overcome. The abolition of private property by the proletariat is identical with the "definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature and between man and man."⁵⁵

⁵³Karl Marx, Capital, trans. Martin Milligan (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1961), I, 264-265.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 645.

⁵⁵Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," op. cit., p. 127.