

The supersession of private property is therefore the complete emancipation of all the human qualities and senses. It is this emancipation because these qualities and senses have become human, from the subjective as well as the objective point of view.⁵⁶

Fromm keeps intact the core of the Marxian theory of man and uses it to discredit the completely isolated character of the Freudian concept of man. At the same time, Fromm liberates Marxism from the confinements of class analysis and economic determinism, relating it to complex aspects of human life. Fromm's analysis of the sickness of modern man leads him to the concept of alienation. And it is to be further noted that his analysis of alienation is hardly more than a reiteration of Marx.

Convinced that the sense of alienation is most conspicuous in our time, Fromm, too, finds the cause of alienation in capitalism, though, contrary to Marx, he sees some definitely positive contributions which capitalism has made.

. . . capitalism not only freed man from traditional bonds, but it also contributed tremendously to the increasing of positive freedom, to the growth of an active, critical, responsible self. But at the same time it made the individual more alone and isolated and imbued him with a feeling of insignificance and powerlessness.⁵⁷

However, the most significant influence of Marx upon Fromm's thought is the thesis that man is a product of his

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 132.

⁵⁷EF, p. 108.



society. Man does not stand in opposition to society, but he is what society makes him. Fromm is particularly aware of Marx's concern with the objectively given conditions which give shape and direction to human character. Fromm agrees that these conditions can determine man's conscious thought, because his needs and drives are themselves socially produced and infinitely flexible. In this context, Fromm speaks of Marx as follows:

His premise is that before man can engage in any kind of cultural activity, he must produce the means for his physical subsistence. The ways in which he produces and consumes are determined by a number of objective conditions: his physiological constitution, the productive powers which he has at his disposal and which, in turn, are conditioned by the fertility of the soil, natural resources, communications and the techniques which he develops. Marx postulated that the material conditions of man determine his mode of production and consumption and that these in turn determine his socio-political organization, his practice of life, and eventually his mode of thought and feeling.⁵⁸

Fromm, however, departs from Marx on one basic pre-supposition concerning man: he rejects the Marxian economic determinism which maintains that man's sickness is caused solely by economic conditions and healed only by correcting them. Fromm believes that Marx is blind to the unique elements in man's nature. Fromm argues that man's life must be understood as the interaction of economic conditions and the

⁵⁸SS, p. 261.



fundamental needs of human nature which transcend the purely economic. Fromm writes:

Marx . . . had not paid sufficient attention to the fact that history was not only determined by economic conditions, but that cultural forces in turn also influence the economic basis of society.⁵⁹

Therefore, as Fromm sees it, the fundamental error of Marx lies in his mistaken notion which is summarized by Fromm as follows:

. . . the socialization of the means of production was not only the necessary, but also the sufficient condition for the transformation of the capitalist into a socialist cooperative society.⁶⁰

C. Fromm and Zen Buddhism

Fromm is convinced that the essence of religion is the affirmation of humanity. The objective of religion then must be identical with the full realization of man's innate potentialities to be rational and loving. Fromm argues that it is Zen Buddhism that expresses this same humanism most thoroughly and logically.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 263.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 265.

⁶¹ Fromm's knowledge of Zen Buddhism is primarily based upon his association with D. T. Suzuki, who was considered to be the most creative Zen philosopher of Japan till his recent death. Incidentally, Fromm did not have to suffer the burden of having to read translations of the former's work. Suzuki both spoke and wrote the English language with ease and skill. His numerous books include Essays in Zen Buddhism (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1949).

According to Fromm, the enlightenment of the self, satori, in the thought of Zen Buddhism, is neither an abnormal state of mind nor the unconscious state of trance. Rather satori is the goal at which psychoanalysis is aimed; it is "the true fulfillment of the state of well-being."⁶² The state of well-being, which is held by both psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism, according to Fromm, is defined as man's relationship to the world around him on a higher and truly conscious level.

It is a state in which the person is completely turned to the reality outside and inside of him, a state in which he is fully aware of it and fully grasps it. He is aware of it--that is, not his brains, nor any other part of his organism, but he, the whole man. He is aware of it; not as of an object over there which he grasps with his thought, but it, the flower, the dog, the man, in its, or his, full reality. He who awakes is open and responsive to the world, and he can be open and responsible because he has given up holding on to himself as a thing, and thus has become empty and ready to receive. To be enlightened means "the full awakening of the total personality to reality."⁶³

Fromm further maintains that Zen Buddhism not only correctly identifies the nature of true humanity, but also is superior to other religions including Judaism and Christianity, because it emphasizes the independent and absolute

⁶²ZBP, p. 115.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 115-116.



nature of man without succumbing to the concept of a supernatural power which exists outside man himself. "The East . . . was not burdened with the concept of a transcendent father-savior in which the monotheistic religions expressed their longings."⁶⁴ Therefore, it is clear that:

Zen Buddhism helps man to find an answer to the question of his existence, an answer which is essentially the same as that given to the Judaic-Christian tradition, and yet which does not contradict the rationality, realism, and independence which are modern man's precious achievements. Paradoxically, Eastern religious thought turns out to be more congenial to Western rational thought than does Western religious thought itself.⁶⁵

The merit of Zen Buddhism then lies in its unconditional affirmation that man is essentially good. When man is left alone without being disturbed by outside forces, man will eventually become rational. Fromm writes:

The attitude of the Zen master to his student is bewildering to the modern Western reader who is caught in the alternative between an irrational authority which limits freedom and exploits its object, and a laissez-faire absence of any authority. Zen represents another form of authority, that of "rational authority." The master does not call the student; he wants nothing from him . . . ; the student comes of his own free will. . . . But inasmuch as he wants to learn from the master, the fact has to be recognized that . . . the master

⁶⁴WH, p. 80.

⁶⁵ZBP, p. 80. Fromm is heavily indebted to Feuerbach's theory of projection although Fromm does not acknowledge it publicly.

knows what the student wants to know. . . . The Zen master is characterized at the same time by the complete lack of irrational authority and by the equally strong affirmation of that undermining authority, the source of which is genuine experience.⁶⁶

In other words, the Zen master and the analyst in psychoanalysis play the identical role of helping the individual come to terms with himself. Or to put it in psychoanalytical language, both the master and the analyst help man experience in himself "that which was unconscious" and "reintegrate it into his consciousness."⁶⁷ What is accomplished through all this is nothing other than "the experiential realization of humanism."⁶⁸ Fromm summarized the points of agreement by saying this:

Psychoanalysis . . . can help Zen avoid the danger of a false enlightenment. . . . Zen thought will deepen and widen the horizon of the psychoanalyst and help him arrive at a radical concept of the grasp of reality which is the ultimate aim of full, conscious awareness.⁶⁹

Although Fromm's use of Zen Buddhism as one important source of his thought is discerning and penetrating, his treatment of it suffers from two factors: (1) his sweeping generalization of Zen Buddhism at the expense of some significant differences among different schools of Zen and (2) his blindness to the basic incompatibility between the presupposition of Zen Buddhism and that of his thought.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 120-121.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 124.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 107.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 140.

Our first point is obvious when we read different accounts of the way of attaining satori. In some schools of Zen, the master is authoritative and even resorts to the use of physical violence in training his pupils. DeMartino relates how a young Zen student, made desperate and fearful by his search for the attainment of satori, may have to be "spurred, inspired, goaded or even driven" by the master. "He has sometimes to be beaten, pulled, dragged, or, as once was actually witnessed, forcibly carried by four other monks out of the meditation hall and into the interview."⁷⁰ At the end of the interview the master gives him thirty blows with a bamboo stick.⁷¹ This and many other similar accounts make us question the accuracy of Fromm's equation of the Zen master and the psychoanalyst.

But, more importantly, we must point out that the measure to which the basic presupposition of Zen Buddhism is compatible to the entire framework of Fromm's thought is an open question. At least, it does not justify Fromm's easy generalization. The concept of satori is a mystical experience which is attained through deep meditation. It is not concerned with man's intellectual understanding of man and the world about him. Rather, it is man's radically new

⁷⁰ZBP, p. 161.

⁷¹Ibid.

understanding of himself achieved momentarily by his own intuition. D. T. Suzuki describes satori as follows:

. . . when a certain moment is reached, a hitherto closed screen lifted, an entirely new vista opens up, and the tone of one's whole life thereafter changes. This mental clicking or opening is called satori by the Zen masters and is insisted upon as the main object of their discipline."

In short, Zen Buddhism is concerned with man's self-enlightenment; it has to do with man's self-understanding achieved by his own inherent and intuitive powers. "To see directly into one's original Nature, this is Zen,"⁷³ says Suzuki. Thus, the essence of Zen Buddhism is best expressed by Nichiren, a great Zen master in the seventeenth century, as follows:

"A special transmission outside the Scriptures;
No dependence upon words and letters;
Direct pointing to the soul of man;
Seeing into one's nature and the attainment of
Buddhahood."⁷⁴

The conclusion which we must draw from all this is that satori is almost a totally individualistic and private experience. This observation is supported by Suzuki himself, who writes that "perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Zen experience is that it has no personal note in it

⁷²D. T. Suzuki, Zen Buddhism, ed. William Barrett (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956), pp. 90-91.

⁷³Ibid., p. 88.

⁷⁴Quoted by Suzuki. Ibid., p. 9.



as is observable in Christian mystic experiences."⁷⁵ In other words, Zen Buddhism is not at all concerned with the possibilities of social change as Fromm certainly is. Rather, it is basically a turning away from society in the search for individual salvation. Fromm, therefore, must explain further how it is possible for him to incorporate into his thinking a philosophy, the presupposition of which is radically different from his own.

D. The influence of Judaism

Having been brought up in a devout Jewish family, Fromm naturally has been greatly interested in the writings of the Old Testament. In recalling the days of his youth, he says that "the writings of the Old Testament touched me and exhilarated me more than anything else I was exposed to."⁷⁶ Let us, therefore, examine how Judaism is involved in the formation of his thought.

Throughout this section, it is well for us to keep in mind that Fromm is deeply indebted to the Hasidic tradition. Thus, the Old Testament is regarded as a compilation of numerous accounts of human evolution from immaturity to maturity. In it he sees nothing but the process of man's liberation from his confinement to nature to his independence from nature.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 106.

⁷⁶BCI, p. 5.



The Old Testament is a revolutionary book; its theme is the liberation of man from the incestuous ties to blood and soil, from the submission to idols, from the individual, for the nation, and for all of mankind.⁷⁷

It is from this standpoint that Fromm not only interprets everything in the Old Testament, but also maintains that his interpretation is identical with what the Biblical writers really wanted to say. And it is especially here that he finds the Old Testament extremely compatible with Feuerbach's projection theory which he wholeheartedly accepts as valid. This point can be shown best if we focus our attention on Fromm's discussion of the Jewish concept of man and society.

In discussing the progressive development of the Jewish concept of man, Fromm reiterates the Hasidic and Feuerbachian thesis that God is really man. The supreme value is conceptualized as analogous to the supreme power in society.

I believe that the concept of God was a historically conditioned expression of an inner experience. . . .

"God" is one of many different poetic expressions of the highest value in humanism, not a reality in itself.⁷⁸

Expressed in more concrete terms, God is at first formed according to the political and social concepts of a tribal

⁷⁷Erich Fromm, You Shall be as Gods (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 7. Hereafter YSG.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 18, 19.

chief and king. God is visualized as an absolute ruler, a tyrant in the first stage of this evolution, because "he has made nature and man, and if he is not pleased with them, he can destroy what he has created."⁷⁹ The image is then developed of a constitutional monarch. In this stage, God is no longer regarded as absolute but begins to share some of the important human characteristics. This new development in the concept of God is seen in the Jewish idea of the covenant. God and man are both bound to the conditions of the covenant. God is no longer an arbitrary deity. As seen in Abraham's dialogue with God, man is now able to challenge God in the name of God's own promises.⁸⁰ This thesis, according to Fromm, is one of the major emphases of Hasidism.⁸¹ Fromm maintains that this is best symbolized by the rainbow in the story of Noah.

The idea of the covenant between God and man may have an archaic origin, going back to a time when God was only an idealized man, perhaps not too different from the Olympian gods of the Greeks--a

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 22.

⁸⁰"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" This sentence marks the fundamental change in the concept of God as the result of the covenant. In courteous language, yet with the daring of a hero, Abraham challenges God to comply with the principle of justice. His is not the attitude of a meek supplicant but that of the proud man who has a right to demand that God uphold the principle of justice" (Ibid., p. 28).

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 79-81.

God who resembles man in his virtues and in his vices and who can be challenged by men.⁸²

What is the content of the covenant? For Fromm it is "the absolute respect of all life, the life of man and of all other living creatures."⁸³ This is again most clearly expressed in God's promise to Noah: "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth (Genesis 9:11). The right of all living creatures to live is established as the first law which even God cannot change. Thus, in the Jewish concept of the covenant, the most important step toward the identification of the divine and the human takes place. Fromm concludes:

The idea of the covenant constitutes, indeed, one of the most decisive steps in the religious development of Judaism, a step which prepares the way to the concept of the complete freedom of man, even freedom from God.⁸⁴

The final phase in the evolution of the concept of God is reached in God's revelation to Moses as "a nameless God."⁸⁵ God's revelation of himself to Moses as "I am who I am" is interpreted to mean the rejection of any kind of theological speculation concerning a transcendent deity. God must not be presented in a name or an image.

⁸²Ibid., p. 25.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 29.



This prohibition of any kind of representation of God is clearly expressed in the Ten Commandments, which forbid man to bow down before any "graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:4). This command is one of the most fundamental principles of Jewish "theology."⁸⁶

The reason for this rejection of any kind of imagery in speaking of God is found in Fromm's identification of the divine with the human. Here again Hasidic influence is evident. God is humanity; therefore, neither a name nor an image is adequate to express this idea. Fromm quotes a sentence from I. Berger's Esser Tzachtzochoth on Hasidism.

Each Jew has within himself an element of the messiah which he is required to purify and mature. Messiah will come when Israel has brought him to the perfection of growth and purity within themselves.⁸⁷

Consequently, in Fromm's thought, Moses' encounter with God is taken to mean man's realization that God is really man himself. Moses' experience symbolizes "man, trying to be like God, . . . approximating himself to God."⁸⁸

Fromm goes on to delineate his understanding of the Jewish concept of idolatry. Idolatry, as he understands it, is not man's dishonoring a transcendent God; rather, it is man's trust in anything other than the common humanity of

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 31.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 151.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 44.



man. In short, idolatry means man's failure to affirm his humanity as the most noble and highest value for his life. "The idol," says Fromm, "is the alienated form of man's experience of himself."⁸⁹ He neatly summarizes his discussion as follows:

The Old Testament is the document depicting the evolution of a small, primitive nation, whose spiritual leaders insisted on the existence of one God and on the nonexistence of idols, to a religion with faith in a nameless God, in the final unification of all men, in the complete freedom of each individual.⁹⁰

It is easy to criticize Fromm's one-sided interpretation of the relationship between God and man in the Old Testament. He completely ignores the historical and critical views of the Old Testament. What is unmistakable is that the historical and critical understanding of the Old Testament definitely presupposes the existence of God who is radically different from man. Its affirmation of reality which transcends the world of man is the source of meaning in the midst of ambiguities for the Biblical writers. According to critical-historical understanding, this point is particularly underscored whenever the prophets describe God as holy. Hosea, for example, constantly focuses our attention to the word of God, "I am God and not man, the

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 9.



Holy One in your midst." Since this is so, God's thoughts and ways surpass human understanding.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
Neither are your ways my ways,
says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are my ways higher than your ways
And my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

This point is convincingly argued by scholars who are engaged in the historical-critical examination of the Old Testament. For example, G. E. Wright makes it clear that the focus of attention of the Old Testament is "the objectivity of God's historical acts" and never "the subjectivity of inner, emotional, diffuse, and mystical experience."⁹¹ Wright is supported by Von Rad, who holds that it is the objectivity of God's historical acts that explains the literal device of the Old Testament: ". . . retelling remains the most legitimate form of theological discourse in the Old Testament."⁹² The Hebraic affirmation of the existence of a transcendent God is most concisely stated by John Bright as follows:

⁹¹G. E. Wright, God Who Acts (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 55.

⁹²Gerhard Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), I, 121.



The God of Israel stands before us as one God--invisible, Creator of all things, Ruler of nature and history--absolutely unique in the ancient world. But that is not all. Israel did not believe merely that such a God existed; she was convinced that this God had, in a historical act, chosen her, entered into covenant with her, and made her his people.⁹³

Therefore, it is true that anthropomorphism is indigenous to Biblical faith which views God in terms of historical actions and relationships rather than in terms of natural power or impersonal being. But its anthropomorphism is always qualified by God's transcendence. God is like a father. Yet there are important respects in which He is not like a father. God is like a king. Yet there are important respects in which he is not like a king. The analogy always breaks down in relation to God. Fromm cannot convince us that what the Old Testament is really saying about God is its own account of man's progress from immaturity to maturity, for he relies solely upon the Hasidic tradition for his interpretation without effectively rebutting the historical-critical understanding of the Old Testament.

As far as the concept of man in the Old Testament is concerned, this much is also clear: according to the

⁹³John Bright, The Kingdom of God (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), pp. 26-27.



historical-critical understanding of the Old Testament, man cannot claim any worth in his own right, for man has worth only as God's gift. In short, God and man are not identical in the Old Testament. The historical-critical scholars of the Old Testament maintain that this is the theme of such statements in the Old Testament as the following one.

When I look at thy heavens, the
work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which
thou hast established;
what is man that thou art mindful
of him,
and the son of man, that thou
dost care for him?
Yet thou hast made him little less
than God,
and dost crown him with glory
and honor. (Psalm 8:3-5)

In short, the Old Testament writers were convinced the whole existence of man depends upon God. It is "the primary, irreducible datum of Biblical theology."⁹⁴ According to Eichrodt, this affirmation is best expressed in the idea of the Covenant between God and the Jews.⁹⁵ A. H. Rowley supports Eichrodt's thesis by saying that God's Covenant

⁹⁴ Wright, op. cit., p. 43.

⁹⁵ Eichrodt has reconstructed the entire Old Testament theology around the Covenant (Theologie des Alten Testaments, Berlin: Evangelische Verlanganstalt, 1948).

with Israel "depends on the divine election of Israel, and the initiative is therefore with God."⁹⁶

Similarly, it is incorrect to state dogmatically that the prophetic writers interpret idolatry to be the failure to affirm humanity as the highest value in the universe. Outside the Hasidic tradition, the prophetic writers are interpreted to have made it explicit that idolatry means the worship of gods other than the one living and true God and that false gods include man's undue estimation of himself. Thus, Bernhard Anderson argues that, for the Old Testament prophets, sin is man's "unfaithfulness with no sense of gratitude for Yahweh's past deeds of benevolence and His continuing providence."⁹⁷ In short, sin is man's "breaking of the Covenant"⁹⁸ or his "revolt against God."⁹⁹ Abraham Heschel convincingly argues that the Augustinian-Niebuhrian understanding of human sin as man's unduly high regard of himself is the correct interpretation

⁹⁶H. H. Rowley, The Unity of the Bible (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1957), pp. 69-70.

⁹⁷Bernhard W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), p. 303.

⁹⁸Rowley, op. cit., p. 70.

⁹⁹George Arthur Buttrick (ed.), The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), IV, 361.

of the Old Testament prophets' understanding of sin.¹⁰⁰ It is simply impossible to identify the relationship between God and man in the Old Testament with Fromm's interpretation based upon his overly zealous appropriation of Hasidism and Feuerbach's projection theory.

From the above analysis, it is possible to conclude that it is only through the eye of Hasidism and Feuerbach's projection theory that Fromm finds in the Old Testament an evolution of the concept of God from a tribal chief to the full realization of true humanity. Through a highly artificial and selective exegesis, Fromm uses the Old Testament as an effective instrument to establish the logic of his atheistic humanism.¹⁰¹

The Old Testament, however, has enabled Fromm to be concerned with the importance of social justice in our society. The liberation of the Hebrews from the Egyptians is interpreted as the awakening of human consciousness toward social justice. "This liberation is primarily not a national

¹⁰⁰Abraham I. Heschel, "A Hebrew Evaluation of Reinhold Niebuhr," Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought, Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, editors (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), pp. 392-410.

¹⁰¹On a Jewish scholar's opposition to Fromm's interpretation of the Old Testament, see Jacob J. Petuchowski, "Erich Fromm's Midrash on Love," Commentary, XXII, No. 6 (December, 1956), 548-549.

but a social revolution."¹⁰² It is a transition from slavery to freedom.

This original awakening toward social justice is finally culminated in the concept of peace in the prophetic writings. Peace is not man's correct relationship with a transcendent God; rather, it is man's harmonious relationships with nature and fellow men. Isaiah's glorious visions of the wolf dwelling with the lamb, and the sucking child playing over the hole of the asp, and the Egyptians worshipping together with the Assyrians, for example, all point to this concept of universal peace.

Thus the idea of peace, in the prophetic view, cannot be separated from the idea of the realization of man's humanity. Peace is more than not-war; it is harmony and union between men, it is the over-coming of separateness and alienation. . . .

The prophetic concept of peace transcends the realm of human relations; the new harmony is also one between man and nature. Peace between man and nature is harmony between man and nature. Man is not threatened by nature and stops striving to dominate it; he becomes natural, and nature becomes human. He and nature cease to be opponents and become one. Man is at home in the natural world, and nature becomes a part of the human world; this is peace in the prophetic sense.¹⁰³

How do the prophets go about establishing peace and harmony among men? They challenge the power and force of

¹⁰²YSG, p. 90.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 126.

society that seek to maintain the status quo. They do this, because for them salvation is primarily social, not individual.

They do not think in terms of individual salvation only, but believe that individual salvation is bound up with the salvation of society. Their concern is the establishment of a society governed by love, justice, and truth; they insist that politics must be judged by moral values, and that the function of political life is the realization of these values.¹⁰⁴

Here we see the root of Fromm's passion for social justice. From the Old Testament prophets, he has learned the ability to see the moral reality underlying social and political reality. Consequently, he sees the possibilities of change and the direction men must take.

Having examined the meaning of the prophetic writings from the point of view of a radical humanist, Fromm has discovered another important facet of the prophetic thought. That is the assertion that the Kingdom of God, in order to be meaningful to man at all, must be established on earth, and only on earth. Salvation is this-worldly and historical, not other-worldly and trans-historical. What the prophets longed for was not the coming of a supernatural God, but the establishment of the House of David on earth. "The Jewish development," says Fromm, "emphasizes the horizontal

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 117-118.

. . . axis."¹⁰⁵ Therefore, our affirmation of humanity, too, must always be experienced in the political and social dimensions of our life. Though Fromm finds in the Old Testament everything he needs to substantiate his atheistic humanism, the prophetic concept of social justice has left an unforgettable impact upon his thought. He is convinced that the restoration of humanity must be related to the transformation of society. It is this passion for social justice rooted in the prophetic writings that has made his thought concrete and challenging. His fervent plea for the humanization of our technological society, as we shall see later, reflects the prophetic concept of the Kingdom of God on earth.

E. Fromm and other contemporary psychoanalysts

In addition to the social, religious, and philosophical ideas which have been analyzed thus far, Fromm is deeply indebted to such scholars who have been extremely influential in the field of psychoanalysis in the past several decades as Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, and H. S. Sullivan. Therefore, it is important for us to be aware of certain basic similarities and differences between them and Fromm.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 134.

1. Fromm and Adler

The basic similarity between Fromm and Adler may be summarized by saying that they always regard man as a social being, not as an independent and isolated existence. Adler's emphasis on the social character of man can be illustrated as follows: first, he insists that man must develop social interest in order for him to be a mature human being. Social interest means empathy: "To see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another."¹⁰⁶ Adler further maintains that social interest can be developed only in accordance with human reason. Reason is defined in the context of man's relationship with others.

By reason we understand, with Kant, a process which has general validity. Hence, by reasonable we understand common sense. We may define common sense as all those forms of expression and as the content of all behavior which we find beneficial to the community. This represents the kind of action and conduct which we designate as reasonable.¹⁰⁷

Without such common sense, man will not be able to regard his life as significant and uniquely worthwhile in relation to others. Adler also holds that social interest is an innate potentiality of man. To say this is to say that it

¹⁰⁶Alfred Adler, The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler, ed. Heinz Ansbacher and Rowena R. Ansbacher (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1956), p. 135.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 149.

"has to be consciously developed."¹⁰⁸ Since in favorable circumstances the human infant naturally develops this ability, Adler thinks that whether or not the infant will develop social interest depends, to a large extent, upon the general attitude of the parents. The child must feel that he is genuinely loved by his parents. Adler particularly emphasizes the importance of the first five years of the child's life within the family.¹⁰⁹

Thus far, we have attempted to substantiate the point that both Fromm and Adler wholeheartedly agree with each other on the thesis that man is a social, not an isolated, being. If there are certain basic similarities between them, however, it also must be noted that there are certain differences between them that should not be overlooked. One is that Fromm is less critical of the Freudian libido theory than is Adler. As we shall see later, Fromm frankly acknowledges bodily needs as universal and gives explicit importance to individual differences in temperament. Adler, on the other hand, focuses his attention largely on the infant's relationship to the parents and never deals with his temperament and natural endowment.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁰⁹Ruth Munroe, Schools of Psychoanalytic Thought (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1955), p. 376.

Second, while Fromm identifies the infant's initial anxiety as his awareness of separation from the parents, Adler maintains that by the very nature of the status of infancy, the infant starts out with a normal sense of helplessness and hostility. In short, every infant has inferiority feeling.

If we consider that every child is actually inferior in the face of life and could not exist at all without a considerable measure of social interest on the part of those close to him, if we focus on the smallness and helplessness of the child which continues so long and which brings about the impression that we are hardly equal to life, then we must assume that at the beginning of every psychological life there is a more or less deep inferiority feeling.¹¹⁰

The strivings of the infant are seen as compensatory striving for superiority over the people and forces which originally had mastery over him. Thus, inferiority feelings are not in themselves abnormal. Rather, they are the cause of all improvements in the position of mankind. "Indeed," writes Adler, "it seems that all our human culture is based upon feelings of inferiority."¹¹¹ Fromm does not agree with Adler's use of inferiority feelings. In his estimation, Adler puts too much emphasis upon their rational side and ignores their irrational and destructive tendencies.

¹¹⁰Adler, op. cit., p. 115.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 117.

Inferiority feelings are not a blessing for the infant, because they always lead him to belittle himself or to rule over others, in short, masochistic and sadistic tendencies.

Perhaps the most glaring difference between Fromm and Adler is found in the concept of the goal of man. According to Adler, man wishes to overcome difficulties and strives for perfection in order to experience "begins in earliest childhood and continues to the end of our lives."¹¹² Fromm, on the other hand, would say that when man's goal is defined as security, it is unavoidable to identify the goal with adjustment to the status quo of society. But the values of our present society can not be the norm for man's true potentiality. For this reason Fromm avoids such words as security and adjustment and, instead, defines man's goal as his reunion with nature, others, and himself on a higher level. This explains why Fromm is committed to the transformation of society, whereas Adler makes no effort to classify social and cultural impacts as he does with the early parental influences.

2. Fromm and Horney

Fromm reminds us of Horney's basic position that psychoanalysis must take into consideration the importance of man's interpersonal relationships. Horney states clearly,

¹¹²Ibid., p. 104.

"My conviction, expressed in a nutshell, is that psychoanalysis should outgrow the limitations set by its being an instinctivistic and a genetic psychology.¹¹³ Like Fromm, Horney finds it extremely important to realize that many neurotic conflicts are determined by cultural conditions. It is natural, therefore, for her to conclude that the specific conditions of the family are likely to produce certain kinds of character development. The child can accept challenges if he feels essentially loved, accepted, and appreciated by his parents: ". . . the basic evil is invariably a lack of genuine warmth and affection from the parents."¹¹⁴ Both Fromm and Horney are in complete agreement on the thesis that the whole personality of man is molded and shaped by the way people relate to each other. Horney's thinking is so close to that of Fromm concerning this matter that she would accept with no reservation the following statement of Fromm:

. . . [human personality] is determined by the socio-economic and political structure of society to such an extent that, in principle, one can infer from the analysis of one individual the totality of the social structure in which he lives.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Karen Horney, New Ways in Psychoanalysis (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1939), p. 8.

¹¹⁴Karen Horney, The Neurotic Personality of Our Time (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1937), p. 80.

¹¹⁵MH, p. 79.



Then, too, Horney shares Fromm's dynamic view of man. She believes that man has both the capacity and the desire to develop his potentialities and become a rational and mature human being. Furthermore, this humanizing process is a constant one in that man goes on changing as long as he lives.

. . . we believe that inherent in man are evolutionary constructive forces, which urge him to realize his given potentialities. This belief does not mean that man is essentially good-- . . . It means that man, by his very nature and of his own accord, strives toward self-realization, and that his set of values evolves from such striving.¹¹⁶

Like Fromm, Horney is concerned with man's moral problems. She is convinced that the medical scientific side of psychoanalysis must be combined with the realization that "psychic ailments . . . do involve moral problems."¹¹⁷ To deal with such problems is extremely important, simply because it is these problems that a neurotic person is most anxious to hide. Psychoanalysis enables the patient to see distinctively the character of his moral problems. Moral problems must eventually be solved by the patient's own decision, and it is psychoanalysis that encourages this process. There is no doubt in Horney's mind that the patient can solve his moral problems, because man is by nature not destructive.

¹¹⁶Karen Horney, Neurosis and Human Growth (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1950), p. 15.

¹¹⁷Horney, New Ways, op. cit., p. 300.



Man's destructive or hostile disposition is not his nature, but it is to be regarded as a defensive mechanism, the extent of which is absolutely in proportion to the degree in which he feels hurt and endangered.¹¹⁸

But there are certain basic differences that exist between Fromm and Horney. While Horney sees the basic psychological problem as a need for security, Fromm finds it in man's escape from freedom. According to Horney, the infant does not necessarily feel helpless in a hostile world. His helplessness is to be seen as the primary condition for neurotic development when actual difficulties in his surroundings make the outside world seem frustrating and hostile at a time when he is largely at the mercy of his environment. In short, in Horney's estimation, man is normally secure unless the conditions of his life have fostered neurotic trends. Fromm, on the other hand, maintains that human life is anxious to begin with. To be human means to be free from the form of instinctual existence and to be free to create one's own destiny. Man is not of nature, although he certainly is in it. This gives him feelings of estrangement and alienation. The quality of man's life depends on whether or not he is successful in constantly

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 128.

overcoming alienation productively--by uniting himself with nature, others, and himself on a higher level.

This difference may be clarified further by looking at their different concepts of the goal of man. Even more emphatically than Adler, Horney insists that man strives to "have some feeling of safety."¹¹⁹ Therefore, feelings of fear and anxiety must be overcome at all costs. The normal person is free from them. Horney makes this point clear in her discussion of the aim of psychotherapy.

The aim of therapy is . . . not to help the patient to gain mastery over his instincts but to lessen his anxiety to such an extent that he can dispense with his "neurotic trends."¹²⁰

Fromm, however, does not agree. He maintains that man strives toward reunion, not security. In fact, he must sacrifice security for the sake of reunion. His analysis of the basic problem and opportunity of mankind suggests that a measure of uneasiness is universal. Having acquired "freedom from," man ceaselessly seeks to attain "freedom to." Anxiety is unavoidable in this process. Thus, according to Fromm, anxiety can be used constructively as the basis from which man grows productively. In short, for Fromm, man's basic terror springs from the failure to attain reunion, the result

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 78.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 11.

of which is the feeling of alienation and insignificance, whereas for Horney fear is motivated by the threat to man's sense of security.

3. Fromm and Sullivan

Fromm is immensely influenced by Sullivan's thesis that we must not accept any kind of individualistic notions of man as valid. It was Sullivan who originally defined psychology as "the psychology of interpersonal relationships." The basic problem of psychology is that of clarifying and exploring the particular kind of the individual's relationships toward the world about him, not that of examining expression and suppression of single instinctual desires. The satisfaction and frustration of man's instinctual desires, according to Sullivan, are only part of the total complex relationships of the individual toward the world. Fromm is in complete agreement with the following statement of Sullivan:

Let me repeat that psychiatry as a science cannot be concerned with anything which is immutably private; it must be concerned only with the human living which is in, or can be converted into, the public mode.¹²¹

The central importance of interpersonal relationships in the thought of Sullivan is illustrated in his concept of

¹²¹H. S. Sullivan, The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1953), p. 20.

love. In defining love as "a real sensitivity to what matters to another person,"¹²² Sullivan maintains that without this ability, human life would be hopelessly chaotic. He further states that the era of preadolescence is characterized by the appearance of impulses in interpersonal relations which make for a new type of satisfaction in place of the other person, a "chum."¹²³ Love then enables the individual to value the satisfaction of the loved one as much as that of the lover. In short, love is the manifestation of the need for interpersonal intimacy.¹²⁴

It is clear that man's psychological health depends upon whether or not he can successfully relate himself to others and allow others to relate themselves to him. His failure to do so creates in him intense anxiety to such an extent that he may become unable to "make any sense of, to develop any true grasp on, the particular circumstances which dictated the experience of this intense anxiety."¹²⁵ But man cannot live in a meaningless world. He attempts to overcome the sense of meaninglessness either by renouncing his individual integrity or by destroying others so that the world ceases to be threatening. Here again it is to

¹²²Ibid., p. 245.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 246.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 314.



be noted that these mechanisms of escape are intelligible only if we consider man in an interpersonal context.

Although Fromm agrees with Sullivan on his concept of man as a social being as well as on his discussion of the mechanisms of escape, he has some serious reservations with certain points that are basic to Sullivan's social psychology. For example, Sullivan holds that the self has no autonomous entity of its own, since it is nothing but the many roles man plays in relations to others. The self is constantly changing due to its function of eliciting approval and avoiding the anxiety which is produced by disapproval. According to Sullivan, any theory that maintains that there is an essential nature is to be regarded as "the delusion of unique individuality."¹²⁶ As we shall see later, Fromm explicitly rejects this selfless view of man, insisting that the basic cause of the sickness of modern man lies in his selflessness. Man is sick today because he is so interested in becoming what others tell him to be that he simply does not know who he really is.

This leads us to another point of difference. As do Adler and Horney, Sullivan thinks that the objective of man's life is to establish security. Man strives to be

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 140.

secure in a hostile world. This point is clearly indicated in his following three criteria for mental health:

These are the need for personal security--that is, for freedom from anxiety; the need for intimacy--that is, for collaboration with at least one other person; and the need for lustful satisfaction, which is connected with genital activity in pursuit of the orgasm.¹²⁷

Fromm, on the other hand, thinks that when the purpose of life is identified with security, the power of man's freedom to transform society for the sake of his innate potentialities is bound to be ignored. This difference can be further elaborated by examining Sullivan's concept of love. We have said that Sullivan defines love in an interpersonal context and that on this he and Fromm are in agreement. They also agree that love is one's sensibility to the needs of another person. And yet, it is clear that what Sullivan means by love is essentially a pathological phenomenon in Fromm's thought. Sullivan thinks that we must acknowledge the value of another person, not because man is intrinsically unique and supremely valuable, but because "we play according to the rules of the game to preserve our prestige and feeling of superiority and merit."¹²⁸ It is for this reason that love is equated with intimacy in Sullivan's thought. He explains as follows:

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 264.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 246.



Intimacy is that type of situation involving two people which permits validation of all components of personal worth. Validation of personal worth requires a type of relationship which I call collaboration, by which I mean clearly formulated adjustments of one's behavior to the expressed needs of the other person in the pursuit of increasingly identical--that is, more and more nearly mutual satisfactions, and in the maintenance of increasingly similar security operations.¹²⁹

Yet, for Fromm it is this kind of obsession with security that forces man to lose the sense of identity and personhood. In short, what Sullivan describes as love is for Fromm hardly more than the experience of the alienated and marketing personality of modern man.

Even our cursory examination of the thoughts of some of Fromm's contemporary psychoanalysts shows that his position is deeply set in the post-Freudian psychoanalysis that regards man as a social being, not an independent, instinctual existence. But Fromm transcends his colleagues by defining man's goal as something which is other than the norms of our present society. Instead of making the goal of man conform to society, as we shall see later, he tries to do just the opposite: society is defined in terms of the productive potentiality of man. Herein lies Fromm's fervent plea for social transformation.

129 Ibid.

Having examined the major sources of Fromm's doctrine of man, we are now ready to proceed to examine the content of his doctrine of man. Our examination will focus its attention on the following three issues: (1) the essential nature of man and the problem of human existence; (2) man's sickness and its symptoms; and (3) Fromm's proposed cure for the sickness of man.

II. Fromm's concept of man

A. The essential nature of man and the problem of human existence

1. The essential nature of man

As Seward Hiltner points out, Fromm is convinced of the existence of the core of human nature, the essence which is common to all mankind.¹³⁰ Moreover, Fromm maintains that it is the task of "the science of man" to arrive eventually at a correct description of what deserves to be called human nature."¹³¹ It is this conviction that led him to question the dualistic self of Freud and the economic determinism of Marx. In Fromm's estimation, neither Freud nor Marx came to grips with the essential nature of man which is uniquely his own. Indeed, the discovery of the essential nature of man is

¹³⁰Seward Hiltner, "Erich Fromm and Pastoral Psychology," Pastoral Psychology, VI (September, 1955), 11.

¹³¹SS, p. 13.

most urgent, because, according to Fromm, without a firm understanding of it, any therapeutic attempt either on the individual or on society is destined to fail.

Fromm is well aware of the fact that from the physiological point of view, man is little different from the animal; but from the psychological point of view, man occupies a realm unique to himself. In order to speak of the essential nature of man, the basic core of man's humanness, Fromm maintains that he must take into account these two aspects of man: man in nature and man transcending nature.

By the former Fromm means that man's existence is just as precarious and dependent upon the contingencies of nature as any animal existence certainly is. Physiologically speaking, man is a creature of nature.

Man, in respect to his body and his physiological function, belongs to the animal kingdom. . . . The higher an animal is in the scale of development, the more flexibility of action pattern and the less completeness of structural adjustment do we find at birth. . . . But great as the development within the animal kingdom is, certain basic elements of existence remain the same.¹³²

What are the certain basic elements of existence that remain the same? Though Fromm nowhere spells them out in specific terms, he does imply at least two things. The first is the obvious fact that man is dependent upon nature for the source

¹³²Ibid., p. 22.

and the maintenance of his minimum "physiological organization."¹³³ Man did not will himself into being; he was born of nature and is sustained by it.

The second element of the finitude of man is just as obvious as man's dependence upon his natural environment for his existence, and that is the fact of death. Unlike animal, man is aware of death; but just as any other animal, man is completely powerless in the face of death. "There is nothing for us to do," writes Fromm, "but to accept the fact of death."¹³⁴

Though man is physiologically defined as animal, he is by no means purely animal. Living in and limited by nature, man, at the same time, transcends nature. Therefore, man is an "anomaly" and the "freak of the universe."¹³⁵ Of what does his power of transcendence consist? Fromm's answer is clear: "Self-awareness, reason, and imagination disrupt the harmony which characterized animal existence."¹³⁶ Fromm further observes that the emergence of distinctive humanity coincides with man's break with nature. And once

¹³³EF, p. 17.

¹³⁴MH, p. 41.

¹³⁵SS, p. 23.

¹³⁶Ibid. Fromm at one point emphasizes self-awareness over reason and imagination, holding that man's "awareness of himself as the subject of his experience" lifts man out of nature into a new level of existence (ZBP, p. 98).



this break has taken place, man can never return to the pre-human stage again. "Man's evolution is based on the fact that he has lost his original home, nature--and that he can never return to it, can never become an animal again."¹³⁷ This break with nature, according to Fromm, really occurs when man's life ceases to be directed by instincts alone, when man acquires liberation from "instinctual determination of his actions."¹³⁸ The emergence of man can be defined as occurring at the point where "instinctive adaptation has reached its minimum."¹³⁹ As the preceding quotation shows, in Fromm's way of thinking man's break with nature is purely accidental; it is a product of chance and therefore explainable only in terms of natural evolution.

At a certain point of animal evolution, there occurred a unique break, comparable to the first emergence of life, and to the first emergence of animal existence.¹⁴⁰

Thus far we have examined Fromm's analysis of the essential nature of man as both in and above nature. Man, in spite of the limitations forced upon him by his physiological structure, transcends nature via self-consciousness, reason, and imagination. Man in this sense is both limited and limitless at the same time. Fromm summarizes man's dialectical nature as follows:

¹³⁷SS, p. 25.

¹³⁸EF, p. 32.

¹³⁹MH, p. 39.

¹⁴⁰SS, p. 23.

The problem of man's existence, then, is unique in the whole of nature; he has fallen out of nature, as it were, and is still in it; he is partly divine, partly animal; partly infinite, partly finite.¹⁴¹

This dialectical character of man, however, does not embrace the whole of man's essential nature. "It is necessary," says Fromm, "to go beyond this description and to recognize that the very conflict in man demands a solution."¹⁴² Due to his dialectical nature, unlike animal, man can never rest in the given situation of a passive adaptation to nature. Having lost the pre-human unity with nature, he has become a wanderer. Every stage he reaches leaves him discontented and perplexed, and this very perplexity urges him to move constantly toward new solutions. That is to say, "there is no innate 'drive for progress' in man, it is the contradiction in his existence that makes him proceed on the way he set out."¹⁴³

It is this necessity to seek ever-new solutions that is the source of the passions and anxieties which man alone experiences. Even the most complete satisfaction of all his physical and instinctive needs does not solve his peculiarly human problem, for his most intensive passions and needs are rooted in his very existence.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁴² HM, p. 117.

¹⁴³ MH, p. 41.