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# Marxism, the Millennium and Beyond

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## The Ethical Marxism of Erich Fromm

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Only if man masters society and subordinates the economic machine to the purposes of human happiness, and only if he actively participates in the social process, can he overcome what now drives him into despair – his aloneness and his feeling of powerlessness (Erich Fromm, 1941).<sup>1</sup>

The coincidence of the centenary of the birth of Erich Fromm (1900–1980) and the dawn of a new century provides a timely opportunity to reassess his largely neglected contribution to socialist theory. Fromm is one of the most widely read theorists associated with the Marxist tradition, but for the most part this popularity rests on the attraction which books like *The Art of Loving* hold for those in search of individual paths to enlightenment in a rather unloving world.<sup>2</sup> Fromm was very concerned by the possibility that his work could be read solely for individual therapy, with the socialism pushed to one side. Shortly before the publication of his final book, *To Have Or to Be?* (1976), he withdrew a section on ‘Steps Towards Being’ for fear that it might encourage individualistic responses to conditions which require structural transformation.<sup>3</sup> Indeed he condemned many of the books which purport to show the way to well-being as harmful by their fraudulence, ‘exploiting the new market that caters to people’s wish to escape their malaise’.<sup>4</sup> Metaphorically, the intention here is to relocate Fromm from the burgeoning ‘Spiritual Paths’ shelves of the radical bookshop to the dusty and diminishing space reserved for ‘Socialist Theory’. I will argue that in developing the ethical and psychological implications of Marx’s theory of alienation and applying it to the conditions of his day, he made an immensely valuable yet underestimated contribution to socialist theory. Its ethical force has immense resonance today, in the era of

'super-capitalism' which he anticipated back in the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> Although his interventions on aspects of social and political life covered several areas, I will focus solely on his discussions of working life as an example of how socialist humanistic ethics can assume a practical relevance in a politics of everyday life.

Fromm developed a fusion of Freudian psychology and Marx's social theory in Frankfurt in the late 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>6</sup> He sought to fill a lacuna in socialist theory by analysing how and why the consciousness of social groups developed in the way that it did. At the outset of his work he was convinced that socialist theory had concentrated on the economics and politics of social transformation at the expense of understanding how people responded psychologically to social change. From his own autobiographical account we gather that the carnage of the First World War and the bellicose mentality it generated had a profound effect in urging him towards ways of understanding the madness that had been unleashed.<sup>7</sup> He trained in Freudian psychoanalysis in Munich and Berlin in 1928 and 1929 and his early work shows him struggling to link a Marxian conviction in the primacy of socio-economic conditioning with Freudian libido theory based on biologically grounded instincts.<sup>8</sup>

On his appointment as a social psychologist at the Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt School in 1930, Fromm commenced work on an empirical study of the character-types of working-class people. The project had clear links with Marx's interest in what the working class thought about their place in the world. Towards the end of his life Marx had put together a detailed questionnaire to gather evidence from the working class about a range of issues concerning their working and living conditions, from wage levels and trade union activity to what their children were taught in school.<sup>9</sup> Fromm's study involved a detailed questionnaire, distributed to over 3000 workers in Germany during 1929–31, the period when millions were thrown out of work. The analysis of the 1100 responses concluded that 20 per cent of respondents were 'authoritarian' in nature and that only 15 per cent were passionate supporters of left-wing views.<sup>10</sup> The majority were therefore more passive than communists or socialists liked to think, and were quite likely to acquiesce to an authoritarian 'solution' to social ills. The work was a pioneering endeavour to fuse Marxist class analysis and psychological character analysis, as well as a chilling indication that the prospects for resisting the rise of German fascism were unfavourable.<sup>11</sup>

The Nazi seizure of power forced Fromm and his fellow members of

the Frankfurt School into exile, first in Geneva and then New York, and it was here that he made a decisive break with Freud's theory of instincts, along with other founders of the 'culturalist' school of psychoanalysis, Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan. The break with Freud was not acceptable to his colleagues in the Frankfurt School, and Fromm departed in 1938. Although Marcuse later attacked Fromm as a 'neo-Freudian revisionist',<sup>12</sup> John Schaar is closer to the mark when he states that Fromm was a revisionist of Freud much as the Prince of Darkness was a revisionist of the Prince of Light.<sup>13</sup> However, even though Fromm proceeded to develop his concept of social character based on cultural conditioning rather than biological determination, his character types retain a similarity to Freud's, and he always maintained a respect for the breath and bravery of Freud's discovery of the unconscious. But Fromm's most profound and enduring debt was to Marx. Early in his career he describes Marx as 'the greatest sociologist of all',<sup>14</sup> but his admiration was deepened on encountering the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, published for the first time in 1932. According to Fromm, it was Marx's 'interactionist' account of human development which was the decisive influence on his development of the concept of social character in the course of the 1930s.<sup>15</sup> Not only did Fromm share Marx's rich philosophical humanism, but he did much to publicize this 'alternative Marx' by having the English translation published in the United States in 1961 and editing a popular collection of papers in the socialist humanist tradition.<sup>16</sup>

### Social character and human essence

Fromm's development of a distinctive social psychology and a humanistic ethics culminated in *The Fear of Freedom* (1941) and *Man For Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (1947). In the appendix to *The Fear of Freedom* he outlines his key concept of social character, that part of the character structure of individuals which is common to most members of a particular social group, developed in response to their conditions of life, '[t]he social character comprises only a selection of traits, *the essential nucleus of the character structure of most members of a group which has developed as the result of the basic experiences and mode of life common to that group*'.<sup>17</sup> Social character is shaped by the dynamic adaptation of needs to social reality, and, in its turn, social character conditions the thinking, feeling, and acting of individuals. In a later formulation, Fromm argues that the concept of social character helps to

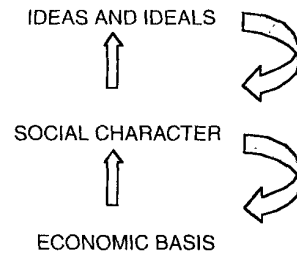


Figure 3.1 Fromm's notion of social character as intermediate between material basis and ideas

explain the link between the material basis of society and the ideological superstructure. It is the 'intermediary' between the socioeconomic structure and the ideas and ideals prevalent in society.<sup>18</sup>

Setting down the position of social character in terms of causal flows runs the risk of implying deterministic relationships, but Fromm is careful to stress the dynamism of human adaptation and our capacity to change the world. In later writings he emphasizes the complex interaction between human nature and the nature of the external conditions, stating that humanity is not a 'blank sheet of paper on which culture can write its text'.<sup>19</sup> So, despite his analysis of the various ways in which humanity has turned away from real freedom in the modern era, he maintains that the ideal of positive freedom endures and is manifested in the dignity and decency of many individuals.<sup>20</sup>

*The Fear of Freedom* is concerned with the psychological effects of the socio-economic changes of modernity on various social classes from the time of the Reformation to the mid-twentieth century. On the one hand, modernity is characterized by the genuine advance of freedom from the 'political, economic and spiritual shackles that have bound men',<sup>21</sup> but on the other hand the dissolution of old securities is so frightening that people in different social classes have grouped together behind a variety of belief systems and movements which bind them to new forms of domination and submission. So, in the course of modern history, the authority of the Church is replaced by the authority of the State, which is in turn replaced by the authority of conscience, and finally, in the twentieth century, the authority of conscience is replaced by the 'anonymous authority of common sense and public opinion as instruments of conformity'.<sup>22</sup>

Writing at a time when fascism was still in the ascendant, Fromm is naturally concerned with the development of the authoritarian character in the middle classes, from the point of view of both those who lead and those who follow.<sup>23</sup> However, the final chapter is devoted to freedom and democracy, and here Fromm is chiefly concerned with the 'illusion of individuality', pointing to the pressures in modern society which discourage critical thinking, spontaneity and authenticity. Fromm lambasts such practices as the suppression of the emotions, rote learning in education, mass advertising, and the trivialisation of news presentation. In general he bemoans the increasing 'loss of self' which increases the need to conform and is typified by a profound feeling of powerlessness as modern 'man' gazes towards approaching catastrophes 'as though he were paralysed'.<sup>24</sup> These themes are now widely associated with the Frankfurt School theorists, but it was Fromm's book which first brought them to the attention of a wide readership. In sharp contrast to his erstwhile colleagues, Fromm's warnings about the illusions of modern freedom are tempered with words of hope. This takes the form of a commitment to the real possibility of self-realization, the development of the potential present in everybody but expressed all too rarely. Positive freedom is defined as 'the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality',<sup>25</sup> and, furthermore, it is expressed only through solidarity with others.<sup>26</sup> While democracy is a prerequisite for development towards this positive freedom, it must be extended from the political to the economic sphere, and the manipulation of people must be replaced by co-operation.<sup>27</sup>

The historical social psychology presented in *The Fear of Freedom* is really a brilliant elaboration of Marx's work on alienation and commodity fetishism, disclosing the mechanisms through which the 'freedom' of developed capitalist society leaves people isolated and dominated by forces beyond their control. At this stage Fromm is more intent on posting warnings than identifying potential progressive movements, but in the historical circumstances this is understandable. Marcuse's judgement that Fromm offers no more than the 'power of positive thinking' in response to the curtailment of freedom in our society is somewhat harsh.<sup>28</sup> In fact, Fromm fully accepts Marx's injunction to change the world, and from the publication of *The Sane Society* in 1956 his work moves increasingly towards an engagement with social and political action which might contribute to a radical transformation of values.

In *Man For Himself* Fromm boldly sets out to provide an 'objectively valid' humanistic ethics.<sup>29</sup> In the process he elucidates a view of human

essence and also elaborates in some detail the character-types or 'orientations' which are left vague in the previous work. Fromm spurns the 'rules and principles' approach which has dominated the philosophical treatment of ethics for two centuries and instead propounds what might be termed a 'character ethics'.<sup>30</sup> Alisdair MacIntyre has argued persuasively that the Enlightenment attempt to justify morality was bound to fail because it jettisoned the central element on which all moral thought from Aristotle up to that time had been based, namely, the idea of a human nature and a human *telos*.<sup>31</sup> The abandonment of the idea of an essential human nature striving towards a *telos* leaves a vacuum, for moral precepts cannot be derived from a view of untutored human nature. More often than not, Enlightenment ethics assumes that to be moral is to overcome human nature, and what is natural to humanity is often seen as 'an enemy within', something to be suppressed if good is to be achieved. Fromm explicitly criticizes not just Luther and Calvin for promoting this perspective but also Kant, for whom the pursuit of happiness was not an ethical consideration.<sup>32</sup>

Ultimately, for Fromm, a humanistic ethic requires that we love our selves, in a non-egotistical sense, in contrast to most modern ethical philosophy which regards self-love as a sin or a failing. His conception of human essence is the premise on which he bases his commitment to value ourselves as co-operative, creative beings. He commends Aristotle's espousal of the goal of eudaemonia or happiness based on the full development of our human potential, and also on Spinoza's commitment to freedom and the productive use of powers as the only criteria of value.<sup>33</sup> Fromm identifies a similarity between Spinoza and Marx in their conceptions of human essence, citing the passage in *Capital* in which Marx derides Bentham's utilitarianism. Marx argues that to talk about what is good for man requires a view of human nature in general, in the same way that to talk about what is good for a dog requires a knowledge of dog nature. Marx explicitly distinguishes between human nature in general and human nature as 'historically modified'.<sup>34</sup> In his later work, Fromm comments that Marx had arrived at the most significant definition of the species character of 'man' as 'free, conscious activity'.<sup>35</sup> Fromm considered the phenomenon of alienation to be incoherent without a conception of the essence from which we are alienated. Commenting on a passage in *Capital* in which Marx depicts the worker becoming distorted into a 'fragment of a man', Fromm comments that Marx must have had a concept of human nature from which man could be 'crippled'.<sup>36</sup>

For Fromm, humanistic ethics is based on the principle that 'good' is

what is good for man and 'evil' is what is detrimental to man, and the sole criterion of ethical value is man's welfare.<sup>37</sup> 'Good' is regarded as the affirmation of life through the unfolding of man's powers and 'virtue' as responsibility to our own existence, whereas 'evil' is the crippling of our power and vice is irresponsibility toward oneself.<sup>38</sup> In the discussion of social character in *Man For Himself* Fromm contrasts productive and non-productive orientations.<sup>39</sup> The non-productive orientations are presented as the receptive, exploitative, hoarding and marketing types, the latter being the most recent development whereby the character is dependent on the requirements of the market.<sup>40</sup> Where the non-productive orientations prevail the result is 'dysfunction and unhappiness',<sup>41</sup> and when this happens on a widespread scale it gives rise to a 'socially patterned defect'.<sup>42</sup> It is important to note that as the concept of social character is a dynamic one; the various non-productive sub-orientations are not mutually exclusive, and nor are productive and non-productive orientations. Rather it is a question of which orientations predominate and why. In his account of the productive orientation he effectively maps out a modern equivalent of what the Ancient Greek philosophers referred to as the virtues.<sup>43</sup> Productiveness involves the development of our human powers of rationality and love while avoiding exercising power as domination over others. Through productiveness we resolve the paradox of human existence by simultaneously expressing our oneness with others *and* our uniqueness.<sup>44</sup> Later, in *To Have or To Be?*, he lists the qualities of the character structure of the 'new man', emphasizing the need to take full responsibility for our lives, to reduce greed and hate, and to exercise our imagination in the struggle to remove intolerable circumstances.<sup>45</sup>

Fromm distinguishes between 'universal' and 'socially immanent' ethics. He notes that universal principles such as 'thou shalt not kill' or 'love thy neighbour as thyself' have been amazingly similar in all cultures, but there are also principles which are specific to particular cultures and even social classes within cultures whose virtues need to be adhered to if the social entity is to survive.<sup>46</sup> Ultimately, there will remain a conflict between the two different types of ethics 'as long as humanity has not succeeded in building a community in which the interest of "society" has become identical with that of its members'. The contradiction between absolute and immanent principles will tend to disappear only if society becomes progressively free and human.<sup>47</sup> This formulation is almost identical to a passage by Marx in *The Holy Family* in which he declares that 'private interest must be made to coincide with the interest of humanity'.<sup>48</sup> Fromm's account of the major moral

problem of the age – ‘man’s indifference to himself’ – is, in effect, an ethico-psychological analysis of what commodity fetishism does to human relations and mental health. He argues that the pursuit of money, prestige and power prevents us from recognising the interests of our real self, and he bemoans the fact that we bow down to the ‘anonymous power of the market’ and ‘of the machine whose servants we have become’.<sup>49</sup> Boldly, he claims objective validity for his ethics on the grounds that living is an art and that like all arts there are objective norms against which we make judgements. Humanistic ethics, he claims, is the applied science of the art of living based on the theoretical ‘science of man’.<sup>50</sup> However provisional the truths of this science, Fromm argues that it is possible to use the tools of psychological and other research to reach an understanding of human nature.

In giving his account of the virtuous character and distinguishing it from non-productive character types, Fromm’s ethics makes explicit what Marx hinted at in his contrast between the self-realized person and the alienated one. It seems to me that more than any other Marxist Fromm has developed a humanistic ethics which builds faithfully on the ethical foundations of Marx’s thought, even though Marx determinedly shunned the language of moralism.<sup>51</sup> In the long introductory essay to *Marx’s Concept of Man* Fromm makes clear his enthusiasm for the normative implication of the alienation thesis:

For Marx, as for Hegel, the concept of alienation is based on the distinction between existence and essence, on the fact that man’s existence is alienated from his essence, that in reality he is not what he potentially is, or, to put it differently, that *he is not what he ought to be, and that he ought to be that which he could be*.<sup>52</sup>

Throughout his work, Fromm emphasizes that in common with Marx he is committed to the idea that humans ought to live directly for themselves and for others, rather than for money, status, nation, God, or anything alien and alienating. He summarizes Marx’s conception of socialism as the destruction of the idols.<sup>53</sup> He endorses the passage from Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in which he laments that in capitalist ideology ‘the less you are, the less you express your own life, the more you have, the greater is your *alienated* life’.<sup>54</sup>

Marx wrote of an alienation which was accompanied by deep poverty, but Fromm recognizes an ‘affluent alienation’ which can be equally dehumanising.<sup>55</sup> His driving concern is with how this alienation was manifested in social character, the extent to which it prevailed, and the

possibility of its supersession through the creation of a libertarian socialist society.

Although Fromm endorses Marx’s idea of human essence, he puts a psychological spin on it. Marx emphasized our capacity for premeditated and co-operative production, and production becomes his key concept. Fromm points to the dynamic development of the relationship between essence and existence, between human nature in general and human nature as historically modified, in terms of our constant striving to extend our faculties. For Fromm, the human essence is to be found in the contradiction of being *in* nature and at the same time *transcending* nature through our awareness of ourselves, others, and time. Striving to overcome this contradiction, humans may regress, by doing away with the specifically human qualities of reason and love and becoming slaves, slave-drivers, or automata, or they may progress towards a new unity with fellow humanity and nature by creating a world in which human potential can be freely developed.<sup>56</sup>

*To Have or To Be?* brings together many of the themes developed in previous works. Rejecting the equation of technology and consumption with progress and freedom, he argues that unlimited production, absolute freedom and unrestricted happiness amount to a new religion of Progress which he dubs ‘The Great Promise’. This is based on the psychological premises that radical hedonism and egotism will lead to harmony and peace.<sup>57</sup> The promise, of course, can never be met, for it is premised on *not* delivering general satisfaction but encouraging acquisitiveness, and the individual can never be satisfied because, as Fromm says, ‘there is no end to my wishes’.<sup>58</sup> Indeed the logic of accumulation also encourages a constant fear of losing what we have gained.<sup>59</sup> Fromm’s analysis of the ‘having mode’ reads very much like a socio-psychological extension of Marx’s commodity fetishism; at one point he claims that it ‘transforms everybody and everything into something dead and subject to another’s power’.<sup>60</sup> For Marx, alienation in the accumulation process operates at the very basis of social life, and Fromm is concerned to show how thoroughly this is transmitted in the practices of daily life. There is a tendency for the will of individuals to be broken by ‘a complicated process of indoctrination, rewards, punishments, and fitting ideology’, but in such a way that most people remain convinced that they are following their own will.<sup>61</sup> The pressures to conform and compete are increasingly hard to resist. It is not simply the case that greed and envy are so strong because of their inherent intensity, argues Fromm, but because of the way they are enmeshed in our social relations, producing an urgency to be ‘a wolf with the





wolves'.<sup>62</sup> Fromm is concerned with the impact of an ultra-competitive social structure on the psyche of individuals, and, on the basis of his view of human nature, contrasts it with an image of an authentic life, the 'being mode'. Although he accepts that the having mode is socially dominant, he argues that only a small minority are governed entirely by it. There are still aspects of most people's lives in which they are genuinely touched by non-instrumental feelings for their fellow human beings.

Fromm's socio-political contributions are designed to explore how we might maximize our productive potential to move us closer to a society in which the being mode prevails. Although his former collaborator Michael Maccoby considers that Fromm's inclination towards messianism diverts us from developing feasible strategies to make the world a better place,<sup>63</sup> there is a great deal of evidence in Fromm's work to resist that conclusion. The remaining part of this chapter will outline his chief socio-political concerns, in particular his interest in the politics of the world of work.

### What sort of politics?

Fromm was no idle dreamer and quotes the betting odds on the prospects of social 'salvation' at about fifty to one, adding that no reasonable person would stake their fortune on it.<sup>64</sup> But a slight chance, he argues, must be translated into a 'real possibility' when it is a matter of life or death. This requires political intervention, for, as Fromm admits, it is not possible to construct a submarine by reading Jules Verne, or a humanist society by reading the prophets.<sup>65</sup> In many respects his mature political perspectives are similar to many New Left radicals of the 1960s and 1970s – the demand for radical democracy,<sup>66</sup> resolute opposition to bureaucracy,<sup>67</sup> support for movements focusing on ecology and consumer awareness,<sup>68</sup> enthusiasm for feminism, which he first advocated in the early 1930s,<sup>69</sup> economic redistribution in favour of the third world,<sup>70</sup> and unilateral nuclear disarmament.<sup>71</sup> Before moving on to consider his comments on the organisation of work, let us first look at the general principles which underpin his politics of an ethical Marxism.

Perhaps the most important principle which permeates Fromm's politics is that a radical change of values must precede and develop with radical economic and political change. Fromm appeals for a 'humanistic religiosity'. He refers not to theistic religion with dogma and institutions but to a spirit of 'devotion' which can contribute to the

'necessary energy to move men and women to accomplish drastic social change'.<sup>72</sup> He insists that our actions today must anticipate a more ethical world, so that 'we can experience the future as if it were the here and now'.<sup>73</sup> For Fromm, social democracy and communism had turned socialism into a purely economic concept, placing the emphasis on efficient production and improved levels of consumption. This limited perspective is so far removed from the vision of a non-alienated society that Fromm is moved to assert that 'even the words socialism and communism are compromised'.<sup>74</sup>

Fromm considers that in order for people to develop a consciousness which could challenge the economic logic which governs our lives we need to engage in the utopian practice of portraying alternatives. He complains that earlier socialists, including Marx and Lenin, refused to be drawn into concrete plans for a socialist society. In the absence of such concrete goals, compromise and accommodation can have a deadening effect. Fromm argues for a social science that deals with the future, an array of 'designs, models, studies and experiments that *begin to bridge the gap between what is necessary and what is possible*'.<sup>75</sup> He argues that on purely economic grounds 'a new ethic, a new attitude towards nature, human solidarity and cooperation' is necessary if the Western world is not to be wiped out.<sup>76</sup> Fromm was willing to seize on ideas which could attract support without presupposing the wholesale transformation of the capitalist system. His comments on the world of work are particularly interesting because they bring in many of his other concerns such as the demand for the radical extension of democracy, the appeal for sane consumption, and the problem of distorted communication. Work is of central significance for Fromm, as it was for Marx. It is our unique creative ability which distinguishes us from other animals, and our finest products and cultivations are expressions of 'the creative transformation of nature by man's reason and skill'.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, Fromm insists that the desire to be active, creative and co-operative is 'inherent and deeply rooted'.<sup>78</sup> However, the golden age of medieval craftsmanship has long departed, and Fromm views the modern work experience as stultifying and inimical to the development of the productive character.<sup>79</sup> For the manual worker, de-skilling has destroyed interest in the process of work, engendering a 'socially patterned syndrome of pathology' manifested in apathy, boredom, lack of joy and a vague feeling that life is meaningless.<sup>80</sup> The majority of workers suffer from the dictatorial authority structures of major corporations, in which managerial elites display virtually unlimited power. It is, according to Fromm, the very opposite of the democratic process, a situation of



'power without control by those submitted to it'.<sup>81</sup> In this situation managements create their own organizational culture and rewards accrue to those who enthuse about it, rather than to those most receptive to the needs of the workers. 'Only in exceptional cases', he writes, 'is success predominantly the result of skill and of certain other human qualities like honesty, decency, and integrity'.<sup>82</sup> In addition to direct managerial pressure, the insecurity of the labour market means that those in work live in fear of offending management or feel obliged to adjust their behaviour to conform to the organizational culture. Those who want to move into new occupations in mid-life have little opportunity to do so and become 'trapped' for decades in work which holds no interest for them.

What is to be done? Fromm is quite clear that these problems would not be adequately resolved before the realization of the final goal of socialism, democratic control of all economic activities, free co-operation of all citizens and the reduction of central state activity to a minimum.<sup>83</sup> But he is also well aware of the need to present 'intermediate' socialist goals which could be pursued meaningfully by broad sections of working people. These intermediate goals concerning the world of work, many of which he articulated as early as the mid-1950s, deserve closer examination.

The idea of a Guaranteed Income for all is one of the ideas supported by Fromm in the 1950s, and one which has resurfaced in a variety of schemes in recent years.<sup>84</sup> Fromm sees it as a means to removing one of the greatest limitations on human freedom, 'the threat of starvation against all who were unwilling to accept the conditions of work and social existence that were imposed upon them'.<sup>85</sup> It is important to note that for Fromm the implementation of any such scheme needs to be matched with greatly diminished working hours for all and measures to discourage socially damaging consumption. He talks of a move from 'maximal' consumption to 'optimal' consumption, without which those on the minimum basic income would feel frustrated and worthless.<sup>86</sup> Ideally, the Guaranteed Income would be a step towards liberating people from the domination of the world of work so that they would have the time to confront the critical questions about the direction in which society was travelling and the values it embodied.<sup>87</sup> One of the merits of Fromm's suggestion is that it exposes the hollowness of the liberal claim that the labour contract is a 'free' exchange and indeed challenges the link between private property and freedom which tends to be glossed over in modern liberal theory.

Another approach which Fromm considers significant is the work on

human relations management pioneered by Elton Mayo in the late 1940s. In his study of the various experiments in management conducted at the Chicago Hawthorn Works of the Western Electric Company, Mayo demonstrates that the output of workers increased considerably not primarily because their conditions were improved but because they were involved in the decisions to set the conditions of work. Participation in decision making not only improved their job satisfaction but also improved productivity.<sup>88</sup> Although it is possible to be sceptical about human relations management on the grounds that it is merely another device to raise productivity, the demand for greater participation in decision making poses a direct threat to authoritarian management systems. Evidence of the greater efficiency of participatory schemes also challenges the commonly held management assumption that workers will perform better only when harassed and pressured. In his socialist manifesto he demands workers' participation in the management of big corporations and a greater influence for democratic trade unions, particularly on issues surrounding working conditions.<sup>89</sup> Ultimately, Fromm wants to see drastic curbs on the right of stockholders and the management of big enterprises to determine their production solely on the basis of profit and expansion,<sup>90</sup> but he sees increased workers' participation as a step towards challenging the omnipotence of corporate management. Where it can be shown that autocratic management is inefficient and damaging, the possibility of raising more consensual alternatives is opened.<sup>91</sup> If democracy is now widely seen to be not simply the least dangerous but also the most efficient form of political decision-making, why should it not be similarly perceived in the economic sphere?

Fromm's observations on the world of work were made largely before the end of the postwar boom and the return of mass unemployment. However, in *The Sane Society* he did anticipate an era of 'super capitalism' based on performance related pay and other forms of individualised incentives.<sup>92</sup> This has developed with the intensification of competition not just between firms but within organizations, accompanied by ruthless short-termism and an oppressive jargon of the sort that Fromm deplored. Interestingly, the demands in his socialist manifesto for workers' participation and stronger trade unions are followed immediately by an entreaty to support all attempts to restrict 'hypnotic suggestion in commercial and political propaganda'.<sup>93</sup> He is even more emphatic on the need to prohibit such 'brainwashing' in *To Have or To Be?*, describing it as a serious danger to mental health.<sup>94</sup>

In the world of work today workers are subjected to a whole new





lexicon of managerial 'buzz words' which set the culture to which they must conform even though there is widespread awareness that this rhetoric is twaddle. However, as Fromm points out, propaganda of this sort is never wholly successful, for people continue to be aware of the numerous occasions in when they are lied to, cheated, or treated with contempt.<sup>95</sup> Despite the assault on labour and the hubris of modern management, progress has been made in combating sexism and racism in work as well as exposing the managerial bullies. Fromm provides ethical criteria for supporting these struggles and for rejecting the fundamental elements of inter-personal relationships in the having mode – competition, antagonism, and fear.<sup>96</sup> In recent years the campaigns in favour of workers' participation and consultation, reduced working hours, and more respectful working practices challenge the 'survival of the fittest' ideology of late capitalism. The nature of trades unions and the focus of their work has altered along the lines Fromm hoped for,<sup>97</sup> and their development contributes to a broader movement of re-regulatory political economy which will play a vital role in challenging global corporate power in the coming century.

## Conclusion

Marx once commented that 'correctly understood interest is the principle of all morality'.<sup>98</sup> He anticipated a world in which the producers, pursuing their class interests, would recognize their exploitation and free themselves from it, in the process freeing humanity at large to realize its full potential in a global, ethical community. Fromm was among those who recognized that the revolutionary class consciousness which Marx had hoped for had not materialized, and that the question of consciousness had to be addressed directly for emancipatory socialist politics to succeed. Fromm regrets Marx's underestimation of the complexity of human passions and his neglect of 'the moral factor in man'.<sup>99</sup> However understandable it may have been for Marx to eschew moral argument in favour of scientific analysis, there can surely be no justification for such neglect today. Fromm's work has gone some way to filling this lacuna. With great care he explicates the ethical underpinnings of Marx's social theory, extends it to analyse the affluent alienation of the late twentieth century, and searches for new ways of contesting it.

Speaking in 1962, long before 'globalization' became fashionable in social science discourse, Fromm declared that the emergence of the 'one world' was not only inevitable but probably the most revolutionary

event in the history of mankind. The question, he says, is whether that one world will be a liveable world or a world battlefield.<sup>100</sup> Since his death in 1980 the globalization of capitalism has developed apace and the bombs continue to whistle down. But a politics of new social movements has developed throughout the world and has had a not inconsiderable impact in raising awareness of global inequalities and global interdependence. The struggles against racism, sexism, environmental degradation and third world debt pose anew those big questions about the purpose and direction of social life to which Fromm dedicated his life. He was right to recognize that the transformation of values was a prerequisite for the achievement of human freedom and solidarity, and that only through active engagement at every level of public life can this be achieved. The hope that the one world might indeed become liveable in the coming century is to be found in the ongoing work which has produced a number of global summits, schemes for developing democratic global governance, demands for global economic re-regulation and redistribution, as well as in the myriad struggles which oppose oppression in everyday life and assert instead the paramouncy of human dignity.

## Notes

1. Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London, Routledge, 1997) p. 238. This is the title adopted for publication in Britain in 1942. The original title in the United States was *Escape From Freedom*.
2. Fromm's *The Art of Loving* sold one and a half million English language copies between 1956 and 1970 and was translated into 28 other languages – see Rainer Funk, *Erich Fromm: The Courage to be Human* (New York, Continuum, 1982) p. 7.
3. The excised section has since been published as *The Art of Being* (London, Constable, 1993) – see the foreword by Rainer Funk, p. vii.
4. Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (London, Abacus, 1993) p. 169.
5. Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (London, Routledge, 1991) pp. 240–46.
6. On the development of Fromm's career see Rainer Funk, *Erich Fromm* (note 2) Introduction, or, for a brief biographical sketch of his early life, Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance* (Cambridge, Polity, 1994) pp. 52–60.
7. Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter With Marx and Freud* (New York, Trident Press, 1962) ch. 1.
8. For example, 'The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology: Notes on Psychoanalysis and Historical Materialism' (1932), in Erich Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970) ch. 7, particularly pp. 116–17; also 'Politics and Psychoanalysis' (1931), in Stephen Bronner and Douglas Kellner (eds), *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader* (New York and London, Routledge, 1989) ch. 16.

9. Hilde Weiss, 'Karl Marx's *Enquête Ouvrière*', in Tom Bottomore (ed.), *Karl Marx* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973), originally published in the Frankfurt School's journal in 1936; Weiss was a co-worker on Fromm's study of the German working class.
10. Erich Fromm, *The Working Class in Weimar Germany: A Psychological and Sociological Study* (Leamington Spa, Berg, 1984) p. 228.
11. For an excellent discussion of the Weimar workers' project see José Brunner, 'Looking Into the Hearts of the Workers, or: How Erich Fromm Turned Critical Theory into Empirical Research', *Political Psychology* 15/4, 1994.
12. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (London, Routledge, 1998 [originally 1955]) Epilogue.
13. John H. Schaar, *Escape From Authority: The Perspectives of Erich Fromm* (Evanston, NY and London, Harper Torchbooks, 1964) p. 8.
14. Erich Fromm, 'Psychoanalysis and Sociology' (1929), in Bronner and Kellner (note 8) p. 39.
15. Fromm, 'Marx's Contribution to the Knowledge of Man', in *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (note 8) ch. 3. In this paper, delivered in Paris at the time of the street-fighting in May 1968, he presents Marx as a forerunner of Freud.
16. Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York, Continuum, 1992), including a translation of the *Manuscripts* by Tom Bottomore; Erich Fromm (ed.), *Socialist Humanism* (New York, Doubleday).
17. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (note 1) p. 239.
18. I have adapted this diagram from the original one found in Fromm, 'The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx's Theory', in Fromm, *On Disobedience and Other Essays* (New York, Seabury Press, 1981) pp. 29–30.
19. Fromm, *Man For Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (New York, Owl Books, 1990) p. 23; he repeats this formula in *The Sane Society* (note 5) p. 81.
20. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (note 1) p. 232.
21. *Ibid.* p. 1.
22. *Ibid.* p. 218.
23. Fromm extends this study to concentrate on Hitler in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (London, Pimlico, 1997 [originally 1974]) ch. 13.
24. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (note 1) pp. 220–21.
25. *Ibid.* p. 222.
26. *Ibid.* p. 228.
27. *Ibid.* pp. 234–8.
28. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (note 12) pp. 262, 266.
29. Fromm, *Man For Himself* (note 19) pp. 14–20; for an excellent discussion of Fromm's ethics, see Rainer Funk, *Erich Fromm: The Courage to be Human* (note 2) ch. 5.
30. See Edmund Pincoffs, 'Quandary Ethics', in Stanley Hauerwas and Alisdair MacIntyre (eds), *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy* (Notre Dame and London, University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).
31. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd edn (London: Duckworth, 1995) ch. 5.
32. Fromm, *Man For Himself* (note 19) pp. 119–23.
33. Fromm, *Man for Himself* (note 19) pp. 25–7.
34. Marx, *Capital* in C.W. Vol. 35, p. 605n; Fromm cites this passage in *Man For Himself* (note 19) pp. 27–8n, *The Sane Society* (note 5) p. 254, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter With Marx and Freud* (London, Abacus, 1980) p. 28, and *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (note 8) p. 47.
35. Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanised Technology* (London: Harper Colophon, 1970) p. 58. The reference is to Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* in C.W. Vol. 3, p. 276.
36. Fromm, 'The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx's Theory', in Fromm, *On Disobedience and Other Essays* (note 18) pp. 38–9. The passage from *Capital* is in Marx, C.W. 35, p. 639.
37. Fromm, *Man For Himself* (note 19) p. 13.
38. *Ibid.* p. 20.
39. *Ibid.* ch. 3.
40. The discussion of the non-productive orientations is found in *ibid.* pp. 62–82.
41. *Ibid.* p. 219.
42. *Ibid.* p. 221.
43. *Ibid.* pp. 82–107.
44. *Ibid.* pp. 96–7.
45. Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (note 4) pp. 167–8.
46. *Ibid.* pp. 240–41.
47. *Ibid.* pp. 243–4.
48. Marx, C.W. Vol. 4, pp. 130–1.
49. *Ibid.* pp. 19, 245–50.
50. *Ibid.* p. 18; for his defence of the 'science of man', pp. 20–24.
51. I discuss Marx's conception of human essence, its status in his social theory, and his eschewal of moral discourse in Lawrence Wilde, *Ethical Marxism and its Radical Critics* (London, Macmillan and New York, St Martin's Press, 1998) chs 1, 2, 3.
52. Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (note 16) p. 47.
53. *Ibid.* p. 61.
54. Karl Marx, C.W. Vol. 3, p. 309.
55. Erich Fromm, *Socialist Humanism* (note 16) p. xi; in *The Holy Family* Marx describes the members of the propertied class as alienated, albeit 'at ease and strengthened' in their alienation because they see it as a product of their own power and retain 'the semblance of human existence' (C.W. Vol. 4, p. 36).
56. Fromm, *On Disobedience and Other Essays* (note 18) p. 39.
57. Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (note 4) pp. 11–13.
58. *Ibid.* p. 15.
59. *Ibid.* p. 111.
60. *Ibid.* p. 82.
61. *Ibid.* p. 83.
62. *Ibid.* p. 194.
63. Michael Maccoby, 'The Two Voices of Erich Fromm: Prophet and Analyst', in *Society* 32/5, 1995.
64. Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (note 4) p. 192.
65. *Ibid.* p. 171.
66. *Ibid.* pp. 178–9, 189–91; cf. Fromm, *Revolution of Hope* (note 35) pp. 107–16.

67. Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (note 4) p. 175.
68. *Ibid.* ch. 9.
69. In an article published in 1934 Fromm condemned the 'patricentric' psychic structure and linked 'matricentrism' with socialism – see *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (note 8) ch. 7; see also ch. 6 and *To Have or To Be?* (note 4) pp. 186–9.
70. Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (note 4) p. 184.
71. *Ibid.* pp. 191–2; his big appeal for nuclear disarmament came in *May Man Prevail? An Inquiry into the Facts and Fictions of Foreign Policy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961).
72. Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (note 4) pp. 133, 196.
73. *Ibid.* p. 128.
74. *Ibid.* p. 157.
75. *Ibid.* p. 172.
76. *Ibid.* p. 193.
77. Fromm, *The Sane Society* (note 5) p. 178.
78. Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (note 4) pp. 103–4.
79. Fromm's discussion of work is criticized at length by John Schaar in *Escape From Authority* (note 13) pp. 264–83. The potential in developing Fromm's ideas on work organization for emancipatory theory has been recognized by Hugh Wilmott and David Knights, 'The Problem of Freedom: Fromm's Contribution to a Critical Theory of Work Organisation', *Praxis International* 2/2, 204–25.
80. Fromm, *The Sane Society* (note 5) p. 295.
81. Fromm, 'Let Man Prevail' (originally 1960) in *On Disobedience and Other Essays* (note 18) p. 62.
82. Fromm, *Man For Himself* (note 19) p. 69.
83. Fromm, 'Humanist Socialism' in *On Disobedience and Other Essays* (note 18) pp. 78–9.
84. The idea for an unconditional income for all was first expressed just after the First World War, in books by Bertrand Russell and Dennis Milner. See Philippe Van Parijs (ed.), *Arguing for Basic Income* (London: Verso, 1992) Introduction.
85. Fromm, 'The Psychological Aspects of the Guaranteed Income' (originally 1966) in *On Disobedience and Other Essays* (note 18) p. 91.
86. *Ibid.* p. 96.
87. *Ibid.* p. 93; see also his discussion of the 'universal subsistence guarantee', in *The Sane Society* (note 5) pp. 335–8.
88. Fromm, *The Sane Society* (note 5) pp. 302–5.
89. Fromm, 'Humanist Socialism', in *On Disobedience* (note 18) p. 89.
90. Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (note 4) pp. 173–5.
91. Fromm approvingly quotes Peter Drucker's *Concept of the Corporation* (New York, John Day, 1946) in *The Sane Society* (note 5) p. 181. Drucker is still warning against the short-sightedness of conventional business management – *Management Challenges for the Twenty-First Century* (London, Butterworth Heinemann, 1999).
92. Fromm, *The Sane Society* (note 5) pp. 240–6.
93. Fromm, 'Humanist Socialism', in *On Disobedience* (note 18) p. 89.
94. Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (note 4) p. 183.
95. Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (note 4) p. 101.
96. *Ibid.* p. 114.
97. In the United States this is reflected in the success of the 'New Voice' movement in the AFL-CIO – see Jo-Ann Mort (ed.), *Not Your Father's Union Movement: Inside the AFL-CIO* (London, Verso, 1998).
98. *C.W.* Vol. 4, p. 130.
99. Fromm, *The Sane Society* (note 4) p. 264.
100. Erich Fromm, 'A New Humanism as a Condition for the One World', in Fromm, *On Being Human* (New York: Continuum, 1998) pp. 61–2.

