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**AMBIGUITIES OF LOVE: AN INQUIRY INTO
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ERICH FROMM**

Nicholas J. Yonker

1961

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, under the Joint
Committee on Graduate Instruction, Columbia University**



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Man's freedom, according to Fromm, results from his emergence from an original oneness with nature and the primitive community. He draws a close parallel between the growing freedom of the human race and that of the individual emerging from the matrix of the family. In both cases, individuation is ambiguous; it creates the possibility for greater self-strength, but it also makes possible a growing aloneness. Consequently, the way in which man relates to his world becomes all important. Man can unite himself with the world in the spontaneity of love and productive work or else he can seek forms of security which destroy his individual freedom and integrity. A number of destructive personal and political relationships are formulated. These are followed by a discussion of the productive personality which retains its independence and yet relates to the world with love and reason.

In contemporary thought, love for one's self and love for one's neighbor have generally been regarded as opposed emotional vectors. Freud's presupposition of a fixed amount of libido follows this view. The more love that one directs toward another person, the less one has for himself, and vice versa. Fromm challenges this position by distinguishing between selfishness and self love. The former develops as a compensatory



mechanism for a lack of genuine self love whereas the latter is the actual base for a sound love of others. Fromm interprets the Biblical injunction to "love thy neighbor as thyself" as implying that the love and respect given to other individuals cannot be separated from the love and respect that one feels toward one's self. Genuine love is an active striving for the growth and happiness of the loved person, rooted in one's own capacity to love. It is an expression of productiveness and implies care, respect, responsibility and knowledge. The great "normative humanists" of various cultural traditions have manifested these productive traits.

Fromm's views on love are then contrasted with the Christian perspective of Reinhold Niebuhr and the Freudian perspective of Herbert Marcuse. Niebuhr accents the sacrificial, self-giving aspects of love and is generally skeptical of any usage of the phrase self-love. Nevertheless, similarities are found between Fromm's usage of the term "self-love" and Niebuhr's concept of "grace." Marcuse criticizes Fromm for having denied the instinctual base of human love. This denial robs the Freudian critique of society of its explosive content. Fromm counters by insisting that Freud over emphasized the power of sexuality and repression in both the individual and culture. In a comparison of the three thinkers, Niebuhr's critique of utopianism is found to be relevant to both Fromm and Marcuse.

There follows a more detailed critique of Fromm's view of the human situation, self love, and neighbor love. Fromm



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does not adequately relate his concept of social process to his concept of an essential and normative human nature. At times, the social process appears all encompassing and this leads to an even more relativistic view than the Freudian position that Fromm criticizes. However, Fromm attempts to counter this tendency with his view of a real self which is good and normative but which is perverted and alienated by various social structures. His views of the self and society are shown to be over simplified and misleading. His utopian revision of the social structure is based on a naive view of the self. In actuality, such revisions would require authoritarian practices for their fulfillment.

The author juxtaposes a formative humanism to Fromm's normative humanism by proposing a symbol complex which evokes behavior patterns that are essential to the emerging world community.



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Professor Horace L. Friess, of Columbia University, for giving generously of his time and wisdom. His personal concern and his pluralistic sensitivity to diverse religious and philosophic views have had an exemplary value for me. I wish also to express my indebtedness to Professor Roger L. Shinn for his careful review of the entire manuscript and to Professor Daniel D. Williams for his early advice in the shaping of the outline. The comments and criticism of Professors Jacob Taubes, Goodwin Watson, and Charles Stinnette have greatly broadened and deepened the perspectives of the writer. Finally, I am most grateful to my wife for her able assistance in the translation of Fromm's early articles and for her buoyant sustaining spirit.



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PART I

THE EXPOSITION OF FROMM'S CONCEPT OF LOVE



CHAPTER I

THE HUMAN SITUATION

For Erich Fromm, the key task that confronts contemporary psychology resides in the study of the specific kinds of relatedness that man has towards the world. In the introductory chapter to Fromm's first book Escape from Freedom, he states his main theme as follows: "man, the more he gains freedom in the sense of emerging from the original oneness with man and nature and the more he becomes an 'individual,' has no choice but to unite himself with the world in the spontaneity of love and productive work or else to seek a kind of security by such ties with the world as destroy his freedom and the integrity of his individual self."¹ Throughout the many books and articles that Fromm has since contributed to the interpretation of modern man, this theme has remained central. It will be the intention of the first part of this essay to survey many of the significant thoughts that Fromm has contributed to this basic perspective.

Fromm maintains that the self-awareness of prehistoric

¹Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1941), pp. 22-23.



man was of a comparatively dim intensity. The individual remained imbedded in the natural and social ties of his immediate clan and environment.¹ The history of man began when he emerged from this state of oneness with the natural world to an awareness of himself as a distinct entity separate from nature. This emergence of man from his original bond with nature, Fromm calls the process of "individuation."² This development has apparently unfolded in an evolutionary manner and has reached an unusually high intensity in Western culture between the Reformation and the present.

1. The Emergence of Individuality in the Child

Fromm asserts that the same process of emergence molds the life history of every human being. A child is born when it becomes a distinct biological entity separate from the mother. But this separation of bodies is only the first stage in a gradual separation. Functionally, the child remains a part of the mother. The child is cared for in every important aspect by the mother, and it is only through a very gradual process that he comes to realize the distinction of his own being from that of the mother.

The general development of the infant's mental and

¹Ibid., p. 24.

²Ibid. Fromm's meaning for "individuation" is different and in some respects opposed to that of Jung. Fromm accents the emergence of ego consciousness above the primal bonds of nature and tribe whereas Jung stresses a reunification of the ego with its unconscious shadow.



motor skills eventually enables him to grasp and manipulate objects and through them to become aware of a world outside of himself. The weaning and education of the child also furthers the process of individuation. This interaction frequently involves a frustration of the child's basic desires, and the mother, in the eyes of the baby, often becomes a hostile and dangerous object. This antagonism is in itself a part of the educational process and helps to sharpen the distinction between the "I" and the "thou".¹

A few months pass after the birth of the child before it is able to recognize another person as distinct from itself. The parents are a "part of the child's universe, and this universe is still part of the child." The meaning of the child's leaning on the parental authority at this stage differs of course from this leaning on authority in later years. Fromm labels the bonds that hold and support the child before it emerges fully from the mother's wing "primary ties." "They are organic in the sense that they are a part of normal human development; they imply a lack of individuality, but they also give security and orientation to the individual."² Primary ties bind the child to its mother in a way that is analogous to the ties that hold the member of a primitive community to nature and his clan or the medieval

¹Ibid., p. 26.

²Ibid., p. 25.



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man to his church. "Once the stage of complete individuation is reached and the individual is free from these primary ties, he is confronted with a new task: to orient and root himself in the world and to find security in other ways than those which were characteristic of his pre-individual existence."¹

Fromm does not attempt to give a concise definition of the meaning he gives to freedom. However, he does characterize the dialectical nature of freedom by indicating what for him are its two most important psychological aspects. He distinguishes on the one side of the process of individuation a "growth of self-strength" and on the other side a "growing aloneness."² As the child develops, he attempts to integrate his increased physical, emotional, and mental strength into self-determined modes of behavior. But as the individual's independence increases, he also becomes more aware of being alone in the world. The primary ties had offered a comparatively safe harbor from the world, and as long as the child remained an integral part of that early matrix, he did not become aware and perhaps afraid of the responsibilities of individual action. But as he emerges from these roots, he finds that he stands alone and faces the world with all of its many perilous and overpowering aspects.

¹Ibid., p. 25.

²Ibid., p. 29.



This separation can result in a sense of isolation characterized by extreme anxiety and insecurity. The desire then arises to give up one's aloneness and powerlessness. The child attempts to submerge his growing individuality by retaining or renewing the relationships that he is outgrowing. The child, however, cannot reverse the processes of individuation. His attempts to do so inevitably involve a submission of his own emerging self-strength to the authority figures of his past. "Consciously the child may feel secure and satisfied, but unconsciously it realizes that the price it pays is giving up strength and the integrity of its self."¹ Such submission results in insecurity and hostility which in itself is frightening because it is directed against the very persons on whom the child has remained dependent.

Fromm declares that there are also healthy ways of avoiding the anxiety of aloneness. One can establish a "spontaneous relationship to man and nature, a relationship that connects the individual with the world without eliminating his individuality."² If the child can match each movement in the direction of separation with a corresponding growth of self-strength, then the development is relatively harmonious. The child may achieve a new kind of closeness

¹Ibid., p. 30.

²Ibid.



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and solidarity with others. Needless to say, this harmonious development is rarely maintained. The process of growth occurs automatically, but the development of the self is hindered by countless individual and social factors.

2. The Emergence of Individuality in the Race

The history of man can also be characterized as a process of growing self-awareness and freedom. Man emerged from the animal world as a freak of nature. He had lost most of the instinctive equipment which regulates the survival patterns of other animals, and this instinctual loss made the early years of his life dangerous and dependent on outside help. But this biological weakness provided the very basis for human culture. Man developed the capacity for thought, imagination, and self-awareness which transformed nature and himself.

For thousands of generations he remained tied to nature, living by food gathering and hunting. He identified himself with animals and worshipped these representatives of nature as his gods. In the course of his development, however, man became more active in his relationship to nature. He began to cultivate the soil and to domesticate animals. He gained greater skill in his arts and craftsmanship, and he exchanged his products for those of other tribes. The gods of man reflected this change. As man increased his



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skill as an artisan, he built idols of stone, wood, and metal. And as he gained a greater feeling of his own strength, his gods took the shape of human beings. Initially, these gods corresponded to the agricultural stage of man's development, and his images expressed dependency on the all-protecting and all-nourishing "Great Mother." Eventually, however, man began to worship fatherly gods represented by abstract principles and laws.¹

According to Fromm, this development can be seen "in Egypt, with the religious revolution of Ikhnaton in the fourteenth century B.C.; in Palestine with the formation of the Mosaic religion around the same time; and in India and Greece with the arrival of the Northern invaders not much later."² This evolution develops to a further stage during the middle of the first millenium before Christ. In China, it becomes manifest in the teachings of Confucius and Lao-tse, in India with the Buddha, in Greece with the philosophers of the Greek enlightenment, and in Palestine with the Biblical prophets. - This emergence and proliferation reaches a greater height with Christianity and the Stoicism of the Roman Empire, with Quetzalcoatl in Mexico, and another

¹Erich, The Sane Society (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1955), p. 50.

²Ibid., pp. 50-51.



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half millenium later with Mohammed in Africa.¹

Northern Europe remained dormant for a long time. But gradually, the Greek and Christian ideas which were transmitted there during the first five centuries after Christ reached a synthesis of expression in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Middle Ages developed a fundamental unity in philosophy, science, education, and art which was dedicated to the glorification of God. But around 1500 A.D., This comparatively unified world view collapsed. The major underlying reasons were the growth of an independent merchant class, the Renaissance of classical learning, and the Reformation of Christian doctrine.

Another important transforming factor, and one that has not been stressed enough by Fromm, was the slow but steady development of science. Man began to seek for natural causes of the phenomena around him. He sought new underlying principles to replace those that had fallen with the Medieval world view. Gradually, this scientific world view gave man a sense of how alone and insignificant among the immensities of the universe he really was. Man, intellectually, had emerged from the protective mythological shells of mother and father deities and now confronted the difficult problems of living with himself and others without

¹Ibid., p. 51.



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expectation of supernatural aid.

Fromm has placed his major emphasis on the economic, social, and political conditions that have provided the basis for the modern emergence of individuality. He comments that the breakdown of the Medieval society had a twofold result: first of all man "was torn loose from the world which had satisfied his quest for security both economically and spiritually" and secondly, man became relatively free "to act and to think independently, to become his own master and do with his life as he could--not as he was told to do."¹

However, the ability to utilize this new freedom varied with different social classes. Only a very few profited from the rising capitalist system to gain real wealth, power, and security. The new aristocracy of money, often combined with that of birth, was in a position where they could enjoy and benefit from the new feeling of mastery and individual initiative. Still, they had to dominate the masses and struggle against each other. Consequently, even though the new freedom had a predominantly positive ring for the new capitalist, he was not free from a fundamental insecurity. The lower classes were, of course, exploited by the capitalist, and they ardently hoped for increased freedom from the ensuing economic and personal oppression.

¹Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 99.



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These hopes manifested themselves in political revolts and religious movements which often exhibited the uncompromising ethical spirit which was typical of the very beginning of the Christian movement.¹

Fromm's main concern, however, is the depiction of the economic and psychological development of the middle class. This class had a very static social position prior to the Reformation, and it enjoyed a high degree of security. The member of a Medieval guild, for example, felt that he belonged to the guild. He knew his place in the society, and the equitable distribution of supplies among the guild members made his position relatively secure economically. However, with the development of capitalism and free enterprise, the middle class was squeezed between the wealthy new capitalists and the proletariat. They envied the wealthy. They feared the proletariat. And they were forced into an intense competitiveness with each other.

This intense economic competitiveness, even though it increased independence and initiative, brought with it a great sense of isolation and insignificance. And Fromm maintains that Protestantism was essentially the religious expression of both the independence and impotence of the new middle class. The Protestant doctrines "taught him

¹Ibid., p. 100.



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that by fully accepting his powerlessness and the evilness of his nature, by considering his whole life an atonement for his sins, by the utmost self-humiliation, and also by unceasing effort, he could at least hope to belong to those whom God had decided to save."¹ The new character structure which resulted from this religious intensification of behavior patterns in turn became an important factor in shaping further social and economic development. Those qualities which became rooted in this character structure-- "compulsion to work, passion for thrift, the readiness to make one's life a tool for the purposes of an extra personal power, asceticism, and a compulsive sense of duty"²-- became the character traits through which the capitalistic society was formed.

Protestantism freed man from the hierarchical bonds of the Medieval religious structure, and Capitalism provided the economic basis which extended this individuation sociologically and politically. The individual was no longer circumscribed by a fixed social and economic system based on tradition. He was permitted and expected to make personal economic gains. He alone received the benefits of his courage, skill, or luck, and he alone suffered if his

¹Ibid., p. 101.

²Ibid., pp. 101-102.



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enterprise failed or was beaten down by a competitor. Under the feudal structure the limits of an individual's life were usually set before birth, but in the free competition of the capitalistic system, "the individual, particularly the member of the middle class, had a chance--in spite of many limitations--to succeed on the basis of his own merits and actions."¹

Fromm cites several positive results of this new found freedom.² Man learned to rely on himself and to make responsible decisions. He began to give up "both soothing and terrifying superstitions." He began to harness natural forces to his will to a degree previously undreamed of. He became more equal in his relationships and more free from illusions. The differences of caste and religion became much less pronounced. Political freedom also expanded. The revolutions in England, France, and America mark a development which reaches its peak in the modern democratic state based on the principle of equality for all men and the right of all men to share in the government via representatives of their own choosing. "In a word, capitalism not only freed man from traditional bonds, but it also contributed tremendously to the increasing of positive freedom, to the growth

¹Ibid., p. 107.

²Ibid.



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of an active, critical, responsible self."¹

At the same time, however, the growth of a free economy made the individual more isolated and gave him a feeling of insignificance and powerlessness. The individual no longer had a fixed place in the economic structure. The growth of "freedom from" the old ties separated the individual from his fellows. The teachings of the Reformation fostered this development. The Catholic Church had provided a link between man and God, but in Protestantism the individual faced God without any visible intercessor. In such a relationship, the individual could not help feeling unworthy and insignificant before so great a power. He sought his salvation in submission to it. Fromm maintains that this spiritual individualism is not too different from that of economic individualism. In both, the individual is alone and faces superior power whether it be God, a competitor, or impersonal economic forces.²

The individualistic character of the capitalist economy is undeniable. But the overall results of the system hardly led to a greater appreciation of the human person. For in Capitalism, man's fate becomes enmeshed in serving the economic system. He begins to amass capital as an end

¹Ibid., pp. 107-108.

²Ibid., p. 109.



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in itself. Consequently, he becomes "a cog in the vast economic machine--an important one if he had much capital, an insignificant one if he had none--but always a cog to serve a purpose outside of himself."¹ In this view capitalism and Protestantism work hand in hand and even though Luther and Calvin would never have approved of the supremacy of economic values, still Fromm believes that it was largely through their insistence on man's evilness and submission to higher powers that man was psychologically prepared for the role he had to play in modern society.

Modern man believes that he is motivated by self-interest and yet his life is devoted to aims that are not his own. "The 'self' in the interest of which modern man acts is the social self, a self which is essentially constituted by the role the individual is supposed to play and which in reality is merely the subjective disguise for the objective social function of man in society."² Even though man has attained a remarkable control over nature, he is no longer master over the machines that have given him control. "The work of his hands has become his God" and he has become an instrument to the very machines that his hands have built. Modern man "keeps up the illusion of being the

¹Ibid., p. 110.

²Ibid., p. 117.



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center of the world, and yet he is pervaded by an intense sense of insignificance and powerlessness which his ancestors once consciously felt toward God."¹

Man's feeling of isolation and powerlessness is increased by the character of alienation human relationships have acquired. The relationship between competitors is almost bound to be that of hostility or indifference. The owner of capital employs another man as he would a machine, and they rarely have any interest in each other apart from their mutual usefulness. This same instrumentality is the rule in the relationship of the business man with his customer. The customer is an object for manipulation rather than a human being whose interests are to be satisfied. The modern manufacturer and worker are not interested primarily in what they produce but in what is profitable. The end result for both laborer and white collar worker has been an increase in mechanization and a resulting ennui.²

The average person remains to a large extent consciously unaware of his isolation and powerlessness. He covers his anxiety by the daily routine of his activities by "having fun," "making contacts," and "going places." But

¹Ibid., p. 118.

²For an excellent brief discussion of the dehumanization of modern production techniques see Daniel Bell's Work and Its Discontents (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956).



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underneath, the aloneness and fear remain, and people cannot stand that for long. "They cannot go on bearing the burden of 'freedom from'; they must try to escape from freedom altogether unless they can progress from negative to positive freedom."¹ The major avenues of escape in our time have been through submission to a totalitarian leader in Fascist countries or through a compulsive conformity in our own democracy. Before discussing these various mechanisms of escape, however, it is necessary to examine Fromm's general theory of human character types.

3. Character Orientations in the Modern World

a. The Distinction between Character and Temperament

Fromm makes a distinction between temperament and character that is roughly equivalent to the difference between inherited and acquired qualities. He claims that temperament is largely constitutional and unchangeable. It refers to the mode of reaction to experience. Character, in contrast, is largely formed by a person's experiences, especially those of the early years. It is alterable to some extent through new experience and insight.

Fromm follows Hippocrates in distinguishing four different types of temperament: choleric, sanguine,

¹Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 134.



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melancholic, and phlegmatic. If a person has a choleric temperament, his mode of reaction will be quick and strong. But this does not tell us anything about that to which he reacts with such vigour. For this, one must know something about his character. If he is a productive, just, and loving person, he will react with feeling and intensity when he loves, when he is enraged by injustice, and when he is impressed by a new idea. If he is sadistic or destructive, he will be just as quick to take advantage of submissiveness or helplessness. Goering and Himmeler had different temperaments--the former a cyclothyme, the latter a schizothyme. Consequently, an individual who is attracted by the cyclothymic temperament would have preferred Goering to Himmeler and vice versa. However, from the standpoint of character, both men were ambitious sadists. From an ethical perspective, both were equally evil.

Fromm maintains that the fundamental basis of character resides in the specific kinds of relatedness that a person develops toward the world and his fellows. He can relate himself by 1) acquiring and assimilating things, and 2) by relating himself to people and himself. Fromm calls the former process "assimilation" and the latter "socialization."

Man can acquire things by receiving or taking them from an outside source or by producing them through his own effort. But he must acquire and assimilate them in some fashion in order to satisfy his needs. Also, man cannot live alone and unrelated to others.



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He has to associate with others for defense, for work, for sexual satisfaction, for play, for the upbringing of the young, for the transmission of knowledge and material possessions. But beyond that, it is necessary for him to be related to others, one with them, part of a group. Complete isolation is unbearable and incompatible with sanity. Again man can relate himself to others in various ways: he can love or hate, he can compete or cooperate; he can build a social system based on equality or authority, liberty or oppression; but he must be related in some fashion and the particular form of relatedness is expressive of his character.¹

Fromm defines character as "the (relatively permanent) form in which human energy is canalized in the process of assimilation and socialization."² This canalization of psychic energy into character orientations is the human equivalent of the instinctual patterns of animals. Since man's actions are not determined by instinct, life would become too precarious and complicated if he had to deliberate each time he acted. A particular character system, even though it might be undesirable from an ethical standpoint, at least permits an individual to act with a fair degree of consistency.

b. Types of Unproductive Character Orientation

Fromm outlines five kinds of character orientation

¹Erich Fromm, Man for Himself (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1947), p. 58.

²Ibid., p. 59.



in the process of socialization: masochism, sadism, destructiveness, automaton conformity, and love. He also discusses five major character types based on the process of assimilation: the receptive, the exploitative, the hoarding, the marketing, and the productive. Only the fifth category of each process, the loving, reasoning, productive person, is regarded with affirmation by Fromm. All other forms of socialization and assimilation are considered as unproductive or as "mechanisms of escape." We will first consider the negative forms of socialization and follow this with a discussion of the four unproductive kinds of assimilation. We will then consider the productive orientation and conclude this section with a presentation of Fromm's views of self-love and love of others.

1) Unproductive Forms of Socialization

Fromm prefaces his remarks on the various escapist forms of socialization with a brief discussion of his distinction between the neurotic and normal personality. The term normal or healthy can be defined in two ways: 1) a person might be considered healthy if he can fulfill the role that the society demands, or 2) he might be considered healthy if he is capable of optimum growth and self-realization. If a society were structured in such a way as to give an optimum possibility for individual happiness, then both viewpoints would coincide. However, this is rarely



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if ever the case. Most psychiatrists take the structure of their own society for granted, and consequently regard those persons who are not well adapted as less valuable. Fromm is opposed to such a view. He maintains that the person who is normal in the sense of being well adapted is frequently less healthy than the neurotic person in terms of human values. The well adapted person may have given up all genuine individuality and spontaneity in order to become the person that he is expected to be. The neurotic on the other hand could be characterized as someone who was not ready to surrender completely in the struggle for his self.¹

We turn now to some of the unhealthy ways in which the isolated individual may attempt to escape his aloneness. Once the primary bonds which gave security to the individual are severed, he has two courses open to him which will help him overcome the resulting state of aloneness and powerlessness. He can progress to "positive freedom" by relating himself to the world in love and work and through the genuine expression of his emotional, sensuous, and intellectual capacities. Or he can abandon his freedom by attempting to eliminate the gap that has arisen between himself and his world. This second course never can unite the individual to the world in the way that he was related to it before he

¹Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 139.



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emerged as an individual. The process of individuation never remains static. Consequently the attempt to escape from it is motivated by fear and has therefore a certain compulsiveness about it. Some of the mechanisms of escape are important for individual psychotherapy but relatively unimportant for a broad social understanding. Fromm considers only those harmful forms of socialization which play a significant part in the social understanding of the modern forms of democracy and totalitarianism.

The first mechanism of escape that Fromm discusses is the tendency to give up the freedom of one's self and to fuse it with somebody or something outside of one's self. The individual desires by this means to gain the strength that his own self lacks. He seeks "secondary bonds" to replace the primary bonds which have been lost. The forms of the mechanism are found both in the masochistic strivings for submission and the sadistic attempts at domination.

a) Masochism: Masochistic strivings most frequently appear as feelings of inferiority, powerlessness, and individual insignificance. This type of person frequently desires to rid himself of these feelings on the conscious level, and yet some power within seems to impel him toward masochistic behavior patterns. Masochists tend not to assert themselves and submit to outside pressures. Life is generally considered to be something that is overwhelmingly



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powerful over which they have little or no control. In more extreme cases there is a tendency to hurt oneself and to make oneself suffer. Often accidents are brought about by an unconscious tendency to incur them. These masochistic trends are sometimes felt by the person to be pathological and irrational, but more often they are rationalized away. Masochistic dependency is conceived of as love or loyalty, inferiority feelings are thought of as an adequate expression of actual shortcomings, and one's suffering as being caused by unalterable circumstances.¹

The root of masochistic strivings, according to Fromm, is found in the individual's attempt to escape from an unbearable feeling of aloneness and powerlessness. The lonely, frightened individual attempts to find some thing or somebody that he can bind himself to. He cannot bear to be himself. "The different forms which masochistic strivings assume have one aim: to get rid of the individual self, to lose oneself; in other words, to get rid of the burden of freedom."² As long as a person struggles between his desire to be independent and his feeling of weakness and insignificance, he will be caught in a tormenting conflict. However, if a person can rid himself of his self,

¹Ibid., pp. 142-143.

²Ibid., p. 152.



he may overcome the awareness of his separateness and consequently save himself from the struggle.

There are several ways in which an individual can escape from this conflict. He can feel small and hopeless and then seek a refuge; he can lose himself through various forms of intoxication; he can become overwhelmed by pain and agony; and if all else fails the fantasy of suicide might bring relief from the burden of aloneness. In some situations, the masochistic strivings are comparatively successful. For example, when a country bows in submission before a Fascist leader, the masochist will gain some security in uniting with millions of others who share these feelings. Even in such a situation, however, the underlying conflict and unhappiness remain.

The desire to unite oneself with something larger and more powerful outside the self is essentially what Fromm means by idolatry. It is basically an alienation from oneself by submission to another object, whether it be a person, an institution, God, or an inner psychic compulsion. What we frequently call love is often nothing but this psychic submission. The "lover" in this kind of relationship projects all of his or her love, strength, and thought unto the other person. The other person is experienced as a superior being and the only way to find satisfaction is through complete submission and worship. This



is similar to religious idolatry where one projects all of one's own richness on to an outside object and where one can only regain contact with it through an act of submergence in the object. This prevents a realistic appraisal of the other person or object, and it also prevents the loving person from experiencing himself as the bearer of productive human powers.¹

The masochistic bonds are fundamentally different from the primary bonds. The former refer to the individual before he has emerged from his early natural and social matrix. They give a genuine security and knowledge of where he belongs. The masochistic or "secondary bonds" are attachments formed to escape the person's own emerging individuality. But the emergence of the individual self cannot be reversed. Consciously, the person might feel as if he "belonged" but underneath he suffers from the subservience of his self. "He and the power to which he clings never become one, a basic antagonism remains and with it an impulse, even if it is not conscious at all, to overcome the masochistic dependence and to become free."²

b) Sadism: This method of relating works hand in hand with masochism. Their intimate relation is seen in

¹ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 123.

² Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 157.



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that people who have one trend in their character structure invariably have the other to some degree. Fromm distinguishes three different types of sadism. One form makes others dependent on himself so that he has unrestricted control over them. He turns others into his instruments and molds them like "clay in the potter's hand." A second type of sadistic impulse aims to exploit others, to disembowel them, to steal from them, and to incorporate anything eatable in them. This desire can refer to either material things or immaterial ones, such as the emotional and intellectual qualities of another person. A third kind of sadism manifests itself as a wish to make others suffer or to see them suffer. Its aim is to hurt, humiliate, or embarrass others, or to see them in humiliating situations.¹

In the masochistic character structure the dependent traits are obvious. In the sadist, however, these dependent traits are not so readily apparent, and Fromm places a special emphasis on illustrating the dependence that the sadist feels toward the objects of his domineering acts. A closer analysis reveals that the sadist needs the person over whom he rules. His own feelings of strength are rooted in the fact that he is master over some one. This dependence may be entirely unconscious. As an example, Fromm cites a

¹Ibid., p. 144.



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situation where a man treats his wife very sadistically and tells her repeatedly that she can leave the house any time. Usually she will be too crushed to make the attempt to leave. But if she does gain the courage to leave, something quite unexpected will probably happen. He will break down, beg her to stay, and declare that he cannot live without her. Usually, the woman, not used to asserting herself anyway, will change her decision and stay. At this point, the play begins again in an endless folie a deux.¹

Fromm maintains that all forms of sadism go back to a basic impulse to have complete mastery over another person. The sadist desires to become the absolute ruler over another, to become his God, and to do with him as he pleases. The most radical aim is to make the object suffer since this is the most extreme expression of control over another person. On the surface the masochistic need for dependence appears to be the opposite of the sadistic drive to dominate and make others suffer, but psychologically both tendencies arise from the inability to carry the isolation and weakness of one's own self.

Fromm gives the name "symbiosis" to the aim which underlies both masochism and sadism. "Symbiosis, in this

¹Ibid., p. 145.



psychological sense, means the union of one individual self with another self (or any other power outside of the self) in such a way as to make each lose the integrity of its own self and to make them completely dependent on each other."¹ It is always the individual self's inability to stand its own aloneness which drives it to form a symbiotic attachment with somebody else. Just as the masochistic person seeks security by being swallowed, so the sadist gains it by swallowing somebody else. In the one case the self is lost by being incorporated in a larger whole; in the other, the self attempts to make up for the strength it lacks by incorporating another. Both tendencies are part of an inability to stand alone.

e) Destructiveness: Sado-masochistic strivings are often found blended with the phenomenon that Fromm calls destructiveness. Destructiveness is distinguishable, according to Fromm, because it does not aim at active or passive symbiosis, but rather at the elimination of the object. Destructiveness is also rooted in feelings of powerlessness, and aloneness, but the way of escaping such feelings is by destroying the world outside of the self. Sadism aims at engulfing and controlling the object; destructiveness aims at the removal of the object. When this happens, it is

¹Ibid., p. 158.



true that the subject remains alone, but this is a splendid isolation which cannot be crushed by objects outside of one's self.¹

Frequently, destructiveness is not recognized as such, but is rationalized in various ways. Love, duty, conscience, patriotism are frequently disguises for inherently destructive movements. Fromm, however, distinguishes between two different kinds of destructive tendencies. There is a natural and comparatively healthy kind of destructiveness which results from specific situations where one must react to defend one's life and one's integrity. The negative form of destructiveness, however, is not this rational. It arises instead from a lingering tendency in the person to wait for opportunities in which his latent hostility can be expressed. There may be very little or no provocation for the manifestation of this irrational type of hostility, but the person will usually contrive some form of rationalization to explain it. The objects of irrational destructiveness and the reasons given for it are of only secondary importance. The destructive impulses are a passion within the person and they will find some object.

Destructiveness is also caused by unbearable feelings of aloneness and powerlessness. The individual who is

¹Ibid., p. 179.



plagued by persistent destructive traits has been blocked from realizing his sensuous, emotional, and intellectual potentialities. Destructiveness in individuals is proportionate to the amount to which expansiveness of life is thwarted. Life has an inner dynamism of its own. It desires to grow, expand, and express itself. If this tendency toward growth is inhibited, the life energies are turned toward destructive ends. The drive for life and the drive for destruction are not mutually independent but have a reversed interdependence. "The more life is thwarted, the stronger is the drive toward destruction; the more life is realized, the less is the strength of destructiveness. Destructiveness is the outcome of un-lived life."¹

d) Automaton Conformity: This is the mechanism by which most individuals escape from the modern human situation. The individual ceases to be himself. He becomes the kind of personality which is offered to him by the cultural patterns. He adopts the kinds of behavior patterns others have or that they might expect him to have. The aloneness and powerlessness disappear because the distinction between the "I" and society disappears. Fromm compares this mechanism to the protective coloring that some animals acquire. They become so similar to their surroundings as to be

¹Ibid., p. 184.



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indistinguishable from them. "The person who gives up his individual self and becomes an automaton, identical with millions of other automatons around him, need not feel alone and anxious any more. But the price he pays, however, is high; it is the loss of his self."¹

The forms of authority in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were overt. Usually a person was quite aware of who it was that did the ordering and the forbidding. But the character of authority in the middle of the twentieth century has changed its character. Today we succumb to "anonymous, invisible, alienated authority." In family life the disappearance of overt authority is plainly visible. The parents do not command as much as formerly; rather they suggest that the child "will want to do this." They have no convictions themselves and consequently they try to guide the children toward the latest conforming trends in the community. In fact, the children are often more in touch with "the latest" and parents learn from them what attitude is required. In business and industry, one suggests and manipulates rather than commands. In our society, neither persons, ideas, nor moral laws place demands on the individual. And yet, according to Fromm, there is as much or more conformity in our society as in a rigid authoritarian

¹Ibid., p. 186.



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structure. In our society, an anonymous "It" becomes the authority. "What is It? Profit, economic necessities, the market, common sense, public opinion, what 'one' does, thinks, feels. The laws of anonymous authority are as invisible as the laws of the market--and just as unassailable."¹ Where there is overt authority, there is the potentiality for conflict and rebellion. And in rebellion, even if it is defeated, there is the possibility of developing and experiencing the sense of self. But if we are ruled by an anonymous authority, we lose ourselves and become merely a "one," a part of the "It."

The replacement of pseudo acts for original, spontaneous acts of thinking, feeling, and willing, eventually leads to the replacement of the true self with a secondary or pseudo self. The pseudo self is an actor. It plays the role that a person is supposed to play in a given context under the guise that it is the expression of the true self. The majority of men in the Western democracies feel that they are individuals who think and act as they please. But in most cases, this belief is an illusion which is dangerous for it blocks the removal of those forces that encourage the false state of affairs.

The loss of self and its replacement with a pseudo

¹ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 152-153.



self does not really allay the underlying anxiety. When a man has become for the most part a reflex of what other people expect of him, he has come close to losing his own sense of worth and identity as a person. To overcome the anxiety resulting from this loss of identity, the individual is compelled to conform and to find his identity in the approval of those around him. If he acts according to the expectations of others, at least they will know who he is. And if they know, he can know also if he only takes their word for it.¹

2) Deficient Forms of Assimilation

a) The Receptive: The receptive character² believes that everything must come to him from outside whether this something be material or whether it be affection, love, knowledge, or pleasure. Love for this type of person means essentially "being loved" rather than the active process of loving. Consequently, he is very sensitive to any criticism or withdrawal of love. If this type of person is religious he will expect everything from God and nothing from his own activity. If he is not religious, he will exhibit the same attitude toward other people and institutions. He is continuously in search of the "magic helper." His sense of

¹Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, pp. 205-206.

²Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, pp. 62-63.



loyalty is usually a form of gratitude to those on whom he is dependent. He feels lost when he must assume responsibility or make decisions on his own.

The receptive type of person has a great fondness for food and drink and will frequently use them to overcome depression and anxiety. The mouth is often the most prominent and expressive feature; the lips tend to be open as if in a continuous expectation of being fed. In dreams, being fed is often a symbol of being loved, and being starved is an expression of lack of affection. The outlook of such people is generally optimistic and friendly except when their "source of supply" is threatened. They often have genuine warmth and a desire to help others, but their altruism also assumes the function of gaining favor.

b) The Exploitative: The exploitative orientation¹ also stems from the feeling that all good is outside of oneself and must be sought there. The basic difference, however, is that the exploitative does not want to receive from others, but rather feels that he must take from them by force or cunning. This person is intent on stealing, and it doesn't matter whether it be another's wife, friend, ideas, or material goods. He feels attracted only to people that he can take away from somebody else. In the realm of

¹Ibid., pp. 64-65.



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intellectual pursuits, this type of person tends to steal ideas rather than produce them. The same attitude prevails toward material things. Something that can be taken from someone else always seems better than anything that he can produce for himself. He "loves" those people who are promising objects for exploitation and becomes "fed up" with the persons that he has swallowed. This orientation seems to be symbolized by the biting mouth and such a person often does make "biting" remarks about others. Since they are usually more satisfied in obtaining things that they can acquire from others, they tend to overrate what others possess and underrate what is theirs. Rather than displaying the cheerful optimism of the receptive type, they exhibit suspicion, cynicism, envy, and jealousy.

c) The Hoarding: The hoarding orientation¹ differs from both the receptive and exploitative types in that it does not expect anything from the outside world. Security is based on saving while spending is considered to be a threat. These people surround themselves with a protective psychological wall and attempt "to bring as much as possible into this fortified position and to let as little as possible out of it." This miserliness pervades their lives and is as active in the realm of feelings and thoughts as with

¹Ibid., pp. 65-67.



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material possessions. Love means possession. They do not give love, but they try to possess the "beloved" at a minimal cost to themselves. This type of person often cherishes his memories to an inordinate degree. They sentimentally indulge in their past and love it as their private treasure.

People with this type of orientation can also often be recognized by their facial expression. It is often tight-lipped and their gestures are characteristic of their withdrawn attitude. Also, they are often orderly to an extreme degree. "The hoarder will be orderly with things, thoughts, or feelings, but again, as with memory, his orderliness is sterile and rigid. He cannot endure things out of place and will automatically rearrange them. To him the outside world threatens to break into his fortified position; orderliness signifies mastering the world outside by putting it, and keeping it, in its proper place in order to avoid the danger of intrusion."¹ Compulsive cleanliness may be another expression of this need to undo contact with the outside world. For the outside world is experienced as a threat to one's fortified position, and obstinacy or "sitting tight" is the almost automatic defense against pressure or intrusion. Such people feel that they have only a fixed quantity of energy, and it can be exhausted by use. They

¹Ibid., p. 66.



do not comprehend "the self-replenishing function of all living substance and that activity and the use of one's powers increase strength while stagnation paralyzes; to them, death and destruction have more reality than life and growth."¹

d) The Marketing: The marketing character is the counterpart in the process of assimilation to automaton conformity as a process of socialization. This type of person regards himself as a commodity that can be bought and sold. In our time, the marketing orientation has been growing rapidly. We have what is aptly described as the "personality market." "Success depends largely on how well a person sells himself on the market, how well he gets his personality across, how nice a 'package' he is; whether he is 'cheerful,' 'sound,' 'aggressive,' 'reliable,' 'ambitious'; furthermore what his family background is, what clubs he belongs to, and whether he knows the right people."² The type of personality required depends to some degree on the special field in which the person works, but regardless of the differences, all must fulfill one condition: "to be in demand."

There is no sense of selfhood in the marketing

¹ Ibid., p. 67.

² Ibid., pp. 69-70.



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orientation. In the receptive, exploitative, and hoarding orientations, something is developed from the potential of the person even if it is perverse. But with the marketing orientation, no specific attribute in the person's potential is developed unless the absurd assertion is made that "nothing" is also a part of the human potential. "Its very nature is that no specific and permanent kind of relatedness is developed, but that the very changeability of attitudes is the only permanent quality of such orientation. In this orientation, those qualities are developed which can best be sold. Not one particular attitude is predominant, but the emptiness which can be filled most quickly with the desired quality."¹ There is no genuine core to the self in such people, and they can be molded or "other directed" to fit whatever requirements are placed upon them.

The quasi ethical code of the marketing personality is that of fairness. This principle maintains that things should be exchanged at a fair price with no tricks or influences interfering with the fairness of the bargain. This does make for a certain kind of ethical behavior. According to this principle, one does not lie, cheat, steal or treat another person unfairly. But even so, this ethic is something quite different than the Christian ethic that is so

¹Ibid., p. 77.



often professed. There is no full, genuine love for the neighbor in fairness ethics. "We practice fairness ethics, and profess Christian ethics." And we fail to see the contradiction between the two because we reinterpret the religious and humanistic ethic of the tradition into terms compatible with the fairness ethic.

The Golden Rule of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" was in its early Jewish and Christian meaning equivalent to the command to "love thy neighbor as thyself." But in the system of fairness ethics, it means merely "Be fair when you exchange. Give what you expect to get. Don't cheat!" The Golden Rule can be such a popular religious phrase today only because "it combines two opposite systems of ethics and helps us to forget the contradictions."¹

The marketing character, unlike the exploitative robber baron and the conservative hoarding type of character which frequently existed side by side in the 18th and 19th centuries, is of comparatively recent origin. In many areas the gospel of selling has replaced the gospel of work. The "package," the "label," and the "brand name" have become the significant factors in commodities and human relationships. The days when a lone individual could make a fortune by

¹Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 173-174.



"delivering the goods" has become increasingly rare. Today, the man who wants to get ahead attempts to develop those personality traits which will permit him to fit into the organization as smoothly as possible. However, this is done only through great injury to one's self integrity. The resulting depersonalization and emptiness demands a more creative interpretation of the potentialities of human living. This way of life is called by Fromm the "productive orientation."

4. The Productive Character

Fromm discusses several different traits in the productive character orientation. The most significant are reason, conscience, and love. I shall discuss the first two at this point and reserve the discussion of love for the main body of the essay.

a. Productive Reason

Fromm distinguishes his use of the term productive reason from that of intelligence. Intelligence is considered to be man's tool for dealing with the practical aims of life. It is interested in discovering those aspects of things which are essential to their manipulation. The goals or premises may or may not be rational in themselves. Fromm cites the function of intelligence in a bright paranoid as



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an example.¹ His premise that everyone is conspiring against him is irrational and false, but the logical processes built upon this premise may possess a high degree of logical coherence. The application of intelligence to problems is of course not restricted to pathological illustrations. Most of our thinking must necessarily be concerned with superficial, manipulative aspects of phenomena without ever attempting to penetrate deeply into the premises, the nature, and the ends of the phenomena we study.

Reason, in contrast to "mere intelligence," involves a dimension of depth. Reason is not divorced from the practical aims of life, but still it is more than just a tool for immediate action. "Its function is to know, to understand, to grasp, to relate oneself to things by comprehending them. It penetrates through the surface of things in order to discover their essence, their hidden relationships and deeper meanings, their 'reason'."² In the process of productive thinking, the thinker has a deep interest in his subject matter. He is affected by it and he cares and responds to it. But despite this deep interest, the productive thinker is also characterized by his objectivity. He has the ability to see the object as it is rather than as

¹ Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 102.

² Ibid., pp. 102-103.



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he might wish it to be.

Objectivity is possible in our thinking only if we respect the things we observe. If we want to understand something, we must be able to see it as it exists in its own nature, and for this, particularly if the object of knowledge is another human being, a basic respect is necessary. Another aspect of objectivity which must be present in productive thinking is the ability to see "the totality of a phenomenon." Productive thinking is "perspectivistic" to use Nietzsche's term. "It grasps all conceivable perspectives and dimensions, not only the practically relevant ones."¹ A word of caution is needed at this point. For Fromm here appears to overstate the ability of reason to be objective. "Perspectivistic" thinking actually implies a definite sense of limitation. It attempts to arrive at a complete objectivity as an ideal, but it defeats its own intentions if it is incapable of sensing its own limitations.

b. The Humanistic Conscience

Another important aspect of the productive orientation is the development of the humanistic conscience in place of an authoritarian conscience. "The authoritarian conscience is the voice of an internalized external authority, the parents, the state, or whoever the authorities in a

¹Ibid., p. 103.



culture happen to be."¹ Conscience can become a more effective regulator of conduct than the fear of external authority. For a person can rebel against or run away from external authority, but he cannot escape an internalized authority that has become a part of himself. For the authoritarian conscience, "good conscience is consciousness of pleasing the (external and internalized) authority; guilty conscience is the consciousness of displeasing it."² The authoritarian person finds his inner security only by becoming a part of an authority structure in a symbiotic way. His feeling of security depends on this symbiotic relationship. If he is rejected by the authority, he must confront the void of his own nothingness. Anything, even punishment, which at least indicates that the authority still cares, is better than this rejection.

The "authoritarian conscience" in democratic cultures or family situations is more likely to arise from anonymous forms of authority. Many people are incapable of relevant criticism of their parents, or else they feel guilty or anxious when they do express criticism or rage against them. Often parents want the children to make up for what they missed in life. Consequently, the child is subtly taught

¹ Ibid., pp. 143-144.

² Ibid., p. 146.



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to fulfill parental expectations. Or often parents expect to be the center of a child's attention or feelings, and the child feels guilty because he does not feel as much love as the parents require. In situations where anonymous authority prevails, we find highly charged emotional expectations rather than explicit commands.

The child fights not only for freedom from those pressures which tend to crush or annul his spontaneity and independence, but also for his right to become a full human being. Rare is the child that escapes these early struggles without neurotic scars. "The child's defeat in the fight against irrational authority are to be found at the bottom of every neurosis. They form a syndrome the most important features of which are the weakening or paralysis of the person's originality and spontaneity; the weakening of the self and the substitution of a pseudo self in which the feeling of 'I am' is dulled and replaced by the experience of self as the sum total of other's expectations."¹

The most significant symptom that indicates that one has not succeeded in breaking out of the authoritarian net is the guilty conscience. The only way relief can be gained from the authoritarian conscience is by renewed submission to authority. Fromm remarks that St. Paul, Augustine,

¹Ibid., pp. 157-158.



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Luther, and Calvin have best described this form of good conscience. "To be aware of one's powerlessness, to despise oneself, to be burdened by the feeling of one's own sinfulness and wickedness are the signs of goodness."¹ The authoritarian good conscience results from feelings of obedience, dependence, powerlessness and sinfulness. Paradoxically, the authoritarian guilty conscience springs from feelings of strength, independence, productiveness, and pride.

The humanistic conscience, by contrast, is not the internalized voice of an external authority. Rather, it is the voice of our individual selves speaking independently of external taboos. "Humanistic conscience is the reaction of our total personality to its proper functioning or dysfunctioning; not a reaction to the functioning of this or that capacity but to the totality of capacities which constitute our human and our individual existence."² Those actions, thoughts, and feelings which are conducive to the "unfolding of our total personality produce a feeling of inner approval, of 'rightness,' characteristic of the humanistic 'good conscience.'" Our humanistic conscience is the voice of our true selves. It summons us back to ourselves

¹Ibid., p. 150.

²Ibid., p. 158.



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to become what we potentially are. It is the voice of "our loving care for ourselves." The authoritarian conscience, declares Fromm, is concerned with man's obedience, self-sacrifice, duty, and "social adjustment." The humanistic conscience, in contrast, is an expression of man's self-interest and integrity. The voice of the humanistic conscience is almost completely drowned in contemporary culture. It is extremely difficult to listen to ourselves when we have a constant bombardment of ideas and opinions striking at us from the newspapers, television, radio, and idle chatter. Amid the din of various distractions, we lose our most priceless possession, namely ourselves. Modern man finds it difficult to hear his humanistic conscience primarily because he cannot stand to be alone with himself long enough to listen. He prefers the most trivial company and activity to being alone. The only time that man cannot drown the voice of his humanistic conscience is during sleep. Here man is "shut off from the noise hammering at him in the daytime and receptive only to his inner strivings as well as value judgments and insights."¹

Fromm remarks that his separate examination of the authoritarian and humanistic conscience is not intended to imply that they are separated or mutually exclusive in

¹Ibid., p. 164.



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reality. On the contrary, everyone has both consciences, and it is the task of psychoanalysis to distinguish their various strengths and relationships. Frequently, our guilt feelings are consciously experienced in terms of the authoritarian conscience, while unconsciously they are rooted in the productive, humanistic conscience. In such a case, "the authoritarian conscience is a rationalization, as it were, of the humanistic conscience."¹ The person that feels consciously guilty for not living up to the expectations of an authority, may unconsciously feel guilty for not living up to his own self expectations. Needless to say that for Fromm, the growth of the humanistic conscience is a prime prerequisite for the development of the productive personality.

c. The Blending of Productive and Unproductive Character Traits

Fromm's remarks about the inseparable quality of the authoritarian and the humanistic conscience also applies to all of the various character orientations. Fromm felt that for didactic purposes it was necessary to deal with each orientation as if they were separate entities. But in reality, we always deal with various blends. A living human

¹Ibid., p. 165.



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being never represents one of the nonproductive or the productive orientations exclusively. Some of the nonproductive orientations, as we have seen, have more affinity for each other than do others. For example, the receptive and exploitative orientations have in common a closeness toward the object which contrasts with the remoteness of the person maintaining a hoarding orientation. However, even the orientations with less affinity for each other are frequently blended. Consequently, "if one wants to characterize a person, one will usually have to do so in terms of his dominant orientation."¹

The same general commentary can be made regarding the blend between nonproductive and productive orientations. No one completely exemplifies the productive orientation, but on the other hand, no one is completely devoid of productive traits. "The respective weight of the productive and the nonproductive orientation in each person's character structure varies and determines the quality of the nonproductive orientation."² In the orientation where the productive character structure is dominant, the nonproductive orientations do not have the same negative meaning that they have when they are dominant. The survival needs of every person

¹Ibid., p. 113.

²Ibid., p. 113.



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includes an ability to accept things from others, to take things, to save, and to exchange. "Only if his way of acquiring things and relating himself to others is essentially nonproductive does the ability to accept, to take, to save, or to exchange turn into the craving to receive, to exploit, to hoard, or to market as the dominant ways of acquisition."¹ In a predominantly productive person, such social traits as loyalty, authority, fairness, and assertiveness reveal themselves in healthy forms. Whereas, in the predominantly nonproductive person, they become manifest as submission, domination, withdrawal, and destructiveness. Each nonproductive orientation has a positive and negative aspect according to the degree of productiveness in the total character structure.

Fromm concludes his discussion of the various character traits by commenting on the tremendous diversity possible in each person because of the fact that:

- "1) the nonproductive orientations are blended in different ways with regard to the respective weight of each of them;
- 2) each changes in quality according to the amount of productiveness present;
- 3) the different orientations may operate in different strength in the material, emotional, or intellectual spheres



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of activity, respectively."¹

If to this picture of diverse character orientations is added the different kinds of temperaments and talents, we see that "the configuration of these basic elements makes for an endless number of variations in personality."²

¹Ibid., pp. 116-117.

²Ibid., p. 117.



CHAPTER II

LOVE OF SELF

1. A Brief History of the Meaning of Self-Love

"Modern culture," Fromm comments, "is pervaded by a tabu on selfishness."¹ This statement appears to be in complete contradiction to the economic attitudes of contemporary society which declare that selfishness is the most legitimate and most powerful drive in man and that in fact man makes his best contribution to the society through the expression of his acquisitive aims. Nevertheless, the teaching that selfishness is sinful and that love for others is the highest virtue is still a powerful force. In this contrast, Fromm notes that "selfishness is used here almost synonymously with self-love. The alternative is to love others, which is a virtue, or to love oneself, which is a sin."²

Fromm maintains that the foremost expression of this

¹Erich Fromm, Man for Himself (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1941), p. 119.

²Ibid., p. 119.



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doctrine is found in the Reformation thought of Luther and Calvin. Calvin regards self-love as "a pest." He places his emphasis on the nothingness and wickedness of man before God. Man can do nothing good in terms of his own strength and worth. "We are not our own; therefore let us, as far as possible, forget ourselves and all things that are ours. On the contrary, we are God's; to him, therefore, let us live and die."¹ To obey ourselves leads to ruin. Only God can provide for our guidance and salvation. When an individual does find pleasure in himself he betrays his sinful self-love. Such a fondness for oneself causes one to despise others. Consequently, self-love supposedly excludes love of others and is considered to be identical with selfishness. This view of man has had great significance for the self conception of modern Western man. It represented an attitude "in which man's own happiness was not considered to be the aim of life but where he became a means, an adjunct, to ends beyond him, of an all-powerful God, or of the not less powerful secularized authorities and norms, the state, business, success."²

Immanuel Kant, who in one aspect of his thinking,

¹John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. by John Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1921), p. 619.

²Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 121.



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maintained that every individual should be treated as an end in himself and never as a means only, nevertheless also condemned any ethical sanctioning of self-love. For Kant, the individual should find his highest happiness in the fulfillment of his duty. It is true that under certain conditions one's own happiness might be the objective of one's duty, since the absence of any happiness or well being may prevent one from fulfilling his duty toward others. But as an ethical principle, the striving for one's own happiness and self interest could only serve to undermine morality. Kant does distinguish between philautia, a benevolence toward oneself and arrogance, a pleasure in oneself, but even self-love that is rational and benevolent is deemphasized in comparison to the individual's duty to obey moral laws. Fromm remarks that "Kant emphasizes the native propensity for evil in the nature of man, for the suppression of which the moral law, the categorical imperative, is essential lest man should become a beast and human society end in wild anarchy."¹ The individual should seek his fulfillment and happiness in his duty, and this is only found in something larger than the individual such as mankind as a whole or the state. Even though Kant respects the individual more than either Luther or Calvin, he still would have the man who rebelled

¹Ibid., pp. 122-123.



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against even a tyrannical government punished with death if the rebel threatened the life of the sovereign.

In contrast to this deemphasis of self-love, the trend in contemporary philosophy extending from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment that has emphasized the individual's claim to happiness has found its most radical expression in Stirner and Nietzsche. However, even though they have taken a position that is opposed to that of the Reformers and Kant with regard to the value of selfishness, they nevertheless agree with them in the assumption that love for oneself and love for others are alternatives. They condemn love for others as weakness and affirm egotism, selfishness, and self-love as virtues. They too, Fromm remarks, confuse the issue by not clearly differentiating between these attitudes.¹

Stirner denounced the masochistic forms of love by which the individual subordinates himself to some force outside of himself. Nietzsche, though differing from Stirner in many ways, also inveighs against love and altruism as manifestations of weakness and decadence. Nietzsche's ideal of the good society consisted in a highly intelligent, talented, and healthy aristocracy which controlled the masses for their own well being. The Christian virtue of

¹Ibid., p. 123.



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love represented the virtue of the slaves who were incapable of fighting for what they desired and who therefore attempted to gain their ends by love.

Fromm does not believe that this "spirit of contempt and egoism" represents the true core of Nietzsche's teaching. Nietzsche's philosophy arose from three major sources: 1) as a rebellion against the philosophic tradition which subordinated the individual in his concreteness to abstract ideas or forces; 2) as a reaction formation over against his own feelings of weakness and anxiety; and 3) as an expression of the Darwinian philosophy of the survival of the most fit.¹ Fromm maintains that even though Nietzsche did insist on the contradiction between love of self and love of others that his views still contain the germ from which this false dichotomy can be overcome. The kind of love that Nietzsche attacks is rooted in psychological weakness rather than in strength. The weak man does not love himself sufficiently. Speaking of this type, Nietzsche proclaims, "Your neighbor-love is your bad love of yourselves. Ye flee unto your neighbor from yourselves and would fain make a virtue thereof!"² In contrast, the love of the strong man manifests an overflowing of goodwill from an abundant heart. It is a love that "does not give in order to take;" it has the wealth

¹Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 125.

²Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, trans. by Thomas Common (New York: Modern Library), p. 75.



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of the person as its premise. In such a view, love is manifested as a "phenomenon of abundance." It is the affirmation of life and productiveness in oneself and in others. "It seeketh to create what is loved."¹ For Nietzsche the love of another person rests on the strength of one's self. It becomes an evil if it merely indicates an incapacity to be one's self. Fromm appreciates much of what Nietzsche has to say, but concludes that Nietzsche leaves the problem of the relationship between self-love and love of others an unresolved antinomy.

2. Fromm's Relation to Freud

The position that love for oneself is identical with selfishness and is an alternative to love of others has pervaded modern thought on philosophic, religious, and popular levels. Fromm declares that it has been "rationalized in scientific language in Freud's theory of narcissism."² Since Fromm's position has developed with Freud's concepts constantly in the background, we shall therefore give their contrasting views on love a more extended treatment.

Freud maintains that man has only a fixed quantity of life energy or libido. In the infant, all of this libido

¹Ibid., p. 102.

²Ibid., p. 128.



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is directed toward the child's own person. This state Freud calls primary narcissism. As the child develops, the libido is transferred from his own person to that of other objects. When a person becomes blocked in his "object relationships," then the libido is withdrawn from outside objects and the phenomena of fixating on oneself (secondary narcissism) occurs.

Fromm points out that in Freud's view there is an "almost mechanical alternative between ego-love and object-love. The more love I turn toward the outside world the less love I have for myself, and vice versa."¹ Freud, consequently, regards the giving of love toward someone else as an impoverishment of one's self-love. He remarks that if we adapt a naive attitude toward the injunction, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," we will find ourselves astonished as though at something unnatural. Why should we so love? In fact, how can it possibly be done?

Freud declares that his love is a valuable thing and that he has no right to throw it away without reflection. If we leave aside those relationships that may be of some significance to us in a sexual or utilitarian way, then we find that the object of our love and sacrifice "must be

¹Erich Fromm, "Selfishness and Self-Love," Psychiatry, Vol. 2, No. 4, Nov., 1939.



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worthy of it in some way or other."¹ Furthermore, another person will be worthy of our love when he is either so much like oneself that a man can love himself in the other, or if he is so much more perfect than oneself that a man can love his ideal in the other. It would even be wrong to love those who are unworthy, for it would be an injustice to those who are worthy to place them on the same level with those who are unworthy. Freud concludes that "if I am to love him (with that kind of universal love) simply because he, too, is a denizen of the earth, like an insect, or an earthworm or a grass-snake, then I fear that but a small modicum of love will fall to his lot and it would be impossible for me to give him as much as by all the laws of reason I am entitled to retain for myself."²

For Freud, the altruistic love that a man bestows on his neighbor results from an inhibition of the sexual drive. The direct expression of genital love frequently leads to a painful loss of the love-object. However, a small minority of people are able to "make themselves independent of their objects acquiescence by transferring the main value from the fact of being loved to their own act of loving; they protect themselves against loss of it by

¹ Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents (London: The Hogarth Press, 1949), p. 81.

² Ibid., p. 82.



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attaching their love not to individual objects but to all men equally, and they avoid the uncertainties and disappointments of genital love by turning away from its sexual aim and modifying the instinct into an impulse with an inhibited aim."¹ This sublimation of the sexual instinct leads to an emotional state which is quite unlike the "stormy vicissitudes of genital love." Freud comments that the gentle attitudes of Saint Francis of Assisi serves well to illustrate this transformation from sexual desire to tender love for every creature.

For Freud, the core of every neurotic difficulty resides in an unresolved Oedipal problem. The Oedipus complex implies that the child is bound to the parent of the opposite sex by sexual ties and that the child hates or even wishes the death of the parent of the same sex. The overcoming of this complex is a prerequisite for normal adult sexuality, whereas the unconscious fixation to these early love objects lays the cornerstone for the neurosis.

In the young male, the simplest expression of the complex usually takes place between the ages of three and five when the already tender attachment to the mother is intensified by the emerging sexual impulses. To permit gratification of these impulses, the father, who is

¹Ibid., pp. 69-70.



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considered to be a rival for the mother's love, must be removed. This is achieved by imagining himself to be his mother's lover in place of the father. Endless variations on this basic theme can be caused by experiences such as premature seductions, observation of sexual scenes between the parents, birth of a sibling who then demands more of the mother's attention, absence of one of the parents, being an only child, etc.

For the young girl, the development of the early love relationships is more complicated since the transition of affection for the nursing mother must be overcome in favor of the father. The most significant of these experiences are disappointments that occur in the processes of toilet training, weaning, and the births of siblings. Furthermore, there is another disappointment for the female--namely the thought that she once had a penis which her mother has taken away from her. The girl then attempts to gain from the father that which the mother has denied her. (In fantasy the idea of "penis" is replaced by that of the idea of "child.") She loves the father and desires the penis and/or a child by the father. This is conjoined with mixed feelings toward the mother of hatred, guilt, and the love retained from the preoedipal attachment.

It is out of this early incestual matrix that Freud weaves his theories of morality and culture. The child's



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love and sexual strivings are directed toward the parent of the opposite sex and his hatred is vented on the parental rival of the same sex. From this early situation all of the basic fears, hostilities and feelings of guilt necessarily arise. These incestuous and murderous impulses are integral parts of man's nature and developmental process. Consequently he must develop ethical norms in order to make social life possible. In primitive societies a system of tabus was instituted. In later, more sophisticated cultures, man developed ethical codes to protect the individual and the societies from the unleashing of these impulses.

Freud sees a fundamental dichotomy between the individual and society. The basic, though unconscious drives in the individual, reside in the id. The id is described as a "seething cauldron" of sexual and aggressive drives which give to the life of the self its inner dynamic. The id is governed by the pleasure principle, and its only aim is to seek for immediate gratification. It is an "instinctual cathexis seeking discharge."¹ The immediate satisfaction of instinctual drives, however, might well endanger the organism by bringing it into conflict with either or both its natural and social environment. The id, of course, cares nothing for this and is moved only by the pleasure

¹Sigmund Freud, New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, trans. by W. J. H. Sprott (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1933), p. 105.



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principle. Consequently, another agency in the psyche must develop in order to control the otherwise unrestrained pressures of the id.

The ego, acting as the agency that mediates between the id and the external world, attempts to keep down the instinctual claims of the id. It also struggles to find "the most favorable and least perilous method" of gaining personal satisfaction while taking cognizance of the repressive forces in the external world. The ego is the psychic agency in which the reality principle arbitrates with the pleasure principle of the id. "In popular language, we may say that the ego stands for reason and circumspection, while the id stands for the untamed passions."¹

But the interactions of the mind become even more complex when we realize that there is a third factor, the superego, which emerges out of the activity of the ego in its confrontation with external reality. The superego is the introjected representative of the person's parents and educators, and it corresponds to what Fromm has called the authoritarian conscience. It serves as a socializing agent and becomes critical and prohibitive over against the wayward impulses of the id.

Freud, for the most part, maintained this basic

¹Ibid., p. 107.



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dichotomy between man and society. Society must inhibit and domesticate the asocial, primitive instincts of man. He warns against any utopian dreams of a perfect adjustment between man and society. The ego is buffeted by the id which demands instinctual gratification and by the superego which insists that its rigid standards are not to be violated. The individual ego, even though it is under these powerful pressures, must attempt to act as rationally as it can in order to find outlets that give instinctual gratification and yet are not self-destructive.

The task for mankind, as for each individual, centers about the task of finding a solution between the claims of the individual and those of the civilized community. "It is one of the problems of man's fate whether this solution can be arrived at in some particular form of culture, or whether the conflict will prove irreconcilable."¹ Freud generally comes to a pessimistic resolution of such speculations. The force of communal suppression can bring about a sublimation of instinctual drives into socially useful patterns of behavior. However the very process of sublimation usually intensifies the forces that lead to the suppression of instinctual drives, and this inhibition of the natural drives increases the danger of neurotic

¹Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 143.



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disturbances. Consequently, we discover that implicit in the processes that create culture, we have the forces that increase neurosis. The fateful question for Freud concerning the human species is "whether and to what extent the cultural process developed in it will succeed in mastering the derangements of communal life caused by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction."¹

Fromm's view of man is in many respects in complete contrast to that of Freud. Where Freud sees man in conflict at every level of his being, Fromm views man as essentially good and rational. Man wants to be healthy. He wants to relate to his world lovingly, to use his reason objectively, and to guide his life humanistically while at the same time freeing himself from irrational authorities.²

As Herberg has pointed out, Freud's view of man is patterned after Hobbes while Fromm's view is similar to Rousseau.³ Both Freud and Fromm see a conflict between man and society. But Freud envisions the conflict as being between man's "biological self" with its destructive instinctual drives, and society with its coercive structures. Fromm,

¹Ibid., pp. 143-144.

²Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 275.

³Will Herberg, "Freud and the Revisionists," Freud and the 20th Century, ed. by Benjamin Nelson (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1957), p. 153.



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in contrast, reflects the portrait of man as given by Rousseau. Man is born free and essentially good, but the evil forces of society corrupt him. "Freud finds the evil drive in man's biologic nature, whereas Fromm sees man's aggressive antisocial tendencies to be the result of social pressures, particularly social frustration and insecurity."¹

The contrast between Freud's biological orientation and Fromm's cultural focus can be seen in their diverse views of the Oedipal complex. Fromm believes that Freud's observation was correct, but that his interpretation was wrong. Fromm agrees that there are sexual strivings in children, that lasting dependency ties can be formed, and that in patriarchal societies there is a conflict between the father and son. However, recent anthropological data indicates 1) that the Oedipus complex is not universal, 2) that the rivalry between father and son does not occur in societies where there is no strict patriarchal authority, and 3) that the incestuous tie to the mother is not necessarily sexual.²

Freud saw the great significance of the fixation to the mother, but "he emasculated his discovery by the peculiar interpretation he gave to it. He projects into the little

¹ Ibid., p. 153.

² Gerald S. Blum, Psychoanalytic Theories of Personality (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1953), p. 95.



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boy the sexual feeling of the adult man; the little boy having, as Freud recognized, sexual desires, was supposed to be sexually attracted to the woman closest to him, and only by the superior power of the rival in this triangle, is he forced to give up his desire, without ever recovering fully from this frustration."¹ Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex is both an acknowledgment and a denial of the crucial phenomenon: "man's longing for mother's love." "In giving the incestuous striving paramount significance, the importance of the tie with mother is recognized; by explaining it as sexual the emotional--and true--meaning of the tie is denied."²

According to Fromm, the full significance of Freud's discovery can only be recognized if we translate it from the sphere of sex to that of interpersonal relations. For Fromm, the essence of the incestual attachment is not sexual craving, but rather the deep fundamental desire "to remain a child attached to the protecting figures of whom the mother is the earliest and most influential."³ The infant has been and still is in many ways a part of the mother.

¹Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 41-42.

²Ibid., p. 42.

³Erich Fromm, Psychoanalysis and Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 79.



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The birth of an independent person is a process that takes a life time. "To cut through the navel string, not in the physical but in the psychological sense, is the great challenge to human development and also its most difficult task."¹ As long as man remains tied to the early family matrix, he remains to some extent a foetus and consequently incapable of taking his life into his own hands.

The conflict between father and son results from the authoritarian attitudes prevailing in the patriarchal society. It has, according to Fromm, relatively little to do with sexual rivalry. The treatment of the son as an instrument to carry out the demands of an authoritarian father wars against the growing need of the child to become free and independent. Consequently, the greater the pressure by the father to make the son a means to his own ends, the greater will be the conflict and the possibilities of neurosis.²

As we have before noted, Freud's view of love presupposes a fixed amount of libido. The more love that a person directs toward another person, the less he has for himself, and vice versa. Fromm raises a serious challenge to this view of love. He asks whether or not psychological

¹Ibid., p. 80.

²Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 157.



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observation supports the thesis that there is a contradiction between love for oneself and love for others. Perhaps the phenomena of love for oneself and selfishness are opposed rather than similar. "Is the selfishness of modern man really a concern for himself as an individual, with all his intellectual, emotional, and sensual potentialities?" Or rather, has man become "an appendage of his socioeconomic role?"¹

3. Two Forms of Self-Interest in Modern Man

Fromm finds that modern man's attitude toward himself is very ambiguous. In a competitive, capitalistic society, one's self-interest is generally taken for granted. But Fromm questions this basic assumption, and he cites two fundamentally different approaches to the problem. To illustrate this ambiguity, one view, formulated by Spinoza, defines self-interest or the interest "to seek one's profit" as being identical with virtue. "The more each person strives and is able to seek his own profit, that is to say, to preserve his own being, the more virtue does he possess; on the other hand, in so far as each person neglects his own profit, that is to say, neglects to preserve his own

¹Ibid., p. 128.



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being, is he impotent."¹

Fromm declares that such a concept of self-interest is objectivistic in as much as the "interest" is conceived in terms of what the nature of man is rather than in terms of subjective feeling. Man's real interest is to develop fully his human potentialities. In order to achieve this aim, he must understand the needs and the interests of the self so that they might be served rather than deceived. For it follows "that man can deceive himself about his real self-interest if he is ignorant of his self and its real needs."² The science of man becomes the basis for determining what constitutes man's genuine self-interest.

In the last three hundred years, however, man's concept of self-interest has increasingly narrowed so that it has gained a meaning which is almost diametrically opposed to that of Spinoza. Rather than being synonymous with virtue, it has become identical with selfishness, power, and material success. This deterioration was made possible by a change from the objectivistic view of self-interest to an erroneous subjectivistic conception. Self-interest was no longer determined by the nature of man and his needs, but rather by what a person felt represented the interest of

¹Spinoza, Selections, ed. by John Wild (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), pp. 303-304.

²Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, pp. 133-134.



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his self.

Fromm describes the modern concept of self-interest as a blend of two contradictory concepts: that of Luther and Calvin on the one hand, and the progressive thinkers since Spinoza on the other. The former taught that man must suppress his self-interest and consider himself primarily as an instrument of God's will. The progressive thinkers, in contrast, taught that man ought only to be an end in himself and not a tool for purposes that transcend him. Actually, modern man "accepted the contents of the Calvinistic doctrine while rejecting its religious formulation. He has made himself an instrument, not of God's will but of the economic machine or the state."¹ Man became an instrument, but for industrial progress rather than for God.

The monastic asceticism of the Middle Ages was replaced, as Max Weber observed, by an inner-worldly asceticism. This attitude was at first conjoined with obedience to the will of God. But it has been increasingly divorced from Calvin's concept and blended with the "pursuit of happiness" which has characterized modern industrial society. Contemporary man believes that he is acting in behalf of his self-interest when actually his paramount concern is with money and success. In such a structure, man deceives

¹Ibid., p. 135.



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himself; he leaves his most significant potentialities unfulfilled and loses himself in processes which are supposedly the best for him.

After the breakdown of the Medieval synthesis, the individual faced the task of experiencing himself as an independent entity in a much more intensified way. His sense of identity with group symbols and processes was to a large extent shattered and had to be replaced with a sense of individual identity. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the self was usually felt to be constituted by the property one possessed. During the last few generations with the increasing influence of the market however, the concept of the self has shifted from meaning "I am what I possess" to meaning "I am as you desire me."¹ Man is alienated from himself even as the seller of commodities is divorced from that which he wants to sell. He is immensely interested in his success on the market, in having a "winning personality," but he himself has become a commodity in the personality market.

The concept of self-interest in its modern deteriorated form has inspired attacks upon democratic forms of society from various types of totalitarian ideologies. Such critics claim that in their systems, the subordination of the

¹Ibid., p. 136.



individual to the cause, the race, or the state is morally superior to the selfish principles that prevail in the capitalistic democracies. This view has appealed to those who have been disenchanted with the unhappy state of the competitive society and who would like to find alternatives that manifest a greater sense of solidarity and responsibility among men. Fromm objects to such ideological deception by showing it to be the mask of a selfish "elite" that controls the masses for its own ends. Furthermore, the doctrines of totalitarianism are a secular revival of the religious idea of human helplessness and the resulting need for submission. Consequently, they threaten the most precious achievement of Western culture, the respect for the uniqueness and dignity of the individual. For Fromm, the failure of modern culture does not lie in the principle of individualism as such, but rather in the deterioration of the meaning of self-interest. The failure lies "not in the fact that people are too much concerned with their self-interest, but that they are not concerned enough with the interest of their real self; not in the fact that they are too selfish, but that they do not love themselves."¹

4. The Need for Genuine Self-Love

Fromm chides modern man not for loving himself too

¹Ibid., p. 139.



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much but for not loving himself enough. The idea that love for oneself and love for others is mutually exclusive is fallacious. "If it is a virtue to love my neighbor as a human being, it must be a virtue--and not a vice--to love myself since I am a human being too."¹ Any doctrine that separates love for one's self and love for one's neighbor is intrinsically contradictory. Unlike many Christian writers, Fromm interprets the Biblical injunction to "Love thy neighbor as thyself" as implying that the love and respect given to other individuals cannot be separated from the love and respect that one feels toward one's self.

Fromm's basic premise that genuine self-love is a prerequisite for loving others is stated as follows: "not only others, but we ourselves are the 'object' of our feelings and attitudes; the attitudes toward others and toward ourselves, far from being contradictory, are basically conjunctive."² Love of my own self is inseparably connected with love for other selves. "Love is indivisible as far as the connection between 'objects' and one's own self is concerned."³ Genuine love is "an active striving for the growth and happiness of the loved person, rooted in one's

¹Ibid., p. 129.

²Ibid., p. 129.

³Ibid., p. 129.



own capacity to love;" it is an "expression of productiveness and implies care, respect, responsibility, and knowledge."¹

Supposedly, the love of mankind is an abstraction which follows the love of specific persons. But Fromm insists that the "love of man" is actually the prerequisite attitude for loving any specific individual. "The basic affirmation contained in love is directed toward the beloved person as an incarnation of essentially human qualities. Love of one person implies love of man as such."²

In brief, love is a conjunctive attitude toward one's own self and all other human beings. It is essentially indivisible, and one's own self must, in principle, be as much the object of love as any other person. "The affirmation of one's own life, happiness, growth, freedom, is rooted in one's capacity to love, i.e., in care, respect, responsibility, and knowledge. If an individual is able to love productively, he loves himself too; if he can love only others, he can not love at all."³

a. The Distinction between Selfishness and Self-Love

Fromm distinguishes the selfish person from the one

¹Ibid., p. 129.

²Ibid., p. 130.

³Ibid.



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who manifests a genuine self-love. Rather than having the same or similar characteristics, Fromm delineates their unconscious dynamics in order to display a fundamental opposition between them. The selfish person is interested only in himself; he wants to gain everything for himself and feels no pleasure in giving. He appraises everything in terms of its usefulness to him. This would appear, at least on the surface, that concern for others and concern for oneself are unavoidable alternatives. But it is this assumption, Fromm believes, that has led to so much confusion in the consideration of the problem.

Fromm succinctly states his view as follows: "Selfishness and self-love, far from being identical, are actually opposites. The selfish person does not love himself too much but too little; in fact he hates himself."¹ This lack of a basic love and respect for the self leaves the person feeling empty and frustrated. He feels that he must grasp at things in order to fill the void. The selfish person has a greedy insatiability. He is always afraid of not getting enough, of missing something, or of being deprived of something. He is filled with a burning envy of anyone who has more than himself. The unconscious dynamics of such a person shows that the selfish person basically is not fond

¹Ibid., p. 131.



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of himself. On the contrary, he deeply dislikes himself. He is in constant anxiety concerning his own self. He does not have the inner security that can exist only on the basis of a genuine self-affirmation. Consequently, he attempts to compensate for his own lack of self-respect with an over-concern for his own welfare.¹

The same basic dynamics are at work in the so-called narcissistic person--although in this case the person is less concerned with getting things for himself and more concerned in admiring himself. People who appear so fond of themselves are actually compensating for a basic lack of self-love. This view differs from Freud who has interpreted the narcissistic person as one who has withdrawn his love from others and has directed it toward himself. Fromm, in contrast, maintains that while it is true that the selfish person is incapable of loving others, it is equally true that he is incapable of loving himself. He is impotent to love either his neighbor or himself. Fromm illustrates this mechanism of overconcern that the selfish person feels toward himself by comparing it with the overconcern that is often felt toward others. Mothers, for example, who consciously believe that they are particularly fond and protective of their children, frequently have a deep repressed

¹Erich Fromm, "Selfishness and Self-Love," Psychiatry (1939), p. 521.



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hostility for the objects of their concern. They are overconcerned because they must compensate for an inability to love the children at all.

b. Neurotic Unselfishness

The symptoms exhibited in neurotic "unselfishness" bear out Fromm's theory on the nature of selfishness. The neurotically unselfish person frequently feels depressed, tired, unable to work enthusiastically, and empty in his love relationships. He feels that his one redeeming feature is his unselfishness. The "unselfish" person is proud of the fact that he does not want anything for himself and that he lives for others rather than for himself. And yet such a person discovers that in spite of his unselfishness that he is unhappy and that his relationships with those nearest to him are unsatisfactory. A deeper probing into the dynamics of such unselfish behavior shows that the unselfishness is not something apart from the other symptoms. For it is found that such a person is pervaded with a hostility against both his own life and the life of others. "Behind the facade of unselfishness, a subtle but not less intense self-centeredness is hidden." The person's ability to love and enjoy anyone or anything has been paralyzed. Such a person "can be cured only if his unselfishness too is interpreted as a symptom along with the others so that his lack of productiveness, which is at the root of both his



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unselfishness and his other troubles, can be corrected."¹

The nature of this unselfishness becomes clearer in the context of the effect of the "unselfish" mother on her children. "She believes that by her unselfishness her children will experience what it means to be loved and to learn, in turn, what it means to love."² The result, however, is generally quite different. The children do not exhibit the happiness of persons who rest with confidence in their mother's love. They are often unconsciously infected with their mother's hostility toward life. They become afraid of the mother's disapproval and anxious to live up to her expectations. Often the total effect of the "unselfish" mother is worse than that of the more apparently selfish mother because the mother's unselfishness prevents the children from criticizing her. "They are put under obligation not to disappoint her; they are taught, under the mask of virtue, dislike for life."³ In contrast to such mother-child relationships, one observes that the mother who is filled with genuine self-love is able to give to her children the love, joy, and happiness which comes from the abundance of her own being.

¹Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 132.

²Ibid., p. 132.

³Ibid., p. 133.



5. Two Forms of Hatred: Reactive and Character Conditioned

Fromm differentiates between two different kinds of hatred: one that is rational and "reactive" and another that is irrational and "character-conditioned." He describes reactive hatred as "a hatred which is essentially a reaction to an attack on one's life, security, or ideals or on some other person that one loves and identifies oneself with."¹ The premise of such hatred is an essentially affirmative attitude toward life. If there is love and affirmation of life, then anger and hatred must be aroused against that which would negate it. "Such hatred is the counterpoint of life. It is aroused by a specific situation, its aim is the destruction of the attacker and, in principle, it ends when the attacker is defeated."²

Character-conditioned hatred arises as a reaction to traumatic experiences undergone by the individual in childhood. It then becomes a character trait of the child and remains just beneath the surface of the person's behavior as a kind of "readiness for hatred." It often remains observable even when there is nothing in the external

¹Erich Fromm, "Selfish and Self-Love," p. 513.

²Ibid.



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environment to give rise to hatred. It can be actualized by the same kind of realistic threat which arouses reactive hate, but the person with character-conditioned hatred expresses himself as though he were happy to have found a situation in which to express his lingering hostility. One can almost sense the pleasure that he derives from his hatred.¹

According to Freud, this lingering hatred and destructiveness is inherent in all human beings. Its expression differs only in the object of hatred--whether it is directed against others or ourselves. The underlying assumption of such a position is that destructiveness against oneself is in reverse proportion to that directed against other human beings. But Fromm believes that this assumption is contradicted by the fact that people differ in the amount of their total destructiveness. We do not find a great deal of hostility against others in those who feel little hostility against themselves. Rather "the life-destructive forces in a person occur in an inverse ratio to the life-furthering ones."²

Character-conditioned hatred arises from the many ways in which the freedom, spontaneity, and growth of the

¹ Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 215.

² Ibid., p. 216.



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self in the child are either blocked or destroyed. It has been observed that younger children express their hostility more directly while older children have already repressed the hate reaction and can only manifest hate in free-play situations.¹ The means of bringing about such repression varies from open aggressive intimidation to subtle forms of "anonymous authority" which do not overtly forbid anything but which says, "I know you will or will not like this or that."²

Fromm maintains that simple frustration of the instinctual impulses does not create deep seated hostility. "It only creates a reactive hate reaction." Freud, however, based his concept of the Oedipus Complex upon this assumption. The Oedipal theory implies "that the frustration of sexual wishes directed toward the father or the mother creates hatred which in its turn leads to anxiety and submission."³ Fromm believes that the real issue does not lie in the isolated frustration of single instinctual drives, but rather on the more generalized plane of forces that suppress the child's freedom and spontaneity. The primary

¹Lauretta Bender, and Paul Schilder, "Aggressiveness in Children," Genetic Psychology Monographs (1936) 18:410-425. Results used by Erich Fromm "Selfishness and Self-Love," Psychiatry (1939), p. 514.

²Erich Fromm, "Selfishness and Self-Love," p. 514.

³Ibid., p. 515.



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battle is waged between freedom and various forms of authority.

The ways in which a child's struggle for growth and freedom may be defeated are many and subtle. The child may internalize the external authority and be "good"; he may overtly rebel and still remain dependent. He may attempt to "belong" or to conform to the given cultural patterns, and in so doing lose his individuality. In any case, the result of such a loss of self-hood brings with it a sense of inner emptiness and resentment and an envy of those who have retained their sense of individuality and capacity for enjoyment.¹ The inner tendency of life is to grow, but if this is thwarted, the energy undergoes a process of change and becomes a life-destructive energy. "Destructiveness" according to Fromm, "is the outcome of unlived life."²

Since destructive energy does result if the productive energies are blocked, it would appear that it can rightly be called a potentiality in man's nature. But Fromm does not conclude that the potentiality for growth and the potentiality for destructiveness are of equal strength. The potentiality for becoming a tree exists in every healthy seed, but this does not mean that a healthy tree will develop

¹Ibid., p. 515.

²Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 216.



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¹Ibid., p. 515.

²Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 216.



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from every seed. There are specific conditions such as proper soil, water, and sunlight which must be present before there is a healthy growth. If the right conditions are absent, some distortions will result and the tree will either die or become stunted. Consequently, Fromm describes the process of growth in terms of a primary potentiality which is actualized when the conditions for growth are met, and a secondary potentiality which comes into being if the necessary conditions are lacking.

Both the primary and secondary potentialities are part of the organism. But the term "primary" is used to denote the development of potentiality that occurs under normal conditions while the "secondary" potentiality becomes manifest only in abnormal, pathogenic conditions. If such is the case, then destructiveness is a secondary potentiality in man which becomes manifest only if he is unable to realize his primary potentialities. Fromm concludes "that man is not necessarily evil but becomes evil only if the proper conditions for his growth and development are lacking. The evil has no independent existence of its own, it is the absence of the good, the result of the failure to realize life."¹

Fromm maintains that even though hatred is a secondary

¹Ibid., p. 218.



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potentiality it can become "character-conditioned" and pervasive in the life of the individual. As has been indicated, this basic hatred was originally brought into existence by certain significant people in the early life of the individual. However the hatred gradually becomes a part of the character structure and the objects of the hatred play a secondary role. The lingering hostility is always there and it makes comparatively little difference whether its objects are one's own self or outside of the self.

Hatred directed against oneself has not been recognized so clearly as that directed against others. And yet, this self-hatred can be considered rare only if we think of people who quite overtly hate or dislike themselves. Usually self-dislike is concealed in one way or another. For example, one of the most prevalent forms of self-dislike in our culture is that manifested by inferiority feelings. The people who have such feelings do not consciously believe that they dislike themselves. Rather, they feel only that they are inferior to others, that they are less intelligent or unattractive, or whatever the particular content of the inferiority feelings happen to be. Nevertheless, in such feelings, a basic lack of fondness for one's own person is always a dynamic factor.¹

¹Erich Fromm, "Selfishness and Self-Love," p. 517.



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Another subtle form of self-dislike is the tendency toward constant self-criticism. Generally, such a person's self-criticism is entirely out of proportion to his mistakes or shortcomings. If such a person can feel that what he does is perfect or that it can win the approval of other people, then he can relax. But when such a sense of achievement is missing, such individuals feel overwhelmed by an otherwise repressed feeling of inferiority.¹

We have previously discussed the role of the "authoritarian conscience" as the internalization of external authorities and as the bearer of deep seated hostilities against oneself. This can be seen in the way people often treat themselves. They become their own slave drivers. Rather than being the slaves of people outside themselves, they have placed a cruel master within. Such a conscience forbids the full savor of any pleasure and does not permit one to do what he wants. If a person does follow his desires, he must do so furtively and at the expense of a guilty conscience. Even the pursuit of pleasure becomes as compulsory as work and fails to remove the continual restlessness that pervades such lives.²

In summary, we see that Fromm bases his views on the

¹Ibid., p. 517.

²Ibid.



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premise that the attitudes and feelings that we show toward others and ourselves are conjunctive rather than contradictory. Love for others and love for ourselves are not alternatives. Nor are hatred for others and ourselves alternatives. On the contrary an attitude of love for themselves will be found in all those who are genuinely capable of loving others. Furthermore a fundamental hatred against oneself is an inseparable ingredient in any sustained hatred of others even if on the surface the very opposite appears to be the case. Consequently, such apparently diverse phenomena as selfishness, neurotic unselfishness, and inferiority feelings arise from a more fundamental self-hatred. Against such self-hatred, only the regenerative power of love can again awaken the self to love and respect itself.