

Article

The Power of Man in Fromm's Humanistic Ethics

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Abstract: Erich Fromm analyzed how man is divided in his sense of true self. This division within forces him to cling to abstract and concrete entities outside of himself and Fromm calls this "transference" which he, after all, borrowed from Freud. This transferring of man's individuality to outside forces brings temporary relief to his experience of powerlessness and loneliness. The transference makes man acquire a masochistic character wherein he submits himself to outside irrational forces that perpetually dehumanize him. This is the reason why his ethics is a struggle to bring back the power of man within, nursing his potentialities to change himself and transform his world. Ethics, for Fromm, is a form of normativity which leads man into freedom to fully actualize his own sense of self.

Keywords: Fromm, transference, philosophical anthropology, humanistic ethics

Life, as we find it, is too hard for us, it brings us too many pains, disappointments, and impossible tasks. What do they demand of life and wish to achieve in it? The answer to this can hardly be in doubt. They strive after happiness, they want to become happy and to remain so. – Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents

Erich Fromm was a psychoanalyst, sociologist, and a philosopher. The Frankfurt School which originally emanated from the Institute of Social Research wanted to analyze society and its pathologies through the guiding principles of Marxist theories,¹ and as a member, Fromm studied the dialectic between man and society by applying

¹ Cf. Alex Callinicos, *Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (UK: Polity Press, 2007), 246. The Frankfurt School, under Horkheimer's directorship wanted to revive Marxist orthodoxy which focuses on the working class, that could enlightened the dialectic of society and its history. The

principles from psychoanalysis. He wrote books and articles expressing his thoughts primarily on man as man. Some commentators particularly Rainer Funk² believed that Fromm “dissected” the human individual from the clinical and sociological perspectives. As a psychoanalyst, he developed his thoughts from the Freudian lenses and as a sociologist, he was influenced by Marxist philosophy particularly that of the humanist Marx. His *Escape from Freedom, Sane Society, and Beyond the Chain of Illusion, Being and Having* are considered to be his monumental works.

Rainer Funk, Fromm’s autobiographer, commented that humanism which is central in his (Fromm) philosophy cannot be separated from his thoughts on other disciplines like sociology, anthropology, religion, technology, management, consciousness, ethics, and the like.³ For Fromm, the centrality of any investigation begins and ends in man. In his book *Man for Himself*, the focus of his thinking is the rebirth, the renaissance of man. He believes that man is full of possibilities that can hardly be ignored. Further, he thinks that “he (man) is the archaic man, the beast of prey, the cannibal, the idolater, but he is also the being with the capacity for reason, for love, and for justice.”⁴ This is how, at least for Fromm, humanism is understood that it cannot be separated from the facticity of man. Man and humanism are one. They are inseparable entities and no further justification is needed to prove this humanistic experience than man being himself in all his potentialities, in all his humanity as a “sinner and saint, child and adult, sane and insane, man as he was in the past and man as he will be in the future.”⁵ Moreover, Fromm’s humanistic philosophy is best described in *The Heart of Man*, he says,

This humanistic experience consists in the feeling that nothing human is alien to one, that “I am you”, that one can understand another human being because both of us share as our common possession the same elements of human existence...the broadening of self-awareness that humanistic experience brings about—including as it does the transcending of consciousness and the revelation of the sphere of the social unconscious—

main agenda was to focus on the society’s socio-economic substructure by analyzing and integrating Marx and Freud into the theory of social psychoanalysis.

² He is the biographer and literary executor of Erich Fromm. In most of the books Fromm wrote, Dr. Funk inserted some commentaries on the former’s integration of Marxist ideology and Freudian psychology.

³ Cf. Erich Fromm, *On Being Human*, Editor’s Foreword (New York: Continuum, 1999).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

enables man to experience himself in the full dimension of his shared humanity.⁶

Why focus on man? What is in man that makes him the center of philosophical enterprise? For Fromm, if there is no common ground where we can take off to debate on the humanity of man—How then could we talk and discuss man in other cultures and understand the “stranger” in them?⁷ Since the beginning of man wondering about himself, his world, and his God, he has become a question unto himself. “Man is the interrogative unto himself” says Battista Mondin.⁸ All philosophical inquiries have their beginning in man and actually end in him. We cannot distantiate him from the rest of nature. He was and will always be the center of investigative inquiries in sociology, anthropology, history, arts, mass media, business enterprises, law, religion and morality, natural as well as the human sciences. The bringing back of his humanity, his integral constitution, his beingness from the point of classical philosophy, his power to reason and to love, is the epitome of humanism. Mondin declares,

To enter into ourselves and to discover what the fundamental nucleus of the human individual is, is a great deal more difficult than to go to the moon, especially after two world wars, which have not only destroyed so many of our cities, but above all have overturned our consciousness...we have been precipitated into cultural chaos...no agreement at any level...what “to be man” means and what value of human life is.⁹

Former Russian leader Gorbachev echoed the same sentiments a decade ago. He said “everything that is happening—certainly the greater part of it—seems like nothing so much as an attack on human being. So many things are arrayed against us...the exacerbated contradictions between the human being and society, between human being and the powers that be.”¹⁰ Any yearning for human development struggling for his full potentiality cannot gear towards full actualization without understanding his nature, his

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Cf. Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chain of Illusion* (New York: Continuum, 1962), 10.

⁸ Cf. Battista Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology* (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 1985), 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰ Mikhail Gorbachev’s Foreword to Salvatore Puledda’s *On Being Human* (San Diego: Latitude Press, 1997), 1.

desires, and his inner world. Modern societies must, whether they adhere to evolutionist or creationist, scientific or fundamentalist thinking, go back and take a look once again who this *man* is in his totality. We are not talking here of an essentialist view of man, but we are dealing on the actual man experiencing his full humanity in a globalized society. The centrality of man, his value and his dignity is the core of humanism.¹¹ The actualization of human development is seen on how man manifests his own humanity. It is not an abstraction of who he is but how he does in modern society.

The issue of man *on* himself is the stepping stone of Fromm. A psychoanalyst and sociologist by profession, he puts his analyses on humanism—man *as a product of history*. He believes that though we are already living in highly modernized society, the life that we have is not *full*; it is always empty, devoid of a truly humanistic living. Fromm and other social thinkers believe that man needs a kind of *rebirth* i.e., experiencing his humanity, his facticity, his historicity. For Fromm, we are actually living in the world of illusions and any human development that we pursue happens *within* this illusionary mind-set. How did Fromm arrive at this conclusion?

Human Nature

If we assume that man is anatomically and physiologically the same for all, regardless of his color and race, can we also assume that he is the same as far as his psychic organization is concerned? This was the question Fromm wanted to grapple with in his monumental book *Beyond the Chain of Illusion*.¹² For him, there must be a model for human nature and this can be found in the thoughts of the philosopher Benedict Spinoza. Fromm says,

Man, and not just men in this or that culture, could be understood like any other being in nature because man is one, and the same laws are valid for all of us at all times...there is a model of human nature which is ascertainable and definable and from which the laws of human behavior and reactions followed.¹³

Again, he said among the philosophers, Spinoza, the father of modern dynamic psychology, postulated the picture of the nature of man in terms of a “model of human nature.”¹⁴ In his *Man for Himself*, Erich Fromm set a tone that the real human nature is allowing man to unfold his power,

¹¹ Cf. Puledda, *ibid.*, 1.

¹² Cf. Fromm, *Beyond the Chain of Illusion*, 20

¹³ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

his potentiality, in order for him to become who he is. Man, through his capacity to reason out, has also the capacity to be who he is. He becomes virtuous in the Aristotelian sense if he comes to know and understand his own peculiarity. Fromm narrates,

Aristotle uses “virtue” to mean “excellence”—excellence of the activity by which the potentialities peculiar to man is realized...Man’s virtue, likewise, is that precise quality which is characteristic of human species, while each person’s virtue is his unique individuality.¹⁵

The power of any value judgments must arise from man himself. Through reason, he can distinguish between what is good and what is bad, and the difference between the two is inferred through the recognition of humanistic ethics. For Fromm, it is a “form” of ethical thinking which brings back to man his capacity *to be*, his virtue which was lost at the onset of industrial capitalism. In humanistic ethics, man, through his capacity to reason, has to decide which is good and bad for him. It is only him who “determines the criterion for virtue and sin.”¹⁶ What is good and what is bad is rooted in the “peculiarities of his existence and are meaningful only in reference to it...the humanistic position is there is nothing higher and nothing more dignified than human existence.”¹⁷ Unlike the other forms of ethical theories, humanistic ethics for Fromm is man *becoming* more human. The standards of measuring one’s value judgments are not derived from an external source but from man himself. It is through his capacity to reason and to love that he becomes more than he is. Through humanistic ethics, man has the power to relate unto himself, and unto the world which he finds himself.¹⁸

We cannot fully understand what humanistic ethics means without contrasting it with what he called *authoritarian ethics*. The norm giver is always “external” to man. He transcends the individual. He dictates what is “good” for him. Fromm said, “Such system is based not on reason and knowledge but on awe of the authority and on the subject’s feeling of weakness and dependence...its decision cannot and must not be questioned.”¹⁹ Lawrence Kolberg’s theory of morality explicates what Fromm is talking about. We have to recall that morality is transferred by the

¹⁵ Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1947), 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

parents to the offspring through the instigation of reward and punishment. Further, Fromm says,

The foundations of our ability to differentiate between good and evil are laid in childhood...his [our] value judgments are formed as a result of the friendly or unfriendly reactions of the significant people in his life.²⁰

In authoritarian ethics,²¹ the gestures of one's parents are enough to teach the child what is good and what is bad. This continues in school and in the society. "Good" is that which he is praised and "bad" is that which is frowned upon by social authorities. Psychologically, this kind of ethical thinking results in dominion over the people. It is the power over the people. The parents become the norm giver. They impose rewards and punishments. In later years, the parents are substituted by irrational authorities or idols that serve as norm givers. As a consequence, man submits his life to the laws and norms of conduct enforced by the norm giver. In Authoritarian ethics, Fromm said, "criticism of the authority is not only not required but forbidden."²² Moreover, "authority ordains obedience to be the main virtue and disobedience to be the main sin."²³ As a result, this kind of ethics prevents man from asking critically whether "good" is good for him or for the authority. Actions or gestures that contradict the intentions of the norm giver are tantamount to transgressions. Hence, it paralyzes the capacity of man to be himself, for the ultimate goal is to please the norm giver. Fromm declares,

The employer considers an employee to be good if he is of advantage to him. The teacher may call a pupil good if he is obedient, does not cause trouble, and is a credit to him. In much the same way a child may be called good if he is docile and obedient. The "good" child *may be frightened, and insecure wanting only to please his parents by submitting to their will, while the "bad" child*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²¹ In *Man for Himself*, Fromm distinguished *authority* which we can depend on for our *humanization* and *authority* as a form of imposition. He is against the latter, and he saw that with this kind of authority, man cannot become independent from the illusions that continue to blind him.

²² Fromm, *Man for Himself*, 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

*may have a will of his own and genuine interests but ones which do not please the parents.*²⁴

Since humanistic ethics allows the peculiar qualities of man to flourish, and thus to become virtuous, is it possible then for man to come up with norms of conduct and value judgments which are valid for all men? For Fromm, this is possible only if we come to understand man's true nature—a nature which is not tainted by illusions. If ethics allows us to achieve excellence in life, the principles that arise from it must also come from the nature of life itself and not from external source.²⁵ It is illogical for Fromm at least to have norms of conduct imposed on man which contradict his own nature—norms which force and allow him *to be dependent on external forces*. These external forces create in man worlds of illusions, which dominate and rule him. Nevertheless, for Fromm, man can still arrive at an objective and valid norms of conduct once he comes to know who he is and to what extent his powers are. He said, “the aim of man's life, therefore, is to be understood as the unfolding of his powers according to the laws of his nature.”²⁶ How then can we experience the true nature of man? For him, we have lost the experience of humanity of man. This humanity, this humanism, was present in the Buddhist, Judeo-Christian, and Spinozist thinking. But with the onslaught of industrial capitalism, this humanism faded into the background creating gradually the true nature of man into a different form—a form that emanates from the shadows of industrial capitalism. How was it done? Fromm relied on two great thinkers—Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. It is through them that we come to grips with the true nature of man.

Freud and Marx: The Sick Individual and the Sick Society

The nature of man can be arrived at through the various manifestations of his human existence. We can understand man in its abstract form—a human nature in general but a better understanding must begin from the actual man i.e., the various “man-like” activities that emanate from him. It is only through these manifestations that we can call man—*man*. For Fromm, Marx dealt with this human nature as the raw material where we can speak of man, but this *specific, historical man* does change in the course of history transforming himself and becoming what he is in the process.²⁷ Quoting Marx, Fromm said,

²⁴ *Ibid.*, (Italics mine)

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20

²⁷ Fromm, *Beyond the Chain of Illusion*, 22.

The whole of what is called world history is nothing but the creation of man by human labor, and the emergence of the nature for man; he therefore has the evident and irrefutable proof of his self-creation of his own origins.²⁸

However, though man transforms himself in the course of history, the transformation that he does is still *within* the boundaries of illusions. His thoughts are patterned after the social conditions that affect him. It is the "*particular structure and mode of functioning society*"²⁹ that veils a particular economic and social interest which now *alienate* man from his true nature. On the other hand, if there are social economic structures that alienate man from his true humanism, Freud believed that what alienates man is his libidinal structures which keep man from the real. For him, most of what is real is not conscious.³⁰ The *id* and the *superego* are always at odds so that what the *id* says is junked by the *superego*, and what the *superego* imposes, the *id* repels.³¹ The driving force is the sexual energy.

The libido goes through certain stages: first it is centered around the sucking and biting activities of the infant then around the process of anal and urethral elimination...primitive man as one who gives full satisfaction to all his instincts and also to those perverse instincts which are part of primitive sexuality.³²

But for unknown reasons, the primitive man foregoes these instinctual satisfactions when he developed what we call civilization. The development of civilizations began the frustrations of his instinct. Frustration of libidinal instincts leads to more sublimation and more frustrations. Fromm said, "The more civilization grows, the more man sublimates, but the more he also frustrates his original libidinous impulses. He becomes wiser and more cultured but he is also in some sense less happy than the primitive man was and increasingly more prone to neuroses which are the results of too much instinctual frustrations."³³ Moreover, the

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 35.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

³¹ Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. by James Strachey (New York: Norton and Company, 1961), 38.

³² Fromm, *Beyond the Chain of Illusion*, 25.

³³ *Ibid.*

passing of norms from authorities causes prohibitions and commands which instigate more repressed feeling in the individual. How are these “aspects” of life possible? Since Fromm is influenced much by Freud, we have to get a glimpse of Freud’s theory of *cathexis* to understand the “disorientation” of man’s libidinal impulses. In the book of Calvin Hall, he says, “A cathexis which produces anxiety may be prevented from registering itself into consciousness by being opposed by an anti-cathexis. This nullifying or restraining of a cathexis by an anti-cathexis is called repression.”³⁴

The principle that drives man for happiness is the *id*. This is the pleasure principle for Freud. Happiness is the ultimate goal of human life. He expressed this in his *Civilization and its Discontents*.³⁵ It is the absence of pain and displeasure. However, this *cathexing*³⁶ of pleasure is not in consonance with the norms and laws of the world. Our happiness is not absolute and is “restricted” by “structures” coming from the family, school, and community. In other words, Freud seems to be saying that we are doomed to suffer and it is a fact of life.³⁷ This “state” of suffering pushes us to seek for pleasure, thus, avoiding the pain. However, *the pleasure that we gain is only a temporary relief from the pain we experience*.³⁸ The pleasure or happiness proved to be “inadequate” and it has a psychological repercussions for the individual. The cathexis of pleasure (*Id*) and, the demands and restrictions of the world (*superego*) are at loggerheads. They clash in a repetitive cycle to the extent of producing more repressed feelings in the individual. Fromm says “*this libido causes painful tensions, which is reduced only by the act of physical release—pleasure*.”³⁹ Thus Freud contends that the acts of defense mechanisms like sublimation, repressions, regression, displacement, denial, rationalizations, and compensation happen in the act of cathexis.⁴⁰ But these do not confront the real cause of suffering. They divert from the real source of pain. This cycle is repeatedly done by the individual unmindful that neuroses are built up in him. Eventually, these experiences that we have are now stored in what Freud calls—unconscious. What we seem to think as real and conscious is actually a product of the unconscious. It drives us to think and act unmindful of the real motivations that lie within. Hence, the world of illusions. For Fromm, man is living at

³⁴ Calvin Hall, *A Primer of Freudian Psychology* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1954), 85.

³⁵ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 25.

³⁶ This is a term used by Freud, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, to designate “yearning,” “struggling,” “desiring” for pleasure.

³⁷ Cf. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 26.

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 34-38.

³⁹ Fromm, *Beyond the Chain of Illusion*, 23.

⁴⁰ Cf. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 51.

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the edge of these illusions. His thoughts, actions, and feelings are all wallowing in the world of illusions.

With Marxism as his starting point, Fromm believes that there is a conflict between the new productive forces and old structures of social forms. This conflict is compounded as society cannot catch up with these productive forces. Fromm says,

This conflict (for instance between the steam engine and the previous social organization of manufacturing) leads to social and economic changes. The new stability, however, again is challenged by further development of the productive forces (from steam engine to the use of gasoline, electricity, atomic energy)...Together with the conflict between productive forces and socio-political structures goes the conflict between social classes.⁴¹

As the productive forces improve and as man produces more for his satisfaction, he becomes more independent from nature. He begins to rule and subdue nature—transforming it and thereby transforming also his own life. He now develops his emotional and intellectual faculties. But unknown to him, the conflict has now transformed. It has expanded in nature. *It now begins to alienate man himself.* The productive forces gradually cripple him and alienate from *life*. Because of this conflict, he does not experience his own actions, his own feelings, his own thoughts, his own person.⁴² Fromm quotes Marx, “*the more the worker expends himself in work, the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, the poorer he becomes in his inner life and the less he belongs to himself.*”⁴³ The products which the worker produces stand *alien* to him. He and his product are no longer one. There is no longer any relation between the two, for the product is already owned not by the worker but by the employer. Fromm says “The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, assumes an external existence, but that it exists independently, outside himself, that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power.”⁴⁴ What is the effect of this? Life is cut off from the worker. Life becomes now a matter of submission to the wishes of the

⁴¹ Fromm, *Beyond the Chain of Illusion*, 26.

⁴² For Fromm, the concrete example of alienation is seen in his book *For the Love of Life*, trans. by Robert and Rita Kimber, edited by Hans Jurgen Schultz (New York: THE FREE PRESS, 1983), 93.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

employer. The worker is *alienated* from himself, from his fellowmen, and from nature. The life of the worker now becomes *a means of life*.⁴⁵ The work that man does appears to be a matter of survival: "I do this one in order for me to survive." For Fromm, The worker "*has much and uses much but he is little*."⁴⁶ We have become *homo consumens* according to Fromm. In "*cathexing*" pleasure and avoiding pain, he has this to say:

Doctors are constantly warning people who eat, drink, and smoke compulsively that they may die prematurely of heart attack...if those people act on their doctors' warning, they suddenly succumb to attacks of anxiety, insecurity, nervousness, depression. There are people who eat or buy things not to eat or to buy but to quell their feelings of anxiety or depression. Increased consumption promises healing...*I am someone after all; I have something in me; I'm not nothing. He fills himself with things to drive out his inner emptiness...he represses those inklings by consuming.*⁴⁷

The more pleasures we consume, the more "*cathexing*" leads us to more neuroses and thus repressed emotions. Instead of confronting directly the pain or suffering man experiences, he re-directs his energies and focuses on things that temporarily and immediately give some form of relief. The fear, pain, boredom, and anxieties we experience force us to "*cathex*" things which could hopefully give us some sense of relief. However, the *cathexis* of things is not the solution for Fromm.⁴⁸ Since man creates *new* needs to satisfy his appetite, industrial corporations stimulate his appetite thereby creating more unnecessary needs. Fromm says, "every man speculates upon creating a new need in another in order to force him to a new sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence and to entice him into a new kind of pleasure and thereby economic ruin."⁴⁹ Man now becomes a passive consumer led by big transnational corporations "which have no aim and vision except that of becoming ever bigger, more efficient, and growing faster."⁵⁰ On the other hand, the entrepreneur entices the consumer charming him with any tricks in order to turn *wants* into needs.⁵¹ The more

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Erich Fromm, *On Being Human* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 25.

⁴⁷ Fromm, *For the love of Life*, 6.

⁴⁸ Cf. Fromm, *On Being Human*, 49.

⁴⁹ Fromm, *Beyond the Chain of Illusion*, 39.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*

the entrepreneur does this, the more man becomes a subject to his alienated needs. He becomes a “mentally and physically dehumanized being...the self-conscious and self-acting commodity”⁵² who inhabits an “economic system [that] is based on maximum production and maximum consumption.”⁵³ Further, “more consumption, more gadgets, does not increase happiness but only anaesthetizes the boredom.”⁵⁴ We have installed a culture of *having*. We have become a consumerist society and as Adorno put it, the *culture industry*.⁵⁵ The authoritarian ethics forced man to become dependent and submit himself to this consumerist society. The new god is consumerism. Man searches for meaning *in* and *through* illusory society. Since the structuralized-bureaucratized-industrialized world serves as the substructure, the superstructure changes.⁵⁶ Man’s consciousness is a consciousness stamped by illusions. It is now patterned in accordance to the forces of a deceptive environment. Arts, laws, morals, religion, and even life itself are now under the dictates and control of *having* and *consuming*. Unconsciously, the more man wades in the world of illusion, the more he becomes *alienated*. The more he eases this alienation through “cathexis,” the more he wallows in the world of illusions. Man now is trapped in a cycle. The dictates and demands of the superego are too harsh for man, he diverts to the id, giving temporary pleasure, but the id depends on the demands of the superego, for he cannot live without it. The clash between the two needs the ego to balance them, according to Freud. But more than that, Fromm says in his book *Sane Society* that the pressures coming from social structures push us more to seek pleasures instead of the ego balancing both.⁵⁷

Transference

The theory of transference was borrowed by Fromm from Freud. From the clinical point of view, this has something to do with the

⁵² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵³ Fromm, *For the Love of Life*, 20.

⁵⁴ Fromm, *On Being Human*, 55.

⁵⁵ Cf. Callinicos, *Social Theory*, 253.

⁵⁶ For a better discussion on the substructure and superstructure of Karl Marx, see *A Contribution To Political Economy*, trans. by N.I Stone (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1904), 11-12. In relation to this, see also *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. by Gregor Benton (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974). We can also take a look on Fromm’s *Beyond the Chain of Illusion*, 62.

⁵⁷ Cf. Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1955), 22.

attachment of the child to the parents.⁵⁸ The Oedipal longing of the child bears what Freud calls *transference*.

However, as a consequence of the *alienation* that Marx is describing, this phenomenon is applied into a wider social perspective. Fromm says that when the person transfers his love and power to somebody outside of himself – into an object of desire usually a person, an object or any thing that can give him satisfaction – this is called *transference*.⁵⁹ This is one of the processes of *cathexis* which gives relief from despair.⁶⁰ We can further say that transference happens when man avoids pain and suffering. Fromm says that the “patient transfers his feelings of love, fear, hate, he had experienced as a child.”⁶¹ In other words, since there is pain, there is suffering that the individual is experiencing consciously or unconsciously, then he sees the analysts or anybody else as somebody who can give solution to his problems. *The analyst becomes his idol or model as a form of security from pain, fear, or unhappiness*.⁶² Those who are involved in this process submits themselves totally to external authorities no matter how irrational they may be, hoping that they are the solutions to the pain. But actually what they are looking for is the “relationship” between the child and the father or between the child and the mother. Since the product of my labor is no longer mine, and the exchange value is prioritized over the use-value, the person feels an inner vacuum, an emptiness that needs to be filled-in. Hence he has to choose an object outside of himself to fill in that longingness, that emptiness, that impotence. So he projects his human qualities—his love, his intelligence, his courage—into the person of the analyst.⁶³ He now feels strong, re-energized, courageous and secure. Transference is a direct consequence of man’s alienation. It is a kind of pathology that “consumes” modern man. Fromm gives many examples of this phenomenon of transference. The false “great love” is one of them.⁶⁴ After breaking off with a relationship, the guy is overpowered by depression and now is in the brink of committing suicide. Life becomes meaningless for him. He can no longer live without her. It is only through her that his life becomes meaningful. It is only through her that the real meaning of love is felt. This man does not experience the true meaning of love but only wanders under the illusion of love. He fears that by losing the girl he loves, life becomes meaningless. This man *transfers* his powers, his

⁵⁸ Cf. Erich Fromm, *The Greatness and Limitations of Freud’s Thought* (US: Estate of Erich Fromm, 1980), 39.

⁵⁹ Cf. Fromm, *On Being Human*, 24.

⁶⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶¹ Fromm, *Beyond the Chain of Illusion*, 40.

⁶² Cf. Fromm, *Beyond the Chain of Illusion*, 41.

⁶³ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 41.

love, and his life unto the girl of his dreams. The same is true with somebody who thinks he has an original idea and thus, wants to express it. However, he has actually *transferred* his brain into the idols of public opinion, newspapers, or government or political leader.⁶⁵ Fromm continues “he believes that they express his thoughts while in reality he accepts their thoughts as his own.”⁶⁶ Lastly, *transference* of one’s power and love into external idols such as money, fame, and women is a form of neuroses. The streamers and tarpaulins we see around us speak of a pathology...a kind of sickness that we have to address in order to bring back the humanity of us all. The philosopher-educator Paolo Freire also says something about transference. Their ideal is *to be* men, but for them *to be* men is to be like the oppressors. This is their model of humanity “to be is to be like, and to be like is to be like the oppressors.”⁶⁷ This is the concrete reality the oppressors and the oppressed are submerged. For the oppressed, the *new* man is themselves becoming like the oppressors. Since the oppressors are the ideal, the consciousness of the oppressed is already structured or patterned to follow the former. Fromm says,

The transference phenomenon, namely the voluntary dependence of a person on other persons in authority, a situation in which an individual feels helpless, in need of a leader of stronger authority, ready to submit to this authority, is one of the most frequent and most important phenomena in social life.⁶⁸

As a consequence of this phenomenon of *transference*, in order to be psychologically sane from the standards of industrial capitalist society, we need to fill up that emptiness, that inner vacuum by means of a “cathexis” of the things to our utmost satisfaction. We want to consume to feel safe and secure as the demand of the industrial-cybernetic age is now becoming too much to handle. For Fromm, man becomes the “eternal consumer; he ‘takes in’ drink, food, cigarette, lectures, sights, books, movies; all are consumed, swallowed. The world is one great object for his appetite; a big bottle, a big apple, and a big breast. Man has become the suckler, the eternally expectant and the eternally disappointed.”⁶⁹ If man is not the consumer, he is the trader in this economic system that we have. In order to satisfy this

⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 42

⁶⁷ Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1970), 30.

⁶⁸ Fromm, *Greatness and Limitations*, 41.

⁶⁹ Fromm, *On Being Human*, 33.

vacuum, in order to fill up the anxiety, he needs to trade-in, barter, for another thing just to have a “new” encounter, a “new” experience again. Indeed, as a great consumer and a trader, man has transformed “himself into a commodity and experiences his life as capital to be invested profitably. If he succeeds in this, he is ‘successful’ and his life has meaning; if not, he is a ‘failure...’ his ‘value’ lies in his salability, not in his human qualities of love and reason or in his artistic capacities.”⁷⁰

The authoritarian ethics and the phenomenon of transference go hand in hand. Where authoritarian ethics goes, transference follows. We only have to look at the faces of the *masses* whenever a charismatic leader appears. We see “an expression of blind awe, adoration, affection, . . . which transforms the face from its humdrum daily expression into that of a passionate believer.”⁷¹ This phenomenon, since it is a consequence of the authoritarian ethics, brings us into the powerlessness and helplessness of the child longing for a helper. There is a feeling of uncertainty, and insecurity that longs for somebody—somebody who could fill up that vacuum. A savior is needed to give the power, security and certainty longed for. According to Fromm, a “*society whose members are helpless needs idols.*”⁷² Thus, the phenomenon of *transference*.

If the social structures—economic, political, cultural, academic, religious, – are too much to bear, then there is tension.

If the work that one has is an *alienating* one, then there is tension.

If the family that one belongs to is so indifferent, then there is tension.

If the academe is too stressful, then there is tension.

If friends are nowhere to be found, then there is tension.

Where can we turn too? Where can we focus our psychic energies? We consume...We consume just to give us a sense of freedom that at least “I have,” “I consume” and “I consider this as ‘mine.’” However, little that we

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Fromm, *Greatness and Limitations*, 41.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 43.

know, this mentality leads now to what we call neurosis, particularly, a narcissistic mentality.⁷³

Unless we come to know the illusions that blind us, unless we can conquer these illusions, and unless man becomes independent from these idols, there would be no need for *transference*. As Fromm puts it:

In a society which is rationally organized, which does not need to confuse man's mind in order to deceive him about the real situation, in a society that encourages rather than discourages man's independence and rationality, the sense of helplessness will have disappeared and with it the need for social transference...this need can only be overcome to the extent to which man is fully aware of reality and of his own forces.⁷⁴

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⁷³ In *The Sane Society*, Fromm discusses the different mental disorders and one of them is the narcissistic mentality. A person may have this self-adoration because of lack of the basic element which is love. A person who never experienced being loved or to love results in fear, and the person in fear redirects his attention to the self, and begins to adore the self. See Fromm's discussion on page 241 onwards of the book.

⁷⁴ Fromm, *Greatness and Limitations*, 41.

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