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basis a clear account of what the concept of need involves. Perhaps, then, the most serious criticism one could make of Marx is that he makes much of his case depend on a concept which is essential to his whole account of man and society,<sup>108</sup> but a concept nevertheless, to which he nowhere devotes sufficient analysis, discussion or critical examination. As I have already argued, Marx was very ready to dismiss pure philosophy and yet he is prepared to argue, arrive at conclusions and make judgements on the basis of an account which turns on a concept which is left extremely vague. One cannot expect that Marx could or would have discussed the concept of 'need' in the way that a British analytic philosopher in the twentieth century would do, but one can say that Marx has overlooked the finish and consistency, which better use of some of the philosopher's tools might have given to his work. More importantly, Marx's limited treatment of the concept of need obscures its special status as a concept which is both normative and empirical. One can only regret that a concept which is so vital to the Marxist account of man and society is so confined that it creates problems for the sympathetic reader in rendering the account consistent.

It is not that Marx's account is wrong. Indeed, as I hope I have shown, it provides a valuable basis for an account of human needs.

To sum up the valuable aspects of the account then:

Marx rightly stresses the similarities and differences between human need and the needs of other members of the animal kingdom,

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<sup>108</sup> The importance of the concept of 'needs' to the Marxist analysis of man has in fact been seen more clearly by Fromm and Marcuse than by Marx himself.

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emphasising that human needs are social and that needs determine and shape human relationships. Marx shows that the level of advancement of a society can be seen by the level of fulfilment of the needs of its members. There are needs which men share but social development results in a legitimate increase of needs. On the other hand societies which do not have the fulfilment of human needs can suppress or manipulate human needs to further the interests of those in power.

Most importantly, Marx stresses that the problem of human needs is revealed, and in turn solved, not by abstract speculation but by an examination of man's situation in the world and action to change that situation to one where society can "inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" 109

If one supplements what is of value in Marx's account with a clear conceptual elucidation, one can arrive at a consistent and complete account of needs.

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K. Marx and F. Engels, "Critique of the Gotha Programme", in Basic Writings, p. 106.



## Chapter 2

### BASIC NEEDS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE CONCEPT OF NEEDS

#### Introduction

In Chapter One I have discussed the account of needs to be found in the writings of Marx. The account has been found to make valuable contributions to the discussion of human needs. However, what is missing is an attempt to deal with the conceptual problems involved in the notion of human needs and, in particular, to recognise that the concept of needs is bound up with more general beliefs about human beings and their goals and aspirations.

In this chapter I propose to defend the view that the concept of needs is normative. I shall be arguing that there are basic needs and relating what I have to say on this to Erich Fromm's account of needs. In defending the view that the concept of needs is normative I firstly look at the distinction between needs and wants, secondly examine some need statements and thirdly, look at the differences between animal and human needs. Next, Erich Fromm's account of basic needs is discussed and some criticisms offered.

#### Needs and Wants

When we compare the statements, (i) 'x needs y' and (ii) 'x wants y'<sup>1</sup> several important differences must be noted:

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<sup>1</sup> I have already pointed out (Chapter One, p. 8), that the German words for 'needs' and 'wants' are often the same and that in translations of Marx's writings the two are often used indiscriminately. However, here I am using 'wants' more in the sense of desires.



(a) Statement (ii) refers to a conscious volition. A is aware of wanting and of what it is that he wants. On the other hand, as Marx and others clearly showed, an individual is not always aware of his needs; they can be hidden, distorted or manipulated. The fact that statements about wants are statements about conscious volitions is seen in the fact that we can talk about the needs, but not the wants of inanimate objects: "only animate creatures can be said to want, but anything can need."<sup>2</sup>

(b) Statement (i) refers to accepted standards or norms whereas statement (ii) refers to a subjective disposition of an occurrent want.

Benn and Peters stress this:

To say that a man wants food is simply to describe his state of mind; to say that he needs food is to say that he will not measure up to an understood standard unless he gets it. <sup>3</sup>

Of course x may want y and need y but the use of 'wants' rather than 'needs' emphasizes the subjective character of the state of affairs.

(c) Statement (i) carries the implicit suggestion that x will be harmed in some way unless his need for y is fulfilled. As Joel

Feinberg argues:

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<sup>2</sup> Alan R. White, "Needs and Wants," Philosophy of Education Proceedings, 1974, p.167. This point about the difference between inanimate objects and people has limited application, however. White goes on to make the more contentious claim that: "Adults, children, animals, the country's economy, the coal industry, an internal combustion engine and a proper fraction may need different things, but they all need them in the same sense of 'need'." (*Ibid.*)

<sup>3</sup> S. I. Benn and R. S. Peters, Social Principles and the Democratic State (London: Allen and Unwin, rev. ed. 1931), p.143.

We harm a man when we deny or deprive him of something he needs; we fail to benefit him (merely) when we deny or deprive him of some good he does not need . . . . To receive something one wants but does not need is to benefit or profit, but not to the point where loss of the gain would be a harm. 4

(d) x may need y although he does not want it. Paul Taylor,<sup>5</sup> seeking to make the difference between 'wanting' and 'needing' almost non-existent, claims that what one needs is usually relevant to what one wants<sup>6</sup> and offers the example of a person who has decided to commit suicide and does not need food or shelter. But in light of the distinction made in (a) I would say that this example could itself be used as a counter-example to Taylor's generalization: the would-be suicide might well need food and shelter even though he does not want them. It might be the lack of fulfilment of the need for food and shelter which has led him to wanting to end his life. If we say people need food and shelter we refer to the understood standard of life maintenance

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<sup>4</sup> Joel Feinberg, Social Philosophy, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 30. Feinberg goes on to argue that an individual's needs involve claims on others and makes the interesting (although contentious) suggestion that since "When persons and groups are deprived of what they need, they are harmed; it may not be implausible to insist that the country as a whole, in this and future generations (including people who have no present desire for culture, history, nature or beauty), needs large national parks, wilderness areas, enormous libraries, museums, atomic accelerators for physical research, huge telescopes, and so on. (Ibid. p. 54)

<sup>5</sup> Paul Taylor, "'Need' Statements," Analysis, (1958-59), pp. 106-111.

<sup>6</sup> Arnold S. Kaufman, ("Wants, Needs and Liberalism," Op. cit.) also argues unconvincingly that to each need there is a corresponding want.



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- a need common to all men. Examples of people wanting things they do not need are plentiful. Marx, Marcuse and Fromm discuss many of these, for instance, the desire to acquire more and more material things.

(e) In statement (ii) it is less likely to be the case that x expects others to share his desire since statement (ii) is a self-contained statement describing a state of affairs - x's state of mind. However, statement (i) implies that x needs y to ... ; x's need arises from some understood requirement, for the attainment of some further end, purpose or aim. We feel that there may be needs common to all men but that what people want is subjective. A search for what all men want would be fruitless.

(f) x will see less reason for offering justification of statement (i) than he will for statement (ii). If asked why he wants x, he may well reply "I don't know. I just want it." But the defence of statement (i) would include reference to what are taken to be common human goals. What one needs is not simply a matter of personal preference as is often the case with what one wants.

(g) As to the truth of statement (ii), x is the ultimate authority. However, statement (i) may be more easily verified by someone other than x:

The difference lies in this: in a case where there is evidence that N does desire something, and equally weighty evidence that he doesn't, his testimony will decide the issue, provided at least that we have general grounds for thinking him habitually sincere. But in a case where there is evidence both ways about N needing

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something, his saying so only begs the question. It carries no more weight than the opinion of anyone else equally observant. 7

The original point is good but Braybrooke has overstated the case. Whilst the opinion of others can, and often does, carry weight on questions of an individual's needs, it is not clear that in the case of a dispute it is of equal value. The danger of Braybrooke's statement that the opinion of the subject of the need "carries no more weight than the opinion of anyone else equally observant" is that it could be used to defend all sorts of paternalism where the 'experts' - politicians, psychiatrists, teachers - know better than the 'laymen' - voters, patients, students, what the needs of the latter are.

(h) We feel that x can control or suppress his wanting of y, but that to a large extent his need for y is beyond his control. Or to put it another way: 'x wants y, but can do without it' seems a normal sort of remark but there is something strange about 'x needs y but can do without it'.

The distinctions between statements (i) and (ii) made in (a) to (h) support the claim that 'x needs y' is a normative statement involving references to x's well-being and suggesting that x's need should be fulfilled. Statement (ii) 'x wants y', on the other hand,

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David Braybrooke, "Let Needs Diminish that Preferences May Prosper," American Philosophical Quarterly Monograph Series, Monograph No. 1, ed. Nicholas Rescher, Oxford, 1968, pp. 89-90.

is a factual assertion about x's state of mind not necessarily or usually involving any obligations on the part of others.

I shall now examine some need statements to see if they, too provide support for the claim that 'need' is a normative concept.

### 'Need' Statements

What sort of statement is a 'need' statement? In general we have no difficulty with the way in which we use 'need' statements in everyday life. C. A. Mace claims that, 'need' is, "... not a technical term, it is in common use, and it is perhaps less ambiguous than any of the alternatives that might be suggested".<sup>8</sup> This apparent ease with which we talk of needs, belies the difficulties facing a philosopher or psychologist attempting to analyse the concept. How can we establish any common meaning of 'needs' in statements which, as R. F. Dearden points out,<sup>9</sup> are used to explain, concede, justify, warn, exhort and advise?

I suggest that despite the wide variety of need statements which our discourse encompasses, we can establish some common features. Let us look at some of the different 'need statements' we might hear in everyday speech:

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<sup>8</sup> C. A. Mace, "Homeostasis, Needs and Values," British Journal of Psychology, XLIV, Part 5 (August, 1973), p. 202.

<sup>9</sup> R. F. Dearden, "'Needs' in Education," British Journal of Education, (August, 1953), p. 5.



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- (i) 'The refugees desperately need food'
- (ii) 'Every housewife needs a vegetable peeler'
- (iii) 'The car needs an oil-change every 3,000 miles'
- (iv) 'The dough needs more water'
- (v) 'Young children need an environment with sensory stimuli'
- (vi) 'Applicants need a university degree'
- (vii) 'Going to church fulfils some need in me'
- (viii) 'He needs your love'

Several aspects of these statements appear to be common to all of them:

(1) Perhaps what strikes us most when we examine these need statements is their intentional character. In each one, the need statement points to something outside the subject of the need. In the examples of need statements given, what the need points to varies a great deal; in (vi) it is a university degree, in (viii) it is an emotional response from another human being.

(2) In each case the need involves an implicit reference to something further - that is 'x needs y' involves implicitly 'x needs y to ...'. We can explain this 'something further' in terms of the completion or success of x - that is - x will not succeed as an x without y; without y, x somehow falls short of what it is to be an x. The utterer of (vii) could well enlarge on his statement by saying "I am not myself when I cannot go to church". The implication of (ii) (especially if it appeared in an advertisement) is that a woman

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is not a real housewife without a vegetable peeler. When more water is added to the flour and water mixture, we might say "Now that's the consistency of dough!" It is in this way that what x needs can be seen as something which contributes to the completion or success of x as an x.

(3) 'x needs y to ...' can also be filled in, as Benn and Peters point out, by reference to attainable standards or norms: The fact that these standards are attainable is important. 'x wants y' can be filled in by reference to goals which are not attainable. Compare the following: 'x wants to go to the moon', 'x wants to become a famous actress', 'x wants a magic geni' with 'x needs to go to the moon', 'x needs to become a famous actress' and 'x needs a magic geni'. I suggest that there is nothing strange about the first three sentences but that the last three could only sensibly be uttered in a limited number of contexts. The last statement could only be uttered jokingly since the obtaining of a magic geni is not a realizable goal. The previous two statements could not be uttered with reference to any ordinary person. They make sense only where the goal is attainable - for example where x is an astronaut or an actress. In any other context these two statements would almost certainly evoke the response: "But he can't!" The implication here is "How can you say that when it is obviously impossible?" The standards to which need statements make implicit reference will vary - from the standard of maintaining physical life ((i)) to the educational standard necessary for a particular job ((vi)).

(4) When we say 'x needs y', it is almost always the case that

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we would also be prepared to say that any other members of the same class or group as *x* share this need. This works well for (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (v), and (vi) but what of (vii) and (viii)? I shall argue later on that although there may be basic needs which all men share, the way in which these needs are manifested and fulfilled may vary - for instance, all men may have some sort of spiritual needs but a sun-worshiper would obviously not fulfil this need by going to church. I do not wish to argue that because we expect others to share our needs, what we see as needs should always in fact be called human needs, but simply that since when we state a man's needs we refer to accepted goals and standards, it is natural for us to expect that there are at least some needs which all men share. (I shall examine those needs which it seems are shared by all men when I deal with 'basic needs'.)

The remarks made about need statements in (1) to (4) are more or less an expansion of Benn and Peters definition of needs. When they claim that to talk of a man's needs is "to indicate the lack of something which it would be injurious or detrimental to the subject not to supply; alternatively, a lack which frustrates some end envisaged on his account",<sup>10</sup> I take it that the 'alternatively' means something like 'and/or'. In the examples of need statements I have cited, we can see that 'detriment to the subject' and 'lack of realization of a

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<sup>10</sup> S. I. Benn and R. S. Peters, Social Principles and the Democratic State, p. 143.



goal' are closely related and often overlap in examples of needs. For example in (i) we would most likely say that failure to give the refugees food would have detrimental effects on them rather than that eating was a goal which was being frustrated; however in (vii) and (viii) we might say that the church-goer's or the patient's behaviour reflected a goal which was unfulfilled and yet we might also say that failure to attain this goal would have detrimental effects on them.

It seems then, that talk of what a man needs, as distinct from what he wants, involves appeals to standards, goals or aspirations and that there is at least an implication in talk of human needs that there are needs which are shared by all men. I have already argued that in Marx's account of needs there are certain needs which he believed all men share despite the historically determined circumstances of an individual's life.

Before discussing the question of basic needs, I should like to look again at the distinction (made also by Marx) between 'animal' needs and 'human' needs.

#### Animal Needs and Human Needs

By 'animal needs' I mean roughly the same needs that have been called 'biological' or 'physical' needs. I have called these needs 'animal' needs to emphasize the fact that they are needs which man shares with other members of the animal kingdom rather than specifically as a homo sapiens. Or, as Marx would put it, these are man's natural needs rather than the needs of his species being. Examples of animal needs are the needs for food, drink, warmth and shelter. Failure to

fulfil these needs will be physically detrimental to the individual and prolonged lack of fulfilment will result in death. As Marx has pointed out these physical needs must be fulfilled before man can turn his attention to his more sophisticated needs. (The proletarian, according to Marx, was continually engaged in the task of fulfilling his physical needs and even then he often went hungry; his further development by the fulfilment of intellectual and creative needs was out of the question.) Because these physical needs are needs concerned with the maintenance and preservation of physical life, they are needs which all men share.<sup>11</sup>

Human needs, the non-physical needs, share with animal needs the characteristics described in (1) to (4), where I considered features common to the examples of need statements. Human needs can nevertheless be distinguished from animal needs in a number of ways:

Firstly - human needs are less often determinable than animal needs. By 'determinable' I mean able to be recognized and identified. There are relatively few ways in which the need for food or drink can be manifested. The experience and manifestation of animal needs are not tied to social conditions as human needs often are. Most of us would have little difficulty in recognizing in ourselves or others a need for food or warmth, but recognizing an individual's need for love would be much more difficult partly since the ways in which the

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<sup>11</sup> Although the quantity and type of food and drink needed by a baby will be different from the quantity and type needed by an adult.



former need would be manifested would be fewer and less complex than in the case of the latter.

Secondly, the particular human needs of individuals in any society relate to the 'quality of life' of the society. Animal needs are those concerned solely with the preservation or maintenance of life. Human beings are capable of a high degree<sup>12</sup> of manipulation of their environment so it is with the quality of life that they are concerned. By 'quality of life' I mean the way in which and the degree to which the individual can find fulfilment both as an individual and in his social functions. A society in which people are concerned with this quality of life is at a higher level of sophistication than one in which people can barely manage to fulfil their animal needs. Basic needs are needs which all men share but the manifestation of needs and the way in which needs are satisfied in any society is related to legitimate expectations concerning the quality of life. It is reasonable to say that an Australian is entitled to an adequate education, a job, somewhere to live, time for relaxation and a holiday, since all of these involve reasonable expectations regarding the quality of contemporary Australian living, and since all relate to the fulfilling of basic needs.

Thirdly, human needs relate individuals to other human beings. These needs partly arise from our relationships with other people and are usually dependent on others for their fulfilment. These relationships may be of an individual and reasonably spontaneous

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<sup>12</sup> Although not to such an extent in the poorer countries of the world where basic problems of life maintenance still prevail.



nature - for example, in a friendship or of a social and structural nature - for example, between a boss and his employee. Whereas a man in isolation might be able to fulfil his animal needs, he could not, alone, fulfil his human needs. A man marooned on a desert island would have to try to ignore or suppress his need to relate to other people.

Fourthly, man is capable of discrimination regarding some needs (although not basic needs). Fromm believes that man's "conscience ought to tell him which needs to ... let wither and starve out".<sup>13</sup> (This is not, I believe, an adequate basis for an account of how we discriminate between needs but I shall return to a discussion of this in Chapter Three.) We have no choice, however, about fulfilling animal needs if we want to continue to live. Failure to fulfil some of our human needs will affect the way in which we live but failure to fulfil animal needs will eventually result in death.

In the foregoing I have stressed the distinction between the characterization of human needs and the way in which these needs are manifested. I should explain this distinction more fully.

When we discuss human nature, we are discussing the 'essentials' of our conception of man. We are looking for what it is that constitutes the essence of man - those characteristics which man has irrespective

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<sup>13</sup> Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 28.

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of the time and place in which an individual lives.<sup>14</sup> However, these needs are, when translated into particular social environments, multiplied into many particular needs according to different social features like economic conditions, religious beliefs, social customs and so on. Thus it is that whilst there may be some needs which all men share, the way in which these common needs are manifested through particular needs and their method of satisfaction may differ from one society to another.<sup>15</sup>

I should now like to look at the whole issue of basic needs. Do human beings have basic needs? Are these basic needs shared by all human beings? If there are basic needs, are we to establish what they are by empirical or philosophical investigation? In answering these questions, I shall be relating what I have to say to Erich Fromm's account of needs.

#### Basic Needs - Fromm's Account

One finds in Erich Fromm's writing a mixture of philosophy, psychology, political analysis, normative ethics and critical analysis.

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<sup>14</sup> When I talk of our 'idea of man', inevitably I have in mind twentieth century man, but there is no apparent reason why the 'human nature' characterized by the description of basic needs should not have been shared by primitive man living in community with others and communicating by means of a primitive language.

<sup>15</sup> This is discussed again in Chapter Three, pp. 103 ff.

Fromm is particularly concerned with the marriage of ethics and psychology and makes the bold claim that "psychology must not only debunk false ethical judgements but can, beyond that, be the basis for building objective and valid norms of conduct." <sup>16</sup>

Fromm has been influenced by the 'humanist' strand in Marx's writing but argues that Marx's view of man should be supplemented with the psychological discoveries made by Freud in the establishment of a 'scientific ethics'.

Some of the main similarities between Fromm's account and Marx's are the following: (i) like Marx, Fromm distinguishes man from other animals by reference to the more sophisticated needs.

Marx and Fromm both distinguish the basic or animal needs for the maintenance of life, from the more sophisticated needs for such things as intellectual development, happiness and relatedness to others:

The physiologically conditioned needs are not the only imperative part of man's nature. There is another part just as compelling, one which is not rooted in bodily processes but in the very essence of the human mode and practice of life: the need to be related to the world outside oneself, the need to avoid aloneness. <sup>17</sup>

These needs spring from the three main qualities which distinguish man from the other animals: his "self-awareness, reason and imagination". <sup>18</sup> Animals react to specific situations and

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<sup>16</sup> Erich Fromm, Foreword to Man for Himself, p. V11

<sup>17</sup> Erich Fromm, Fear of Freedom, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, rev. ed. 1930), pp. 14-15.

<sup>18</sup> Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 40.



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immediate physical needs, but because of his distinctive qualities, man both transcends his situation and is subject to new needs:

"The disharmony of man's existence generates needs which far transcend those of his animal origin." <sup>19</sup>

Fromm, following Marx, claims that man is primarily a social being. Both advocate a system where man's needs and particularly his need to relate to other human beings can be fulfilled:

The aim of the development of man, for Marx, is a new harmony between man and man, and between man and nature, a development in which man's relatedness to his fellow man will correspond to his most important human need. <sup>20</sup>

(ii) Both Fromm and Marx hold that there are some needs which all men share. As we have seen Marx held that men have needs for self-development, meaningful relationships with others; happiness; realization of being useful to society and to other individuals; education; intellectual development; bodily and mental activity.

Fromm holds that all men have basic needs and that the fulfilment of these needs is a prerequisite for society. Basic needs are objective, that is they can be established independently of felt needs:

... a sane society is that which corresponds to the needs of man - not necessarily to what he feels to be his needs, because even the most pathological aims can be felt subjectively as that which the person wants most; but to what his needs are objectively, as they can be ascertained by the study of man. It is our first task then, to ascertain what is the nature of man, and what are the needs which stem from this nature. <sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 43

<sup>20</sup> Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 254

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

The study of man reveals that there are in fact five basic needs which are shared by all men irrespective of their social circumstances. Although those five needs are characterised quite differently, they are compatible with the needs talked about by Marx.

Fromm's five basic needs are :

(a) Relatedness - the need to relate to other human beings and the world. 'Productive love', a 'syndrome of attitudes' of care, responsibility, respect and knowledge, is in fact the only thing which satisfies this need:

The fact that utter failure to relate oneself to the world is insanity, points to the other fact: that some form of relatedness is the condition for any kind of sane living. But among the various forms of relatedness, only the productive one, love, fulfils the condition of allowing one to retain one's freedom and integrity while being, at the same time, united with one's fellow man. 22

(b) The need to transcend existence

Closely connected with the need for relatedness is man's need to transcend his "state of the passive creature".<sup>23</sup> Man is:

endowed with reason and imagination, he cannot be content with the passive role of the creature, with the role of dice cast out of a cup. He is driven by the urge to transcend the role of the creature, the accidentalness and passivity of his existence, by becoming a 'creator'. 24

There is, however, another way of transcending existence and that is by destructiveness. This is the alternative to creativeness:

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<sup>22</sup> Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 33.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.      <sup>24</sup> Ibid. One is reminded here of Marx's distinction between the worst of architects and the best of bees. See Chapter One, p. 24.



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"However, the satisfaction of the need to create leads to happiness; destructiveness to suffering, most of all, for the destroyer himself." <sup>25</sup>

(c) The need for natural ties or 'rootedness'

Man needs to feel at home in the world and thus he exhibits a "deep craving ... not to sever the natural ties, to fight against being torn away from nature, from mother, blood and soil." <sup>26</sup>

For most individuals:

The family and the clan, and later on the state, nation or church, assume the same function which the individual mother had originally for the child. The individual leans on them, feels rooted in them, has his sense of identity as a part of them, and not as an individual apart from them. <sup>27</sup>

The method by which individuals in groups seek fulfilment of this need can have extreme and bad consequences. For instance, a group may seek to put national interest above humanity:

Nationalism is our form of incest, is our idolatry, is our insanity. 'Patriotism' is its cult ... by 'patriotism' I mean that attitude which puts the own nation above humanity, above the principles of truth and justice, not the loving interest in one's own nation, which is the concern with the nation's spiritual as much as with its material welfare - never with its power over other nations. <sup>28</sup>

As love for an individual should be part of one's love for mankind so should love for one's nation be love for humanity. The only real satisfaction man can attain is when "he can feel rooted in the experience of universal brotherliness ..." <sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 38      <sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 38

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 41      <sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 58      <sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

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(d) The need for a sense of identity

Man may be defined as the animal that can say 'I', that can be aware of himself as a separate entity. The individual must have some idea as to what this 'I' refers to:

Man, being torn away from nature, being endowed with reason and imagination, needs to form a concept of himself, needs to say and to feel: 'I am I'. 30

The individual may find a substitute for a truly individual sense of identity, for instance, by identifying himself by reference to nation, religion, class and occupation. Fromm argues that people are driven to extreme lengths in search of fulfilment of this need. They:

are willing to risk their lives, to give up their love, to surrender their freedom, to sacrifice their own thoughts, for the sake of being one of the herd, of conforming, and thus of acquiring a sense of identity, even though it is an illusory one. 31

(e) The need for a frame of orientation and devotion

Similar to the way in which the child is confronted by physical objects to which he must orientate himself, man is confronted with puzzling phenomena in the world around him and "having reason, he has to make sense of them, has to put them in some context which he can understand and which permits him to deal with them in his thoughts." 32  
The fulfilment of this need may take many forms, often religious in nature.

Fromm does qualify his account of needs to the extent that whilst

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30 Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 60

31 ibid. p. 63      32 ibid.



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he claims that the basic needs are shared by all men, the way in which they are satisfied may differ according to social conditions. It is this which distinguishes these needs from purely physical needs:

Man's solution to his physiological need is, psychologically speaking, utterly simple; the difficulty here is a purely sociological and economic one. Man's solution to his human needs is exceedingly complex, it depends on many factors and last, not least, on the way his society is organized and how this organization determines the human relations within it. 33

The fulfilment of all the above needs is necessary for man's sanity, according to Fromm. Satisfaction of an incomplete nature will lead to neurosis. 34

(iii) Like Marx, Fromm contrasts the legitimate increase of needs as social arrangements become more complex with the creation of false needs.

Both Fromm and Marx see the system of needs as related to the complexity of social and productive arrangements. 35

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33 Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 38.

34 "If one of the basic necessities has found no fulfilment, insanity is the result; if it is satisfied but in an unsatisfactory way - considering the nature of human existence - neurosis (either manifest or in the form of a socially patterned defect) is the consequence." Ibid. "satisfied but in an unsatisfactory way" is of course a bad way of expressing what Fromm means. We must assume that the satisfaction is incomplete or unreal.

35 See the passage from The German Ideology quoted in Chapter One, p. 18.

However, under capitalism progress in production is at the expense of the individual:

New artificial needs are created, and man's tastes are manipulated . . . . This spirit of consumption is precisely the opposite of the spirit of a socialist society as Marx visualised it. He clearly saw the danger inherent in capitalism . . . . He wanted to liberate man from the chains of his material greed, so that he could become fully awake, alive, and sensitive, and not be the slave of his greed. 36

Following Marx, Fromm holds that there are false or 'irrational needs'. These needs are forced upon man by inhuman political systems which take no account of real human needs. Eventually man comes to feel as if these are real needs but in fact they have nothing to do with human aspirations and man's nature and are rather the product of inhuman obsessions like the senseless acquisition of material things and money:

It is also true that there is a legitimate need for more consumption as man develops culturally and has more refined needs for better food, objects of artistic pleasure, books, etc. But our craving for consumption has lost all connection with the real needs of man. Originally . . . Consumption was a means to an end, that of happiness. It now has become an aim in itself. The constant increase of needs forces us to an ever-increasing effort, it makes us dependent on these needs and on the people and institutions by whose help we attain them. 37

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36 Erich Fromm, "The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx's Theory", Socialist Humanism, edited by Erich Fromm, pp. 235-237.

37 Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 134-135.



79.

But we need not forever remain a prisoner of these false needs. Fromm is more optimistic than Marcuse about our ability to recognize which needs are false. According to Fromm we can learn to distinguish our real from our false needs. But Fromm's account of how this comes about seems incomplete. He suggests that our conscience helps us to decide:

While his body tells him what to eat and what to avoid - his conscience ought to tell him which needs to cultivate and satisfy and which needs to let wither and starve out. But hunger and appetite are functions of the body with which man is born - conscience, while potentially present, requires the guidance of man and principles which develop only during the growth of culture. 38

The failure of a particular form of social organization to fulfil human needs contributes to social change:

Social change and revolution are caused not only by new productive forces which conflict with older forms of social organization, but also by the conflict between inhuman social conditions and unalterable human needs. 39

If we extend Fromm's claim about what constitutes a sane society to particular political systems we should obviously assess and value the latter according to the degree to which they take account of human needs. Different political systems can be seen to ignore man's needs altogether or to create 'false' needs amongst people. But human needs should be vital to an analysis of social organization (or at least to a socialist analysis):

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38 Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 78.

39 Erich Fromm, "Human Psycho-analysis and Marx's Theory", Op. cit., p. 234.

The task for the socialist theoreticians is to study the nature of human needs; to find criteria for the distinction between genuine human needs, the satisfaction of which makes man more alive and sensitive, and synthetic needs created by capitalism, which tend to weaken man, to make him more passive and bored, a slave to his greed for things, 40

Presumably 'socialist theoreticians' can refer to both the social psychologist and the political philosopher.

Fromm criticises Marx for not sufficiently recognizing the false needs which are created in men by the inhuman society in which they live:

The famous statement at the end of the Communist Manifesto that the workers 'have nothing to lose but their chains', contains a profound psychological error. With their chains they have also to lose all those irrational needs and satisfactions which were originated while they were wearing the chains. 41

Firstly, to base this sort of criticism on an emotive appeal taken from the Manifesto (surely one of the more unsophisticated of Marx's works) is unfair. Secondly, although he did not deal with the problem at great length, Marx did recognize what has been called by later Marxists 'false-consciousness'. This can be seen where Marx discusses the labourer who has been conditioned to accepting needs

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<sup>40</sup> Erich Fromm, "Human Psycho-analysis and Marx's Theory", Op. cit., p. 238.

<sup>41</sup> Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 264.





81.

which have lost all relation to his real human needs.<sup>42</sup>

If Marx's discussion of false needs is limited in the main to a discussion of alienated labour in industrial England, it must be remembered that there is a limit to how far any writer, no matter how great his vision, can transcend the boundaries created by the age in which he lives. Marx cannot be blamed for his failure to conceive the extreme and complex alienation which was to take place amongst Americans under neo-capitalism. After all, Fromm, too, is in a sense bound by the fact that he is primarily a psychologist writing about American society.

At other times, Fromm seems to recognize the fact that some of the limitations of Marx's account of man are due to the era in which Marx wrote. For example, Fromm points out that despite the fact that both the early and later writings of Marx were filled with psychological concepts like the 'essence of man', the 'crippled man', 'alienation', 'consciousness', 'passionate strivings' and 'independence',

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<sup>42</sup> Under capitalism the worker's "position does not even allow him to satisfy the needs arising directly from his human nature" (The German Ideology, p. 319). Engels, in his Introduction to Marx's The Class Struggles in France, expresses the view that capitalism's obscuring of man's real needs will not be able to continue once the masses have been shown how these needs can be fulfilled: "If, in all the longer revolutionary periods, it was so easy to win the great masses of the people by the merely plausible false representations of the forward-thrusting minorities, why should they be less susceptible to ideas which were the truest reflection of their economic condition, which were nothing but the clear rational expression of their needs, of needs not yet understood but merely vaguely felt by them?" (K. Marx and F. Engels, Selected Works, Vol. 1, p. 191)

there is a lack of actual psychological theory in Marx's writing. This lack is attributable to the fact that Marx was writing before Freud's discoveries, according to Fromm. Marx's account can be supplemented with Freudianism and its account of psychic forces and motives.

Both Fromm and Marcuse attempt to complete Marx's picture of man in the light of the important insights Freud provided. In particular, Freud was responsible for 'discovering' the subconscious, recognising and explaining the significance of the libido, and in developing psycho-analysis as an effective form of therapy. But it is in their interpretation of the psychology and philosophy of Freud that a major divergence between Fromm and Marcuse emerges. In Man for Himself, Fromm criticises and revises many of Freud's theories, whereas in Eros and Civilization Marcuse presents a fundamentally sympathetic account of Freud.<sup>43</sup>

Fromm rejects the ethical relativism which he claims is involved in most psychological theories and he criticises some of

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<sup>43</sup> Marcuse follows Freud in emphasising the importance of the libido. He claims that Fromm and the 'revisionists' have emasculated Freud's theory by playing down the importance of sexual impulses. Fromm, for instance, stresses the importance of love, whereas Freud, (according to Marcuse) held that love in our culture "must be practised as 'aim-inhibited sexuality', with all the taboos and constraints placed upon it by a monogamic-patriarchal society". Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, (London: Sphere Books, rev. ed. 1972), p.182.



83.

the implications of Freudianism. In particular, Fromm criticises Freud for isolating the libido as the supreme drive and for failing to take account of man's other vital needs. Moreover, Freud held that 'civilization' or 'culture' could survive only by fulfilling its own needs for perpetuation at the expense of the needs of individuals who were consequently suppressed.<sup>44</sup> This struggle of civilization to quell individuals is thus not unlike Marx's description of capitalism's suppression of individual needs. But what makes Freud's theory ultimately reactionary is that he thought it necessary for the status quo to prevail. Marx, Fromm and Marcuse, on the other hand, believe and hope<sup>45</sup> that the individual and his needs will prevail in the establishment of a more humane system.

Any analysis of man, Fromm argues, must begin with an understanding of his needs. "The archimedic point of the specifically human dynamism lies in this uniqueness of the human situation: the understanding of man's psyche must be based on the analysis of man's

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<sup>44</sup> According to Marcuse, Freud held that "Free gratification of man's instinctual needs is incompatible with civilized society: renunciation and delay in satisfaction are the prerequisites for progress". (Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 23.)

<sup>45</sup> Marcuse is less hopeful however: "One Dimensional Man will vacillate throughout between two contradictory hypothesis: (1) that advanced industrial society is capable of containing qualitative change for the foreseeable future; (2) that forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode the society. I do not think that a clear answer can be given." (One Dimensional Man, p. 13)

needs stemming from the conditions of his existence.<sup>45</sup>

Mental health, sanity and needs

Fromm's account of mental health and sanity is closely bound up with his account of needs. He argues that "The concept of mental health depends on our concept of the nature of man"<sup>47</sup> and criticises the current psychological definitions of mental health which "stress those qualities which are part of the alienated social character of our time: adjustment, co-operativeness, aggressiveness, tolerance, ambition, etc."<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, mental health has been defined in terms of the individual's adjustment to society. Instead Fromm argues, mental health:

must be defined in terms of the adjustment of society to the needs of man, of its role in furthering or hindering the development of mental health. Whether or not the individual is healthy, is primarily not an individual matter, but depends on the structure of his society.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 25.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 37.      <sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 72. Fromm considers a possible objection to this account of mental health: "Should we speak of this primitive man as lacking in mental health, when he is simply lacking in qualities which only further evolution could give him?" (Ibid., p. 70) Fromm answers that "one would call healthy all forms of orientation, which correspond to the adequate state of human evolution; while (as Freud showed) 'one would call 'sick' those 'fixations' or 'regressions' which represent earlier stages of development after the human race has already passed through them". (Ibid., p. 71)





88.

Thus a sane society, for Fromm., is one "which corresponds to the needs of man ... as they can be ascertained by the study of man",<sup>50</sup> A condition for sanity and mental health<sup>51</sup> is found to be the satisfaction of the five basic needs already discussed.

There are some inconsistencies and inadequacies in this account of the relationship between needs and sanity. Firstly, Fromm conflates the concepts of sanity and mental health, secondly, he equivocates as to whether sanity is descriptive or normative, thirdly he is too dogmatic about the necessity for the fulfilment of basic needs. (I shall discuss these objections shortly)

It is obvious that much of Fromm's account consists of empirical claims regarding the causes of insanity and neurosis. The truth or falsity of these empirical claims must, in the end, be left to the psychologists, psychiatrists and psycho-analysts. But there are several questions the philosopher can ask and in what follows I shall discuss some philosophical objections to philosophical objections to Fromm's account.

#### (1) Scientific Ethics

I have claimed that the concept of need is normative. However, the concept of need poses difficulties for the philosopher which are not posed by purely ethical concepts like the concept of moral rights.

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<sup>50</sup> Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 20.

<sup>51</sup> See the passage quoted on p. 77.